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CIRCULAR LETTERS

FROM THE

WOODSTOCK AND STONINGTON

BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS,

TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CHURCHES.

[REPRINTED 1807.]

G. W. ALLEN, Printer.

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CIRCULAR LETTER.

THE *Ministers and Messengers* of the WOODSTOCK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, to the *Churches* whom they represent, send greeting,

DEAR BRETHREN,

Permit us to address you on the important and interesting subject of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*.

As these are Sacraments appointed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to be continued until his second coming, and unto the end of the world; it is of great importance that we understand what they are, and to whom they are to be administered. And

1st, These are *positive institutions* about which we can know nothing, but from what Christ, and those inspired by his Spirit have taught us.

2d, Whenever, and wherever, these ordinances are so altered, as to lose the intent of the institutor, then and there the ordinances are lost and become no Christian ordinances, These things we shall take for granted.

When our Lord commanded his ministers to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, he must mean that they should perform some *particular action* in that sacred name. And what that action was, we may understand by knowing the *meaning* of the word baptize, and the *manner* in which baptism was actually performed by John the Baptist, and Christ's immediate followers. The meaning of the original verb, *Baptizo*, which is translated to baptize, is first, to dip or overwhelm; secondly, to wash. For this definition we have the united testimony of a numerous train of learned and pious *Pedobaptist* authors.

John the Baptist baptized in Aenon, near to Salem, because there was much water there, and in the river

Jordan; and Jesus, being baptized of him, went up straightway out of the water. Christ's disciples were wont to pray by a river side. Philip and the eunuch went down both into the water, and he baptized him. From the above, and other evidence, which we have not room to insert, it appears to us that John the Baptist and the Apostles baptized by *dipping*. And a multitude of learned and pious *Pedobaptist* authors fully concede to this.

Thirdly, we conceive, that where sprinkling or pouring is practised for baptism, the ordinance is so far *changed* as to *lose* the *intent* of the institutor, and consequently becomes *no christian ordinance*.

Fourthly, we can find no evidence that any were baptized but such as were apparently *made disciples*; John required, in order for baptism, that his hearers should bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Matth. 3d, 8th; and Luke 3d, 8th.

We have no account that Christ's disciples baptized any, but such as were apparently *made disciples*. 1st John, 4th, 1st, 2d.

Christ, in the commission which he gave to his ministers, gives no liberty to baptize any, but such as are first taught or disciplined. Matth. 28th, 19th, and no one, that we have any account of in the New Testament, ever deviated from the rule laid down in the commission.

Fifthly, in *strict conformity* to the commission which Christ gave to his disciples, they *immediately* baptized all those who gave evidence of their faith in Christ.* The case of Saul and that of the jailor are *remarkably full to the point*; for the former had neither ate nor drank for three days, yet he was baptized before he took meat; and the latter, being converted in the dead of night, was baptized before break of day.

Furthermore, *we have not the least intimation that ever one was admitted to the Lord's table prior to his being baptized*. Now the *same* commission which our Lord gave to his primitive disciples, he *still* gives his ministers; and *our practice* ought to

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*Acts 2d, 38th, 41st, and 8th, 12th, 13th, 36th, 37th, 38th and 9th. 18th chap. 18th, 8th, and 22d, 19th.

be as *theirs* was ; therefore, no unbaptized person ought to be admitted to the communion table.

Our next enquiry shall be, who are in duty bound to come to the Lord's table ? Or who are thus directed, " this do in remembrance of me." This command was given to Christ's disciples, and doubtless continues to be the duty of all such to this day. Then why have we denied this privilege to many, whom we really esteem as his disciples ? This is a question of serious importance to us ; for on account of this practice we are stigmatized as self righteous, uncharitable bigots, not only by the world, but by professors of religion : And this is not all, for some whom we really esteem as the Lambs of Christ, of various denominations, including our own, are much grieved with this practice. When this is the case, we ought to examine carefully, and see if we act agreeably to Christ's commands, which inculcate love and union among christians. We ought likewise to render the reasons of our conduct to our grieved brethren, of all denominations. This we shall endeavor briefly to do.

