

AN ACT
OF THE
Associate Synod of North America,
FOR A
PUBLIC FAST.

Philadelphia, May 22d, 1810.

THE Associate Synod, on turning their attention to themselves, to the congregations under their inspection, to the state of other churches of Christ in this land, and to the aspect of Providence towards the inhabitants of the world, find abundant reason to engage, and to call upon those over whom they preside in the Lord to join them in the seasonable exercise of *fasting, humiliation, and prayer.*

In surveying the Associate Church as a religious body of professing Christians, the Synod perceive them marked with many spots,—spots dishonourable to God's children. The most superficial view of their general character proclaims, that they have not yet attained, neither are already perfect. Some of them have espoused their profession without close examination and serious conviction, and are not established in the truth: others of them are strongly and easily beset with the sin of proudly boasting of the goodness of their profession, and of securely resting in it, without suitably exemplifying it in correspondent practice. While they profess more than others, many of them fall far short of these in performance; and yet are apt to exclaim, *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.* Connected with this pride of profession, in many instances they manifest a carnal, contentious, and unforbearing spirit. Their conduct declares, that they have in a great measure forgotten the new command of love, the keeping of which is the ornament and criterion of the Christian; and under pretence of adhering to the truth, they have frequently broken the peace and unity of the church. And while such are some of the spots which stain the Associate Church, a closer inspection will discover various blemishes to mark the conduct of the different classes of her members, and which greatly disfigure her character.

Her Ministers, who bear the vessels of the Lord, and whose lips should keep knowledge, come far short of conformity to the great Teacher of righteousness. They are neglectful in acquiring and treasuring up those stores of literary and sacred knowledge, which would render themselves respectable, recommend the profession they have espoused, and promote the interests of the church. All of them are chargeable with neglecting their own vineyard, while they profess to keep that of others. Among them, brotherly love and co-operation in promoting the cause of Christ, especially in attendance on church courts, prevail not as they ought. There are humbling evidences of a spirit of self-preference and self-seeking, and of a want of candour. Hence they feel not sufficient interest in each others welfare, and in the prosperity of

Zion, and both in preparing and delivering their messages, they are seldom so duly impressed with the importance of their station and employment, as to warn, with becoming earnestness, sinners of their danger, and to feed with diligence and tenderness the souls which Christ has purchased with his blood. While Satan is going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, the watchmen are inactive—instead of being instant in season and out of season, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and many tears; taking heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers; keeping back nothing that is profitable; teaching publicly and from house to house; testifying to all repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

The eldership is in some instances also culpable. Inattention to the conduct of church members; undue severity on the one hand and too great lenity on the other, in the exercise of discipline, are faults too often to be found among them. They often do not rule well their own houses, and hence fail in governing the church of God: For where they are remiss in the important duties of family instruction and government, or do not enforce these by their example, they cannot be successful in their official duties.

In attendance on the means of grace appointed by God for their salvation, congregations are deficient in punctuality and uprightness of intention. To many of their members the least inconvenience is sufficient excuse for absenting themselves; and it is to be feared, that few of those who do attend wait on the Lord after the due order, to hear all things which are commanded them of God. For it is matter of lamentation, that many are less concerned about appearing reverently and acceptably before God, in gospel ordinances, than about transacting the business of life, and that the opportunity of an accession to their worldly possessions is embraced by them with more alacrity and diligence, than that of shewing forth their Lord's death. From this poisonous source flows that contracted and illiberal spirit, which has greatly supplanted that generous concern for the interests of neighbouring congregations, and of the body at large, which should pervade the assemblies of God's people, especially influencing them to relieve each others distress, to rejoice in each others prosperity, and to seek communion with one another in the ordinances of grace.

Every house ought to be a little church, where the evening and morning sacrifice is duly offered, and a little seminary for educating children for Christ. But it is much to be deplored, that the sacrifice of prayer and praise there offered, seldom proceeds from a grateful fervent heart. Too many endeavour to reconcile sinning and praying, and separate prayer from good works. Regarding iniquity in the heart they pray and are not heard, they ask but not in godly sincerity, faith, perseverance, and importunity. In educating their children, parents, though bound by the strong impulse of natural affection, and the most solemn engagements of religion, neglect their duty and trifle with their vows. After promising before God and his people, to use all diligence in training up their children for God, teaching them his words when they sit in the

house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down and rise up, yet, unless perhaps a few minutes on a Sabbath evening, they spend not an hour in their life giving them line upon line, precept upon precept, to acquaint and impress them with their guilt and misery as sinners, and to bring them to the Saviour. They are more assiduous in communicating to them those instructions necessary for their procuring a comfortable temporal subsistence, than the instructions they need to guide them safely through the temptations of life, and to inspire them with ardor so to run as to obtain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Indeed the conduct of most plainly testifies, that the end of their family compact, is to enable them to live comfortably as creatures, and not as christians; and too much do all forget to be helpers of one anothers faith, promoters of each others joy, and to walk in all the statutes and ordinances of God blameless.

