

1856 Circular of Delaware River

Written by
Elder D. L. Harding

[Ministers present in this session were: Elders John W. Thomas (Indiana), D. L. Harding, Philander Hartwell, Gilbert Beebe, Robert C. Leachman, J. L. Purington, Gabriel Conklin, E. Rittenhouse, and Curtis.

The associations seated were: Warwick, Delaware, Delaware River, Baltimore, Salisbury, Lexington, Chemung, Alleghany, Maine O.S. Association, Maine O.S. Conference, Corresponding Association of Va., Ocmulgee (Ga), Uharley, (Ga), Yellow River, (Ga.), Oconee, (Ga), Kehukee (NC), Licking Particular (Ky).]

Circular Letter

The elders and messengers of the Delaware River Old School Baptist Association, convened with the 1st. Hopewell Church, Mercer Co., New Jersey, the 28th, 29th and 30th days of May, 1856, To the several churches composing the same, Send this our Circular unto you, as a token of love in the Lord:

Dearly Beloved:- The revolving wheels of time have brought about the period of our annual meeting, and from a long established custom, you doubtless expect from us something in the form of a Circular; and as we know of nothing more comforting to your hearts than the love of God, we will at this time endeavor to call your attention to that all-important subject: **The Love Of God.**

The Scriptures teach us that God is immutable, “*being in one mind and none can turn Him,*” – Job 21:13, “*with no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*” – James 1:17. Consequently He does not love one object today and hate it to-morrow; therefore His love is from everlasting to everlasting unto His people. “*The Lord hath appeared unto me of old, saying: Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.*” – Jer. 31:3. And Jesus saith to the Father, “*Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.*” – John 17:23-24. This love to them in connection with His own glory, was the moving cause of all that provision of grace and salvation, treasured up in Christ, their Head and Redeemer, from everlasting, and His works also in creation and providence. Hence says the Apostle: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. 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. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will and the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved: 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 1:3-7. And by the spirit of Christ by Solomon: “*The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His ways, before His works of old. I was brought up from everlasting, or ever the earth was when He gave the sea his decree that the waters should not pass His commandment, when He appointed the foundations of the earth, I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth and My delights were with the sons of men.*” – Proverb 8: 22-31. And by the prophet He says, “*I have put My words in thy mouth and have covered you in the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, thou art My*

people.” –Isa. 51:16. And Moses saith, “*When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel, for the Lord’s portion is His people and Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.*” Deut. 32:8,9. Thus we learn from the Scriptures the antiquity of His love unto His people. And notwithstanding they have rebelled against His law, and rendered themselves loathsome in His sight by sin, yet His love has in no wise abated toward them. “*But in the fullness of Time, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*” – Gal. :4,5. “*Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son, to be a propitiation for our sins.*” – 1 John 4:10. “*God so love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”- John 3:16. “*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.*” – Rom. 5:7,8. “*He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.*” Rom. 8:32. It is also manifested in the raising up of Christ from the dead. For says the Apostle: “*And that it is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us ward, who believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and power, might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to His church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.*” Ephesians 1:19-23.

His love is also manifested in quickening them into life. For the death of Christ could only free them from the curse of the law by His being made a curse for them; yet, they must be born from above by His Spirit to enable them to worship Him who is a Spirit, and seeks such to worship Him as do worship Him in spirit and in Truth. This work is not performed by instrumentalities. “*For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whomsoever He will.*” – John 5:21. And when made alive spiritually, and brought to see their fallen condition as sinners, and that by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified, and the Spirit presenting that spotless robe of righteousness which His own gracious hand has provided, and giving them faith to lay hold upon it, and receive it as the gift of God unto them, and that they are His children, and if children then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What a fullness is here presented to the heaven-born and all flowing from the love of God to them by Jesus Christ, the first begotten and only Son, possessor of all things, and the saints joint inheritors with Him. Well might the Apostle declare unto his brethren, “*That all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.* -1 Cor. 3: 22,23.

Now, dear brethren, after having hinted briefly at the manifestations of God’s love to His people, we desire to call your attention to some of the effects produced in the hearts of its recipients.

1st. Toward God. “*He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whosoever keepeth His word, in Him verily the love of God is perfected.*” 1 John 4:4,5. “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” – 1 John 4:19. Hence their language is, “*Lord what wilt Thou have me to do;*” not to look to see what kind of religious profession is the most fashionable in the world, or what way shall I go that I may escape the ridicule of the ungodly, but what may I do to glorify Him who hath loved me and given Himself for me; manifesting a willingness to follow their Redeemer in the institutions of His house, by

coming into the sheepfold by the door- showing their subjection to Him as the King of Zion by casting their idol gods to the moles and to the bats, those blind worshipers that have no spiritual eyes to see the Sun of Righteousness – leaving their native land, (the world, with its charms,) and like Ruth, the Moabitess, wish to dwell with the people whose God is the Lord. *“For if we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the Truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sins.”* – 1 John 1:6,7. Again, *“He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*- I John 2:4.

2d. It leads those who are begotten of His Spirit to love those who also are begotten, in proportion as they bear the image of the heavenly. *“He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him; but he that hateth is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.”* – 1 John 2: 9-11. *“But not in word only, but also in deed. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*- 1 John 3:16-18. Love also leads its possessors to pray for one another, and to forgive one another their trespasses, as it leads those who have trespassed to confess their faults, and turn from them.

In conclusion, do we bear those marks which are only characteristic of the children of God? If so, you are prepared to give Him all the glory of your salvation and to join with the apostle in saying, *“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God;”* and as such you love His doctrine and His ordinances, esteeming the reproaches thereof of greater value than the treasures of the present world; *“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”* Although carrying about with you a body of sin and death, yet you feel inclined to put off the old man, which is corrupt, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, and a looking forward to that state of immortal blessedness when you, with all His chosen blood-washed family on high, shall bring forth in swelling the immortal anthem of praises unto our God, for loving us and washing us from our sins in His own body and making us kings and priests to reign with Him forever and ever. Amen.

Philander Hartwell, *Moderator.*

Samuel H. Stout, *Clerk.*

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