

JOHN GILL
**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, 1732.

*Formatted, modernized, and annotated by
William H. Gross, www.onthewing.org, Dec 2019*

Sir,

Having had the happiness of hearing, and since of reading, your two Discourses, *Of the Insufficiency of Natural Religion*, I cannot help 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 afoul on some of your friends, while you were engaging with our common adversary.

When I heard your first discourse on this subject, I observed a paragraph which gave me some uneasiness. I determined to notify you of it, as I had opportunity. And knowing I would be present when you condescended to submit your discourses to the correction of some friends, I purposed to humbly offer some reasons for either dropping or altering the paragraph. But to my great satisfaction, I found no need to do it. Upon reading it, the passage I refer to had been omitted. I concluded from this, that upon a revisal of your discourses, you had seen reason in your own mind to strike it out. But since reading your sermons that have now been made public, I find that it still stands — and if I am not mistaken, with some additional keenness and severity. Your reason for this, you best know. Your words are these:

“It has been said, that during the times of our civil commotions, there was little preached except faith in Christ; and the duties of morality were little insisted on. It is certain that some ignorant, enthusiastic ¹ preachers then, much insisted on ETERNAL UNION with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm. But all wise and thoughtful men abhorred such immoral conceits.” ²

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 except faith in Christ,” and that “the duties of morality were little insisted on.”

One would have expected you to give an answer to this charge, and it looks as if you had designed it by your mentioning it. But you neither grant nor deny it. Instead of doing either, as you should have done, you put off the objection by saying, “that some ignorant, enthusiastic preachers then, much insisted on *eternal union* with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm” — things which are not in the charge, and are in no way to your purpose in mentioning them. Without taking it upon myself to be a dictator to you, you might have truthfully allowed that during those times, faith in Christ was very much preached, 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 constantly; that family and private devotions were maintained with much strictness; and that morality, in all its branches, was in a

¹ *Enthusiastic*: in the 18th c., this was an epithet for those considered overly emotional and excited; irrational.

² A Defence of some important Doctrines of the Gospel, by several Ministers, Vol. I, p.48.

very flourishing condition in those times, when *faith in Christ* was so much insisted on. I am very sensible that you are capable of observing this; but you rather chose to fling contempt at the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION with Christ, and to introduce it in an awkward way. By joining it with a disagreeable notion of sin doing a believer no harm, you drew disgrace upon some good men in those times, whom you call “ignorant, enthusiastic preachers;” and through them, you strike at some who are now preaching.

II. It doesn’t appear to me a matter of fact that in those times, *eternal union* with Christ, and the assertion that sin could do a believer no harm, were much insisted on, as you say.

I don’t know, indeed, what acquaintance you may have with the pulpit performances of those times. For my own part, I can only judge their preaching by what they printed. And I presume that if these doctrines are anywhere to be encountered, they are to be found in the writings of those who, in those times, were branded *Antinomians* — such as Eaton, Saltmarsh, Simpson, Town, Richardson, and Crisp. I have carefully perused their writings, 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, while headings of doctrine are made up by the adversaries, rather than by the authors themselves — out of their dissertations, books, and sermons — that sometimes their sense is not sufficiently taken, or happily expressed; and that both here and there, a great deal indeed is said, but not much is to the purpose; and that they either don’t understand, or they mistake the thing that is in dispute.”³

As to the DOCTRINE of ETERNAL UNION with Christ, however consistent it may be with some principles of theirs, I don’t perceive that they take any notice of it. 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 *Honeycomb of Free Justification*, has these words:

“Christ will have no foul leprous members united and made one with him; and therefore he first washes us in his own blood, and makes us clean from all our sins, and then knits and unites us as fit members into himself. The order also, and the natural dependence of these benefits upon one another (that is, justification and union), confirm the same. For we cannot be knit into Christ before we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. The Holy Ghost doesn’t come to dwell in us before we are reconciled to God; and we are not reconciled to God before we have all our sins abolished out of God’s sight, but only when all our sins are abolished, and we are 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 of Christ’s righteousness alone, made above our sense and feeling, fit brides for so glorious a Bridegroom.”⁴

And in another place, he has these words:

“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. Indeed, by this inseparable union and conjunction, which is through faith, Christ and I are made, as it were, one body in spirit.”⁵

³ Namque video, dum ex integris ipsorum dissertationibus libellis & concionibus theses conficiuntur per scriptores adversarios magis quam per auctores ipsos nonnunquam haud satis feliciter illorum sensus capi & exprimi & tum hinc tum inde multa quidem dici at non multum & vel non intelligi vel non peti τὸ κρινόμενον. Hoornbeeck Summ Controv. 1. x. de Brownistis, p. 701. 702.

⁴ Chap. 15. Pp.437-38,

⁵ Page 443.

Simpson, another of those men who were called Antinomians in those times, expresses himself on the subject of union in this manner, when he is speaking of the use of faith in justification:

“So that by faith, though we are assured of God’s love in the first place, we are not only assured, but likewise Christ is applied to us; we are united to him, and we enjoy all things in him, and receive all good things from him.”⁶

And in another place,

“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.”⁷

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, except by faith. He observes that,

“The pure spiritual and mystical fountain of the mortification of sin is being planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death, our old man being crucified with him (Rom 6.6). Our union with Christ our Head, our Righteousness, our Vine.”⁸

And, a little after, he has these words:

“Now that power in which we are perfectly mortified, is our union with Christ — our being planted in the fellowship of his death, etc. And that in which we are imperfectly or partly mortified, is that transformed nature, or spiritual nature — the body of sin being more or less in a believer, till he lays down this body and takes it up a more glorious one. Thus, a believer is to consider himself dead to sin, only in the fellowship of Christ’s death *mystically*; and he is to consider himself dying to sin only in his own nature *spiritually*. Thus, in Christ alone is he complete; and in himself he is imperfect at best. We are complete in Him, says 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 will find sin dying in him from this: the Spirit working most in the virtue of this.”

And in another place, he says;

“A believer has a twofold condition — in Christ, and in himself. Yet he should ever consider himself *in Christ by faith*, and not in himself.”⁹

And elsewhere he observes:

“The word says that we are complete in Christ, and righteous in Christ. But when I repent, or love, or obey, I believe that I am in Christ; and therefore my love, repentance, and obedience is such that I may believe not in *them*, but in *Him*, to be good and spiritual.”¹⁰

Town, another writer of those times, who was often charged with Antinomianism, says nothing of *eternal union*. But he has many expressions in his writings, which show he had no other notion of union, than by the Spirit of God, and by the grace of faith. In one of his books he has these words:

“The righteousness of faith unites them, that is, the saints to Christ, who is their Lord, Head, and Governor, so that from then on, they may be led by his free Spirit, and swayed by the scepter of his kingdom.”¹¹

⁶ Sermon III on Ephesians 2:8, 9; p. 116,

⁷ Ibid. p. 129.

⁸ Free Grace, or the Flowings of Christ’s Blood Freely to Sinners, p. 66-7.

⁹ Ibid. p. 141.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 156-7, I have seen two other pieces of Saltmarsh’s one is called “Shadows flying away” being a reply to Gataker; the other, “The Smoke in the Temple” and chiefly respects church government nor is there anything in either of them concerning union with Christ.

¹¹ The Assertion of Grace, p. 4.

And in the same treatise, he asks,

“Where does the law speak a syllable about our conjunction and union with Christ through faith, by which Christ and the believer become one body in spirit?”¹²

And in another place;

“By faith we, being united and married to Christ, bring forth fruits to God by him, even perfect obedience imputatively, and inchoative holiness¹³ through the operation of his Spirit. These are received by the ministry and doctrine of faith, and not by the law.”¹⁴

Though, in another passage in the same book,¹⁵ he makes out the ordinance of water baptism to be the saints union with, and insition (*grafting*) into Christ.

His words are these:

“That ordinance is a true, spiritual, and real grafting of them into Christ (1Cor 12.13). So that, faith is but the revelation of what was secret and hidden before; or an evident testimony, and a lively and comfortable apprehension and application in the person’s conscience, 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:

“Let the poor sinful, miserable, and lost soul, *first* be united and married to Him in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead, and in whom she is then complete, wanting nothing (Col 2.9-10) — and *then* tell of duties.”¹⁶

Again,

“If you do truly good works, you do them in Christ, abiding in him (Joh 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.”¹⁷

Once more,

“Can man’s nature be changed, he says, till he is united and grafted into Christ, the true Vine? And doesn’t virtue come by that insition and union?”¹⁸

And some pages after,

“It is by the Spirit that the soul comes to union with Christ.”¹⁹

And, in another of his treatises,²⁰ he has these words:

“Faith comes by hearing, and *after* faith comes actual union.”

The only writers in the times referred to, that I have met with, who assert union even before faith, are Richardson,²¹ and Crisp,²² who yet don’t speak a word about *eternal union*; nor do they, or the writers above-mentioned, professedly treat the doctrine of union in any sense. They only take notice of it as it falls in their way. I read their books with a greedy expectation of frequently meeting with the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION. I had hopes of finding arguments to confirm it, and of receiving more insight into it, which I believe to be an eternal truth. *Eternal union* was so far from being, as you say, “much insisted on in those times,” that I don’t find it was insisted on at all.

¹² Page 74.

¹³ *Inchoative*: with increasing stages of development.

¹⁴ Page 118.

¹⁵ pages 11, 12.

¹⁶ The Reassertion of Grace, p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 105.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.126.

²⁰ *Monomachia*; or a single Reply to Mr. Rutherford, etc. p. 37.

²¹ Answer to Dr. Homes, p. 111-12.

²² Christ Alone Exalted, Vol. I, Sermon VII, p. 104, Vol. III, Sermon VII, p. 597, 599, 600; Sermon VIII p. 609, 614-617.

