

James Horner
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CHAVIS'S LETTER

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UPON THE DOCTRINE

John Chavis *of the*
Wake County

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EXTENT OF

THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

PRICE 15 CENTS.

1843

John Chavis

RALEIGH:
PRINTED BY J. GALES & SON.
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TO THE MODERATOR

OF THE

ORANGE PRESBYTERY OF N. CAROLINA.

REVD. SIR: From reading the Minutes of the last General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and other Religious publications, I find that the Redeemer's kingdom is advancing in an astonishing manner; and, it is my unshaken belief, that much of this glorious work may be attributed to the increasing belief, which appears to prevail, of the extent of the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ. Such a belief expands the mind of the Christian, and, in prayer, the desire of his heart grasps in one view the whole world of mankind, and leaves the event to God, who hears and grants the blessing.

The time was, when I was a firm believer in a limited atonement, and I do believe, that it was God alone that convinced me of my mistake, and that, in an almost miraculous manner.

In the early part of my Ministry, after Preaching, I could nearly recollect my Sermon *verbatim*. And it was my usual custom, after Preaching, to review my Sermon, to see if I had not advanced some false doctrine or said something improperly.

At a certain time I preached to a large congregation, and my subject led me to treat of the fall of man, and of the remedy that was provided for his recovery, and I invited my congregation with all the pathetic zeal of which I was capable, to come and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might be saved; that he was the only Saviour of sinners and the only way to eternal life; that unless they were regenerated and born again of the spirit, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven; yea, I felt as though I was standing on the brink of eternity and my congregation ready to be precipitated into utter destruction. After Preaching, I got upon my horse, and as usual began to review my Sermon, and it was suddenly impressed upon my mind, as though some person had spoken to me: *What?* you believe in a limited atonement, and yet you have been inviting all mankind to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation! How is this? Such was the shock, that it appeared as if I rebounded from my saddle, and certain I am, from

my feelings, that my whole frame must have been in a tremour; and I rode on, one of the most miserable of men, and found no peace of mind until I became satisfactorily convinced that the atonement which our Saviour had made was commensurate to the spiritual wants of the WHOLE HUMAN FAMILY; that he had made it possible for each individual to be saved.

At the door of my investigation, I met with much difficulty. I knew that if I reasoned from false premises, my conclusions would be false. To contrast the moral perfections of God with the moral law, and reason from the moral law being a transcript of God's moral perfections, did not appear to me would be conclusive. Here I was at a loss for some time, not knowing what theory to adopt to reason from, that would be conclusive. At length, it occurred to me that I must have recourse to God's natural perfections, and of these his infinity would best answer my purpose, for it appeared plain, that the sin which Adam and his posterity had committed by violating the law of an infinite God, carried in it an infinite evil; because it was committed in the violation of a law of an infinite God, and therefore required infinite satisfaction and none but an infinite God could render that satisfaction. At this discovery my burden was removed, and I felt comforted because I conceived that I had got upon safe ground—that the Apostle had said, that Christ came to redeem those that were under the Law, to satisfy the Law and make it honorable that God might be just and justify the sinner that believeth. Then, as all Adam's posterity were under the curse of one and the same Law, all doomed to eternal destruction, it appeared evident that he could not die to satisfy the demands of that very same and express law for a part and not for the whole; that when he addressed his Father and said, 'Father I have finished the work thou gavest me to do;' and when he expired upon the cross, and cried 'it is finished' and the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom, which signified that the middle wall of partition was broken down between Jew and Gentile, that all mankind individually, might enter into the holy of holies, and have access to a throne of grace through a Redeemer and a Mediator. This laid the foundation upon which the extent of the atonement was built, and which gave authority for such free and unbounded invitations and promises, which are recorded both in the Old and New Testament. "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money come ye, buy and eat, yea come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. And the spirit and the bride say come. And, let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Now it is plain that those invitations and promises are made to the whole human family without limitation, and whatever may be their import or meaning, that they

