

2073!

Baptists. Connecticut. Stonington Association.
The Sentiments and Plan of the Stonington Association.
[New London, 1787]. 10 pp.
MHS copy.

4110 F 11

The SENTIMENTS and PLAN

OF THE

St. John's

Stonington Association.

1787.

SENTIMENTS.

1. **W**E have learned by experience, that a combination of churches is both prudent and useful, yea, the word of God informs us, that, "Two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." The numerous errors that are propagated and prevailing in our land, at this day, afford a striking proof that such a combination is expedient, as thereby we may more effectually maintain the order and faith once delivered to the saints,—our acquaintance enlarged,—our union increased, while we mutually consult each other's welfare, and the prosperity of our brethren in general.

2. We utterly disclaim all classical power, and superiority over the churches; acknowledging the independency and power of each particular church.

3. We conceive it necessary that an association consist of men expert in the laws of their God—knowing and judicious in the scriptures; that thereby help may be administered to the enquiring mind.

P L A N.

1. The association to consist only of messengers chosen and sent by the churches. Their expences to be borne by the churches which send them.

2. The churches by their messengers send letters addressed to the association. In the letters the names of the messengers are mentioned; also, the state of the churches—their increase—their diminution, by death, dismission to other churches; or excommunication: and the present number of members.

3. Churches are to be received into the association by a
written

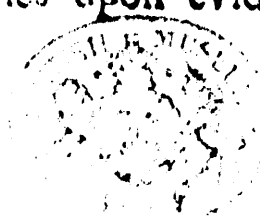
written petition ; shewing their desire to be admitted—their faith—order—and willingness to conform to the rules of the association. When the necessary steps are taken, and suffrage being given in favour of the petition, the moderator, in token of fellowship, gives the messengers his right hand.

4. The association to convene annually at such time and place as they shall appoint : and first, a sermon to be preached ; after which, a moderator and clerk chosen—the letters from the churches are read—letters, and minutes to be read (if any) from the associations, with whom we have opened a correspondence—letters prepared, and messengers appointed to the above-mentioned associations—ministers are appointed to supply destitute churches occasionally—all necessary business attended to, and minutes thereof made—the place appointed for our next annual convention, and (if expedient) appoint one to preach the next association sermon—a circular letter to the churches prepared, and affixed to our minutes—and a collection of monies to be made for defraying the charges of printing the minutes, and other necessary expences of the association.

5. All matters to be determined in this association by the suffrage of the messengers. All that speak are to address the moderator, who is to take care that none be interrupted when speaking, and that no other indecorum take place.

6. Should any church or churches, belonging to this association, neglect attending our annual convention, year after year, the association view themselves obligated to enquire after the cause of such neglect, and act accordingly.

7. The faith and order of this association, are expressed in a confession put forth by our fraternity, (in Great-Britain) A.D. 1689. Some of the principles in said confession are, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity—the inability of man to recover himself—effectual calling by sovereign grace—justification by imputed righteousness—immersion for baptism, and that on profession of faith and repentance—and reception into churches upon evidence of sound conversion.



MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,
held at Stonington, October, 1787.
Tuesday, October 16th, 1787.

THE* elders and brethren, messengers of the churches, met at elder Simeon Brown's meeting-house, and

1. Sermon by elder Isaac Backus, from Isa. lxx. 15, 16.
2. Brother Isaac Backus was chosen moderator, and brother Valentine W. Rathbun, clerk.
3. Letters from the churches were read, and the following account taken of the number added, dismissed, excluded, or who have died the year past; and of the present number of members.

N. B. Ministers names in *italic*. Those marked thus, † not present. From the churches marked thus, * we received no letters. Dashes denote no settled minister.

