

THE
CIRCULAR LETTER.
ELDERS AND MESSENGERS
OF THE
SEVERAL
BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Aulcester, Bengworth, Birmingham, Bridgenorth, Brittlelane, Bromsgrove, Cirencester; Dudley, Leominster, Pershore, Tewkesbury, Upton, and Warwick*, (having received Letters from *Middleton, Hooknorton, Bewdley, and Worcester*) Met in ASSOCIATION at *Birmingham, May 20, 21, 1777*, holding the doctrines of *Three equal persons in the union of the glorious Godhead; eternal and personal election; original sin; particular redemption; free justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed; efficacious grace in regeneration; and the final perseverance of the saints;*

To the several Churches they represent, send Christian Salutation: wishing Grace, Mercy, and Peace, from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Brethren,

THROUGH the special kindness of God, we have had a most agreeable Association. Never were we more happy on these occasions. The Lord of host was with us of a truth, *Jehovah Shammah* was indeed our motto. The addresses to the throne of God, and the several discourses we heard, were warm and animated. In a word, we may truly say. It was good for us to draw nigh to God. Jesus brought us into the banqueting house, and his banner over us was love. The blessed seasons we enjoyed, in some measure compensated for the small additions of the past year: And let us all pray, with redoubled fervor, that a future year may furnish accounts more agreeable in this respect.

We now beg leave, as usual, to give you a word of exhortation in meekness and love.

We set not up as Lords over God's heritage, or dictate in our own right, like authors of heresy and fathers of tradition; but as *stewards* and *shepherds*, *pastors* and *messengers*, we beseech and intreat you:—And we beg to preface our advice and counsel with our prayers to God that the fame may be made useful to your souls: At the same time we beseech you to let your supplication unite and ascend with ours, that this may indeed be the case. O may your hearts cleave to the Lord, his word, and each other, as the heart of *Ruth* to *Naomi*, or the soul of *Jonathan* to the soul of *David*, and that in a sense and to a degree much more sub- lime and strong. :

God knows, and we hope you know, that the present peace and future felicity of your souls are the grand objects before us in all our labours among you. It is neither wealth nor popularity, nor is it merely *civility* or *morality* that induce us to labor in your Vineyards: No, Brethren, we seek not *yours* but You! We wish not to be enriched by your *temporals*, but that you may be enriched by our *spirituals*. Permit us to tell you what would give us infinitely more satisfaction than all the applause and wealth in the world:— and that is, to see you tender-hearted; kindly affectioned one towards another; living in love and peace; growing in grace; contending earnestly for the faith; savory and zealous in your frame and spirit; regular and steady in your attendance in the house of God, and all the means of grace; to keep up family religion; to be watchful over your own conduct and one anothers; in a word, that you may indeed be the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation.

You believe the Doctrine, and have been Baptized into the name of the holy TRINITY; think then, whether you can call God, *Father*, and Jesus, *Lord*, by the holy Ghost. Can you say you walk as the dear children of God? That you follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth? that you are led by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit? doth he seal you sanctify you, dwell and walk in you, strengthen and comfort you? Happy then are ye, for the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you.

You believe the Doctrine of *Election*; well, and what evidence have you from God, or what proof do you give to men, that you were elected? Take notice Sirs! the bare, simple

belief of a doctrine, though a great and glorious one, will do you no kind of service. The question is whether you have received this truth in the love of it? whether you consider that the elect were chosen to *sanctification*, to the *sprinkling* of the blood of Jesus; to the *belief of the truths* and to true filial Obedience? Moreover, Do you give diligence to make your calling and election sure? Do you consider, that though calling doth not *precede* election, yet it *proves it*: and without Conversion, it is in vain to talk of election, Then dear Sirs, what do you know of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus experimentally? of sanctification, of believing the truth, and of true, evangelical obedience; for if God made choice of you before the foundation of the world, it certainly was that ye should be *holy* and *without blame* before him in love? God help you to think on these things! Again, you believe the doctrine of *Original Sin*. Indeed, you have reason to believe it. That all are corrupted and condemned, is very certain, is awfully true! but then do you believe this doctrine because others believe it! Rather do you not believe it because you *read* it in the Bible *and feel* it in your own hearts? that scripture, observation and experience; (those faithful vouchers for God and truth) convince you, that man by nature is fallen, lost and undone? Remember then the rock from whence ye were hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence ye were digged. Look back to the origin of your descent; —look *within* also, and see what a scene of defilement and pollution hath over spread every power of the Soul. Bear it ever in mind, that you were cut out of the olive, which is wild by nature, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive tree; and let all this teach you the lessons of self-abasement, humility, and

godly fear.

