

## 1855 Circular of Delaware River

Written by Elder Philander Hartwell,  
A committee composed of Elder T. P. Dudley, Elder Gilbert Beebe, Elder Reed Burritt, Elder Thomas Barton, and Elder George Conklin, examined said circular and approved its adoption.

### SUBJECT: JUSTIFICATION

[Note: In this session, the Delaware River first opened correspondence with the Licking Association of Particular Baptists of Kentucky. Ministers present this session were: Elder R. C. Leachman of Va., Elder E. Rittenhouse, Elder Philander Hartwell, Elder Gilbert Beebe, Elder Daniel L. Harding, Elder D. W. Patman, Elder William Housel, Elder J.L. Purington, Elder S. I. Lowe, Elder Thomas Barton, Elder J.F. Johnson, Elder Reed Burritt, and Elder Barton;

Associations, (Ketocton dropped in previous year (see 1854 and notes), seated were: Warwick, Delaware, Delaware River, Corresponding of Va, Salisbury, Chemung, Lexington \*N.Y.), Maine O.S. Association, Maine O.S. Conference, Allegeny, Ocmulgee (Ga) Oconee (Ga), Uharley (Ga), Yellow River (Ga), Kehukee, (NC) and Licking of Ky.

When I saw the committee membership that would read, correct, and recommend this circular, and its subject, - Justication, I set others aside for later. This the reader should STUDY, not merely read! Transcribed by Stanley Phillips, December 25, 2008.]

*The Delaware River Baptist Association, held with the Southampton Baptist church, Bucks Co., Pa. to the churches composing the same send Christian greeting.*

*Beloved Brethren:-* Presuming that you will expect from us as usual, a letter of love and fellowship, we will offer for your consideration a few general remarks on the Scriptural doctrine

### OF JUSTIFICATION.

The glorious Gospel of God our Savior, abounds with many exceedingly rich and heart stirring consideration for the contemplation and comfort of all who are born of God, and taught by the Holy Spirit; but in all the chain of Gospel doctrine, we are not aware of any one of its links to which we can attach a more fundamental or vital importance that to that which we have chosen as the theme of this letter.- Volumes might be written without exhausting its fullness, but the limits of a Circular require that our remarks should be brief. When we consider the fallen state of all the human family, as transgressors of the law of their Creator, their just condemnation and utter inability to establish a righteousness of their own, either by the deeds of the law, or by any other means, we can but admire and adore the wisdom and boundless grace of God in providing and revealing to us a way in which He is just and the justifier of all who believe on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well might the enraptured prophet cry out, "*Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold thy King cometh unto thee, He is just, and having salvation.*"- Zech. 9:9. Surely we may say, "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" Nothing short of infinite wisdom, eternal goodness and Almighty power could have brought to light a plan in which sinners could be saved from the wrath and condemnation of the righteous law of God, without involving His own justice, or doing dishonor to His holy law; but in the justification of His people none of His eternal perfections are in the least impaired, nor is one jot or title of His law abated or uncanceled. While angels gaze upon and desire to look into this sublime and heavenly mystery, we rejoice and give thanks to God that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and that it is His gracious pleasure to shew unto them His covenant; that He has hidden these

things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes, because so it seemed good in His sight.

Justification simply considered, is the legal acquittal from blame, and in a Gospel sense, signifies to present the church holy and unblamable. Pardon or forgiveness differs widely from justification; for the pardoning of a transgressor does not make him righteous. And if only the sins of God's people were remitted or forgiven, however it might release them from punishment; it never could justify them or remove their guilt. It is true the children of God are the recipients of forgiveness as well as of justification, but these gracious favors have their respective and appropriate places in the great work of salvation; the one releasing them from wrath and punishment, and the other declaring them to be righteous and holy in the sight of God, by removing from them all their guilt, and clothing them in spotless righteousness. Both are secured for, and given to the people of God as they stand in Christ Jesus, *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us, in all wisdom and prudence."*- Ephesians 1:7,8. Out of Him, we cannot be the subjects of either, for the law of God can neither justify nor forgive a sinner.

The justification of the ungodly is alone through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. None but redeemed sinners are therefore the subjects of it, for nothing short of the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from guilt. But the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can and does effectually and forever remove from those for whom it was shed, all sin, as well as all the penalties connected therewith. But the grand question to be considered is, how or upon what principle the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, could, consistently with law and justice apply to guilty sinners, for cleansing and justification before God?

Many have appeared only to regard this matter as only requiring the sovereign display of the power of God, that He being moved with compassion for a guilt stricken world, graciously consented to the substitution of the only begotten Son, to suffer, bleed and die in the room and stead of His people, and on the condition that Christ should meet all the requisitions of the law, and suffer all its penalties on their behalf, He would be satisfied. It is true, the sovereign power of God is abundantly displayed in the redemption of sinners, and all the perfections of the eternal Godhead shine equally in the salvation of His people, and it is also true that the sufferings of the Redeemer were vicarious, He suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God, but it is highly important we should understand that in all this, **our God has acted only in strict harmony with the eternal counsel of His own will.** His righteousness, truth and justice have been honored and all their demands fully met and satisfied, so that He is not only a Savior, but *"A Just God, and a Savior."* Zech. 9:9. Every link in the chain of salvation by grace was essential and indispensable to the accomplishment of the work; not one could be omitted nor even transposed without defeating the grand purpose and design of God.