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Ad.	Dif.	Exc.	Died.	Num.
1. Stonington,	<i>Eleazer Brown,</i> <i>Joshua Babcock,</i> <i>Peleg Randall,</i> <i>Jonathan Palmer,</i> <i>Nicholas Randall,</i>	3	1	1	0	100
2. Stonington,	<i>Simeon Brown,</i> <i>Zebulon Brown,</i> <i>Simeon Brown, jun.</i> <i>Afa Spalding,</i> <i>Robert Stanton,</i>	19	0	1	2	130
3. Stonington,	<i>Valentine W. Rathbun,</i> <i>Sands Niles,</i>	7	0	1	1	40
1. Groton,	<i>Timothy Wightman,</i> <i>Peter Avery,</i> <i>Benadam Gallup, jun.</i>	72	0	0	1	153
* 2. Groton,	_____					36
* Say-Brook,	_____					70
Exeter,	<i>Solomon Sprague,</i> <i>Matthew Clark,</i>					198
* South-Kingston, †	<i>Benjamin Wight,</i>					48

Church

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Ad.	Dif.	Exc.	Died.	Num.
Church formerly of South Kingston, now of Richmond	_____	6	0	0	1	41
West-Greenwich,	† <i>Elisba Green,</i> William Gorton, John Tillinghast, <i>Christopher Palmer,</i>					46
1. Colchester,	<i>Abel Palmer,</i>					60
2. Colchester,	Jabez Rogers, <i>Charles Bos,</i>	4	0	0	0	43
Richmond,	William Perkins, Reuben Green,	10	1	0	0	33
		121	2	3	5	998

4. Received a letter and minutes from the Warren association, by the hand of their messengers, elders Isaac Backus and Thomas Green, and brother Joseph Crafton; whose coming was welcome to us.

5. Chose our brethren John Rathbun, and Jonathan Palmer, jun. to prepare a letter to the Warren association.

6. Appointed brother Afa Spalding, and brother James Brown, to draw the letter to the Shaftsbury association.

Adjourned till to-morrow morning, 9 o'clock.

Brother Thomas Green, of Cambridge, preached in the evening from Acts xi. 23. *Who when he came, and had seen the grace of GOD, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the LORD.*

Wednesday, October 17.

Met pursuant to adjournment.

7. Read the minutes of the Philadelphian and Shaftsbury associations.

8. Read and approved of the letter to the Shaftsbury association, and made choice of elders Charles Bos and Abel Palmer, as our messengers to them; their next association to be held at elder Ainos Burroughs's meeting-house, in Shaftsbury, the first Wednesday in June next.

9. Read

9. Read and approved the letter to the Warren association, and appointed elder Eleazer Brown, and brother Sands Niles, to attend their annual convention, at elder Dodge's meeting-house, in Sturbridge, the Tuesday after the first Wednesday in September next.

10. Read the circular letter to the churches, prepared by brother Sands Niles; which, after some amendment, was approved.

11. Brother Valentine W. Rathbun, is appointed to draw the circular letter for the next year.

12. The Sentiments and Plan of this association, prepared by our committee appointed for that purpose last year, being presented, was read and approved; ordered, that the same be affixed to our minutes.

13. Supplies for the destitute church of Richmond:—elder Simeon Brown, the third Lord's day in November; elder Eleazer Brown, the second in January; elder Valentine W. Rathbun, the second in May.

14. Appointed elders Timothy Wightman, and Simeon Brown, to visit the destitute church in Groton, and make report of their circumstance at our next association.

15. Appointed our brethren Sands Niles, John Rathbun, and Valentine W. Rathbun, to write a friendly letter to the church in Say-Brook; from whom, we have received no letter, year after year.

16. The next association is to be held at elder Abel Palmer's meeting-house, in Colchester, the third Tuesday in October next, at 10 o'clock A.M.

17. Brother Valentine W. Rathbun, is requested to superintend the printing our minutes.

Elder Backus made the concluding prayer.

Now follows our circular letter.

Dearlly

Dearly beloveds.

