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Baptists. Warren Association, 1788.

Minutes of the Warren Association, held at
Sturbridge ... 1788.

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MINUTES

OF THE

WARREN ASSOCIATION,

HELD AT

S T U R B R I D G E,

AT THE

REVEREND MR. *DODGE'S* MEETING-HOUSE,

1788.

MINUTES, &c.

TUESDAY, Sept. 9, 1788.

AT two o'clock, P.M. the Reverend Mr. CALEB BLOOD, according to appointment, delivered an introductory Sermon, from *Hebrews xi. 39, 40.*

2. After publick worship, the Association proceeded to business, and chose the Reverend Mr. JOHN STANFORD, Moderator, and the Reverend Mr. THOMAS GAIR, Clerk.

3. Read the letters from the several Churches, and took the following account of the members who have been added, dismissed, excluded, or who have died the last year, and the present number belonging to each Church.

N. B. We received no information from the Churches marked with an *. Ministers distinguished by an † were not at the Association.

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Ad.	Dis.	Excl.	Died	No.
1st Boston,	† Samuel Stillman,	8				206
2d Boston,	Thomas Gair,	14	1			220
Bellingham,	Neah Alden,				1	23
	Samuel Darling,					
	Lilian Blood,					
Haverhill,	† Hezekiah Smith,	1				168
Warren,	† John Putman,					40
1st Middleborough,	† Isaac Backus,	2	1	1	3	114
* 2d Middleborough,						51
3d Middleborough,	Afa Hunt,		11		2	176
	Ebenezer Nelson,					
	John Tripp,					
Charleston,	Nathaniel Green,		1		3	135
	Daniel Bacon,					
	Richard Dwyer,					
Wilbraham,	Seth Clark,	9	6		1	151
	Jonathan Walden,					
	Timothy Burr,					
	Seth Clark. jun.					
Montague,	Richard Montague,					31
* Sutton,						78
Royalstone,	† Whitman Jacobs,	7	2			78

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Add.	Diff.	Excl.	Died.	No.
*Richmond, Wrentham, South Brimfield,	Jacob Estey, James Kelton, † <i>Matterean Bellou,</i> <i>William Williams,</i> <i>Elijah Coddington,</i> Daniel Munger, Deacon Wales, John Munger,	1		1	1	39 39 190
Attleborough, Woodstock, Chelmsford, *Barnstable, New Salem, Leicester,	† <i>Abishai Crofman,</i> <i>Samuel Bigelow,</i> <i>Ijaac Beals,</i> Samuel Green,	2	3		1 3	74 126 113 48 39 65
*Freetown, Medfield, *Harwich, Dudley,	Jeremiah Haskell, Joseph Amidon,		4		1	97 76 45 22
*Southington, *Rehoboth, Harvard, Newton,	† <i>John Hicks,</i> † <i>Ijaiab Parker,</i> <i>Joseph Grafton,</i> Robert Prentiss, Nathan Dana, Abijah Stone, † <i>Samuel Fletcher,</i> Hezekiah Smith,	13 16	2	2	1 2	18 100 128 80
*Salem, (N. Hamp.) Colerain, *Northbridge, Cambridge,	<i>Thomas Green,</i> Stephen Blanchard,	4				64 29 25 37
Ashburnham, Providence, *Gloucester, Sturbridge,	<i>John Stanford,</i> † <i>Joseph Winsor,</i> <i>Jordan Dodge,</i> Henry Fisk, Deacon Phillips, Deacon Fisk,	1 2			1 3	60 104 81 84
Templeton,	<i>Joel Butler,</i> Silas Cutler,	4	1			64
*New Rowley, Bridgewater,	† <i>William Ewing,</i> <i>George Robinson,</i> Nathaniel Perkins,	7	1		1	44 22
*Newport,	† <i>Benjamin Foster,</i>					69
		91	33	4	32	3347

4. Read a letter from Horton, in Nova Scotia, requesting our fellow assistance.

5. Read a letter, and also received minutes from the Shaftsbury association, by their messengers, Rev. Caleb Blood and Obed Warren.

6. Read a letter from the Newhampshire association.

7. Read a letter from Stonington association, received by their messengers Messrs. Eleazer Brown and Sands Niles.

8. Read a letter from the Bowdoinham association, received by their messenger Rev. Isaac Cafe.

N. B. This last mentioned association was received into union with us at this meeting.

9. Appointed Rev. Messrs. Hunt and Grafton to draft a circular letter to the several associations.

10. Adjourned to 8 o'clock, A. M. Wednesday.

Sermon in the evening by Rev. Mr. Stanford.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10. Met according to adjournment.

