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Baptists. Vermont. Shaftsbury Association, 1791.

Minutes . . . in Stockbridge, M, DCC, XCI.

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M I N U T E S

• F T H E

Shaftsbury Association,

A T T H E I R

A N N U A L C O N V E N T I O N

H E L D I N

S T O C K B R I D G E,

M, D C C, X C I.

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BOOKS

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MINUTES, &c.

WEDNESDAY, June 1st, 1791.

1 **A**T two o'clock, P. M. elder Justus Hull preached the introductory sermon, from Timothy, ii. 5.

2 A moderator and clerk was chosen.

3 Letters were read from the several churches; and the following list taken of the number of members who have been added, dismissed, excluded, or died, the year past.

N. B. Ministers names in italics: those marked thus *, not present: from the churches marked thus †, we received no letters: dashes denote no settled ministers.

Churches.	Ministers & messengers.	Add.	Dis.	Exc.	Died.	No.
Pittsfield,	<i>Valentine Rathbun,</i> Daniel Rathbur.	9			2	31
Stillwater,	<i>Lemuel Powers,</i> <i>David Fish,</i> Ezekiel Sayles, Silvenus Sayles, Thaddeus Histed,	182	46	3	2	232
Shaftsbury,	† — — —					47
Shaftsbury,	— — —					32
Adams,	<i>Peter Worden,</i> Gideon Seaman, Stephen Carpenter, Oded — — —,	16	8	8	1	176
Newbethlehem,	— — — William David,				1	18
Sandisfield,	<i>Jeshua Mors,</i> Solomon Shephard, Jesse Mors,	24		2	5	64
Washington,	<i>John Nichols,</i> Amos Kingiby, Stephen Wadsworth	2		3		60

Battskill

Churches.	Ministers & messengers.	Add.	Dif.	Exc.	Died.	No.
Battskill,	<i>Nathan Tanner,</i> <i>Robert Kinyan,</i>	111				217
Littlehofick,	<i>Justus Hull,</i> <i>Robert Nies,</i> <i>Eber Muffeit,</i> <i>Henry Reynolds,</i>	7				97
Hallifax†,	— — — —					37
Hilldale,	<i>Stephen Gano,</i> <i>Samuel West,</i>	8	4	1		63
Pawlingstown,	<i>Samuel Waldo,</i> <i>John Waldo,</i>				2	68
Greatninepartners,	<i>Joseph Randel,</i>	6	1			50
Newbritain,	<i>Afa Palmer,</i> <i>Isaac Beeman,</i>	2				30
2nd church Lanesborough,	<i>Nathan Mason*,</i> <i>Hezekiah Mason,</i> <i>David Mason,</i> <i>Ase Whipple,</i> <i>Squire Munro,</i>	16	4	6	1	112
4th church Shaftsbury,	<i>Caleb Blood,</i> <i>Abiathar Waldo,</i>	2		3		127
Stockbridge,	<i>Samuel Whelply,</i> <i>Caleb Chapman,</i> <i>Sam'l Whelply, jun.</i>					16
Ashfield,	<i>Ebenezer Smith,</i>	2				24
Bullocksglant,	<i>Nathan Hastings,</i> <i>Afur Reed,</i>	2		2	1	56
Newgalloway,	<i>Abijah Peek,</i> <i>James Greenfield.</i>	3		3		36
Chesterfield,	<i>Ebenezer Vining,</i>	16				31
Saratoga,	<i>Samuel Rogers,</i> <i>Salmon Monger,</i>					47
Colrain,	<i>Edmund Littlefield,</i>					17
Northeastown,	<i>Yshua Daken,</i> <i>Jonathan Hays,</i> <i>Charles Pattenon,</i>					46
St. Coyk	<i>Jehiel Fox.</i>					
		408	63	31	15	1777

N. B. The four last named churches were cordially received into our fellowship the present year.

4 Received letters and minutes from the sister associations, by the hands of their messengers, who took a seat with us.

5 Received a letter, and minutes from an association newly formed by the names of the Danbury association, by the hand of their messengers, elders, Hammelton, and Hull, who on request were cordially received into our fellowship as a sister association.

6 Appointed elders, Hamelton, Gano, Warren, Mofeit, and mr Samnel Whelply, to write letters to the corresponding associations.

