

Circular Letter.

Reverence the Word.

THE LETTER OF THE N. S. EASTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, ADDRESSED TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Dear Brethren,—

One of the greatest privileges we have on earth is hearing the blessed tidings of the gospel of Christ. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. Hence Christ said, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." No doubt it was a great privilege to see and hear the Son of God in the days of His flesh, but that did not secure to those who heard Him any greater blessing, for Christ said, "Thomas, because thou hast seen thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." We have the word of God proclaimed in our ears. It is for us to improve our opportunities, and be made better by our mercies. We who are favored with the written word and the public preaching of the gospel can scarcely conceive how greatly our forefathers, in days of ignorance and persecution, valued a Bible, or the opportunity of hearing a faithful sermon. It may be truly said of them, "And the word of the Lord was precious in those days."

The Bible as an inspired record is an infallible guide, and it is the final authority for faith and life. Its inspiration involves its infallibility. Its hallowed sayings are our stay when all other support fails, our rock amid the billows; the songs of our pilgrimage, the pledge of our final rest. It should now be considered by every child of God as a glowing light, and, if held up, will direct the wanderer, otherwise surrounded with darkness, to see his way to safety. It was our belief in the word we read and heard that led us to accept Christ for our salvation, and if our hold of the truth remains firm the influence of our lives will mould other characters also, and so we shall leave lasting impressions on them for good. If our love and reverence for the truth would continue through life the same as it was when we first offered the petition of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and when we found Christ ready to save us, we would doubtless lead many more souls to Jesus.

There is too little reverence for the word manifested by believers. Not intentionally, perhaps, but through carelessness and neglect of a right use of time and opportunities for doing good. We are told to "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving our own souls." We cannot deceive God. He sees with what interest we listen, what we retain, how much progress we make by means of what he supplies, and how earnestly we pray. He who will require our account knows all. Let us not then deceive ourselves on the ground of our having come eagerly to hear the word if we do not perform what we so inadequately hear. To hear and to do is to build upon a rock. "If any one be a hearer of the word and not a doer he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But who looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man is blessed in his deed." He never is the subject of doubt, while his views of things are conformed to the disclosures of the word, and his feeling and course are in harmony with its requirements. In resting upon this Word as the ultimate ground of certainty we are led to take from it rule, direction, and motive, and thus receive divine teaching. What the mind perceives to be taught here, true conscience approves as right, and the heart loves as good. The man has never yet been found who felt that he was doing wrong in submitting himself in a spirit of implicit faith to the truth of Jesus Christ. His submission has always been the source of his peace, a peace as deep and refreshing and satisfying as his faith has been strong and decided.

We rejoice over the news from the churches, the good news, the glad tidings of so many having found their way to the Saviour. The large additions to our ranks brings responsibility upon those who have been a longer time in the delightful service. We must hold up the Word by our example as the only safe guide for youth and age.

Those having alleged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus during this year of grace should with all true believers reverence the word of truth. In order to do this we must avoid as much as in us lies all such society, all such amusements, all such tempers, as are incompatible with the Christian life. Some things which are apparently innocent, and do not assume an alarming aspect, or bear a dangerous character, yet if we find that these things abate our love for religious exercises or infringe on our time for performing them, if they make spiritual concerns appear insipid, if they wind the world a little more about our heart, in short, if we have formerly found them injurious to our own souls, then let no example or permission, no belief of their alleged innocence, no plea of their perfect safety, tempt us to indulge in them. Our Lord and Master said to His disciples, and He says to you, "Ye are the salt of the earth." To be the salt is to live in strict obedience to the truth; to do everything in our power by word, by persuasion, by influence, by example, to make those around us more Christlike than they would otherwise have been.

