

Christian Messenger.

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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

DENOMINATIONALISM.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE CHURCHES COMPOSING THE NOVA SCOTIA CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, CONVENED WITH THE NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH, HALIFAX.

Dear Brethren,—

In our annual epistle we ask you to consider the importance of cultivating a spirit of greater love for our denomination. In selecting this subject, our object is not to promote party feeling or sectarian bigotry, but to bring the members of our denomination to feel more fully their obligation to sustain the body to which they belong. In discussing this subject, we may be charged with narrowness, or exclusiveness in love to the great christian brotherhood, while yet we may possess the most liberal feelings towards other evangelical bodies, and see in them excellencies which it would be profitable to imitate.

The right of private judgment, and a strict adherence to the fundamental truths of salvation, and the ecclesiastical polity developed in the New Testament, is a privilege belonging to all. With an open Bible to read, a mind to comprehend the truth, and a heart to feel its power, convictions must be formed which will lead a christian to act—in matters of religion—conscientiously, as he understands the revealed will of God. He will have a creed, or system of belief, which he supposes to contain the leading principles of Divine Revelation, and, as religion is social in its character, he will unite with other christians, whose views of the doctrines of the gospel, and practice of the ordinances, coincide with his own. Here is denominationalism. It is spiritual freedom, resulting from the right of private judgment and unrestrained action. So the Apostle felt in the following declaration to the Church at Corinth—"Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy."

Under the prevalence of christian love, one might prefer having the whole family of the redeemed known by the name first given them at Antioch, which is very comprehensive and appropriate, but, under the existing state of things it is impossible, for the Lord's host has become divided and subdivided, according to their convictions of the teaching of Christ and his Apostles. "I dwell among mine own people," is the language of every conscientious christian, as he unites with the denomination of his choice, hence his duty to love that denomination, and strive to promote its interests. There is a vast religious machinery in operation for evangelizing the world, which is worked by the existing sects in their independent capacity, and while we say "God speed" to all whose efforts are so directed, as to lead sinners to rely wholly upon the atonement of Christ for salvation, we yet turn to the denomination of our choice, with our heart's best sympathy and warmest love.

Love for our denomination is justifiable:—

1st. Upon the principle of honesty. Honesty demands that every one who unites with a religious denomination should love it, and uphold it. Of the many virtues that adorn the christian, and promote symmetry of character, none is more worthy of admiration than straightforward honesty in avowing his belief in matters of religion, and maintaining the principles which he feels to be consistent with the plain teaching of God's word. When a man by his public profession of faith in Christ unites with that christian denomination whose views of the doctrines of the gospel, and practice of the ordinances are—in his opinion—nearer the Apostolic belief and practice than any other, he should love it best, its interests should be dear to him, and all his zeal and efforts in the cause of religion—which may aim first to secure the salvation of sinners—should be so directed as ultimately to promote its prosperity.

Christian manliness, in one who professes to be a child of God, is important. Those who possess it will always avow their principles, and maintain the cause of truth. The duty of looking after the interests of religion devolves especially upon christians. Every one who names the name of Christ should not only depart from iniquity, but also take a decided stand in the Redeemer's cause, displaying an activity commensurate with the grace received. If such were the case, every christian denomination would be amply sustained by its members, in its efforts to save souls, and advance the kingdom of Christ.

The Baptists of these Lower Provinces have been signally blessed by God, and have, by his grace, become a large and prosperous body. Over twenty-seven thousand members are enrolled upon our church books. Let love reign in the heart of each, and all be true to their avowed principles, and much will be done by them for the salvation of sinners, our denominational advancement, and the glory of God.

