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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Ecclesiastical.

Circular Letter.

To the Churches composing the Nova Scotia Western Baptist Association.

DEAR BRETHREN:—

In our annual epistle we have selected as the subject on which to address you, *the obligations of church members to the churches to which they belong*. And in selecting this theme we have been guided not so much by a consideration of its importance in itself, as by the apprehension that these obligations are not perceived as clearly or felt as forcibly, as the welfare of the churches and the glory of God, as well as the highest individual prosperity of Christians themselves require. It is feared that many members in our churches have never recognized at all, and many more, never as they should, the fact that in becoming members of the church of Jesus Christ, they take upon themselves obligations of a grave character, and of more sacred binding force than any other which are, or can be, assumed in life.

These obligations are, 1st. To love the Church. Every person connected with the church of Christ, ought to love it for what it is. As an institution it is divine in its origin and organization, and the worthy object of the intense affection of God the Father, and the purchase by his blood and life, of Christ the Son. In the language of Dr. Angus, "It combines the advantages of every form of society into which men have been gathered. It is not a *caste*, for it despises none, and rejects none; yet like caste, it preserves, amidst human change, a sacred order; all, 'kings and priests unto God.' It is not a *secret society*, for it practices no reserve, and yet its members have a hidden life, and a joy with which a stranger intermeddles not. It is not a *nation*, for it selects individual persons from among each of the nations, and will ultimately include all; yet it is as clearly defined, though more extensive. It is not a *family*, and yet its bonds are equally tender, only they are incomparably more expansive." The Church is the repository of the truth,—its "pillar and ground." The objects in which it is interested, and the labours in which it engages, are identical with those which are the most dear to every Christian. Its triumphs and destinies are those in which every Christian hopes and expects to participate. For its high origin and exalted character; for its dearness to God and its relation to Christ; for the position it occupies, the privileges and benefits it confers, and the community of its interests and destinies with those of every child of God, the church should be loved by its individual members more intensely, than any other local organization or any earthly object.

2nd. To give constant attendance upon the services of the church. On gaining converts to Christianity and gathering them into societies, the apostles taught them to meet steadily in Christ's name, to celebrate his praise, to receive and impart instruction, and to observe his ordinances, and enjoined upon them "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together." And in all ages of the Christian church, the spiritual improvement of individual Christians, and the promotion of the interests of Christ's Kingdom, have been secured by the use of the means of grace in general, stated assembly. What is the duty of the whole, in this connection, is the duty of the individual members.

3rd. To engage in earnest, devoted efforts, and sacrifices of self, to promote the objects of the church. These objects, legitimately, are the conversion and sanctification of the world, and should be sought by all scriptural and suitable means. Touched with the transforming rod of saving love, the soul recognizes the authority of its Lord, and rises toward a sympathy with his benevolent affections. He loves the souls of his fellowmen and the Kingdom of his Redeemer, and recognizes his duty to do what he can to extend that Kingdom by bringing souls into blessed allegiance to his gracious King. This duty he learns, not simply from the rectified tastes of his regenerated nature, but from the explicit teaching of the word of life, as well as from the instincts of natural reason. And the limit of his efforts and self-sacrifice for this end is that accepted by Paul,—*"as much as in me is."* He is no longer his own, after having been bought with the precious blood of Christ, the contract having been sealed, and the delivery made. All that he is, consecrated for life, with all he may possess, his Savior claims, to be used in his service for the promotion of his glory. So far as the end may be best reached by individual effort, he is bound to put it forth. When associated effort is demanded, the church is the divinely appointed society for accomplishing all which it may be able to effect; and with this he should act, and personally endeavor to raise it to that degree of effectiveness, in which it can best glorify Christ in the accomplishment of his work.

4th. To regulate his life and affairs with a reference to the honor and the influence of the church. As members of churches, individuals are parts of a whole. That the whole is injured by the injury of the parts is a truism which need scarcely be uttered here. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." Considering the origin, Christian design, and destiny of the church of Christ, it is manifest that an injury done it, is an offence of grave moment. Every member of a Christian church who, as an individual, allows his Christian reputation to suffer, dishonors the church and robs it of influence. In view of the personal interests of his brethren, of

the objects to be accomplished by the church, and the glory of Christ, the Church's head, every member should bear constantly in memory the duty resting upon him to honor Christianity and the church of Jesus, by consistency of deportment, in his daily life. How gross the shame, and great the sin, that individual brethren should be injured, the church paralyzed in its efforts, its vital energy sapped, and profession of religion made a by-word, by the personal irregularities and delinquencies of its individual professors. And yet how frequent the instances in which we have to witness it. "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy."