As the word is the instrument in the hands of the Spirit of God, it is our duty to honor it in every turn and phase of our lives. We must and we will do so if we are loyal to our Master. He would have us show our reverence for His truth by doing our utmost in causing it to reach unrenewed hearts, and, as it is "the savor of life unto life to those that receive it," but "of death unto death to them that refuse it," dare we stop anywhere short of our whole duty? The Christian is the only Bible man of the world read. If we take care that in this book be plainly shown the loving spirit, the grandeur and the winning friendliness of Christ, then we shall find many hearts open to receive this actual testimony of Christian life. The past gives encouragement. The outlook is hopeful, and may we not look for a still greater increase during the coming Association year? If we may venture to hope for a better issue it must be on the basis of a closer walk with God and a fuller respect for His word, and on a better appreciation of true discipleship. We must have the gospel pattern of piety held up before us. Our religion must be more to us than a mere opinion, more than a mere excitement of feeling, it must be a well grounded belief in the record God has given of His Son, a resolute and manly service. Then we "shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace, the mountains and the hills shall break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

For us—whatever's undergone, Thou knowest, wilt what is done. Grief may be joy misunderstood; Only the good discerns the good. I trust Thee while my days go on.

Whatever's lost, it first was won: We will not struggle nor impugn. Perhaps the cup was broken here That heaven's new wine might show more clear. I praise Thee while my days go on.

—E. B. Browning.

Heavenly mansions built after earthly patterns are but castles in the air.—Edward Wigglesworth.

There is nothing meaner than barbarous and cruel treatment of the dumb creatures who cannot answer us or resent the misery which is so often needlessly inflicted upon them.—No. Bright.

The bird that soars on highest wing Builds on the ground her lowly nest, And she that doth most sweetly sing Sings in the shade when all things rest.—Montgomery.

The Christ whom we preach must be the full Christ of the Gospel—not the ideal, but the historic Christ; not a Christ of one's own invention and handiwork, but the Christ whom the believing church of all ages confesses and adores as her own.—Van Oosterzee.

Sunday Reading.

The following Sermon was sent to us by a friend who heard it preached on Lord's Day morning, June 3rd, 1883 in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.

"Supposing Him to have been in the Company."

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"Supposing him to have been in the company.—Luke ii. 44." All who were present on the occasion are sure to remember our meditation upon, "Supposing him to be the gardener." Although it was only supposition, and evidently a mistake, yet it yielded us most profitable thought. Here is another supposition, a mistake again—a mistake which yielded a good deal of sorrow to those who made it; and yet in the hands of God's Spirit it may bring forth profitable instruction to us as we think it over.

I. We will begin our discourse by saying that THIS WAS A MOST NATURAL SUPPOSITION. That the child Jesus should have been in the company returning to Nazareth was a most likely thing. When the Jews came up from their different allotments once in the year to Jerusalem, they formed family groups at their first starting, and then as they got a little on the road these groups combined and made larger bands; and as the roads approached to Jerusalem, the people gathered into great caravans: thus they went up to the House of God in company. It must have been a delightful season, especially if they sang those "Psalms of degrees" which are supposed to have been written for such pilgrims. What with prayer, and praise, and holy conversation, and with the prospect of meeting together in Jerusalem, the throne of the great King, they must have been happy bands of pilgrims. It was natural enough that, when all was over at Jerusalem—the child Jesus should return home: knowing the time when his parents would return he would be ready to start with them, and failing to meet with them he would join the company with which he came, and so go back to Nazareth.

His parents did not expect to find him wandering alone: they looked for him in the company. Jesus was a child who loved society. He was not stocial, and thus selfishly self-contained; and he was not sullen, avoiding society. He did not affect singularity. In the highest sense he was singular, for he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; but throughout his life he never aimed at singularity either in dress, food, speech, or behaviour. He grew up to be a man among men, mixing with them even at weddings and funerals: no man was more truly human than the man Christ Jesus. It is to be believed that as a child he was like other children in all things but sin; even as a man he was like other men in all but evil. Jesus was not one whose company would be shunned because of his ill-manners; rather would it be courted because of the sweetness of his disposition. He would not make himself disagreeable, and then crown that disagreeableness by stealing away from those whom he had vexed. They knew the sweetness of their dear child's character and the sociableness of his disposition, and therefore they supposed him to have been in the company. This supposition would even more readily occur to us, knowing what we know about him, which is more than his parents knew; for we know that of old his delights were with the sons of men, we know that he often came among men in angel form before his incarnation, and that when he came into the world he came seeking men. As a man he never seemed happier than when he was in the midst of his disciples, or surrounded by publicans and sinners, or feeding famishing crowds. He was so great a lover of mankind that he loved to be "in the company." Living and working in such a city as this, with all its millions, the burden is enough to break one's heart as we consider the city's sin, its irreligion, its neglect of God. It is sweet to hope that when he loved to be "in the company" he who was here, will certainly come and bless these throngs of men. If ever a physician was wanted, it is in this vast hospital; if ever a shepherd was needed, it is among these perishing sheep. Jesus has such a love to the sons of men, and such a wish to gather them to himself, that even now his redeeming work is done he is still ever with us. He has been lifted up, and now he draws all men to himself; and therefore do we expect to find him in the centre of these throngs. Those who go into the dense masses of humanity may expect this same Jesus to be with them in full power to save. Rescue the perishing, and he will be in the company. It was a most natural supposition, because of the sweetness and friendliness of his

temper, that they would find Jesus in the company.