are intended for and do embrace the spiritual wants of the whole human family individually, is a truth which cannot be denied nor disproved. Let me be permitted further to remark, that if Jesus Christ did not die to make atonement for the sins of the whole human family individually, where I would ask, the propriety of complaining, 'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.' Of whom does he complain? Undoubtedly, both of Jew and Gentile, or in other words, of all the disobedient of the whole human family individually. Surely no person will be so presumptuous as to charge the Saviour of mankind with folly, or that he would complain without a just cause. For it must or ought to be supposed, that his complaint is founded upon his death and suffering. Permit me further to remark, that as death ever has, and ever will make the dying man tell the truth, I ask, whoever read or heard tell of any person on a death bed ascribe his lost state to God, but in every instance they ascribe it to their own disobedience? Now if Jesus Christ did not die to make atonement for the whole human family individually, would not the dying man set up a defence for himself and plead that Jesus Christ did not die for him, and therefore he could not be saved? And, as he does not set up any such defence, does it not prove plainly that he believes that Jesus Christ died for him and that he might have been saved, provided he had complied with the terms of the Gospel; and as he did not, is it not at least, a tacit confession that his damnation is just? Now as this is the experience of the dying all over the world, does it not prove that the doctrine of the extent of the atonement is true?

To put the proof of the doctrine beyond all question, permit me to state that express and emphatic command of the Saviour himself to all his Ministers of every nation, tongue and language: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be damned." What language could be more explicit to prove the doctrine of the extent of the atonement which makes provision for the whole human family, individually?—Moreover, if Jesus Christ did not die to make atonement for each individual, why preach to each individual? Can it possibly be believed that the Saviour would send his Ministers to preach to any part of the human family for whom he did not die, when he knew from the nature of their situation they could not believe on him, (for without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin) and to add to the awful curse of damnation upon them for their unbelief? The character of the Saviour, the plan of Redemption, reason and common sense forbid such a belief.

I might go on and quote more Scriptures, and illustrate the subject more fully by familiar examples, but I think it quite unnecessary, because the language of the Saviour just quoted defies contradiction; but more of this hereafter. But notwithstanding the proof of the doctrine of the extent of the atonement appears to

be so plain, explicit and unequivocal, yet another difficulty presented itself. How were all mankind individually to have the opportunity of partaking of the blessings contained in the blood of the atonement? To remove this difficulty was a matter of anxious solicitude. At length, it occurred to me that the atonement made must be one thing, and the application of it another; that there was blood enough in the Saviour to save all, and that if any were lost, it must be for the want of application; and here another difficulty presented itself. Why did not all make application? To remove this, was a matter of the utmost importance. Here I had to make a solemn pause, and to look into the broad fields of Theories, to see if I could find any of their number from which I could so reason as to make the subject plain and intelligible to all capacities.

And here I discovered that I must adopt as theories, the doctrine of motives, the freedom of the will, and the object of choice. And should I be asked, what is a motive, I answer, it is that something, whatever it may be, that excites or prompts to action; and should I be asked also, what it is that gives the will, I answer, it is the object of choice. And lest I should be charged with too much tautology, let it be understood, that whenever I may use the word *motive*, the freedom of the will and the object of choice is to be understood in every instance.

In my explanation, I shall pass unnoticed the ignorance of those who say they have done many things contrary to their wills, and take with me the *Philosopher and the experience of mankind*, as witnesses, to prove that no person ever did nor ever will act contrary to their will. That action which any person performs contrary to their will, is compulsory, and therefore it is not their action at all.

It cannot be readily supposed, that any person can be willing to be punished for committing a crime, though they may acknowledge that they ought to be punished; but to be heartily willing, is not a supposable case.

For instance, suppose a servant disobeys his master, who calls him to account for his disobedience, and orders him to strip himself, that he intends to chastise him for his disobedience. The servant at first hesitates, being unwilling to be chastised, but presently obeys and strips himself; and why does he do it? It must be, because he knows that his master has him completely under his power and authority, and therefore he becomes willing to obey him; and his motive is to induce his master to be merciful in his punishment. And so it is in all other cases of the actions of mankind; they have motives and objects of choice for all they do.

