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Circular Letter.

INCREASED LIBERALITY—THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH, AND THE NECESSITY OF THE AGE.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER FROM THE NOVA SCOTIA WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED, 1872.

Beloved Brethren,—

The sublime and startling statement, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price," rings in our ears at the very commencement of our religious life. And as we hear the Master's voice saying unto us, "Glorify God in your bodies and spirits which are his," we acknowledge his claim. We admit his right to all we have and are. Life—body—soul—all,—we are ready to lay on his altar. And we exclaim, "What have we but our sins that we have not received? But as a limb loses strength and vigour by lack of exercise, so does a faculty of the soil or a grace of the heart. Through improper training, neglect of carrying out good resolutions, or the cooling of religious ardour, we soon come to seek our "own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's; originally all things were declared to be the Lord's; yet we find even Christians ready to claim some things as their own. They would seemingly break up the proprietorship of Jesus, and to a certain extent dispossess the Creator. To warp us back from our departure from God in this matter to a proper anchorage-ground, let us note the following considerations:—

I. GOD DEMANDS LIBERALITY AT THE HANDS OF HIS PEOPLE.

Did he not ask of the ancient patriarchs, even to a tenth of their income, valuable animals in sacrifice? And was not this offering imposed upon them as an obligation they owed to God, and as a condition of his worship? We are told that "the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering." It is said that "Abraham gave Melchisedec tithes of all." "Even the patriarch Abraham," says Paul, "gave the tenth of the spoils." And Jacob said; "I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

As time passes on and the strife for wealth grows keen, and men are in danger of becoming selfish and exclusive, the Lord demands liberal gifts of his people Israel, as an evidence of their attachment to him and a proof that their worship is sincere. The burdens laid upon them in this matter would seem to us heavy in the extreme. One-tenth was to be given to the tribe of Levi. Another tenth was for public festivals, and for the poor. The first born males of all cattle were to be given up, and other donations were to be made to the poor. Hence a very large proportion of their income must have been given for benevolent purposes.

Now, as Christians live in the midst of greater light and are surrounded by more abundant blessings, we do not wonder that the Lord should expect great gifts of us, "Thou shalt not appear before me empty," is his command, "Bring an offering, and come into his courts," is the word of his servant. The law of Christ, his example, and moral likeness to him, all demand of the Christian large liberality. In this way God would teach man that He alone is the Proprietor and Ruler of the Universe—that his claims are superior to those of all others, and that he has a right to do as he will with his own. In demanding of man a portion of his income for the support of his worship, he would teach man the value and privilege of that worship, and that if he would enjoy the blessing, he must make the sacrifice.

II. GOD COMMENDS LIBERALITY.

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble," "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again." "He hath dispersed; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour." "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The abundant and varied provision which the Lord ordered his ancient people to make for the poor, and the many valuable gifts that were to be brought to his altar, shew in what estimation he holds christian liberality.

III. JESUS TEACHES LIBERALITY.

By the parable of the good Samaritan, he condemns selfish exclusiveness, and teaches that sympathy which prompts to appropriate relief is a mark of heavenly citizenship and heavenly brotherhood. By two other parables, he discloses man's relation to God as a steward. In one he shows that the Lord expects returns in proportion to the talents received. In the other, he informs us that he will bestow the rewards of grace according to the faithful improvement of the talents that were possessed. And the Saviour's whole grand and blessed life was a commentary on his teachings in this matter. From first to last, his life of goodness—human and divine—was the embodiment of benevolence. And this is what he expects to find in his people. They are "not to love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." They are to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."

IV. THE EARLY CHRISTIANS PRACTISED LIBERALITY.

Just as soon as the pulse of spiritual life was quickened by the Holy Spirit in renewed hearts, the early disciples had all things in common. They rose at once out of their natural selfishness and national exclusiveness, and gave up their property for the general good. And when a famine was predicted, the early church contributed without delay so as to mitigate its severity.

A beautiful example of christian liberality is the humble Dorcas, who labored most diligently so as to be able to give away. Cornelius, too, was frequent in prayers and abundant in alms. And wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, what they did will be spoken of for a memorial of them.

The Philippian Church was distinguished for its liberality. Although it was originally composed of a few stalwart Romans who had been dispossessed of their lands by the Roman Emperor, the

Apostle Paul could point to it with pride as a benevolent church. For the greater part of thirteen years, in whole or in part, they had supported him in his missionary tours. And true to his promise, the Lord blessed this church abundantly.

