
by

Butter, Jacob

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2009
A LETTER

TO THE

REV. ROBERT HAWKER, D.D.

VICAR OF CHARLES, PLYMOUTH:

WHEREIN IS SET FORTH

Some of the Sinful Practices,

AND

IRRECONCILEABLE CONTRADICTIONS,

OF HIS .....

PUBLIC MINISTRATIONS; and

WITH ADMONITIONS, &c.

BY JACOB BUTLER, .....

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT THE PHILADELPHIA CHAPEL, PLYMOUTH.

"And the man said unto me, son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee, art thou brought hither; declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel." - Ezek. xi. 4.

"For the time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" - 1 Peter iv. 17.

"But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." - 1 Cor. xi. 32.

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1815.
ADDRESS

TO

CHURCH OF GOD.

DEARLY BELOV'D IN TH' LOV'G D.

THROUGH the medium of the press, I have set before you the following epistle, from the fullest conviction that it is right so to do; as I have no other channel whereby to make it generally known, both to evangelical ministers of the Church of England, and their spiritual hearers. I do not hereby appeal to your judgment, to decide on what I have written, because I well know there will be a great diversity of opinions on this subject; and perhaps there will be more to condemn, than justify it: but I do it from a desire to correct the judgment of those who may be uninformed in these things. It has fallen to my lot, to minister among a people, who are interwoven with those who attend the ministry of Dr. Hawker; therefore it is addressed to him, because his conduct tends to pervert the minds of the people. It is my heart's desire, and prayer to God, that he will accompany it with his blessing.

And am

Your servant, for Christ's sake,

J. B.
IT is now nearly two months since I delivered into your hands the letter, which I addressed to you, (a transcript of which I now publish,) concerning the evils of your public ministrations. Your having passed it by in silence, and continuing in the same course seems to indicate a contemptuous rejection of it. This you may do with a spirit of apparent indifference, and thereby only act agreeably to those parts of your conduct described in my letter; yet I must assure you, that it is not a light thing with me, but on the contrary I am persuaded that it is of vast importance. Under this persuasion, and looking for the influence of the Spirit of God, I wrote the letter to you; and by His guidance I hope to proceed in bringing it before the church of God, leaving the event with that Lord who sitteth upon the throne judging right, who hath the government upon His shoulder; —He that hath the key of David;—He that openeth
and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.—My Lord has graciously given me direction for acting herein, both from His word, and by His Spirit; and I feel constrained to proceed, according to the light given, in exposing those things which are an injury to yourself, and to the church of Christ, and a dishonor to His holy name. You may now think hardly of me for writing against your adherence to corrupt ordinances; but it is possible that before your journey is ended in the wilderness, you may love me for it.—Lev. xix. 17. —Psal. cxli. 5.—Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

I remain,

Very respectfully,

Your's in Christ,

J. BUTTER.

Gascoyne Place, Plymouth,
February 22, 1815.
THE LETTER.

TO THE

Rev. Robert Hawker, D.D.

DEAR SIR,

I DO most sincerely love and esteem you, because many very worthy things are done of you, in your sphere, both in public and in private life; and this is a truth which must be acknowledged by every honest mind where those things are known. And there is much in your ministry which constrains me to esteem you very highly: herein it is that I discover so much of the image of Christ, which unites us in those bonds which issue from the heart of our Jesus, and extend to the binding together in Him, the souls of all them in whose heart he is formed the hope of glory. Nevertheless there are many injurious things contained in several parts of your public administrations; and my design in this letter is to point out some of those evils, which are to the dishonor of God, and pernicious to the church. Though in many words I may possibly err, yet I am persuaded that the general import of what I shall say, will be right in the sight
of God. Were I to consult my natural feelings, I should have nothing to do with this matter: neither do I enter on this subject, without some due sense of my own sinfulness and nothingness. Nor is it your infirmities as a man, that I am about to expose; for I rather desire to hide them with the mantle of charity. Did I not think highly of a great part of your pulpit labors, I should have nothing to do with any other part of your public ministrations; but it is, because I believe you to be a minister of Christ, whose labors He hath greatly owned and blessed, that I now address you; and it is with the hope, that He will more abundantly increase your usefulness, that the following things are written unto you. I might mention many strong and scriptural reasons for thus writing, as the Lord's command, Isa. lviii. 1. “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” Lev. xix. 17. “Thou shalt no hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt anywise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.” Prov. xxvii 5, 6. “Open rebuke is better than secret love. ’F’thful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” Prov. xxviii. 23. “He, that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with his lips.” Prov. xxix. 5. “A man that flattereth his neighbor, spreadeth a net for his feet.”