From this short definition of the doctrine of motives, which I believe will accord with the experience of all mankind, I hope I shall be able to give a satisfactory reason why some men are saved, and some lost.

By the death and suffering of the Saviour, a free and unbounded fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness, and all mankind, individually, are freely invited to come to this fountain, and partake of its cleansing and healing influences, and be made whole from the pollution of sin; and we find that a part of mankind do obey the call and invitation, and do come and partake of the benefits of this fountain, and are made whole. Ask them why they acted thus, and they will answer that it was because it pleased God by the light of his Holy Spirit, to set life and death before them; that they saw that they were wholly polluted with sin and corruption; that unless they were cleansed and made whole by the blood of Christ, they were eternally lost; that the motive of their actions was that they were willing to be saved upon the terms of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; that they had acted freely and willingly, from motives of choice, and not from compulsion.

We find that those others who have had life and death set before them by the Holy Spirit of God, had it made known to them that they were wholly polluted with sin and corruption; that they were freely invited to come to this fountain and be cleansed and made whole; but they shut their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and refused to obey the call and invitation so freely offered. Ask them why they acted thus, and they will answer that it was because they were unwilling to obey the call and invitation of the Gospel; that they had other motives of gratification, and therefore were unwilling to come; that in so doing, they had acted freely and willingly, and from motives of choice, and not from compulsion.

Thus we have a true and plain definition, why it is that some men are saved and some lost. This definition also makes the road which mankind travel to heaven and to hell, as plain as two and two make four.

But here I saw that I should be met with the Calvinistic doctrine, or the doctrine of God's decrees; for they are built upon the Atonement of Christ.

The opposers of this doctrine say that if God did from all eternity foreordain or decree whatsoever comes to pass, then every thing is unalterably fixed, and mankind cannot act otherwise than they do—and besides, this doctrine makes God the author of sin, which cannot be admitted.

If the opposers of this doctrine understand it to mean that God as it were, put his hand upon one man and pushes him up into heaven, and upon another man, and pushes him down into hell, irresistibly, they are grossly mistaken. This would indeed be making God the author of sin, which I say with them, cannot be admitted.

What the Westminster Divines meant by God's foreordination or decrees, was simply this: that God did certainly foreknow from all eternity whatsoever would come to pass, but there was to be no compulsion in the case. It is plain then, God's foreordination or

decree is nothing more nor less than his foreknowledge. Rob God of his foreknowledge, and you at once say there is no God; and who that looks upon the works of creation, can possibly deny the being of a God? Here I must appeal to the experience of the opposers of this doctrine themselves, that God's foreordination or decree has no compulsion or influence upon the actions of mankind at all. And here I must ask them to go back to their infancy, and carefully examine all their actions, and the motives of their actions, and say whether they conscientiously believe that God's foreknowing what they did or intended to do, had any compulsive influence at all upon their actions; or whether in all they ever did or intended to do, in any single instance, they first looked forward to see whether God foreknew or had any knowledge of what they were about to do, or intended to do? If not, in what does their opposition to the Calvinistic doctrine consist? For here they must acknowledge that all they ever did was done freely and willingly, and from motives of choice, however righteously or unrighteously they might have acted; and that God's foreknowing what they would do or intended to do, had no compulsion or influence upon their actions at all; therefore God is not the author of sin. Then it is plain and put beyond all contradiction, that God's foreknowledge or decree has no compulsion or influence upon the actions of mankind at all.

Witness the crucifixion of the Saviour. The Scriptures inform us that *this transaction was foreordained by God from all eternity*; yet the Jews have ever been blamed and ever will be blamed for their conduct. And for why? Because they acted from wicked motives and that freely and willingly, and that of choice and not from compulsion, and even Judas, for the part he acted in the cruel transaction, did not pretend to set up a defence for himself that he was compelled to do what he did; so far from it, such was his conviction of the horrid deed, that he could not bear the sight of man, nor the light of the sun, and therefore hurried himself out of the world by hanging himself.

