



CONTENTNEA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

This body held its annual session with the church at Town Creek, in Edgecombe county, N. C. 20—22 of October, 1837. Elder Samuel Moore was chosen moderator, and Elder Mark Bennett clerk. Letters from 16 churches were received, from which it appeared that during the past year, 3 members were received by baptism, 4 by letter, 2 restored, 5 dismissed by letter, 7 withdrawn, 10 deceased—present number of members, 10. Petitionary letters from the churches at Hancock's Galloway's, in Pitt county, were presented and received. Their next meeting is to be with the church at River Dam, Lenoir county, to begin Friday before the Sunday in October, 1838. The following is the

CIRCULAR LETTER.

The Ministers and Messengers composing the Contentnea Baptist Association, now sitting at Old Town Creek meeting house, Edgecombe county, N. C. the 20, 21 and 22 days of October, 1837, to the churches they represent, send you this, agreeably to a long standing custom with us, as our annual epistle, in which we shall call your attention to some of the important truths which this great goodness has seen fit to reveal by his Holy Spirit in the hearts of us (as we do hope) his dear children.

DEAR BRETHREN: There have been in almost all ages of the world, men who by profession have denied the existence of God, the immortality of the soul; teaching that happiness alone consisted in doing what man thinks to be right, agreeably to the dictates of common sense with the highest cultivation of the mind by the aid of human wisdom. To such we would say in the language of Paul, 1. 20: For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are created, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. And it really does appear to us while contemplating the wonderful works of nature, that there could not be any rational and intelligent being so depraved that he could lay his hand on his breast, gazing on the same, and say in his heart, there is no God;—and all nature exist some how or other by mere chance,—nature caused itself,—that happiness is alone here,—that we do not exist after death,—that there is no judgment to come of the just and the unjust, no judgment seat of Christ where we are all to appear, and answer for the works or deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be bad. Yet it is said in the scriptures, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Not understanding there are men with such opinions, we can rejoice that he never left himself without a witness, and to you, dear brethren, we can say in the language of holy writ, (ii. Peter, 1. 19.) We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye heed: for the prophecy came not of old time, by the will of men, but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. There have been and still are men that deny the nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, although the scripture says, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the high Lord shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Likewise there have been, as have been before, men that profess a universal salvation,—that all will finally be happy in eternity, the scripture to the contrary notwithstanding. See Mark, 3. 29, and this passage: "And of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting shame and contempt." As many other scriptures, if we had space to quote them, we have great cause to rejoice in the Rock of our Salvation, and to thank and adore him for one more privilege of meeting together as our Association, in the land of liberty, and worshipping him in a way that seems right to us, consistent with his word.

We think it fit to attend first, to some of the important truths contained in the word of God. It is declared in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which we do believe to be the word of God, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and created the beasts of the field, fowls of the air, fish of the sea, and man. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. Here we find the origin, let the infidel say what he may. We also find that God gave the creature a rule by which he was to be governed, and that he better understood, a law. This law is manifested by the knowledge of good and evil. Thou shalt not eat of it; for the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. What told us that man disobeyed, that he did eat of the forbidden fruit? We find that man disobeyed, that he did eat of the forbidden fruit; therefore the penalty annexed to the transgression, which was death, must certainly follow. Of this death it may be considered, that our first parents did die to that created state in which they stood before the transgression; that by the fall they brought condemnation upon themselves and their posterity, and death of the body and soul, and made alive through the efficacy of Christ's atonement. This is what is said, by one man came sin, and death by sin, so death passed upon all, for all have sinned; and further why it is said, sin was the transgression of the law; for by the law is the knowledge of sin, as Paul says to the Romans. This is what is understood by a state of condemnation, born in sin: "For in sin did my mother conceive me." We are born in sin, and brought forth in iniquity," says one of old.

There are some of the truths contained in the word of God, relating to man's fall and his present state by nature. Notwithstanding so much that has been and still is said to the contrary by those that try to persuade mankind, through the death and sufferings of Christ, where he died before the fall; that is, that Christ by his death has done away original sin, by his atonement has made salvation possible for mankind, that man is now condemned alone for actual sin, committed alone for not believing in Jesus Christ! How does this agree with the word of truth? which declares that by man came sin, by the disobedience of one many were made sinners—not by the disobedience of many. And again, was Adam condemned for not believing in Jesus Christ, or for transgressing God's law? What say you? The scriptures in Christ proves that we are in a state of condemnation. Christ came not into the world to condemn the world; but that all men by him might be saved. And again, if not sinners, how can, or why do they die? For death is the punishment for sin. And again, how are sinners, how are they saved by Christ? For he came to save sinners, not the righteous. And again, if they are cleansed from sin, must be by an application of the blood of Christ. Therefore, if they cannot ever after come into condemnation; if they do, Christ's

blood avails them nothing. If once holy, they must remain ever holy; for his seed remaineth in them. The word of truth and daily experience prove the saints' everlasting holiness; for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses from all sin. Do we not see the carnal heart is enmity itself to God, not subject to the law of God, neither can be?

