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ON READING THE WORD OF GOD.

THE
CIRCULAR LETTER
FROM THE
MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS
OF THE SEVERAL
BAPTIST CHURCHES
OF THE
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ASSOCIATION,

Assembled at Kettering, June the 8th, 9th, and 10th,

1813.

Maintaining inviolably, the important doctrines of three equal persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal election; original sin; particular redemption; free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; efficacious grace in regeneration; the final perseverance of real believers; the resurrection of the dead; the future judgment? the eternal happiness of the righteous, and everlasting misery of such as die impenitent; with the congregational order of the churches:

To the several Churches they represent—

Meeting at *Loscoe and Swanwick, DERBYSHIRE; Sutton-Ashfield, Collingham, Newark-upon-Trent, and Nottingham, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE; Burton-upon-Trent, STAFFORDSHIRE; Sheephead, Leicester, Sutton-in-the-Elms, Arnsby, and Foxton, LEICESTERSHIRE; Oakham, RUTLAND; Spalding, LINCOLNSHIRE; Gretton, Clipstone, Guilsborough, Braunston, Walgrave, Kettering, Moulton, Road, Bugbrook, Braybrook, and Northampton, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE; Olney, Fenny-Stratford, and Ivinghoe, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE; Dunstable and Luton, BEDFORDSHIRE; and St. Albans, HERTFORDSHIRE.*

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from
Jesus Christ our Lord.

DEAR BRETHREN,

WE have enjoyed a pleasing and profitable interview. The intelligence from the churches was upon the whole encouraging; and the various exercises of the meeting interesting. The absence of one of our brethren,* however, on account of a dangerous affliction, diminished the pleasure of the opportunity.

* Brother JARMAN, of Nottingham.

Desirous of assisting you, dear brethren, in your spiritual progress, we have, in our annual epistles, made it a point to address you upon some subject which we considered important and interesting. In this light we know you will regard that which we this year recommend to your attention, namely, *The reading of the word of God*. Emphatically, this divine volume is called the *Bible*, the *Book*, intimating that there is none like it. Its divine origin, its high authority, its unrivalled excellency, place it on a throne before which every other book must bow. Our duty and our interest are deeply involved in the command of our gracious Redeemer, to search the scriptures. The truths they reveal, the precepts they inculcate, the promises they make known, and the threatenings they contain, include whatever is interesting and dear to both God and man. Under a sense of their high importance, then, let us search them with the most diligent attention; with an attention inspired by a concern for the honour of God and the happiness of our own immortal souls. Here are subjects which may be familiar to the meanest, and yet engage the most enlarged powers of rational beings.

We exhort you, brethren, to read the word of God with *Reverence*. Consider its high authority. Treat it not as the word of man; but, as it is in truth, the word of God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God. Holy men of God spake, moved by the Holy Ghost. Could we sit down at the feet of Paul, or listen to the lectures of Solomon, we should do it with reverence; but he who communicated to the one his treasures of knowledge, and inspired the other with his stores of wisdom, speaks unto us in his word. It is the voice of Him who gave us our existence, revealing to us that eternal rule, according to which our final state is to be irrevocably fixed. Peruse it with a sacred awe upon your spirit. Consider that you hold in your hand a volume which reveals the mind and

will of the infinitely blessed God. Bowing with the most devout respect to its divine dictates, your grand concern will be to understand in order to obey. Like David, you will say, "My heart standeth in awe of thy word." He that trembleth at God's word, is a favourite with the Most High.

Again, brethren, we exhort you to read the word of God with *Gratitude*. To you in a measure is applicable the language of Moses, when he said, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is a people like unto thee!" What advantage then had the Jew? "Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."—The oracles of God! These reveal the perfections of his divine nature and the glories of his character. They unfold his eternal thoughts, his gracious designs. Here are made known doctrines divinely sublime and divinely true: doctrines which interest the attention and engage all the powers of angels, so that they are desirous of looking into them more fully, in order that they may understand them more clearly. Here we trace the way to everlasting life. Observation and experience convince us that we are in a wretched condition. Our guilty fears forebode future and greater miseries. And here, destitute of the oracles of God, we should have been left in dark despair, without a ray of hope. But now the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Farther, to warm your hearts with unfeigned gratitude, seriously consider the deplorable state of those countries where the bible is unknown. Who can read the accounts given by our brethren in India, more particularly those contained in No. XXIII of our *Periodical Accounts*, without feeling his soul chilled with horror? While nature revolts, while your feelings are crucified, recollect that our

