

1795 Circular Warwick Association

Written by
Elias Lee

[John Asplund who compiled the register of Baptist Churches for 1792 was present this session, and this note is recorded: Item 13. "Whereas reports have been circulated, that *John Asplund*, has imbibed corrupt sentiments, he being present declares he still as heretofore holds the doctrines of this association, and stands in union with us; we therefore recommend him to our churches.

We see herein a development that will continue to grow, *i.e.*, ministers with free time are given assignments to preach for destitute churches, both in the Warwick and independent ones, on a regular assignment. Those given assignments to supply these destitute churches were: Benjamin Montanye, Thomas Montanye, John Caton, Silas Southworth, Isaac Roads, Reuben Garrison, Enoch Ferris, and Ebenezer Ferris.

The Circular letter covered Election, Reprobation and Eternal Vital Union.

CIRCULAR LETTER

*The Elders and Brethren of the several Churches met in Association, at Clinton Town,
May 26, 1795*

To the Churches with whom they are connected, Greeting.

Beloved Brethren,

In our Minutes of October 16, 1792, we addressed you upon that truly great and important subject, the **doctrine of eternal electing love**. We want to turn your attention to the opposite side of that question; and address you upon that equally true, and eternal doctrine, the **subject of reprobation**, represented in the Sacred Volume, under the idea of "hatred."

A brief discussion of this point appears to us necessary at this time, inasmuch as it is considered by a great part of *professing* Christians, as the source of those evils which have embarrassed *Theology*; and laid a foundation for the complete and total ruin, of a great majority of the human race. And here we confess it is matter of wonder and surprise, (to us) that while men of learning and abilities, have said so much to support and defend this doctrine, they have said so little to illustrate and explain it.

It is also surprising that while some have strenuously supported the doctrine of election, they have at the same time absolutely denied that of reprobation; whereas in respect to the Divine purpose, these are concomitants depending on each other, the first supporting the latter, and cannot with any propriety be said to exist without it. And our

surprise is still increased, by observing again, that others, either through ignorance, prejudice or ill-will to the Supreme Authority of Heaven, have dressed up these harmless and lamb-like points of doctrine, in the habit of the lion; and endeavored to make them roar out in the most hideous and terrible manner, only to frighten and disturb the weak and inconsiderate, and to threaten them with hell-fire, and eternal damnation, only for the pleasure of tormenting the hearers.

But let us now quit the vain conceits and imaginary views of frail mortals, and take our flight in pursuit of the great Apostle, in the contemplation of this grand and majestic theme. How inimitably beautiful are his exhibitions of the works of God, under the aconomy (sic) of one great and illustrious family; of which Jesus Himself is represented as the beginning and the Head. See Eph. 1.21st, and 3.15th. From these general observations guided by the Omnipotent Spirit of inspiration, he proceeds to point out more particularly the glowing beauties of this astonishing scene of order and regulation.

In excellency of wonder and pleasure, he surveys the chain of the eternal purpose of Heaven as running through and forming a grand division in the whole intelligent creation. On the right hand he observes the Covenant of Grace in all its resplendent glory, comprehending Christ and the elect in Him; or Christ and the Church, or in other words, the Bridegroom and the Bride, or Christ as the Master, and the Church in actual union with and in Him, as the mistress of the *universe*, and that before the world was made. On the left hand the moral system presents to view; comprehending an illustrious train of servants, including the remainder of the human race prospectively, and the whole society of Angels, yea, even the Bride of Christ in her creatureship, belongs to this system; and is taken from it in the order of time, and extricated from the ruins of the fall under it, in consequence of her election in and with Christ. She then in respect to nature and mortality, is considered as the *servant* and subject of Christ, as though there was no election at all; but in respect to election and grace she is considered as His Bride and Spouse, in distinction from her moral obligation to Him. Here we discover the right use of the moral law to Christians, and hence it is, that we are prohibited by the Sacred Oracles to depend, either upon the law or the perfection of nature, for the procuring of those peculiar and distinguishing blessings exhibited to us through the medium of the Gospel.

From these observations it is plain to a demonstration, that neither election nor reprobation, destroy our moral obligation to our Supreme Being, and that reprobation in its true and genuine signification, amounts to nothing more than non-election, or the negating (sic) a certain part of the human race, together with all the angelic throng of an inheritance in the Covenant of Grace.

But does this in any respect exclude them from the rectitude and glory of their creature and sinless state? Or from the privileges and blessings bestowed upon them by a kind and beneficent Creator, as the subject of His moral government? Or does it in the

least degree involve them in transgression and misery? Surely it does not; but rather tends to promote their interest and happiness as the servants and subjects of the best of beings. What evil then is there in reprobation? Surely none at all; but how easy and familiar is the idea when exhibited in a right manner. Suppose an earthly prince possessed of a peaceable kingdom, should of his own volition choose and appropriate to himself, one of his own subjects, to be his spouse and bride in particular; how could it in any wise be injurious to the rest of his subjects? Would it deprive them of their liberty, their property, or any of those privileges which they enjoyed before? It would not. Or suppose a gentleman saw fit to choose to himself a partner in life, would such a choice infringe upon the privileges of other ladies, in the town or country? Would it deprive them of their beauty, their virtue, their ornaments or any other thing which they doted upon? It would not. How unreasonable then are all our objections against the great Sovereign of His own universe on account of the harmless and inoffensive doctrine of election and union to Himself and of reprobation, which He hath revealed in His Word? But perhaps all this may not satisfy the curious and the caviling; reprobation must still (by them) be considered as the source of sin and misery, to them who are finally lost. We would ask then, How the Angels in Heaven have retained primitive purity, *since in comparison with the Saints, they are reprobate*; that is, they are not included with them in the election of grace and union with Christ, though in comparison with them that fell, they are said to “be elect,” or chosen in the wisdom, and confirmed by the power of God alone, in the moral system; see 1 Tim. 5. 21st. Besides, if reprobation is the *cause of sin*, we should think that none but the reprobate would have sinned, whereas the elect as fallen creatures in the moral system, are represented both by nature and practice, as though children of wrath even as others.