2nd. From love to a lost world. The love of Christ in the heart manifests itself by an increasing desire for the salvation of sinners and the spread of truth. Those who feel its power are anxious for the fulfilment of the prediction,—“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” It is the truth as it is in Jesus, the same truth that the Apostles labored to propagate, and for which they suffered, that every well instructed christian would give to a lost world. True love cannot look with complacency

upon the spread of falsehood, or propagation of error. It shrinks from it, as from unrighteousness. It foresees the spiritual dearth that must—in the future—overspread the world if truth should be suppressed, and is therefore opposed to the charity that would promote a wide-spread and false liberalism, which would ultimately degenerate into cold indifference for the fundamental doctrines of salvation. “It rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” By the truth the sinner is made free, and by it also the spiritual nature of the christian is nourished and strengthened, hence the importance of giving it to a lost world in all its purity. It has ever been the desire of Baptists to have their faith and practice accord with the plain teachings of Jesus. They have striven to shield the truth from the dogmas of men and the corruptions of error, and to give it to the world in doctrine and duty, precept and practice, in its primitive purity.

3rd. On account of the antiquity of its origin. We do not claim for the Baptist denomination exemption from imperfection; and there are many things among its members that are neither pleasing to God, nor lovely in the sight of men, but we do claim for them antiquity of origin. We go back as far as the times of the Apostles for all that we hold dear in the fundamental principles of religion. We would not wish to be classed with the race of boasters, but rather be clothed with humility, yet must stand up firmly before all and not only say,—“The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants;” but also, that we do “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” A thing ought to be prized, and loved, for what it is in itself, for the quality which it possesses rendering it worthy of love and regard. In the christian church a person should not be highly esteemed merely because he loves the truth and defends it, faithfully follows Jesus, and lives in the fear of God. A religious denomination should be the one of our choice, not merely because it is wealthy, aristocratic, and popular with the fashionable world—things which have a great influence over those who are only superficially religious—but because it is cast in the Apostolic mould, adheres to primitive simplicity in doctrine and practice, always cleaving to the Divine Oracles, refusing to teach “for doctrines the commandments of men.” The New Testament presents the religion of Christ in its early dawnings and triumphs, and shows what kind of men the first followers of Jesus were, not ashamed to own his name before a scoffing world, or be called singular when a profession of faith led to a separation from the dead forms of the religion of the Jews, and the sinful maxims and customs of the Gentiles. The ordinances of the christian church, baptism and the Lord's Supper—those beautiful symbols of the gospel—setting forth as they do, Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and that his people live by faith in Him, were highly prized by them. The love of Christ was the constraining power that led them forward in the obedience of faith. Those who receive the whole truth and obey it—not considering anything non-essential which Christ has enjoined—whose church polity is derived wholly from the New Testament, and in whose hearts love reigns, may justly claim those primitive disciples as kindred in Christ.

The late venerable Dr. Baron Stowe in speaking of his relation with the Baptist denomination, with true christian manliness said:—“Nor am I—by comparison—ashamed of my company; for although there may be some persons and some things among us that I suppose could well be spared, and others that might be greatly improved, yet here are a people with whom I can happily labour for christian ends, and from whom I count it an affliction to be separated. To the practical development of those principles which we have learned at the feet of our great teacher my life is devoted.” He loved his denomination. Such, dear brethren, should be the position taken by each member of our body.

Where that love exists, it should manifest itself by a proper desire for the prosperity of the denomination, and a commendable zeal in promoting it. Love is always practical, seeking the good of the object loved. Christ loved lost sinners and gave himself for them. When the love of Christ prevails with the christian he declares it, not in words only, but also by proper efforts for the advancement of his cause. Love cannot be hid. It will burn in the heart, speak through the eye, glow in the countenance, and act in the life. It does not change with circumstances, but while in prosperity it may rejoice, in adversity it displays its full strength. The Judean captives by the rivers of Babylon retained fond recollection of their native land, and there—in the hour of adversity—pledged eternal fidelity to it. “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 prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” Such a spirit of christian patriotism animating the members of our churches would bind them firmly to the denomination they professedly believe in and love, would cause them to feel its interests to be theirs, and bring all their religious energies into vigorous exercise, to extend its bounds by the triumphs of truth. Should we estimate the denominational love existing in our body by the zeal displayed in promoting its interests, it would not afford a very flattering view of its depth and strength. Some noble examples there are, but the number of the faithful is too small, and the burden presses heavily upon them.

