

CIRCULAR LETTER.

OUR MISSION AS BAPTISTS.

I do not propose to speak of that mission which we hold in common with that of other denominations, but of our distinctive mission which our separate existence demands; or rather of that mission which demands our separate existence, and makes it our duty to maintain a distinct denominational organization and character. If we have a work to do, different from that which others are likely to do from the nature of their organizations and principles, let us know it, and know what it is; but if we have no such noble and important work, which others are not likely to do just as well or better than ourselves, we should know that also, that we may abandon our separate organization, and unite with others, that there may be no unnecessary divisions in the ranks of Christ's followers.

But we believe that there is a definite and important mission committed to us, and that we should prove untrue to him who has blessed and honored our denomination in the past, if we were now to abandon our ecclesiastical connections and distinguishing tenets, and unite with any of the other religious societies in existence.

Our history is very different from that of any other of the so-called Protestant denominations. We are Protestants only in that we protest against the corruptions of the Church of Rome. They are Protestants because they came out of the Church of Rome protesting. But we never came out of Rome, because we were never of Rome; we existed before the Protestants as a distinct class of religionists existed. The Baptists testified against the corruptions and innovations of Rome before Luther and Huss and Wickliffe were born; yea, they held and preached the doctrines we now hold before Roman Catholicism had an existence.

I do not mean to claim that from the time of the Apostles to the present, we are able to trace a class of Christians bearing the name "Baptist;" but that during all this period, even through the darkest time in the Middle Ages, classes of Christians have been found outside of the Church of Rome who have held, fundamentally, the doctrines and practices of the Church as we now hold them, and that we are legitimately and truly their spiritual descendants; thus enabling us to trace our existence as a denomination directly back to the Apostles, without going through the Church of Rome. Have we not reason, therefore, to regard our denominational existence as highly important, and our mission one which we cannot neglect or abandon without proving untrue to the Lord who has bought us; a mission which, when we take into consideration its magnitude and immense power for good, should humble us before God, and make us bold before men, that we may be true to our calling, as those who have been commissioned from the court of heaven to engage in one of the noblest works ever committed to man.

1. It is our peculiar mission to maintain the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as a perfect guide in all matters of religious belief and practice. Whatever we find there, we esteem binding on the conscience; whatever is not there commanded, is not binding. We do not admit for a moment that we are to be governed in our views of the Holy Scriptures, or Church practices, by tradition, the writings of the Fathers, or the decrees of councils. The Scriptures, and the Scriptures only, are our guide. By holding firmly and infuse truth into every

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