

Letter in Response to the Pastoral Letter

Sarah Grimke

Haverhill, 7th Mo. 1837.

DEAR FRIEND--

1.1 When I last addressed thee, I had not seen the Pastoral Letter of the General Association.

1.2 It has since fallen into my hands, and I must digress from my intention of exhibiting the condition of women in different parts of the world, in order to make some remarks on this extraordinary document.

1.3 I am persuaded that when the minds of men and women become emancipated from the thralldom of superstition and 'traditions of men,' the sentiments contained in the Pastoral Letter will be recurred to with as much astonishment as the opinions of Cotton Mather and other distinguished men of his day, on the subject of witchcraft; nor will it be deemed less wonderful, that a body of divines should gravely assemble and endeavor to prove that woman has no right to 'open her mouth for the dumb,' than it now is that judges should have sat on the trials of witches, and solemnly condemned nineteen persons and one dog to death for witchcraft.

2.1 But to the letter.

2.2 It says, 'We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the FEMALE CHARACTER with wide-spread and permanent injury.'

2.3 I rejoice that they have called the attention of my sex to this subject, because I believe if woman investigates it, she will soon discover that danger is impending, though from a totally different source from which the Association apprehends,--danger from those who, having long held the reins of usurped authority, are unwilling to permit us to fill that sphere which God created us to move in, and who have entered into league to crush the immortal mind of woman.

2.4 I rejoice, because I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted, even by some of those who are now endeavoring to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many, who hardly dare to speak their sentiments.

2.5 'The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties are unobtrusive and private, but the sources of *mighty power*. When the mild, *dependent*, softening influence of woman upon the sternness of man's opinions is fully exercised, society feels the effects of it in a thousand ways.'

2.6 No one can desire more earnestly than I do, that woman may move exactly in the sphere which her Creator has assigned her; and I believe her having been displaced from that sphere has introduced confusion into the world.

2.7 It is, therefore, of vast importance to herself and to all the rational creation, that she ascertain what are her duties and her privileges as a responsible and immortal being.

3.1 The New Testament has been referred to, and I am willing to abide by its decisions, but must enter my protest against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentaries thereon.

- 3.2 I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have.
- 4.1 The Lord Jesus defines the duties of his followers in his Sermon on the Mount.
- 4.2 He lays down grand principles by which they should be governed, without any reference to sex or condition:--*‘Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it tunder a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.’*
- 4.3 I follow him through all his precepts, and find him giving the same directions to women as to men, never even referring to the distinction now so strenuously insisted upon between masculine and feminine virtues: this is one of the anti-christian ‘traditions of men’ which are taught instead of the ‘commandments of God.’
- 4.4 Men and women were **CREATED EQUAL**; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for man to do, is right for woman.
- 5.1 But the influence of woman, says the Association, is to be private and unobtrusive; her light is not to shine before man like that of her brethren; but she is passively to let the lords of the creation, as they call themselves, put the bushel over it, lest peradventure it, might appear that the world has been benefited by the rays of her candle.
- 5.2 So that her quenched light, according to their judgment, will be of more use than if it were set on the candlestick.
- 6.1 *‘Her influence is the source of mighty power.’* This has ever been the flattering language of man since he laid aside the whip as a means to keep woman in subjection.
- 6.2 He spares her body; but the war he has waged against her mind, her heart, and her soul, has been no less destructive to her as a moral being.
- 6.3 How monstrous, how anti-christian, is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man!
- 6.4 Where, in all the sacred Scriptures, is this taught?
- 6.5 Alas! she has too well learned the lesson which **MAN** has labored to teach her.
- 6.6 She has surrendered her dearest **RIGHTS**, and been satisfied with the privileges which man has assumed to grant her; she has been amused with the show of power, whilst man has absorbed all the reality into himself.
- 6.7 He has adorned the creature whom God gave him as a companion, with baubles and gewgaws, turned her attention to personal attractions, offered incense to her vanity, and made her the instrument of his selfish gratification, a plaything to please his eye and amuse his hours of leisure.
- 6.8 ‘Rule by obedience and by submission sway,’ or in other words, study to be a hypocrite, pretend to submit, but gain your point, has been the code of household morality which woman has been taught.
- 6.9 The poet has sung, in sickly strains, the loveliness of woman's dependence upon man, and now we find it reechoed by those who profess to teach the religion of the Bible.
- 6.10 God says, ‘Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of ?’ Man says, depend upon me.
- 6.11 God says, ‘**HE** will teach us of his ways.’ Man says, believe it not, I am to be your teacher.
- 6.12 This doctrine of dependence upon man is utterly at variance with the doctrine of the Bible.