1. Voted, That all ordained ministers of sister churches and associations, who are present, be admitted to act with us.

2. Having received information that the majority of the church at Ashfield have withdrawn themselves from their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Smith, in a disorderly manner, we think it our duty to drop them from this association.

3. From information by a late council of churches, and other good evidence, in respect to the Rev. Mr. Smith, of Ashfield, we find that a majority of the Baptist Church, in said Ashfield, have withdrawn themselves from Mr. Smith in a disorderly manner: But as it appears to us that he hath in all respects held to the doctrines of faith, to which said church first agreed, and hath conducted himself as becometh a minister of Christ, we are in full fellowship with him as such.

4. Read and approved the circular letter to the churches, prepared by the Rev. Edward Clark.

5. Read and approved the circular letter to the corresponding associations,

6. As the Church in Nova-Scotia addressed their letter to Rev. Dr. Stillman, he is requested to write them an answer in our behalf, assuring them of our readiness to afford them every assistance in our power.

7. Rev. Mr. Williams is chosen to write the circular letter to the churches for the next year.

8. The church at Woodstock are requested to omit taking a fast at this meeting, in hopes that before another annual association their difficulties will be settled.

9. A majority of the Baptist Church at Grafton, together with Mr. Elkanah Ingalls, a publick teacher, having professed the doctrine of Universal Salvation ; and as, according to the doctrines maintained by the associated churches, there is a manifest impropriety in our holding communion either with Mr. Ingalls, or the church aforesaid, therefore, voted, to drop them from this body.

10. Received a letter from the committee of the Virginia associations, who express their wishes to correspond with us, and the other Baptist associations in New-England. By this letter, and another inclosed from Rev. John Leland, we received very agreeable intelligence of a great work of God among that people. This information was confirmed by a pleasing verbal account from Rev. Mr. Hunt, who visited that country the last winter, and had opportunity of seeing the wonderful displays of divine grace upon large numbers, who are hopefully brought to an acquaintance with the gospel.

11. Chose Rev. Messrs. Backus, Hunt and Blood, to prepare a letter for the associations in Virginia, and to that at the eastward.

12. Chose Rev. Dr. Manning our messenger to the Philadelphia association. Rev. Messrs. Backus and Hunt, to Virginia. To Stonington association, Rev. Messrs. Ledoit and Grafton. To Shaftsbury association, Rev. Messrs. Clark, Beals, Robinson and Nelson. To Woodstock association, Rev. Messrs. Butler and Green. To Bowdoinham association, Rev. Messrs. Robinson, Green and Grafton. To the Newhampshire association, Rev. Messrs. Hunt and Gair.

13. Collected, by several of the churches, and paid into the hands of Rev. Mr. Gair, the sum of £.5 11 3 to be transmitted to our brethren

at Cambridge, in addition to what they have already received towards defraying the expense of their late law-suit.

14. Rev. Mr. Gair is requested to superintend the printing of the minutes. Also, voted him the surplus money collected last year now in his hands, together with the thanks of this association for his past services.

15. As many of our societies are still under oppression on account of ministerial taxes, a memorial and petition to the Legislature of the Commonwealth, for its removal, and the establishment of equal religious liberty in this government, was laid before the association by Rev. Mr. Backus, and was approved. Appointed Rev. Dr. Stillman, Hezekiah Smith, Isaac Backus, Thomas Gair, and Richard Gridley, as a committee to present this, or a similar petition, in such time and manner as they shall think proper.

16. Agreed on the following supplies for destitute societies:—Medfield, Rev. Mr. Alden, second Lord's Day in October; Rev. Mr. Williams, fourth in November; Rev. Mr. Briggs, third in December; Rev. Mr. Grafton, second in January; Rev. Mr. Green, first in May. Weston, Rev. Mr. Green, first in December; Rev. Mr. Nelson, second in December; Rev. Mr. Alden, second in May. Upton, Rev. Mr. Alden, second in November. Colerain, Rev. Mr. Green, fourth in September.

THE next association is invited to be held again in Sturbridge, and will accordingly be attended there the Tuesday after the first Wednesday in September, 1789, at 2 o'Clock, P. M. at the Rev. Mr. Dodge's meeting-house. Rev. Dr. Manning is chosen to preach the sermon; and in case of failure, the Rev. Mr. Gair.

The *CIRCULAR LETTER*,

Prepared by the Rev. Mr. EDWARD CLARK, of *Framingham*.

