

## PASTORAL LETTER ON MINISTERIAL SUPPORT.<sup>1</sup>

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**D**EAR BRETHREN: Convinced by many painful facts that the interests of Christ among us are suffering much loss by the inadequate compensation of ministers, we judge it our duty to address to you a word of pastoral instruction and exhortation concerning it. We thankfully recognize the improvement which has been made, and is now making, in this matter, and we commend the exertions of Synods, Presbyteries, and churches, to remedy evils previously existing, bidding them God-speed in their laudable endeavors. Many churches, especially in our densely peopled districts, seem to give as full pecuniary support to their ministers as is needful. But much yet remains to be amended. It appears that the average of the salaries paid to the ministers of our denomination is only about \$460; and as some receive large sums, there must consequently be a large number whose income sinks far below this moderate sum. Many cases of cruel suffering and destitution exist in the families of men who are faithfully endeavoring to serve God and his church; and the usefulness of our ministers is grievously crippled in a multitude of cases by pecuniary distress.

### WHAT IS AN ADEQUATE SUPPORT.

The question, What is an adequate pecuniary support? cannot be answered absolutely, and without regard to surrounding circumstances. The cost of living, the style prevalent in the community in which the minister labors, and many other things must be considered; for what would be sufficient to one in one place, might be entirely inadequate to another in another position. And a salary which was formerly liberal may have now become insufficient, because of the great and general change which has occurred in the value of money, as related to all the means of

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subsistence. On this point it should be especially considered that money is not an absolute article of value, but only a representative of value, and that a fluctuating one. The adequacy of the compensation made is not to be measured by the absolute amount of money paid, but by the quantity of the means of subsistence which that money will buy. The late rise of prices has had just the effect on the interests of ministers of an actual reduction of salary, where their stipends have not been correspondingly increased. Consider, we pray you, whether it will not be an abuse and dishonor of God's bounty if his recent liberal blessing on your industry is thus accompanied by an increased stinting of the servants who labor in his sanctuary.

We neither demand nor wish that the means of luxury or of avaricious accumulation shall be bestowed on our ministers. It is our desire that they shall ever be models to their charges of sobriety and Christian moderation. And may the Great Head of the church ever forbid that this service should possess such worldly attractions as to entice into it ungodly or selfish men, actuated by the love of lucre. What we demand as the just right of the minister is a *decent competence*, which will place him on a level in this regard with the respectable classes of his charge, and which will enable him to train his children for stations of usefulness and respectability in Christian society, and to leave his widow above the fear of pauperism.

#### WHY INSUFFICIENT SALARIES ARE GIVEN.

We are persuaded that much of the deficiency in ministers' support proceeds not from designed injustice, but from misconception. In agricultural communities, where the most frequent instances of hardship occur, there is much error as to the amount necessary for the maintenance of a family. The farmer observes the stipend of the minister, and finding it equal or superior to the sum for which he himself sells all those productions of his farm which are sent to market, he concludes that the pastor is liberally paid. He forgets that the larger part of the maintenance of his own family is derived directly from the soil without being converted into money. If he, like the minister, were compelled to pay in money for all those thousand products and comforts which the bounty of his farm confers, he would find that an adequate support would consume far more than passes

annually through his own or his minister's hand in the form of money.

Many of our smaller congregations also are content to pay their ministers insufficient salaries, because practically they do not feel that they are paying for all their time. The people misconceive their own spiritual wants, and the nature of that toil which should be expended in their supply. They suppose that if the minister spends a day or two of the week in hurried preparation of one or two sermons, and the Sabbath in their delivery, this, with an occasional attendance at scenes of affliction, is all that need be done. The rest of the week he may devote to his own interests. If he engages in teaching a school or cultivating a farm for his own support they do not feel themselves wronged, for they do not consider his whole time as purchased by them. They regard his sacred functions as additional to his secular, and consider themselves consequently as only bound to provide for a part of his support, instead of regarding his ministry as all in all, as he and they should think it. In this case the deficient support is rather a mistake than an injustice. But we exhort the congregations under our care to dismiss this erroneous and mischievous conception, and to seek the whole of the minister's energies and labors, by rendering for them a just recompense. The increased prosperity of the congregations and usefulness of the pastors will soon convince all that it is wise to secure the undivided labors of the ministry by a fair and full compensation. And when such compensation is rendered we shall not complain of, but rather applaud you, if the ministers under our care are strictly required to give their whole time and efforts to your service.

#### TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

To commend this subject further to your consciences, we argue, first, the explicit testimony of the Holy Scriptures to the minister's right to a just maintenance. We enter our solemn rebuke against the unscriptural idea that what is given for ministerial labors is a charity, which may be bestowed or withheld as generosity dictates, instead of the payment of a just debt. There is probably little need among us to rebuke the ignorant notion that mental and professional services are not true labor, and so are not fairly entitled to a pecuniary equivalent. The

whole sense of mankind and course of society refute it. That mental labor is, of all kinds, the most arduous, is sufficiently proved by the fact that, notwithstanding its greater emoluments, so few are found who can endure it and succeed in it, compared with the numbers who pursue manual occupations. We also testify earnestly against the assertion that it is unworthy of the disinterestedness of the Christian minister to receive pay for preaching the gospel. The true minister does not preach *for gain*; but he is not a disembodied spirit; he must live, or he cannot preach. Sufficient to refute all such views is the word of God. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Under the Old Testament and the New alike, God has explicitly ordained that the ministers of religion shall receive support from those for whom they minister. "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14.) This positive command of God should be enough for all his servants. And what labor can be so worthy of liberal recompense as that of the minister, to the successful performance of which the longest training and the rarest combination of bodily, mental and moral excellences, with temper, experience and social tact are requisite, which concerns the dearest interests of man, both for this life and that which is to come, and which is performed by the faithful workman, under the influence of the most sacred sympathies and affections, and the most solemn responsibilities? "If they have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if they shall reap your carnal things?" (1 Cor. ix. 11.)

#### HINDRANCE TO MINISTERIAL EFFICIENCY.

Second, We urge upon you the loss of ministerial efficiency which the church suffers through the neglect of this duty. The great cry of our Zion is for an increase of ministers; and annually we pray the "Lord of the harvest," in solemn concert, to "send forth laborers into his harvest." If all the men in our church capable of usefulness were wholly released from the hindrances which proceed, directly or indirectly, from inadequate support, the efficiency of our ministry would be vastly increased. And this would be equivalent to a proportionable

increase of their numbers, with this additional advantage, that the church would enjoy this increased service without the long delay and large expense of training new men. Most of our churches are able to give fair compensation to their pastors if they fully understand the duty and put forth their strength. And if the strong would give that help to the weak which Christian charity and unity dictate, the lack of our small churches would be abundantly supplied from the superfluity of the rich.

*We are able* to remedy this whole evil at once if we will. What, dear brethren, is the guilt of causing this vast waste of Christian efficiency in such a day of need, and this wide-spread loss of souls by the voluntary neglect of a duty which the bounty of providence has placed easily within our reach? How can we pray to the Searcher of hearts to prosper his cause in our hands while this neglect is unreformed?

Suffer us to point out the modes in which the usefulness of ministers is herein wasted, in order that you may apprehend your own loss in it, as well as that of Christ's cause at large. It is too obvious to need remark, that when the minister is driven to secular labor for a part of his support, so much of his time is lost to the direct service of his Master. But this is not all. His energies and thoughts are divided, and the remainder of his time is less efficiently employed in his ministry. Too often secular labor, reluctantly begun under a stern necessity, forced upon him by the injustice of his people, results in the loss of studious habits, the chilling of pastoral zeal and the secularizing of the spirit. Does providence bless those secular labors with success? Do the minister's intelligence and energy make him a prosperous teacher or farmer? That success becomes often a snare, and he grows less and less a pastor and more a man of business. Thus, too, often the finest energies have been almost lost to the church, contrary to the early intentions and wishes of the minister himself. It has been remarked with much truth, that the pastors of our church are usually found richest in those districts where the salaries are most insufficient. You have an explanation above.

