

CIRCULAR LETTER,

To the New Brunswick Baptist Association, convened at Jactontown, on the 5th July, 1847.

DEAR BRETHREN,—The subject to which we would call your attention in this Letter, is, the present spiritual condition of our Churches, the manifest declension of piety which so generally prevails, and which demands our serious consideration. The reflections we purpose to make on this subject will lead us to mention the causes of this declension, and to suggest the employment of such means as may result in the revival of religion.

It is a lamentable fact that a decline of religion has spread, during the few past years, over the Churches of Christ, both in Europe and America. Our own Province mourns under its influence, and we cannot shut our eyes to the melancholy truth that the most of our Churches have declined very far from their former state of piety and prosperity. How strongly was this painful fact written in the letters which were read at the last annual meeting of this Association! How general was the complaint they uttered of the decay of religious feeling, the prevalence of a worldly spirit among professions of religion, the defection of many from the truth, and the absence of those gracious and heavenly influences which are essential to the preservation and revival of godliness, and to the conversion of sinners! Alas! how mournfully evident is it that the glory has departed from many of our Churches, and that coldness, indifference, and the want of spiritual comfort, have succeeded, in too many instances, to the zeal, the love, and joy of former years!

But is there not a cause—rather, are there not many causes—to which this sad declension may be attributed? In enumerating the principal of these causes, we are aware, brethren, that our remarks will not wear the garb of novelty; we do but remind you of truths already well known, and often discussed; but we wish “to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance,”—to recal to mind duties too often forgotten and departed from in practice, and the neglect of which involves the greater guilt, inasmuch as we have professed to be well acquainted with their nature.

1. The *disuse of prayer*, especially of *private prayer*, is doubtless one of the most evident causes of the decay of piety.

There is a divinely established relation between the faithful discharge of the duty of prayer, and the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. They stand and fall together, so that if the duty is sincerely performed, the blessings certainly follow, according to the unchangeable law and promise of God; while, on the other hand, if prayer is restrained, the life and power of religion is sure to decline. God has taught us that he “will be enquired of by his people to do those things which he has promised;” and it would be presumptuous to expect him to bestow upon us the gifts of his grace, when we fail to solicit them. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.” “If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?” Such is the doctrine taught us by the Saviour, in reference to the connection between prayer and the reception of heavenly blessings. Many other passages of scripture might be cited in confirmation of it, but we have only space to advance one more: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

After reflecting on the meaning of these words, can we doubt that there exists, and has existed for some time, in our Churches, a deplorable neglect of prayer—especially of secret prayer? When God has promised to answer the requests of his people by conferring on them the richest gifts, when the Lord Jesus Christ has solemnly given us the same promise, saying, “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you;” why is it that we mourn the absence of revivals among the people of God, and of conversions among sinners? There is but one answer to the question, and we may give it in the words of the Lord to his ancient people, “But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.” Yes, brethren, too much of the lukewarmness, the worldliness, the departures from God, which mark the present state of the greater number of our Churches, is attributable to the prevalence of a prayerless spirit. The closet, the secret sanctuary, where communion with Heaven has been enjoyed in other days, is now forsaken. The voice of prayer, the breathings of holy desire, have ceased to ascend to “the throne of the heavenly grace;” and the consequences have been that fervent love, and hope, and peace, have deserted the hearts of multitudes of professed Christians, and they have proceeded step by step in the path of the backslider, till they are at a great distance from the Cross of Christ. To the abandonment of closet devotion has succeeded the neglect of the family altar, and of the social prayer meeting, and in too many cases the disuse of all the means of Grace.

2. But another cause of spiritual declension is the *neglect of watchfulness*.

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation,” was the Saviour’s command to his disciples on that solemn and awful occasion when he was about to enter upon his own fiery trial. The injunction must be regarded as addressed to all his disciples; for they are always exposed to temptation, and need the support of the strongest preservatives. “Be sober, be vigi-

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