Again, the opposers of this doctrine raise another objection to show its inconsistency. They say that according to this doctrine, there can be no possible use for preaching; for let a man do what he will, he will be saved, and let him do what he will, he will be damned, and yet we see from the explanation given of the doctrine of motives, of the freedom of the will and the object of choice, that it is emphatically true, that let a man do what he will, he will be saved, and let a man do what he will, he will be damned, and it is because he wills all his actions, and in so doing, acts freely, willingly and from motives of gratification, and not from motives of compulsion.

Thus we have a demonstrative evidence of the fatal and dangerous effects of prejudice—that it blinds the mind, and forbids free and open investigation after truth. Whereas, if the opposers

of this doctrine would lay aside prejudice and reason calmly and dispassionately, and that upon Philosophical principles, how easy it would be to determine that there is no bugbear in the doctrine at all; but that it is perfectly consistent with the character of God and the state and condition of all mankind.

It is plain also from the explanation given of the Calvinistic doctrine, that the faith and practice of consistent Calvinists and consistent Armenians when rightly understood are one and the same thing. Both preach and believe that man has a will to choose and refuse and that he acts accordingly. Both believe and practice that faith that works by love and purifies the heart, and which is always productive of good works, by which we are to be judged at the last day; upon the whole, the only difficulty before us, is to reconcile God's decrees with moral agency, which is a secret which must be left alone for God to reveal.

Here I saw again that I should be met with the doctrine of objection, which is also founded upon the atonement of Christ. If I understand the opposers of this doctrine right, they say, that the doctrine of election makes God a partial God, and therefore an unjust God. For say they, if all Adam's posterity are under the condemnatory sentence of God's righteous law and liable to eternal punishment, equally guilty and helpless, and have no power or method of their own to extricate themselves, then for God to choose or elect a part to eternal life, and a part to eternal death, must undoubtedly make him a partial God, and therefore an unjust God.

To obviate this objection, I must again bring to my assistance the doctrine of motives, the freedom of the will, and the object of choice.

Upon the foundation of the doctrine of the extent of the atonement of Christ, I do believe that God did from all eternity, according to his foreknowledge and foreordination, and his eternal purpose, determine or decree to elect, raise and build up a Church and people, to love and to serve him through all succeeding generations and ages of the world; that his name should be put upon them; that they should be called his people; that they should fill all the various stations in his Church, whether Ministers, Bishops, Elders, Deacons or lay members; all for the purpose of his own glory, and for the good and prosperity of his Church and people. But how did he elect them? Contrary to their will? No. How then? Why, according to their own free will and choice, and from love to God and to his Church and people, and the salvation of their own souls. Then it is plain that their election was of their own choosing according to the foreknowledge and purpose of God, (for they acted precisely as he foreknew they would do, by repentance and faith in his blood.) All of which did not proceed from compulsion at all, but from their own free will and choice. For the truth of this I must appeal to the experience of all the professors of christianity in the church at the present day, of every grade, to say whether

Their standing and spheres of action in the church, did not proceed from their own free will and choice; and whether, in all they ever did, in and for the church, did not proceed from motives of love to God and to his church and people? If so, where can there be any possible ground for supposing that the doctrine of election makes God a partial God, and therefore an unjust God. For it is plain and put beyond all contradiction, that from the same parity of reasoning which has already been given, that those who are lost, choose their own election of damnation. Upon the same principles of motives, the freedom of the will, and the object of choice, that instead of their choosing a life of salvation and eternal happiness, they have chosen a life of damnation and eternal misery.

