

# 1876 DELAWARE RIVER OLD SCHOOL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

[The Associations represented at this session are: Baltimore, Delaware, Warwick, Chemung, Conference Western N.Y., Corresponding, Va., Lexington, N.Y., Maine Ass'n., Licking Particular of Ky., Salisbury, Oconee, Ga., Euharlee, Ga., Yellow River, Ga., Kehukee, N.C., Contentna, Va., Western Corresponding, Mo.,

Appointed the Elders of this Association, together with Gilbert Beebe, S. F. Jones, and A. St. John, to examine the Circular Letter.

The committee on the Circular Letter reported, and recommended the same, whereupon it was read and adopted.]

NOTE: The author of this Circular presents the exhortations that apply to the outward man in the flesh, to put away its wicked works, and then presents those admonitions that apply to the spiritual man within; hence addressing both that which is natural and that which is spiritual. SCP.

*The elders and messengers composing the Delaware River Old School Baptist Association, in session with the Kingwood Church, Kingwood, Hunterdon Co., N. J., May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2d, 1876, to the several churches whose messengers we are, send love in the Lord.*

*Beloved Brethren:-* Through the abounding mercy of our God we are spared to meet once more in an association, for which we would adore and reverence His holy and reverend name, ever remembering our entire dependence upon Him **for every blessing, both temporal and spiritual.**

As it has been our annual custom to address you by letter, we see no reason why we should depart from our usual course; because the Scriptures show conclusively that the apostles wrote letters to the churches, in which they expressed their prayerful anxiety for the churches, that God might prosper them; and they also warned, reprov'd and rebuked them, when they departed from the order of Christ's kingdom. Therefore, upon the present occasion, we feel to use as the foundation of our remarks the following words: "*Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*" – 1 Peter 2:1-3.

As the Scriptures have been given to the *children of God* by inspiration, and have been preserved and given to us Gentiles in our own vernacular, or mother tongue, the Bible is not to be used as an amulet or charm, but to be carefully, seriously and prayerfully read and pondered; and what is taught therein is to be heeded and obeyed; and, so far as it is the purpose of God to work in His children "*both to will and to do of His good pleasure,*" they certainly will obey. The Scripture quoted as the text, was not addressed to the carnal world of mankind, but to the "*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*" In elucidating or expounding any portion of Scripture, due care should be taken not to detach from the *just* connection such portion of Scripture, and, when *thus* separated, force an interpretation; for such distorting the Scriptures is pernicious, and its consequences tend to confuse the minds of the children of God.

While it is very convenient to have the epistles divided into chapters and verses, in order that any portion or declaration may be easily found, it should ever be borne in mind that the

original epistle, as written by the apostles, had no such divisions, but were one united and continuous letter. Also, a due regard should be had to the just and legitimate meaning of every word as framed into the sentence in which it stands; for without such care, a very foreign meaning may be given such word or words, and thereby a perversion be made, and the true import of the text be left untouched.

*Wherefore.* This word may justly be considered a “connecting link” between what immediately precedes and succeeds; for it is equivalent to the words, *for which reason, those reasons, or that reason, &c.* If we carefully read the preceding chapter, reasons strong and powerful will be seen; for they whom Peter addressed had certainly, by their profession and confusion, given him reason to believe that they were the objects of God’s everlasting love, subjects of redemption, and partakers of the divine nature; but because such was their blessed relation to Christ, and they had been made the recipients of such wonderful blessings, their fallen, carnal and depraved nature remained **unchanged**. Yet a great and wonderful **change in their conduct** would surely follow their being born again; for divine Truth, when cordially received, *always* produces effects corresponding to its **own nature**. Because having Christ “*in them the hope of glory,*” there was **implanted a principle in them**, when under its controlling power, to do exactly what Peter exhorts them to do, with so much fervency and zeal. But no such language is addressed to carnal men, for they are in love with just such passions of the depraved heart, and sometimes manifest them to an alarming extent.

*Laying aside all malice.* Malice signifies extreme enmity of heart, or malevolence, a disposition to injure others without cause, &c. Now, it is impossible to lay aside any thing if we have it not; therefrom it would be an absurdity to exhort any individual to lay aside that which was not possessed. If we have an old, tattered and filthy garment, as individuals, with ordinary muscular powers, we can and do lay it aside. Now the wicked principle of malice stands first in this list of the works of the flesh, as a mother of all the other wicked practices named; and were it not for malice, there would be none of the other vices named in such close connection; but they are the natural results, produced by cherishing malice. The presence of malice yet within a Christian testifies to the unchanged nature of the Adamic flesh. James says to his brethren, “*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*” Also, “*From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your members?*” The express declaration is to lay aside *all malice*, not a part of it; not cherish any of that latent wicked principle. Again, it is a testimonial to the unchanged nature of the flesh by the new birth.

