

The Doctrines of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect

by John Gill

The sermon explores the doctrines of God's everlasting love and the eternal union of believers with Christ, emphasizing their significance and practical implications for Christian living.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:3, Romans 8:35, Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "God's Love", "Eternal Union with Christ"

Description

John Gill expounds on the doctrines of God's everlasting love towards His elect and their eternal union with Christ, emphasizing that this union is not contingent upon human faith or actions but is rooted in God's sovereign grace and eternal purpose. He defends the idea that believers are united to Christ from eternity, and that this union is the foundation for their salvation and sanctification. Gill critiques the notion that sin can harm a believer's standing before God, arguing instead that God's love remains constant and unchanging, regardless of the believer's state. He asserts that the love of God is the ultimate bond that secures the believer's relationship with Christ, and that this love is evident even while they are in a state of nature. The sermon ultimately highlights the security and assurance found in God's everlasting love and the implications it has for the believer's life.

Transcript

THE DOCTRINES OF
GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE
TO HIS ELECT, AND THEIR
ETERNAL UNION WITH CHRIST:
TOGETHER WITH SOME OTHER TRUTHS,
STATED AND DEFENDED,

In a Letter to Dr. Abraham Taylor.

S I R,

Having had the happiness of hearing, and since of reading, your two Discourses, Of the Insufficiency of Natural Religion (See Lime Street Lecture, ed.); I cannot but express a satisfaction with your method of treating the argument; nor would you have heard from me in this public manner, had you not, in your performance, fallen foul on some of your friends, whilst you was engaging with the common adversary. When I heard your first discourse on this subject, I observed a paragraph which gave me some uneasiness.

I determined to take notice of it to you, as I had opportunity and knowing I should be present when you condescended to submit your discourses to the correction of some friends, I purposed humbly to offer some reasons for either dropping or altering the paragraph; but, to my great satisfaction, I found myself under no necessity of doing it. The passage I refer to being omitted in reading, I concluded from hence, that upon a revisal of your discourses, you had seen reason in your own mind to strike it out but, since reading your sermons, now made public, I find it stands, and, if I mistake not, with some additional keenness and severity: your reason for this you best know.

Your words are these (A Defence of some important Doctrines of the Gospel, by several Ministers, Vol. I, p.48). "It has been said, that during the times of our civil commotions, there was little preached up but faith in Christ; and that the duties of morality were little insisted on: it is certain that some ignorant enthusiastic preachers insisted then much on eternal union with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm; but all wise and thoughtful men abhorred such immoral conceits."

What I have to complain of in this passage, is as follows: I. The lameness and impertinence of it. You observe, "It has been said, that during the times of our civil commotions, there was little preached up but faith in Christ, and that the duties of morality were little insisted on." One would have expected that you would have given an answer to this charge, and it looks as if you had designed it, by your making mention of it, but you neither grant nor deny it; and, instead of doing either, as you ought to have done, you put off the objection, by saying, "that some ignorant enthusiastic preachers insisted then much on eternal union with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm."

Things which are not in the charge, and no way to your purpose to make mention of. Without taking upon me to be a dictator to you, you might have with truth allowed, that during those times, faith in Christ was very much preached up, though not to the exclusion of moral duties; and, with a great deal of justness, you might have observed, that the power of godliness very much prevailed; that the duties of religion were much practiced; that the Lord's day was strictly and religiously observed; that social worship was attended on constantly; that family and closet-devotion were kept up with much strictness; and that morality, in all its branches, was in a very flourishing condition in those times, when faith in Christ was so much insisted on.

This I am very sensible you are capable of observing; but you chose rather to fling at the doctrine of eternal union with Christ, and to introduce that in an awkward way, and by joining it with a disagreeable notion of sin's doing a believer no harm, to draw an odium upon some good men in those times, whom you call "ignorant enthusiastic preachers," and through them to strike at some who are now in being. II. It does not appeal to me matter of fact, that in those times eternal union with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm, were much insisted on, as you say.

I know not, indeed, what acquaintance you may have with the pulpit performances of those times. For my own part I can only judge of their preaching by what they have printed; and, I presume, that if these doctrines are any where to be met with, they are to be found in the writings of such, who, in those times,

were branded for Antinomians; such as Eaton, Saltmarsh, Simpson, Town, Richardson, and Crisp; whose writings I have carefully perused, and find no reason to conclude that those doctrines were much insisted on, as you say.

By reading the works of these authors, I have been confirmed in the truth of an observation made some years ago, by the learned Hoornbeeck: "For I perceive, says he, while heads of doctrine are made up by the adversaries, rather than the authors themselves, out of their dissertations, books, and sermons, that sometimes their sense is not sufficiently taken, nor happily expressed; and that both here and there a great deal, indeed, is said, but not much to the purpose; and that they either do not understand, or mistake the thing in dispute."

As to the doctrine of eternal union with Christ, however consistent it may be with some principles of theirs, I do not perceive that they take any notice of it; and some of them seem to have no notion of it, but tread in the common beaten path of union by the Spirit of Christ, and faith in Christ. Eaton, in his Honey-Comb of Free Justification, has these words (Chp. 15. Pp.437-38): "Christ will have no foul leprous members united and made one with him; and therefore he first washeth us in his own blood, and makes us clean from all our sins, and then knits and unites us as fit members into his ownself."

The order also and natural dependence of these benefits (that is, justification and union) upon one another, confirm the same; for we cannot be knit into Christ before we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us: the Holy Ghost comes not to dwell in us before we be reconciled to God; and we are not reconciled to God before we have all our sins abolished out of God's sight, but when all our sins are abolished, and we made perfectly holy and righteous, from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, then the Holy Ghost comes and dwells in us, and knits and unites us, as fit members, into the blessed body of Jesus Christ; then we are, by the wedding garment alone of Christ's righteousness, made, above our sense and feeling, fit brides for so glorious a Bridegroom."

