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The Elders and Messengers of the Several Baptist Churches...
at Philadelphia October 12th and 13th, 1779.
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T H E
E L D E R S a n d M E S S E N G E R S
O F T H E S E V E R A L
B A P T I S T C H U R C H E S,

M E E T I N G A T

Pennepeck,
Middletown,
Piscataqua,
Cohansey,
Hopewell,
Montgomery,
Kingwood,

Southampton,
Philadelphia,
Scots-Plains,
Morristown,
New-Britain,
Pitsgrove,

New-Town,
Dividing-Creek,
New-Mills,
Upper-Freehold,
Lyon's Farms,
Oblong,

Being met in Association at Philadelphia October 12th and 13th, 1779.

To the said C H U R C H E S send G R E E T I N G.

Dearly beloved Brethren, *by Samuel Smith*

S E V E N T Y - T W O years have now elapsed since the first Association that was held in this place. During which period, but more especially of late, we have been led to note many remarkable displays of **D I V I N E P R O V I D E N C E**, which, by appointment, is to be the subject of our present Address. Confession of Faith, Chap. 5.

When we admit the Divine Authority of the Holy Scripture, and by the light thereof, together with that of Nature, we discover the being and perfections of God, we are next led to consider his purposes and decrees and the execution of these in the Works of Creation and Providence. These are all material Objects of Faith, and main pillars, as well as essential parts of true Religion.

That the all wise and omnipotent Jehovah is the Creator and disposer of all things is a matter of general consent, discoverable by the light of nature; inso-much that Creation and Providence may be said to be the two testaments out of which natural religion is deduced; but still much more manifest by the sure testimony of the scripture of Truth. See Ps. 104. Act. 17, 25, 28, &c.

Creation

Creation is the effect of Almighty Power and wisdom, whereby the Eternal God created all things, visible and invisible, even the whole Universe, out of nothing. Col. 1, 16. But chiefly Man, the glory of this lower creation, being made after his own Image, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Gen. 1, 27.

By Divine Providence is meant, the superintendence of the Deity over all his works and all possible events. Whereby,

1. He upholds and sustains all things, animate and inanimate. Heb. 1, 3. Act. 17, 28.

2. Provides for all living. Act 17, 25. Ps. 104, 21. 136, 25.

3. And governs the whole universe. Ps. 103, 19. Providence is,

1. General, Act 17, 25, or particular, Mat. 10, 29.

2. Mediate, by second causes, I Kings, 13, 24, 22, 22, and the fixed laws of nature. Or immediate, by his will and appointment.

3. Ordinary, in the common course of things, or extraordinary. I Kings, 17,

4. Dan. 6, 22. 3, 27.

In this view we are led to conceive of the Divine Being as the head of a vast family, extending his care and beneficence to every individual of it; or as a great monarch, who has his eye not only on those near his throne, but extends the benefits of his benign influence to the remotest parts of his vast dominions. For as we would not expect the greatest to be above, so neither are the least below, his notice; inasmuch that a sparrow does not fall to the ground without him, and the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. Mat. 10, 29, 30.

O how august and stupendous this work of God! It is a most rich display of all the divine perfections; especially of wisdom, goodness and power; and it excites and improves all the powers, best faculties and affections of the soul, as well as every grace and virtue; as love, reverence, admiration, gratitude, and the like. For who can contemplate such manifestation of power as we see in the ways of Providence; and not feel a reverential awe of him, who controuls and sustains all creation? Who can view that infinite wisdom manifest in the whole, and not be filled with wonder and astonishment? Or who can trace the footsteps of goodness and mercy visible every where, but especially in the recovery of Man, which is a particular dispensation of Providence, and not feel the springs of love, gratitude and praise excited in him? Surely one would think it must be impossible, but we shall grow wiser and better while we read in the Book of Providence, that lies continually open before us. Yet after all we must remember that in our present state we can comprehend but a very small part of this vast whole, as it is mentioned in the Book of Job. Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him. Job 26. 14.