This doctrine beloved, rightly understood will teach a poor sinner to value a Saviour, — *God be merciful to me a sinner.*—*Men and brethren what shall we do?*—*Sirs, what must I do to be saved, &c.* will be the language of all who experimentally know and feel the doctrine of original sin and corruption. God help you to walk daily with a just sense of this humiliating truth on all your hearts!

You profess also, with us, to believe the doctrine of *Redemption*, and call it *particular* Redemption; —but the question is, are you redeemed, in particular? Redemption by the blood of Christ, is followed and proved by redemption through the power of Christ. If therefore you are delivered from the slavery and dominion of sin, you are also delivered from the Curse due to sin. Moreover, the character of the Redeemed is, *they come to Zion with songs, &c.* Now are you on your way to Zion? are you “marching through Emmanuel’s ground, to fairer worlds on high?” and are you marching singing? It is also said *that Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* Now then, are you purified, peculiar people? and are you zealous of good works? This Sirs, and nothing short of it, will prove your interest in the Redemption of Christ: will demonstrate, that the Lamb of God, hath taken away your sins, and saved your souls.

Yet again. *Regeneration* by efficacious grace, is another sentiment in your sacred Creed. Happy is it for those who truly and ready experience, what is contained in this article of your

faith. Our Lord Jesus hath adored us, that, *Except we are converted and born again, we cannot see the kingdom of God*, Matt, xviii, 3. John iii, 3. Am I therefore Converted and born again? is a question every one of us should put to his own soul: —Not whether I believe the *doctrine*, but whether I enjoy the *blessing* of Conversion? If so, we love God; and love all that are born of God (of every Name) and all that is like God, and tends to his honor and glory.

This glorious change, We are assured *is not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of man, but of God*. Hence Paul says, *He that hath begun a good work in you; and it is God that worketh in you*, See. Here note. —it is a *work*, (and a glorious one) it is a good work: Good as it respects its Author, *nature, and effects*. Moreover, it is of God. It doth not come to pass by accident, moral suasion, or a good disposition. It is indeed, the very work of almighty power and grace. Then again. It is *in you*; remember that! What will it avail us to have Religion in our kingdom, our Country or Parish; to have it in our very families, heads and mouths, if it is not in our hearts? alas! nothing at all. We should therefore remember, what mighty stress the holy Ghost lays on the idea of religion *in us*. And we pray dear Brethren, and beg of you to pray, that the efficacious grace of God may operate effectually to the total extirpation of sin, and the transformation of your souls into the image and likeness of Christ.

Again, *Justification* by the *imputed righteousness* of Christ, is another gospel doctrine you profess to believe: —A doctrine full of sweet and unspeakable comfort to them who know the Lord. Everyone who hath seen his lost estate by sin and his condemnation by the law; must also see his need of

this righteousness. The law can only convict and condemn; by the deeds of it can no flesh be justified. 'Til therefore the peculiar province of the gospel, to reveal a righteousness that makes the sinners just. This has been a subject of ministerial discussion, and a favourite doctrine of the Church of God in all ages. Hence David says, I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine ONLY. And the prophet speaking of Christ, has these remarkable words, *This is his name whereby he shall be called, The LORD our RIGHTEOUSNESS*, Jer. 23, 6.

Now then Brethren, is Christ the Lord your righteousness? Are you adorned in this garment of salvation, and covered with this robe of righteousness? Can you claim it as your own? Do you consider it, and confide in it as the matter of your justification before God? Do your tempers and general deportment answer to the nature and end of this most gracious mode of acceptance; through a righteousness imputed? If so proceed, go forward, and God be with you! To you there is no *condemnation, charge, or separation*; for it is written, *In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory. And, whom God justified, them he also glorified.* Of this blessed number and Character, may you ever appear; and your light and life so shine before men, that, in this view, you may be justified by *works*, and your *faith* thereby made perfect.—Another doctrine you hold, is *The final perseverance of the saints*,—A blessed truth indeed!—Some there are who represent a title to grace and heaven, in as dubious and uncertain a state, as a disputed title to a worldly inheritance; but ye have not so learned Christ: Convinced you are that out of his hands none can pluck you: That your Security depends on the absolute, unchangeable love, counsel and covenant of