And in another place, he has these words (p. 443): "This union and conjunction then is the cause that I am separated from myself, and translated into Christ and his kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and glory; yea, by this inseparable union and conjunction, which is through faith, Christ and I are made, as it were, one body in spirit." Simpson, another of those men who were called Antinomians in those times, expresses himself on the subject of union after this manner, when he is speaking of the use of faith in justification (Sermon III on Eph. 2:8, 9; p. 116): "So that by faith, says he, though we are assured of God's love in the first place, yet we are not only assured, but likewise Christ is applied unto us; we are united unto him, and do enjoy all things in him, and receive all good things from him."

And in another place (Ibid. p. 129); "A believing man is bone of the bone, and flesh of the flesh, and one spirit with the Lord Jesus: there is a close and near union and application of Christ to the soul by faith." Saltmarsh says nothing in what I have seen of his, concerning eternal union; and what he says of union itself, is not very intelligible; yet it seems as though he had no other notion of being in Christ, or of being united to Christ, but by faith. He observes (Free Grace, or the Flowings of Christ's Blood Freely to Sinners, p. 66-7); "That the pure spiritual and mystical fountain of the mortification of sin, is the being planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, our old man being crucified with him (Rom. 6:6). 6."

Our union with Christ our Head, our Righteousness, our Vine." And, a little after, he has these words: "Now that power wherein we are perfectly mortified, is our union with Christ, our being planted in the

fellowship of his death, &c. and that wherein we are imperfectly, or in part mortified, is in that transformed nature, or spiritual nature, the body of sin being in a believer, more or less, till he lay down this body and take it up a more glorious one; so as a believer is to consider himself dead to sin, only in the fellowship of Christ's death mystically, and to consider himself only dying to sin in his own nature spiritually: so as in Christ he is only complete, and in himself imperfect at the best.

We are complete in him, saith the apostle (Col. 2:10), yet there is such a power and efficacy, and mighty working in this mystical union and fellowship with Christ, that he shall find sin dying in him from this, the Spirit working most in the virtue of this." And in another place, he says (Ibid. p. 141); "A believer hath a twofold condition, in Christ, in himself; yet he ought ever to consider himself in Christ by faith, not in himself." And elsewhere he observes (Ibid. p. 156-7): "The word says, that we are complete in Christ, and righteous in Christ; but when I repent, or love, or obey, I believe, I am in Christ; and therefore my love, and repentance, and obedience, is such as I may believe, though not in themselves, yet in him to be good and spiritual."

Town, another writer of those times, who was much charged with Antinomianism, says nothing of eternal union, but has many expressions in his writings, which shew that he had no other notion of union, but by the Spirit of God, and by the grace of faith, in one of his books he has these words (The Assertion of Grace, p. 4): "The righteousness of faith unites them, that is, the saints, to Christ, their Lord, head and Governor, that so henceforth they may be led by his free Spirit and swayed by the scepter of his kingdom."

And in the same treatise, he asks (p. 74), Where doth the law speak a syllable of our conjunction and union with Christ through faith, whereby Christ and the believer become one body in spirit?" And in another place (p. 118); "By faith we being united and married to Christ, do by him bring forth fruits to God, even perfect obedience imputatively, and inchoative holiness through the operation of his Spirit, received by the ministry and doctrine of faith, and not of the law."

Though, in another passage in the same book (p. 11, 12), he makes the ordinance of water baptism to be the saints union with, and insition (grafting) into Christ. His words are these: "That ordinance, speaking of baptism, is a true, spiritual, and real engrafting of them into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), so that faith is but the revelation of what was secret and hid before, or an evident testimony, and lively and comfortable apprehension and application in the conscience of the person of what was conferred and made his before;" that is, if I understand him, in baptism.

In another of his books, he has these expressions (The Re-assertion of Grace, p. 12): "Let the poor sinful, miserable, and lost soul, first be united and married to him, in whom dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead, and in whom she is then complete, wanting nothing (Col. 2:9, 10), then tell of duties." Again (Ibid. p. 20), "If you do truly good works, you do them in Christ, abiding in him (John 15:4), in whom you are alive, and walk continually by faith.--Now the soul cannot walk in Christ, nor have union with him, save by faith."

Once more (Ibid. p. 105), "Can man's nature be changed, says he, till he be united and engrafted into Christ, the true Vine? And doth not virtue come by that insition and union?" And in some pages after (Ibid. p.126), "It is by the Spirit that the soul cometh to union with Christ." And, in another of his treatises (Monomachia; or a single Reply to Mr. Rutherford, &c. p. 37), he has these words "Faith cometh by hearing, and after faith comes actual union." The only writers, in the times referred to, that I have met with, who assert even union before faith, are Richardson (Answer to Dr.

Homes, p. 111-12), and Crisp (Christ Alone Exalted, Vol. I, Sermon VII, p. 104, Vol. III, Sermon VII, p. 597, 599, 600; Sermon VIII p. 609, 614-617), who yet speak not a word of eternal union; neither do they, or the writers above-mentioned, professedly treat of the doctrine of union in any sense, but only take notice of it as it falls in their way. I read their books with greedy expectation of frequently meeting with the doctrine of eternal union, in hopes of finding arguments for the confirmation of it, and of receiving more light into it, which I believe to be an eternal truth.

Eternal union was so far from being a subject much insisted on in those times, as you say, that I do not find it was insisted on at all. As to the notion of sin's doing a believer no harm, Eaton, Saltmarsh, Simpson, and Town, say nothing of it; nor have they any thing like it, that I have met with, in their writings; and I could easily fill up whole pages with passages out of them in which they express their abhorrence and detestation of sin, and their great regard to a holy life and conversation.

Richardson and Crisp are the only writers, in those times, that I have observed to make use of any expressions of this kind. As for Richardson, he has but one single passage which looks any thing like this notion, that sin does a believer no harm; which is this (Justification by Christ Alone, p. 21): "If all things work together for our good, then, says he, all falls, pains, diseases, crosses, afflictions, &c. do us no hurt, but work for our good; all things work for our good (Rom. 8:28)."

