

1841 Circular Warwick Association

[Ministers seated in this session were Elders: Samuel Trott (preached Introductory sermon on “Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord forever”, Gabriel Conklin, Gilbert Beebe, R.D. Pickard, P. C. Broome, Henry Hait, D. Forshee, Benjamin Pitcher, John F. Felty, Joel W. Clark, and Amos Harding.

Association in correspondence, Lexington N.Y.; Delaware; Delaware River N.J.; Baltimore, Md.; Ketocton, Va.; Corresponding Va. (First seated in 1840 session); Chemung N.Y.; Rappahannock, Va; and Alleghany N.Y.

The Circular Letter’s author is not noted in the Minute, nor the previous Minute of 1840. However, it bares the marks of Gilbert Beebe, and within the body of it, the word “*connexion*” is used rather than than “*connection*,” which is often used by Elder Beebe. It really matters little, for the Circulars in the Warwick are always examined, corrected, and recommended by a large committee, and voted on by the full body before being published abroad.-SCP]

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Warwick Baptist Association, convened with the church at Walkill, Orange County, N.Y., to the churches whose messengers we are, send Christian salutation:

Beloved Brethren:- Of the rich and ample variety of profitable subjects embraced in the Gospel of our precious Lord Jesus Christ, we select as the subject of this epistle, that of

The Gospel Liberty.

Restricted, in the discussion of this subject, as we must necessarily be, to the ordinary limits of a Circular; we propose to present only some *general* observations, in which we desire to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

The vital importance of this subject is fully implied in the admonition of the Apostle (Gal. v.1.) “*Stand fast therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage,*” The disorder, confusion and even witchcraft that obtained in the Galatian churches, through their inattention to the true principles of Gospel Liberty should be regarded as a warning to the Church of Christ, in all subsequent ages.

That the saints of God, are, by free grace, called from a state of spiritual bondage into a state of spiritual liberty, is too clearly declared in the New Testament, to require arguments to establish the simple fact; but the true, Scriptural nature and tendency of that liberty is not so clearly understood, it has been, and still is a subject of much controversy among professors of Christianity. As in politics, so also in theology, the term *liberty*, is often rendered vague and indefinite. In states and nations where tyranny and

oppression abounds, liberty is boasted of: in churches too, where the Sinai covenant is regarded as the rule of Christian practice, the people talk much of liberty; while the real liberty of the Gospel is regarded by them as the floodgate to *licentiousness, and the open road to hell*. GOSPEL LIBERTY, is the opposite of *legal servitude* and bondage; it is the state unto which the saints are brought when experimentally released from the guilt and consequence of sin, and from the curse and dominion of the Law. Hence, in his allegory, Paul tells us, Gal. iv. 24-31, the two sons of Abraham, the one by a bond maid, and the other by the free woman, represents **two** covenants; that of Mount Sinai, commonly called the “covenant of works,” and which “gendereth to bondage,” insomuch that all the children of the covenant of works are children of bondage; and the other is figuratively, the Covenant of Grace, and peculiar to “*the Jerusalem which is above, is free, and is **the mother** of us all;*” who, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. We cannot be participants of this liberty while we remain under the Law, “*For the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth.*”- Rom. vii.1. And, “*The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all’ but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of 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. And because ye **are sons** God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*”- Gal. iv. 1-7.

