

Circular Letter of the Georgia Baptist Association

By Jesse Mercer

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[Note: while some minor spelling errors have been corrected, the original formatting and British spelling is true to the original.]

Beloved in the Lord,

You are expecting a word of advice and admonition from our annual meeting,—and we address you on subjects of a *practical nature*.

1st, *On Family Religion*. Since the kindly influence of the great revival has passed away, we fear many families neglect prayer, some in the morning, and others altogether. From this we infer, & the negligent know whether our inference is correct or not, that closet or secret devotions are also omitted. We need not expect the blessing of the Lord,—the manifest tokens of his presence, upon our public meetings, if we neglect family and closet religion. No doubt the cold lifelessness, the lamentable apathy apparent in our public assemblies, is to be ascribed to the fact that we have little or no religion at home; that our hearts are not attuned for the services of the Sanctuary by the devotions of the closet.

2nd, *Presumptuous confidence*. While we admit and maintain the doctrine of implicit confidence in God, and the certainty that those who believe “on Him shall not be confounded,” we would caution you against the abuse of this consoling sentiment. The kind of confidence which we would warn you not to entertain, is that, which the god of this world, endeavoured to inject into the mind of the blessed Saviour. This arch adversary of both God and man assured the obedient Redeemer, just after he had ascended the banks of the Jordan, that if he should cast himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, no danger need be apprehended, for the angels were commanded to guard Him. Jesus was unwilling presumptuously to expose himself, and has thus left an example for all his followers. Let each of them remember this prudent conduct in their Leader, when they are tempted towards the dram shop, and other drilling places of the devil, lest presuming on their security they pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

An old writer relates that a priest was called upon to dislodge an evil spirit from a possessed damsel; the spirit answered that he had found her at the theatre, in his own dominions—she was his lawful captive, and therefore denied the right of the priest to interfere. This trusting for safety in God while we needlessly expose ourselves to danger, is the ruin of thousands. Let us beware of it. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

3^d, *Attention to the rising race*. If God has directed us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, can we be guiltless in neglecting it? We cannot *save* their souls by means; nor can we make them rich by means; *but because we are not sure* that our exertions will accumulate vast wealth for them, do we therefore sit down in indolence or despair. No; if one expedient fail, we try another, and we continue until we descend to the grave. So let us thus act in the means of salvation. Let us bring every means in our power to bear upon their hearts—to arouse their slumbering consciences & win them back to God. We dear the duties to our children are sinfully and shamefully neglected by many of us.

4th, *Indifference to the use of means*. Because we are not constituted the *efficient* cause of the soul’s salvation, many of us draw the illogical inference, that we need not attempt anything in

order to save sinners;—and are as indifferent about the means of grace, as if God had not appointed any. But nothing is more clear than that the kingdom of grace is as much a kingdom of means, as the natural kingdom. Look at these texts: “In Christ Jesus *I have begotten you* through the Gospel.” “Thou shalt both *save thyself and them* that hear thee.” “Faith cometh by hearing.” Now if the means used by Paul & others were instrumental in producing regeneration and the exercise of faith; so we may expect that our endeavors will result in the same happy effects,—And yet how indifferent, how careless are we in regard to means.

Our best judgment should be called into requisition to devise the best means to promote the kingdom of Christ. “The liberal soul deviseth liberal things,” Isaiah 32:8, and God blessed the means: nor has he circumscribed the use of them. He has been pleased to mention ploughing and hoeing as the means of rearing a crop, but has not instructed us whether we should turn our horse about to the right or to the left,—nor which hand should govern the hoe: So as the world is the field of our labours, he has not confined us to the use of particular means, but bids us “occupy till I come” with all our talents and all our strength. Happy is the servant who when his Lord cometh shall find him doing so.

5th, *Punctuality in our contracts*: It is admitted, that to be in debt is *to be in the fashion*, and this fashion would not be the fruitful source of so many evils, if these debts were paid when due; but how many pitiful and unjustifiable excuses are made for want of punctuality by professing Christians! A man gives his bond to pay so much money on a given day—the day arrives—the bond is presented. What are the apologies? “I did not think you would want it.” “I have not sold my cotton” or “I expected the money weeks ago, and have not received it.” But what have all these pitiful evasions to do with your solemn obligations? Not a whit more than had Adam’s about eating the forbidden fruit. The violation of our promises and the dishonesty in these matters is truly a subject of lamentation.

But must I never ask for credit? This is not the question. Our exhortation is that you fulfill *your contracts*. We think there is a great deal too much credit in our day, and if necessary should drive you to it, and you perceive you cannot meet the demand when due, go to your creditor and obtain indulgence for further time. By this means you will save your character for honesty. But if he denies any longer credit, sell your property and pay him, for your reputation as a man and a Christian are at stake. It is better for you to sacrifice property than your Christian character.

6th. *Observance of the Sabbath*. We have been pained to see professing Christians violating it by *starting* on journeys, by traveling unless in extreme cases,—by permitting their children to fish, hunt and sport regardless of its sanctity. Talk as much as you please about the abrogation of the ancient economy,—where there is not much attention to the Sabbath, there is not much attention to religion. Recklessness of the one is generally the concomitant of recklessness of the other. While we admit that there are some professing Christians, who that keeping the Sabbath constitute the very essence of piety,—we maintain that he who makes no difference between it and other days, is far from the true faith. No nation has ever advanced in knowledge and true religion where the claims which God makes on his creatures to devote a portion of time specially to his service, have been disregarded.

Lastly, We would caution you to watch with keen-sighted vigilance any encroachments which may be attempted upon your independence and sovereignty. We, the Association, are but men and may unwittingly infringe upon your internal rights and try to lord it over your consciences: if we do, boldly yet respectfully inform us and remonstrate against the first step. By so far as *spiritual things* exceed in value *temporal things*, in so far are the *rights of conscience* more important to be guarded than *civil rights*. If as citizens, you would set at naught judicial authority, which had transcended the constitution of your country; much more will you disregard any acts of ours, violating the principles on which you agreed to associate. Ecclesiastical tyranny is of all others the most intolerable. Industry may recover the property which unconstitutional laws have filched from us; but nothing can contribute an equivalent for conscientious rights which have been trampled on and torn away by lawless power.

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