And yet this is no more than what many sound divines have said, who never were charged with Antinomianism; when they assert, that all things, even the sins of God's people, are overruled by a kind and good Providence for their good, as their afflictions and crosses are; and by falls into sin doing no hurt, he means the hurt of punishment, as is evident from the whole of his reasoning and argument in that place. He clearly hints, in many places, at the hurt that comes by sin, with respect to a believer's peace and comfort, the damage it does to others, and the dishonor it brings to God; "Be afraid to sin, says he (Counsels, p. 98), and use means to prevent it; consider God hath forbidden it (Rom. 6).

Consider sin in the nature of it, in the root and fruit of it: it is the price of blood; there is no true sweetness in sin, no contentment no satisfaction in it, why you should desire it? it fills the soul with wounds, sorrow, bitterness, shame; let experience speak." And, in another place, he says (Counsels, p. 150-51): "We should be afraid to sin, 1. because it is forbidden by God. 2. It is dishonorable to him. 3. It encourageth others to sin. 4. It will fill our souls with sorrow to sin against so loving a Father and to dishonor him, &c.

Having sinned, if but in the least measure, we should be so fain from covering it with any pretence or excuse, that we should abhor it, and ourselves for it, with the greatest detestation?" And elsewhere he says (Divine Consolations, p. 245); "Be sure ye allow yourself in no sin, but in the strength of God hate and abhor, with the greatest indignation, all sin, and the appearance of it; it is better to die than to sin. There is that which accompanieth sin, which strikes at a believer's peace and comfort; it will damp, straiten, and oppress the soul; it will hinder their comfort, joy, and peace in God, unless God doth wonderfully strengthen their faith in him; we find by experience, that sin is a lett to our faith and comfort, it having often unsettled and disquieted us in our peace and comfort, though we ought not to be so."

Crisp is the only writer that expresses himself freely and largely on this subject:, and with the least guard (Christ Alone Exalted, Vol. I. Sermon X, p. 157; Vol. III. Sermon I, p. 509-14; Sermon II, p. 528-29; Sermon III, p. 46, &c.); and yet when he says, that "believers need not be afraid of their sins, his meaning is not, that they need not be afraid of sins committed, as Hoornbeeck, Witsius, and Chauncy, have justly observed; and when he says, that "the sins of believers can do them no hurt: by hurt he means, the hurt of

punishment, penal evil, or the penal effects of sin which believers are freed from, and therefore shall never enter into a state of condemnation, Christ having bore their sins, and made satisfaction to justice for them; but then he speaks of sin, in its own nature, as odious and dreadful to believer's, and of bitterness and evil, as the certain fruits of it.

The Doctor, I verily believe, used these expressions in a sound sense, and with a good design; not to encourage persons in sin, but to relieve and comfort the minds of believers, distressed with sin; yet, I must confess, I do not like the expressions, but am of opinion they ought to be disused. And now surely, Sir, this single author's using of this expression, and that not in the gross and vile sense of it, cannot be sufficient to bear you out, in saying, that sin s doing a believer no harm, was much insisted on in those times: I can hardly think you have any reference to Archer's book, called Comfort for Believers about their Sin and Troubles; in which the author exhorts believers not to be oppressed and perplexed for their sins: though he acknowledges that godly sorrow and true shame become them, and says, that till they have it, God will not own them.

He asserts in so many words, "that we may safely say, that God is, and hath an hand in, and is the author of the sinfulness of his people." (Horresco referens!) and what is enough to make one shudder at the reading of, he says, that "all the sins which believers are left to, they are through and because of the covenant of grace left to them; and the covenant implies a dispensation of sinning to them, as well as other things." And adds, "By sins are they as much nurtured and fitted for heaven, as by any thing else."

All which is blasphemous, vile and abominable; and for which if I mistake not, the book was ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. I say, I can hardly think you can have reference to this author; for though he asserts this notion in the grossest sense, and in the vilest manner, yet it unhappily falls out for you, that this man was not for eternal union, but for union by faith; he frequently observes, that faith immediately unites to Christ, and is the bond of union to him, and what brings the Holy Ghost into the soul.

If you had this author and his book in your eye, you should rather have said, that "union by faith, and sin's doing a believer no harm, were much insisted on in those times." But, III. What I have further to complain of, is your joining the harmless doctrine of eternal union with that hurtful one, as it may be taken, of sin's doing a believer no harm. You could have no other view, than to bring the doctrine of eternal union into disgrace, and an odium upon the asserters of it, as if there was a strict connection between these two, and as if those who espoused the one, held the other.

The notion of sin's doing a believer no harm, was never a received tenet of any body or society of Christians among us; no, not even those who have been called Antinomians. It is not the sentiment of those who are branded with the name in this day. I am well informed, that some churches, who are despised as Antinomian, have cast some out of their communion, for holding this notion in the gross sense of it. I wish some churches, that reckon themselves more orthodox, would shew a like zeal against ,Arianism, and in the behalf of Christ's proper Deity.

There are, indeed, I hear, a scattered scandalous set of persons in the Fen Country, the disciples of one David Culey, who was cut off from a church in Northamptonshire, and was infamous for his blasphemy and scandalous life, who have imbibed this notion, and live answerably to it, but are disregarded by all persons of seriousness and sobriety. It was not a general received notion of those who are called Antinomians, a little before or during the time of our civil commotions.

Dr. Crisp is the only person that speaks it out, and yet not in the gross sense of it, as has been observed. All that their adversaries have said of them, is not to be relied on; such unworthy writers as Edwards and Paget, I give no credit to. Mr. Crandon speaks of some Antinomians in Somersetshire, with whom he was acquainted, and he gives us a catalogue of their sentiments; but nothing like this is taken notice of by him: nay, it does not appear that the Antinomians in Germany, the follower of Islebius Agricola, from Luther's account of them, held any such notion.

Sledian, in his Commentaries, takes notice of them, and of their tenets. His short account of them is this: "This year, that is, 1538, sprung up the sect of them who are called Antinomians; they say, that repentance is not to be taught out of the decalogue, and oppose those who teach, that the gospel is not to be preached, but those whose hearts are first shaken and broken by the preaching of the law: they also assert, that whatever a man's life may be, and how impure soever, yet is he justified, if he only believes the promises of the gospel."