As to the notion of sin doing a believer no harm, Eaton, Saltmarsh, Simpson, and Town, say nothing about it; nor do they have anything like it in their writings — not that I have met with. 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.²³

Richardson and Crisp are the only writers, in those times, whom I have observed making use of any expressions of this kind. As for Richardson, he has but one single passage which looks anything like this notion, that sin does a believer no harm. It is this:

“If all things work together for our good, then all falls, pains, diseases, crosses, afflictions, etc. do us no hurt, but work for our good; *all things work for our good.*” (Rom 8.28)²⁴

And yet this is no more than what many sound divines have said, who were never charged with Antinomianism when they asserted 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, and use means to prevent it. Consider that God has forbidden it (Romans 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 or satisfaction in it. Why you should desire it? It fills the soul with wounds, sorrow, bitterness, and shame; let experience speak.”²⁵

And, in another place, he says:

“We should be afraid to sin, 1. because it is forbidden by God. 2. It is dishonorable to him. 3. It encourages others to sin. 4. It will fill our souls with sorrow to sin against so loving a Father, and to dishonor him, etc. Having sinned, even in the least measure, we should be so far from covering it up with any pretence or excuse, that we should abhor it, and ourselves for it, with the greatest detestation!”²⁶

And elsewhere he says:

“Be sure you allow yourself in no sin, but in the strength of God, hate and abhor with the greatest indignation, *all sin* — even the appearance of it. It is better to die than to sin. There is that which accompanies sin, which strikes at a believer’s peace and comfort. It will dampen, straiten, and oppress the soul. It will hinder believers’ comfort, joy, and peace in God, unless God wonderfully strengthens their faith in him. We find by experience, that sin is a hurdle to our faith and comfort, having often unsettled and disquieted us in our peace and comfort, even though we ought not to be so.”²⁷

Crisp is the only writer that expresses himself freely and largely on this subject, and with the least guard.²⁸ 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,²⁹ Witsius,³⁰ and Chauncy,³¹ have justly observed. And when he says that “the sins of believers can do them no hurt,” what he means by “hurt” is the hurt of punishment, the penal evil, or the penal effects of sin which believers are

²³ *Conversation*: the way we conduct ourselves in public, interacting with others.

²⁴ *Justification by Christ Alone*, p. 21.

²⁵ *Counsels*, p. 98.

²⁶ *Counsels*, p. 150-51.

²⁷ *Divine Consolations*, p. 245.

²⁸ *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, etc.

²⁹ *Summ. Controv. l. x. de Brownistis* p. 714.

³⁰ *Animadvers. Irenieae* c. 12 6 p. 148.

³¹ *Neonomian. unmasked part III debate 17*. p. 26.

freed from, and therefore shall never enter into a state of condemnation. For Christ has borne their sins, and made satisfaction to justice for them. But then he speaks of sin *in its own nature*, as odious and dreadful to believers; and he speaks of bitterness and evil, as the certain fruits of it. The Doctor, I truly believe, used these expressions in a sound sense, and with a good design. It was not to encourage persons in sin, but to relieve and comfort the minds of believers who are distressed with sin. Yet I must confess that I don't like the expressions, but am of the opinion that they ought to be disused. And now surely, Sir, this single author's use of this expression — and not in the gross and vile sense of it — cannot be sufficient to bear you out in saying that “sin does 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 this, the author exhorts believers not to be oppressed and perplexed for their sins. ³² 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 has a hand in, and is the author of, the sinfulness of his people.” ³³ (*What a horror to report this!*) ³⁴ And what is enough to make one shudder at reading it, he says, that “all the sins which believers are left to, 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.” ³⁵ And he adds, “They are as nurtured and fitted for heaven *by sins*, as by anything else.”

All of this is blasphemous, vile, and abominable. And for this reason, if I am not mistaken, the book was ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. I say, I can hardly think you are referring to this author. For though he asserts this notion in the grossest sense, and in the vilest manner, yet unhappily for you, it happens that this man was not for *eternal union*, but for *union by faith*. He frequently observes ³⁶ that faith immediately unites us to Christ, that it is the bond of union to him, and it is what brings the Holy Ghost into the soul. If you had this author and his book in your eye, you should instead have said, “*union by faith*, and sin doing a believer no harm, were much insisted on in those times.” But,

III. What I have further to complain about, is your joining the harmless DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION, with that hurtful one (as it may be taken), of sin doing a believer no harm.

You could have no other view than to bring the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION into disgrace, and to put an odium ³⁷ upon those who assert it — as if there was a strict connection between these two, and those who espoused the one, held the other. The notion of sin doing a believer no harm, was never a received tenet of any body or society of Christians among us, not even those called Antinomians. It is not the sentiment of those who are branded with that name in this day. I am well informed that some churches which 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 show a like zeal against Arianism, and in 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. They have imbibed this notion, and live correspondingly, but are disregarded by all persons of seriousness and sobriety. It was not a generally 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 who speaks it, and yet not in the gross sense of it, as observed. All that their adversaries have said about them, is not to be relied on — I give

³² pages 18-20.

³³ page 98.

³⁴ Originally, *Horresco referens*.

³⁵ page 125.

³⁶ pages 34, 42, 49, 53, 69, 173.

³⁷ *Odium*: a state of disgrace; hatred coupled with revulsion.

no credit to such unworthy writers as Edwards and Paget. Mr. Crandon ³⁸ 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. Indeed, it does not appear from Luther's account of them, that the Antinomians in Germany (the followers of Islebius Agricola) ³⁹ 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 those who are called Antinomians. They say that repentance is not to be taught out of the decalogue, and they oppose those who teach that the gospel is not to be preached except by 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 however impure, yet is he justified, if only he believes the promises of the gospel.” ⁴⁰

This last assertion of theirs is somewhat ambiguous, and may seem to favor this notion of sin 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 even if he allows himself in a continued impurity of life, then 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, even though his former life has been ever so impure, this is a truth of the gospel, and it 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 would assert that the commission of any sin whatsoever, and a continuance in it, could not hurt anyone, if he was but a partaker of that faith which was taught by him.” ⁴¹

This man was a disciple of Aetius, whose followers were called *Aetians*. Epiphanius writes ⁴² of them, that they were unconcerned about holiness of life, or any of the commands of God, and spoke very slightly of sin. Irenaeus has a passage concerning the *Valentinians*, which brings out this notion. It is this:

“That which is earthly cannot partake of salvation; for (they say) it is incapable of it. So too, that which is spiritual — by which they mean themselves — cannot receive corruption, by whatever actions they may participate in. Gold being put into dirt doesn't lose its beauty, but retains its nature; nor is it hurt by the dirt. So too (they say), they may participate in some material actions, and not be at all hurt by them, nor lose their spiritual substance. Hence, the most perfect of them do all those things which are forbidden, without any manner of fear.” ⁴³

And then he instances eating things that are sacrificed to idols, attending the worship of the heathens, frequenting the theatres, and indulging themselves in all fleshly lusts. The *Gnostics*,

³⁸ *Against Baxter*, part 1. chap. 22. p. 264, 265, etc.

³⁹ Vid. Hoornbeeck. *Sum. Controv.* 1. 10, p. 690, 691.

⁴⁰ Hoc anno secta prodiit eorum qui dicuntur Antinomini; hi poenitentiam ex decalogo non esse decendam dicunt; & illos impugnant, qui docent, non esse praedicandum evangelium, nisi primum quassatis animis atque fractis per explicationem legis; ipsi vero statuunt, quaecunque tandem sit hominis vita & quantumvis impura, justificari tamen cum, si modo promissionibus evangelii credat. Sleidan. *Comment.* 1. 12. p. 33.

⁴¹ Fertur etiam usque adeo fuisse bonis moribus inimicus ut asseveraret quod nihil cuiquam obsesset quorumlibet perpetratio, ac perseverantia peccatorum, si hujus, quae ab illo docebatur, fidei particeps esset. August. *de Haeres.* cap. 54.

⁴² *Contra Haeres.* 76.

⁴³ Ως γαρ το χοικον αδυνατον σωτηριας μετασχειν (ου γαρ ειναι λειγουσιν αυτοι δεκτικον αυτης) ουτως παλιν το πνευμαπικον θελουσιν οι αυτοι, ειναι αδυνατον φθοραν καταδεξασθαι καν οποιας συγκαταγενωνται πραξεσιν ον γαρ τροπον χρυσος εν βορβορω κατατεθεις ουκ αποβαλλει την καλλονην αυτου αλλα την ιδιαμ φυσιν διαφυλαττει του βορβορου μηδεν αδικησαι τον χρυσον ουτο δε και αντους λεγουσι καν εν οποιας υλικαις πραξεσι καταγε νονται μηδεν αυτους παραβλαπτεσθαι μηδε αποβαλλειν την πνευματικην υποσασιν διο δε και τα απειρημενα παντα αδεως οι τελειοτατοι πραττουσιν αυτων. Irenaeus *adv. Haeres.* 1. 1. c. 1. p.26. edit. Paris.

Carpocratians, Saturninians, Basilidians, with many others, embraced similar impure notions. It is probable that they received this from Simon Magus, the Father of heresies, who allowed those who believed in him and his Helena, to live as they wished! ⁴⁴ I take notice of these things, to show 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 (that I can learn), nor were they ever received by the same persons.

IV. I observe that you call the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION, as well as that of sin doing a believer no harm, an immoral conceit. I don't well know what you mean by an *immoral conceit*. "Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart being only evil," is an immoral conceit (Gen 6.5). So are all sinful lusts in the mind: "When lust has conceived, it brings forth, sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death." (Jas 1.15)

An *immoral conceit*, properly speaking (I apprehend), is the first motion, thought, and imagination of sin rising up in the mind. I don't see how this is applicable to the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION. 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 to encourage persons in it. What you say has its foundation only in the fancy and imagination of some men, is no conceit, but a truth contained in the sacred scriptures. I hope to make this apparent. If it were a mere conceit, why you would reckon it to be an immoral one, I don't know. If it is a conceit, it is a 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, by which the holiness of God's people is infallibly secured for 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. Just as *eternal election* secures the holiness of the saints, so does *eternal union*. Christ has loved them with an everlasting love; and by loving them, he has united them to himself, and become their Head, and one with them. Therefore, he has given himself for them, "that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify for himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit 2.14). He also sends 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 (Eph 2.10); 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 else, acknowledge that you have abused it.