In descending from families to examine the practice of individuals in every stage of their life, much is found amiss, and loudly calls for humiliation and amendment. God commands, saying, *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, and promises, *they that seek me early shall find me*; yet this precious period of existence, when habits of correct thinking and acting ought to be acquired, is by the generality, prodigally squandered, and too often stained with follies and crimes which will one day pierce the heart with many sorrows, when the sins of youth are brought to remembrance, and the transgressors are constrained to taste the bitterness of their early violations of the divine law.

The conduct of many who have arrived at years of discretion is manifestly such as to create well founded suspicions, and in some instances to afford positive evidence that they have not begun to love God. Though bound by their baptismal vows to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, they furnish no public practical evidence of their being created in Christ Jesus unto good works. In looking and waiting for these appearances in their behaviour, which promise in due season abundance of the fruits of righteousness, serious christians and pious parents, with reluctance and disappointment, behold only repeated instances of their dissipation and folly, carelessness and profanity, clearly indicating that they continue the infatuated slaves of Satan, and are travelling in the meridian of life, the broad way leading to everlasting destruction. By this general practice, many of the seriously inclined, for fear of incurring the charge of singularity, are deterred from openly avowing their attachment to Christ and his gospel; and the temptations of the few who have espoused a profession of religion, are greatly enhanced and multiplied, by the craftiness and lax principles of the multitude who walk in the ways of their heart, and in the light of their eyes, forgetting that for all these things God will bring them into judgment. Even those who have separated from the world lying in wickedness, and professed subjection to Jesus Christ, walk not worthy of their vocation. Some indulge in the vanities and amusements of life, and their conversation savours little of the gospel. Others who profess to regard the duties of piety, are uncharitable, oppressive, griping

and covetous in their dealings with men. And this worldly disposition and covetous practice are evinced not only by such as are in the early and middle stages of life, but by many treading on the border of the grave. And while such is our state, as a professing body of Christians, a transient view of matters among other branches of the church only more forcibly urges the propriety of fasting and humiliation of heart. The small regard which some churches pay to the character of the members they admit to sealing ordinances, ought to be matter of deep humiliation before God. Others claiming to be christian churches, to practical defects superadd the most erroneous tenets, subversive of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, denying the guilt of original sin, the absolute independence of Jehovah in respect of his purposes, and of his being all in all in the salvation of the sinner. Under pretence of being friends they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, holding doctrines and following practices which he hates.

The aspect of providence also calls our attention to the same exercise. JEHOVAH is come out of his place in indignation to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. He is calling for vengeance, even the vengeance of his temple. In anger he is overturning the thrones of ancient kingdoms, bathing his glittering sword in the blood of the inhabitants. Faithful to his threatenings, he is visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon their children. The Lord has many grounds of controversy with the inhabitants of this land. Every where irreligion, swearing, uncleanness, falsehood, stealing, sabbath-breaking, perjury, duelling, murder, slavery, worldly-mindedness and drunkenness are prevalent. While the cry about the constitution is vociferous, few are concerned about the kingdom of Christ, and many unblushingly pronounce the wisdom of God folly.

For these, and various other transgressions of God's holy law, too numerous to be specified, and too obvious to require mention, the Synod call all the churches under their inspection, to **FASTING, HUMILIATION and SUPPLICATION**, and earnestly exhort them to look by faith to the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin, and to his Almighty power and pardoning mercy,—praying that he would remove their transgressions like a cloud, and their iniquities like a thick cloud; that he would return and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die; pour out the Holy Ghost upon all the churches; bless the Associate Church in Britain, Ireland, and America, in her Professors of Theology, Ministers, Students, and members; turn wars into peace to the ends of the earth; endow our civil rulers with wisdom and justice; heal the breaches of Zion; destroy Pagan, Mahometan, and Popish delusions; remove the veil from the heart of his ancient people; make the Redeemers' glory known from the rising to the setting sun, and come speedily the second time without sin unto salvation.

Appointed this Act to be observed in the several Congregations, settled and vacant, under the inspection of this Synod, on the *Third Thursday of November* next.

F. PRINGLE, *Synod Clerk.*

Next meeting of Synod to be at Cannonsburg, 3d Wednesday of May, 1811.