

**1791 CIRCULAR LETTER**  
**WARWICK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION**

By  
John Dodge

[The Circular Letter was read, and laid on the table until the following day, when it had a second reading.]

Query: Is it consistent with the Gospel to receive a candidate into membership when it can be obtained in a sister church that is more convenient?" Ans. The query will not admit of a positive answer; for there are circumstances which would render it necessary; therefore we advise all churches to guard against all causes of the like, where there appears to be any sinister views in the person.

The letter and messenger to the Philadelphia Association failed due to a singular providence. The same letter and messenger sent for the coming year.- SCP.]

CIRCULAR LETTER

*The Elders and Brethren of the several Baptist Churches, belonging to the WARWICK ASSOCIATION, met in Warwick, October 18, 1791:*

*To the Churches with whom they are connected, Greetings.*

*Dearly Beloved,*

We are happy at the close of our meeting, that we can say it was agreeable and comfortable through the whole – we had comfortable news from the churches in our connection, and that an entire union of sentiment subsisted among us, and calls for acknowledgment and giving thanks, that peace and good order generally prevail: However, we have to lament that errors are prevailing in the land, and many are infected therewith, which plainly shews us these are the last days spoken of by the Apostles; doth it not call upon us to be on the watch, and to strive together for the faith of the Gospel, especially when doctrines are advanced which tend to sap the very foundation of the Christian religion; for if once the doctrines of the **imputation of Adam's sin**, Christ's proper atonement, imputed righteousness, &c., are laid aside, what shall we have in the room thereof – Judge ye, if the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do? Therefore we would address you at this time upon the important subject – ***The Doctrine of Atonement*** – and in the illustration thereof, shall be as concise as the limits of a Letter will admit.

The word ***atonement*** is but once used in the New Testament, Rom. v.11. "*by whom we have received the atonement;*" yet it is often used in the old, of typical sacrifices making expiation for sin; Lev. 1:4 and iv. 20, and a number of other places in Lev. vi.30; it is rendered "to reconcile;" yea, the word ***reconciliation*** is frequently used with respect

to this doctrine, and it is evident that atonement and reconciliation design the same thing, and both *satisfaction*. It is said, Job xxxiii.24: “*Deliver from going down to the pit, I have found (an atonement) a ransom.*” So that when we speak of atonement, reconciliation, satisfaction and redemption are so closely connected therewith, there is no separating them.

The word *atonement* signifies “to cover;” and Christ is a covering to His people (from the curses of the law they have transgressed; the wrath of God they have deserved, and avenging Justice their sins have exposed them to;) and that by His all-atoning sacrifice, well might the royal Prophet say: “*Blessed is he whose sin is covered;*” Psalm xxxii. 1. And again, - “*Thou hast covered all their sin;*” Psalm lxxxv.2. Christ’s blood is the purple covering in the chariot of the covenant of grace, under which His people are secure. “*He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel;*” Numbers xxxiii. 21; but saith, “*Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee;*” Canticles iv.7. Whence comes all this? The beloved Disciple declares it, “*and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.*” 1 John 1:7.

The Apostle to the Hebrews, summing up the rites and bloody sacrifices of the Law, saith, “*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.*” Hebrews ix. 22. If we attend to the sacred oracle we shall find that the typical atonement was made with blood. The Lord commanded Moses to make an altar to burn incense upon – that it should be overlaid with pure gold, and Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year, with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; Exo. xxx. 10. Reconciliation is also made with blood, “*and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself;*” Col. I. 20. – so likewise is redemption – and “*hath redeemed us to God by Thy blood.*” Rev. v.9. And all do shew a satisfaction is evident; for, saith the Apostle, “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;*” 1 Cor. xv. 3. – that is, in our room and stead He not only gave that perfect obedience to the law it required in His life, but at His death gave Himself a ransom; satisfied Divine Justice for the transgression of the law, and it was a sweet smelling savor unto God; God was well pleased with it, and declares Himself pacified towards them for all they have done; Ezek. xvi. 63. The great Apostle to the Gentiles saith, “*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;*” Rom. v. 10. Here we see atonement made for sin, reconciliation for iniquity, redemption from the curse of the law, full satisfaction to Divine Justice; And to suppose all this was done without any consideration to any creature, but simply to satisfy Divine Justice, as some assert, or that it was made equally for all the descendants of an apostate Adam, as others affirm, is an impeachment of the wisdom of God; yea, it reflects upon the love of God, His justice, power and immutability, and to an ingenuous mind must carry a refutation in itself.