We would direct your minds, brethren, to the time soon after the fall when, it is said, the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. Here we have the first promise of a Saviour. Also see John, first chapter: In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God; and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. In the first of these passages, Christ is revealed; in the second, made manifest in the flesh. Psalms, 40. 7: So I came, in the volume of the book it is written of me. And again, in the fulness of the time God sent his Son into the world. He came under the law to redeem them that were under the law. And here let us again examine the word of truth, where we will see plainly manifested, in the two first children that were born, the effect of faith with works, and of works without faith, which is still manifest to this day in the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Let us endeavor to travel on in the good old way, the way of truth, stopping at here and there a place and taking a look at the directions.

See the effect of faith in old Enoch: for he walked with God and he was not, for God took him. Let us as much as in us lies, walk likewise. See Noah; and Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, was a just man. And see at the same time the wickedness of man in general. For God says, "Behold I will destroy them with the earth, saith the Lord." For what? Was it not for their wickedness? But to Noah, a just man, he saith, "make thee an ark." And when it was completed after the pattern which God gave him, the Lord said unto Noah, come thou and all thy house into the ark. It does not say, as some say now-a-days, take any body with you; the ark is large enough for all, if they would come. But we find it to the contrary. The call was to Noah and all his house, a definite number. No conditions are named. And do you not think that Noah and his house entered willingly? But what made the beasts, fowls of the air, and creeping things come in? Was it of their own free will and accord? or was it of the power of God? What say you? We think the latter. The same power that brought us into the spiritual ark, Christ. We believe according to the working of his mighty power.

Let us go on to Abram, afterwards Abraham, and see the dealing of God with him. Was Abram the cause of God's calling him to get out of the land of his fathers to a land which God promised to him and his seed? Was it not God working after the counsel of his own will, as saying I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee. We see when God called Abram, he heard, and believed too; and now when God calls a sinner, he makes him hear, and live. Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. Will you say, Abraham was justified by works? We say not. For if he was, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God; for Paul says, to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. So we see that he could not be justified by works, in the sight of God as a sinner, but justified in believing God as a righteous act. And here we see the effectual call proved. A word here is sufficient. Jeremiah, 6. 16. Read this chapter, and see if you can find any thing that agrees with the present times. Then saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see; and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest to your souls. But they said, we will not hearken. What was the consequence? Examine for yourselves.

We must for the present pass by many important places, omitting to notice Isaac, Rebecca, and others. See God's people carried to Egypt, notwithstanding God's promise to Abraham of the promised land. And come on to God's delivering them by Moses. Here we have a most striking display of God's power, in which we find some thing to help the poor minister of God on. See the wonderful preservation of Moses. And when God's time came to deliver his people, he said, I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and am come down to deliver them. No conditions; he had come down to deliver them, and Moses was his choice by which to effect it. Hear Moses' language: Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh? God said, certainly I will be with thee; and say to them, I AM hath sent me unto you. Did any thing prevent God's effecting his purpose? We are told in these times, they might, or could have come out if they would. But to the contrary, we find them under hard masters, and Pharaoh at the head, who would not let them come out. See the same situation now of sinners: they are taken captive of the devil at his will. And again, Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. So it would seem to be a bad chance for them to get out, unless by the power of God. When God called Moses to the work, what did Moses say? what some do now-a-days, pay me so much, or first send me to a theological school, that I may be taught what to say, and then I will go? We think not. Moses seems fully sensible of his inability for the work, and asks of God what to tell them. Now what was the effect? Did he say, I will go and stay as long as they will give me \$20 or \$40 per month? We think not. He went, and Aaron with him. And God delivered his people out of the hands of their enemies. So he does yet, and will continue to do so. Was all the host of Pharaoh delivered with them? Say no: for if they had been, there would not have been any to follow after and pursue them; nor a mixed multitude to be with them. See another display of the power of God at the Red Sea: the sea before, the host of Pharaoh behind! What was to be done? Destruction to all human appearance was certain. What does Moses say? Does he say all hope is gone; prepare for death! No such thing falls from the man of God. Hear him saying, STAND STILL AND SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD. The sea divided—the Israelites pass through dry shod—Pharaoh's host attempt to follow, but are drowned. God is always with his people; but many times they cannot see in what way, or how they are to be delivered.

Brethren, did you ever experience any thing like this? If so, you have great reason to rejoice, as the children of Israel did. But remember they had a wilderness to pass through, as you have; and remember how soon and how often they forgot their God by forsaking his law, and following other gods; by which they brought sore judgments on themselves: which certainly will be our case if we walk in like forbidden paths. See how God displayed his power with Joshua, in taking possession of the promised land.