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own land was once in a similar situation, as to ignorance, superstition, and wretchedness. And to what is the happy change to be ascribed? how has the important revolution been accomplished? By the introduction of Christianity; by the circulation of the holy scriptures. These, in the hand of Divine Providence; these, under the agency of the Holy Spirit, have been the honoured means of regenerating these parts of the earth. Nor do we despair, nay, we rejoice, in the cheerful confidence, that the word of the Lord, which has begun to run and to be glorified in Bengal, shall prevail, till judgment shall run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. The period is not far distant, the day has already dawned, in which those who sit in the region of darkness, and the valley of the shadow of death, shall see the light of life; for the sun of righteousness is arising with healing under his wings. All shall know the Lord from the least unto the greatest.

To you, beloved brethren, we can with peculiar propriety continue our address; for you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Like Jeremiah, you have found the word of God, and have eaten it; and it has been to you the joy and rejoicing of your hearts. By divine truth, your benighted and ignorant minds were enlightened, to realize your true character and awful danger. This led you to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" The discoveries of the gospel relieved and cheered your distressed souls. These, like a divine cordial, you found to revive and comfort your sinking spirits. Instructed by these sacred oracles, you have gradually learned the way of the Lord more perfectly. You have corrected many a mistake respecting both doctrine and practice, and have hid the word of God in your hearts, as a powerful preservative from sin. In seasons of affliction you have found such support and comfort from these sources, that you have been reminded of David's language, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have

perished in mine affliction." Looking beyond the narrow limits of time, with this blessed volume in your hand, you have penetrated, with an eye of faith, the boundless regions of eternity, and said, with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Thus you have tasted the first fruits of the goodly land that is before you. The holy scriptures have been the medium through which all has been enjoyed. Read them with gratitude.

Farther, beloved brethren, while you read, exercise *Faith* upon what you read. Paul says, respecting some, that when the word was preached to them, it did not profit them. The reason is assigned. It was not mixed with faith in those who heard it. This is equally applicable to reading, as well as to the hearing of the word. And hence we learn, that divine truth, in order to be useful to us, must be mixed with faith, or have faith mixed with it. And what is it to mix faith with divine truth, while we read it? It is to read it under a powerful impression of its truth. The Apostle defines faith as the belief of the truth: and the test by which the reality of our faith is demonstrated, is the influence of the truth we profess to believe. Hence the Apostle gives thanks to God, on the behalf of the Thessalonians, that they had received the word of God, not as the word of men, but, as it is indeed, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in those that believe. This is that faith which is styled unfeigned. So the Apostle James, in harmony with Paul, distinguishes between a dead and a living faith. It is the latter which is genuine; and appears to be so, by its being influential. It is easy to illustrate these views. He who gives credit to the divine testimony, concerning his own character and condition, will solicitously inquire, what he must do to be

savea; concerning the person and the work of Christ, will make these the ground of all his hope; concerning the nature and tendency of sin, will hate it with a perfect hatred, and seek deliverance from it, as the most desirable blessing; concerning the excellency and love of purity, will value the promise of the Holy Spirit, and ardently seek his divine influence, that he may be renewed in the spirit of his mind, after God in righteousness and true holiness; concerning the vanity, and perishing nature of all that is visible, the excellency and durability of things that are unseen, will rise above the former, and set his affection upon the latter. Thus to read the word of God in the exercise of faith, will dispose your minds to receive with all readiness and humility those sublime truths which you cannot comprehend. It will tend to the casting down of imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. You will not be offended with, or stumble at, those divine truths which human reason cannot understand. You will regard it as the noblest exercise of your rational powers, humbly to subscribe to the dictates of that wisdom which cannot err. Indeed, if the bible did not contain those doctrines, and reveal those facts, which transcend the utmost heights to which human reason can aspire, it would want one discriminating evidence of its divine origin. Thus you will receive the kingdom of God as little children.