*And all guile.* The term guile, when used in a bad sense, as in the Scripture now under consideration, *signifies* craft, cunning artifice, duplicity, deceit, &c. Whoever cherishes malice in the heart towards any individual, is sure to practice guile, especially when sinister motives lie deeply concealed in the heart, carefully hidden from the child-like, unsuspecting brother or sister. But when such duplicity is being practiced, it seems that the doer of such act must have forgotten what the apostle Paul declared; for he said, “*All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*” Is it not declared that Christ left an example for His followers? Most certainly! “*For hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.*” The Lamb of God having left the example, how can any one who loves, fears and reverences Him, do otherwise than strive to lay aside all guile? That wicked principle is cherished when one envies another’s success; for instance, if it be a minister of the Gospel, who sees that a brother minister is blessed of God with a gift which

edifies and builds up the saints, and prosperity attends his ministry, and he who beholds the success of his brother desires that something may occur to injure him, so that he may not have so much favor with the lovers of truth, and yet the one who has such ill will towards his brother will outwardly manifest strong fellowship; but such course is guile in one of its most hideous forms, whether cherished by preachers or private members of the church: but the command, or exhortation, is to lay it *all aside*.

*And hypocrisies.* The term hypocrisy *signifies* simulation, a feigning what one is not, or dissimulation; a concealment of one's real character, &c. Again, this is a "*work of the flesh,*" yet residual in a child of God, manifesting that the old nature has not been changed. Now we come to the plural number: for where guile is cherished, hypocrisies *must* follow; and how many times Christ applied the term "hypocrites" to the scribes and Pharisees; and is it any less wicked for professed brethren to practice it towards each other? Surely not. And how is it practiced among brethren? Too often in the manner and form following: meet a brother and openly profess love and fellowship for him, and express much gladness to have the opportunity to meet again, even extending the salutation and congratulation so far as to savor strongly of flattery, in his presence, and if he has just spoken in the defense of the Truth, speak of being so well satisfied, and as soon as he is absent, if opportunity is granted, traduce him, by saying, "I did not know what he meant; no one could understand him, and it was no benefit to those present," &c. Such a course of conduct is hypocrisy, and the injunction is to lay *it aside*. We see that the offspring of malice are becoming numerous when they are hypocrisies; yet they are *all* to be put aside.

*And envies.* The term envy *signifies* pain, uneasiness, mortification, or discontent at the sight of superior excellence, reputation or happiness enjoyed by another, &c. Now it appears evident that the practicing of hypocrisy does not remove the envy cherished, but is an outward evidence of the woeful state of the person, when under the control of such vile passions; and bitter strife and envying cause a state of unrest of a very serious nature; therefore he, or they, who cherish such envies, and are not enabled by the grace of God to lay them aside, suffer much more than those envied.

*And evil speaking.* This expression fully explains itself; for evil speaking plainly show that they who are thus speaking *know* that their representations about the brother or brethren, though in some cases the allegations may be true, are made public for evil, instead of good; therefore they are *evil speakings*. It seems that the apostle John had some difficulty in his day with a certain character named Diotrephes; for he said of him, "*Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*" Would it not be much better to heed the exhortation of the apostle James, and "*be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,*" than to be engaged in evil speaking? Such bitter words are compared to weapons of death; for said the Psalmist, of certain characters, "*Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.*"

But as objection may be raised, that the psalmist said that of the wicked, and not of the saints. True; but is it any less wicked when practiced by professors of religion? In order that evil speakings may be openly promulgated, parties must be sought out who will give heed to such things, by having an open ear to receive evil speakings, either church members or nonprofessors; and for that to be accomplished, persons who are under the control of such carnal principles must, in a measure at least, be guilty of what Paul charges against certain characters; for said he, "*And*

*withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.*”

*As new born babes.* This illustration concerning the children of God is beautiful, rich and glorious; for it was said to the aspiring disciples, while they were under the law, by Christ, “*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*” Also, “*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seems good in Thy sight.*” When the saints are first brought into Gospel light and liberty, as well as in after years, when enjoying the soul refreshing presence of their precious Redeemer, how child-like they feel; for they are then filled with wonder, love and admiration; then no illwill is cherished against any one; and the happy child feels to say, “*Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul.*” All the vile passions, in such sweet moments, are in subjection; for then there is peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and Jesus and salvation engrosses the attention of the babe in Christ; also deep anxiety is felt for the lovers of Truth, and the welfare of the church, in her organization here on earth.

*Desire the sincere milk of the word.* When such desire is in lively exercise, no place is found to foster the Satanic principles named in the first verse of our text; because the “*new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,*” can feed on no such wicked principles. We are not to understand by the expression, *sincere milk of the word*, a sort of “abc” Gospel, or that there should be an attempt made to proclaim *smooth things*; for the real marrow on the phrase turns upon the important word, *sincere*. When the apostle says we “*have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the Truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God,*” there was sincerity of heart. Now the servants of God, under such control of the Spirit as that, would proclaim the Gospel *in sincerity* and in Truth; not uttering great and glorious Truths with their lips, and their course of life directly contradict what had been proclaimed; and when the children of God are being led gently and sweetly along, by the Spirit, they receive the seed thus sown, or the preached word, “*into the good ground,*” or new heart of the inner man, and afterwards the fruit is seen in a rich increase of love, patience, forbearance and brotherly kindness – all “*fruits of the inward man.*” The apostle says, “*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the Gospel.*”

Our God, in His infinite wisdom, has so ordered matters in His church, while in her state of warfare, that although good, sound words of truth may be publicly uttered, if there be *sinister* motives in the hearts of them who thus proclaim the Truth literally, the babes in Christ will not receive instruction from such teachers; for there will be “a something” in such preaching that will prove repulsive instead of attracting and edifying.

