

1889 CIRCULAR LETTER, DELAWARE RIVER

CIRCULAR

Written by

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The Elders and messengers of the Delaware River Association of Old School or Primitive Baptists, in session with the church at Hopewell, Mercer Co., N.J., May 29th, 30th, and 31st, 1889, 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 God we are spared to meet again, according to our previous appointment, for which great privilege we surely ought to render thanks you 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 following declarations of Scriptures:

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” – 1 Cor, 2: 1-5.

It has been declared unto the apostle concerning the church at Corinth, that there were “contentions” among them; but did the inspired servant of God *countenance* their divisions, or show a desire to be the leader of a faction or party? No; he fearlessly and faithfully rebuked them all, showing no favoritism to any man or men in the church; but their carnality was severely rebuked. He asks, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.” We have only to read carefully the eighteenth chapter of the Acts to see what course the apostle pursued while at Corinth. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he reverts to his course what at Corinth, and with a holy boldness shows that while there “a year and six months teaching the word of God among them,” he gave no occasion for such divisions among his brethren; for notwithstanding their contentions, he calls them all “brethren.” Now we will particularly notice what he says concerning his preaching.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” He said, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the church I had rather speak *five words* with my understanding, that (by my voice) I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. How guardedly he also speaks when he says, “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit *you*, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?” Excellency of speech and worldly wisdom have fascinating power; and God’s dear children too often show that they are under the controlling power of the *excellency of speech and worldly wisdom*, instead of adhering to the written word of God. Paul said to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” In the epistle to the Romans the apostle says, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye

have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." The apostle besought his brethren to *mark* and *avoid* such characters; and such should be marked and avoided in our day, for they are *disorganizers*. The apostle says in his epistle that he did not go among them with excellency of speech or of wisdom, but he came declaring unto them "*the testimony of God.*" He does not say, "I declared unto you my views, or I understand the Scripture thus and so;" neither did he have any "peace propositions" to offer to his brethren, framed according to his judgment, but declared "the testimony of God," *knowing* that nothing else could cause peace and harmony in the church which would be permanent and enduring, if God's testimony did not. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Saith the Lord?" The apostle was not a dreaming prophet, nor a "chaffy" preacher, but spoke the word of God faithfully; for said he, "We have this treasure in **earthen vessels**, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Also, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." In whatever place, and among whatever people, the apostle's preaching was the testimony of God; and he did not wander off into the barren deserts of rationalism, nor into the quagmires of metaphysics; and whatever branch of the doctrine of God our Savior he dwelt upon, he always produced a "Thus saith the Lord."

If we read the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians we can see with what positive declarations he spoke of the resurrection of the redeemed church of our God. Also, in writing to the Thessalonians upon the same glorious subject, he says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." In these awfully sublime and glorious declarations, is there any theorizing? No; does he argue the matter upon the *principles* of modern science or unbelief? No; for he declares that he says so "by the word of the Lord." He also says, "Comfort one another with these words." It matters not how well-informed any one may be literally, if there be not living faith these words will not comfort such professors of the religion of Jesus Christ. Paul, in his defense before king Agrippa, did not prevaricate; and why did he not seek to evade the truth? Because he had already declared, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. * * * Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." How sweetly and gloriously do his declarations harmonize with what his dear Redeemer had declared, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." Before king Agrippa, he said with a holy boldness, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers." He then declares, "For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Again said he, concerning his accusers and persecutors, "Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me, Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice that I cried, standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called into question by you this day." Because Paul "preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection," he was called a "babbling," "a setter forth of strange gods," "a new doctrine," &c. But Paul preached thus because it was "the testimony of God;" for Jesus said, while God incarnate, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

"*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*" The declaration of "the angel of the Lord" to Joseph was, "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." The apostle said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Said Jesus to Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The one who feels the most feeble and ignorant has the same Almighty Savior that a learned Saul of Tarsus had; for in the salvation of sinners all, whatever may be their condition in life, are saved through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ; for again the apostle said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given,

that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Can any one of God's dear children feel less that "the least of all saints?" It should not be lost sight of, that Paul not only preached Jesus, the Savior, and Christ, the Anointed One, but "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

