

1842 Circular of the Contentnea Baptist Association

The ministers and delegates that compose the 14th Annual Session of the Contentnea Baptist Association, to the churches which they represent,

Beloved Brethren:- We have been thinking of many subjects since our last meeting but there is none on our minds at present that may be of more use to God's people, than to call their pure minds to the high obligations we owe to our Heavenly Father and some of the many duties we owe to Him and in doing this we feel bound to make a few passing remarks relative to ***His divine character and infinite goodness.***

1st. God is a spirit and does not have flesh and bones as you see men have, and no worshippers of Him should draw any picture of any likeness of things on this globe, or in any other region whatever as a resemblance of the Living God, as also saith the Law.

2nd. He eternally existed of Himself and does not borrow leave to be, nor claims aid from any source whatever, for He is Omnipotent in power. His love is eternal, He is all wise and was perfectly acquainted with all things, before He produced them into existence, as He is now or will be in any time whatever. His goodness fills the heavens, and extends to all generations on earth. His mercy is forever and ever. He is also Omnipresent, everywhere at the same time, and where He is not is nowhere, and at one single glance He sees everything in heaven and on earth. He is a God of Truth, and never varies one single shade, for great nor small. He also is a God of Justice and never will deviate one hair breadth from it for friend or foe; for justice and judgment are the habitations of His throne. He is perfection and holiness, and never can deviate from it one shade, for He is of oneness of mind and none can turn Him. He is also a God of life and does not confer the power to bestow life to any other, and always makes Christians Himself, for He is God and there is none else.

His purpose is eternal and has not met with any change since the creation of the world, nor never will until it will end; and all His works are carried on according to His eternal purpose. And in creation He displayed His goodness and power, and pronounced all the workmanship of His hands to be good. Also, God the Son possesses all the divine qualities of His Father; for He was there antecedent to the world in His Father's bosom, or as one brought up with Him; and His delight was with the sons of men, and even at the creation of the world was with the Father, for it is said "*All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*" But those that subscribe to the Unitarian principle and deny His divinity, need not upon their plan ever anticipate entering the kingdom of heaven.

But we state to you that God the Father was Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge. He therefore issued the law to our forefathers in righteousness, and after they transgressed that law, He passed the sentence of condemnation upon them and their posterity in a just

or righteous manner, under which law they must have remained eternally, but for His great love wherewith He loved us in Christ; and according to His eternal purpose close us in Him before the world began; for God so loved the world &c. And Christ is the effect of God's love to the world of His people. Behold! Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, &c. Moreover, sinners were objects of His eternal complacency and when we come to view His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, we call on every power of our souls to praise His holy name.

And again, when we see that our ingratitude did not change His mind to us, but when we were yet sinners, He sent His Son in our stead to die, "the just for the unjust," and purchase eternal redemption for us it brings to our views some of the many obligations we are under to Him. But for His goodness He might have passed us by and have executed His wrath upon us; and our fate (sic) might have been with devils and the damned spirits forever and ever.

Once more, when we come to view God perfectly happy in and of Himself, and all the heavenly bodies fall down before His exalted throne and the elders and their glittering crowns in humble reverence at His feet, and at the same time see Him hold up heaven, earth, and all their contents at His pleasure, and yet have respect to poor helpless lost sinners in their low diversified state, and sends His blessed Spirit to bring them from death unto life, it brings to view the many, yea, the very many obligations we are under to praise and adore Him.

Having remarked thus far we proceed to take up another part of our subject, that is, **love to God**. We love Him because He *first* loved us. Again, love God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man. But we ask, Can the impenitent sinner love Him? The answer is obvious to every real Christian; they cannot for they are enemies to Him by nature, and are not subject to His laws, neither can be. Consequently their natures are averse to His, and will be until grace interposes and changes that condition. 1st. We got our carnal nature by birthright from our earthly parents, and never can by this change the current of our minds to love God. But no doubt there are thousands anticipating happiness from human agency and we would do well to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. 2nd. If we love God we got that nature from our heavenly parent in the second birth, for in that birth the Life of God is set up in the individual which is a holy life averse to sin, in every shape or form - let it appear as it may. And that man that calls himself a Christian and don't hate sin don't love God; and if he does not love Him it proves at once he has not passed the new birth.