SUFFER us to address you in the language of the divine oracle—
 “ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
 Faithfulness and honesty, is commended by almost all ; but (it is to be
 feared) practised by few ! It is an ornament wherever it is to be found—
 in the aged—in the youth—in the rich—in the poor—and in all degrees
 and orders of men. It is what is required from all rational beings ; and
 is justly expected both by God and man, from all that profess to be the
 followers of the Lamb. This character shone conspicuously in the illustri-
 ous Jesus. He was faithful in all things, to him that appointed him.
 This unparalleled faithful high priest, when he ascended up on high, led
 captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Did he ever give even the
 least gift to any human being, but that the receiver is under a necessary
 obligation to improve, for his declarative glory, and the benefit of his
 chosen ? All his gifts and callings are without repentance. His injunc-
 tion is, “ As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same
 one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Here,
 is it not evident, that every edifying gift is commanded to be improved ?
 And may we not safely conclude from the nature of the parable of the
 talents, that he that had received but one, was as justly reproveable for
 non-improvement, as he that had received five ? And, are not those that
 neglect to improve their gifts or talents, liable to have them taken from
 them, and given to others that are faithful ? Yet, the delinquent is not
 in the least excused, from the character of wicked and slothful servant, and
 may justly expect correction and punishment from the great giver. If we
 attend to the volume of sacred writ, we shall hear some of the most solemn
 and awful curses, denounced against such, as neglected to perform divine
 requisitions. “ Curse ye Meroz, (said the angel of the Lord) curse ye
 bitterly the inhabitants thereof : because they came not to the help of the
 Lord, to the help of the Lord, against the mighty.” Again, those that
 committed robbery in tithes and offerings. “ Ye are cursed with a curse,
 even this whole nation !” Are not tithes and offerings, under the law, a
 lively representation, not only of the temporal offerings, to support the
 cause and interest of religion under the gospel, but also of the dedication
 and improvement of the spiritual gifts and endowments of the mind ? If
 so, where shall we find any of the sons of Zion, but what are under con-
 demnation

remission at some time or other. their sinful neglect? However, there may be some of such modern refined taste, and so strongly attached to the fashions and modes of some sorts of professors, that they cannot admit of public exhortations, before or after sermon, though "the tongue of the flammerer shall be ready to speak plainly." Yet, of how little weight will their objections be in the mind of every faithful church or christian? If they attend to what God says, "As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister the same." Will not the language of their hearts be, "I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot go back." I have once (and repeatedly since) vowed, and dedicated my all to God; my soul, my body, my gifts, my every thing to the service of Deity? If this has been the case with you, brethren, (as we doubt not it has) how can it be possible for you to be guiltless, and neglect the improvement of your gifts in the church of God? May you not justly be stiled church robbers? Though your gifts may be small, (yet if the church judge them needful) you are no more excused than he that had but one talent. As every member in the natural body, is necessary for the good order and well-being of the whole: so every member in the mystical body of Christ, is necessary in its order, for the comfort and edification of the whole.

Dear brethren, as a motive to engage you to faithfulness, remember what God said to the father of the faithful: "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." This faithful promiser would reward his an-tient people, on their bringing in all the tithes into his store-house, that there might be meat in his house; he would open the windows of heaven, and pour them out a blessing, that there should not be room enough to receive it. All the faithful may invariably rely, and depend on the truth and faithfulness of Zion's King. And to induce his chosen to fidelity, he says, that "obedience is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams." Also, "the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land." Those that obey him, and keep his commandments, he will come, and (surely) manifest himself unto: He, and his Father, will come unto them, and make their abode with them. Dear brethren, we are confident that true religion, no how else exists in the soul of man, but in the real knowledge of God, and obedience and conformity to his laws and institutions. Conformity and fellowship with him, is the end and design of all gospel institutions. Supreme love and obedience to him,
hath

hath in itself a most sure and certain reward of happiness, in its own bosom. This is what sweetens and perfumes the soul with joy and delight, and creates holy affections and dispositions towards him : so that the will is in some good measure swallowed up in the ocean of his divine sovereignty. When this is the case of the christian, how easily, and with delight do they step forward in the lot and order heaven has designed ? A specimen of this (upon reflection) we see in every real reformation : How bold and obedient are young christians in their exhortations ? Is it not an agreeable scene, to all such as really and actually love our Lord Jesus ; to hear the new born babes, crying, Abba Father : and speaking out (though with a stammering tongue) the excellency of Jesus, in his love : the fulness in him to save, &c. ? How natural is it to them, then, to call upon their fellows—to exhort them—to invite them—and to warn them to flee from the wrath to come ? Is there any that dare to forbid such, but those that are inimical to the cause and religion of Jesus ? May we not conclude, that such professors that shut the doors against exhortation, have but little (if any) religion ? Quite of a different character was the meek servant Moses : he “ would that all the Lord’s people were prophets.” And the author to the Hebrews, impresses the duty of exhortation ; and so much the more as we see the day approaching. And the venerable servant Whitefield said, that application and exhortation was the life of preaching. And, if public exhortation and prophesying, such as should be effected in the last days, when God should pour out his spirit upon the servants and hand-maids, is agreeable to heaven, may we not safely conclude, that such churches (if any there be) as shut the door against it, do thereby grieve the tender spirit of Jesus—wound his dear children—and procure the frowns of the Most High : so that he leaves them with little more than their empty forms of religion ?