We must hasten. We have a long journey before us, beset with snares and traps, still we have a prize in view, which will not admit

of delay. Next we would call your attention to the prophets, which God raised up to instruct his people, and to warn them. Yet notwithstanding all we see, how often they strayed from the right way, and thereby brought distress on themselves. And, brethren, can we escape if we do the like? Let us examine the directions and endeavor to keep in the way. But in all these times we see God had some faithful ones to instruct and warn his people. And what should we do these cold and trying times, if it was not for a few faithful ones that stand firm on the same foundation of the prophets of old, Jesus Christ and his apostles!

We will pass on to the time God sees fit to speak to the world by his Son Jesus Christ. In the fulness of the time, Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, makes his appearance in the world,—the long-looked for Saviour. What was the then state of the world? Was every body faithful, ready to receive him as the Christ; or were they mostly wicked, idol worshippers? Alas, even the Jews, that boasted of being Moses's disciples, seem only to have had a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; as Paul proves. Nevertheless, God's time had come for Christ to come in the flesh. For Peter proves it, when he says, (speaking of Christ,) "Him being delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God." And if delivered according to his council, certainly he came according to the same. For God sent his Son into the world; and he could not send him without first determining to do so. Now there was a cause for God sending his Son, and a purpose to be effected by it. The cause was God's eternal love; the purpose was man's salvation. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. It is one thing to be justified by the law, and another to be justified by Jesus Christ. For if there had been a law that could have given life, then verily righteousness would have come by the law. Then Christ would have died in vain. But Christ is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us stop for a moment, to contemplate the advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into this world, to the few and faithful that were looking for him agreeable to the prophecies, and contrast it with the feelings of those self-righteous pharisees and idol worshippers, who were expecting righteousness by the law. Let us have it in the language of the angel sent for that purpose: Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. A Saviour! what a precious word that is, to a poor, lost, trembling sinner, that sees no way for his escape,—condemned and justly so,—a sinner against heaven and in his own sight,—lost and undone for ever. We say how often have these words been balm to his sin sick soul, and good tidings of great joy; a Saviour, able and willing to save; a Saviour, able to save his people from their sins. His people. Now here arises an inquiry, who are his people? Some will tell us that the people here contemplated are all and every body that may, if they will believe; they may and can be saved. But we do not believe so; for the text does not say so. It says, he shall, in the positive, save his people from their sins. Again, it is said, they are his people when they believe. The text don't read so; it says, he shall save his people. We will admit all are his people by creation and preservation. Further it is contended by some, that all are his by redemption: which we cannot admit. For if so, then he must save all; or he cannot see the travel of his soul and be satisfied—which would lead to an universal salvation, to which we cannot give our assent; as the word of truth is so plain on the point. Well then, what are we to understand the people contemplated in the text? We believe they are the same people contemplated in the passage where it is said, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. We believe it to be the same people, whose sins he bore in his own body on the tree. We believe it to be the same people mentioned in Ephesians: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love. Not chosen, as some say, because they were holy, but we say because they were unholy, and that they might be made holy; which agrees with the text that says, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. We believe it to be the same people given to him in covenant, which is proven by many scriptures. See Hebrews, for one: Through the blood of the everlasting covenant. We believe them to be the same people given to him by the Father: For thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Now if he has bargained for them, and paid the price, (for it is said, bought with a price, redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but his own precious blood;) and if he has all power in heaven and in earth, do you not think, brethren, he will save his people from their sins? To conclude this part: we say, Christ has paid the debt, died in the stead of his people; and now it only remains for them to be brought to a knowledge of the same to be saved from their sins, born again, brought into the ark of safety, brought into the promised land, saved from condemnation, saved from the power and dominion of sin, saved from the love of it, killed to the love of it; for how can they that are dead to sin, live any longer in it.

We now speak of the effect of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of sinners. God says, behold the days come, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the one made with their fathers when they were brought out of the land of Egypt. But it is after this way: I will put my law in their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be my people. And again, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. We believe this is the office or work of the Holy Spirit. For it is said, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And again, born of the Spirit. And now, brethren, for the evidences in your own breast. Have you ever felt any of the operations of the Holy Spirit in your own soul? Such as, being born again, born of the Spirit, dead to sin, striving against sin, warring against it? Have you died to it, and been made alive to holiness; and felt love to God; and love to saints? For love is the fulfilment of the law; and an evidence that you have passed from death unto life, and have the witness in your own heart. If so, you are an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ; kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. And if God be for you, who can be against you? Is not this enough? We think we hear some of you saying, I once thought I felt and knew something of these things; but now it seems to be all gone: it is so dead and cold with me. Suppose you were to let us