Although we would by no means say any thing, that can be taken *hard or unkind*, against any denomination of christians, did not duty require it ; yet as we feel bound to declare plainly, the reason why we cannot commune with all, whom we esteem as christians ; we shall be under the *necessity* of mentioning some things in other denominations, which *bar* us from this privilege which we *ardently wish* to enjoy. But as it is the *Lord's table*, and *not ours*, we must attend to *his directions*, rather than to *our own feelings*.

As our refusing to commune with the Congregationalists and Methodists is the chief, if not all, the occasion of grief in the lambs of Christ, we shall confine ourselves to these two denominations. And first, although it is the duty of all christians to commune at the Lord's table, yet this is not always their first duty : For we read, 1st Cor. 11th, 28th, " let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." Again, Matth. 5th, 23d, 24th, " therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there re-

memberest that thy brother hath sught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother; then come and offer thy gift." Now, had we evidence that any brother had neglected these plain prerequisites, we could not admit him to communion at the Lord's table, without practically bidding him God speed in disobedience to his commands. And the same rule will apply, with equal force, with respect to every plain prerequisite.

And as we have briefly proved, first, that *dipping, and that only, is baptism*; secondly, that baptism is the *first, or immediate duty* of all such as give evidence of christianity; and so the door of admittance into a gospel church; and have no kind of evidence that any were ever admitted without it: We cannot consistently admit any to *communion* whom we esteem *unbaptized*. For if we do, we shall be guilty of *practical falsehood*. For by admitting them we must practically say, either first, that we believe they are baptized (and consequently that many of us have been baptized twice) when we really believe no such thing.

Or secondly, that baptism is not a pre-requisite to communion, when our belief is just the reverse. Or third, that their believing themselves to be baptized makes them so, when our settled judgment is, that neither their belief nor ours can in the least alter the commands and ordinances of Christ. Or lastly, that his commands and ordinances may be trifled with; and that when they cross our feelings or those of our brethren, we are not bound to obey them! when we really believe no such thing. If we should thus seek to please men, we should not be the servants of Jesus Christ. Secondly, if we admit those to the Lord's table, whom we esteem unbaptized, while we fully believe baptism to be a pre-requisite to communion, we go counter to the *law of love*. For if we love the Lord with all our hearts, we shall keep his commands; and if we love our neighbor or brother as ourselves, we shall not suffer sin upon our brother, but shall reprove him in tenderness: And as we could not commune at the Lord's table, *ourselves*, before we are bap-

tised, if we love our brother as ourselves, we cannot admit him, before he has attended to the same divine pre-requisite.

Thirdly, as many congregational churches receive members, who do not even pretend, that they are born again ; yes, receive all civil persons who wish to join them ; and ordain ministers over them, without examining the candidates for that sacred office, respecting the work of regenerating grace on their hearts ; and pay little or no attention to gospel discipline ; we cannot own these as gospel churches, by extending our fellowship to them : Nay, we find no more divine authority for communing with them than with other civil persons, who never joined any church ; and other congregational churches, though they *examine* candidates for the ministry, as well as persons who wish to join them in church fellowship, with respect to christian experience ; and pay attention to discipline ; yet are so *closely connected* with the *first mentioned churches* by reciprocal communion, and in the ordination of ministers, that should we own these as gospel churches, we virtually own the *whole denomination*.

Fourthly, should we assent that sprinkling is gospel baptism ; and that the members of these churches are, in this respect, properly introduced into the visible church ; to be consistent, and as many of their writers allow, we must receive the parents with their numerous offspring, both old and young, into our fellowship ; for they have all been introduced in the same way ; and if sprinkling is baptism for the *parents*, it is for the *children* ; by which act we should not only countenance and assist in building up the practice of infant baptism, but extend our fellowship to all those who were received in infancy, and have not since been excluded ; though many of them, to all appearance, are irreligious and profane, and some are even infidels. If these ought to be received into fellowship, none ought to be refused.

