

1839 CIRCULAR LEXINGTON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

[The Lexington gained correspondence with the Warwick in 1829. The 1830 Minutes did not contain their Articles of Faith, but printed on the cover beginning in this session (1839) they published the follow:

“Holding the doctrine of total depravity by the fall of Adam; **predestination of all things in the Council of God**; eternal and personal election; particular atonement efficacious in the work of regeneration; perseverance of saints through grace to glory; resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; the eternal punishment of the wicked, and everlasting happiness of the righteous.”

Elders present at this session were: Elders David Meade, Hezekiah Pettit, Gabriel, Isaac Hewit, Almiron and St. John.

Associations in correspondence this session were: Warwick, Delaware River, Delaware, Baltimore, Ketockton, and Rappahannock.

An interesting bit of information in this minute was that Elder Gilbert Beebe was *from Alexandria, District of Colombia*. He had been hitherto fore from New York in the Warwick.

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Elders and messengers composing the Lexington Baptist Association to the Churches whom they represent, greetings:

Dear Brethren:- We would on this occasion address you on the importance of “**Rightly dividing the Word of God.**” While the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament form one entire chain, and are the perfect will of God, revealing to us His Eternal purpose of Grace which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began, they notwithstanding contain such a blest variety that Paul exhorts Timothy to rightly divide the word. This admonition was not only important to Timothy, but equally so to us. Some of those important divisions we shall here notice in relation to this subject.

The first revelation God has made in His word is Himself as the sovereign Creator of the Heavens and Earth, and each and every part thereof, for His own glory; and while it displays His wisdom and power, and bears the impress of His Divine hand, its obvious design was as a proper theatre on which to erect His spiritual Kingdom, or His spiritual house, in connection with which the Heavens and Earth are but the needful scaffold, as may be seen by the fact that when the mystery of the Church is finished, the Heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, the elements melt down with fervent heat, and the Earth and the things thereof be burned up. The account given respecting the order of creation is that it was all good, declared to be so by the Divine Author: that man in his primitive state was equally as holy as was the rest of the work of God’s hand, is evident; and in this holy state God was pleased to give him a Law as the rule of his conduct. A

very simple and easy law to follow: of the trees of the Garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the Tree of Knowledge thou mayest not eat, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. The Law thus introduced is a point to be distinctly noticed in rightly dividing the Word.

That man has fallen by the transgression of that Law is an obvious fact, and that the whole human family with their *federal* Head, and being in him, did imputatively and actually fall, is a Bible truth. “*By one man’s disobedience (Adam’s) many were made sinners;*” and although sin has taken its rise among the creatures of God in a way as mysterious as the consequences are awful, yet such is the fact, confirmed not only by the Word of God, but by all the miseries of the children of men: death entered the world by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, Until death entered by sin, none of God’s creatures were subject to it, but afterwards, all His creatures are victims, due to the curse placed upon the earth. It is important that we should know that the *fall of man* has not *abolished the Law of God*, nor extinguished one particle of its demand. God did not change thereby; man did. This may be more closely seen by the revelation given to Moses on tables of stone; and although some things were written would at least admit of a doubt whether they were binding on all of the creatures of God, yet our Lord has told us that love to God and love to our neighbor was the entire subject on which hang all the law and prophets.

This divine Law is also written in every page of the book of nature, so that they who are without law, are law unto themselves, their conscience accusing or excusing them; for the invisible things which are not seen are clearly manifest by the visible things that do appear, even the Eternal Power and Godhead. From the foregoing it may be seen that the Divine Law is of itself calculated for the benefit of all obedient subjects, and that every departure from this perfect rule of right is a transgression of that Divine Law; so that every act of fallen man, whether of heart, head, or mind, is an act of hostility against God, coming from a heart that is enmity itself. It is here we may behold the terrific scenes at Mount Sinai: the awful Majesty that clothed the Holy Law and presence of its Divine Author to creatures already fallen under its righteous curse, made even Moses to quake and the people to request that the word should not be spoken any more, for they could not endure that which was communicated.

The next interesting consideration to which we ask your faithful investigation is, “**The Blessed Gospel of Christ:**” and although it so far excels in glory, that at its very dawn the shadows must all flee away, yet it is needful we should view it distinct from the Divine Law, as the one kills, and the other makes alive. While the old dispensation ended abruptly with the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God, yet the principle of the law in its killing function yet remains.

This glorious subject was first introduced in the curse on the serpent – the **seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head**. It was further revealed in the train of blood that was shed under the first dispensation, that was offered in sacrifice for sin; so much