The apostle says, "But when the fullness of the time was come, 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." Also, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." And, "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." A vast amount of Scripture might be quoted to sustain the glorious doctrine that Christ died for, or instead of, sinners; but sufficient has been quoted to corroborate and sustain the great and glorious Truth; for, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." This great Truth shines in the types and figures under the law, in all of which is constantly held forth that Christ would die for sinners; and in those portions of the prophecies and Psalms which speak of Him, the same Truth is clearly set forth, especially the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and the fortieth Psalm. These awfully momentous declarations show why Paul preached Christ *crucified*; because it was "the testimony of God." In closing these quotations we make an affirmation, and hope we do so in the fear of God. There is not a sentence recorded in the Bible stating that **eternal, spiritual life ever sinned or died; neither is there a sentence showing that Christ died for any other than sinners**. Let it be distinctly understood that we have not chosen this text to discuss the subject of the new or spiritual birth in this Circular Letter, but to dwell on the text under consideration; for in a number of communications **during the past two years the birth, and the experimental salvation which succeeds or follows the birth, have been so mixed as to constitute a perversion of both**.

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Said the apostle, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Also he said, "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as with law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all (men), that I might by all means save some." Now it should be distinctly kept before the mind that the salvation spoken of here is not eternal salvation; for it has already been shown by the same apostle how that momentous matter has been accomplished. But the anxiety of the inspired man was that, if according to God's will, they all might be saved from error of every kind, and be brought fully into Gospel liberty. These declarations clearly and positively show that the Gospel of the grace of God does not make men heady, high-minded and arrogant; but instead thereof, it clothes their minds with humility, as with a garment; for "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." As the apostle was with (not above them, nor lording it over them) his brethren in weakness, in fear and much trembling, he was prepared by reigning and abounding grace to enter into their feelings, both of sorrow and joy; because he says, "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.” These momentous declarations recorded in the Scriptures show clearly and absolutely that no man, however eminent, and however much ability he possess as a man, can comfort God’s dear children, unless he has been with them in weakness, fear and much trembling; for he has to learn these things, not by reading modern authors, but in the same school that the prophet Jeremiah did. For said he, “And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord. Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.”

“*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*” Of the apostle it was said, “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” But he boldly states, “Let such an one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present,” What is the lesson taught in this last quotation? Is it not that there was no prevarication concerning the Truth of God, whether he wrote letters to his brethren, or was present with them? To the Galatians he said, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the Truth?” Anciently there was a class of characters “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things: speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits.” Also another character is thus described, “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.” Frequently we hear words about like these, “I like that preacher, because he is so pleasing in his manners, and he dwells on experimental things, and lets others alone.” “Really he has magnetic power,” &c. But such seldom mention anything concerning the grace of God, but talk about the person’s eloquence and oratory; and sometimes persons are brought into the visible organized church under just such an influence. But such are merely nominal professors, and when there comes a time that God’s servants are constrained to declare the Truth openly and boldly, it will be said by such enticed persons, “These are hard sayings: I do not care to hear them;” and soon they are found walking no more with the church.

We will now particularly notice how it was with Paul when defending himself before Agrippa, and see if his speech was with enticing words of man’s wisdom; for “as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of Truth and soberness. * * * King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” Also, “As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee.” When Paul was not only reasoning before his accusers, but defending himself against false charges, did he speak with enticing words of man’s wisdom? No; but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Such speaking had its effect, in causing one to say he was mad; and another was made to tremble; and to-day the *demonstration of the Spirit* harmonizes with what was declared by patriarchs, prophets and apostles. Wheresoever, or by whomsoever, there is caviling concerning Scripture testimony, whether it be the eternal purpose of God, His immutability, His everlasting love, particular redemption, His working all things after the counsel of His own will, or any other branch of divine Truth, we may rest assured that it is not the demonstration of the Spirit, but the vagaries of the carnal mind. It should never be forgotten by the children of our God that although the heavenly Comforter, the Holy Ghost, is the Author of all meekness, the God of all grace and consolation, yet He hath inspired His servants, the prophets and apostles, to write the severest things against them who “utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry; and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil; he deviseth wicked devices, to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right.” In such declarations made by the prophet, are there any enticing words? No; but the character of such is demonstrated by the Spirit. In perfect accordance with this was the conduct of our Lord, for His whole character was made up of meekness, kindness and love; yet what severe language did he use against those builders, the scribes and Pharisees. In this He is also followed in measure by all His faithful disciples, whom He had so earnestly warned to beware of false prophets, who come in sheep’s clothing. Paul said to “Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation), O full of all subtlety and mischief, thou child of

the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"

