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Delaware River O. S. Baptist Association

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Written by

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The Elders and messengers composing the Delaware River Association, to the churches whose messengers we are, Greeting:

Beloved Brethren:- In our last annual address, your attention was called to the *importance of searching the holy Scriptures*. The Scriptures are the Christian's CHART, the only sure guide to the children of God in their pilgrimage on earth, the sure word of prophecy whereunto we do well to take heed. All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. They are given to the church that the man of God may be *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*. All works of a religious character not authorized by the Scriptures, are bad or evil works, and are to be shunned by the saints. What the Scriptures authorize we may practice; we are obligated to do those things which God in His word has commanded; to follow the apostles as they followed Christ.

The church of God in the world, is composed of baptized believers in Christ, such as have experienced a spiritual birth and follow Christ; they receive His doctrine, follow His example, are governed by His laws, and are called "*Christians*." No body of people can be recognized as the church of Christ, but such as receive and continue steadfastly in His doctrine. By the *doctrine of Christ*, we are to understand all that Christ has taught by His apostles, as well as those words recorded by the Evangelists. In fact, we are to look to the acts of the apostles and the epistles to the churches and saints, for the *doctrine of Christ*. The Holy Ghost has brought to their remembrance all that Christ taught, and they, being thus inspired by the Holy Ghost, have faithfully recorded the same for our use and benefit. Not only the cardinal principles, (as they are called,) such as bring to view how God saved His church, but also the discipline of the church, and the whole order of the house of God. It also embraces all the directions given to the children for their direction and guidance whilst in the world. All the admonitions and exhortations contained in the Scriptures, addressed to the saints, are to be regarded as doctrine of Christ. We must continue steadfastly in all the doctrine of Christ, or we are not recognized as His church and entitled to the privileges of His house. The Scriptures inform us that the saints are a *purified people, zealous of good works*. They are in the world, but not of the world, for they have been chosen out of the world. They come constantly in contact with the world, and with the scenes in which they once mingled. Their names as men and women are still *earthly*, and there is a *natural* proneness to mingle in those scenes again and again; hence the many exhortations and admonitions in the Scriptures. The saints are often reminded of their former state, whilst in nature's darkness, of God's goodness to them, and of their obligations as *children of God*, to adorn the doctrine of God, by walking worthy of the high vocation wherewith they are called. If men, dead in trespasses and sins, walk in the corruptions of earth, that is no excuse to the saints; they have been redeemed from such vain conversation and practices.

Among the many portions of Scripture that set forth these things, we will present for contemplation in this letter, Ephesians 5:8: "*For ye were some time darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*"

In the commencement of this fifth chapter, the saints at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus, are called upon to be followers of God as dear children, to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor. They are then informed that fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, are not to be once named among them, as becometh saints, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which they are told, are not convenient for the saints, but the rather giving of thanks. They are informed that they knew, as much as to say that their anointing had taught them this fact, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Then warned or directed them to let no man deceive them with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with the children of disobedience; the characters here presented to them are vile, having no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, "*For ye were sometime darkness,*" clearly implying that those, that they were not to be partakers with, were still in nature's darkness, while the saints were light in the Lord.

We will now briefly examine the text:

1st. The *darkness*, and the time referred to. Darkness is absence of light (sic. – SCP) When God created the heaven and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and *darkness* was upon the face of the deep. – Genesis 1:2. It was of this earth or ground that man was made. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.- Gen. 2:7. So from the Scriptures we find man in nature's darkness, yet in his innocence he was harmless, as God said, "very good."- Genesis 1:31. Had he remained innocent none of those corruptions spoken of in the context would have appeared in man; he would have remained harmless as any of the creatures of God. But man was an intellectual being, and God gave him a law. All creatures were created under law to God, but to none, of all His creatures on earth, did He give a law but to man. In his innocence he neither knew good or evil. But in the garden was the tree of *knowledge of good and evil*. And God commanded the man, saying "of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."- Genesis 2:16-17.

But the woman being beguiled by the serpent took of the fruit thereof and did eat; and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.- Genesis 3:6. From that time the evil passions of man have been manifest. Man was sent forth from the garden, but that was not all that was necessary, so He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.- Genesis 3:24. Jesus saith out of the heart proceedeth all manner of uncleanness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, are the *works* of the flesh, are of *darkness*.

But should man abstain from committing these gross sins, should he be accounted a moral man by men, yet would he be *darkness*, in the sense of the text. Should man go still farther, should he become pious, (as men use the term,) even as religious as was the Pharisee that went up into the temple to pray, should he even think himself better than other men, yet is he darkness if his religion is of the flesh, whether taught it in a Jewish synagogue, or in a Sunday school, or at some revival, fanatical meeting, or even in a theological seminary, or in all of these together, it will avail him nothing; so long as he

remains a *natural man* he is darkness. He may boast of his light, his knowledge, and of all his good works and resolutions, &c., but none of these will cause him to be light in the Lord. Jesus saith, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness." He also saith, "But if thine eye be evil thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Men in nature are under the *power of darkness*. While in that condition it is not strange that they think themselves better than others, that they are good, and are getting better continually (*progressive sanctification? SCP*), for they are under the power of darkness. Men who live and die in that state cannot see the kingdom of God.