God; on his veracity, faithfulness, promise and oath; on the sufficiency of the Redeemer's sacrifice, and the nature of the work of the Holy Ghost on your hearts. Of the truth of this sublime sentiment, this soul relieving doctrine, you, perhaps, never doubt; though many of you may often doubt, whether you are interested in the privilege of it: —And Sirs, it behoves you to see to it, that you do not rest contented with the idea of a doctrine in your heads, without knowing the grace and power of it in your hearts. What advantage could a man enjoy, from viewing the plan and elevation of a palace, with a most spacious and noble estate annexed to it, without a title to it, and a possession of it? Just the same that you may enjoy in a mere speculative belief of this or any other doctrine, i e. none at all. —The question then is not, whether you believe the *doctrine of perseverance*, but whether you enjoy the *blessing of it*; and whether you in fact do *persevere*? What say your *consciences* to this, Brethren? What say your *lives*? What say your *neighbours*? —Some of the enemies of these Doctrines may perhaps say, by way of irony and invective; (for *ill-will never speaks well*, is an old proverb) that you are “dry nationalists, and hold dry doctrines, &c.” but let your *lives* confute their *lips*; and if you cannot silence them, they will only fight as those that *beat the air*. An holy conversation is the best exposition of the doctrines of grace; and the best proof that, this grace dwells in us, which is revealed in them. If others call them *dry* doctrines, pity them, and pray that you may not give, nor they take, occasion to use freedoms with these most sacred and certain truths. Freedoms, not by any means becoming the mouths of Christians. Gospel doctrines are the believers food, or rather his *feast*. The rich sources of his consolation, and the grand strengtheners of his faith, as he passeth on his way to glory.

A few words more, and we will release your attention. — O that we could but pour out our very souls in wholesome, godly advice! most readily would we do it. We beseech you brethren, to walk worthy of God and of your holy vocation.

Neglect no time or means for spiritual improvement Attend the Lord's Day and worship with unremitting assiduity: Endeavour to fill up every relation in life with diligence and delight: Let neither friend or foe have it in his power to say, you do not act honorably: —when in the company of the unconverted, take care you be not like them. What will they think of your religious profession, if they see you sin as they do? they will think it a mere *farce*; and thus, you *wound* your own Consciences, and, in a sense, *heal* theirs. We lament, with you the distracted state of the British Empire; and hope we shall all unite our most fervent prayers that, the unhappy Contest with America may soon be ended. At the same time, we bless God for our Civil and Religious Liberties. “What Nation, in all the Earth, is like unto thy people in Britain, O Lord! May not our iniquities cause thee to strip us of our mercies, and leave us defenseless, naked and bare! *Save* thy people, O Lord, and bless thine inheritance. Turn our swords into plough shares, and our spears into pruning hooks. Thou that stillest the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the people; be pleased to still the Contest with our Colonies, and bid us live in love and peace; and O thou God of love and peace, be with us.” Finally, Brethren, for this year, farewell; God Almighty bless you and your families; keep you steady and make you happy. Convince all around you that Religion is a *reality*; and that you are Dissenters and Baptists from principle. For peace, purity, public spirit, benevolence,

humility, and charity, may none excel you. For steadiness, zeal, and unity of design, may you appear as an *army with Banners*, or as *a company of horses in Pharaoh's Chariots*. — We shall close with pressing home, a few particular duties, of infinite consequence in your profession; and we place them at the latter end of our Letter that you may remember them the better. Let your attendance at the Ordinance of the LORD'S SUPPER, be constant and regular; and never be absent, but through real necessity. Meet your Brethren and your Lord at his TABLE; and thus remember, and shew forth his death till he come. As you have names and places in the house of God, fill them. Don't trifle with God and sacred things! —Again, Carefully attend all Opportunities of hearing the gospel, and all private meetings for prayer and Conference, when business may be left with propriety. Join your endeavours, with your Ministers, in the very important business of Catechizing your Children: and remember, how much their future welfare and Character depend upon it. Finally, brethren, the time is short; husband it well: lose none of its precious moments. Lay them all out for God. Don't much mind the world; 'tis but a bubble at best. All is Vanity! —Once more God bless you, and cause his face to shine upon you, and give you peace: make you holy on earth, and happy in heaven! —with these advices and these wishes we remain, your affectionate Brethren in Christ.

Signed, in behalf of the Messengers, by the Moderator,

LAWRENCE BUTTERWORTH.

R. BURNHAM CHOSEN TO SALVATION.

Rom. 11. 5; 2 Thess. 2. 13

- 1 All the elected train Were chosen in their Head, To all eternal good, Before the worlds were made; Chosen to know the Prince of Peace, And taste the riches of his grace.
- 2 Chosen to faith and hope, To purity and love, To all the life of God, To all the things above; Chosen to prove salvation sure; Chosen to reign for evermore.
- 3 Nothing but grace appears In this eternal choice; It charms the humble saint, And makes the soul rejoice; Its endless glories shine so bright, It makes obedience all delight.
- 4 Now, Lord, to us reveal The all-confirming grace; And may we all pursue The shining paths of peace; Run in the way to joys above, And ever sing electing love..

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