The stinted means of the minister limit his usefulness in many other ways. He is unable to make those additions to his little library which are demanded for the improvement of his own mind and the interests of his charge. The pinchings of poverty

close against him a hundred smaller channels of usefulness. But far worse, the gnawing cares of a future for which there is no provision consume his spirits, preoccupy his thoughts in the hours of study, and cast a thick shade between his anxious eyes and the page from which he should draw instruction for his people. The mind cannot work when it is bowed down by the load of the heart. Nor is it an answer to this to say, that the sufferer ought to have faith enough cheerfully to cast his worn and wearied wife and his destitute children upon the arm of him who feedeth the young ravens when they cry. It is, indeed, the privilege and duty of all God's people when wronged to cast their burden on the Lord, and it is his glory to sustain them, repairing with the joys of his salvation the sufferings which man has caused. But does not the very compassion with which he heals their sorrows imply in his righteous nature equal indignation against the wrong which has inflicted them? Woe unto that man who thus unfeelingly and profanely invokes the divine goodness to repair the injustice which he himself wilfully permits.

Sometimes the pecuniary distress of the minister arises from a cause against which we feel bound to raise our especial and solemn testimony: long continued arrears upon the salary promised in his call. Then, unless he has a peculiar measure of faith and patience, there is added to his other perplexities the painful sense of injury. This cause of irritation, concurring with every other which arises in his intercourse with his charge, works alienation and bitterness of feeling, and prepares the way for disruption and removal. The warm sympathies of the pastor's heart cannot very easily go out towards those from whose thoughtlessness or injustice he is suffering cruel embarrassments and breach of covenant.

In a word, in pleading for the removal of these evils, we do not plead for ministers' personal interest only; we urge your own injury to the cause of Christ.

Third, It is not improper to remind you that your conduct in this matter will vitally affect the cause of your Master throughout the rest of Christendom. Ours is the only country where Christianity has been wholly divorced from the state, and its institutions left to the voluntary support of its followers. It is questioned whether this support can be trusted; and all the

world now looks upon the American churches with interested gaze, to see whether the warm hearts and the free gifts of those who love Christ are the best and the sufficient resource of his cause, as the friends of religious liberty have asserted; or whether the arm of the ruler and tax-gatherer must still be invoked to wring a reluctant support for it from the citizens. If we, brethren, leave so many godly and laborious men in that destitution, which is now the *opprobrium* of the American churches, the verdict of Christendom will be against the cause of freedom, and many generations may not be able to reverse it.

#### EFFECTS OF INCREASED SECULAR PROSPERITY.

In conclusion, permit us to remind you again of that unexampled secular prosperity in our land, which, while it has increased your gains, has increased the difficulties of your servants in the church, by raising the prices of the means of subsistence. In that prosperity the people of God have fully shared. Bear in mind that while it places in your reach enlarged means of doing good, it also constitutes a new and most treacherous temptation. Sanctify your abundance by a just and generous distribution to the cause and servants of the Giver, and the enjoyment of the remainder will be both sweeter and safer. "If the first fruits be holy, the lump will also be holy." But if you signalize this season of the divine bounty by leaving your brethren who serve you in sacred things under growing privations; if you only enlarge your plans of self-indulgence or greedy accumulation, a righteous God will suffer your abundance to become your bane. "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter i. 18, 19.) Seeing that God is graciously pleased to make your silver and gold means to promote his cause, and seeing that they are at the same time so unspeakably cheap compared with the priceless souls for which Christ died, let your enlightened and righteous resolve be, to give nothing, indeed, for the pampering of luxury or pride, or to foster the desire of gain, and to withhold nothing by which the highest efficiency, the most cheerful and healthy exertions of every minister who truly has a mind to the work, may be secured to his Master's cause.

Believing that the inadequate support of ministers arises more

from the neglect of a proper system, and the fact that no one is properly charged with the duty of its collection, than from intentional injustice or unwillingness on the part of the people, we must say to the officers of those churches where the evil exists that the fault is chiefly theirs. And we urgently recommend that the sessions and deacons make a systematic provision for the pastors' salaries, by a permanent annual subscription or pew rent from the people, which should always be somewhat larger than the sum covenanted in the "call," and that they provide efficient persons for its punctual collection.