- 6.13 In that book I find nothing like the softness of woman, nor the sternness of man: both are equally commanded to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, love, meekness, gentleness, etc.
- 7.1 But we are told, 'the power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from a consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection.'
- 7.2 If physical weakness is alluded to, I cheerfully concede the superiority; if brute force is what my brethren are claiming, I am willing to let them have all the honor they desire; but if they mean to intimate, that mental or moral weakness belongs to woman, more than to man, I utterly disclaim the charge.
- 7.3 Our powers of mind have been crushed, as far as man could do it, our sense of morality has been impaired by his interpretation of our duties; but no where does God say that he made any distinction between us, as moral and intelligent beings.
- 8.1 'We appreciate,' say the Association, 'the unostentatious prayers and efforts of woman in advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad, in leading religious inquirers TO THE PASTOR for instruction.'
- 8.2 Several points here demand attention.
- 8.3 If public prayers and public efforts are necessarily ostentatious, then 'Anna the prophetess, (or preacher,) who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day,' 'and spake of Christ to all them that looked for redemption in Israel,' was ostentatious in her efforts.
- 8.4 Then, the apostle Paul encourages women to be ostentatious in their efforts to spread the gospel, when he gives them directions how they should appear, when engaged in praying, or preaching in the public assemblies.
- 8.5 Then, the whole association of Congressional ministers are ostentatious, in the efforts they are making in preaching and praying to convert souls.
- 9.1 But woman may be permitted to lead religious inquires to the PASTORS for instruction.
- 9.2 Now this assuming that all pastors are better qualified to give instruction than woman.
- 9.3 This I utterly deny.
- 9.4 I have suffering too keenly from the teaching of man, to lead any one to him for instruction.
- 9.5 The Lord Jesus says,--'Come unto me and learn of me.'
- 9.6 He points his followers to no man; and when woman is made the favored instrument of rousing a sinner to his lost and helpless condition, she has no right to substitute any teacher for Christ; all she has to do is, to turn the contrite inquire to the 'Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.'
- 9.7 More souls have probably been lost by going down to Egypt for help, and by trusting in man in the early stages of religious experience, than by any other error.
- 9.8 Instead of the petition being offered to God,--'Lead me in thy truth, and TEACH me, for thou art the God of my salvation,' – instead of relying on the precious promises – 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall HE TEACH in the way that he shall choose'—'I will instruct thee and TEACH thee in the way which thou shalt go – I will guide thee with mine eye' – the young convert is directed to go to man, as if he were in the place of God, and his instructions essential to an advancement in the path of righteousness.
- 9.9 That woman can have but a poor conception of the privilege of being taught of God, what he alone can teach, who would turn the religious inquirer aside from the fountain of living waters, where he might slake his thirst for spiritual instruction, to those broken cisterns

which can hold no water, and therefore cannot satisfy the panting spirit.

9.10 The business of men and women, who are ORDAINED of GOD to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to a lost and perishing world, is to lead souls to Christ, and not to Pastors for instruction.

10.1 The General Association say, that 'when woman assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her, and her character becomes unnatural.'

10.2 Here again the unscriptural notion is held up, that there is a distinction between the duties of men and women as moral beings; that what is virtue in man, is vice in woman; and women who dare to obey the command of Jehovah, 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression,' are threatened with having the protection of the brethren withdrawn.

10.3 If this is all they do, we shall not even know the time when our chastisement is inflicted; our trust is in the Lord Jehovah, and in him is everlasting strength.

10.4 The motto of woman, when she is engaged in the great work of public reformation should be,--The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?: She must feel, if she feels rightly, that she is fulfilling one of the important duties laid upon her as an accountable being, and that her character, instead of being 'unnatural,' is in exact accordance with the will of Him to whom, and to no other, she is responsible for the talents and the gifts confided to her.

10.5 As to the pretty simile, introduced into the 'Pastoral Letter,' 'If the vine whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis work, and half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of the elm,' etc. I shall only remark that it might well suit the poet's fancy, who sings of sparkling eyes and coral lips, and knights in armor clad; but it seems to me utterly inconsistent with the dignity of a Christian body, to endeavor to draw such an anti-scriptural distinction between men and women.

11 Ah! How many of my sex feel in the dominion, thus unrighteously exercised over them, under the gentle appellation of protection, that what they have leaned upon has proved a broken reed at best, and oft a spear.

Thine in the bonds of womanhood,

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