These ideas (though not popular at the present day) are the best we can form of the doctrine of reprobation, from the Sacred Oracles. Yea, the same similitudes are used by the inspired writers to illustrate the idea in a variety of instances, particularly in the first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians which you may consult at your leisure. But the noblest description of the Divine independence in this affair, may be found in the ninth chapter to the Romans, and the eleventh verse, “*For the children being **not yet born**, neither (of them) having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not by works but of Him that calleth.*” Here the purpose of the great Jehovah is represented as far beyond the reach of the influence of all human principles or actions, whether virtuous or vicious; and it is plain that the Apostle here refers to Jacob and Esau as eminent figures of the elect and reprobate in their different stations, and in what a nice and elegant manner are they suspended upon the single point **of the eternal decree of an Infinite Sovereign?** yet in nothing to the disadvantage of either. For though it is asserted in the conclusion of verse 13th, “Esau have I hated.” But as Esau is not considered in this case as having done in any evil, this was said only in comparison of Jacob, and cannot be thought of to be *a positive passion of hatred*, any more than a man when he hath espoused to himself a partner to life, may be considered

as the positive enemy and determined destroyer of her sisters, or other women. It can be looked upon in the sense as a man is required positively to hate his father or his mother, in consequence of his love to Christ; see Luke 14.26. It can be read that “I have given to Jacob an inheritance in the New Covenant, but to Esau only the common blessings of an unblemished creation, in nature. I have set Jacob in line of grace, as My Bride and Spouse, but Esau in the moral system as My servant.”

But perhaps even the notion of a *servant* in this case, may seem disagreeable and degrading to some? To this we observe, it is too degrading to the fallen angels, and likewise to proud and haughty ministers, to serve the church of Christ without wages, and in this respect they are classed with the leader of those angels, see 1 Tim. 3:6. But let us consider the example of Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of *a servant* and served the church with His own life and blood, that she might live through Him, Phil. 2.7. The example of the good angels is also worthy of our attention, for with the greatest pleasure they obey the injunctions of their Lord and Master in administering for them who shall be heirs of salvation. See Heb. 1:14. Besides, that memorable observation in the 12th verse of the aforesaid ninth chapter to the Romans, is completely in our favor, “*the elder shall serve the younger.*” See this also verified in the instance of Sarah and Hagar, of Isaac and Ishmael, and of the spiritual and natural seed of Abraham in general; but time and circumstances will not permit us to attend in particular to all these things at present.

We therefore proceed to draw a few inferences from the whole.

And 1st, It is evident to a demonstration, that election and reprobation runs entirely clear of the apostasy and misery of both men and angels, and that to take either of these points of doctrine bend to any timely circumstance of the creature, is actually to infringe upon the independency of Heaven. And,

2d, That election and reprobation are perfectly consistent with the happiness of the whole intelligent creation, in their different spheres, provided they had kept their first estate by a regular obedience to the laws and rules of the moral system.

3d, That the system of free and sovereign grace is entirely distinct from the moral system, and that there is in a comparison the same difference, between the eternal union of Christ and the church, and between Him and the angels and the rest of mankind, as there is between the husband and wife, and between the master and his servant.

4th, That Christ manifest Himself to the church in the line of free grace, in a spiritual manner, as a particular Head and Husband; but to the rest of intelligent beings in the line of the moral system as a kind and benevolent Master.

5th. That the “hatred” of the Divine Sovereign annexed to the great decree, is only a disapprobation of some part of the intelligent creation, in that particular case, but no way inconsistent with His general love and communications of His common favors to them

as His creatures, and should never be confounded with His aversion to them as sinners, or His reprobation of them as such, or His decree to punish them for their crimes.

6th. And lastly, Is it not plain and evident, that this mode of explaining Scriptures, in respect to the doctrine of election and reprobation, is the best and even the only way to shut the door effectually against the carnal objections of the haughty sons of pride, and to beat down all the distorted images of misery and death, which the Arminians have raised upon them, to frighten and perplex the inconsiderate and inattentive part of mankind.

And now, dear brethren, we leave you a while to contemplate this grand and important theme, hoping you will ever be careful to support and maintain the “faith once delivered to the Saints,” and that in this day of trial and adversity wherein iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxing cold; you will by no means neglect to adorn the doctrine of God your Savior, by a well ordered life and conversation in the world. Thus with a sincere desire for your advancement, and prosperity in spiritual religion, we commend you to the care of Him who is able to keep you from falling, and present you spotless before the throne; to whom be glory and dominion, world without end, Amen.

Signed by order and in behalf of the association.

Benjamin Montanye, *Moderator*.

Thomas Montanye, *Clerk*.