V. You call the persons whom you say insisted much on *eternal union*, "ignorant, enthusiastic preachers." One would think you might have spared this severe reflection for the sake of some who have asserted an *eternal union*, who 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:

"As in the womb, head and members are not conceived apart, but together, as having a relation to each other, so we and Christ (comprising one mystical body unto God) were formed together in the eternal womb of election." ⁴⁵

Again,

"If you were so chosen in Christ, that God never purposed you a being except in Christ; and gave you this subsistence in Christ, never casting a thought upon you outside of him — then reckon

⁴⁴ Hi qui in cum & Helenam ejus spem habent & ut liberos agere quae velint. Irenaeus *adv. Haeres* 1.1. c. 20 p. 116.

⁴⁵ Vol. I. Part I, p. 62.

yourself of no other being than what you have in Christ. Don't reckon what you have in honour, or what you are in greatness or parts; but reckon what you were in him before this world existed, and of all the spiritual blessings which he then blessed you with. Likewise, reckon what you are now in him by an *actual union*, as you were then by a *virtual* and representative one.”⁴⁶

And in another place,

“We were one with Christ before the world existed; there is one way of union then. Jesus Christ in human nature comes down and represents us, and does what we have to do. Here now is another way of union. Why? This is the reason: for we were one with Christ by his undertaking for us alone, *from everlasting*; but we were one with him by an active representation, when he was *on earth* below.”⁴⁷

And elsewhere he says:

“There is a threefold union with Christ; the first is relative, by which 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, such a relation is made by marriage. The husband may be in one place, and the wife in another, so that there can be no communion between them; and yet they are man and wife. So too, the union between Christ and you, is as complete in the relation *before* he acts anything upon you — though he is in heaven, and you are on earth — as if you were in heaven with him.”⁴⁸

And so, in another part of his works, 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* he sends his Spirit — he apprehends us first. It is not my being regenerate that gives me a right to all those privileges; it is that Christ takes me, and then gives me his Spirit, faith, holiness, etc. 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.”⁴⁹

Witsius says that 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, to be the Head of all those who are to be saved; and (3) by a true and real union. But that union, 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.”⁵⁰

A little after, he 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.” (Rom 5.8)

It is evident that he allows not only a 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 who might be named, you might have forborne the heavy charge of “ignorance and enthusiasm.” And if not for their sake, surely for the sake of your own father, who asserts an eternal representative

⁴⁶ Vol. I. Part I, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Part II, p. 215.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Part III, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Vol. III. Book V, Chp. 20, p. 347.

⁵⁰ Unitio sunt Christo, — In aeterno Dei decreto. — 2. Unione confoederationis aeternae, qua Christus a Patre eonstitutus est caput omnium servandorum. — 3. Vera & reali unione, sed quae ab ipsorum parte duntaxat passiva est, uniuntur Christo, quando Spiritus Christi eos primum occupat, & novae vitae principium infundit. — Porro quum fides sit actus ex principio spiritualis vitae emanans, palam est sano sensu dici posse, quod homo electus vere & realiter Christo unitus sit ante actualem idem. Wits. *Iren. Animadv.* c. 6. &. 1-3.

union of the elect with Christ. And he does that in a book of which you yourself were the editor.⁵⁴ 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 those are ever justified, so all who 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 — in which 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 (2Tim 1.9). It must be further granted, that all elect sinners had *a representative union with Christ from eternity*. When Christ was chosen as their Head, they were chosen together with him, as his members.”

In another page, 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, that it 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 [union] gave them a fundamental right to justification. They are *actually united* to Christ when they believe; and they 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 a union *before faith* — an *eternal union* in some sense. By contrast, you have reproached it as an immoral conceit, and its preachers as ignorant and enthusiastic — without any exception or explanation. You would do well to explain your sense, and clarify yourself. For my own part, I would not greatly care to be reckoned *ignorant*, and especially *enthusiastic*. Yet I think I may, in a safe and sound sense, insist upon the DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL UNION.

THE DOCTRINE OF 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 that we will not differ about the persons who are united to Christ; that these are God’s elect, and them alone. Nor will we differ about the nature of the union itself; that it is a union of the whole persons (the souls and bodies of God’s people) to the whole person of Christ. Though it is not a *personal union* — that is, not a union like that of the divine and human natures in Christ — it is a real, solid, substantial, and not imaginary union. It is complete and perfect, and not gradual or brought about by degrees; rather, it is finished at once, as is our justification. It is exceedingly close and near, and indissoluble; there can be no separation of it. What we are most likely to differ about is *when* God’s elect are united to Christ; and *what* the bond is 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 would think that the whole of it should be ascribed to him, since it is such an instance of surprising love and grace, that there cannot well be thought a greater one than this. Why must this union be pieced together with faith on our part? This smells so prodigiously rank of self, that one may justly suspect that something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it.

⁵⁴ Mr. Richard Taylor’s *Scripture Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 14, 15.

I will 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, to seal them for the day of redemption, and to bestow 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 are united to him by the Spirit; rather, they are first united to him, and *by virtue of this union*, they receive his Spirit. To conceive otherwise, would be as preposterous as to imagine that the animal spirits,⁵² which have their seat in the head, are communicated to, and diffused throughout the several parts of the body, without union to the head; or that they are antecedent to such a union, and effect it. As this would be justly reckoned an absurdity in nature, so the other is no less an absurdity in grace. A person is first joined, glued, closely united to Christ, and then he becomes one Spirit with Christ; that is, he receives, enjoys, and possesses in measure, the same Spirit as Christ does — as the members of a human body share the same spirit as the head, to which they are united: "He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit." (1Cor 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 (Eph 1.4-5), made one with him, and become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8.17); and then, as the apostle says, "*Because you are sons, God has 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 we know by this, says the apostle John, that he abides in us: by the Spirit which he has given us." (1Joh 3.24) And in another place, "By this we know that we dwell in him, and he in us: because he has given us of his Spirit." (1Joh 4.13)

There is, indeed, a union of which the Spirit of God is the efficient cause. But this is not a union of God's elect to the Person of Christ, but a union of believers one with another in a church-state. The apostle intends this, when he says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1Cor 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. *Nor 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 in us*, or by our *act* of faith. And since there are different acts of faith, they should tell us by which of these our union is made — whether by the first, second, third, etc. acts of believing. If we are united to Christ by the habit or principle of faith *infused in us*, 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 Christ is the author and finisher of it (Heb 12.2). 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 it is not by grace; for, "if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it is of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." (Rom 11.6)

I have often wondered that our divines would make the grace of faith to be the bond of union to Christ, when there is nothing in it of a cementing and uniting nature. It is not a grace of *union*,

⁵² Or "animating spirits" — the nervous energy that is the source of physical sensation and movement.

but of *communion*. Had they pitched upon the grace of *love* as the bond of union, it would have appeared 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 between saints, one with another: their hearts are knit together in love. Hence, charity or love is called “the bond of perfectness” (Col 2.2 with 3.14). It was this which so closely joined and cemented the hearts of the first Christians to one another, insomuch that, “the multitude of those who believed, were of one heart and 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 it 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 don’t 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 the faith by which we are united to Christ, is a faith that works by love. Dr. Jacomb⁵³ indeed — having addressed 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 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. It is “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 between them.”

And besides Jacomb, 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,” he says, “is the mutual love of Christ and believers, or a mutual obligation of Christ and believers, to love one another.”⁵⁴

Now, though there is something of truth in this, 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 alone is the real bond of our union to him. He loves his people; and by loving them, he unites them to himself. 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 clings to him. It expects and receives all from Christ, and gives him all the glory. But then, a soul can no more be said to be united to Christ by this, than a beggar may be said to be united to the person he applies for, and from 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. This is an act of fellowship, as a fruit of union, by which believers live on Christ, receive of his fulness, grace for grace (Joh 1.16); and the walk on in him, as they have received him. Union to Christ is the foundation of faith, and of all the acts of believing, such as seeing, walking, receiving, etc. 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 have that union. To talk about *faith* in Christ, before *union* to Christ, is a most preposterous, absurd, and irrational notion.

Faith is the fruit and effect of union, even what is commonly called *vital union*. Faith stands much in the same place in spiritual things, as reason does in natural things. There must first be a 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 too, there must be a 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 its exercise, is secondary to the union of the soul and body, so too, faith and

⁵³ On Rom 8.1, p. 51.

⁵⁴ Haec unio est mutuus inter Christum & fideles amor, sive mutua Christi & fidelium obligatio ad sese mutuo amandum. Alsted *Lexicon Theolog.* c. 10. p. 189.

its exercise, is secondary to a person's union to Christ. There must first be 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. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, no more can you, unless you abide in me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me, and I in him, brings forth much fruit.” (Joh 15.4-5)

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 yields fruit” (Pro 12.12). The branches of the wild olive tree must first be grafted into the good olive tree, and become one with it, and so partake of the root and its richness, before they can bring forth good fruit. If there could 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 comes before faith. And therefore, faith cannot be the bond of union; not on our part. Vital union comes before faith. There was always 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. When it pleases him, he communicates this life to them in regeneration, and implants it in them, though there is no activity or exercise of this life until they believe. ⁵⁵

3. *The everlasting love of God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, is the bond of the elect's union to the sacred Three.* What may be said of the three divine Persons in general, is true of each of them in particular. All three have loved the elect with an everlasting love, and thereby they have firmly and everlastingly united the elect to themselves. Christ has loved them with an everlasting and unchangeable love, by which his heart is knit to 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, and from which there can be no separation. For, “who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded 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.” (Rom 8.35, 38, 39)

4. *There are several unions which arise from or are branches of this everlasting love-union, which are all antecedent to our faith in Christ.*

1st. There is an *election-union* in Christ from everlasting: “God has 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 are one with him. Christ was chosen as a Head, and his people as members with him. Nothing is more commonly said by those who are esteemed sound divines,⁵⁶ than this. Now, how Christ can be considered as a 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,⁵⁷ the Remonstrants, have frequently urged the text now mentioned, in favor of election from foreseen faith. And their argument is this:

⁵⁵ For the further proof of what I assert, see Mr. Cotton's arguments for union before faith, in Dr. Chauncy's *Neonomianism Unmasked*, part 2. debate 11. p. 225.