V. THE METHOD OF LIBERALITY.

Whatever God demands of his intelligent creatures, he teaches them how to perform. When he asked the patriarchs for offerings, he told them in what way and to what extent they were to be brought. And so he taught the Israelites. So he teaches us. The New Testament discloses a method of liberality, by which the most signal advantages may be gained. For adherence to God's method will always ensure success. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him that there be no gatherings when I come." Here we have time, priority for God, proportion, ease and certainty, to commend this plan to attention. In this injunction, we have *periodic dedication to God*, "Upon the first day of the week." *General participation* "Every one of you." The giving is to be personal, all are to give. Then we have *prior and certain provision*, lay by him in store, and *conscientious proportion*, "as the Lord hath prospered him;" and *complete preparedness*, "that there be no gatherings when I come." Let this plan be adopted by the churches and properly worked up, and the amount of money raised for benevolent purposes will be at least double, and with but a tithe of the trouble now experienced.

VI. THE ADVANTAGES OF LIBERALITY.

What are these? *Liberality checks the tendency to idolize property.* Man is ever craving for self indulgence, and looking round for self-protection. Not fearing God, he forgets his dependence on him. He cannot trust him for the future. He prefers to take the reins in his own hands, and to get all he can in his possession for possible future needs. The Christian is too prone to fall into the same errors. And he requires the influence of an enlightened and large christian liberality to draw him from these evils, and save him from the idolatry of gold. Viewed in the light of truth and eternity, christian giving will be invested with a charm and a power that will wither into insignificance all the supposed advantages of idolized wealth. *Large christian liberality strengthens the heart's love to God.*

The heart that loves will wish to bestow its best gifts on the object of its love. We reserve our choicest treasures for those that are dearest to us. And our hearts go with our gifts. The flame of love and the stream of benevolence run parallel. And seldom does one go beyond the other. He who loves God most, if he have the ability, will do most for God. And he who devises liberal things for the Lord will find divine love in his heart greatly strengthened and increased. It is no marvel, then, that the curse of the Lord should rest on such selfish souls as Achan, Gehazi, and Demas, and we wonder not that a curse was the portion of Israel for robbing the treasury of the Lord.

VII. THE NEED OF LIBERALITY.

Our Foreign Missions need it. The heathen are perishing, stretching out their hands to us, they are begging for the bread of life. Continually are they sending to our ears the Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us." We have not sufficient means to give them help. Increased liberality on the part of Christians is, therefore, a great necessity of the age.

Our Home Missions need it. Weak churches are growing weaker every year, and staggering to their fall. Destitute sections about our own doors are becoming darker and darker. We want the means to send them the light. Liberality on the part of the churches is therefore a crying necessity of the age.

The cause of Education needs it. We want more ministers. Where are we to look for them? To the Lord. Yes; but the Lord does not usually give us ministers full grown at once. We must look mainly to Acadia College. To train these men called of God for the churches, the churches must supply the means. And with the spirit of a large christian liberality among the churches, a grand endowment for the College could easily be raised. An increased liberality, then, on the part of our denomination is a most pressing necessity of the present age.

REPORT OF THE NOVA SCOTIA WESTERN HOME MISSIONARY BOARD.

BROOKFIELD, June 15th, 1872.

YOUR BOARD HAS ENDEAVORED TO PERFORM THE WORK ASSIGNED TO IT, AND PRESENT A REPORT OF LABOR PERFORMED.

Rev. Joseph H. Saunders was assigned a mission of one year to Shelburne and vicinity by your previous Board. Three months of this term has been performed since the last meeting of the Association. Of this labor your Board have received a Report. Bro. S. labored faithfully and with much acceptance. He gives the following summary of the work performed: Sermons 20. Prayer and Conference Meetings 5. Family visits 74. Miles travelled 906.

Rev. Perez Murray labored one quarter of the term of nine months at Dalhousie West, closing Dec. 26th, 1871, and preached 36 sermons, made 70 family visits, held 8 conference meetings, and baptized 1. Rev. Joseph Saunders having resigned his connection with the Board, as Missionary to Shelburne and vicinity, Bro. Murray in January last was appointed 13 weeks to that field which was duly fulfilled.

We present an abstract of his Report "Went to Jordan Bay and Sand Point—found the brethren there much depressed in spirit. Commenced laboring with them in the gospel, and the Lord was pleased to bless our efforts in the reviving of his work in the hearts of his people. Several who had gone astray were reclaimed, and some sinners were hopefully converted to God. Felt the need of a more commodious place of worship, as the school houses were crowded to excess. Held some services at Shelburne but with no especial tokens of good.—Spent also a few days at East Sable River—found this little church walking in love. Baptized one young man, and received another person into the fellowship of the church by Letter. They are making an effort to build a Meeting House and need help."

Preached 71 sermons. Other meetings held 47. Families visited 90. Baptized 7. Collected in aid of the mission \$57.44.