Although many of the above remarks equally apply to Congregational and Methodist churches, yet we shall make a few observations with particular reference to the latter. It probably will be pleaded in favor of some of their members,

that they have been baptized in the apostolic mode, as we understand it. But we humbly conceive, that the practice of these churches, with respect to baptism, is not only *unscriptural*, but *inconsistent with itself*; for,

1st, By their rules of doctrine and discipline, they hold strictly to the baptism of infants; which must be an *important duty*, or a *great error*; as it very materially effects the upbuilding of the visible church. If it be the latter, by what authority do they maintain and practise it? But if the former, why do they tolerate many of their members in the neglect of it? If it be a *duty*, it is because it is *positively instituted* by Christ; and while they esteem it to be so, how can they hold those in fellowship, who live constantly in disobedience, in the total neglect of it?

2dly. While they hold infant baptism to be valid, and practise it, they yet (if desired) baptize the same persons after they come to years of understanding; which is practically disannulling infant baptism, or rebaptizing; for the latter of which we know of no scripture evidence.

3dly. They practise sprinkling for baptism; and altho' when they sprinkle a person, they declare in the most solemn manner that they baptize, yet when a person, who has been sprinkled, is convinced that he is not baptized, and desires to be so, they baptize him by dipping; which is practically disannulling sprinkling or rebaptizing; and yet at the same time they sprinkle all those who prefer this mode, and solemnly declare that they baptize them.

Secondly. They hold doctrines which to us appear to tend to subvert the great gospel doctrine of salvation by grace alone; a few only of which we shall have room to mention. And first, they deny the doctrine of unconditional election; and affirm that no man is elected until he has performed the previous condition of faith in Christ; and that faith is a cause of election. Secondly, they hold that no man is regenerated, until he has, on his part, actually performed the condition, to which this blessing is positively promised; until he has actually forsaken his wicked ways and thoughts, and

seeks the Lord, and that men do thus without any more divine assistance than others have, who never do it.

On which we take the liberty to observe, that to us it evidently appears, that no unregenerate person ever truly seeks the Lord, while he remains so. For which we offer three reasons. 1st. Spiritual blessings are promised to all who seek the Lord; but never promised to the exercises of a carnal unrenewed heart. 2d. No seeking can be acceptable but through faith in Jesus Christ; for, *without faith it is impossible to please God.* 3d. The man after God's own heart, and other holy men of old, were frequently employed in *seeking God*; and were greatly blessed therein. But "the wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God." Wherefore we humbly conceive, that if unregenerate men, on their part, do actually perform all this, and that too with no more divine assistance than others who never are born again, then there is no need of regenerating grace; for it seems the change is actually wrought; but if it be not completed, they have, it seems, the promise of God that it shall be. And if men perform these important conditions, with that divine assistance which is *common* to others; they may with great propriety thus address the unconverted; "had you done as much in the cause of God, and been as well disposed towards the way of salvation, as we were, with the same divine help that you had, you would certainly have been converted." Thirdly, they believe that those who are regenerated, have no certain promise of salvation; that their salvation now depends solely on their own exertions, unconnected with any more divine assistance than what many have, who actually fall from a state of justification into eternal perdition.

If this doctrine be according to godliness, should these questions be asked the saints in glory, "who maketh thee to differ from another man? What hast thou that thou hast not received?" The answer must be to this effect, "I received no more divine assistance while I lived on earth, than many did who are now in hell; had they improved that

grace as I did, they would have been saved; therefore, altho' it was grace to promise heaven to either of us, on our exertions, yet, as I performed the condition, with no more divine help than they had, my own exertions are the sole cause of the infinite difference which exists between us."

Furthermore, if the above doctrines be according to the scriptures, we conceive, that it depends not on the sovereign will of God, but solely on the will of creatures, whether Christ shall ever "see of the travail of his soul, or have a seed to serve him;" for, it seems, God does no more, in this world, for those who are saved, than he does for many who are lost; therefore the event rests solely with the creature.