Those who suppose that they are to leave their brethren to go on in evil without reproving
them, do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor much of the power of godliness. But the prevailing conduct of this generation, is that sort of civility, which is nothing less than flattering each other in their evil ways; which shews, that the fear of man prevails more than the fear of God. The general tenor of the word is a plain directory for me in this engagement; and I am assuredly persuaded that it is the will of my God, that I should interfere with you in your corrupt ministerial proceedings. The knowledge of His will herein, and being fully assured thereof, is enough to bear up my mind, and to supersede every other argument on the subject. And I can with truth say, that the love of Christ constraineth me to do it; thence every other consideration becomes secondary, though I might add, that I am persuaded it will be attended with good, by an increase of light to many in the church, I also hope that it will tend to accomplish one very principal and desirable event, namely, your emancipation from your present connections: and, with a view to this great object, I shall express myself in the most unequivocal language that I am able. I am well aware that much tumult may arise, and much odium be cast on my name in consequence thereof; but a bad name, even from the saints that attend your ministry, and to have my good evil spoken of, is nothing new with me. Paul saith, "Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and

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doctrine." Did you rule well, this would be your due; but because you deviate so widely therefrom, you are undeserving of that honor, and become subject to reproof. If, therefore, my language to you should border upon rebuke, I believe that the notorious evils set forth therein will become an apology for such language: were I to apologize according to the apparent harshness with which I shall be constrained to write, I should then have need to annex an apology to almost every sentence. I beseech you to attend with candor to the things I shall now lay before you, not considering who it is that writes, but what is written. Remember, it was a child that the Lord appointed to inform Eli of the judgments that should come upon his house for their iniquity.

It is not my design to treat on what appears to me to be the scriptural principles of gospel ordinances; neither can I attempt to controvert any point wherein we might differ, were you to act, as I believe, according to the dictates of your conscience; for it appears to me, that by continual violence you must have so much distorted your conscience, that it can hardly be known to yourself, consequently altogether unknown to me. Therefore what I propose is, to meet you in some of those practices wherein you have hitherto abounded in iniquity with impunity; and which I conceive may be very properly begun in that of christening infants, falsely so called.
How often have you put this awful question to poor carnal heedless sinners, "Dost thou in the name of this child, renounce the devil, and all his works?" &c. By their answer to this question in the affirmative, you draw forth a lie from their lips: then after certain other things, which are all of the same nature, you proceed to sprinkle water on its face, calling it baptizing the same, "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Then you pronounce the child to be regenerated, and grafted into the body of Christ's church. Yea, you mock God, by pretending to give Him thanks for doing that which you know He hath not done. Now, sir, have you any command from the Son of God for such practices? What a strange perversion of things is this! Is not that scripture applicable to such corruptions, Rom. ii. 22. "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" In the pulpit you declare that regeneration, and being grafted into Christ, is as opposite to all those unmeaning and deceitful ceremonies, as light is to darkness. When you have occupied almost a whole sermon, to set forth the new birth, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and faith in Christ Jesus, whereby alone a sinner is risen to newness of life, and delivered from the dominion of sin; you, in the same hour, in the same house, and to the infants of the same people, administer this mock ordinance.* You appear desirous that all

* If you do not believe the principle to be wrong, yet I am verily persuaded that you are assured, that the ritual used by you.
should adhere to this pernicious practice of infant sprinkling: were it so, consequently all the congregation would then have been regenerated in their infancy, according to the form of words used in that rite. And then your sermon on regeneration must give the lie to what you say in your infant sprinkling, unless we are to believe that your sermon is addressed to those dissenters present, who were not christened in their infancy. The ritual of your church enjoins upon you to perform this ceremony to infants, in as public a manner, and before as many of the congregation as may be present.