Bro. Benjamin Miller, Licentiate, labored 6 weeks in Milford and Greywood. He reports good attendance upon the preaching of the word, especially at Milford. Our brother writes "At the close of the Mission there seemed to be a manifestation of the divine favor. One old wanderer returned with weeping to his Father's house, to the great joy of the feeble few that were endeavoring to uphold the cause of God—and I am persuaded that there are others, in the secret of their hearts, crying "O that I knew where I might find him." Sermons delivered 13. Prayer and Conference Meetings 4. Families visited 20. Received in aid of the mission \$8.50.

This brother also spent 5 weeks at New Albany. He states that he found the church in a low state, but that a few praying souls were there to welcome him, and to plead with God for the divine blessing to attend his labors amongst the people; and that in answer to these prayers, an interest was awakened that if followed up and improved must be productive of great good."

Previous to his leaving—the people circulated subscription papers and received pledges to the amount of \$100.00 for the support of Bro. Miller for one half of the time during the coming year—providing the Board can place him on that field. This action of the brethren is worthy of commendation, and encouragement.

Bro. Miller furnishes the following summary of labor performed: Sermons preached 12. Families visited 28. Prayer and Conference Meetings 6. Collected \$11.18.

Rev. Obed Parker spent 4 weeks in Sherbrook and Springfield. His services were gratefully received. He believes that much good would result from the stated ministry of the word in those localities. He reports: Sermons preached 11. Family visits 35. Other meetings 5. Collected \$10.20.

Rev. R. Walker was appointed 4 weeks to New Ross and Dalhousie East. He reports 2 weeks labor in each place. He "found the people in a dark and scattered state." He reports: Sermons preached 8. Families visited 20. Conference and other meetings 4. Collected \$3.00.

At a meeting of the Board in May, it was voted in consideration of the destitute condition of the brethren at Handy Mountain and Port George, to request Rev. L. B. Gates to give them what portion of time he may be able to spare until the Association. He reports a low state of religion. Spent 1 week with the brethren: Sermons preached 3. Conference Meeting 1. Families visited 20. Collected \$1.00.

Rev. H. Achilles received an appointment from the Board of 4 weeks to Chelsea and vicinity. He found the cause very low, and the church much scattered. Services were held mostly in dwelling houses, and these were crowded to excess. The missionary was permitted to witness good results of his labors in the reviving of God's work in the hearts of his people, and indications of interest amongst the young. He says "Our last meetings seemed to be deeply interesting, and I trust some have obtain pardon." This field is greatly destitute of the preached gospel. But they are encouraged to go on with their Prayer and Conference meetings. They have started an interesting Sabbath School: Sermons preached 15. Families visited 45. Prayer and Conference Meetings 4. Collected \$6.50.

The work of your missionaries may be summarized as follows:

Weeks of labor 58.
Sermons delivered 189.
Prayer and Conference Meetings 84.
Families visited 402.
Baptized 8.
Collected by missionaries \$104.82.

Your Board would further invite attention to the fact that our destitute fields are under the present arrangement, inadequately supplied with the preached word. Some of these sections can only enjoy the services of the missionary for a few weeks of the year, while for months they are left wholly destitute. It is felt that there are certain grave defects in our present methods of working. With a proper system we could furnish our destitute churches with stated preaching, and obtain from our people greatly increased contributions.

Holding the truths we cherish, and working them out by gospel rule, we must "wax stronger and stronger." We have reason for gratitude for the prosperity and growth of some of our churches, but yet it is evident that we are far from accomplishing what we might, with the divine blessing. We need to be more liberal in devising, more bountiful in giving, more prompt and zealous in action. The churches must observe the law of christian charity, and seek for the things whereby they may edify one another! The wealthier should have nothing over, and the poorer should feel no lack.

Your Board look forward with interest to the proposed Convention of the churches in Berwick to discuss the subject of union in the missionary work; and trust that these deliberations will be carried on in the fear of God and result in great good to the interests of religion in our beloved Province.

Respectfully submitted,
M. P. FREEMAN, Secretary.

REPORT OF THE ACADIA FRENCH MISSION BOARD.

In making their 21st Annual Report your Board would express their gratitude to God for his blessing on the Mission.

Our Missionary has been permitted to continue his labors without interruption for the past year.

The following is a summary of his work: Sermons preached 80. Family visits 223. Miles travelled 1766. He has also distributed 2880 pages of Tracts, 4 New Testaments and 4 Bibles; besides preaching by the wayside as opportunity offered. This wayside preaching forms quite an important item. This is the report of labor since the 30th of Sept. last.

The Board would now call the attention of the Association to the necessity of obtaining another efficient Missionary; especially as we have a Mission House unoccupied, and a large field adjoining uncultivated.

Miss Ellen Porter, as recommended by the Association last year,