

1866 Circular Delaware River

[Ministers present at this session were: Elders Thomas Barton, Gabriel Conkling, Philander Hartwell, Gilbert Beebe, R.C. Leachman, J.L. Purington, J.H. Wallingford, G.W. Staton, and D.L. Harding. Associations seated: Warwick, Baltimore, Baltimore River, Delaware, Corresponding Va., Salisbury, Western N.Y., Maine Predestinarian Conference, Maine Predestinarian Association, Lexington NY, Chemung, NY, Licking Particular, Ky, Others not present due to post- Civil War conditions: Ocmulga, Ga, Uharley, Ga, Yellow River, Ga, Kehukee, NC, Contetnea, Va,

Circular
Written by
Elder Gabriel Conklin

*The Delaware River Association, to the several churches of which it is composed,
Greeting:*

Beloved Brethren:- From the very many interesting subjects that might be made the theme of our Circular Letter, we have selected that of the:

Importance of Searching the Holy Scriptures

Nothing can exceed in importance this imperative duty- this blessed privilege given to the saints in dark and trying times like the present falling away; and the great and only object should be, to see and hear what **God says**, in order that we may glorify Him in what we say and do as His professed disciples.

The importance of searching the Scriptures will appear from the following considerations:

1st. The Savior Himself, and by His servants the prophets and apostles, has enjoined it upon us by the solemnities of His word, His precepts, His example, and so shall we prove to those around us that we are His- that we belong to Kingdom which is not of this world.

2d. They, the Scriptures, testify of Him. Moses, the law, the prophets, the Psalms, and the New Testament – all with one accord testify of Him; the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets of old, and so it is said the testimony of Christ is the “spirit of prophecy;” the prophecies of the prophets in old times was therefore the testimony of Christ Himself. As then, Christ is the “*all in all*” to His people, how important that we search the Scriptures touching Him and His salvation!

3d. The truth and veracity of the Scriptures is a very important argument in favor of searching them – they are reliable – all good citizens esteem these points (truth and veracity) very important to the well-being of worldly society, and so absolutely necessary that it cannot exist without them; if so, how much more so in Christian society. Well we have them (truth and veracity) in their pristine purity and excellence in the Scriptures. The apostle Peter speaks of a *more sure word* of prophecy, evidently

meaning the Scriptures – 2d Epistle 1:19 – for he speaks directly after of the prophecy of Scripture. He not only speaks of the surety, certainty, and veracity of the Scriptures, but he brings them in contrast with *seeing* and *hearing* with the natural faculties, and declares that they (the Scriptures) are *more sure*. This testimony of Peter as to the veracity and reliability of the Scriptures is weighty, and may well draw our attention to a close examination of them from time to time.

4th. Another unanswerable argument in favor of searching the Scriptures, is that they are not the writings of men or the production of the wisdom of the world, but are of divine origin, and of that wisdom that comes down from above, and upon this fact Peter founds his testimony, as above noticed, in their behalf. Hear him saying, “*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation;*” that is, no person by his own wisdom and research has brought or can bring those things forth, and as Peter would say, let this thing be known and established first of all and remembered. For the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man. But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Let us search them constantly then, brethren, for we shall not be deceived by them.

5th. The Scriptures are to God’s people as a light that shineth in a dark place, so says the Apostle. If so, how encouraging to study them. We may have known, some of us, something of the inconvenience and unpleasantness of being shut up in a dark place, and if we have not experienced it, we can form some idea of it in imagination, and what a relief to have the light let into our cell, or better still, we brought out into the light. This is but a faint illustration of the invaluable blessing of the Scriptures to the people of God in this dark world of sin and sorrow- They feel very often that the night is thick and dark, and are ready to cry when will it be gone and the light once more appear. Again and again they have been led to inquire what should we do, where should we go, what would become of us were it not for the Bible, the blessed word of God?

Again, the Scriptures, being a revelation from God Himself, as such claims our careful, prayerful, and unremitting attention. In them He has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, thus manifesting and shewing Himself a God of mercy as well as of justice – that He can save the vilest of the vile through Christ and yet be a just and holy God. In the Scriptures all necessary rules and regulations are given for the government of His Kingdom, by the King Himself, until He, Christ the Son, the Mediator, shall deliver it up to the Father.

The organization and order, therefore, of the gospel church are embraced in those regulations as found in the Scriptures. Do we delight in the order and ordinances of Christ’s house, the worship of His courts, the cheerful songs and solemn praises of the solemn assembly? Let us search the Scriptures in order that we may be conformed in all things to the pattern shewed us by the Savior, and by His apostles and prophets. Do we meet with embarrassments in our pilgrimage journey? Let us search the Scriptures and look to the Lord that they may be removed. Do we encounter enemies, opposition to ourselves, or the doctrines, *etc.*? Let us search the Scriptures that they may be overcome.

Are we in doubt in regard to any point of Gospel doctrine? Let us search the Scriptures that we may be established. Are we unsettled in our minds in regard to any point of order or any ordinance of the Gospel? Let us search the Scriptures that we may be settled, rooted and grounded in the Truth. Are we in the dark as to the meaning and application of a Gospel sense, of any part or portion of Bible Truth? Let us faithfully and prayerfully examine the Scriptures with a special view to this matter, that we may be enlightened; and we shall not search in vain, for God is His own interpreter and will make the matter plain. Are we tempted by the world, the flesh and the devil, to do wrong and thus wound our brethren, and destroy our own peace by sinning against the God we love? Let us search the Scriptures and look to the Lord that we may overcome the temptation, be delivered from the evil, and enjoy that peace of mind that makes its possessor happy, and without which the child of God is miserable. Peter tells us we do well to take heed unto this more sure word of prophecy. Is it our desire to *do well*, then let us be careful to take heed to the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. But if we do not take heed to them, we shall certainly do ill, or evil, for without a knowledge of them by the Spirit of God, we are in ignorance and darkness; but they, when taken heed to, are by the Spirit of Christ, full of instruction and serve to make one wise, and are as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path through the darkness of this world; for with all the wisdom of this world – with all the light of science of other ages and countries, and of this age and country, and notwithstanding the great accumulation of knowledge and great boasting of the “onward march of civil and religious freedom and light,” darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people – religious intolerance stalks abroad, and “*he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.*” The apostle (2d Epistle of Peter, 2 Chapter) goes on to say that there were false prophets in old times as well as true prophets of the Lord, and as there were false prophets among the people then, so there will be false teachers among the people now, bringing in privily or privately damnable heresies, *etc.*, and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of Truth shall be evil spoken of.

This prophecy of Scripture is being now fulfilled, and will continue to be fulfilled to a hastening degree until it is completed. But how do we know this? By taking heed to the Scriptures; the sure word of prophecy of the prophets and apostles of our Lord, and it is so sure and plain, that we have no doubts in the least about it. We know it is so, we cannot be mistaken.

In closing, suffer a word of exhortation. Dear brethren, laying aside all malice and all guile and all evil speaking, let us as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby. Let there be no evil surmisings and perverse disputings among us: these are unbecoming our profession and contrary to the spirit of Christ, and if we possess *that*, we shall be one, perfectly joined together. It can't otherwise be.

Finally, dear brethren, let us give the more earnest heed to the Scriptures, lest at any time we should let them slip. Let us search them diligently, and ask the Lord to give us an understanding of them, and with one heart and one accord abide their decision in all cases and under all circumstances. Thus shall Zion be found to be a peaceable and

quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down.

Philander Hartwell, *Moderator*:

Elijah Leigh, *Clerk*.