Suppose then, after such a sermon as I have here alluded to, you were to perform this ceremony before the same congregation to whom you have been thus preaching about regeneration, &c. how would every enlightened mind blush, and be confounded in consequence thereof. And how would it tend to increase the blindness, and harden the hearts of the unawakened sinners then present; to make them believe that God would look upon sin with impunity; seeing the man who calls him-

when sprinkling infants, is altogether unscriptural. Therein you join the names of God, to language conveying ideas which you do not believe. If this does not deserve the name of mockery in the presence of God, then I know not what does deserve that name. You labor to set at nought the baptism of believers, as administered by the apostles, and you follow a human ritual instead thereof; which ritual you cannot but believe to be erroneous: and I am persuaded you refrain from administering that ordinance in the way which you believe to be right. Such conduct is injurious and sinful indeed.
self, the minister of God, will so strangely prevaricate, as first to declare a thing to be true, and then, in the most obvious way, by infant sprinkling, to contradict what he had before affirmed. And thus one part of your ministrations reciprocally and continually contradict the other. May we not rank such proceedings as these among what the apostle calls spiritual wickedness in high places? which as far exceeds the common transgressions of flesh and blood, as the maturity of your body exceeds the imperfect state of the infants on whom you practise this abomination.

According to the tenor of your ministry, you must believe that many, very many, are now dead in sins, and others gone down to everlasting perdition, on whom you have practised this vile mockery: and that all those infants were destitute of the smallest evidence of grace, at the time of your pronouncing them to be regenerate. Is this holding fast the form of sound words? "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matt. xii. 37.

The next part that I shall notice, will be that of your administering the Lord's supper. The form of words prescribed for the personal address to each communicant, is by no means to be rejected, but rather to be approved, when the individual to whom this address is made, is a partaker of the faith of God's elect. But to use these words indiscriminately to all sorts that may be disposed to attend; especially those whom you cannot but know to be
dead in trespasses and sins! and have neither part nor lot in the matter; this must be erroneous indeed. What are such proceedings, but wilfully profaning the holy name, and prostituting that blessed ordinance of the Son of God? I charge you to ask your own soul, as in the sight of God, and to answer the question—"By what authority dost thou these things? and who hath required it from your hands?" I know that you have attempted to answer this question, or rather done that which tends to dissemble and cloak the subject, and mislead the people by referring to that solitary and awful instance of Judas Iscariot, whose partaking of the Lord's supper, and afterwards being our Lord, was foretold in Ps. Lm xli. 9, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." And for his monstrous transgressions herein, the Holy Ghost by the Psalmist invokes on him these dire imprecations, in Psalm cix. 6—19, "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let satan stand at his right hand; when he shall be judged let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin: let his days be few, and let another take his office: let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow: as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him," &c. Now, sir, if I understand rightly the meaning of your arguments, in one of your Saturday evening sermons you brought this subject forward as a precedent, by which to justify a heedless and indiscriminate ad-
ministration of the Lord’s supper. May not an immediate inference be made from hence, that instead of warning the wicked to flee from the error of their ways, and from the wrath to come, that you do rather strengthen them in the practice of eating and drinking unworthily, and thereby eating and drinking damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord’s body. Remember, sir, there was but one Judas, and he by divine appointment, as our Lord speaks of him. But it seems as though you were indifferent about how many there were, whose conduct bore a likeness to Judas.

There is nothing which more darkens and hardens the mind of man, than natural religion: and, under this influence, dead sinners come and receive from your fostering hand a kind of salvo for their sins. Does not the whole tenor of the revealed word of God teach us that the true worshippers should in these things, as much as in them lieth, be obedient to the word of the Lord, which saith, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” If the true followers of the Lamb of God are not, as much as in them lieth, a separate people, in administering and receiving of gospel ordinances; then wherein shall they be a separate people? For in their civil concerns they must needs be connected with the world, or else they
had need go out of the world. But such proceedings as your’s, here referred to, are certainly contrary to the plain direction of the word, and nothing short of rebelling, and teaching rebellion, against the Lord; mixing the church and the world together; perverting the ordinances of God; deluding poor dark sinners; defiling and becoming an occasion of stumbling to the saints. And above all, profaning that holy name, which at all times ought to be had in reverence, and especially in public worship, by those who ought to teach the fear of the Lord. How many are there now in that place, where hope never cometh, who have been lulled in their sins, by continually receiving from your hands the memorials of the death of Christ, against whom you must know them to have been enemies all their days, and who will say unto them at the last day, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” In these things, sir, you are neither faithful to God nor mammon.

