

Circular Letter of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association

1862

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Ministers and Delegates of the Sandy Creek Association convened at Brush Creek, October 3–5, 1862, to the Churches which they represent, send Christian Salutation.

DEAR BRETHREN—We wish to call your attention to a resolution adopted by your Association, four years ago in these words: “*Resolved*, That this Association recommend to each of its churches, to come together for worship on each Lord’s day, whether they have preaching or not, and when they have no Minister present, spend an hour in singing and prayer, and exhortation.”

We have determined to make this resolution the subject of the present communication, from the importance of the subject, and because we fear the churches of our Association have not *generally* acted upon it. We wish, therefore, to urge upon the churches, the duty and importance, of assembling at their respective houses of worship on every Sabbath day, for Divine worship and religious instruction.

We suppose it will not be denied by any member of our churches that it is the duty of its members to meet for public worship to regular, stated times. To worship God in private, in our families is right. But we must meet with our brethren in public congregation o the Lord. This, we say, we suppose none of our brethren deny, and therefore will not enter upon its discussion.

But how often and on what day shall we meet for social worship? We answer, that we believe that it is a law given by the great Head of the church that his followers should meet for this purpose, on the first day of every week, or on the christian Sabbath.

The first argument in favor of this position is drawn from the very nature of the institution and design of the christian Sabbath. It is evident to every Bible reader that the Jewish Sabbath was a day of rest—a holy convocation. Levit. 23:3.

The people came together on that day for public worship and religious instruction. Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. Acts 13:21. The people shall worship before the Lord on the Sabbaths. Ezek. 46:3.

Now whether Christ and his disciples meant to retain the duties of the Jewish Sabbath, shifting only the day from the seventh, to the first day of the week, as some suppose, or whether the Jewish Sabbath, with its duties and obligations, passed away under the Gospel dispensation as a part and parcel of the ceremonial law, as is believed by others; still we must come to the conclusion that the assembling of ourselves together on the first day of the week for social worship and instruction, is a law of Christianity given by our Saviour and practiced upon by himself and disciples. From this practice of our Lord, and of the primitive Christians, we argue that the design of the Christian Sabbath was that lard down in this communication. When the Sabbath day was come Jesus began to teach in the synagogue. Luke 4:16. He came to Capernaum and taught them on the Sabbath day. Luke 4:31. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. Luke 13:10. The practice of the disciples and early Christians follows that of the Saviour. The disciples went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and after reading of the law and the prophets, Paul stood up and said. Acts 13:14, 16. The Prophets are read every Sabbath day. Acts 13:27, and verse 29; the Gentiles besought that the words might be preached unto them the next Sabbath, and, verse 44, the next Sabbath came almost the

whole city together to hear the word of God. Paul as his *manner* was went in unto them and three Sabbaths reasoned unto them out of the Scriptures. Acts 17:2, 3. Paul reasoned in the synagogues *every Sabbath*. Acts 18:4. Upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread. Acts 27:7. There are various other Scriptures the teaching of which is to the same effect.

But it may be objected that these are not express precepts. But it is answered; Baptist churches generally admit as authoritative the practice of our Saviour in other matters. We look not only to His teachings, as laid down in His word, but also to His life and acts. The simple fact that His baptism was by immersion, determines the practice of our brethren in this respect. It would do it, and properly too, even if the meaning of the word used to designate the rite were less clear than it is. They would say, as they say now, His example is sufficient for us. Why shall not His example be sufficient, in the case before us. The command is “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” But we inquire how shall we keep it holy? The example of our Lord and Master is sufficient for us.

But if we admit that Christianity requires its votaries to meet for the public worship of God at His house, and at the same time admit that the very design of the Christian Sabbath was to set apart a day for the discharge of this obligation, how can we discharge our duty as Christians, and as church members, by observing on Sabbath or two in the month in the manner required by the law of its institution, and the other two or three in a different manner? What right have we to employ a part of the Lord’s time according to his law, and the remainder according to the law of our carnal desires?

It is not clear, then, that the practice in vogue among the many of the churches of our Association, of meeting at the house of worship only once a month, is in direct conflict, with the teachings of the sacred Scriptures? And this, of itself, ought to be sufficient, to convince us, that such a practice will not be successful, if not positively hurtful in its tendency.

How is it with *this* practice?

Under it no one from the head to the smallest member of the family seems to have a home or any employment on the Sabbath, and Satan is very sure to find employment for idle hands. Children and servants are neglected. The chances are these youthful offenders will engage in hunting, fishing, gaming, or perhaps fighting, while their parents are but little better employed visiting or walking over their farms.

The Sabbath fro the monthly meeting comes on. The neighborhood gathers together at the place appointed. Many members from other churches are present, who meetings occur on some other Sabbath. These visiting brethren, are of course invited to dine in the neighborhood. Company has been expected, and preparation accordingly made. Thus that which was intended as a feast for the soul is turned into a feast for the body. The conversation indulged on such occasions if not highly censurable is generally far from indicated a deep toned piety. The families of these visiting brethren desecrate the Sabbath because father and mother are absent from home and all restraints are thrown off.

As the young grow up they are accustomed to regard the Sabbath as a day of mirth and frivolity—a hollyday of mere pass-time and pleasure. The same thing is repeated the next Sabbath in an adjoining neighborhood until the monthly circuit is completed.

But ought every church to meet on the first day of the week in the absence of a minister? We believe most positively they ought. Our Saviour bestowed upon his church such graces and gifts as are necessary for its prosperity and usefulness. In the 4th chapter of Ephesians Paul enumerates some of these gifts. "And He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors, and some teachers. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Here as in other passages the doctrine is clearly taught that the church of Christ is an active working body. That every member has his gift and his part to perform.

That these duties and gifts are various, and unto every one is given grace according to the measure of his gift. But the system practiced by our churches ignores all these gifts except that of the ministry and even the acknowledgement is growing into a cold formality. We pray God to deliver us from the day when religion shall become a system of stale rules and cold formalities without the life and power of godliness. Would to God we could dispel that delusion which hangs like a pall over the minds of many professing Christians, that after their conversion they are to sit down in inaction until it shall please God to carry them to Heaven while the very object of their conversion is that they may be prepared for the performance of a great work. Let us, dear brethren, arouse ourselves to the performance of this great work, "redeeming the time because the days are evil." On every blessed Sabbath day, which God shall give you, go to His house with your families. Teach the statutes of the Lord—the truth of our holy christianity to your children and neighbor's children. Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Gospel. Let your prayers like incense ascend to Jehovah for his mercies. From every house of worship throughout the bounds of our Association let the sons of Zion rise to the praise of the triune God. You will find, if you will but persevere, the gifts which God has given you increasing in interest. The Sabbath School will flourish, and the cause of Christ will prosper in your midst. All through life your children will think of the Sabbath in connection with the services of the Sanctuary, and be constrained to "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy." "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits Anew."