5th. To yield to the requirements and decisions of the church, made conformably with Christian principles and law. The self-government and independence of our churches, according to the divinely given models, require that the few should submit to the many, where differences occur in matters which do not require a sacrifice of conscience. With Christian charity in exercise, and every one desirous of "pleasing his brother for his good to edification," union in action and cheerful co-operation are easily secured. The voice of the majority then becomes the voice of the church. But this not the unexceptionable rule, by any means, it is feared. In societies of human organization, the members can mutually agree to submit to well constituted majorities. The church, in this respect, as in all others, should be a model society and above reproach. True religion demands that refractory insubordination of the few to the many, should never be exhibited in the holy society of the church. Christian charity requires that sullen, inactive acquiescence should not be practiced, but that cheerful and hearty compliance should be yielded, by the few, with the deliberate action of the many. If the voice of the majority be the voice of the church, he who offers persistent opposition to the many, is persistently opposed to the church, and sets himself against it. And without agreement, there can be no harmonious, happy and prosperous walk together. Christian principle, the platform of association, and common reason would dictate, that in Christian churches, considerate, loving, and active compliance and co-operation should be practiced by the few, in case of their differing from the many.

In all probability, it would be freely admitted by all members of churches, that they ought to love the church more ardently than any other society, or any earthly object, that for their own spiritual improvement, and the promotion of the interests of the body, they ought to give constant attendance upon the services of the church, that they ought to engage in earnest and devoted efforts to secure the objects had in view by the church, that they ought to regulate their lives and affairs with a reference to the honor and interests of the church, and that they ought to yield to the requirements and decisions of the church, made conformably with Christian principles and law. But while the duty is admitted, the obligation which is involved in the admitted duty, is not perceived or felt. The *ought* is acknowledged, but the constraint and the restraint of the bond of obligation is not realized. The results are, that our churches are deficient in affection and devotion for the institution of the church; in self-sacrificing and zealous efforts for the promotion of its interests; in careful Christian consistency in the walk and deportment of individual members, and in ready, charitable compliance, and co-operation in the enterprises and actions of the church, when differences obtain.

Desirous of having you realize more sensibly, if possible, dear brethren, these obligations, we will consider briefly the sources whence they arise. Perhaps it might be regarded sufficient to remark that because it is our duty or right to love the church, &c., therefore we are under obligation to do it,—that the perception of rectitude is sufficient to establish the bond of obligation. That ought to be so. What is our duty to do, we are under bounden obligation to do always. But there are external obligations, in addition to this, binding us to the church, a few of which we will mention.

1st. The obligation arising out of the expressed will of God. God as Creator and proper Sovereign of his creatures, has a right to command them, and they are under obligations to obey him. But being, as he is, the head of his Church, and the re-creator of its members, his right to reveal to them his will as their law, and their obligations to respect and comply with that law, appear in greater clearness and intensity. In his Word he has bound them to his church in obligations to love, and to labor, and to make sacrifices for the promotion of its objects and the advancement of its interests.

2nd. The obligations arising out of the church relationship freely entered into. We accept in our "Declaration of Faith and Practice," this definition; viz. "A particular visible church of Christ is a number of his saints by mutual acquaintance and communion, voluntarily and understandingly covenanting and embodying together for upholding and promoting the worship and service of God, to show forth his declarative glory, and for their own edification." Each member added to the church is embodied with, and forms a part of it. "We give up ourselves to one another," in the language of our covenant; "framed together," in the language of Paul. While a member continues with it, he is obligated to it, as a member to a body,—a responsible part, to a whole. In voluntarily entering into the compact he acquired rights to the love, the fellowship, the watch-care, the counsels, the instructions and admonitions of its members and teachers; to an equal voice in the transaction of its business, and the privilege of communion at the Lord's table, and co-operation with the church in its labors for Christ. And, acquiring these rights by entering the compact voluntarily, he also assumes responsibilities and accepts obligations in connection with them. While he is welcomed

the position involves commensurate obligations, according to equal rights and privileges in the church, the acceptance of the measure of ability. The obligations, as well as the rights and privileges, are reciprocal. In proportion as there is neglect in the discharge of the former, the claim upon the latter is vitiated. In proportion as the relationship is tender, the obligations are pressing. In proportion as there is neglect of obligations there is schism in the church, and a marring of its unity.