*That ye may grow thereby.* The precious Truth of the Gospel, when spoken in love and sincerity, and applied by the Spirit of God, feeds, comforts and builds up the children of God; and when thus led and blessed, the truth of the following words is clearly exhibited; “*And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*” Said Christ to the Jews, “*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man,*

*and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me, and I in Him.*” Now, so far as the saints are enabled to receive by faith those immortal principles, or eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, there will be an evidence of the same in their daily walk here upon earth.

Did the dear Redeemer, when reviled, revile again? No! When charged with being under the control of Satan, did He manifest anger? No! He manifested love in all His course; and “*such a High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*” When the food of the heaven-born and heaven taught is the flesh and blood of Christ, there will be an outward manifestation of it in the love, forbearance, long-suffering, patience, holy fear, sincerity and charity of the saints; for said the apostle Paul, “*Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.*” What a glorious growth is manifested when such endurance, such firmness, such integrity and such love as that are openly exhibited by the children of God; for then how plainly can be seen the truth of the following declaration: “*Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*”

Now, can the **new man** in the believer feed on the wicked and depraved principles which the apostle exhorts the children of God to lay aside? Certainly not! Then, can there be any *real growth in spiritual things*, while those carnal vices are fostered? We think not; but there will be a sort of growth, or satisfaction to the carnal mind, when it sees, or thinks it does, some of those Satanic principles accomplished; but what will be the state of that one, or those children of God, when under the controlling power of such wickedness? Will it not be leanness of soul, barrenness of mind? If he be a minister of the Gospel, his emptiness will be discovered, by his *incoherent* remarks, when attempting to expound the Scriptures; and his preaching will not feed the flock of God. How is it when private members of the church are under the control of those carnal principles? Why, a fault-finding spirit will exhibit itself; for, being wrong themselves, they will see, or think they do, all others wrong; and it is to be feared that, sometimes, rather than not have their carnal desires carried out, they would see the visible church ruined, so far as peace, love, joy and harmony are concerned.

*If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.* What momentous things surround, or are involved in the little word “*if*”; but it should show to every lover of God’s truth the precision with which the Scriptures are written; for if they had not tasted of spiritual food, or that the Lord is gracious, all of those important declarations would be of no real benefit to them; *therefore* now the same things are true; and what was food for the babes in Christ in Peter’s day, is food for the same kind of characters in our time; and the same carnal principles that were to be laid aside then, by the followers of Christ, are to be laid aside now. But see how guarded the last verse of our text is; for it reads, “*If so be,*” &c. Now, are we not justified in deducing from the last verse of our text the following: a person may make a *profession* of religion, may be *sound* in the *letter* of the word, may be *baptized in water*, may partake of the *symbols* of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, and yet has *not tasted* that the Lord is gracious? If such should be the sad condition of any one, such person would be a *nominal professor*, and a *graceless hypocrite*; and if so, such one cannot desire the sincere milk of the word, because he, or she, has no knowledge revealed of it.

Then, how vitally important, brethren and sisters, that we “*examine ourselves*” and strive, as God may enable us, to see whether we “*be in the faith,*” and thereby prove “*our own selves.*” Those who are merely nominal professors, and do not feed upon the sincere milk of the word, sometimes “hang,” as it were, upon the lips of mortal eloquence, and are much pleased with the ability of the speaker, but instead of feeding on Christ and Him crucified, they are enraptured, entranced and delighted with the preacher, all of which is simply feeding their vanity.

Brethren, the day in which we now live, clearly predicted by the apostle Paul in his second epistle to Timothy, as recorded in the third chapter, should lead us to watchfulness, carefulness and prayerfulness; for the dire confusion in the carnal religious organizations, and the unrest of the nations of the earth, show unmistakable evidences that we are in the apostasy of the last days, and that the final coming of our Lord draws near; for now infidel mockers no longer hide under the pretension that they believe the Scriptures, but openly declare the Bible an antiquated record that might do for the age and time when it was written, but is not in accordance with the *improvements* of the present day; and the scoffing atheist no longer hides his hateful head, but pronounces the Scriptures a false record, and instead thereof boldly teaches the abominable system that the universe is all the god there is; but pantheism is true, and there never was any such thing as calling the worlds into existence out of nonentity – that matter is itself eternal.

Now, as we are surrounded by such horrid sentiments, does it not become us to carefully examine the Scriptures, and strive, as much as our God may enable us, to lay aside malice, guile, hypocrisy, envies, and evil speaking native to the Adamic flesh, so that love, peace and harmony may be manifested amongst us, in the dark and evil day, when iniquity abounds, and the love of some of God’s dear children waxes cold?

Brethren, we will now close our address to you, by quoting the words of the apostle Jude: “*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*”

Philander Hartwell, *Moderator.*

Wm. J. Purington, *Clerk.*

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