

1887 CIRCULAR

Delaware River Old School Baptist Association

[This Circular Letter was written by Elder William J. Purington. Elders present at this session of the Delaware River were: Marvin Vail, J. D. Hubbell, **Wm. L. Beebe**, Benton Jenkins, New York; Wilson Housel, Wm. J. Purington, New Jersey; **Silas H. Durand**, William A. Campbell, Pennsylvania; Joseph L. Staton, Delaware; **P.D. Gold**, North Carolina; **J. G. Eubanks**, Georgia; Frederick W. Keene (licentiate), Canada.

Associations seated this session were: Chemung, Pa.; Corresponding of Va., Lexington, Maine Conference, Maine Association, Licking of Ky., Salisbury, Md.; Oconee, Ga., Euharlee, Ga., Yellow River, Ga.; Ocmulgee, Ga.; Kehukee, N.C.; Contentnea, Va.; Western Corresponding, Mo.; Covenanted Particular Baptist of Canada; Black Creek, N.C.; Baltimore, Ass'n. Md.; Delaware Ass'n.; Warwick, N. Y.

We would note, that this Circular addresses the growing desire to “Down-grade” the truth held by Old School Baptists, by some sentimentalists, to soften the Gospel truth. Obviously, in the void of the preaching of the doctrine, the “wood, hay, and stubble” of nominal church members would quickly depart from the faith altogether. The writer, and the association adopting this circular, understood the direction such a movement would degenerate into. Today, they are vindicated in their opposition to the growing “Means doctrine” then first arising around them. Conditionalism, and/or “*Limited* predestinarianism – if such can be classed as *predestinarianism* at all, did rapidly grow, and some present in this session helped it to spread, as we now know by hindsight. The names in **bold are such men.**]

The Elders and messengers of the Delaware River Association of Old School or Primitive Baptists, in session with the church at Kingwood, Hunterdon Co., N. J. June 1st, 2^d and 3^d, 1887, to the several churches whose messengers we are, send love in the Lord.

Beloved Brethren:- Through the abounding goodness and watchful care of the immutable and covenant-keeping God, we are spared to meet again, according to our previous appointment, for which great privilege we surely ought to render thanks to Him who keepeth Israel in safety, and supplies all our needs, bestowing every blessing upon us, **both temporal and spiritual**. As it has been our established rule, from our organization to the present time, to present an annual address by letter, we now would call your attention to the glorious subject of **the final victory of the elect of God over every foe, both external and internal**; and we have chosen as our text the following declarations of the apostle Paul:

*“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the** called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified.” . . . “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” – Romans 8:28-34.*

In the dark and inscrutable purpose of God, His true, tried and faithful followers, during the legal dispensation, as well as in the Gospel day, have at times had to pass through fiery trials,

in which it seemed to them that their God had utterly forsaken them; and like David, they have felt to cry in their distress, *“Is His mercy clean gone forever? Doth His promise fail forevermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah.”* But untold thousands of the tried, afflicted and tempest-tossed children of God have received sweet consolation and real comfort by the Spirit’s application of the substance of the following declarations”

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee.” The glorious and soul-cheering Truth uttered by the Spirit concerning the Messiah is, *“The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know **how** to speak a word in season to him that is weary.”* The word will always be spoken *in season and exactly right.* Notwithstanding the rebellion and open idolatry of national Israel, God said, *“I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.”* Said the adorable Redeemer, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* Said the inspired Paul, *“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”* Also, if we read the eleventh chapter of Second Corinthians entire, we shall see not only what holy boldness the apostle possessed, but that a graphic description of his sufferings is therein recorded; therefore that devoted servant of Jesus Christ was prepared to write the Romans the important declarations which we are about to consider in this our Annual Letter.

*“And we know that **all things work together for good** to them that love God.”* Having previously spoken of the various sources of consolation, and especially, in the two preceding verses, of the Spirit helping our infirmities, and that He gives those prayers, and those only, which are heard of God, the apostle manifests that ardent desire for his Roman brethren that he does in his other epistles, that they might, if according to the will of God, be well persuaded of the happiness and privilege of their condition, that they might be enabled to serve God with cheerfulness and freedom of spirit, and pass through the troubles and difficulties of the world, trusting in God; and although often they are in sorrows, sufferings and trials, which are not in themselves joyous, but grievous, yet in the purpose of God they redound ultimately to the good of God’s dear children and His declarative glory.