More complete union of views, feeling, and action is requisite. While we consider a commendable zeal in promoting the interests of our denomination a fair criterion of

the love that exists in its members, due allowance must be made for some, either on account of circumstances or constitutional peculiarities. One may be a Baptist from principle, and be firmly bound to the body by love, and yet through the pressure of cares and labour—in supplying the wants of his family—have his time and means so absorbed that he is unable to give much expression to his love. Another may entertain humble views of his own ability, and feel his deficiency when compared with others, so that from mere timidity he keeps quiet. Each of these possesses more love to the denomination than he displays in action. Some shrink from boldly maintaining our denominational principles on account of what they term christian charity; but it is feared many are mistaken in this matter, that instead of their being influenced by the spirit of charity, they are either afraid of displeasing the members of another denomination, or are deficient in true love for Baptist principles and practices. If this feeling is allowed to prevail, it will do much towards undermining our strength. The next thing you will hear from those advocates of charity is,—“It is not very material what denomination one unites with if he is a christian”; then weakness and wavering in denominational sentiment, and flagging in zeal follow. Such a man is afloat, you never know just where to find him, never can feel that he honours our principles, or imparts anything more than a mere nominal strength to our body. The strongest love for our own denomination is compatible with the spirit of christian charity. One may firmly hold to his own principles and practices, and yet cultivate the charity that “that thinketh no evil.” Let it be well understood, that in labouring energetically for the advancement of religion in connection with our denominational interests, we do not infringe upon the rights of others, or rob them of their privileges, but only act in harmony with what was implied in our public profession of religion and union with the body. In this connection we would call your attention for a few moments to a matter of importance touching our denominational prosperity, viz., the sustaining of our Institutions of learning, and societies for promoting religious knowledge. They are centres of strength and crowns of glory to the denomination and should be amply sustained. Is it not a sad evidence of a lack of love, when they are left destitute of the funds requisite to carry them on prosperously, when those funds are in the hands of the people to whom they belong? Have you not failed to look at these objects in their true light? Have you ever properly thought of the importance of our Missionary Societies as a means for systematic effort in carrying the gospel to the lost residing in destitute regions, and of our Institutions of learning, in which our rising youth are educated and fitted for lives of usefulness? We would not question your love, but suggest that it may have been warped aside through prejudice, or restrained by covetousness, and never have attained its full proportions. It must appear evident to every one, that, if there are connected with us, and under our management and control, certain objects calculated to sustain the cause of religion, and promote our denominational advancement, and your love does not embrace them, it has not yet attained its full strength, and been taught to flow in all its appropriate channels. We like to see it gushing out in acts of benevolence, and glowing in the tangible form of dollars and cents.

We close with the words of an eminent Divine:—“Satisfied that primitive truth is held by the body represented in this Association; that it is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, then there ought to be in all its members a strong denominational spirit.”

For the Christian Messenger.

THE PROBLEM OF LIFE.

BY W. H. NEWCOMB, A MEMBER OF THE GRADUATING CLASS, ACADIA COLLEGE, 1870.

Several gentlemen who were present at the recent Anniversary and listened to this Essay, expressed a desire that it might appear in print. In accordance with that wish we have obtained it for publication. The writer's references to the subject of religious conflict, are very appropriate and forcible, and given with clearness and beauty of expression.

In contrast with some of the views put forward nowadays by self-styled “liberal” minds, the conservatism of this Essay is a hopeful augur for its author:—

The life of man is a Pathetic perhaps—a given point, bounded every way by the unknown. In the universe of being, islanded from other existences by superior mental endowments, and from those of its kind by the exclusiveness of individualism, each human life is absolute in its unity, a separate incarnation of a universal life. Life, which in its primary acceptation means the vital principle, the time during which body and soul are connected, by a kind of metonymy comes to express the development, changes, in short all the effects which require a period of conscious existence for their growth. One of the strongest elements in our idea of life is consciousness. Being without the consciousness of being is predicable only of inanimate matter. Life is the result or condition of matter organized. Organism without life exists only as waste material. After the experiment has been performed, it matters little what be-