2d. "*But now are ye light in the Lord.*"

Having told the saints what they were, He assures them that they are *light* in the Lord. As earth and that which cometh out of it, is *darkness*, we must look elsewhere for *light*. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."- John 1:1,2. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men."- verse 4th. And in the fifth verse it is said, "And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." And in the ninth verse it said, "*That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*" Eternal life is here presented as *light*, and it is the only light that can make *darkness* light, but He can and does by making them experimentally light *in Himself*. He shineth in *them, i.e.*, in darkness. The great enquiry in the heaven-born is, "Am *I* light in the Lord?" But when they search themselves they find *darkness* in *themselves*, instead of light, which causeth them to sigh and groan; their heads are bowed down. God is love, and every one that loveth is born of God. But when we search our hearts we find not *love*, as we desire to feel it, in ourselves, and at times each of us feels to inquire in the language of the poet:

"If I love why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?
Hardly sure can they be worse
Who have never heard His name."

God is light, but in ourselves we find *darkness* instead of *light*. God is holy, but we find nothing but sin in ourselves. As we search our hearts and lives for some evidence that we are *light*, we find nothing to give us encouragement, but instead we find much to discourage us, and we are led to exclaim with the poet again:

"When I turn my eyes within,
All is dark, and vain, and wild;
Filled with unbelief and sin
Can I deem myself a child?"

The search in ourselves for evidence of our interest in Christ having availed us nothing, we must search the *chart*, to see if we can find any evidence there that we are *light in the Lord*." "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."- 1 John, 5:10. But what is the witness in ourselves? Surely it is not that *our nature has become holy*, for our natures are *darkness* still. But we have already found laid down in the Book of books, that *the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.*" Also we find recorded, 2d Cor. 4:6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give the light* of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Is it consistent for us to look in our own faces to find that which God informs us in to appear in the face of Jesus Christ? We should remember that it is the *light* that shineth in *darkness*. We in ourselves are darkness still, but the *light shineth in us*, not that

we shine, or are able to comprehend the *light* or its shining in us. These things are too deep for us; our finite minds cannot comprehend that which is infinite. It is God, who hath shined in us, to give light, not that our natures shine. What we see of the glory of God is only seen by this light, and we behold it only in the face of Jesus Christ. Do we not behold perfection in Christ? Is He not altogether lovely? In Him shines the glory of God, and the shining in us gives us the light of the *knowledge of this*. We have not found it out by searching, neither has it been taught us by man, but God has revealed it unto us by His Spirit. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the *light*; for whatsoever doth make manifest *is light*.- Ephesians 5:13. Have not the things which are reprov'd been made manifest to us? Then are we not thereby encouraged to believe that the Light hath shined in us to make our depravity manifest to us? Light can make manifest to men their corruptions, and when light manifest them to us we loathe them, and we loathe ourselves on account of them. We saw them not until the *true light* shined in us. We saw not the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, until God shined *in* our hearts, to give the *light* of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Since then we have been attracted by that glory, and shall not be satisfied until we awake with that likeness, until we are wholly transformed into His image.

In nature we belong to the kingdom of darkness, not to the kingdom of *light*. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of *light* and of life eternal, and this *light* is the only *true light*. But we trust that God hath delivered us from the *power* of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. Love to God, love of the Truth, and love to the brethren, are Scriptural evidences that we are *light in the Lord*. It is not a change of nature that makes us children (emphasis,Scp.); it is not that nature which is *light*, but we *are light in the Lord*. In our spiritual birth we are made *partakers of light*, are brought into union with Christ experimentally who is light, and we are no more darkness but light, for eternal life has been given to us. Christ's life is our life, and when He who is our life shall appear, then we also appear with Him in glory.

3d. "*Walk as children of light.*" For our example we have Jesus, who is the *light*, and He has directed us to come after Him; we are directed to be followers of God as dear children. Jesus saith, "if ye love Me keep My commandments." We are to deny ourselves, take our cross and follow Jesus. "*By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God, and keep His commandments.*"- 1 John 5:2. To walk as children of light, is to walk in the light. "*If we say that 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 the other.*"- 1st john 1:6,7. To walk in darkness is to walk after the flesh, or to live according to our fleshly desires, to walk after the commandments of men, to manifest the spirit of the world, or of anti-christ. The works of the flesh are works of darkness; in them the children of darkness walk. The *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law.- Galatians 5: 22-23. In these the children of light are to walk. They are under law to Christ. He has commanded them to let their light so shine before men that they may see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven.- Matthew 5:16. Men of the world can judge of Christianity only by what they can see and hear with their natural organs of seeing and hearing, &c. Hence it is necessary that the *children of light* let their light shine in their walk and conversation, lest the name of Christ be reproach'd. It is necessary that we walk as children of light, that unity and peace be maintained in the church of God on earth. If saints manifest the corruptions of their natures in their intercourse with their brethren, or in their dealings among men, the doctrine of God will be blasphemed. The new commandment which Jesus gave to His disciples, is to be kept by the children of light, *that they love one*

another, that they love one another as He has loved them. In ancient days, or rather the days of Christ and the apostles on earth, love characterized them; it was said, “*Behold how they love one another.*”

Love is of God, is *light*, for God is love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love leads us to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. To walk as children of light, is to walk by faith and not by sight. Finally, brethren, to live or walk as *children of light*, we are to walk in all the commandments of Jesus, to walk worthy of our high calling in Christ Jesus, and to abstain from everything that agreeth not therewith.

May our God grant us grace, that we may ever *walk as children of light.*

Philander Hartwell, *Moderator.*

I. P. Hellings, *Clerk.*