⁵⁶ Vid. Act. Synod. Dordrect. p. 4, 83, 86, 87. Ames. Medull. Theolog. c. 25. & 27. Walaei opera, tom 1. p. 330. Polani Syntag. Theolog. p. 248. Synops. Pur. Theolog. disput. 24. thes. 26. p. 281. Zanch. in Eph. 1.4. Dr. Goodwin, vol. 1. part 1. p. 62. Mr. Richard Taylor on Justification, p. 15. with many others.

⁵⁷ Armin. Examen Praedest. Perkins. p. 512, 594, 599. inter opera ejus edit. 1631, 4to. Script. advers. Coll. Hag p, 64. Apolog. pro Confess. Remonstr. c. 18. p. 197. Corvid. contr. Molin. c. 19. p. 284, 285. & advers. Bogerman. par. 2. c. 23. p. 552. Vorst. Amic. Collat. Cum Piscat. & 112. p. 233.

“None are chosen to salvation except in Christ; none are in Christ except believers, who are grafted into Christ and united to him *by faith*. Therefore, none are chosen to salvation, except those who are believers in Christ, grafted into him, and united with him.”

For they had no other notion of being in Christ, except by faith — like some others, who yet would be thought far from the Arminians’ scheme. But then, among other replies, they have been told by the Anti-Remonstrants,

“It is certain that we are chosen and regarded in Christ *before* we were believers. This is fully proved from several places of scripture, which plainly make it apparent that the elect have some existence in Christ, even before they believe. For unless there had been some kind of union between Christ and his members, Christ would not have been their Head, nor could he have satisfied for them.”⁵⁸

2nd. There is a *legal union* between Christ and the elect, from everlasting. They are one in a law-sense, just 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 for his people. He is the surety, the *εγγυος* (*egguos*), of the better Testament (Heb 7.22), who 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 by God, Christ and the elect were looked upon, in the eyes of the law, as one person — even as among men, the bondsman and the debtor 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 legal sense, their sins become his, and his righteousness becomes theirs.

3rd. There is a *federal union* between Christ and the elect from everlasting. As they were considered one in election — he as head, and they as members — they are likewise considered one 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 (2Tim 1.9); and they are said to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph 1.3).

4th. There is a *natural union* between Christ and his people. “For both he that sanctifies, and those 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 a union *in time*, but it is the effect of Christ’s love *before time*. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise partook of the same.” (Heb 2.14)

The nature he assumed is the same as that of all mankind, but it 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.

⁵⁸ Certum est nos esse electos & respectos in Christo antequam essemus fideles. quod probatur invictis his locis, Eph 5.25. Rom 5.8. 1Joh 4.10. 2Tim 1.9. Haec loco evincunt, electorum aliquam in Christo existentiam fuisse etiam, antequam crederent. Nisi enim aliqua fuisset unio inter Christum & membra, Christus non esset caput eorum, & pro iis satis facere non potuisset. Walaeus de electione, iter opera ejus, tom. 1. p. 239. Vid. etiam p. 358, 359. & tom. p. 227. & *Synops. Pur. Theolog. disput.* 24. thes. 27. p. 281.

5th. It is sufficiently evident that there is a *representative union* between Christ and the elect — both *from everlasting* and *in time* — which is independent of, and prior to their believing in him. He represented them as their head in election, and in the covenant of grace, as already observed. And so he represented them when on the cross, and in the grave — when he rose from the dead, and 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, indeed, are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6.4, 6, 8; Eph 2.6)

Now, these several unions arise from, and have their foundation in, the everlasting love of Christ to his people. This is the grand origin, the strong and firm bond of union between him and them. And it is the spring of all that fellowship and communion they have with him in time, and shall have to all eternity. It is from here 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 doesn't 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 with him. It is indeed true that God's elect don't know of their being in Christ and union to him, until they believe. Then, what was secret before, is made manifest. And because things are sometimes said to be, when they are only manifested to be, the people of Christ are said to be in Christ, when they are made new creatures. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." (2Cor 5.17) Being a new creature doesn't put a man into Christ, but is the evidence of his being there; and without it he neither knows, nor should he profess himself to be in Christ. And so likewise, in another place, it is said, "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom 8.9).

He may be one of his chosen and redeemed ones, though he doesn't have the Spirit of Christ 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, except by the Holy Ghost (1Cor 12.3). The apostle Paul takes notice of some who 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 in conversion, this is made known to one before it is to another. There are different manifestations of union to different persons, and to the same persons at different times. This is what Christ prays for, when he says,

"May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me." (Joh 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.

Sir, I would now have closed this letter, were it not for a passage in your discourse *Of the Doctrine of Grace as it Encourages Holiness*. In it I apprehend that you have poured much contempt on several valuable and excellent truths of the gospel. I will repeat your words, and take leave to make a few strictures⁵⁹ on them. They are these:

"There have been some, who have shown by their life and conversation, 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; and of His seeing no sin in his people, and good works not being necessary to salvation; and who have been bold to condemn pressing men to duty, as *legal preaching*; and exhorting to repentance, mortification, and self-denial, as *low and mean stuff*."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Stricture*: a severe criticism.

⁶⁰ See a *Defense of Some Important 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, only 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 anything that is contrary to the purity and holiness of God, or has a tendency to embolden vice-ridden persons in a course of sin and wickedness. And yet I 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 if with a sunbeam in the sacred writings.

1. God's love to his elect is not as of yesterday; it doesn't begin with their love to him, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1Joh 4.19)

It was borne in his heart towards them long before they were delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col 1.13). It doesn't commence in time, but bears a date from eternity; it is the ground and foundation of the elect's being called in time out of darkness into marvelous light. "I have loved you," the Lord says to the church, "with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you" (Jer 31.3); that is, in effectual calling. Many instances might be given in proof of the antiquity of God's love to his elect, and as 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, as the fruit and effect of it; for election presupposes love. Demonstrative proofs of his early love to them, are His making an everlasting covenant with his Son, ordered in all things, and sure, on account of those He chose in Christ; His setting him up as the Mediator of the covenant from everlasting; His donation of grace to them in Christ, before the world began; His putting their persons into Christ's hands, and so making them his care and charge. For, can it ever be imagined that a choice of persons would be made, a covenant of grace be so well formed and stored, a promise of life be granted, and security be made of both 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; for "God is love, and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." (1Joh 4.16)

Hence 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. (Jas 1.17) Hence also, the salvation of God's elect doesn't stand upon a precarious foundation, as it would if his love changed as theirs does. But he is the Lord, who "does not change, and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal 3.6) The several changes that 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, which cannot be 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 the one who was afterwards the great apostle of the Gentiles. A blaspheming, persecuting, and injurious Saul, was 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 from them for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness he will have mercy on them. For he has said, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, nor 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 in his own heart is unchangeably and invariably the same, as it 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 they are in a state of nature, be considered a fancy? And why should 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 in a state of nature. Christ's coming into this world, and dying in the place and stead of the elect, are at once proofs of both 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 the time, they were considered as ungodly, as yet sinners, as enemies in their minds, by wicked works, and without love to God. For the apostle says,

“When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God commends 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, then much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” (Rom 5.6, 8, 10)

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, set off, and illustrate the greatness of God's love:

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1Joh 4.10)

From this 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, drawing them to Christ with the cords of powerful and efficacious grace in effectual calling, are instances of his special grace and favor, and the fruits and effects of his everlasting love to them.

“God who is rich in mercy, for the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ.” (Eph 2.4-5)

The time of the effectual calling of God's people having 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 to them when in their blood, “Live!” Indeed, 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 were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, 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.” (Tit 3.3-6)

If God did not love his elect while in a state of nature, they must forever 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 it. 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. This 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 place 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. (Joh 16.8) 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 that it would be a greater instance of God's love, than the gift of himself, his Son, and Spirit. Indeed, all that God does in time, or will do to all eternity, only tells his people how much he loved them from everlasting. It is all but a comment upon, and an opening of that ancient act of his. Nor does this doctrine have any tendency to licentiousness, or to discourage the performance of good works. The consideration of this — that God loved me before I loved him; indeed, when I was an *enemy* to him; and that his thoughts were employed about my salvation when I had no thoughts about him, nor concern for myself — lays me under ten thousand times greater obligations to fear, serve, and glorify him, than a consideration that he began to love me *when* I loved him, or *because* I loved him, could possibly do. Why, then, should this doctrine be considered a mere fancy, which has so good a foundation both in the word of God, and in the experience of his people; and those who maintain it, be maligned as amusing themselves with fancies?

II. Perhaps you will say that it is not merely the notion of God's loving his elect in a state of nature, that you condemn as a fancy, and its defenders as amusing themselves with a fancy. Rather, it is his loving them so as to delight in them while in that state — since you join together love and delight when you express yourself so freely on this topic. There is a distinction which you may imagine will help you, between a love from pity and benevolence, and that of satisfaction and delight. It is with the first of these, some say, that God loved his elect before conversion, and while in a state of nature; but not with the latter. It is an idle and ill-grounded distinction of some ignorant, trifling, popish schoolmen. Some of our grave divines have been fond of it, and have used it when they thought it would serve their purpose. But it is subversive of the very nature and perfections of God, and represents him as altogether one like ourselves, subject to change — whose love, like ours, alters, and increases by degrees. A love given out of pity and benevolence, passes into a love of satisfaction and delight. It supposes that God first views his elect in a miserable state and condition, with whose misery he is touched, and is filled with compassion and pity towards them, which occasions some wishes in His mind for their good. And these rise up at length into resolutions and purposes to do them good. When he has, at least in some measure, executed these, his affections glow, his love grows more ardent, and it issues in satisfaction and delight. If this is not to make God changeable, and bring him down into the rank of mutable creatures, I don't know what is.

I could tell the friends of this distinction — though it may be no news to them, and perhaps they may find their account in it — that these same popish schoolmen have distinguished the love of God into *amor ordinativus* (a love in ordination, purpose, and design), and *amor collativus* (a love in gift, which is actually bestowed). This may suit well enough with the divinity of some men, who seem to be ready to give into such schemes as these: that God's love to his elect before conversion, is only a purpose to love them once they are converted; that eternal election, is only a decree to elect persons in time; that the everlasting covenant is made with persons once they believe; that faith, repentance, and sincere obedience are the conditions of it; that there is no reconciliation of God's elect to him *before* faith; and that the sufferings and death of Christ only make God reconcilable, but not reconciled. I am almost tempted to call things such as these, low and mean stuff. It is high time that these distinctions about the love of God, between an antecedent and consequent one, were laid aside, for they so greatly obscure the glory of God's unchangeable love and grace. It must be an odd sort of love among men, that is separate from delight in the object that is loved.