Further, it reflects upon the Person of the Redeemer and His work, which is perfect; for who can doubt of ability in the Mighty God, when the prophet saith, - “*their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of Host is His name;*” Jeremiah 1. 34. But it was necessary

that the Redeemer should be man also, that He might be capable of dying to make atonement for the sins of His people; therefore the man of God's right hand was made strong. The human nature being taken into union with, and subsisting in the Person of the Son of God, He was fitly qualified to stand between God and man, and make intercession for transgressors; being a Divine Person, He could and did draw nigh to God, in the counsel and covenant of peace, and engaged to restore that which He took not away, even the honors of God's holy law, and to obtain eternal redemption for His people. Had He been only man, He could never have supported under the amazing load of sufferings He had to endure, therefore He must be God. All the sins of all His elect were imparted to Him; and all the ponderous weight of Divine wrath, demerited by those sins, was to fall on His head – surely, saith the prophet, “*He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;*” Isa. liii. 4.- a load too heavy for angels or men; yea, it would have crushed, as it were, to atoms all created beings; His Divine Person gave efficacy and merit to His obedience and sufferings. Had He been a mere man, His obedience and righteousness could have been beneficial only to Himself, nor could His sufferings and death have atoned for the sins of others; but being God and man in one Person, His blood is the blood of the Son of God, and so cleanse from all sin, and is a proper atonement for it.

The manner in which Christ made atonement, deserves a little to be attended to, which was by dying for sin and for sinners in their room and stead. The Apostle represents this as the first article of the Christian faith – that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; 1 Cor. xv. 3. – and saith Jehovah the Father, for the transgression of My people was He stricken; 1 Sam. Liii.8. The blessed Jesus saith, “This is the blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many.” Agreeable to this, the Lord said to Moses, - “for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul; Lev. xvii. 11. So we find the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many; Matt. xx. 28. – the many sons He, the Captain of their salvation, should bring to glory.

Thus, Dear Brethren, may these few lines upon the subject lead you, 1<sup>st</sup>. To search the sacred record, wherein it is fully displayed (the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein; Psalm iii.2;) and take a view of the completeness, fullness, and sureness of this atonement, made by our great High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the Heavens; Heb. viii.1. 2d. May it lead you to consider what love, mercy and grace is manifested and brought to light through the death of the blessed Jesus, and with what holy admiration your souls should be filled, exclaiming with the inspired Apostle – “*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*” I John iii.1. 3d. May it lead you to see what hearts of gratitude and thankfulness it calls for, and what obligations it lays you under of living for Him that hath done so much for you. A heart truly sensible of these things, will cry out with the Psalmist, “*What shall I render*

*unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?"* Psalm cxvi. 12. 4<sup>th</sup>. May it lead your mind to reflect that this doctrine is so far from opening a door to licentiousness and sin, that it entirely shuts it out, and those that talk otherwise are ignorant of and without that filial nature those possess who believe; for believing pre-supposes knowledge, and where there is knowledge or understanding, there must be a life answerable to it: Those that are born of God are renewed in the inward man – old things are done away, all things are become new; a new heart, new desires, aims and ends; therefore when an object that is evil is presented to view, and Satan tempts, the language of that soul is – How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? Gen. xxxix. 9. 5<sup>th</sup>. Learn from hence the vile nature of sin, the exceeding sinfulness of it, what an evil and bitter thing it is, that nothing could make atonement for it but the blood-shed, suffering, and death of Christ, the strictness of divine Justice, that would make no abatement but insisted upon Christ's ding and suffering all that the Law required to make satisfaction for the sins of His people – and if it spared not the Son of God, standing in their room and stead, but demanded and had full satisfaction at His hands, it will not spare Christless sinners: what a fearful thing will it be to fall into the hand of the living God?

6<sup>th</sup>. To conclude, may it lead you to remember that the half shekel, called the atonement money, was given for every one alike, the rich gave no more nor the poor less, so the same everlasting love to the elect, is to one as the other, which, provided the blessings and the way of the communication thereof to them; the same blood made atonement for one as the other; the same Spirit teaches the one as the other, and the same inheritance is promised, and is as sure to the one as to the other, who are the heirs of promise; and as you are all travelling the same road together, see that you fall not out of the way, but let us consider one another, to provoke to love and good works, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, is the prayer of yours in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.

John Dodge, *Moderator*

Thomas Montanye, *Clerk*.