3rd. The obligations arising out of promises, solemnly given. In uniting with the church, each member enters into a covenant with the body, minute and comprehensive, acknowledging his everlasting and indispensable obligations to carry out its conditions. Considering the character of this covenant, and the ground and manner of his entering into it, no promises, beside, can be so binding, no pledges so solemn. On the basis of the atonement of Jesus Christ, in view of regeneration experienced by the power of the Holy Ghost, and looking to life-long service for him by whom he has been bought, each individual entering the holy precincts of the church of God, formally, and in the most awful presence, and solemn manner, conveys away his last interest in himself, to the church of Christ, and to Christ himself, through his church. In the sacred ordinance of baptism, the oath of allegiance to heaven's King is taken, and the badge of fealty is accepted; in the giving and receiving of the hand of fellowship of the church, there is expressly uttered assurances of close, affectionate, holy union of soul, which grows out of love to God, and faith in Christ as a common Saviour, and there are mutually given pledges and promises for communion, and labor, and reciprocal efforts, for the promotion of individual holiness and preparation for heaven; and verbally, in covenant meetings, and as often as the death of Christ is communicated in the Supper, these promises are most solemnly repeated, and these pledges given afresh. Sons of Temperance, Free Masons, and Knights of the Golden Circle, may think their several initiative ceremonies impressive, and the obligations devolved by their several orders, binding; but in comparison with the sacred circle of of the Christian church, their ceremonies are shadows, and their obligations, ropes of sand. May God grant to the church an appreciation of its dignities, its privileges, and its obligations, for the honor of his cause and the glory of his name.

The "Church" and the "Society."

Dr. Wayland, in his "Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel," discusses the relation now commonly said to exist, in New England, between the "church" and the "society," and the following paragraphs are worth reading, as showing what the recognised relation is, how it sometimes works, and what is the author's opinion of the relation itself:—

"So far as I know," he says, "in churches of the Congregationalist and Baptist persuasions in New England, this relation is of the following character: The church is composed of men and women who profess to be renewed by the grace of God, separated from the world, who have consecrated themselves and all they possess to Christ for time and eternity. They, however, have no power whatever over the temporalities of the church. The persons who own pews in the meeting-house, form what is called the society, a body corporate by law. These may be members of the church or not; they may be believers or unbelievers, their simple title to membership being that they own a pew. A member of the church cannot, without this qualification, belong to the society. It is conceded that the society owns all the property of the church. They, by vote, decide upon all its expenditures; they fix the salary of the minister; they pay for the music, and in fact govern all the expenditures of the corporation. When the pulpit is vacant, a joint committee is appointed, equally from the church and the society, to select a candidate for the pastorate. Half of this committee may be religious, the other half irreligious men. When they have agreed upon a candidate, and he has preached with acceptance, he is first presented to the church. If they elect him, his name is then presented to the society for their approval. If they coincide with the church, he is considered duly elected; otherwise not. If the church and society, therefore, do not coincide, the action of the church goes for nothing, and another candidate must be presented, who will have the sanction of both the church and the society. The society having thus a negative upon the doings of the church, and the power of determining and paying the minister's salary, it comes to pass that, virtually, the election of a minister is frequently determined by them.

"I know of a case, at a meeting of the society of a Baptist church, a few years since, in which the following facts transpired. The subject of the different powers of the church and society having been under discussion, a leading member of the society remarked 'that the society owned the meeting-house, and had unlimited control over it and over the pulpit, and that they had a right to place in that pulpit whomsoever they chose; even,' said he, 'a Catholic priest, if they should so determine.' When asked what right, then, the church had in this matter, he replied: 'They may choose their minister if they like, but it is for us to say whether he shall occupy the pulpit.' Such is the tendency of this relation; and the harmony that is spoken of where the relation is acknowledged, is owing to the fact that the church avoids coming into collision with the society, and by so doing yields the point essential to its independence until there is no longer any danger of antagonism.