The philosopher says that benevolence, properly, is neither friendship nor love. And that, as benevolence is the beginning of friendship, so delight and pleasure at the sight of the object, is the beginning of love. And that no man can be said to love, who is not first delighted with the form or

idea of the object.⁶¹ Indeed, I cannot see how it can be love, if it is without any delight in the object that is said to be loved. If a man were to say to his wife, “I love you well; I wish you well; and I am willing to do you all the good offices that I am able; but, at the same time, I can take no delight in your person, nor pleasure in your company” — wouldn’t this be considered a contradiction to his expressions of love to her? So too, if a father said to his child, “I wish you well; I pity you in what you do amiss; and I design to do something for you which may be for your good; but I can take no delight and pleasure in you as a child of mine” — what kind of love would this be thought to be? The same may be observed in many other such instances.

God’s love to his Son, as a Mediator, is an everlasting love; “You loved me,” says Christ, “before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17.24). This love was a love of satisfaction and delight; for Christ as Mediator, was from everlasting; *then* by him (that is, the Father) “as one brought up with Him, and was daily His delight, rejoicing always before him.” (Pro 8.30)

Now, God loves his elect with the same love he loves his Son as Mediator. Hence, Christ prays for the open and manifest union between him and his people: “That the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them, as you have loved me.” (Joh 17.23)

If God has therefore loved his Son, as Mediator, from everlasting, with a love of satisfaction and delight, and he has loved his elect from everlasting with the same love He has loved him, then he must have loved His elect from everlasting with a love of satisfaction and delight. And indeed, how can it be otherwise, since the elect were always in Christ their Head, in whom they were chosen before the foundation of the world? And they could not be considered in him except as righteous persons, through his righteousness, with which God is always well pleased. This is because the law is magnified and made honorable by it. And so Christ is often said to be God’s beloved Son, *in* whom, not *with* whom, He is well pleased (Mat 3.17; 2Pet 1.17). This intends not only his person singly, but all the elect, as considered in him. Together with Christ, they are the objects of God’s eternal delight and pleasure.

It is certain that Jesus Christ has, from everlasting, loved the elect with a love of satisfaction and delight. For, from everlasting — from the beginning, or before the earth ever was; when there were no depths or fountains; before the mountains and hills were brought into being; while God had not as yet made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world — Christ’s “*delights* were with the sons of men.” (Pro 8.31)

The word שׂשׂשׂ (sha shua)⁶² in the Hebrew, rendered *delights*, expresses the most intimate, sweet, ravishing delight and pleasure. And being not only plural, but also having its radical letters, especially its two first radical letters doubled⁶³ (which in the Hebrew language, increases the signification of the word),⁶⁴ it sets forth that exceedingly great delight and pleasure which Christ had in his people from everlasting. Indeed, he not only took delight in the persons of the elect, as they were presented to him in the mirror of his Father’s purposes and decrees, but he also took pleasure in the previews of the very spots of ground where he knew his people would dwell. And hence he says that he was “rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth” (Pro 8.31). Now, why God the Father would not from everlasting, love the elect with the same love his son did, I don’t know.

⁶¹ Η δη ευνοια φιλια μεν εοικεν ου μεν εσιν γε φιλια Αλλ ουδε φιλησις εσιν ειοκε δη αρχη φιλιας ειναι ωσπερ του εραν η δια της ομειως ηδονη μη γαρ προηθεις τη ιδεα ουθεις ερα, Aristotle, *Ethics*. 1. 9. c. 5.

⁶² Vocem שׂשׂשׂ quod attinet, novies eandem deprehendimus in sacris, & semper quidem de oblectatione intima, multiplici, suavissimamque, quando rem aliquam non satis intueri, meditari aut amplexari possumus, ulteriori semper eo propendentes cupidine; nam radix est h[ç] aspexit, ubi geminatio radicalium radicis quoque geminat significatum. Gejer. in Pro 8.30.

⁶³ Vid. Aben Ezra in Psa 65.2.

⁶⁴ So פתלתל is very perverse, Deu 32.5. ירקרק very yellow, Psa 69.12. שחחררת very black, Song 1.6. יפ'פה exceedingly fairer, Psa 65.2. חמרמרר very much troubled, Lam 1.20. with many other instances of a similar kind.

Nothing is more evident than this: that God's choosing his people in Christ before the foundation of the world, is an act of love. And I will venture to say, it is an act of love, founded upon, and springing from his delight in them — even as God's loving and choosing of Israel (which was an emblem and representation of his special love to, and choice of the true and spiritual Israel of God) is owing to that delight he had in them. For it is said, "The Lord delighted in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their seed after them, you above all peoples, even at this day." (Deu 10.15)

And indeed, all the favors and blessings which God bestows on his people in time, arise from his delight in them. His bringing them out of darkness into light, out of a state of nature into a state of grace, out of distresses and difficulties of every kind, springs from his delight in them. "He brought me forth also into a large place," says David; "He delivered me, because he delighted in me." (Psa 18.19) In a word, the whole salvation of the elect is owing to God's love of delight, with which he loves them. "The Lord takes pleasure in his people." And as a fruit and effect of that, "He will beautify the meek with salvation." (Psa 149.4) He has promised to rejoice over them, and to do them good. It is said, "He will save, he will rejoice over you with joy; and he will rest in his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." (Zep 3.17)

Some will say, perhaps, that the elect while in a state of nature, are destitute of faith — which is very true. And since, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11.6), God can take no delight in them while in that state. The Remonstrants urged this text in favor of election, *ex fide prævisa*.⁶⁵ Their argument is this:

"If it is impossible to please God without faith, then it is impossible that any should be 'chosen by God unto salvation,' without faith — seeing that, to be chosen unto salvation, is the highest instance of God's love and good-will to man that He can show him." But, "They have been told, by the anti-Remonstrants, that though election is an act of God's great love and good pleasure, it may be *without faith*, since there is a sense in which persons may be said to please God *before faith*."⁶⁶ For God is said even to manifest His love to his enemies. (Rom 5.8, 10) If, then, He loved them when enemies, they must please him *before* they believed." And they have been told that, "although whatever is done without faith may be displeasing to God, God may be said to love some *persons* whose *actions* displease him. So he loved the person of Paul before he was converted to the faith of Christ — indeed, that there is a certain satisfaction in the person, if it is proper to say so, before his works and faith please God."⁶⁷

It is easy to observe that the apostle is speaking, not of the satisfaction which God has in the *persons* of his people, but of that satisfaction which He has in their *works and actions*. Now, no works without faith can please God — such as praying, reading, hearing, and the like — because whatever is not of faith, is sin. It is in this sense, that they that are "in the flesh." That is, those who are unregenerate, are in a state of nature, and "cannot please God" (Rom 8.8). For it may as well be expected to "gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles" (Mat 7.16), as that good works, well-pleasing to God, should be done by an evil man. But though man can do nothing that will please God without faith, this doesn't keep the persons of God's elect, *as considered in Christ*, from being well-pleasing to God before faith, and without it.

It may be further objected, that God's elect, while in a state of nature, are "children of wrath," (Eph 2.3) even as others; and therefore they cannot be the objects of God's love and delight. For how can they be children of wrath, and yet be objects of love, at one and the same time? To which

⁶⁵ Vid. Script. Advers. Coll. Hag. p. 63.

⁶⁶ Dicitur enim Deus etiam dilectionem suam manifestare erga hostes suos, Rom 5.8, 10. si ipsos dilexit etiam quum hostes essent, necesse est placuerint ipsi antequam crederent. Ibid. p. 71.

⁶⁷ Quamvis autem Deo displiceat, quicquid sit sine fide, potest tamen dici Deum amare quasdam personas, quarum facta ei displicent; sic personam Pauli amabat, prius quam ad fidem Christi converteretur—denique est quaedam (si fas ita loqui) complacentia personae antequam ejus opera & fides Deo placeant. Molinaei Enodatio Graviss. *Quaest.* Tract. 7. c. & p. 269, 270

I reply, that a person may be the object of love and delight, and of displeasure and wrath, at one and the same time, *in a different respect*.

It is said of the Jews, concerning the gospel, that “they are enemies for your sakes; but touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.” (Rom 11.28) This will be better exemplified in the instance of Jesus Christ. Standing in two different relations, and sustaining two different capacities, he was at one and the same time, the object of his Father’s love *and* wrath. As he was the Son of God, he was always the object of his Father’s love and delight; but as he was the sinner’s surety, and while bearing the sins of his people in his own body on the tree, he was the object of his Father’s displeasure and wrath, which he sensibly felt. And therefore it is said, “You have cast off and abhorred; you have been furious with your anointed.” (Psa 89.38) And yet, even then, when the Father poured out his wrath to the uttermost on him, on account of his people’s sins — when He ordered justice to draw its sword, and sheath it in him — His love towards him, *as his Son*, was not in the least abated.

Thus, the elect of God, being considered in different views, may be truly said to be “children of wrath,” and *objects of love*, at one and the same time. Consider them in Adam, and under the covenant of works — they are children of wrath; they are deserving of the wrath of God; and they are exposed to the curse of the law. But then, as considered in Christ, and under the covenant of grace — they always were, and ever will be, the objects of God’s love and delight.

This doctrine, I apprehend, is in no way contrary to the purity and holiness of God’s nature. It does not follow, that because God loves and delights in his elect while in a state of nature, that He loves and delights in their sins. “God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon sin with any approval or delight.” (Hab 2.13) “He is not a God who has pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him.” (Psa 5.4) We are obliged to distinguish between the *persons* and *sins* of God’s people after conversion. It is allowed that God loves and delights in their persons, even though he hates their sins.

Now, I don’t see why the same distinction may not be allowed *before* conversion, as *after* — since it is nothing that is done by them, nor wrought in them, that is the ground and foundation of God’s love to and delight in them. Rather, his love to and delight in them is the ground and foundation of all that He does for them, or works in them. No doubt, what He works in them is well-pleasing in his sight. But their acceptance with God, and their persons being well-pleasing to him, doesn’t lie in *this*, but in the *Beloved*.