They never suspected that he would be found in any wrong place. No thought ever crossed their minds that he would be found in any haunt of vice, or in any assembly of vanity, though such could have been found in Jerusalem. We do expect to meet our Lord amid the throng of perishing men and women, seeking and saving them; but we know that we shall not find him among those who find pleasure in noisy laughter and lawless mirth. We never look for Jesus in the theatre or drinking saloon: it would be profanity to suppose him there. We never look for him where a question of morals might be raised, for he is undefiled. We expect to find him where his people meet for worship; we look for him where honest men are labouring hard for their daily bread, or where they lie suffering his Father's will; but we never dream of his being found where the world, the flesh, and the devil hold supreme control. Let his example be followed by us: let us never go where our Master would not have gone. There are some places where we cannot suppose him to have been; in those places let it not be supposable that we can be. Let us go only where we can remain in fellowship with our divine Master, and where we should be happy to be found if he were suddenly to come in his kingdom. Let us judge of where we may go by enquiring, "Would Jesus have gone there?" and if he would not have gone, let your feet refuse to carry you that way.

II. But, secondly, THIS SUPPOSITION BROUGHT THEM GREAT SORROW; from which I gather that we ought, with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, to leave nothing as a matter of supposition. By supposing him to have been in the company, they were made to miss him, and to seek him sorrowing for three days. Why did they lose sight of him at all? Why did they not abide with him? We may not blame them, for he did not: but, at any rate, they fell into days and nights of trouble by supposing something about him. Do not suppose anything about Jesus at all. Do not suppose anything about his character, his doctrine, or his work; go in for certain on such points. I have heard of a German who evoked a camel out of his own inner consciousness; what kind of a camel it was I do not know: but many persons evoke a Christ out of their own imaginations. Do not so; for if you do this you will make to yourselves a Christ nothing like Jesus; it will be a mere image, a false Christ an idol Christ. No human thought could ever have invented our Saviour. We put it to all those who doubt the inspiration of the four evangelists—would they kindly write us a fifth evangel? Would they even suggest another action of Jesus which would fit into the rest and be of the same order? They cannot do it. The whole conception of Jesus is original and divine. It is not possible that the most ingenious fancy can add anything to the life of Christ which would square with that which is recorded. If you chance to read the *Prot-evangelion* or the *Gospel of the Infancy*, which are spurious narratives of the childhood of Jesus, you will throw them into the fire and say at once, "These do not fit in with the records of the true evangelists. These stories are ludicrously unlike the child Jesus." In fact, all the books which pretend to be a part of the canon will be detected and rejected at once by the simplest reader who is thoroughly versed in the four evangelists. Do not, therefore suppose anything concerning Jesus, but read the word of God and see what is revealed about him. Never clip the King's coin, but accept it as it is minted in all its purity and preciousness. Add not to the perfect word, lest plagues be added to you. What the Holy Ghost has written concerning the man Christ Jesus, the everlasting Son of God, receive humbly, but do not import suppositions into your theology. This has been the cause of the division of the church into sects: the bones of contention have not been truths revealed, but fictions imagined. I may invent one theory, and another man another, and we shall each fight for his theory. An hypothesis is set up and supported by the letter of Scripture, though not by the spirit of it; and straightway men begin to differ, dispute, and divide. Let us lay aside all suppositions, for these things will only bring us sorrow in the end. Let us believe in the real Jesus as he is revealed in the Scriptures, and as the Holy Ghost graciously enables us to behold him in the glass of the word.