Finally, brethren, read the word of God with fervent *Prayer*. Seek the teachings of that Holy Spirit, who moved holy men of old to speak and write, that you may hear and read with understanding. His influences are necessary, not on account of any obscurity, in the manner in which divine truths are revealed; the vision is made plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it;—nor from a defect as to your natural powers, or rational

capacities; the way is so plain, that such as are styled fools, persons of weak intellectual parts, shall not, upon that account, err therein. The necessity of divine teaching is of a moral nature. It rises from the state of the heart. Thus Christ, when assigning the reason why some did not understand him, says, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do." That charge brought against Israel, by God, "They do always err in their heart," is applicable to men at large. It is added, "They have not known my ways." Darkness in the understanding is the effect of depravity of heart. Hence we understand wherein the work of the Holy Spirit principally consists, in leading us into the knowledge of divine truth. He renews us in the spirit of our mind. He gives us a heart to know the Lord. Thus when he gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, he is said to do it, by shining into our hearts. He imparts a sense of the transcendent excellency and divine glory of spiritual objects. He forms in the heart a holy taste. Spiritual perception follows. The inspired page appears in a new light, and wears an attractive beauty. Its contents are perused with a sacred relish, and their import examined with an attention hitherto unknown. In this state of mind, the little you understand will make you desirous of understanding more. Feeling your need of divine teaching, you will cry out, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Thus you will acknowledge, with the Apostle, that you have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that ye might know the things that are freely given to you of God.

And now, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you. You have received it into your hearts by faith. Be habitually and familiarly conversant with it. Let it be your counsellor,

your friend, your companion. Let your regards for it be impartial. While you esteem the doctrines it reveals, be equally attentive to the precepts it inculcates. The latter will yield satisfactory evidence that the former is pure and genuine. While you rejoice in its promises, revere its threatenings. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Whatever may be your circumstances, personal or relative, in outward respects or inward exercises, search the scriptures for a word in season. Depend upon it, there is one to be found graciously adapted to your case. Perhaps it may be a word of doctrine, or of reproof; a word of correction, or instruction in righteousness. Let it be which it may, it will be equally welcome, if your hearts are sound in God's statutes. The present is an eventful period. Study the passing scenes with the bible in your hand. Thus, and thus alone, you may look upon them with a holy calmness. Whatever dispensations affect the world or the church, still the Lord reigns. The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. By faith view Jesus, as head over all things to the church. He who was dead is alive, and his hands hold the keys of hell and of death. Seated upon his throne, at the head of the universal empire, he opens the sealed book. New scenes arise, which astonish heaven and earth, all tending to bring on that glorious day, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Christian brethren, benevolence is a leading feature in Christianity. Do all you can to communicate this invaluable treasure to those who are destitute of it. The religion you profess teaches you to love your neighbour as yourselves. If John thought the character of such professors doubtful, as possessed a portion of the good of this world, who, when they saw a brother who had

need, shut up their bowels of compassion from him; is not their character more doubtful, who profess to have an interest in the words of eternal life, and feel no pity for those who are perishing for lack of knowledge?

And now, beloved brethren, do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that we may rejoice in the day of Christ, that we have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. And now, brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified.

Signed, in behalf of the Association,

ANDREW FULLER, MODERATOR.

The Northampton Association of 11 churches
as held at Kettering, June 8th, 9th, & 10th

10

~~Prayer by~~ **BREVIATES.** ~~who~~

~~Tuesday evening, vi. Brother FULLER, pastor of the church where the Association was assembled, engaged in prayer, and was chosen Moderator; the letters from the churches were read; and Brother WHEELER, pastor of the church at Bagbrook, concluded in prayer.~~

connected
with
~~Wednesday morning, vi. Met for prayer. The brethren DAVIES, of Middleton Cheney, MILLAR, of Oakham, NICHOLLS, of Collingham, HOGG, late of Thrapston, EVANS, of Blaby, and PATRICK, of Fenny Stratford, were engaged.~~

~~Half past 8, Assembled for public worship. At the Independent Meeting, Brother DANIELL, of Luton, ^{and} Brother ANDERSON, of Dunstable, preached, from I Cor. vi. 20. *Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.* Brother HALL, of Leicester, followed, from Psalm cxlv. 11. *They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power.* Brother CUTTRISS, of Arnsby, concluded in prayer.~~

Between the afternoon and evening services, the ministers and messengers retired into the vestry, to read the *Circular Letter* written by Brother SUTCLIFF, which was approved. A proposal was made by our friends at Northampton, for an Institution for the relief of ministers laid aside from their work, of their widows, and of their children. It was unanimously resolved, That such an Institution is desirable, and that the movers of it be requested to adjust a plan by the next October Ministers' meeting, at Northampton.