7 Adjourned to tomorrow morning eight o'clock, A. M.

THURSDAY, *June* and.

MET pursuant to adjournment.

8 Brother Blood delivered a discourse from 1 Cor. iv. 20.

9 The circular letter prepared by brother Willoughby, on the subject of the power of an association, being accidentally mislaid, did not come to hand: therefore appointed elders Worden, Gano, and Hull, to prepare a circular letter on that subject for the present year.

10 Letters to the sister associations were read and approved.

11 Appointed brethren, Stephen Gano, Adam Hamilton, and John Waldo, our messengers to the Philadelphian association. Brethren, Eber Mofeit, and Samuel Whelply, jun. to that of Warren. Elders Powers, Rogers, and Mofeit, to that of Stonington. Elders Warren, Littlefield, and Vining, to that of Woodstock. Elders Mors, and Blood, to that of Vermont. Elders Waldo, Dakens, and brother Whelply, to that of Danbury.

12 Query

12 Query from the church at Greatninepartners. 1st. Does any person merely by virtue of their being baptised, become a member of a particular visible church? Answered in the negative.

2nd Is any such person, in a proper circumstance, for church communion? Answered in the negative.

13 Query from the church in Ashfield. When any matter of difficulty, has been fairly discussed by a council from sister churches; has any neighboring church a legal right to demand a hearing of said difficulty; provided those justified by the result of council, do not request it, and the party judged to be in the wrong refuse to join in council? Answered in the negative.

14 The circular letter produced by the committee was read and approved.

15 Agreeable to a motion from the Warren association on the utility of a united address to our congress, earnestly praying, that they would take such measures, as the constitution may permit, that no edition of the Bible, or its translations, be published in America, without its being carefully inspected, and certified to be free from errors: voted that brother Blood, brother Hull, and brother Gano, be appointed a committee in behalf of this association, to prepare, and transmit a petition to congress on this subject.

16 Appointed brother Samuel Wisely, jun. to prepare a circular letter for the next year.

17 Appointed brother Blood to superintend printing our minutes.

18 Our next association to be held at elder Powers' meetinghouse in Stillwater on the first Wednesday in June next at two o'clock, P. M. Elder Blood to preach the introductory sermon; in case of failure elder Waldo.

CIRCULAR

CIRCULAR LETTER.

Dearlly Beloved,

IN our minutes of last year we expressed our intention, of explaining the third article of the plan of this association; which particularly relates to its power.

In order to throw light on this subject and discover the distinctions really existing between the power of churches and that of an association; it is necessary to attend primarily to the scripture account of the nature, business, power and government of a gospel church in two different branches.

We shall first attend particularly to our Saviour's account, in Matt. xviii. of the nature, business, power, and government of his church on earth: and in each particular, shall inquire for the apostles' understanding of the matter.

1 In verse third of this chapter our Saviour informs us that the subjects of his kingdom or the proper members of his church are such as are converted and become as little children. Hence we learn that the church of Christ, is made up of persons whose hearts are renewed by grace, and become united in the love of the truth. It is also the apostles idea of a gospel church, 1 Pet. ii. 5. Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house. Also Eph. 2. 22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation, of God through the spirit. Indeed all the writings of the apostles are addressed to the church in this character.

2 The work which Christ has assigned to his church, in this world; is truly important and solemn: for notwithstanding all, the opposition, and offences, she may receive from a sinful world, yet she is instrumentally (by the help of grace) to preserve the world, from entire darkness, corruption, and infidelity; by holding up and maintaining the cause of truth, and righteousness, in the earth, while the world in general lieth in wickedness. As ten righteous would have
 stayed

stayed the hand of God, from the overthrow of Sodom, so the kind Lord spares a guilty world, for his people's sake; hence saith our Saviour, Matt. v. 13. Ye are the salt of the earth. And vereses 14 and 16. Ye are the light of the world, and let your light so shine before men, &c. That is let the great doctrine of Christ in its various brances both in faith and practice be truly distinguished, exemplified, and held forth by you; that the world may have the glorious cause of truth set before them in the clearest light, both in doctrine and example.