*“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are **exercised** thereby.* In times of sore anguish and deep distress the question arises in the mind, If God hears our sighs and groanings, why are we not immediately delivered from our afflictions and troubles? In answer to which the apostle shows that not a “link” can be severed in the **divine concatenation**; for if such a thing could be, the “**golden chain**” of God’s purpose would be broken; so that, although they are not removed, as we desire, yet God **makes them work for good**. But in order that none should be led into carnal security or a state of indifference, the apostle adds, that they for whom **all things work together** for good are such as *“love God, and are the called according to His purpose.”* And this is not only in itself, but is here asserted to be a **Truth known to believers**, and to no others.

After positively asserting many things the apostle says, *“we know,”* do not surmise, or deduce from all the rest of the things enumerated, but certainly know; and this does

not mean that believers know it merely in a “speculative” manner, but that it is a knowledge which they have in the heart, producing in them confidence; for “*the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.*”

All things, whatever they be; all things **indefinitely** are here intended; but the extent of this expression is by many in this day **limited** to afflictions; and while it is true that the apostle had been referring to the present sufferings of believers, and enumerating various things which are consoling, but, approaching to the conclusion of the wonderful enumeration, the last of them is of a most comprehensive description; and that it is so, the terms he employs *warrant* us to conclude, with him, ***all things***, as he says. And if the context necessarily limited this expression, its universality ought not to be contended for; but it does not. Is it more than the apostle says on another occasion, when he uses the very **same expression, *all things***, adds a most comprehensive catalogue? “*All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or like, or death, or things present, or things to come; **all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.***” And again, “**All things** are for your sakes.” (See also Romans 8:35-39). That all things work together for the good of them that love God, is a truth affording the highest consolation, when applied by the Spirit, to believers; for these words teach believers that whatever may be the number and overwhelming character of adverse circumstances, they are all working for their good; and why? Because God governs the world, and is the sole Arbiter of all events; for the first cause of all is God; secondary causes are all His creatures, whether angels, good or bad men, animals, or the inanimate creation; and all secondary causes move only under His direction. When the time comes, according to His purpose, God, the **first cause**, moves **all secondary causes** against His enemies, as it is said, “*In that day will I make a covenant with them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowl of the heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground, and will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.*” Also, “*The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.*” If these last quotation do not show that Jehovah is the righteous and absolute Monarch of the universe, then there can be no meaning in terms, and language has no force. Right here, brethren of this association, we feel it to be binding upon us to propound a few questions:

While it has been stated and advocated by some in various parts of our country, that these strong doctrinal points are not of much account, and are useless to dwell upon, we hope that not a single member of this association has become so bewildered as to consider these things, which are the very “marrow” of the Gospel, nonessential, or so much so that they ought not to be much dwelt upon.

Dearly beloved brethren, if such feelings are fostered by any of us, where would be our fear and reverence of God, when this important branch of Truth, which our God has revealed from heaven, is considered at best rather useless and unnecessary to dwell upon? What! Shall our glorious Creator be taught by any of us, His *creatures*, what is fit to be preached, and what should be suppressed? Is the adorable God so very defective in wisdom and prudence as not to know till His *creatures* **instruct Him** concerning what would be useful and what would be pernicious? Could not He, whose understanding is infinite, foresee, previous to His revelation of this sweet and precious doctrine, what would be the consequences of His revealing it, until we poor, finite creatures should point it out to Him? If it was in harmony with the will of our God to make known these things in His written word, and to bid His messengers publish them abroad, woe be unto that servant who attempts to so “soften” these matters as not to displease the world nor cross the “visionary notions” of some of his brethren.

Objection has been made to the terms “*Predestinarian Baptists*.” Can it be that any one of us dislikes to be called a “Predestinarian Baptist”? It is to be hoped not; for if we are not Predestinarian Baptists, we are not the class the New Testament Scriptures describes.