If the above be the doctrine of pure grace, we confess we know not how to distinguish between grace and works, nor how boasting is excluded. But we fear, that all which has been, or can be said on the foregoing subject will be of little avail with many, unless we for a moment pay attention to a plausible objection, or rule, which is very prevalent with both professor and profane.

Rule, "whatever men think to be right, is so for them: Conscience is our guide; although other churches, to us, appear unscriptural, in faith and practice, yet we charitably hope, they are right at heart, and sincere in their faith and practice; and if so, their faith and practice is right in the sight of God; and we ought to receive them into church fellowship."

Brethren, this is a *short rule*, and if it be a *good one*, it is worthy of our attention; for by adopting it we shall save ourselves much labor. 1st It supersedes the necessity of searching the holy scriptures; and however negligent we have been in this respect, yet if we have a system of ideas, which we sincerely believe and practice, though it may be diametrically opposite to plain scripture testimony, our really believing it to be right makes it so in the sight of God! And they, who see it to be utterly unscriptural, ought to fellowship us in it!

2d. It will save us the labor of examining, to see if in establishing our system, our judgment was not influenced by

educational prejudice, other prepossessions, or want of love to the truth ; for however much we may have been influenced by any, or all these, yet, if we really think we are right, we are so in the sight of God !

But, if we adopt this rule, we must receive into our fellowship, Shakers, Papists and Mahometans ; for the great body of these professors appear really to believe what they profess.

3d. We must receive a persecuting Saul, and all those who because they love not the truth, are left to strong delusions, to believe a lie, that they might be damned ; for the former “ verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth ;” and the latter really believe a lie. Now, brethren, if it will not do for us to admit the consequences, and extend our fellowship to all those above mentioned, let us reject the rule which unavoidably leads to it ; and make the holy scriptures our rule in all things ; and not encourage persons or churches in those things which we esteem quite wrong ; but withstand them to the face (though we may believe them to be as sincere as Peter) in those things wherein they *ought to be blamed*. For by receiving them to the Lord’s table, we practically declare to the world that we esteem their doctrine and practice to be in a good degree according to divine rule. And if they are so, then our doctrine and practice, wherein they so widely differ from theirs, must be wrong. But, if while we believe them to be wrong in matters of so much importance, we by our fellowship assist in building them up, and bid them God speed, we are partakers of their evil deeds.

Finally, although they should prove to be really wrong, yet being ignorantly so, they will be beaten with *few* stripes ; but if, while we are fully convinced of their errors, we assist in building them up, we shall be beaten with *many* stripes. And now brethren, dearly beloved, think on these things ; consider the importance of them. If ye know them, happy are ye if ye do them. May the God of peace and love bless you, and enable you patiently to bear his cross here, that you may wear the immortal crown.

CIRCULAR LETTER.



*The STONINGTON ASSOCIATION to the CHURCHES composing
the same.*

BRETHREN, dearly beloved in our Lord, through the long-suffering goodness of our compassionate Redeemer, we have been permitted to assemble once more in association, by which we do learn something of the dealings of our Divine Master with his professed followers in the year past. From the information received through the medium of letters by the hands of our esteemed Elders and Brethren, we have renewed cause, with repentance and humility, to ascribe praise and thanksgiving to our God for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the sinful children of Adam. The ever blessed Redeemer is still on the mercy seat, and thro' the agency of his Divine Spirit, is rendering the dispensation of his gospel effectual upon the hearts of the King's enemies; those, who were far from righteousness, without hope, and without God in the world; those, who were not only the opposers of experimental religion, but also violent opposers of our faith and order, in the gospel, have been brought to bow at the foot of sovereign love, to take upon them the easy yoke of the Redeemer, and to follow the footsteps of the flock, as marked out by Christ and his apostles.