This last assertion of theirs is somewhat ambiguous, and may seem to favor this notion, of sin's doing a believer no harm, as this author has delivered it: if his meaning is that they held that a man may be justified by faith in the gospel-promise, without sanctification; or though he allows himself in a continued impurity of life, this is a contradiction to the grace of God; but if his meaning is that they held that a man may be truly justified by faith in Christ, though his former life has been never so impure; this is a truth of the gospel, and gives no countenance to this doctrine.

Of all that I have met with, none more roundly assert it than Eunomius, and his followers, who lived in the fourth century. "It is reported of this man, that he was such an enemy to good manners, that he should assert that the commission of any sin whatever, and a continuance therein, could not hurt any one, if he was but a partaker of that faith which was taught by him." This man was a disciple of Aetius, whose followers were called from him Aetians; of whom Epiphanius writes, that they were unconcerned about holiness of life, or any of the commands of God, and spoke very slightly of sin.

Iræneus has a passage concerning the Valentinians, which comes up to this notion; it is this: "As that which is earthly cannot partake of salvation, for they say it is incapable of it; so again, that which is spiritual, by which they mean themselves, cannot receive corruption, by whatsoever actions they may be concerned in. Just as gold being put into dirt, does not lose its beauty, but retains its nature, nor can it receive any hurt from the dirt: so they say, that they may be concerned in some material actions, and not be at all hurt, or lose the spiritual substance: hence the most perfect of them do all those things which are forbidden, without any manner of fear."

And then instances eating things sacrificed to idols, attending on the worship of the heathens, frequenting the theatres, and indulging themselves in all fleshly lusts. The Gnostics, Carpocratians, Saturninians, Basilidians, with many others, embraced such-like impure notions: which, it is probable, they received from Simon Magus, the Father of heresies, who allowed those who believed in him and his Helena, to live as they list! These things I take notice of, to shew by whom this tenet has and has not been received; and, to support the justness of my complaint against you, in joining the doctrine of eternal union with it, when they never went together, as I can learn, or were ever received by the same persons.

IV. I observe that you call the doctrine of eternal union, as well as that of sin's doing a believer no harm, an immoral conceit. I do not well know what you mean by an immoral conceit; every imagination of the thoughts of the heart being only evil, is an immoral conceit; all sinful lusts in the mind are so: When lust

hath conceived, it bringeth forth, sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (Jam. 1:15). An immoral conceit, properly speaking, I apprehend, is the first motion, thought, and imagination of sin rising up in the mind; how this is applicable to the doctrine of eternal union, I see not: but, I suppose, your meaning is, that the doctrine of eternal union is a conceit and fiction of some men's brains, which has a tendency to promote immorality, and encourage persons in it.

That it is no conceit, which has its foundation only in the fancy and imagination of some men, but a truth contained in the sacred scriptures, I hope to make appear. Was it a mere conceit, why you should reckon it an immoral one, I know not; if it is a conceit, it is an harmless one; nor can it be reasonably thought to have a tendency to promote immorality and profaneness any more than the doctrine of eternal election has, by which the holiness of God's people is infallibly secured unto them; for God has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

Now how persons can be in Christ, chosen in him, and yet not united to him, or how there can be an eternal election of persons in Christ, and yet no eternal union of them to him, is what I do not understand; and as eternal election secures the holiness of the saints, so does eternal union. It is because Christ has loved them with an everlasting love, and by loving them, has united them to himself, and become the Head of them, and one with them, therefore he has given himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14); and does also send down his Spirit into their hearts, to renew and sanctify them; to implant grace in them, to enable them to perform good works, in which he has before ordained that they should walk, and to hold on in faith and holiness to the end.

Redemption from sin, the sanctification of our hearts, all the good works done in faith, and perseverance in grace to the end, are the fruits and effects of eternal union to Christ. In what sense then it is an immoral conceit, or how it tends to promote immorality, you would do well to tell us, or acknowledge that you have abused it. V. You call the persons who, you say, insisted much on eternal union, "ignorant, enthusiastic preachers." One would have thought you might have spared this severe reflection, for the sake of some, who have asserted an eternal union, that are above your contempt, and very far from any just charge of ignorance and enthusiasm.

Dr. Goodwin. speaks of an election-union, a virtual and representative one, which the elect have in Christ before the foundation of the world (Vol. I. Part I, p. 62): "As in the womb, says he, head and members are not conceived apart, but together, as having relation to each other; so were we and Christ (as making up one mystical body unto God) formed together in the eternal womb of election." Again (Vol. I. Part I, p. 64), "Were you so chosen in Christ, as that God never purposed you a being but in Christ, and then gave you this subsistence in Christ, never casting a thought upon you out of him; then reckon of no other being but what you have in Christ.

Reckon not of what you have in honour, or what you are in greatness or parts; but reckon of what you were in him, before this world was, and of all the spiritual blessings wherewith he then blessed you; and likewise of what you are now in him, by an actual union, as then by a virtual and representative one." And in another place (Ibid. Part II, p. 215), "We were one with Christ before the world was: there is one way of union then; Jesus Christ in the human nature cometh down and represents us, doth what we have to do; here is now another way of union; Why?

This is the reason; for we were one with Christ, by his undertaking for us only from everlasting; but we were one with him, by an active representation, when below on earth." And elsewhere he says (Ibid. Part III, p. 40): "There is a threefold union with Christ; the first is relative, whereby we are said to be his, and he ours; as you know he is called our husband, and the church is called his wife; and before husband and wife company together there is such a relation made by marriage; and the husband may be in one place, and the wife in another, so that there can be no communion between them and yet be man and wife; so is the union between Christ and you as complete in the relation, before he acts any thing upon you, though he be in heaven, and you on earth, as if you were in heaven with him."

And so in another part of his works (Vol. III. Book V, Chp. 20, p. 347); he makes union to Christ to be before the Spirit, or faith, or any grace is given: His words are these: "Union with Christ is the first fundamental thing of justification, and sanctification, and all: Christ first takes us, and then sends his Spirit; he apprehends us first; it is not my being regenerate that puts me into a right of all those privileges; but it is Christ takes me, and then gives me his Spirit, faith, holiness, &c.