Fidelity and honesty, so much commended, and so becoming to all sorts of professors, is it only displayed by such as have useful public gifts of improvement in the church ? Is it not required of every, even the weakest christian in Zion ? Where ever the gift of saving grace is bestowed on any of the lapsed race of Adam, there is the spirit of supplication ! And God says, “ I will be sought unto by the house of Israel, to do them things

things for them that they need." And is it possible for an heaven-born soul, to content himself without exercising the breath of prayer and praise to God? And does not God require the improvement and growth of every grace and gift bestowed? Has he not said, I will pour out my wrath upon the families that call not on my name? Every head of a family should exercise the characters of prophet, priest and king in his family. As a prophet, he should (according to his ability) endeavour to teach and instruct them, that there is a God; and that they have souls of an infinite value; and that they must be delivered from sin, and reconciled to God, or be eternally miserable. As a priest, it is incumbent on every head of a family, to exercise his gifts (though never so small) in prayer and intercession with God for them; though he can't atone for them, yet it is his duty to carry the case of himself and family before the throne of grace, and intercede with God, if it be but in few words, according as his gifts may admit, in such a manner, that his family may hear, and join with him! Though morning and evening family prayer is not expressly commanded in the new testament; yet, is it not implied by the morning and evening sacrifices and offerings, under the law? And, is it not fully held out in the command, that we "pray without ceasing;" and, "in praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit;" and, that we should "be instant in prayer." Is it not to be feared, that there may be some sorts of professors, that neglect this most important, and soul-satisfying duty? But is there any real heaven-born soul, that can be so forgetful of his former experience—so disengaged in religion, as not to pay his acknowledgements to God?—so regardless and cruel to his family, as not to beseech and intercede with him, for their everlasting well-being? If there be any such benumbed, unfaithful christian, that is the head of a family, suffer it not to be told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Askelon, before you heartily confess your neglect to God, and to your family, and assume, by practice, the character of a faithful follower of the Lamb! As a king, and governor in his family, like the father of the faithful, he ought to command his household, and to restrain them from following the superfluous and vain fashions of the children of this world, in adorning the dying body, until they make themselves to appear ridiculous in the eyes of every sober and discreet beholder! Every

by faithful head of a family, will endeavour, by every scripture method, to restrain his family, and all under his care, from associating, keeping company, and spending their precious time in the frolicking chambers, with the giddy, irreligious rabble, that are putting the evil day afar off! Vain dancing, was the cause of John Baptist's losing his head! Though there may be some sorts of professors that indulge their families in this horrid evil, and esteem it as an innocent recreation! Is it not because they have no realizing sense of the preciousness of time—the approach of the judgment day, when they must give an account for every thought, word, and action, before the awful and glorious tribunal of Jehovah? Has not the consequence of such practice been, to cut off, and shut the door against the spirit of conviction? And, have not numbers in our day, attended such vile company, on purpose to stifle conviction? Indeed, have not parents been such cruel masters, as to advise their children to such vicious and sinful courses, in order to get rid of what they called melancholy? If so, what a most shocking consideration is it, that any should be so void of the fear of God! and so regardless of the fate of their children in the coming world?

Finally, brethren, suffer a word of exhortation; to attend to the foregoing, and to whatsoever things are lovely, and to whatsoever things are of good report: by so doing, and being faithful unto death, you will inherit the crown of life. Amen and Amen.

Signed in behalf of the association.

ISAAC BACKUS, Moderator.

VALENTINE W. RATHBUN, Clerk.