DEARLY BELOVED,

CHRI^ST's kingdom is not of this world; and therefore the Christian profession involves considerations of infinite weight and moment. We profess to believe, that all mankind are fallen from God by trans-

gression, and that there is a glorious display of divine grace, made in the Gospel, for the recovering of sinners to a state of endless glory and communion with God, by a Redeemer. There are a variety of opinions respecting the nature, extent and operation of this grace ; but the sacred scriptures should govern our judgment upon these interesting points. As to the extent of the grace of God, we shall only say here, that we hold it to be limited by his sovereign will. That which more immediately calls for our attention at present is, what the grace of God means, together with some of its effects.

Notwithstanding all our advantages, under the light of the Gospel, the pride of our hearts, and the prejudices of education, may have such an influence upon us, as to render it more difficult to form a right judgment of supernatural truths, than many imagine. A proper understanding of the total depravity, guilt and condemnation of human nature, in consequence of the apostacy, including the consideration of the infinite difference there is between the uncreated excellencies of Jehovah, and the nature of man ; and that it is impossible for a mere creature to possess divine perfection, may serve, in a great measure, to remove our prejudices, clear up our sight, and enable us to distinguish the characters of that divine plan, which discovers the grace of God to be reigning, through righteousness, to eternal life, by Jesus Christ, our Lord. The scriptures speak plain upon this subject : They inform us, of grace given in Christ before the world began ; of grace in the incarnation of Christ—in the work of redemption—in the word of truth—in the forgiveness, justification, and final salvation of all who believe and obey the Gospel—that grace instructs believers to deny ungodliness, &c. By this account we learn, that the grace of God means, his conduct in ordaining and accomplishing the redemption and salvation of sinners by Christ, and that the true grace of God is found only in Christ ; that is, in his character, as the brightness of his Father's glory, and the only mediator between God and man : they who believe have access into this grace, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The spirit of God is the spirit of grace, because it is a gracious act of God to send the spirit to testify of his grace in the gift of Christ, and by means of the truth, to bring sinners out of darkness into marvelous light, that they may have inheritance amongst the sanctified, by faith in Christ.

The divine nature in the abstract is not grace ; for the law discovers this ; but the law does not discover grace. It is peculiar to the Gospel to make known that God is gracious : And as it is absurd to call an effect and its cause the same thing, so it is unscriptural to blend and confound the grace of God with its effects. By the gracious conduct of God in Christ, a new and living way of access to his favour is opened for mankind—a heavenly paradise is granted, and a new tree of life ordained, even Jesus, who is the life of his people. All who believe, eat of this tree, and live forever. The state of grace is not liable to be forfeited and lost, as Adam's state was. No—The veracity of God is security for its continuance on earth, and for the consummation of the happiness of believers in heaven.

The experimental knowledge and governing influence of the grace of God, have an inseparable connection ; For as justice is united with the administration of grace, it maintains the honour of God, not only by vindicating the holiness of his law, and his right to punish for transgression, but by renewing the hearts of men, and subjecting them to its sovereign dominion. Hence the grace of God forms a new character for its subjects, every way suited to the dignity and importance of the state to which it introduces them. This is called the new man—Knowing and loving the truth, as it is in Jesus, and conforming to his inimitable example, makes up the character that is interested in the blessings of grace and promises of glory. This character is of supernatural original : the covenant of grace stamps the distinction of it. Jesus the second man, the Lord from Heaven, appeared in it when here on earth : It involves the honour of God and endless blessedness. Surely a man capable of being in this world and in glory at the same time, must be a new man indeed ; especially amongst apostate creatures. Believers are commanded to put on this new man ; not to put it into them in some mystical sense, but to put it on evidently in sentiment, temper and conduct ; to have the same mind in them that was in Christ, and be found doing the things he has enjoined upon them. It is no just objection to thus putting on the new man, that we cannot be perfect in this life. Grace does not require impossibilities. Believers are in the kingdom of grace, and are provided with every necessary means to qualify them to live to God ; their active concurrence with the government of grace is of indispensable obligation, and without it there can be no well grounded

hope of eternal life. The practical part of Christianity is provided for, and secured by, the covenant of grace, as surely as the doctrinal part is established by that covenant : and the superiour pretences of the religion of Christ to all other religions in the world, are justly vindicated only upon the ground of this connection between doctrine and practice. The gospel is made known to mankind for the obedience of faith ; and this obedience is not merely believing in Christ, without keeping his commands. Tho' faith is a distinct thing from works, yet, being true, genuine faith, it will make men work for God. Divine grace in saving sinners is efficacious to turn them from the ways of sin, by subjecting their consciences and conduct to the authority of Christ ; therefore Christians are said to be created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works ; to be the light of the world, followers of the Lamb, giving all diligence in a way of obedience, to make their calling and election sure. These things are essential to prove the divinity of the gospel, and that Christianity is honourable to God, and benevolent towards men ; that it governs with energy, and accomplishes its designs in a way that is consistent with the obligations mankind are under to God and one another. In this view only, does the religion of Jesus bear sway in the world, and makes those who understand it meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