But

But as all the ways of God ^{are} ~~one~~ mysterious to us in this imperfect state, while we are so prone to judge of the whole from seeing a part; so there is one objection ~~lies~~ against the doctrine we are speaking of. Not such as has been made by those, who are fond of cavaling, but which has been a difficulty to the Godly. To the Psalmist; Ps. 73, 2, 5. To Jeremiah; Jer. 12, 1. ~~to~~ H b. 1, 13; and to Job 10, 3, and many others since: Namely, that it is not just and equal, the wicked being often prosperous and the righteous afflicted. To which it might be sufficient to say with the Apostle, Who art thou that repliest against God? Rom. 9, 20. But we would further observe,

1st, Inequality is necessary in all governments, and the beauty of them, as there must be different members in a body.

2d, Wicked men may have some virtues, which cannot be rewarded but in this life.

3d, All do not prosper.

4th, The prosperous wicked are not so happy as they are thought to be. Prov. 14. 13, 14.

5th, Their prosperity will have an end. While, on the other hand,

6th, The righteous have imperfections.

7th, And afflictions are necessary to perfect them in grace and holiness.

8th, Lastly, their reward will be hereafter, when the equality will be made. Ps. 73, 17.

In regard of the question, how Providence can be versant about evil actions without destroying the liberty of the will, but that man may still remain a free agent; we have but room to suggest; that what is natural in the act is of God, what is sinful of man, like the ascending of vapours and exhalations from all bodies owing to the sun, but that stench should arise from any, is owing to their being corrupted in themselves. So also, speaking is from God; but speaking wickedly from man.

As for the concerns of Providence with good actions, there is but little danger of our erring by ascribing too much to it.

Finally, brethren, the well ordering, sustaining and over-ruling all things and all possible events, in the whole universe, and through all ages, is the object of Providence, under the direction of him, whose kingdom ruleth over all. Ps. 103, 19.

Two or three things we would now point out by way of improvement, and so conclude:

1st, We ought to learn and accustom ourselves to see and acknowledge our God, and set him before us, in all these his ways, wherein his wisdom, power, mercy, and goodness shine.

1st, That

1st, That such a display of divine perfections may not pass unheeded.
2d, That so much goodness may not be lost on us, and rise up in judgment against us.

3d, That we may not miss of means so powerful to promote virtue and vici-
piety.

4th, Wherein if we fail we must be stupid and ungrateful to a degree not only unworthy of the Christian, and the means we enjoy, but also of the powers we are endowed with. Dan. 5, 23.

2d. When chastised we ought to hear the rod and him that has appointed it. Mich. 6, 9. And this is and has been our case for some years past, which we have not room now to enlarge upon.

3d, Lastly, when the profusion of a kind Providence is showered on our heads it becomes us to be taught humility, dependance, love and gratitude. Rom. 2, 4. And this has always been our case, tho' more remarkably of late; when the Lord remembered mercy in the midst of deserved judgment. For if you consider the steps whereby divine Providence interposed in our favour during the present contest with Great-Britain, you must see and know that the most high God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. Dan. 5, 21.

Thus, dear brethren, we have just entered on the subject, and as it were traced some of its out lines, than which our limits would allow us little more. We shall now conclude in the words of the Apostle to the Romans, chap. 11, ver 33, 36. O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen.

BENJAMIN MILLER, Moderator,
SAMUEL JONES, Clerk.

ON FASTING AND PRAYER.

by Abel Morgan

IN compliance with the request of a former association, here follows some brief remarks concerning fasting: That it is the duty of christians, on certain occasions, to fast or to abstain from their usual refreshment, at the stated times, cannot with any just reason be once called into question; forasmuch as Christ himself takes it for granted, "when thou fastest," and proceeds to give necessary directions how to act therein: Mat. 6. 16. Of the various kinds or diversities of fasts, our concern at present is only about a religious fast, which is either private or public; private, when one alone sets himself by fasting and prayer to seek the Lord, as David did, who fasted, lying all night upon the earth, 2 Sam. 12. 16. Daniel, who sought by prayer and fasting, chap. 9. 3. Anna, a prophetess, who served God with fastings and prayers, Luke 2. 37. Public fasting, appointed either by the civil power, as Jehosaphat proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah, 2 Chron. 20. 3. Also Esra, chap. 7. 14.—8, 21. The King of Ninevah, Jonah, 3. 5. or by mutual agreement of the members of churches; for instance, in that famous christian church at Antioch, when Barnabas and Saul, by the command of the Holy Ghost were separated to the work appointed them, Act. 13. 2, 3.

