

1844 CIRCULAR WARWICK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

[Ministers present this session were, Elders : H. West, Gilbert Beebe, Gabriel Conkin, D. Forshee, Henry Hait, , and Amos Harding.

Associations seated were: Delaware, Kectocon, Delaware River, Baltimore, Lexington of NY, Licking of Ky., Chemung, Allegany, Rappahannock, Corresponding Meeting of Va. Association agreed to correspondence with the Ebenezer Association of Va., and requested correspondence with the Salisbury Association, and voted to open correspondence with the Predestinarian Conference in Maine.

Of special importance: “*Resolved*, That the question relative to the constitutional **form** of our Association, referred to the churches in our minutes last year, be referred to them again; and that the churches be requested to give the subject a **thorough examination, and make known their views and wishes fully next year**. It is hoped that as the subject is an important one, the churches will give it the **attention its importance demands.**”

While we have often seen in previous Circulars mention of the doctrine of Eternal Vital Union, we believe this to be the earliest fully developed theme, and believe it one of the best. It would be hard to improve upon. And, of not, all **bold** and underlined words and phrases are added for emphasis by the transcriber.- SCP.]

CIRCULAR LETTER

By

Gabriel Conklin

The Warwick Baptist Association, convened with the church at Warwick, June 5 & 6, 1844, to the churches composing the same, sends love in the Lord.

Dear Brethren:- As the theme of this letter, we present for your consideration the subject of

UNION TO CHRIST

Volumes might be filled in dwelling upon the grand, glorious, and sublime doctrine of the eternal union of the church to Christ her Head, without exhausting the subject, or unfolding one half of its real beauties. The testimony of the Scriptures prove beyond contradiction that the church of God was **created, secured, preserved and sanctified in Christ Jesus from everlasting**; that the Lord has been her *dwelling place in all generations*, even from everlasting to everlasting; (Psalm xc.1;) that the church was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that she should be holy and

without blame before Him in love, and that her spiritual life was **essentially and really *in* Him as her Spiritual Head**, when in His Mediatorial character or headship He was brought forth set up as the natural life of all mankind, was in Adam the natural head, in the day that God created him. **Here is the true ground of all union.** If we had no existence in Adam we could not have sinned, been condemned and died ***in*** him thousands of years before we were actually born; and if the church had not in like manner had a spiritual life in Christ secured, she could have no part or inheritance in the provisions of grace and mercy which were treasured up in Him before the world began. Christ is *emphatically* the Life of His people, and they possess no spiritual Life in themselves until Christ is formed in them by regeneration.

[Note: Here is the background for the two man doctrine of regeneration: one natural, one spiritual.-SCP] Our union with Adam is measured by *time*, it is perpetuated through *time*, and must cease when *time shall be no longer*; but the Life of the church was “*hid with Christ in God,*” “*in the secret place of the Most High,*” and “*under the shadow of the Almighty, FROM everlasting and TO everlasting.*” But our Adamic nature, as we have observed, belongs to our *time state*, and will be put off when it returns to the dust, as God said to Adam, “*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*” But in the resurrection of the redeemed bodies of the saints, all that is earthly, sensual, and corrupt, shall be left behind; and these mortals shall put on immortality, and these corruptibles shall be clothed in incorruption; (i Cor. xv.) and the bodies of the saints shall be **quickened and raised up** by the same Spirit that brought again from the dead the **body** of our Lord Jesus: and their **bodies** shall be like that body which was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. Hence the resurrection of the bodies of the saints is spoken of as the “*manifestation of the sons of God.*”- Romans viii.19. The relationship of the church to Christ was independent of and **prior to** their connection with Adam. They were children of God, and as such became **partakers of** flesh and blood, as in like manner Christ “*also took part of the same; for both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*” – Hebrews ii. 4 & 11.

The subject of union to Christ should also be considered in an *experimental* point of view. Doctrinally we have proved that such **union did exist before all time**, and must continue forever; but we feel the importance of this union to Christ experimentally, by a true and *living* faith. The branches had their existence in the vine before their development as branches, and we see that in the swelling bud, and their ultimate manifestation was but a growing out of the vine. So stand the members of Christ’s mystical body, in relation to Himself. He is the “*True Vine,*” and they are the branches, which have grown out of, or *become manifest* in their *vital connection with Him*. The

branch has no life in itself, neither have the children of God; but as the life of the branch is in the vine, so is the life of the church **in** Christ.