It is now time for me to say to the opposers of the doctrine of God's decrees and election, that I do believe that those doctrines are perfectly consistent with the character of the sovereign Ruler, and Governor of the world, and as perfectly consistent with the present fallen state and condition of the whole human family individually. For I find that it is the belief of all those who are well instructed in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, that, after the fall of man, God was under no obligation to save a single individual of the whole human family. Then it certainly is or ought to be a comforting and consoling consideration for us to know, that God has in mercy determined or decreed to elect a church and people to love and to serve him. And for that glorious purpose, laid the plan of redemption, and executed it by or through the death and suffering of his son, to give them the opportunity of being restored to their primitive state of rectitude, and to make their way to heaven and eternal happiness. And because it found that some refuse to accept of the offered mercy and are lost, then for God to be charged with partiality and injustice is language too insolent and heaven-daring for mortals to use; and all those who use it, ought to fall prostrate before him, and repent of their sins and lay in the depths of humility to the end of their day. And why? Because God's ways and dealings with his creatures are merciful and full of compassion in the plan of redemption, and perfectly consistent with their present state and condition.

In a word, my opinion is this, that wherever the word election is mentioned in the New Testament, it is intended to be adapted to the various capacities of mankind, to give them to understand that there is such a thing as an election of grace to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is a matter of the utmost importance for them to earnestly endeavor to make use of all the means which God has ordained, or put in their power to attain to that blessed inheritance. That there is some agency in this affair, cannot be doubted; but how or by whom, or in what manner it is put into operation, or how the operation is affected, is a matter not so easily to be understood. However, on the one hand,

God by the enlightening influences of his holy spirit, may touch, at least, one of the cogs and put the wheel in motion, and on the other hand, when we take into consideration the faculties of the mind of man, and begin and reason from philosophical principles founded upon the Bible, and take with us the doctrine of motives, the freedom of the will and the object of choice, we are enabled to arrive at the fair conclusion, that man himself is one of the prime agents in the operation, which proves I think satisfactorily, (if I may be allowed to adopt a course of reasoning which may be called the splitting of a hair) that God ought to be charged neither with partiality nor with impartiality, neither with justice nor with injustice; for at the great day of accounts, the books are to be opened, in which the actions and transactions of the whole human family individually are recorded, and out of those books they are to be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil; and when the final sentence of the judge is pronounced, each individual will have to say Amen, either to their salvation or to their damnation, and will then and there be constrained to acknowledge that all those records were true, and proceeded from motives of gratification, and not from compulsion. This I think ends and puts the capstone upon the whole affair, from the beginning to the end, and leaves the opposers of those doctrines which I have been investigating, wrapped up in a mantle of something, which I shall leave to themselves to give a name. For it is plain and put beyond contradiction, that God never did nor never will compel any man to be saved, or to be damned.

But to return to the proof of the doctrine of the atonement. Perhaps it may be thought by some that I have not sufficiently established the proof of the doctrine. If so, it cannot be amiss for me to ratify it, and put a seal upon it, from the oracles of the records of the court of heaven. John, in the Isle of Patmos, informs us that, in one of his visions, "he beheld and lo a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb; and all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts fell before the throne on their faces and worshipped God saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be to our God, for ever and ever, Amen. And one of the Elders, answered, saying unto me, what are those which are arrayed in white robes? And whence come they? And I said unto him, sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, these are they which come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in the temple: And he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them. And they

shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them nor any heat. For the lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Now if Jesus Christ did not die to make atonement for the sins of the whole human family individually, how comes it to pass that this glorious vision should be made known to John; that he should be instructed by one of the elders of the heavenly court or church, that this great multitude, which no man could number, had come out of great tribulation and had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. What a remarkable and striking coincidence is it, that from the days of John in the Isle of Patmos, to the present day, that wherever Jesus Christ has sent his ministers to preach his gospel to any nation, tongue, or language of people, that some of these more or less, have embraced religion, and have become the humble followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and have manifested by their manner of worship and adoration that they possessed kindred spirits with the heavenly host, and serve God day and night in the temple. What an astonishing proof of the doctrine of the extent of the atonement of Christ, and the fulfilment of the promise of the Father to the son, that "he would give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession."