"Supposing him to have been in the company." This supposition caused them great sorrow. Again, I say, beloved, do not take anything about Jesus at haphazard and peradventure. Let this truth apply to your personal dealing with him; as, for instance, do not suppose him to be in your hearts. Do not suppose that because you were baptised in infancy you are therefore in Christ and Christ in you. That is a dangerous supposition. Do not say, "But I have been baptised as a professed believer, and therefore Jesus is in my heart." The inward grace is not tied to the outward sign. Water baptism does not convey the Spirit of God. Blessed are they who, having the Spirit, can use the ordinance to their profit; but do not suppose that the grace of God is tied to any outward rite. Do not say, "I have eaten at the communion table, and therefore Jesus is in my heart." You may eat and drink at his table, and yet never know him, and he may never know you. Outward ceremonies convey no grace to graceless persons. Do not take it for granted that because you are admitted into a Christian Church, and are generally accepted as being a believer, that therefore you must needs be so. I dread lest any of you should think your church membership to be a certificate of salvation. It was not given to you with that view; we judge favourably of your conduct and profession, but we could not read your heart. Do not even suppose that grace must necessarily be in your souls because you have been professing Christians for a great many years, for the lapse of time will not turn falsehood into truth. It is difficult to know how long hypocrisy can be kept up, or how far a man may be self-deceived; it is even possible that he may die with his eyes blinded through the exceeding deceitfulness of sin. Do not suppose that Jesus is in your heart because you are an elder, or a deacon, or a pastor. I will not make any supposition in my own case, for woe is unto me if, after having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway! Such things have happened: Judas was one of the twelve. Men have been sweet of voice, and yet bitter of heart: they have been taught in the word of God as to the letter thereof, but they have not known the power of the everlasting Spirit, and so they have perished. Verily, I say unto you, in Christ's name, unless the Spirit of God do actually rest upon each one of us personally, it will be all in vain for us to suppose that he is in our hearts because of professions and ordinances, for the supposition may be a damning falsehood, and may lull us into a fatal slumber. How terrible to be taken out to execution with our eyes bandaged by a supposition!

Again, dear friends, do not ever suppose that Christ is in our assemblies because we meet in this house. Do not go up to a place of worship and say Jesus is sure to be there. He may not have been there for many a day. Is it not sad that out of the tens of thousands of assemblies held on this day there will be many in which Jesus will not be present; for his gospel will not be preached, or if preached, it will not be set forth in the living power of the Holy Ghost? Christ is not present where he is not honoured. All your architecture, all your millinery, all your music! all your learning, all your eloquence are of small account; Jesus may be absent when all these things are present in profusion; and then your public worship will only be the magnificent funeral of religion, but the life of God will be far away. It brings great sorrow in the long run to a church if they take it for granted that Jesus must be among them. Our question every Sunday morning ought to be, "What think ye, will he come to the feast?" for if he does not come to the feast it will be mockery of a festival, but no bread will be on the table for hungry souls. We must have our Lord in our company or we will break our hearts over his absence. We desire his presence even in the smallest prayer-meeting, and in our minor gatherings when we meet to consult as to his work. If he arouses us by his Spirit, and discovers to us that he was not in our former meetings, we will seek him sorrowing, as his father and mother did.

Once more, let us not take it for granted that the Lord Jesus is necessarily with us in our Christian labours. Do we not too often go out to do good without special prayer, imagining that Jesus must surely be with us as a matter of course? Perhaps we thus conclude because he has been with us so long, or because we feel ourselves fully equipped for the occasion, or because we do not even think whether he is with us or not. This is perilous. If Jesus is not with us, we toil all the night and we take nothing; but if Jesus is with us, he teaches us how to cast the net, and a great multitude of fishes are taken if Jesus be not with us, we are like Samson when his hair was shorn: he went out as at other times thinking to smite the Philistines hip and thigh, as he had done before, but as Watts puts it, he— "Shook his vain limbs with vast surprise, Made feeble fight, and lost his eyes."