Now, even at this present time, as true believers are humbled with spiritual discoveries of the Divine glory in the way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, will their zeal be kindled against every corruption of the Gospel, so as not to "bear them that are evil," not even to receive them into their house, nor bid them God speed. In the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees seven times "hypocrites," and once a "generation of vipers." A vast amount of Scripture might be adduced to show that not only prophets and apostles, but our Lord Jesus Christ, used the most severe invectives against false teachers that are recorded in the Bible; therefore the Holy Ghost describes men exactly as they are.

"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." The inspired servant of God arrives at the conclusion of the reason that his speech and his preaching were of a kind, showing that the faith of God's children should not stand in anything but the power of God; and that is conclusive evidence that the faith of God's elect rests on the testimony of its Author; for the apostle said to the Hebrews, in unequivocal language, that such is the fact. His words to them are, *"Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faith in your minds."* The apostle, after he had withstood Peter "to the face, because he was to be blamed," said, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Here we can see plainly that living faith is not to be found where Christ is not; also, that faith always, when in exercise, looks to its Author; therefore it stands not in the wisdom of men, but the power of God. The word of God clearly and fully makes the distinction between the righteousness which justifies the sinner, and the faith which receives it. Our God in His love, wisdom and purpose has given to His Church and people all the record they need; for the declaration was, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples." If the testimony has been bound up, and the law sealed among His disciples, there **will be no addenda made to the testimony, nor alterations therein**; and woe be unto the man or men who openly attempts to do so; for such can only alter the *letter*; and change some of the *outward forms*. The purpose of God can no more be changed than Jehovah can cease to exist. But let us hear with trembling and fear what is said concerning them who would add unto or take from anything recorded in prophecy. *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."* It is clearly demonstrated by the Spirit that if our faith stands in the wisdom of men, such a kind does not stand in the power of God; and no spirit can cause any of the children of men to have a just understanding of any declaration of Scripture except the Spirit of God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." This last quotation settles the matter as to whom the divine Instructor is, and no power or powers

can ever change this matter.

Now, brethren of this association, as we are about to close our Letter, we wish to address **you** by way of interrogation and affirmation. Do we, as an association, confide in the wisdom of men concerning any of the principles of the doctrine of God our Savior? Or do we with child-like simplicity receive the testimony of God as recorded in the Scriptures, absolutely confiding in His everlasting love, His infinite wisdom and Almighty power, to *accomplish everything* declared concerning His eternal purpose of love and mercy to His dear people, as well as His wrath and vengeance to His enemies, and **that no event ever has and never can transpire by chance**? If such be our blessed condition, our faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the *power of God*. Next to being born of the Spirit, the greatest boon with which a child of God can be blessed **is to be established in the Truth**. What did Paul say while on his perilous voyage to Rome? Hear him. *“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Caesar; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”* In the midst of that terrible storm the apostle believed God; therefore his faith stood in the power of God, and that he would exactly accomplish what He had promised. If our faith stands in the power of God, we shall believe His word *as recorded* in the Scriptures. We are to heed the declaration of no man or men unless the same are sustained by the Scriptures; neither the doctrine of any association, if such doctrine is not clearly established by “the testimony of God.” Said an apostle, *“We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of His majesty.”*

Now, in closing our letter to you, we feel to exhort you to heed none of the **vain theorizing that that is now so prevalent**, but take the Scriptures as your guide; and in what seem dark and obscure, do not be led away by the comments of uninspired men. If such a course is pursued, the result will certainly be confusion and strife; but if we receive the testimony of our God with child-like simplicity, peace, love and harmony will abound in the churches composing this association.

“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.”

William J. Purington, *Moderator*.

Cyrus Risler, *Clerk*