It is through our union with Christ, and the perfect holiness of his nature, to whom we are united, that we partake of the privileges of the covenant of grace." Witsius says, the elect "are united to Christ,--1. In the eternal decree of God.--2. By the union of the eternal compact, in which Christ was constituted, by the Father, the Head of all those who are to be saved.--3. By a true and real union, but what on their part is only passive, they are united to Christ when the Spirit of Christ first lays hold on them, and infuses a principle of new life;" And a little after adds; "Moreover, since faith is an act flowing from a principle of spiritual life, it is plain, that it may be said in a sound sense, that an elect man may be truly and really united to Christ before actual faith."

It is evident, that he allows not only an union to Christ in God's eternal purpose, but a federal union with him from eternity, as the Head of the elect. Now for the sake of these men and others that might be named, you might have forbore the heavy charge of ignorance and enthusiasm; and if not for the sake of them, yet surely for the sake of your own Father, who asserts an eternal representative union of the elect with Christ, and that in a book of which you yourself was the editor (Mr.

Richard Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Justification, pp. 14, 15). His words are these "It must, indeed be granted, that God, from eternity, decreed to justify elect sinners through Christ: and that as none but they are ever justified, so all that were decreed for justification are certainly justified. It must also be granted, that God, from eternity, entered into a covenant of grace with Christ, as the Head of elect sinners; wherein Christ as their surety, undertook for their justification.--It must likewise be granted, that there was a gift of all grace made to Christ for elect sinners, as he was their Head and Surety from eternity (2 Tim. 1:9).

It must be farther granted, that all elect sinners had a representative union with Christ from eternity. When Christ was chose as their Head, they were chose together with him, as his members." In another page (Ibid. p. 19), he says: "Believers may, with the greatest delight and comfort, take a survey of their justification, in the different gradations, or progressive steps of it. God decreed their justification, and they had a representative union with Christ, as their Head and Surety, from eternity.

This lays such a sure foundation for their justification, as cannot be overturned by the joint power of men and devils: they had a legal union with Christ, and were federally justified in him when he rose from the dead. This gave them a fundamental right to justification: they are actually united to Christ when they believe, and are then actually justified." You see that all wise and thoughtful men do not abhor eternal

union as an immoral conceit: if you say that these men plead for a real and actual union by faith, you cannot deny that they also assert an union before faith, yea, an eternal union in some sense; whereas you have reproached it, as an immoral conceit, and the preachers of it, as ignorant and enthusiastic, without any exception or explanation.

You would do well to explain your sense, and clear yourself. For my own part, I should not greatly care to be reckoned ignorant, and especially enthusiastic, and yet think I may, in a safe and sound sense, insist upon the doctrine of eternal union. And now, Sir, if it would not be thought tedious, I would freely give you my sentiments concerning the doctrine of union. I am persuaded we shall not differ about the persons who are united to Christ, that these are God's elect, and they only; nor about the nature of the union itself, that it is an union of the whole persons, souls and bodies, of God's people to the whole person of Christ; though it is not a personal union, that is, such an one as the union of the divine and human natures in Christ; that it is real, solid, substantial, and not imaginary; that it is complete and perfect, and not gradual, or brought about by degrees, but finished at once, as our justification is; that it is exceeding close and near, and indissoluble, of which there can be no separation.

What we are most likely to differ about, is, when God's elect are united to Christ, and what is the bond of their union to him. It is generally said that they are not united to Christ until they believe, and that the bond of union is the Spirit on Christ's part, and faith on ours. I am ready to think that these phrases are taken up by divines, one from another, without a thorough consideration of them. It is well, indeed, that Christ is allowed any part or share in effecting our union with him; though one should think the whole of it ought to be ascribed to him, since it is such an instance of surprising love and grace, than which there cannot well be thought to be a greater.

Why must this union be pieced up with faith on our part? This smells so prodigious rank of self, that one may justly suspect that something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it. I shall therefore undertake to prove, that the bond of union of God's elect to Christ, is neither the Spirit on Christ's part, nor faith on their part. 1. It is not the Spirit on Christ's part. The mission of the Spirit into the hearts of God's elect, to regenerate, quicken, and sanctify them, to apply the blessings of grace to them, and seal them up to the day of redemption, and the bestowing of his several gifts and graces upon them, are in consequence, and by virtue of a previous and antecedent union of them to the Person of Christ.

They do not first receive the Spirit of Christ, and then by the Spirit are united to him; but they are first united to him, and, by virtue of this union, receive the Spirit of him. To conceive otherwise, would be as preposterous as to imagine, that the animal spirits, which have their seat in the head, should be communicated to, and diffused throughout the several parts of the body, without union to the head, or antecedent to an union, and in order to effect it; as this would be justly reckoned an absurdity in nature, so is the other no less an absurdity in grace.

A person is first joined, glued, closely united to Christ, and then becomes one Spirit with him; that is, receives, enjoys, and possesses in measure, the same Spirit as he does, as the members of an human body do participate of the same spirit the head does, to which they are united: he that is joined unto the Lord, is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The case is this; Christ, as the Mediator of the covenant, and Head of God's elect, received the Spirit without measure, that is, a fulness of the gifts and graces of the Spirit: These persons being united to Christ, as members to their Head, do, in his own time, receive the Spirit from him, though in measure.

They are first chosen in him, adopted through him, made one with him, become heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; and then, as the apostle says, Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6). Besides, the Spirit of God, in his personal inhabitation in the saints, in the operations of his grace on their hearts, and in the influences of his power and love on their souls, is the evidence, and not the bond of their union to God or Christ, and of their communion with them: For hereby we know, says the apostle John (1 John 3:24), that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

And in another place (1 John 4:13), Hereby know we, that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. There is, indeed, an union which the Spirit of God is the efficient cause of; but this is not an union, of God's elect to the Person of Christ, but an union of believers one with another in a church-state; which the apostle designs, when he says, For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

The bond of this union is peace and love; hence the saints are exhorted to walk with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2, 3). 2. Neither is faith the bond of union to Christ. Those who plead for union by faith, would do well to tell us whether we are united to Christ, by the habit or principle of faith implanted, or by the act of faith; and since there are different acts of faith, they should tell us by which our union is, and whether by the first, second, third, &c. acts of believing.