The concomitants, or what should accompany religious fastings, are, 1, unfeigned confession of our sins, Dan. 9. 4, with a sense of the evil of them, and turning from them to God; otherwise it appears so much like hypocrisy and lying to God with our tongues. Also, 2 with prayer, Joel, 1. 4. Emphatically expressed by "crying unto the Lord." 3, Unadorned humiliation, intimated by outward tokens, as being clothed with sackcloth and laying in ashes, Dan. 9, 3, Jonah 3, 8. 4, To avoid all acts of oppression, and to shew kindness to the needy: The fast which the Lord has chosen, i. e. which he approves of, is to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke, to deal your bread to the hungry, to relieve the poor, to cover the naked, &c. Isa. 58. 6, 7. Alas! how far are our fasts from being accompanied with those things which the Lord requires!

The occasions of fasting and prayer are such as, 1, To deprecate lawful judgments, felt or feared; as sword, famine, pestilence, or other sore afflictions. 2, To intreat for the revival of religion, the coming and spread of the Mediator's kingdom, success of the gospel, unity of christians, and the like desirable blessings. 3, Occasion on some weighty, important undertakings, as the constitution of churches, ordination of church-officers, Act. 14 23. Preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper, protection from imminent danger, Ezra, 8, 21.

The length of time to be observed in fasting is not determined; it must be regulated by agreement, prudence or public order, at least it ought to be so long till public worship is over.

When our continent is filled with tears and blood, ravages and desolation abound, perpetrated by English troops, and if possible, by the more wicked combinations of base traitors among ourselves, as now it is, when religion declines, and iniquity triumphs, it is a time which calls aloud for humiliation before God, Fasting and Prayer, with a steadfast endeavour for a reformation through our sinful afflicted land.

M I N U T E S
O F T H E
A S S O C I A T I O N.

OCTOBER 12th, 1779.

1. THE Association being met according to appointment, it was opened with a suitable discourse, from 2 Cor. 5, 20, by brother Benjamin Miller.
2. After service proceeded to make choice of a Moderator and Clerk: To the former appointed Benjamin Miller, and to the latter Samuel Jones.
3. After reading a few of the letters from the churches, adjourned to nine o'clock next morning.

OCTOBER 13th, 9 o'clock.

4. After prayer proceeded to read the remainder of the letters.
5. The circular letter read and approved of.
6. Mr. Samuel Jones reported that on settling with Mr. Wescott, it appeared there was a balance of one hundred and nine pounds nineteen shillings and one penny in said Wescott's hands, which he put in the continental fund.
7. Also, that he had received of the money of Mrs. Hew's donation, two hundred and twenty-eight pounds fifteen shillings and two-pence. Agreed the same be put in the continental fund.
8. The piece written by Mr. Morgan on fasting and prayer being read and much approved of, agreed the same be printed with our letter.
9. Concluded to continue the days of fasting and prayer as in the year past, viz. the second Thursday in November, February, May and August.
10. Brother James Benedict having lately suffered by the Indians; agreed to recommend his case to the churches and desire them to make collections for his relief, and convey the same as soon as may be to Mr. Cole's at Hopewell.
11. There being a call for the catechisms from divers places, agreed that the churches enquire among themselves and see how many they will take of them at

seven shillings and six-pence a piece and make a return of the same to the next Association.

12. Brother Thomas Fleeson to write to the Association of Virginia and be a messenger to them.
13. Brother John Backwell to write to the Warren Association, and Brother Elcanah Holms to be messenger.
14. Brother Abel Morgan to prepare the Association letter for next year.
15. The Association next year to be held at Philadelphia, on Tuesday after the third Sunday in October at three o'clock.
16. Brother Samuel Jones to preach the Association sermon, and in case of failure, Brother John Blackwell.

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