So shall we be defeated if we imagine that we can now succeed without fresh divine assistance; the fact being that we ought to seek the Lord in prayer before the smallest Christian engagement, and then we may reap in it the most important result of our lives. You are going to see a poor bedridden old woman; do not attempt to comfort this king's daughter without first seeking the presence of "the Consolation of Israel." You are going to teach your Sunday-school class this afternoon; you have taken it so many times that you get your dinner and walk off to the school scarcely thinking enough about what you are doing to breathe a prayer for your Lord's help? Is this right? Can you afford to waste one single Sabbath, afternoon, or one opportunity to speak for Jesus? and yet it will be wasted if he be not with you. Some of your children may be dead before next Sunday, or never come to the class again; go not even once without your Lord. Do not sit down to teach as if you had Jesus at your command, and were sure that of necessity he must succeed your endeavours. He will withdraw from us if we fall into a careless prayerless habit. Why was he not with his mother that day? Truly he had to be about the business of his heavenly Father, but why did he permit his human mother to miss him? Was it not because she needed to be taught, as well as the rest of us, the value of his company. Perhaps, if we never missed him, we might not know how sweet he is. I can picture Mary, when she had lost the dear child, weeping floods of tears. Then she began to understand what old Simeon meant when he said, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own heart also." The sword was piercing her heart even then to prepare her for three other days in which she would mourn him as dead with still bitterer grief. See how she enquired everywhere, "Have ye seen him?" She reminds me of the spouse in the Song, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" I think I see her going through the streets, and saying at the close of the day, "I sought him, but I found him not." Everywhere the same question, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" but she gets no tidings of him. Peace is all unknown to her till she finds him. But, oh, how precious he was in her eyes when at last she discovered him in the temple. How careful she was of him afterwards, how happy to think that no harm had come to her dear charge! If you and I ever lose the society of Christ in our service, we will go to him, and cry, "My Lord, do not leave me again. What a fool I am if thou art not my wisdom! How weak I am if thou art not my strength! How worse than silent I am if thou art not mouth to me! How heartless is all my talk, and how flat it falls upon the hearers' ears, if thou art not the spirit and the life of all my speaking?" Oh, if all our preaching and teaching were in the power of the presence of our Divine Master, how different it would be!

Do, then, learn the lesson, brethren, as I desire to learn it for myself, that we must not take anything for granted about Jesus. We must make sure work concerning eternal things, for if these be allowed to slip, where are we? Grasp the truth, and know that it is the truth. Never be satisfied with "ifs," and "buts," and "I hope so," and "I trust so," but make sure of Christ! If you are not sure about the health of your body, yet be sure about your being in Christ, and so healthy in soul. If you are not sure about the solvency of your firm, if you are not sure about the deeds of your estate, if you are not sure about your marriage lines, yet at least be sure that you have Jesus within your heart. If you have any doubt to-day, give no sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids until the Holy Ghost himself hath sealed upon your spirit the certainty that Jesus is yours. Thus have I used the supposition in two ways.

(Conclusion next week.)

In every man there is a loneliness, an inner chamber of peculiar life, into which God only can enter.—G. MacDonald.

Pray, pray, pray—there is no help but prayer; A breath that fleets beyond this iron world, And touches him who made it. Tennyson.

Let us beware of losing our enthusiasm. Let us ever glory in something, and strive to retain our admiration for all that would ennoble, and our interest in all that would enrich and beautify our life.—Phillips Brooks.

Hope is the ruddy morning ray of joy, recollection is its golden tinge; but the latter is wont to sink down amid the dews and dusky shades of twilight, and the bright blue day which the former promises breaks indeed, but in another world, and with another sun.—Richter.

ASSOCIATION OF... DENOMINATIONS... Your Literature... while gre... religious... is not... done i... Schools... every ki... the mind... supply... in an in... What we... is truth... sprinkling... Baptist B... Halifax... nature of... ded influ... ive princ... strongly r... be encour... people, v... School, o... little addi... a small co... The mo... larged cir... pillar of M... TAN ME... the peopl... in genera... be an jum... Your C... phasis the... of 1882 c... tracts, te... manner o... in the Di... No one... of the B... to the i... their con... said and... the half... rally spea... fective we... and the... tell a tal... the Bapti... there hav... College 2... have ente... fifty-six... three hav... teen as ph... upon me... have giv... pations... Fifty y... simply in... claim to e... tors, profes... of parlian... education... were con... their full... and ruling... influence... ing is not... district wi... wide as th... a part... Now, th... pride. E... Acadia C... these sch... our missi... parments... dren, feeli... subjected... cultivation... of fifty ye... not mere... helps the... will also... for the ne... As our... these Inst... point out... further th... be increas... interest... of our sc... of our I... interpret... itself, of... moral wa... Christians... we cau m... a rate of