“*To them who are **the** called according to His purpose.*” It should cause the children of our God to “*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” when they see the divine harmony existing in the apostolic writings concerning the doctrine of God our Savior; for on the Day of Pentecost Peter said to them who “*were pricked in **their heart**,*” “*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even **as many as the Lord our God shall call***” (Acts 2:39.) The calling did not make the promise, but was the **result** of the promise. Said Jesus to His Father, “*As Thou hast given Him power over **all flesh**, that He should give eternal life to **as many as Thou hast given Him***” (John 17: 1-4.) We have in the Savior’s prayer, and in Peter’s declaration, exactly the same words, “as many as;” not one less, not one more, than the number embraced in God’s purpose. They, and they only, are called not merely outwardly by the proclamation of the Gospel, but by the Spirit internally and efficaciously, and “made willing to obey” (Psalm 110:5) Christ in His ordinances, in this, the “day of God’s power.” They are called according to God’s eternal purpose, according to which He knew them, and purposed their calling, before they were made manifest by a fleshly birth; for all God’s purposes are eternal; and the declaration of the inspired penman positively shows that their calling is solely **the effect of grace**; for when it is said to be a calling “according to God’s **purpose**,” it entirely excludes works; as it is declared, “*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own **purpose and grace**, which was given us **in Christ Jesus before the world began***” (II Timothy 1:9.) By these awfully sublime declarations it is clearly shown that it is an **effectual** and **permanent calling**, for God’s purposes cannot be defeated; for “*The counsel of the Lord shall stand,*” therefore their calling is according to the purpose of Him who “*worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will*” (Ephesians 1:11.)

“*For whom He did foreknow.*” This declaration leads us on directly to a full and a most encouraging view of the progress of the divine procedure, originating with God, and carried through all its “connecting links” (predestination) forward to the full possession of that glory which shall be known in heaven, when the saints shall awake with the **exact likeness** of their glorified Redeemer. Our God foreknows all things in the most absolute comprehension before they come to pass; but the apostle here is designating the elect of God in particular; and the foreknowledge of God is accomplished by His all wise decree; for, as it is said concerning Christ’s crucifixion, “*Him being delivered by the **determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God***” (Acts 2:23.) The reason why this word is here used to denote the divine determination, is because the foreknowledge of God necessarily implies His purpose with respect to the things foreknown; for our God foreknows what **will be**, by having determined what **shall be**. The Scriptures clearly declare that it is not because our God *foresees a thing* that it is determined, but because it is **ordained by Him to come to pass** in the precise order of His Providence; therefore His foreknowledge and determination cannot be separated by the ingenuity of the most subtle metaphysicians now living and active on earth, for the one involves the other; for when our God determined a thing **should be**, He foresaw that it **would be**; consequently He determined with Himself from eternity everything He executes in time; for “*Known unto God are **all His works, from the beginning of the world***” (Acts 15:18.) Our Lord Jesus Christ was delivered into the hands of wicked men, because God foreknew that such would be the case; but it was according to His fixed counsel and ordination, for there can be nothing contingent in the mind of Jehovah, who foresees and orders **all events**, according to His own unchangeable will. Believers are called “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;*” and in the same chapter it is said of Christ, “*Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world*” (I Peter 1:20.) Here *foreknown* signifies, as it is rendered, *foreordained*; for it is from the same original word; also,

“*God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew,*” that is, whom He had before loved and chosen. A vast number of passages of Scripture, in addition to what we have here quoted, might be adduced to corroborate the glorious fact that foreknowledge and foreordination cannot be separated, for they are cognate; the one is not separate from the other.

“*He also did predestinate.*” Concerning this clause of our text, we do not feel to dwell very lengthily upon it, as we have already anticipated its just meaning; but as it is in divine concatenation, we shall make some quotations to sustain it, as well as some remarks concerning it.

True believers in Jesus Christ rejoice that their heavenly Father has spoken in such positive terms concerning them. Paul says, “*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God **ordained** [predestinated] before the world unto our glory.*” Also, “*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace*” (Ephesians 1:6). “*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who **worketh all things** [not part of them] after the counsel of His own will*” (Ephesians 1:11.) As the term is used in these last quotations, it respects not all men indiscriminately, but only those on whom God has placed His love from eternity; and as then it is absolute and complete, so it is definite, and the number who are thus predestinated can neither be increased nor diminished.