2 The church is said to be the pillar and ground of the truth, 1 Tim. iii. 15. by which we learn, that the church is entrusted with the important charge to stand as a pillar to bear up and support the cause of truth in the earth, or on which the inscriptions of truth are written, for the light of the world: and thereby to shew forth the declarative glory of God, to whom she must be accountable for all her actions. Hence we infer, that as it is the church only that has received this charge, it is she only that has proper authority to execute it.

3 It must then be the prerogative of the church to say, who shall be received as members of the visible church of Christ on earth. This agrees with our Saviour's direction, verse 13. that such as give good evidence of their being renewed, and becoming like little children, should be received in his name. So the apostles received it, Rom. xv. 7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. And xiv. 1. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. From the whole it appears, that it is the church, who is directed to determine who are fit members to be received.

Again it is on the principles of gospel fellowship that the church of Christ is built up, and becomes one body, and one bread, knit together with joints and bands, Col. 2. 19. Which can be done in no other way, but by the churches gaining the evidence, that

that those they receive are renewed persons, and made to drink into the same spirit of faith and love; that upon judgment of charity, they may receive them as real members of Christ's mystical body. In this way only can we obtain the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, and be fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint may supply, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part that maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love: Eph. iv. 16. So that whoever pleads for the admission of church members, in any other way than by the fellowship and suffrage of the church as a body, plead for the building up of a church without even the means of charity and gospel union; without which we are nothing. 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

4. Again if it is the church's province to say who shall be admitted, it is hers also to say who shall be continued as visible members. It is one important important branch of the church's business in this world, to watch over her members for good, and to exclude such from her fellowship, as are transgressors of divine rule, either in faith or practice; provided always that they cannot be gained by those steps of labor, the gospel requires to be taken with them. In verses 8 and 9 of the chapter under consideration, we learn that, although a member may be as dear as a hand, a foot, or an eye; yet if they give just occasion of offence and cannot be gained, they must be cut off and rejected. In this light the apostle commanded the *churches*, 1 Cor. v. 5. When ye are come together to deliver such an one unto satan, &c. and vi. 2. Do ye not know that the *saints* shall judge the world, and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Again 2 Thess. iii. 6. Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. It is easy to see from our Saviour's discourse, in verse 10, it is the *church* that was to

take heed in her discipline, not to despise one of these little ones. It is she also, who is required to be careful to look up, and bring home those who have gone astray and if restored, to receive them with joy; verses 12, 13, 14. Furthermore the rule given to deal with those guilty of private offences, must issue in telling it to the church, as the proper board of trial; from which there is no appeal to any higher place of trial, on earth: for if he hear not the church he is to be considered as a heathen man and a publican; without any further trials. In verse 18 we have the authority of the church expressed in the fullest manner; Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. By this we are assured that whenever councils, associations, and synods, assume the seat of judging decisively in cases of discipline, they become mere usurpers, and intruders upon the government of the church. Our Saviour concludes the chapter under consideration by encouraging his people to look to him for wisdom and a sound judgment, and the sure promise that he will be in the midst: also by urging the necessity of a spirit of forgiveness at all times.

It is also the church's province, to try, prove, and judge of those who profess to be ministers of Christ; and receive or reject them according as they appear to be true or false. Hence the church is commanded to try the spirits, whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world, 1 John iv. 1. Again, the church at Ephesus met with the divine approbation, because she had tried them that said they were apostles and were not, and found them liars; Rev. ii. 2. This God would never have justified, had she undertaken to judge in matters beyond her limits.

If then she has a right to try, prove, and judge of church affairs, as 1 Tim. iii. 10. she has an undoubted right to appoint them: for who else can have a right to say who shall be the officers to serve the church.

church but those who are to rejudge of their qualifications? We are therefore necessarily led to think it is the church only, who has a right to appoint those who are to be the immediate actors in behalf of the church: in consecrating, ordaining, or setting apart those officers to their work.

From the scripture account it appears to us that the churches in the days of primitive christianity, were dependent on those actually in office to act for them in ordaining their officers. We therefore think it not expedient for any church to appoint those who are not in office to that work, excepting in extraordinary cases. The primitive practice may be learned from Acts vi. 6.—xiv. 23.—xiii. 2. and Titus i. 5. 1 Tim. iv. 14.