If we are united to Christ by the habit or principle of faith infused, then our union is not by faith on our part; because faith, as a principle or habit, is a gift of grace, of the operation of God, and which Christ is the author and finisher of. And if we are united to Christ by faith, as an act of ours, then we are united to Christ by a work, for faith, as an act of ours, is a work; and if by a work, then not by grace; for, if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work (Rom. 11:6).

I have often wondered that our divines should fix upon the grace of faith to be the bond of union to Christ, when there is nothing in it that is of a cementing and uniting nature: it is not a grace of union but of communion. Had they pitched upon the grace of love, as the bond of union, it would have appeared much more plausible; for love is of a knitting and uniting nature; it is the bond of friendship among men; it was this which knit the soul of Jonathan to the soul of David, so that he loved him as his own soul.

This is the bond of union of saints one with another: their hearts are knit together in love. Hence charity or love is called the bond of perfectness (Col. 2:2; 3:14). It was this which so closely joined and cemented the hearts of the first Christians one to another, insomuch that the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and of one soul (Acts 4:32). Had our divines, I say, fixed upon this grace, as the bond of union to Christ, it would have looked more feasible, and might perhaps, have been the means of leading them into the truth of the matter.

Some, indeed, tell us, that we are united to Christ by faith and love; but then they do not consider love as a part of the bond of union, but only as an evidence of that faith by which we are united; or their meaning is, that that faith by which we are united to Christ, is a faith that works by love. Dr. Jacomb (On Rom. 8:1) indeed, having treated of a mystical union between Christ and his people, the bond of which he makes to be the Spirit on Christ's part, and faith on theirs, and of a legal union between Christ and believers, the

ground of which is Christ's suretyship, speaks of a moral union between them, the bond of which is love, even "a mutual, reciprocal, hearty love between Christ and believers; he loves them, and they love him, and by virtue of this mutual love, there is a real and close union betwixt them."

And besides him, the learned Alsted is the only divine I have met with, who makes the bond of union to be the mutual love of Christ and his people. "This union, says he, is the mutual love of Christ and believers, or a mutual obligation of Christ and believers, to love one another." Now though there is something of truth in this, yet it is not the naked, pure, and unmixed truth of the matter; for it is not our love to Christ, but his love to us, which is alone the real bond of our union to him; he loves his people, and by loving them, unites them to himself: and this is the ground and foundation of all their communion and fellowship with him, both in grace and glory.

Faith is no uniting grace, nor are any of its acts of a cementing nature. Faith indeed, looks to Christ, lays hold on him, embraces him, and cleaves unto him; it expects and receives all from Christ, and gives him all the glory; but then hereby a soul can no more be said to be united to Christ, than a beggar may be said to be united to a person to whom he applies, of whom he expects alms, to whom he keeps close, from whom he receives, and to whom he is thankful. Faith is a grace of communion, by which Christ dwells in the hearts of his people, which is an act (of) fellowship, as a fruit of union, by which believers live on Christ, receive of his fulness, grace for grace, and walk on in him as they have received him.

Union to Christ is the foundation of faith, and of all the acts of believing, as seeing, walking, receiving, &c. A man may as well be said to see, walk, and receive without his head, or without union to it, as one can be said to believe, that is, to see, walk, and receive in a spiritual sense, without the head, Christ; or as an antecedent to union to him, or, in order to it. To talk of faith in Christ before union to Christ, is a most preposterous, absurd, and irrational notion.

Faith is the fruit and effect of union, even of what is commonly called vital union. Faith stands much in the same place in things spiritual, as reason does in things natural. There must first be an union of the soul and body of man, before he can be said to live; and there must be life in him before there can be reason, or the exercise of it; man must first become a living soul, before he can be a reasonable one; so there must be an union of the soul to Christ before it can spiritually live; and there must be a principle of spiritual life before there can be any faith, or the exercise of it.

Now as reason and the exercise of it, is a second remove from the union of the soul and body; so is faith, and the exercise of it, a second remove from person's union to Christ. There must be first a vital union to Christ, before there can be any believing in him. This is fitly and fully exemplified in the simile of the vine and branches, which Christ makes use of to express the union of his people to him: Abide in me, and I in you, says he (John 15:4, 5), as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.

Now faith is a fruit of the Spirit, which grows upon the branches, that are in Christ the Vine; but then these branches must first be in the vine, before they bear this fruit; for the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit (Prov. 12:12). The branches of the wild olive tree must first be engrafted into the good olive tree, become one with it, and so partake of the root and fatness of it, before they can bring forth good fruit. Could there be the fruit of faith in Christ's people before their union to him, then the branches would bear fruit without the vine, without being in it, or united to it, contrary to our Lord's express words.

From the whole, it may safely be concluded, that union to Christ is before faith, and therefore faith cannot be the bond of union; no, not on our part. Vital union is before faith. There always was a fulness of life laid up and reserved for all those who were chosen in Christ; there was always life in Christ the Head for all his members, which he, when it pleases him, in regeneration, communicates to them, and implants in them, though there is no activity or exercise of this life until they believe.

The everlasting love of God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, is the bond of the elect's union to the sacred Three. What may he said of the three divine Persons in general, is true of each of them in particular. They have all three loved the elect with an everlasting love, and thereby have firmly and everlastingly united them to themselves. Christ has loved them with an everlasting and unchangeable love, whereby his heart is knit unto them as Jonathan's was to David. He loved them as his own soul, as his own body, and the members of it.

This is that cement which will never loosen, that union knot which can never be untied, that bond which can never be dissolved, from whence there can be no separation; for who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded, says the apostle (Rom. 8:35, 38, 39), that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are several unions which arise from or are branches of this everlasting love-union, which are all antecedent to our faith in Christ. 1. There is an election-union in Christ from everlasting: God hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). This is an act and instance of everlasting love, by which the persons chosen are considered in Christ, and one with him. Christ was chosen as an head, his people as members with him. Nothing is more commonly said by those who are esteemed sound divines, than this: Now how Christ can be considered as an head, and the elect as members of him in this eternal act of election, without union to him, is hard to conceive.