The visible kingdom of Christ is extending, and the word of God is fulfilling—that he would give his son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possessions—Papal power and deception is expiring—Mahometan delusion is giving back—Pagan idolatry is tumbling before the word of the Lord—Europe is emerging from the dark confines of established priestcraft—India's spicery vales are now resounding with praise to our Redeemer—Ethiopia's sable sons stretch forth their hands to God—Many
in this American land are running to and fro, proclaiming

the acceptable year of the Lord, and knowledge is increasing. When our venerable but persecuted fathers fled from their pleasant native land, to seek an asylum of liberty on these Columbian shores, then uncultivated, and only inhabited by the tawny savage of the wilderness, and the terrific beast of prey, the God of Jacob attended, conveying them in safety across three thousand miles of dreary ocean, to Massachusetts' shores. Here the Lord planted them, and with them the growing order of his gospel. Here the God of Israel displayed his power in extirpating the ruthless savage, and giving unto his chosen their land for a possession. O how wonderful is the providence of God! In a few years this little band of heroes were increased to numbers as the stars in the firmament of heaven. While they have been thus multiplied, preserved and extended, until we have become a great nation, scattered over our western hills, the God of grace as well as providence, has been pleased, as we humbly trust, to preserve to himself, in our American Israel, a chosen band, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Blessed be the name of our God, that from time to time, ever since our first settlement in this favored land, he has been raising up young men of our own coasts, qualifying them by divine grace, sending them forth to preach unto us the unsearchable riches of his grace in a glorious Christ. Thousands and thousands have been made to hear the Almighty voice, and enter while there was room. With propriety, dear brethren, we may adopt the words of the Psalmist, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Within the last few years, how hath the Lord of the harvest been visiting our guilty land, with the rain of his grace—in Boston, Salem, Sedgwick, on the eastern border of our union, Providence, Newport, New-London, New-York, Philadelphia, the cities and towns in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. All these and many of the villages and hamlets throughout these states, have been made to sing of redeeming grace and matchless love.

“Where will the growing numbers end,
The numbers of his grace.”

We have further cause to praise our heavenly King, for the exhibition of his power and love, in filling the hearts of numbers of our brethren in the ministry, with an ardent desire to carry the knowledge of our Savior, by the administration of his word and ordinances, to our kindred in the western countries, and the poor natives of that land. The Lord has been faithful to his promise, “and lo, I am with you, &c.” Even to the extreme parts of our land and country, the labors of our missionaries have been greatly blessed, and even now, dear brethren, while we are contemplating the pleasing scene, we may rationally believe, that the lonesome forests far beyond the cloud topt summits of Allegany’s mounts, are made to reverberate with praise, from savage tongues, to Jesus’ name,

Under the consideration of such visible tokens of God’s power and faithfulness, in accomplishing the predictions and promises of the scriptures, how emphatical and appropriate are the words of the apostle to us, “that seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience” in the heavenly race, &c.

Since our last anniversary, the Lord has been working in many of our churches, by the power of his spirit. O! that it may spread from church to church, and from heart to heart, until Zion shall become a praise in the whole earth. If any of our churches, or the individuals composing them, are destitute of the special communications of the Divine Spirit, is there not a cause therefor? Can any of us say, that under a sense of our want, we have asked our Lord for bread, and have received a stone? Have two or three of us ever met together to call upon the name of our God, with some good measure of agreement to ask our Divine Lord for the effusion of his blessed Spirit—have we been denied?

Dear brethren, search your hearts, and try yourselves by the divine standard; we are directed to exemplify our faith by a life and practice correspondent thereto. Are the servants

of our Lord laboring with you, stately, and occasionally, in word and doctrine, striving to break unto you the bread of life? Remember, that a Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but of God we have the increase. Also, remember, dear brethren, that those who minister unto us dwell in houses of clay. Do we need the support of temporal bread from day to day—so do they? Do we love our lives, with those of our companions and children? Do we delight to comfort, instruct and support them? In like manner do your ministers desire to fulfil the pleasing duties to their families and friends. Therefore, dearly beloved, we recommend to you to take the word of God for the man of your counsel; asking the wisdom of God, that you may have light in your paths; and while the servants of God minister unto you of their holy things, be not unmindful of them in your temporal good things; that you and they may become mutual comforts to each other, while here on earth.

“Each in their proper station move,
And each fulfil the care of life and love.”

Now unto the King eternal, invisible, the only wise God,
he praises everlasting. AMEN.