God has not accommodated the Christian religion to the temper and conveniency of men, whose hearts are glewed to this world. The infinite excellency of this institution, the prospects it opens to the mind, the hope it inspires, and the rules it establishes to regulate the lives of believers, all shew the contrary ; neither can the beneficial effects of it be confined to seasons of worship. Religion is an every-day business with those who do not receive the grace of God in vain.

Regeneration is a glorious effect of divine grace, securing the salvation of the soul ; but it does not supercede the believers labour in putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new ; because all the vicious propensities of corrupt nature, though apparently conquered, are yet in him that is born of God. Believers themselves know to their sorrow, though greatly to their advantage, that they have proud, selfish, worldly, covetious hearts : these are properties of the old man. It is the believers work to renounce and oppose these vices, and to exercise the contrary tempers of humility, love to God and mankind : denying

self, taking up your cross, doing good as far as we have opportunity, to all men, especially to the household of faith, are duties inculcated by the doctrine of grace itself; and unless we are engaged in this labour of love to Christ, we can have no evidence of our being heirs of salvation.

The true grace of God, as experienced and enjoyed by the believer, is the saving operation of the truth of the gospel, which is mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. It is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, making free from the law of sin and death. It is the spirit of truth dwelling in the believer, in a way of knowledge and love. This is the only well of water that springs up to everlasting life; and therefore the true grace of God is something entirely different from all dormant habits or principles of man. Some suppose that grace may be buried up in their hearts; that the graces of the spirit of God may be in them and not in exercise. But this is a doctrine of tradition, and not of scripture. The true grace of God reigns over the subjects of it: and the true graces of the spirit of God are the fruits of the spirit. There are no dead principles, but living productions, which manifestly appear in acts of obedience to God: exercise is essential to faith, love, brotherly kindness, &c.

Believers are made partakers of the divine nature, only in consequence of an interest in the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and their having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Therefore, this is a privilege intirely distinct from the work of regeneration; for the promises of God are given to no man in particular, until he is born again, and becomes a believer in Christ. According to the apostle, none enjoy this privilege but those who are called to glory and virtue, and have all things given them pertaining to a life of godliness. This partaking of the divine nature is by *no means* our having something substantially divine *infused* into or *implanted* in our souls. This idea is grossly preposterous. The divine nature is not made up of parts; it is indivisible, and therefore no portion of it can be infused into or fixed in the soul of man. And surely none of us are so irrational as to imagine that the divine nature itself constitutes the new man, or that it can lay dead and dormant in any man's heart?

In regeneration the foundation of the new man's character is laid in the knowledge of and relish for the truth as it is Jesus; but as this doc

not amount to an independent ability for living to God, and the new man's character is known only in actual life ; to the believer lives the life of a new man by virtue of his union to Christ. He lives by faith in the son of God. Christ's fullness is the source of his life. As there is no serving God, acceptably without love, so there can be no true ability for Christian obedience without faith : and the genuine faith and love necessarily include each other. Yet the scriptures make an important distinction between them : Love will endure forever, but faith will end with time : Love fixes upon divine objects as amiable ; but faith upon the truth, as declaring the certain existence of such objects. In the one case we have either a sensible view, or a rational demonstration of beauty ; in the other we have neither of those : for supernatural things are not open to our senses : and who can, upon the mere principles of reason, demonstrate the propriety of the great work of redemption wrought by Christ ? To believe the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of Christ, is a very different thing from that of loving the beauty of the divine perfection, or even the truth of the gospel itself, merely because it discovers an amiable consistency in the divine plan. Christ, as having made peace by the blood of his cross, is the only medium of access to God, and of all satisfactory and saving knowledge of the divine perfection ; and therefore all pretences of love to God without faith in Christ's divinity and sufferings, are at best but the dreams of philosophers.