Arminius and his followers, the Remonstrants, have frequently urged the text now mentioned in favor of election from faith foreseen, and their argument upon it is this: "None are chosen to salvation but in Christ; none are in Christ but believers, who are engrafted into Christ, and united to him by faith, therefore none are chosen to salvation, but those who are believers in sin Christ, are engrafted into him, and united with him." For they had no other notion of being in Christ, but by faith; like some others, who yet would be thought to be far from being in their scheme.

But then, among other replies, they have been told by the Anti-Remonstrants, "That it is certain that we are chosen and regarded in Christ before we were believers; which is fully proved from several places of scripture, which plainly make it appear, that the elect have some existence in Christ, even before they believe; for unless there had been some kind of union between Christ and the members, Christ would not have been their head, nor could he have satisfied for them." 2.

There is a legal union between Christ and the elect from everlasting: they are one in a law-sense, as surety and debtor are one; the bond of this union is Christ's suretyship, which is from everlasting, and in which Christ engaged, as a proof of his strong love and affections to his people. He is the surety of the better Testament, the egioV, that drew near to God the Father in the name of the elect, substituted himself in their place and stead, and laid himself under obligation to pay their debts, satisfy for their sins, and procure for them all the blessings of grace and glory.

This being accepted of by God, Christ and the elect were looked upon, in the eye of the law, as one person, even as the bondsman and the debtor, among men, are one, in a legal sense; so that if one pays the debt, it is the same as if the other did it. This legal union arising from Christ's suretyship-engagements, is the foundation of the imputation of our sins to Christ, and of his satisfaction for them, and also of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, and of our justification by it.

Christ and his people being one, in a law-sense, their sins become his, and his righteousness becomes theirs. 3. There is a federal union between Christ and the elect from everlasting. As they were considered as one, he as head, and they as members, in election; they are likewise considered after the same manner in the covenant of grace. Christ has a very great concern in the covenant; he is given for a covenant to the people; he is the Mediator, Surety, and Messenger of it.

It is made with him, not as a single person, but as a common head, representing all the elect, who are given to him, in a federal way, as his seed and posterity. What he promised in the covenant, he promised for them, and on their account; and what he received, he received for them, and on their account. Hence grace is said to be given to them in him before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9); and they are said to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). 4.

There is a natural union between Christ and his people; for both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one; that is, of one nature; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11). This is an union in time, but is the effect of Christ's love before time; Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same (Heb. 2:14). The nature he assumed is the same with that of all mankind, but was taken to him with a peculiar regard to the elect, the children, the spiritual seed of Abraham, who are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Now this natural union, which is the fruit of Christ's everlasting love, is antecedent to the faith of New Testament saints. 5. It is sufficiently evident, that there is a representative union between Christ and the elect, both from everlasting and in time, which is independent on, and prior to their believing in him. He represented them as their head in election, and in the covenant of grace, as has been already observed; and so he did, when upon the cross, and in the grave, when he rose from the dead, entered into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Hence they are said to be crucified with him, dead with him, buried with him, risen with him, yea, to be made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Now all these several unions take their rise from, and have their foundation in, the everlasting love of Christ to his people; which is the grand original, strong and firm bond of union between him and them, and is the spring of all that fellowship and communion they have with him in time, and shall have to all eternity.

It is from hence that the Spirit of God is sent down into our hearts to regenerate and renew us, and faith is wrought in our souls by the Spirit. Faith does not give us a being in Christ, or unite us to him; it is the fruit, effect, and evidence of our being in Christ and union to him. It is true, indeed, that God's elect do not know their being in Christ and union to him, until they believe; then what was before secret is made manifest; and because things are sometimes said to be, when they are only manifested to be, hence the people of Christ are said to be in Christ, when they are made new creatures; if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

Being a new creature, does not put a man into Christ, but is the evidence of his being there; and without which he neither knows, nor ought he to profess himself to be in Christ: And so likewise, in another place, it is said, If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his (Rom. 8:9). He may be one of his chosen and redeemed ones, though he has not the Spirit of Christ as yet; but he cannot know this until he has the Spirit of Christ; for no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, that is, his Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:3).

The apostle Paul takes notice of some that were in Christ before him (Rom. 16:7); all God's elect were chosen together in Christ, not one before another: They had all together a being in him; but this in conversion is made known to one before another. There are different manifestations of union to different persons, and to the same persons at different times; for which Christ prays, when he says, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me; and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:21-23).

The full manifestation of it will be in heaven, when the saints shall be with Christ where he is, and behold his glory, and enjoy uninterrupted communion with him, as the fruit of their eternal union to him. I should now, Sir, have closed this letter, were it not for a passage in your discourse Of the Doctrine of Grace as it Encourageth Holiness; in which, I apprehend, you have poured much contempt on several valuable and excellent truths of the gospel: I will repeat your words, and take leave to make some few strictures on them.

They are these: "There have been some, who, by their life and conversation, have shewed, that they were far from being enemies to holiness, who have amused themselves with fancies about God's loving and delighting in his elect, while they were in a state of nature; of his seeing no sin in his people, and good works not being necessary to salvation; and who have been forward to condemn pressing men to duty, as legal preaching; and to speak of exhorting to repentance, mortification, and self-denial, as low and mean stuff (See a Defense of Some Import Doctrines of the Gospel by Several Ministers, Vol.

II, p. 512)." I. I observe that you esteem the doctrine of God's loving his elect, while in a state of nature, a fancy; and that those who hold this doctrine do but amuse themselves with a fancy. I must beg leave to say, that if it is a fancy, it is a scriptural one: I would not willingly say or write any thing that is contrary to the purity and holiness of God, or has a tendency to embolden vicious persons in a course of sin and wickedness; and yet cannot help saying, that the doctrine of God's everlasting, unchangeable, and invariable love to his elect, through every state and condition into which they come, is written as with a sunbeam in the sacred writings. 1.

God's love to his elect is not of yesterday; it does not begin with their love to him, We love him, because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). It was bore in his heart towards them long before they were delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son. It does not commence in time, but bears date from eternity, and is the ground and foundation of the elect's being called in time out of darkness into marvelous light: I have loved thee, says the Lord to the church, with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee (Jer. 31:3); that is in effectual vocation.

