

present state of the Christian church, that there is much declension and departing from the truth among professors of religion. Some are excluded from our religious communities, of whom we had entertained pleasing hopes; and many who remain indulge in a shyness and distance in their behaviour to others, directly opposite to that *brotherly love* Christians are so repeatedly exhorted to cherish.

It is, however, a consolatory truth, that there are churches in our land where true piety reigns—where brotherly love prevails to a pleasing degree, and where many are *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to the living God*. But where churches do not prosper, where sinners are not led to enquire, *What they must do to be saved*, there must be some radical defect. Ought it not then to be a subject of enquiry, *Why Christian Societies do not more generally prosper?*

The writer of these hints would ask his brethren, whether it may not be owing to the want of more personal religion among professors themselves? It cannot, generally, be ascribed to a neglect of the external means appointed for this purpose; for though, in particular instances, this may be the case, yet prayer meetings and the preaching of the word of God, are attended to as well as in times more prosperous. But however numerous the religious services through which we pass, if our hearts be not thoroughly engaged, if we do not enter experimentally into the things of God, we are not likely to be of any use in promoting the cause of our Lord Jesus. Then shall we be the means of communicating a sacred glow of the love of Christ to others, when his love reigns in our own minds. When our bowels move for the salvation of sinners, then will our prayers for their pardon ascend to God through

Jesus Christ with a holy eloquence that shall obtain the blessing. We shall never recommend the word of life with lasting effect to others, unless *we have handled it, and tasted it ourselves*. If our tempers are imperious, our lusts unsubdued, it will be in vain to expect religion to prosper in our hands. But nothing can be more evident than that the cultivation of holiness in the heart and in the life, in all its branches, will be the most effectual way of bringing down on ourselves and connections showers of divine influence to quicken and to convert the soul. God will smile upon that society which makes all his ordinances, and the means of grace he has appointed, the means of promoting personal religion.

Have we not used prayer as a *duty, and to quiet our consciences*, rather than as an exercise in which we enjoy sacred pleasure, and by which we draw nigh to God? In hearing God's word, have we not too often considered how much of what we have heard belonged to others, rather than, with Christian faithfulness, applied it to ourselves? How little communion have we had with God in his public worship! Many, very many, there is reason to fear, of the duties of religion have been attended to at home with a degree of formal regularity, while the question has seldom been asked, *What effects do these duties produce on my heart, or on the heart of any one in the family?*

Has not our conformity to the world, been a very serious cause of the declension of true religion amongst professors? While we are mingling in worldly society, we have not unfrequently connived at sin, when it ought to have been reprov'd—a repetition of the same sins in our connexions has so inured us to them, that they pass almost unobserved, though committed under our imme-