We envy not the heads or hearts of those who, through their ignorance of the true nature of **Gospel liberty**, suppose it to be a door to licentiousness, or an unrestrained license to commit sin. If to be changed in circumstance from a servant to a child; from a slave to a son, involves such absurdity, then the slanderous reports of those defamers of the primitive church, who affirmed that “*they said they would sin that grace might thereby abound,*” was not altogether without foundation. Of it, to secure the affections of the saints to Christ, or their conformity to the doctrine and precepts of our Savior; - the thunder, fire and tempest of Mount Sinai were necessary, a lease from the bondage and dominion of the Law might be justly charged with such consequences. He must be ignorant indeed of the true principles of Gospel liberty, who does not know that in releasing the people of God from the Law, which they never did nor could keep, they are brought under Law to Christ. Instead of perpetual bondage under Moses, the royal law of liberty is indelibly written in their hearts, with a provision as strong as the arm of God’s omnipotence, that they shall never violate the provisions of the New Covenant. The heart of stone is taken away, and a heart of flesh is given:- they shall not depart from God, nor will He turn away from them, or cease to do them good. This, in reality constitutes the ground of Gospel Liberty, *a new heart given*.- Not the hand writing of ordinances requiring servitude and gendering to bondage;- but the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, by which we are made free from the Law of sin and death, as an abiding

and governing principle, is established in their *hearts*. It is not issued from the Mountain in Arabia, that might be touched only on penalty of death and damnation; but is that Law that goeth forth from Zion, bearing the seal and signet of Jesus our spiritual King. This royal law, is a law of liberty, because it enjoins on the people of God no servitude or drudgery. “*It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure;*” and hence, as the poet has said:

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“Grace, like an uncorrupted seed
Abides and reigns within
Immortal principles forbid
The sons of God to sin.”

This New Covenant relation to Christ, into which the sons of God are brought, when they receive the spirit of wisdom, invariably banishes from them the love of sin; with their mind, they serve the Law of God their Savior; even while with their flesh they continue to serve the law of sin. Their dual natures are in constant conflict: “*Whatsoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*” 1 John iii.9. “*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the Law; for sin is the transgression of the Law.*”- 1 John iii.4.

The subjects of Gospel Liberty enjoy in Christ a full, free and eternal release from the demands, penalties, curses and threats of the Law, and are commanded to touch not, taste not, and handle not. – Col. ii. 21. Thus, being fully delivered from the Law, and all **connexion** between them and it forever dissolved; “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; for the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*”- Rom. viii. 1,2.

By the law of the spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, we understand, the immutable principle of holiness, that governs the affections, desires and faith of all who are born of God. In Christ was life, and that life was and is the light of men. Of His fullness have all we received and grace for grace.- John 1. 4&16. This life, is emphatically, “*Christ in them, the hope of glory.*” Jesus says, “*I am the resurrection and the life.*” He and that life are inseparable and eternal. – John xi.25. This vital principle, unknown by the world, is the spirit of adoption; it brings us, under its all powerful and irresistible government, into the enjoyment of our union and identity with Christ; as He, in His death, dissolved forever His connexion with the Law, that He took on Him when He was made of a woman, having fulfilled its requisitions and forever cancelled all its demands; nailed its rites, ordinances, ceremonies and penalties with Him to the cross; in His triumphant resurrection, He is justified in the Spirit, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the

world and received up into glory. In His exaltation to the right hand of the divine Majesty, in which He is made higher than the Law under which He suffered, yea, higher than the heavens, is glorified with God's own self, with the same glory which He had antecedently with the Father before the world begun, or before His incarnation; He has received that kingdom that was appointed unto Him, and which agreeably to the good pleasure of the Father, He has given to His *little flock*; has taken His majestic seat upon His holy hill of Zion; rolled the old heavens together like a scroll, caused the elements thereof to be dissolved with fervent heat; and now presides, the supreme Head over all things to His church; which is His body, and the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. He sits, the unrivalled King and Priest upon His throne, unrivalled in His majesty and dominion; and He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man.- Heb. viii.1. In our eternal union, we stand accepted in the Beloved from before the foundation of the world, redeemed from under the law, washed from all our pollutions in His blood, freely justified by His grace, forever perfected through His one offering, and finally brought unto the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Now the exhortation speaketh unto us as unto children: *"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him,"* &c. And again: *"Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage."* The yoke of bondage which we are admonished to avoid, is that spoken of in Acts xv.10, *"which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear;"* and the very attempt to impose it upon the freeborn sons of God, is denounced as "tempting God;" for whom the Son makes free, shall be free indeed- John viii.36. *"Happy art thou, O Israel! Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency? And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."*- Deut. xxxiii.29.