Many are the instances which might be given in proof of the antiquity of God's love to his elect, and as it is antecedent to their being brought out of a state of nature. God's choosing them in Christ before the

foundation of the world, was an act of his love towards them, the fruit and effect of it; for election presupposes love. His making an everlasting covenant with his Son, ordered in all things, and sure, on account of those he chose in him; his setting him up as the Mediator of the covenant from everlasting; his donation of grace to them in him before the world began; his putting their persons into his hands, and so making them his care and charge, are so many demonstrative proofs of his early love to them; for can it ever be imagined that there should be a choice of persons made, a covenant of grace so well formed and stored, a promise of life granted, and a security made, both of persons and grace, and yet no love all this while? 2.

The love of God to his elect is unchangeable and unalterable; it is as invariable as his own nature and being; yea, God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16). Hence it is that the blessings of his grace are irreversible, because they are gifts of him, who is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Hence also it is that the salvation of God's elect does not stand upon a precarious foundation, as it would, if his love changed as theirs does; but he is the Lord, who changes not, and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.

The several changes the elect of God pass under, through the fall of Adam, and their own actual transgressions make no change or alteration in the love of God. The love of God makes a change in them when he converts them, but no change or alteration is made in God's love; that does not admit of more or less; it cannot be said to be more ardent and intense at one time, than at another, it is always invariably the same in his heart. Love produced a wonderful and surprising change in him, who was afterwards the great apostle of the Gentiles, and of a blaspheming, persecuting, and injurious Saul, made a believer in Christ, and a preacher of the everlasting gospel: but then this produced no change in God, nor in his love.

God sometimes changes the dispensations of his providence to his people, but he never changes his love; he sometimes hides his face from them, and chides them in a fatherly manner; but at all times he loves them: he loves when he rebukes and chastens, and though he hides his face for a moment from them, yet with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them; for he has said, The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed (Isa. 54:10).

There is, indeed, no sensible manifestation of God's love to his elect before conversion, or while they are in a state of nature; and it must be allowed, that the manifestations of it to their souls after conversion, are not always alike; and that God's love appears more evident in some instances and acts of it, than in others; yet still this love as in his own heart, is unchangeably and invariably the same, as it needs must be, if he is God. Since then God's love to his elect is from everlasting, and never changes upon any consideration whatever, why should God's love to his elect, while in a state of nature, be accounted a fancy, and those who maintain it, be represented as amusing themselves with a fancy? 3.

There are instances to be given of God's love to his elect, while they are in a state of nature: I have already observed some instances of it to his elect, from eternity. I will just mention one or two instances of it to them in time, and which respect them, while in a state of nature. Christ's coming into this world, and dying in the room and stead of the elect, are, at once, proofs, both of his own and his Father's love to them; God so loved them, as to give his only begotten Son; and Christ so loved them as to give himself for them, in a way of offering and sacrifice for their sins; at which time they were considered as ungodly, as being yet sinners, as enemies in their minds, by wicked works, and without love to God: for the apostle says (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10), When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; for if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Now certainly these persons were in a state of nature, who are said to be "without strength, to be ungodly, sinners, and enemies;" and yet God commended his love towards them, when and while they were such, in a matchless instance of it: and so the apostle John makes use of this circumstance, respecting the state of God's elect, to magnify, to set off, and illustrate the greatness of God's love (1 John 4:10): Herein is love, says he, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

From whence it may strongly be concluded, that God loved his people while in a state of nature, when enemies to him, destitute of all grace, without a principle of love to him, or faith in him. Again, the quickening of God's elect, when dead in trespasses and sins, the drawing of them to Christ with the cords of powerful and efficacious grace in effectual vocation, are instances of his special grace and favor, and fruits and effects of his everlasting love to them. God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (Eph. 2:4, 5).

The time of the effectual vocation of God's people being come, fixed in his everlasting counsels and covenant, it is a time of open love to their souls, and that time becomes a time of life; for seeing them wallowing in their blood, in all the impurities of their nature, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, he says unto them, when in their blood, live; yea, when in their blood he says unto them, live. The spirit of God, as an instance of God's love, is sent down into their hearts in order to begin, carry on, and finish a work of grace, when he finds them in a state of nature, dead in sin, devoid of all grace, impotent to all that is spiritually good: We ourselves also, says the apostle (Titus 3:3-6), were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, etc, when the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

If God did not love his elect, while in a state of nature, they must for ever remain in that state, since they are unable to help themselves out of it; and it is only the love, grace and mercy of God, which engage his almighty power to deliver them from thence. There are three gifts and instances of God's love to his people before conversion, which are not to be matched by any instance or instances of love after conversion; the one is the gift of God himself to them in the everlasting covenant; which covenant runs thus: I will be their God, and they shall be my people: The other is the gift of his Son, to suffer and die in their room and stead, and so obtain eternal redemption for them the third is the gift of his Spirit to them, to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

And now what greater instance is there of God's love to his people after conversion? If the heavenly glory, with all the entertaining joys of that delightful state, should be fixed upon, I deny it to be a greater instance of God's love, than the gift of himself, his Son, and Spirit; and, indeed, all that God does in time, or will do to all eternity, is only telling his people how much he loved them from everlasting; all is but as it were, a comment upon, and an opening of that ancient act of his; nor has this doctrine any tendency to licentiousness, or to discourage the performance of good works.

The consideration of this, that God loved me before I loved him, nay, when I was an enemy to him that his thoughts were employed about my salvation, when I had no thoughts of him, nor concern for myself, lays

me under ten thousand times greater obligations, to fear, serve and glorify him; than such a consideration as this, that he began to love me when I loved him, or because I have loved him, can possibly do. Why then should this doctrine be accounted a mere fancy, which has so good a foundation, both in the word of God, and in the experience of his people; and the maintainers of it traduced as amusers of themselves with fancies?

II. Perhaps you will say, it is not merely the notion of God's loving his elect in a state of nature, but his loving them so as to delight in them, while in that state, that you condemn as a fancy, and

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