So, Brethren, we know the first Christian duty we owe to God is to love Him, and if so we will keep His commandments; for, it is congenial with that nature. And brethren, when we see His great love and goodness toward us in ransoming our souls from the pit, oh how charming and how lovely is His name. But if any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. And it is in vain for any to tell us they love Him without they have seen something of the great debt they owe to Him. For when we were helpless

and without strength in the original mass, or before our visible appearance in time, He left His Father's courts above and came under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law. And although we were dormant He gave His Life a ransom for us, and paid the debt we owed to His Father's Law, which debt must have sunk us down to the chambers of eternal death. And seeing this was our case, we never can tell how many obligations we are under to Him, nor how great a debt we now owe Him. And moreover, when we see He has conferred on us all temporal blessings as well as all the treasures of grace, it must still increase our love to Him; and not only this, but He sent the Holy Spirit into the world to convince us of sin, and righteousness, and of judgment; and gave us an experimental knowledge of our own weak and helpless state and showed us that we could not save ourselves in part nor in whole; and He set our sins before our faces in such a clear manner as to make us pass judgment against ourselves; for some men's sins are open before going to judgment, and some follow after and again convince us of the insufficiency of our own righteousness, and pointed us to that blessed robe that the Son of God wrought out, "for He shall take of Mine and shall shew it unto you," saith the Good Book.

Brethren, when we take a view of what is written above, and the riches of divine grace, and the many other things not written in this Letter which presents themselves to our views, it is certainly enough to bring to our remembrance, that Christ is a Lawgiver and a Judge and we are bound to obey Him in all His sayings, for the Law of Christ is the Law the Church should keep to the end of the world. And we say the man that does not love God is not willing to keep His commandments and if so, it proves clear that he does not experimentally know Him. 4th. And if we experimentally know Him, the next obligation we are under is **to love one another**, for by it, it is to be known, that we have passed from death unto life. So, brethren, examine yourselves and see whether or not you love your brethren in this cold dark time of religion, and see whether your conduct proves it. Do you meet often together as Christians did in days past? Do you love to go up to the House of God and converse about the lovely Jesus and speak of the glory of His kingdom and talk of His power? And do we love to be in each others company as often as convenient and hear tell of the prosperity of the Church of God? And are we often found praying, for our brethren, that God would keep them from evil, and preserve them to His heavenly kingdom? In a word, do we crave their welfare in this world and in the world to come? And, if so, it is a true manifest token that we are taught of God to love one another, and this is the commandment of God, "that we should love one another," and a true evidence of our eternal happiness after we leave this world.

Now brethren, if we have the above evidences of Christianity it is our unbounded duty to follow the footsteps of Christ our Leader, and His people of all ages: 1st. The pillow of cloud that went before the children of Israel to the Promised Land, was a **figure of Christ**, and you notice they *followed it all their journey* through, and when the cloud stood still, they stood still; and when the cloud went on they went on. Therefore

the first Christian duty after the above evidences is to be baptized. We say by immersion; that, like as Christ died and was buried and raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, also, we should walk in newness of Life, and if we have followed Him, and obeyed Him, thus far, the next thing is to prove our religion by keeping the commandments of Christ; we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some (now) is.

Brethren, is not this commandment deviated from too much? Yes. And at this time of our own meetings – these things ought not so to be, but let every Christian possess his vessel in the House of God in sanctification and in honor. You are not to turn about after every wind of doctrine, but to be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. But, brethren, we see some dissenting from us and preaching, we can't tell how many professions to please, and wear a coat to fit them all.

Brethren, judge ye, whether this is according to the pattern of Christ or not; the Book says it is not. Take not with you two coats; but some think it is to their advantage to wear a coat to fit every one. They meet and say, at the same time to a Missionary Baptist, "how d'ye brother," and if they meet a Freewill Baptist, "How d'ye brother," and if a Methodist, "How d'ye brother," and to the nonprofessor, "how d'ye brother," and who they can't "brother," we know not. Now, brethren, is this according to apostolic practice? No. For they went to their own company; again, "*be not carried about by every wind of doctrine.*" Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

Brethren, this duty is too much neglected among us, for there are some that don't watch and perhaps stumble and get out of the way and almost forget to pray, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows, and look as if they were gone back to the world.- Again watch and be sober, and abstain from every appearance of evil. But, brethren, there are some that have forgot what they should abstain from! They should abstain from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. (Acts xv, 20 v.) Lastly, brethren, it is said by some of our opponents that there will not be one of the Old School Baptist in some ten or twenty years to be found. Who believes that? Very few; but those that are enemies to the cross of Christ.

But, brethren, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak, for God will surely visit you for the promise runs thus: "At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son;" and if we are not deceived, we see some symptoms of His near approach; and our combined prayer to God is, that He may before our next Annual Meeting, mount His white horse of the Gospel, and ride through every one of our churches, and save our families, our neighbors or, at least, such as are ordained unto eternal Life. (sic-SCP).

Brethren, keep the commandments of God blameless; be of one mind; live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you. [Not having possession of the previous year's minutes, we have no information as to who the author of this is, other than the committee that recommended it to the Contentnea Baptist Association.]