Sir, when these things are considered by you, I hope you will no longer esteem it a fancy, that God should love and delight in his people while in a state of nature.

III. But I go on to consider another evangelical truth, which indeed is the sum and substance of the gospel. And the scripture abounds with the proof of it — though you are pleased to condemn it as a fancy. And that truth is that *God sees no sin in his people*. I know this doctrine has been most odiously maligned, and most widely misrepresented. But I hope that, once a few things are observed, it will plainly appear not to be a fancy, or a freak of some distempered minds, but a most glorious and comfortable doctrine of the gospel, without which the gospel must cease to be good news and glad tidings to the sons of men.

1st, When it is asserted that “God sees no sin in his people,” the meaning is *not* that there is no sin in believers, nor any committed by them, or that their sins aren’t sins, or that their sanctification is perfect in this life.

1. Sin is in the best of saints; to say otherwise is contrary to scripture, and to all the experience of God’s people; “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1Joh 1.8)

The ingenuous confession of the saints, their groans and complaints, and the continual war between flesh and spirit that they feel in themselves, are so many proofs of sin's being in them; and it is not only *in* them, but it *lives* in them. It is true, indeed, that *they* do not live in sin, for then there would be no difference between them and unregenerate persons. And to live in sin, is not only unbecoming, but contrary to the grace of God. But still, *sin lives in believers*. Though there is an inward principle of grace, and a mortification of the outward actions of sin, and a striving to "put off the former conversation of the old man which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph 4.22) — yet this old man is not changed, or removed, much less destroyed.

Moreover, sin is not merely in believers *now and then*, by fits and starts (as we say), but it *dwells* in them. Hence the apostle calls it, "sin that dwells in me." (Rom 7.17, 20) And where it isn't idle, but active and busy; it hinders all the good, and it does all the mischief it can. It makes war against the soul, and sometimes brings it into captivity. (Rom 7.23)

2. Sin is not only *in* the best of saints, but it is also *committed* by them: "There is not a just man on earth, who does good and does not sin" (Ecc 7.20); nor is there any sin that has not been committed by believers, or may be committed by them, except the sin against the Holy Ghost. Their daily slips and falls, their frequent prayers for the discoveries of pardoning grace, and the application of Christ's blood which cleanses from all sin, confirm the truth of this. It is true, the apostle John says that, "whoever is born of God, does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1Joh 3.9) That is, *as born of God*, he neither does nor can commit sin. What is that which is born of God? It is the *new creature*, the other *I*, as distinguished from sin that dwells in him. (Rom 7.20) This new creature never did, nor can commit sin. There is both an old man and a new man in regenerate persons. The new man never sins; the old man does nothing else but sin. There is both flesh and spirit in the saints. All sinful works are the works of the flesh, just as all good works are the fruits of the Spirit. The work of grace, though imperfect, is not impure. Nothing impure springs from it, nor is anything impure to be attributed to it.

3. The sins of believers are sins, just as the sins of others are. They are of the same kind, and are equally transgressions of the law. The murder and adultery committed by David, were sins in him, just as they were when committed by others. Indeed, oftentimes the sins of believers are attended with more aggravating circumstances than the sins of other men, because they are acted against light and knowledge, love, grace, and mercy. Though believers are justified from all sin by Christ's righteousness, and have all their sins pardoned through Christ's blood, their sins do not thereby cease to be sins. Justification from sin by Christ's righteousness, and the pardon of sin through Christ's blood, free believers from the obligation to punishment due to sin, but they do not destroy the *nature* of sin.

4. The work of sanctification is imperfect in this life. It is a good work begun, but not finished. There is something lacking in the faith of the greatest believer; love does not come to its full growth; and as for knowledge, it is but in part. (1Cor 13.9) There is a twofold sanctification. The one is in Christ; this is complete and *perfect*. The other is derived from Christ, and is wrought in the soul by the Spirit of Christ; this at present is *imperfect*. There is indeed a perfection of parts, but not of degrees — that is to say, the new creature has all its parts, but these are not grown to the perfection they will arrive at. The best of saints need fresh supplies of grace, which they would not need, were they perfect. They disclaim perfection in themselves, though they wish for it both in themselves and others. Therefore, when it is said that, "God sees no sin in his people," neither of these things are intended by it.

2dly, God's seeing no sin in His people, doesn't impeach his *omniscience*. Nor is it to be considered as referring to the article of *providence*, but to the article of *justification*, as I will show presently. God is omniscient. He knows and sees all persons and things; nothing is or can be hidden from His all-seeing eye:

“His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he sees all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” (Job 34.21-22)

All the actions of men, whether good or bad, are known to Him, with their secret springs and principles from where they flow. He sees the sins of his own people, as well as the sins of others — both in their first motions, and in their open productions. “The Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the children of men! The Lord tests the righteous.” (Psa 11.4-5)

About this, there is no debate; they must be stupid indeed, if there are any. For my part, I never heard of any who deny that the omniscience of God extends to the sins of his people. It was never thought of, nor intended by this assertion, to limit or deny the omniscience of God; nor is it limited or denied by it. Though the terms *seeing*, and *knowing*, are used synonymously in the article of *providence*, they are never used in the article of *justification*. There they are always distinguished. Knowledge and sight are two things: the one belongs to the attribute of God’s omniscience, the other to the attribute of His justice. Therefore, when it is said that God sees no sin in his people, the meaning is not that he doesn’t, with his *omniscient* eye, see and know sin to be in them. Rather, he doesn’t see any iniquity in them with his eye of *justice*, or so as to punish them for their sins, or to require satisfaction at their hands for them.

3rdly, Nor does this proposition, that “God sees no sin in his people,” mean that He takes no notice of them, nor resents his people, nor chastises them in a fatherly way, because of them. God does not, indeed, punish his people for their sins in a way of vindictive wrath and justice. For this is contrary to his justice; and it would necessarily overthrow the satisfaction of Christ. For either Christ has perfectly satisfied for the sins of his people, or he has not. If he has not, then they must satisfy for sin themselves; and if he has, it is contrary to the justice of God to punish for sin twice, or to require satisfaction from both the surety and the sinner. But though God doesn’t punish his people for their sins, he chastises them in a fatherly way. He takes notice of their sins, and lays his hand upon them in order to bring them to a sense and acknowledgement of them:

“If his children forsake my law, and do not walk in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and do not keep my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my lovingkindness I will not utterly take from them, nor allow my faithfulness to fail.” (Psa 89.30-33)

4thly, Though God sees sin in his people, as being sanctified only in part, yet he sees no sin in them, because they are perfectly justified. Though he sees sin in them with his eye of omniscience, it is not with his eye of revenging justice. Though he sees them in respect to his providence, which reaches all things, it is not in respect to justification. Though he takes notice of his people’s sins so as to chastise them in a fatherly way for their good, he doesn’t see them, take notice of them, and observe them in a judicial way, so as to impute those sins to them, or require satisfaction for them. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” (2Cor 5.9) No, he has imputed them *to Christ*; he has beheld them *in him*; he has charged them *to him*; and Christ has made full satisfaction for them. Therefore, “who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God who justifies: Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died.” (Rom 8.33-34)

God will not require satisfaction at the hands of his people for their sins. He will not punish them on account of them; they shall never enter into condemnation; for “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8.1) If God were to see sin in his people in this sense, and proceed against them in a forensic way, he must act contrary to his justice, and set aside the satisfaction of his Son. A few things will make it plainly appear that God sees no sin in his justified ones, such as:

First, This will be evident, if we consider what Christ has done with respect to the sins of his people. These have been removed from *them*, to *him*; they have been placed to his account,

imputed to him, and laid upon him. “All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isa 53.6) He has borne this iniquity in his own body, on the tree. Indeed, he is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Joh 1.29) He removed the iniquity of his people in one day. As he was “wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their sins,” (Isa 53.5) so he has washed them from their sins, in that blood of his which cleanses from all sin. By his righteousness, he “justifies them from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Act 13.39) And by the sacrifice of himself, he has put away sin forever. Indeed, he has “finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness.” (Dan 9.24) This is the language both of the Old and New Testament. And if this is the case, as it certainly is, God does not, and cannot see iniquity in his people, since all their iniquity has been transferred onto Christ, and it is all done away by him.

Secondly, This will be still more evident if we consider what God the Father has done on account of the blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and satisfaction of his Son. He has freely forgiven all the sins of his people for Christ’s sake; he has covered them with a covering of mercy, so they aren’t visible; he has blotted them out of his sight, so they aren’t legible to the eye of justice; indeed, he has cast them all behind his back, and into the depths of the sea. And so, “the iniquity of Israel will be sought for, and there will be none; and the sins of Judah, and they will not be found.” Such strong expressions as these from the mouth of the Lord of hosts, will sufficiently bear us out in asserting, that, “God sees no sin in his people.”

Thirdly, Add to this, the view in which the people of God are to be considered, and *are* considered by Father, Son, and Spirit. Being clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and washed in his blood, they are complete in Christ. They are without fault before the throne; “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.” (Eph 5.27) Christ says to them, “You are all fair, my love; and there is no spot in you.” (Song 4.7) The church is a perfection of beauty in his esteem; all the saints are perfectly attractive through the attractiveness he has put on them; indeed, in the sight of God, in the eye of justice, they are unblameable and unreprieveable; and if this is so, then surely God sees no iniquity in them. One must transcribe a considerable part of the Old and New Testament to give the full proof of this doctrine. If this is a fancy, it is the glory of the Bible, and the marrow of the Gospel. It is what most displays the riches of God’s grace, the efficacy of Christ’s blood, the completeness of his righteousness, and the fulness of his satisfaction. It is the foundation of all solid hopes of future happiness. It is what supports the life of faith, and is the ground of a believer’s triumph.