Persecution and cruel mockings from the family of Hagar, and especially from her illegitimate progeny we have reason to expect: for the Apostle says: *"but as then, [in Abraham's house] he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the Scriptures? Cast out the bond woman and her son; for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman."* – Ga. Iv. 29,30. But we can well afford to bear all the insults and mockings of the enemy, seeing we have the assurance that the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath us are His everlasting arms. He rideth upon the heavens in our help, and in His excellency on the sky-

"A hope so much divine,
May trials well endure."

But does it not become us, brethren, in this exalted relation in which we stand to our exalted Prince and Savior, to *watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation*, - to regard the utmost care the admonition: "*But, brethren, use not that liberty for an occasion of the flesh.*" If we find not **in us** a governing principle of grace, **forbidding us to sin**, inspiring a constant desire to be in all things conformed to Christ, then are we destitute of that spirit that was in Christ: and "*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.*" Awful thought! If by the terrors of the Law, the fear of hell, dread of perdition, or by any other restraints, such as human pledges, vows, &c., we are restrained from out-breaking transgressions – such constrained righteousness, however extensive it may be, leaves us without hope and without God – aliens to this grace, and with the sons of bondage to be cast out and cut off forever.

Here the doubting saints may try themselves by an unerring standard: one that cannot deceive us; if we are the sons of God, our **desire** will be above all things, to **walk worthy of that high vocation wherewith He has called us.**

That the epithets, *antinomian, libertine, deist, &c.*, will be heaped on those who hold to the precious doctrine of grace briefly touched on in this letter, is fully anticipated, for we have divine assurance, "*that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution;*" but the best refutation of the slander of our enemies, and the most noble rebuke we can give them, is an unblemished life and deportment before them: that they may be ashamed; have nothing (founded in truth) whereof to accuse us, and while we thus keep our garments unspotted from the flesh; let us give place, unto them, (who privily insinuate themselves among us, to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus) by subjection, no, not for an hour.

And let us also, dear Brethren, avoid being entangled again with the yoke of bondage; by marking and avoiding such as Balaam-like, would lay a stumbling block in the way of the saints. And finally, Brethren, we exhort you, Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God, in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; holding fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly and preserve your whole soul, spirit and body blameless. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. AMEN.

Gabriel Conklin, *Moderator.*

G. Beebe, *Clerk.*

CORRESPONDING LETTER

The Warwick Baptist Association, convened at Wilkill, Orange Co., N.Y., June 9 & 10, 1841, To the associations with whom they correspond, send Christian salutation,-

*Dearly Beloved in the Faith:- “Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ:- With delight and gladness in the Lord Jesus Christ we embrace another opportunity which is afforded us of continuing our intercourse with you. May the God of Zion make it a profitable season to our souls, through the blessing of divine grace, and we experience, *How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; in the doctrine and faith of Christ, and in its heavenly practice. Having therefore, obtained help of God, we continue unto this day; earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* And we hope we can say from the heart, the love of Christ constraineth us, thus to act and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them; for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and Truth. Brethren, the Truth is precious; more precious than gold, yea, than the most fine gold. May we rejoice that our defence is the Rock of Ages, and underneath are the everlasting arms. O Zion, be joyful, the eternal God is thy refuge; there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. We also rejoice that the church of Christ shall stand fast amidst all the “lo-heres and lo-theres;” and Zion is a tabernacle that shall not be taken down – not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. For the Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King, He will save us. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. May we feel more of the bond of love to each other, and our hearts bound together as one family and disciples of the Lamb of God. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.*

We earnestly solicit a continuation of your correspondence and an interest in your prayers.

We remain yours in the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

Gabriel Conklin, *Moderator.*

Gilbert Beebe, *Clerk.*