so, that Paul commenting on those *typical ordinances*, terms them *a school master* to bring us to Christ. The Priest, Altar, and Sacrifice, were all typical; and notwithstanding Abel by faith, offered an acceptable sacrifice, as did many of the old Saints, yet there was a remembrance of sin again, it being impossible that the blood of animals should take away sin: the stain was too deep – the crime too great – and when four thousand years had rolled away, and Daniel’s seventy weeks were accomplished, it is then we hear that voice that gave birth to creation, from the upper world proclaim, “*in offerings and burnt offerings, and offerings for sin Thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo I come to do Thy will, oh God: as in the volume of Thy book it is written of Me, oh God, a body hast Thou prepared Me,*” and the coming of the blessed Messiah is proclaimed by the Angel of God,- “*Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will toward men.*” Here in the face of Jesus Christ we behold the perfections of God, in a united harmony with the chorus of the Savior of sinners: here we behold Him of whom Moses and David did write: here is the great Antitype of all those types under the Law – blessed substance of all the shadows under the First Testament that were fulfilled in His obedience and on His cross – the end of that legal dispensation, although in hypocrisy maintained until the last morning and even sacrifice had come! Here in our Divine Lord we behold all the stores of mercy that His people can need. He spent His days as a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief; while He goes about unwearily doing good, heals the sick, raises the dead, comforts mourners, and eventually bears our sins in His own body on the tree, being delivered up for our offences, and raised again for our justification. In this Divine Personage we behold the essence of the everlasting Gospel. He is the beginning and ending; the first and the last. In Him we behold the foundation on which His Church shall rise – the blest Mediator of the New Covenant “*ordered in all things and sure:*” a divine purpose worthy of God, laid in infinite wisdom, caused into effect with Almighty Power, while all its various parts move at the appointed time, as uninterrupted as the Throne on which Jehovah reigns. Thus we see our Redeemer came in the fullness of time, died at the appointed hour, rose the third appointed morning of the Sabbath, and about forty days after ascended on high as the Great Captain of our Salvation, and High Priest of our profession, and sways the Sceptre of universal government in heaven, earth, and hell, of whom it is said He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. It is in His name that repentance is preached to a guilty world, and the glorious Gospel proclaimed to perishing sinners. Here we would notice another consideration to be kept in view in rightly divine the Word – and that is, “**Wherever the Gospel comes it does command all men to repent and believe the Gospel.**” It does not demand they believe to the saving of their souls, but to acknowledge the Gospel as God’s words. Inasmuch as this is a point in which good men disagree, it becomes us to move with caution; but we shall endeavor to establish the fact.

The point in dispute is, whether the Gospel requires repentance and belief of the Truth where He does not actually bestow it (they both are gifts of the Spirit) – or in other words, of those who finally perish in their sins. We think He does; and for proof of the

same we refer you to Mark 1st chapter, 14th and 15th verses – “*Now, after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe **the Gospel.***” Acts, 17th chapter, 30th verse – “*And the times of this ignorance God once winked at; but now commendeth all men every where to repent.*” These two witnesses, with many more that might be brought, establish the fact that the Gospel does command men to repent and believe. Now if it can be shown that any of those men thus commanded never did repent, the argument is ended. This we think is clearly settled in 2d Thessalonians, 1st chapter, 7th, 8th and 9th verses – “*And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.*” These portions of divine Truth plainly show us that the Gospel comes with divine precept; for the Apostle tells us, where there is no law there is no transgression. Another witness we have in Peter’s remarks to Simon – having first told him that he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and then says to him, “*repent and pray God if the thoughts of thy heart may be forgiven thee.*” This important point is often objected to, on the ground that men cannot repent and believe the Gospel until they are born again. This objection has indeed a plausible appearance at the first view; but when examined, it will prove to be false upon the ground that God requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform. That He requires of us perfect holiness cannot be denied; and the first precept of the divine Law is, “*Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, mind, and strength:*” and we know that we cannot love God while we hate Him. But does this abolish the Law, or form for us the least excuse? The same may be said of repentance: we cannot be sorry for sin while we love it. But such inability does not change God’s right to demand it: for it is just, holy and good.

Having shown what the Gospel requires, we will now at least point at what it bestows; and inasmuch as Christ is the essence of the Gospel Himself, we may here remember He was “*Exalted at the right hand of the Father to be a Savior and a Prince to **give** repentance unto Israel, and the forgiveness of sin,*” and bring the elect of God and all His family elected in Him in seed substance, and predestinated to be conformed to His image, when the time of the effectual calling of His people is come: He is pleased, by His word and Spirit, to take up His abode in the heart and slay the enemy thereof; bows the will, opens the understanding and gives the lost sinner to see the hateful nature of sin, feelingly, and to repent in deep humility of soul, and self abhorrence, and cry for mercy: and as He takes away the stoney heart, and grants a new heart, He bestows on him every Christian grace, such as faith, hope, and charity. The soul being now made alive, when God speaks he trembles at His word, and as the Gospel trump sounds in his ear, and presents a Savior to his heart, he is enabled by the

Spirit to believe to the saving of his soul: he is now translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son; and hence freed from the curse of the Law, being no more under the Law but under grace, adopted into the family of God, consequently made heir of God and joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him; and he is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: this Sovereign Almighty arm sustains him in the trying day and safely conducts him across the boisterous waves of life to bear him dry shod through the Jordan of death, lands him on the shores of a blest immortality, and presents him before the Throne of bliss without spot or wrinkle or any such thing: permitted to join the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn whose names are written here, he beholds the King in His beauty and much admires the wisdom displayed in that noble plan of free and sovereign grace that has presented its unnumbered millions before the Throne with exceeding joy.

Hezekiah Pettit, *Moderator*

Gabriel Conklin, *Clerk*.

NOTE: Notice that Gabriel Conklin, of the Warwick Association, is elected the **clerk** of the Lexington Association. You will gradually see this unique development, as messengers seated become active members of the session they visit, in the same sense of a constituted local church. You will also see the development of a concept that other churches elsewhere are "branches" of the church gathered. SCP.