Faith in divine revelations, as founded in the sovereign will of God, and bringing to light things not seen or comprehended by natural reason, is the religion of Christians. By faith in the promises of God, the old testament saints obtained a good report. They were valiant for the truth ; and the Christian traveller, who walks by faith in the record God has given of his son, has an infallible evidence of the existence of invisible eternal things. His faith looks through the clouds and darkness that hang over this material world, and qualifies him to contemplate the celestial glory. His path is that of the just, even the path of Christ, which, like the increasing light of the morning, gives a pleasing anticipation of the perfect day. This faith bears trying ; is productive of the fruits of righteousness ; and will be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. This faith distinguished and governed the Christian Church at the opening of the new testament

dispensation ; and her character was then drawn and established to continue the same until the sound of the last trumpet. She was clothed with the Son of righteousness, was all glorious within, having the holy one of Israel in the midst of her. She was adorned with a crown of twelve stars, even the testimony of the twelve apostles of the Lamb : She was a burdensome stone to her enemies, looking forth as the morning, clear as the sun in doctrine and discipline, terrible as an army with banners. By means of her doctrine and conduct, the conquests of the Redeemer's grace, and the triumphs of his cross, were spread in a rebellious world. Then the stature of Christianity, and the character of the new man was measured ; not by the number of professors, nor by the extent to which the Christian religion should spread, but by the faith and example of Christ ; not in a stage of life far distant from heaven, but as intimately connected with heaven. Then the grace of God appeared conspicuous in its dominion over the church. The divine perfections, as displayed in the person, life, and sufferings of Jesus, were the objects of her faith and love, the foundation of her hope, peace and joy ; the example of her Lord was her pattern to copy after, and the doctrine of the cross the criterion of her fidelity. Her conformity to this pattern, and bearing the trial of this test, was the proof of her heavenly original, was material to her true glory, safety and happiness in a militant, and the only way of her travel towards a triumphant, state.

The true Christian Church at this day has the same doctrine and grace of God to build it up in faith and holiness, that the primitive believers were privileged with ; and it is undeniable, that the same faith with its fruits must make out the difference between true and false professors of religion in all ages. No arguments, drawn from the bad things found in the Corinthian, Galatian, or any of the seven Churches of Asia, can have the least weight to prove the contrary. Such arguments can only favour the antichristian apostacy, as they must of necessity countenance the perverting of truth, and the prevailing of error and licentiousness ; neither will any thing found in the conduct of old testament saints, favour any person's confidence of being in a state of grace, unless he

has repentance for sin and walk with God in newness of life. To conclude—be exhorted, beloved,

To put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and consider that the word of truth will judge you at the last day : remember that the grace of God teaches and governs effectually those who belong to Christ's kingdom ; that truly believing the " solemn and interesting truths of Christianity," will certainly impress the conscience and influence the conduct of him who believes. Learn from Christ and the apostles, that the doctrine which teaches, that believers have no sinful inclinations, is false doctrine, and may be attended with fatal consequences. It is contrary to the scripture and the experience of the saints in all ages ; it is inconsistent with self denial, the Christian warfare, and a life of dependence upon Christ for justification and eternal glory. Consider that men may profess to be regenerated, and in a state of grace, and yet, when a day of temptation and trial comes, be offended at the truth, turn out unfruitful, and be drowned in destruction and perdition by the love of this world. Consider that the seed of the kingdom, which is nothing but the truth, dwells savingly only in those who keep Christ's sayings, by doing what he has commanded, and bringing forth fruit to God. Hence think of the pernicious tendency of that doctrine which asserts, that the grace of God may be buried up in the heart, under the reigning power of sin, or that it may be where it has no operation. Such doctrine as this, and the light of the gospel, and the Christian character, never can exist together. Hypocrites and apostates love this kind of doctrine ; it nourishes the pride of the Pharisee, and the hope of the covetous worldling, and encourages presumption and rebellion against God under the Christian name. The only principle in man worth contending for, as a saving effect of divine grace, is, a good conscience ; that is, a conscience purged by the blood of Christ from dead works, purified in obeying the truth unto unfeigned love of his cause and people : holding the true grace of God in the faith once delivered to the saints, and realizing the importance of the obligation to add to faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. This principle being kept alive by the power of the spirit of God, will make the Christian stand in an evil day ; he will exercise the whole armour of God, keep

the word of Christ's patience, and prove a conquerer over the world and the powers of darkness, and possess that peace which passeth all understanding; that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. May you, beloved, have this unspeakably rich blessing of divine grace, and be found in the practice of that godliness which has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come; so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A M E N.

By Order of the Association.

JOHN STANFORD, Moderator.

THOMAS GAIR, Clerk.