The plan required to be laid in infinite wisdom, and executed by almighty power; the scheme required to be as **ancient as eternity, that the immutability of God be not infringed; and hence it is called "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself before the world begun.**[emphasis, editor,SCP]

The Church must have had an existence in one that was able to represent her before the throne of eternal deity before the world began, as well as on the cross of Calvary when the fullness of the time appointed should come. To meet all these necessities, a Savior was provided, a Mediator was set up, as the Head over all things to the Church, and the Church so perfectly identified with, indissolubly united to, and completely embodied *in* Him, that she could be *"Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world; that we should be holy and without blame before Him in*

love.” In all this divine arrangement the workmanship of God appears, “*For we are His workmanship, created IN Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*” All we can know of eternal things must be by that revelation which is made to us by the word, and brought to understanding by the Spirit of God. “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life.*”-1 John 5: 11,12. That life which was given to the Church in Christ is called “eternal life”, in distinction from our natural or mortal life which was given to the human family in Adam, and it is called **immortality dwelling in the light**, and it is “*hid with Christ in God,*” so that it can only appear when He who is the Life of His Church appears; for, as we have read above, “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life, because this life is in His Son. This vital union is the basis or foundation on which the Redemption and Justification rests. Without the divine Law and the eternal justice of God could not have regarded the Church as the body, the flesh and the bones, of our Lord Jesus Christ, they could not have recognized in Him the right to redeem her from all iniquity.- That law can admit of no substitution where no union of Life or vital relationship exists. Neither could a union contracted subsequently to the captivity of the Church, been admissible. But the previous union and relationship being perfect and dissoluble is the ground or principle on which His suretyship is predicated and on which the transgressions of His people were legally charged to Him, and His obedience, suffering, and righteousness were imputed to them.

By way of illustration, suppose a flock of sheep have trespassed on the lands of some person, the legal owner of the sheep is held responsible for the damage done by them. He may, it is true, in some cases, let the sheep be held by the injured party for the damages, but he certainly in all cases holds the right to redeem them, by paying the price of their redemption; but if the relationship did not exist **before** the depredations were committed, of owner and property, he could not legally be held for the damage done; neither would his paying for the damage done by them constitute him their owner.

A husband is legally held for the debts contracted by his wife, because the law regards him as her representative in all civil contracts; but in case of a criminal offense, a still nearer relationship is required, to make him responsible. But if his hand, or any other member of his body has committed murder, or any other capital offense, then the head is holden responsible. Christ is not only the lawful proprietor of His sheep, but He is the living Head of His Church, which is His body, and He is not only the Head, but He is the Head *over all things* to His Church, and therefore the right to redeem, buy back, and deliver from captivity and bondage is found in Him and in Him alone.

Adam is the figure of Him that was to come, which is Christ; and Adam was not only related to Eve by conjugal ties, but also by **union** of life. She was, after her formation, as before, the bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh, and she was called *woman*, because she was taken out of man. In the application of this figure to Christ and His Church, no ordinary marriage can fully set forth the union of Christ and the Church. The Church was taken out of the man Christ Jesus, and existed in Him before she was thus made manifest as His bride. And in her formation and presentation to Him, He owns her, yea, He claims her as His own body, His flesh and His bones. And when He saw her involved in sin, in guilt and ruin, He loved her notwithstanding all. And because He loved the Church, He gave Himself for her. Inflexible justice accepted, but could not reject the offering, and by His “one offerings He has perfected forever them that are sanctified.” For her He was made flesh and dwelt among us; for her, He learned obedience, for her He lived and died, and arose from the dead. He was delivered for her offenses and raised again for her Justification, and she is freely, fully and forever justified through the redemption that is in Him. He is of God made unto her Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and

Redemption. And this is the name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness; and forgetting the shame of her youth, and remembering her widowhood no more, this is the name whereby **she** shall be called, "The Lord our righteousness." Her sins are blotted out as a thick cloud, and shall be remembered against her no more.- Who then shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, it is Christ that died; yea, rather that has risen again from the dead, and He arose for her justification, and He ever liveth to make intercession for her. She is now dead to the law by the body of Christ, and married to Him that is risen from the dead, that she may bring forth fruit unto God. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in* Christ Jesus; neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate her from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus her Lord. He has washed her in His all-cleansing blood, clothed her with garments of salvation, and covered her with the robe of His righteousness, and adorned her as a bride for her husband. And He will receive her home to the mansions of immortal glory, as pure, as spotless, and as immaculate, as He received her from His Father long before the highest dust of the world was made, "ere sin was born, or Adam's dust was fashioned to a man."

Dear brethren, may we have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, until He shall call us hence and then with all the redeemed, justified family swell the heavenly notes of that immortal anthem of praise unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, in which all the redeemed of the Lord shall then unite. Then shall we be prepared more fully to appreciate the unspeakable blessings of justification through the blood and righteousness of our dear Redeemer. *Amen.*

Daniel L. Harding, *Moderator.*

E. Rittenhouse, *Clerk.*

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