If it is, as declared, “*to the praise of the glory of **His grace,***” it follows that it must necessarily be **by grace**; that is, free, unmerited and undeserved favor; and love to God, and a desire to be conformed to the image of Christ, cannot in any respect have its origin in fallen man. “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.*” “*We love Him, because He first loved us.*” “*God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Will such glorious declarations of Gospel Truth lead the recipients of spiritual life to be indifferent and careless while passing through life’s journey here on earth? Certainly not, unless the arch-adversary has them so in his “coils” that barrenness and leanness of soul have taken possession of them; “*for the grace of God*” teaches His children, “*that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*” The apostle has told us to “*Put on therefore, as **the elect of God,** holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering: forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*”

“*To be conformed in the image of His Son.*” The trials, sorrows and afflictions of believers in this world manifest clearly that they are set apart from the great mass of mankind; for said the apostle, “*We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*” And again he says, “*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.*” “*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*” (II Cor. 4:11.) Again said the apostle, “*Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death*” (Phil. 3:8.) These declarations show that the conforming of believers to the image of their dear Redeemer begins in the world, and will be perfectly consummated in the world of immortal

glory; for here believers are to “*put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4:22.)

In suffering the saints are conformed, in their measure, to Him who was “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*” His children endure tribulation, that they may “*fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in their flesh, for His body’s sake, which is the Church.*” As the Captain of the salvation was “*made perfect through sufferings,*” so His people must follow Him in sufferings; therefore the “*outlines*” of the image, so to speak, are seen in believers here in time, which will be perfected in heaven; for the apostle John says, “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure*” (I John 3:3.)

“*That He might be the first-born among many brethren.*” Grace was given unto the vessels of mercy “*in Christ Jesus before the world began.*” Also, an apostle says, “*A servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness: in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world begun*” In the determinate counsel of God the period would certainly come when His soul should be made an offering for sin, and He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, and by His knowledge many should be justified, for He should bear their iniquities. In the Redeemer’s prayer (John 17) He said to His Father, “*Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee; as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.*” By His obedience many were made righteous; and as the Captain of their salvation, He was to bring (not attempt or desire simply to do it) many sons unto glory; for “*the gift by grace which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.*” And as He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, He is not ashamed to call them brethren; but in all things He must have the pre-eminence, for “*He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born **from the dead**; that in all (things) He might have the pre-eminence.*” Therefore He is the First, the Principal, the most Excellent, the Governor of His people, and their Lord. Regarding His glorious office, He is our King, our Head, our Lord, our Priest, our Prophet, our Surety, our Advocate with the Father, our all in every sense pertaining to our salvation; and He “*is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*” (I Cor. 1:30.) His children are all His subjects, whom He leads and governs by His Spirit, for whose sins He has made atonement, by His sufferings in the flesh and death on the cross. They are His disciples, whom He has called from darkness into (not merely to) His marvelous light.

Concerning the glory of the Mediator, “*God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” These declarations, recorded in the New Testament, harmonize exactly with the prophecy recorded concerning Him in the Old Testament; for said the Father, “*And I will beat down His foes before His face, and plague them that hate Him. But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with Him, and in My name shall His horn be exalted. I will set His hand also in the sea, and His right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto Me, Thou art My Father, My God, and the Rock of My salvation. Also, I will make Him My first born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him forevermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him. **His seed** also will I make to endure forever, and His throne*

as the days of heaven” (Psalm 89:29.) Under the law the first-born had authority over their brethren, and to them belonged a double portion, as well as the honor of acting as priests; the first-born in Israel being holy; that is to say, consecrated to the Lord. The word first-born also signifies what surpasses anything else of the same kind, as *“the first-born of death;”* signifying a very terrible death, &c. Ephraim is called the first-born of the Lord; that is, his “dear son.” In all these respects the appellation of “first-born” belongs to Jesus Christ, both as to the superiority of His nature, of His office and of His glory.

A vast amount of Scripture testimony might be adduced to sustain and corroborate the glorious Truth that the final victory of the children of God is secured beyond the possibility of the power of any foes, or all foes combined, to ever deprived the feeblest child of the inheritance; for *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time”* (I Peter 1:4.)

In this day of dire confusion, gross idolatry and avowed denial of the finished work of redemption, through the righteous life, bitter and agonizing death, and triumphantly glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, *“the poor in spirit”* rejoice in the immutably fixed purpose and the absolutely sure promise of their heavenly Father, that they *“are more than conquerors, through Him that loved”* them; and times without number have the following consolatory words been applied with sweetness and power by the Spirit unto them, *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Fearing that we might be tedious in our remarks upon this glorious theme, we will bring forward the residue of our text as the finality to this our annual letter. *“Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”*

William J. Purington, *Moderator.*
Cyrus Risler, *Clerk.*

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