The Church at *Ivinghoe*, Bucks. having signified their desire to unite with an Association about to be formed in their neighbourhood.—Resolved, That this brotherly request be complied with.

As no letters have been received from the church at *Spalding*, Lincolnshire, for two years, and as their views of the gospel appear to be very different from ours,—Resolved, That this church be no longer considered as belonging to this Association.

Applications having been made by the Churches at Southwell, Nottinghamshire, and Blaby, Leicestershire, for a connection with this Association,—Resolved, That the same be acceded to.

Prayer by
~~and~~ ~~Prayer~~ ~~by~~ ~~vi.~~ Brother EDMONDS, of Guilsborough, ~~began in prayer~~; Brother EDMONDS, of Cambridge, ~~preached~~ from 1 John, iii. 3. *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* Brother BURRITT, of Sutton-in-the-Elms, ~~concluded in prayer.~~

Prayer by
 Thursday morning, vii. Brother BURTON, of Foxton, prayed. Several of the pastors related a few particulars of what had occupied their minds during the past year; and Brother CLARKE, of Ivinghoe, concluded the public worship in prayer.

~~The Association proceeded to settle the business of the fund. Agreed that the next Association be held at Leicester; Brethren BLUNDELL and FULLER to preach. Put up at the Blue Bear, near to Southgate.~~

The Letter for the next year to be on *Hearing the word*. Brother ROBERT HALL to write it.

~~The Association was then concluded in prayer by the Moderator.~~

The brethren in this association were
 We are requested to remind our brethren of a resolution passed in 1809:—viz. "That in recommending cases of meeting-houses to be collected for among the churches, we judge it advisable, as ministers, *not to sign any case without being previously consulted as to the expediency of building, and satisfied as to the economy of the expenditure.*"

MINISTERS' MEETINGS.

NORTHAMPTON, Tuesday, October 5, 1813.

WALGRAVE, Wednesday, October 6.

KETERING, Wednesday, November 10.

ARNSBY and CLIPSTONE, in Easter week, 1814.

x State of the churches. Baptized 159, received by letter 16, restored 5. Died 39, dismissed 18, excluded 4. Clear increase 109.

State of the Churches since the last Association.

CHURCHES IN THE ASSOCIATION.	INCREASE.			DECREASE.			Total Number of Members.*	Number of Letters wanted.*
	Baptized.	By Letter.	Restored.	Dead.	Dismissed.	Excluded.		
Arnsby	8	1	—	3	1	1	99	36
Braunston	3	—	1	1	2	—	—	12
Braybrook	—	—	—	—	—	—	21	—
Bugbrook	—	—	—	—	—	—	25	—
Burton-upon-Trent, no letter ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clipstone	—	—	—	—	1	—	126	—
Collingham	5	2	—	4	—	—	73	30
Dunstable	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Fenny-Stratford	6	1	—	1	—	—	37	24
Foxton	—	1	—	1	—	—	24	—
Gretton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guildborough	5	3	—	3	1	—	—	—
Ivinghoe	12	—	—	—	—	—	38	24
Kettering	4	—	—	4	1	2	167	150
Leicester	16	2	—	—	2	2	169	72
Loscoe	—	—	1	—	—	1	43	36
Luton	20	—	—	7	2	1	—	36
Moulton	3	—	—	1	1	3	62	—
Newark	3	—	—	1	—	1	26	30
Northampton	10	4	—	4	2	1	196	—
Nottingham	6	—	2	1	—	1	—	96
Oakham	7	—	—	1	—	—	58	48
Olney	1	—	—	2	3	—	99	—
Road	8	—	—	1	2	—	90	42
Sheepshead	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	36
Spalding, no letter	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Albans	15	1	—	—	—	—	40	12
Sutton-Ashfield	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Sutton-in-the-Elms	4	—	—	1	—	1	—	36
Swanwick	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	48
Walgrave	5	2	—	1	—	—	—	18
	159	16	5	39	18	14		

INCREASE.		DECREASE.	
Baptized	159	Dead	39
Received by Letter	16	Dismissed	18
Restored	5	Excluded	14
	180		71

Clear Increase, 109.

* It is requested that every church will in future send its total number of members, and the quantity of *Circular Letters* wanted.