And here let me ask, does not this vision of John, taken in connection with all the concurring circumstances which have taken place through all the stages of the church, put a seal upon the doctrine that cannot be broken?

And here I am constrained to ask boldly and fearlessly, who is it, in this enlightened day of the gospel, that will come forward and undertake to prove positively, absolutely and unequivocally, that Jesus Christ did not die for the sins of the whole human family individually. So certain am I that he did, that I would ask, who it is that would not thank God for a bible? No wonder that a society should be instituted for the purpose of sending the bible to the houses of all the families throughout christendom, yea to the houses and families of all the nations of the earth, that God may be glorified and sinners saved.

That my letter may not be too lengthy and weary your patience too much, your reverend body will readily perceive that I have purposely omitted to mention and to comment on a number of those scripture texts upon which the fundamental doctrines of christianity are founded, because I conceive that these and their practical use and application, are as familiar to you as the drops from your fingers over your wash-basins. Therefore, I shall content myself with giving concise answers to a few of your questions. What is faith? It is the assent and consent of the mind; I agree that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of sinners, and I consent to take my

part and lot in him and to trust to him alone for life and salvation. What is true and genuine faith? It is that faith that works by love and purifies the heart, and which is always productive of good works by which we are to be judged at the last day. What is saving faith? Saving faith has, what I shall take the liberty to call, a golden chain with three links, the holiness of God, the justice of God and the truth of God. Therefore, whosoever can freely, conscientiously and unreservedly make Peter's appeal, Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee, because thou art a holy God, because thou art a just God, and because thou art a God of untainted truth, may take it for granted that they have saving faith. Can this appeal be made perpetually? No it cannot. It can only be made periodically, and then only, when grace is in lively exercise in the soul.

Thus sir, you have my letter before you. It is an original child of my weak brain, and I would with much humility ask your reverend body to cast your charitable garments over its deformities. I have written it for the purpose of letting you know some of the doctrines which I have long preached in the pulpit, and am still preaching in my private and fireside conversations with my neighbors. And if I have been in an error, I know it is a duty incumbent on you to reprove me, which, I trust, I shall receive with humility and christian kindness.

That God may bless you in your deliberations to promote the *best interests of the Redeemer's kingdom*, is the prayer of your unworthy licentiate and beneficiary,

JOHN CHAVIS.

P. S. I have had the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ, of God's decrees and of election, under investigation for about forty years. And although upon those subjects, I have read the writings of some of the greatest men the world has produced, yet they left those doctrines wrapped up in so much mystery that I could not be satisfied with their investigations.

Nor could I be satisfied with my own investigations, until I adopted as theories the doctrine of motives, the freedom of the will and the object of choice, and for these I am indebted to Edwards on the Will. He says that the will is produced from the last dictate of the understanding, which enabled me to come to the conclusion, that it is produced from the object of choice; which, I think, will accord with the experience of every person who will carefully examine the motives of their actions. Having adopted and reasoned from these theories, those doctrines are no longer a mystery, but are as plain to me as the letters A B C, and although I said, when treating on the doctrine of the decrees, that the only difficulty was to reconcile God's decrees with moral agency, yet I do humbly conceive that by this method of reasoning that those doctrines are stripped of all mystery, and stand clothed in as brilliant colours as the shining of the sun's rays at noon-day.

To conclude my Postscript, permit me to observe, that I believe it is acknowledged on all hands that the doctrine of the Atonement and the doctrine of God's decrees, and the doctrine of election, are three of the most mysterious doctrines belonging to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. And that there is no other method of explaining them satisfactorily, but by philosophical reasoning, and although such kind of reasoning is not so easily comprehended by common readers, yet those doctrines ought not to be left wrapped up in mystery, because of their want of comprehension. Such characters must do, as others have done, go to the school of Philosophy, for instruction, which has the Bible for its foundation.

J. C.

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James W. Horners Chapel Hill

North Carolina

Sept 18 1858

James W. Horners

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