As to the power of church officers, it appears from the word of God, that the apostles had the special gift of infallible inspiration, or the keys of the kingdom of heaven; by which they unlocked those mysteries which had been hid in God, and had not before been revealed; Matt. xvi. 19. 1 Cor. ii. 7. Eph. iii. 9. By which it appears that they had power to give special orders and precepts to the churches; as well as to foretel future events, that should come upon the church and world.

As to the office of bishop or the gospel ministry, they have a special commission from Christ, to go forth and teach and baptize. When fellowshipped and ordained by the church, the church is only to inspect their doctrine and morals; but is not to controul them as to when and where they shall preach. They only are accountable to God for the fulfilment of their commission, Matt. xxviii. 19. Go ye and teach all nations, &c.

But if by their consent they are appointed as pastors of particular churches, then they are said to have the rule over them, and the church is to be in subjection to them, Heb. xiii. 7, 17. Theff. v. 12. But not as law givers, this is the work of Christ: nor as judges, to hear, try, and judge for them,

them, this is the church's province only—to judge in all cases of discipline. But they are to be submitted to as those to whom God has given special gifts of lead and government; by which the church is led to an easy method of coming to the true light of the causes she is called to judge in.

The deacons also are to lead in the government of all the secular concerns of the church, so far as they respect her public charges, Acts vi. 2, 3, 4. Thus brethren we have set before you our views of church power and government.

We come now to speak of an association, by which we mean no more, than a number of churches in sister relation, mutually agreeing to meet by their delegates, at stated seasons, for free conference on those matters that concern the general good of the churches: that we might be mutual helpers to each other, by giving and receiving intelligence of each other's welfare; that we may sympathize with and pray for each other, and so be partners in the joys and sorrows that await us in this changing world.

In which conference any church has a right to propose any question that relates to doctrine or discipline; provided that such questions are always so circumstanced, that the solution of them will not interfere with the government of particular churches.

On authentic information of the purity of faith and practice of any sister church, which desires to be received as a member of this conference; it is the privilege and liberty of this association to give them fellowship, and to receive them as a member of this conference. But in case any church or churches shall apostatize from the faith, and become corrupt; on information from sister churches who have taken gospel steps to reclaim them, and have not succeeded, but have necessarily been called to withdraw from them: it is the duty of this association to sympathize with those grieved churches in their sorrows, and to inform the churches in general, that we consider those churches who have fallen, no longer in our fellowship.

ship. It is the duty of this association to give information of apostates, and corrupt men in the ministry; that the churches may not be imposed upon by them. In case any church which is a member of this conference, shall neglect to attend with us in conference, it is but an act of brotherly kindness in us to inquire for the reasons of such neglect: and if any church chooses not to meet any more with us in this manner, it is reasonable they should let us know it in a christian way. If any church shall think it best not to continue a member of this meeting, it is unreasonable to publish their names annexed to the transactions of a meeting of which they did not consider themselves members. In such cases we may drop them from our minutes, and publish the reasons for so doing.

Any church's not becoming, or continuing a member of this conference, is not considered as a bar of our fellowship with them.

Finally brethren we consider ourselves, to have no power as an association to determine any cases of discipline in the churches; but we are only to give our advice and opinion in those points, and intelligence in such matters as come within the limits of a free christian conference.

From what has been said we learn that it is the church only, and not an association of churches, or ministers, that is authorized to execute church discipline.

We are sensible that some may object to this and say, that the church is imperfect, and liable to make wrong judgment. True, but if we admit of decisive councils, to whose judgment the church must submit; if their judgment is in opposition to the church, and they are not convinced they were wrong, they cannot restore the member they rejected without counteracting their own judgments; and if they do it upon the judgment of others, still they can have no more fellowship with such a person than before. It appears from hence, that decisive councils immediately

ly militate against real fellowship and gospel union in the churches. But councils for advice only, in difficult cases are useful. In this way churches and brethren may gain light, and all their difficulties be happily settled.

Dear brethren, we now conclude, wishing you much of the divine presence, and heavenly wisdom, and skill, which are necessary to the right management of church government; that you may meet with the divine approbation in the great day of accounts: which may the Lord grant for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

C A L E B B L O O D, *Moderator,*

By order of the association,

S A M U E L W H E L P L E Y, jun. *Clerk.*