The children of God are **as unconscious of an existence in Christ**, until they are quickened by the Holy Spirit and born of God, as though no such life was **in Him** treasured up for them; for they were “*by nature children of wrath even as others;*” though set aside as vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory. Consequently they were in the same alienation from God, and from every thing of a *spiritual nature* as other men are. “*The son differeth nothing from a servant, until the time appointed of the father;*” even so were all the children of God in bondage, guilt, and condemnation; and **unconscious of their union to Christ**, as they were of their union to Adam before they were born of the flesh. To bring them therefore to the **knowledge and enjoyment** of this sacred **union**, they “*must be born again.*” Not of the flesh, as Nicodemus and all work-mongers seem to understand the subject, by some extraordinary development of human wisdom, virtue or power: “*but by an incorruptible seed, by the word of God which **liveth and abideth forever.***” By regeneration, that Life which was given us in Christ before the world began, is communicated to the people of God. Christ who is their Life, is **formed in them** the hope of glory. Because they **are sons**, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son **into** their hearts, crying, “Abba Father.” This heavenly birth brings forth the sons of God: they **not** “*born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” In connection with this plan, the sons of God are brought into possession experimentally of all the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, &c., and by which they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom this gift of faith *experimentally and manifestatively unites* them.

Faith discovers unto them their redemption from sin and condemnation found in the nature of the flesh, through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. By faith they are made to understand that the *legal right* of Christ to redeem them from sin and death, was **grounded upon the pre-existing union and relationship, the near Kinsman**, in whom the right of redemption was secured; hence they are led to admire and wonder, adore and love their blessed Redeemer, whom they receive as Head over all things to His church, which “*is His body, and **the fullness** of Him that filleth all in all.*” And being owned and accepted **in Him** as **His body**, and as members in particular, they feel the assurance that they are “*the bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.*” They are led by the Spirit to contemplate their union to Christ as being:

1st., **Vital**. It consist not in forms and duties, but there is a **living connection really felt and enjoyed**. His Spirit dwells in them, His love is shed abroad in their hearts, and His righteousness presents them without spot

or blemish before the throne. In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and they are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principalities and power. They, therefore, hold Him as the Head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.- Col. ii. 19.

2d. **IT IS INDISSOLUBLE.** Our guilt and condemnation in Adam, our transgression of the Divine Law, our alienation from God, and enmity of all His perfections, could not dissolve that eternal union, nor arrest the love of Him, who for the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together **with Christ**, so that *“By grace we are saved, through faith, and that (faith) not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.”*- Eph. ii. 45. And the challenge is still on record, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For 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.”*

We might go on to trace the attributes of this union, but the limits of a circular letter will not permit.

REFLECTIONS.

Brethren, Do you enjoy this **vital, heavenly, and invincible union with Jesus Christ?** Do you hold Him as the “Head over all things to His church, and do you disavow all other headships? The dragon and the beast which John saw had a plurality of heads, but Zion has **but one head, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and all His members are called in one hope of their calling.** Do you, brethren, receive all your spiritual nourishment from Him as your Head? Do you honor Him as your Head and Husband, as your Prophet, Priest, and King? Or are you ashamed to be found altogether dissimilar from all the daughters of the Old Mother of Harlots?

If we stand thus united to Christ, may we not expect that the **same vital union will be diffused** from the Head to all the members of His body? Or can we be vitally united with Christ, and feel no special attachment, love and fellowship for all the members of His mystical body? Can we love Him that begets, and not those who are begotten of Him? And, again: If we love Him,

will we not feel disposed with all our hearts to do whatsoever He has commanded us? We cannot consistently believe that His love dwells in our hearts, if it has no governing influence over our **affections**; over our **lives** and **our deportment**. May our union to Him, our love to His people, to His Truth, and to the order of His house, more abundantly appear in our lives and conversation before the world, and before our brethren.

Gilbert Beebe, *Moderator*.

Gabriel Conklin, *Clerk*.