One would have thought, Sir, that you might have forborne so severe a reflection on this truth — of God seeing no sin in his people — since it is the express words of the sacred oracles: “He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor has he seen perverseness in Israel.” (Num 23.21)

IV. I now proceed to another truth decried by you as a fancy; and its asserters ridiculed as amusing themselves with a fancy, which is that “good works are not necessary to salvation.” I am sensible, in some measure, what controversies have been in the world about this subject, and what extremes have been run into on both sides the question. There was a sharp contention among the Lutherans on this topic. George Major asserted that “good works are necessary to salvation;” on the other hand, Nicholas Amsdorsius said that they were “noxious and pernicious to salvation.” Neither of these positions is defensible as stated. Not the former; for though good works are necessary for several valuable ends and purposes, they not necessary to *salvation*; though they ought to be performed by all God’s justified and saved ones, that is not to their justification and salvation; though the people of God ought to maintain good works for necessary uses, these necessary uses do not intend salvation, but other things, as I will show presently. Nor is the latter of these positions to be defended; for though good works are not necessary to salvation, they are not noxious and pernicious to it, unless when placed in the business of salvation, they displace Christ

and his righteousness; and then they are so far from helping us forward, that they hinder the salvation of souls; they become an *ignis fatuus* (an delusion) which leads us out of the way of salvation. The Papists and Protestants have hotly contested this point. The former say that good works are necessary to salvation, *per viam efficientiæ*, “by way of efficiency or causality,” to merit or procure salvation. This is the only sense in which the proposition can well be understood. For if good works are necessary to salvation, it must be to procure it; for in what other sense can they be necessary to it? This is denied by Protestants, and fully confuted by them; though some have made use of some distinctions, to qualify and soften the proposition that good works are necessary to salvation. By doing so, they have betrayed the truth into the hands of the enemy. I will attempt to show, *first*, that good works are in no sense necessary to salvation; *secondly*, I will show what they *are* necessary to, or what their necessary *uses* are.

First, I affirm that good works are not necessary to salvation in any sense.

1st, They are not necessary to salvation by way of causality — having a causal influence on our salvation, or any part of it. Christ is the sole author of salvation. He came into this world to effect it; he has done it; it is finished; it is complete and perfect in itself; it needs nothing to be added to it to make it so. Christ is a rock, and his work is perfect; he is a Saviour in whole, and not in part; he will allow no partner or assistant in this matter. Good works have no concern as causes in our salvation. In saving persons, God doesn’t act according to them, nor by them, nor in consideration of them — “for he has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (2Tim 1.9) The same inspired writer says elsewhere, “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.” (Tit 3.5)

God saves his elect by Christ, in a way of pure grace and mercy, to the exclusion of good works having any hand in it; “For by grace you are saved,” says the apostle, “through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man boast.” (Eph 2.8-9) Good works are not to be ranked among *any* causes of our salvation whatsoever.

1. They are not the impulsive or moving causes of salvation. Nothing outside of God can move him to do anything. Good works didn’t move him to take any one step relating to the salvation of his people; they didn’t move him to choose them unto salvation by Jesus Christ. He chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, before they had yet done either good or evil (Rom 9.11) — not because they *were* holy, but that they might *be* holy. This act of his sprung from his good will and pleasure, and is an instance of pure grace. Hence it is called “the election of grace.” And the apostle adds, “if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it is of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.” (Rom 11.5-6)

Good works are the *fruits*, not the *causes* of electing grace. Nor did these move God to make a covenant of grace with his elect in Christ. In this covenant, the scheme of salvation was fixed, the whole of it secured, and all its blessings and promises put into the hands of the Mediator. Nor was it good works that moved God to send his Son to obtain salvation, but His own free love and grace. Nor is it what moved Christ to give himself for his people, since at that time they were without strength, ungodly, sinners, and enemies to him. In a word, it is not good works, but grace, which moves God to justify, pardon, adopt, regenerate, sanctify, and glorify any of the sons of men.

2. Good works are not the efficient, procuring, or meritorious causes of salvation; for they are imperfect in the best of men. And even if they were perfect, the requisites of merit are still lacking in them. For,

(1.) That by which we would merit, must not be owed to the one of whom we would merit. Now, all our works are previously owed to God. He has a right to all our obedience, prior to its

performance. Therefore, when we have done all those things which are commanded us, we have done but that which it was our duty to do. (Luk 17.10)

(2.) That by which we would merit, must in some way or other, be profitable to the one of whom we would merit:

“But can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it any gain to him that you make your ways perfect? If you are righteous, what do you give him? Or what does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness may hurt a man, as you are; and your righteousness may profit the son of man.” (Job 22.2-3; 35:7-8)

(3.) That by which we would merit, must be done in our own strength, and not in the strength of the one of whom we would merit. We must not be obliged to him for anything in the performance of it. Whereas, all our sufficiency to think a good thought, or do a good action, is of God; without him we can do nothing. It is by the grace of God that we are what we are; and it is by the grace of God that we do what we do; and therefore all the glory belongs to him.

(4.) There must be some proportion between that by which we would merit, and that which we would merit. Now there is a just proportion between sin and its wages, but none between good works and eternal salvation; “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6.23)

In brief, if good works were the efficient procuring causes of salvation, then Christ died in vain. His obedience and sufferings must be useless, and of no effect. Besides this, boasting would *not* be excluded, which is God’s design in fixing the method of salvation in the manner he has. For if men were saved by works, they would have something to boast of.

3. Good works are not coefficient causes, or co-causes of salvation, with Christ. They are not supporting or helping causes of it. They don’t assist in, or help forward the business of salvation — it is done without them. Christ will not allow any rivalry in this matter: his own arm has brought salvation to him; he alone has effected it; and he is the sole author of it. Therefore, good works are needless in this respect. It is a rule in philosophy, *Quod potest fieri per pauca, non debet fieri per plura*; “What can be done by few, ought not to be done by more.” There is a fulness, a sufficiency in Christ unto salvation; therefore good works are not necessary to salvation.

4. Good works are not *causa sine qua non*, of salvation. They are not conditions of salvation, nor that without which persons *cannot* be saved. This is evident from the instances of the thief upon the cross, elect infants dying in infancy, and multitudes of others, it is hoped, whom God calls in the last hour upon their deathbeds — those who don’t live to perform good works. Now, if good works were necessary to salvation, and persons cannot be saved without them, then none of those persons mentioned can be saved.

2dly, There are some worthy divines who utterly deny the efficiency or causality of good works in salvation. Yet they think that this proposition, that “good works are necessary to salvation,” may stand safely, and in a good sense, allowing for some distinctions, which I will briefly note. They are as follow:

Some say that good works are not necessary to salvation as *causes*, and yet they are necessary as *means*. This cannot be true, because every mean is the cause of that to which it is a mean; and then good works must be the *cause* of salvation, which has been disproved already. If good works are the *means* of salvation, they must either be the means of procuring it, or of applying it, or of introducing God’s people into the full possession of it. They are not the means of procuring salvation, for that is procured by Christ alone, without them.

Nor are they the means of applying it in regeneration or effectual calling, because, properly speaking, no good works are done by the sons of men before regeneration or effectual calling.

They must first be regenerated, and called by grace. There must be an application of salvation. The gospel must become the power of God unto salvation, before they are capable of performing good works. “We are his workmanship,” says the apostle, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2.10)

Nor are they the means of introducing God’s people into the full possession of salvation. For “those who die in the Lord, rest from their labours, and their works follow them.” (Rev 14.13) They don’t go beforehand to prepare the way for them, nor to introduce them into the heavenly glory. Good works are not necessary as means, either for the application or possession of salvation; nor for the cohesion or consummation of it.

Others make use of a distinction, which is Bernard’s:⁶⁸ that although good works are not *causa regnandi*, “the cause of reigning,” yet they are *via ad regnum*, “the way to the kingdom.” But it should be observed that Bernard doesn’t say they are *via ad regnum*, but *via regni*, “the way of the kingdom,” between which there is a great difference. For good works may be the way or course of those who are of the kingdom of grace, and belong to the kingdom of glory, when they are not the way to either one. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life — the only true way to eternal life. Good works are to be performed by all who are in the way of Christ; they are the business of all who walk in this way. But good works are not *the way*, unless it can be thought they are *Christ*.

Others say that good works are necessary to justification and salvation, not *quoad efficientiam*, “as to the efficiency of them,” but *quoad præsentiam*, “as to the presence of them.” Though they have no causal influence on salvation, their presence is necessary to salvation. I allow that the presence of good works is necessary to all those who are justified and saved, who are capable of performing them, and who have time and opportunity to perform them. But I deny it is necessary to their justification and salvation. For if it is necessary, then it must be necessary either as a cause, condition, or means of justification and salvation; all of which were disproved already.

Others say they are as necessary to salvation, as the antecedent is necessary to the consequent. But from the instances mentioned before, of the thief on the cross, elect infants dying in infancy, and those whom God calls by his grace on their deathbeds, it appears that salvation is where good works do *not* go before. It is true, indeed, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12.14); that is, without internal holiness, without a principle of holiness in the heart. This must be supposed to be in the persons just instanced; but then, there may be this internal holiness, where there is no external holiness, no performance of good works before men. And that is either through incapacity, or lack of time and opportunity. Now, lest it be thought that I imagine the performance of good works is unnecessary, I will proceed to their *uses*.

Secondly, To show in what sense they are necessary, and what are the necessary uses of them. For, to say that because they are not necessary to salvation, they are unnecessary to anything else, is very illogical. Though the scriptures nowhere say they are necessary to salvation, they direct us to learn to maintain good works for necessary uses (Tit 3.14), which are these following:

1. They are necessary on account of God, who has commanded them. We are under his law as creatures, and ought to do his will and pleasure; and as *new* creatures, we are under still greater obligation. We ought to perform good works in respect to the commands of God, to testify to our obedience and subjection to him; and to show the grateful sense we have of his mercies, both spiritual and temporal; as well as to answer some ends of his glory: “By this,” says Christ, “my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.” (Joh 15.8)

No indeed, we not only glorify God ourselves by our good works, but we are the means of others glorifying him likewise. Hence, says our Lord, “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Mat 5.16)

⁶⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Reformer of the Benedictine monks, leading to the Cistercian order.

2. Good works are necessary on account of ourselves. They are useful to evidence the truth of our faith to the world, and reveal the certainty of our election and calling, to those who have no other way of judging either, except by our outward conversation. By this we adorn the profession we make of Christ and his gospel, so that his name, ways, truths, and ordinances, are not blasphemed, or spoken evil of through us. Indeed, by this we exercise a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man.

