

1834 CIRCULAR Contentnea Baptist Association

The Contentnea Association assembled at Union Church, Edgecombe County on the 27th, October 1834, to all the churches and brethren composing the association:

Dear Brethren:- According to former arrangement we address you by Circular: As this kind of letters is offered but once a year, we feel greatly anxious to present something that will aid you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We do not know how to do this better than by exhorting you to attend to the light and to thy Reading of the Scriptures.

The Bible is the Word of God and contains the matter and sum of all things concerning the Salvation of sinners and the comfort of Saints; pursuing the letter and the spirit of it, we never wander, never mistake. Aside from the Scriptures all else is but the superstition of heathenish darkness, or at best, the imagination of enlightened men. All false religion arises perhaps from false conceptions of God and as the Bible is all the work that gives correct views of Him, we cannot read it too frequently nor too carefully.

The Scriptures display His character as Priest and decide whether He willed in Sovereignty of depended on the counsel and will of others; whether He worked with Sovereign power, or depended upon the aid of others. They exhibit Him in Creation and Providence with the same decisions of character; they prescribe the manner in which He will be worshipped by us, whether it must be by the offering of our bodies or of our spirits; whether He will be worshipped as a merciful God only, or as a just as well as merciful God; whether He will be worshipped as having only a claim of obedience from us, or whether He has not a claim of punishment; also, the Scriptures exhibit Him too, in the awful and sublime character of Judge of the Quick and the Dead; showing us whether in judgment a knowledge of our crimes will be lacking or not, and whether or not He will call every sin into judgment; whether or not He will acquit all the human family, or a part or none and if He acquit any, they show upon what principle: and if He condemns any they show upon what principle. They show us our relationship to Him, whether in our primitive state we did or did not give Him perfect obedience; whether we maintained that state by obedience or fell from it by transgression, and if we fell by transgression whether our transgression exempted us from the debt of obedience or incurred a new debt of punishment, or suffering, and if a new debt of punishment, whether it be temporary or eternal. They show us whether transgression did or did not disqualify us for paying the debt of obedience and if it were possible for us to pay the debt of obedience. They show us whether what would pay for the debts obedience and punishment, whether the one will pay the other, being separate and distinct. If we thus owe a double debt to God, which we cannot pay, the Scriptures show us whether God has condescended to grant any discharge of that debt or not, and whether that discharge of forgiveness be the reward of human works or the gift of divine grace. Whether sinful, lost, condemned, and wretched man may become the child of God; whether this is by

any *change* in man or not; whether in reforming the external deportment or in *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*, making him a *new creature inwardly*. They show whether such a person loves sin or holiness; whether he loves Jesus Christ and His services or Satan and his service; whether a Saint of Christ can sin and still remain a saint; whether or not he is saved so long as he maintains an upright walk and again condemned as soon as he transgresses or saved with everlasting salvation. If the Scriptures afford this light (and abundantly more) you will at once agree that there is great advantage in reading them. You will pardon me for pointing also to some of the disadvantages of not reading them.

As often as you read you hear in a manner the voice of your God, your Father, whom you love. Not reading, you lose this privilege. As oft as you read you see, even if it be dimly, the face of Jesus Christ, and hear His gracious will concerning you. Not reading, you lose these blest enjoyments. By reading we may find whether we have passed from death unto life; by not reading we may continue to be deceived. But if the Holy Spirit wrought the work of Salvation within us and revealed Christ the way, the Truth and the Life” to us, reading the Scriptures will make the way more open and clear the Truth more sweetly and the Life more delightful and heavenly. You lose in some degree the comfort of these by not reading. In short, Brethren, if you neglect the reading of the Scriptures you will not be prepared to converse with the Brethren with so much satisfaction. Weather-talking and nature discussions are not food for the spiritual man. You will lose much even in meditation. You will not understand Biblical preaching so well. You will grow more worldly-minded, lukewarm, and cold, more feeble to resist temptation, have less zeal for the prosperity of the Church and the cause of God generally, and be more liable to receive erroneous doctrines. A sound ministry goes far toward maintaining the Truth in the church, but whenever the church gives over the reading of the Scriptures to the minister exclusively, it takes the first step towards departing from the Truth, and continuing to neglect the reading of God’s word the church will sooner or later be seen departing from the faith and overwhelmed in error. It sometimes happens that ministers of our own people, through mistake, quote that for Scripture which is mere tradition. If you do not read carefully, you will receive it and set it down for Scripture.

Men through design may quote wrong and largely mingle their own traditions, self will and self choice and you will not be able to detect them. If the preacher reads a text which you have not seen, nor heard, you may judge there has already been a great neglect of reading. If you feel more interested in reading men’s books than the word of God; it argues badly for you.

The Truth of the Scriptures is a charge committed to the churches for safe-keeping, and it is as though the Lord has said, “*I leave My Truth in your hands; take care of it until I come.*” Much depends upon believers reading the Scriptures more perhaps than upon all other religious exercises put together, May we read them constantly, and impartially, and the Lord give us understanding in them. May we make them (and not

what men may think about them) the constant rule of our faith and practice. The Lord be pleased to guide you along the narrow way and lead you through the strait gate to His rest for the sake of our Lord Jesus to whom be glory throughout all ages, world without end.- Amen.