So also in the burial of the dead, do you not always and invariably use that language to all, which, in the obvious meaning of words, expresses your belief that they are all fallen asleep in the Lord? by pronouncing on all of them, that you commit their bodies to the ground, “in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,” according to the mighty working
whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." Did the Holy Ghost ever teach you to apply these words promiscuously to all? Do you not in an address to God express your hope that they are all entered into rest? &c. Are not these things uniformly of a piece with those other enormities to which I have already alluded? Thus you deceive poor blind sinners, even from the cradle to the grave. *First.* By a mockery both of God and them about regeneration, &c. *Secondly.* At the table, by telling them they are partakers of redemption by the blood of the Lamb. *Thirdly.* You close this awful delusion, by declaring them to have died in sure and certain hope of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Many, no doubt, in the long course of your ministry, you have passed through these three stages totally in the dark. Is this denying yourself, and following Christ, and leaving the dead to bury their dead? Is it not rather, as much as in you lieth, a departure from Christ, and cleaving to dead works? Again, how uncomely a sight is it, that whilst some of the spiritual part of the people are; or the Lord's-day morning, engaged at the schoolroom in prayer, and among other things for a blessing on their pastor, you are frequently at the same instant, in the adjoining ground, pronouncing on the dead, without distinction, that you have "a sure and certain hope of their resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Instead of being thus employed, were you and others.
(who have been performing this service) in an ad-
joining room, playing at cards, or occupied in any
other carnal amusement, every one would rightly
exclaim shame against you. But whether the for-
mer or the latter would be the greater sin, I shall
leave to be decided by any enlightened unbiassed
mind: When assembled with the public congre-
gation, you, the minister and leader in the worship,
go through a long round of services, in which
your spiritual people do generally dissent from
you: and no sooner have you ascended the pulpit
than you also strangely dissent from your preced-
ing conduct. In the desk, you, the pastor, are
for a long time engaged in a human ritual, whilst
many of your spiritual people are absent, because
they reject it; and many others, if present, will
strenuously avoid the very semblance of joining
with you; insomuch that they think it a reproach
to look into the same book of rites, or to unite in
that formulary which it enjoins. What a strange
jumble of affairs is here presented to view! The
pastor, who one may suppose to be the most en-
lightened in the congregation, is going a round of
service, with the name of God united to almost
every sentence, in which he is only joined by
those whom he thinks to be almost, if not alto-
gether, in the dark: whilst the spiritual people
are, by their conduct, testifying to the evil of their
pastor's deeds. If this sort of service is of divine
appointment, then might we expect that in visiting
the sick, in social prayer, in family worship, and

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in the closet, the prayer book would be your companion and guide. But, on the contrary, if you cannot use these forms in private, because they are not congenial to the nature of simple, spiritual worship, then to use them in public, and beseech all present to join with you, must be a still greater evil, inasmuch as a public transgression must have a worse tendency than a private sin; because if I publicly offend, I not only do evil myself, but, by my example, influence and harden others likewise: "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Thus you continually take the lead in that service, which is approved and followed by those only who are strangers to spiritual worship. Your conduct herein is something like that of Aaron, who said, "Thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief:" and he might have added, thou knowest me, that I have been so foolish as to lead them therein!

By such conduct you greatly increase that deadness and stupor, which do sadly pervade the minds of many saints. How entirely opposite are such proceedings to the apostolic direction, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." Titus ii. 7, 8. In the desk, at the font, in the chancel, and at the grave, you strangely depart from that soundness of speech, which cannot be
condemned. Have you, sir, any authority for thus perverting the right ways of the Lord? Have the long established laws of men, and the carnal systems of creatures, under the garb of corrupt religion, superseded the word of the Creator? Shall the customs and will of the flesh, though practised from generation to generation, pass with impunity in the sight of Jehovah? Will there not a period arrive, when our God shall reprove and punish his servants for an habitual, wilful corruption of his worship? Were these things always to continue, it would leave room for men to conclude that God was altogether such an one as themselves: but he hath promised to correct his people for their iniquity, and thereby prove himself to be both a righteous and merciful Lord.

Another important consideration is, that by your present proceedings you are a servant to carnal men, and they rule over you in those things where it becomes the exclusive prerogative of Jesus Christ to have the dominion by his word and Spirit. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Rom. vi. 16. Be it known unto you, sir, that it is the ordination of Jesus Christ, that his pastors and teachers should bear rule in the church; and that his church should be the seat of its government; and that to the church, and to it only, pertains the keeping of Christ's ordinances. His throne is in the midst