3. Good works are necessary on account of our neighbors. As they are often injured by evil works, they are helped and profited by good works. One part of the moral law is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Now, just as turning from this holy commandment tends to our neighbor's injury, so conformity to it issues in his good.

4. Good works are necessary on account of the enemies of religion. A good conversation recommends the Gospel and its truths, and it may be a means of winning persons over to it. And if not, it yet silences the ignorance of foolish men, and shames them, and stops the mouth of those who reproach the Gospel of Christ as a licentious doctrine, and who falsely accuse the good conversation of the saints.

From the whole, I hope, it appears on the one hand, that good works are necessary, and not trifling and indifferent things that may or may not be done; or that they are useless, unnecessary, and insignificant. And on the other hand, that it is no fancy, but a matter of faith, and what ought to be lived by — that good works are not necessary to salvation.

V. I observe that you describe those who assert (1) that God loves and delights in his elect while in a state of nature; (2) that God sees no sin in his people, and (3) that good works aren't necessary to salvation — as persons who are “bold to condemn pressing men to duty, as *legal preaching*; and exhorting to repentance, mortification, and self-denial, as *low and mean stuff*.” You make the same complaint in another place.⁶⁹

1st, I cannot help but wonder that you consider as culpable or blameworthy, those who condemn pressing men to duty, as *legal preaching*.⁷⁰ For pressing men to duty is none other than legal preaching, or preaching the law, since *duty* can refer to nothing else but the law which obliges us to it. If they condemned pressing men to duty, as being *criminal*; or denied that there should be *any* preaching of it; or denied there is any *use* for the law — then you might justly have blamed them. The duties which the law requires, *in their place*, should be insisted on in the ministry of the word. They should be opened and explained; men should be taught their duty to God and to one another; and they should be pressed to it. That is (if I understand it), they should be exhorted to it with gospel motives and arguments, such as the apostles frequently make use of in their epistles. They should, at the same time, be told where grace and strength lie, and can be had to assist them. The preaching of the law is of use both to saints and sinners. It is made useful by the Spirit of God, who convinces us of sin. (Joh 8.46) “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3.20), though it conveys no knowledge of a *Saviour* from sin. It shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the deformity of nature, the imperfection of man's obedience, and what is required for his justification before God — though it leaves him ignorant of that righteousness which alone can satisfy its demands, and render him acceptable in the sight of God. The law is a rule of walk and conversation to believers, because it is in the hands of Christ, and proclaimed by him as King of his church. It contains the perfect and acceptable will of God. It points out what is or is not to be done. In its own nature, it is spiritual, just, and good. And it is very agreeable to the regenerate man, who “delights in the law of God, after the inward man.” (Rom 7.22)

⁶⁹ *Sermon of the Causes of the Decay of Practical Religion*, p. 584. In Vol. 2. of the *Defence of some important Doctrines of the Gospel*.

⁷⁰ The accusation is that saying, “works play no part in our salvation,” equates to antinomianism, as if condemning any call to duty as legalism. Gill denies both charges. Here he upholds duty in its proper place: *sanctification*. — WHG

But then, pressing men to duty, is preaching the law; and that must be *legal preaching*, though it should not be branded within any odious or invidious character. For all duty belongs to a law. Grace and promises of grace, belong to the *gospel*; but precepts and duty to the *law*. We have had a controversy among us lately about preaching Christ in the lenient versus the restrictive way. And no doubt the people have been much edified and instructed by it. But men may argue to the end of the world, and it can never be proved that preaching *good works* is preaching *Christ*; or that pressing men to *duty*, is preaching the *gospel* — not unless it can be thought that *good works are Christ*, and that the Law is the Gospel. I am all for calling things by their right names. Preaching duty, is preaching the law; and preaching the free grace of God, and salvation by Christ, is preaching the gospel. To say otherwise, is to turn the gospel into a law, and to blend and confound both together. Some very worthy divines, whose names I forbear to mention, formerly talked of *gospel-commands*, *gospel-threatenings*, and *gospel-duties*. To me, these are contradictions in terms. And I fear that this loose and unguarded way of talking, tended to pave the way for *Neonomianism*⁷¹ among us, which a few years ago, gave the churches so much disturbance. We still feel the bad effects of it.

2dly, “Exhorting to repentance,” you say, is spoken of by these persons as, “low and mean stuff.” But you don’t tell us what kind of repentance is meant, or with what views, or upon what considerations an exhortation to it is given. There is an *evangelical*, and also a *legal* repentance.

Evangelical repentance has God for its object, and is called “repentance toward God” (Act 20.21). It is the gift of Christ, who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Act 5.31). It is one of the graces of the Spirit of God, which He implants in the hearts of his people. It is that sorrow and concern for sin, which springs from and is heightened and increased by the discoveries of God’s love. It is accompanied with views, or at least *hopes* of pardoning grace and mercy. It is a “godly sorrow” (2Cor 7.10), *ἡ κατὰ Θεοῦ λυπη* (*h kata theon luye*), “a sorrow according to God,” or agreeable to the mind and will of God. It is a divine sorrow which springs from divine principles, and proceeds upon divine views. Or it is a sorrow for sin, as it is committed against a God of holiness, purity, grace, and mercy. This godly sorrow works “repentance unto salvation.” (2Cor 7.10) It is not to be repented of; and therefore it is by no means to be spoken of slightly. Nor can exhortations to this kind of repentance be treated as “low and mean stuff,” without casting contempt on John the Baptist (Mat 3.2; 4:17), and on Christ and his apostles. For they made use of them to show the necessity of repentance; or to encourage the exercise of this grace in the saints; or to stir them up to an open profession of it; and to bring forth fruits in their conversation, that are fit for the same.

Legal repentance is a work of the law, which consists in an outward confession of sin, external humiliation for it, and an inward horror, wrath, and terror on account of it. It is a sorrow and concern for sin — not as it is in its own nature exceedingly sinful, or as it is an offense to God, and a breach of his law, but as it entails the sinner’s ruin and destruction; “This is the sorrow of the world, which works death;” and may be found where true evangelical repentance never was, nor ever will be found; and therefore it is not to be valued and regarded. Now, to exhort to this kind of repentance, or even to evangelical repentance, as being within the compass of the power of man’s will, and as a condition of the covenant of grace, and a term of acceptance with God, and in order to make peace with God, and to gain the divine favor (which you know is the rant of some men’s ministry) — I say, to exhort to repentance within such views, and on such considerations as these, is “low and mean stuff;” too mean for, below, and unworthy of a minister of the gospel.

3dly, You mention exhorting to *mortification* and *self-denial*, as treated by some, in the same slight and contemptuous manner. You know very well that much of what has been said and written concerning mortification, is low, mean, and trifling; and it would be mortification enough to be obliged to hear and read it. I confess, I have often been at a loss as to what divines mean by

⁷¹ *Neonomianism*: the doctrine that the Gospel is a “new law,” fulfilled by faith and repentance (Richard Baxter).

mortification of sin. If they mean destroying the being of sin, killing and taking away the life of it in believers (which seems to be their meaning), this is contrary both to Scripture and all the experience of God's people. The word of God assures us that sin is in believers; and they find it in themselves — yes, *sin is alive in them*, though *they do not live in sin*. The old man is indeed “put off,” concerning the former conversation, but not put to death; he remains and is alive; and he is sometimes very active, though he lies in chains, and is under the power and dominion of mighty and efficacious grace. There is a mortification of sin by the death of Christ: “The old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed.” (Rom 6.6) Christ has abolished, destroyed, and made an end of sin, through Christ's bearing the sins of his people in his own body on the tree. And through his death, they are dead to sin, and live unto righteousness. But sin is not dead in them; there is no such thing as a mortification, killing, or destroying of the inward *principles* of sin in believers; nor is it to be expected in this life. If *mortification of sin* indeed meant a weakening of the power of sin, such that it has no *dominion* over the saints, this is readily granted to be found in them. But it would be difficult to prove that this is ever called *mortification* in Scripture. The mortification that the Scripture speaks of, and exhorts us to, doesn't intend the mortification of the inward *principles* of sin, but the outward *actings* of it. It is a mortification of an external course of living in sin, and not taking away the life of sin in the soul, as evident from those places where any mention is made of it. “Therefore, mortify your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry... in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.” (Col 3.5, 7) These last words show the apostle referred to a walk, a conversation, a course of living in these sins. So when he says, “those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts,” (Gal 5.24) he means the *works* of the flesh, and the *actings* of unruly passions and deceitful lusts, as appears from the context. And when exhortations to mortification of sin are given in this sense, a special regard should be had to the gracious influences of the blessed Spirit. For as the apostle says, “If, *through the Spirit*, you mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live.” (Rom 8.13)

As for *self-denial*, perhaps no persons are found more in the practice of it, than those you have described — however averse they may be to exhortations made without taking any notice of the grace and assistance of the Spirit of God, as necessary to its exercise. They choose to suffer reproach, the loss of good name and reputation, to forego popularity, wealth, and friends, to be maligned as Antinomians, and reckoned any thing, rather than drop, conceal, or balk at any one branch of truth, respecting Christ and free grace. None are readier to deny self-righteousness than they are; and to submit to the righteousness of Christ, on which they alone depend for justification before God, and acceptance with him. Nor are any persons more powerfully and effectually taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. And, you, Sir, are so kind as to say, that those who have amused themselves with what you call *fancies*, “by their life and conversation have shown that they were far from being enemies to holiness.” And you further add, “Far be it from us to charge some, who have gone into this way of thinking and talking, with turning the grace of God into wantonness.”

I conclude, Sir, with assuring you that I do not write this with an angry and contentious spirit. I am willing to submit these things to the Scriptures of truth, which are the only rule of faith and practice. And I would gladly enter into a sober controversy, and test whether they are mere fancies, or parts of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. If, Sir, you think fit to give me an answer to this letter, I desire you would not so much attend to my inaccuracies in writing, which I know you are able to correct, as to the truths that are asserted and defended in this. I wish you success in your learned studies.

*I am, Sir, with all due respect,
Yours, etc.*