

1826 Circular Warwick Association

Written by
Thomas Powell

[Elders seated at this session were: Elders Zelotes Grenell, Thomas Powell, Gabriel Conklin, William C. Thompson, Daniel T. Hill, William Warren, Henry Ball, Gilbert Beebe, Amos Harding, Thomas P. Terry, Philip Brown, Christopher Suydan.

Of interest to us, is that Gabriel Conklin who in the last session was first seated, is in this session elected the *assistant moderator* of the Warwick, and Gilbert Beebe was appointed their *messenger* to the Philadelphia Association. He will apparently learn much while there. Again, the Association, in Item 28, "*Resolved*, That the thanks of this Association be tendered to the Church and Congregation of New-Vernon, for their kindness and hospitality, during the present session."

Associations in correspondence this session were: Philadelphia, New-York, Abington, New-Jersey, Hartford, Union, Hudson River, New-London and Rensselaerville. The Circular Letter being too lengthy, it was divided, the first part to be printed in this Minute, and the latter in the next. On checking the 1827 Circular, however, we found a different subject.

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Warwick Baptist Association, To its respective Constituted Churches, send Greetings.

Beloved Christian Brethren,

In our present Annual Epistle, we propose to more particularly invite your attention to the "Scripture Doctrine of Grace." Without indulging a disposition to attach any undue weight to the subject, we infer from its very prominent place in the Holy Scriptures that it is worthy of being esteemed important. Suffer us, therefore, to submit to your consideration, a few remarks on its signification.

Praying that we may under the divine blessing derive from it edification and comfort; the English term *grace*, is through poverty of language, used with a certain latitude of signification to determine which recourse is properly had to the connection. When in the Scriptures, alluding to the *form of doctrine*, it means *free favor, unmerited kindness*. And from the term this simply and concisely defined, we perceive, grace to be sovereign, suitable and Free.

The *former*, with relation to God the Author, and the two *latter* with regard to man the object.

Grace is Sovereign

Some of the revealed titles of the Deity are, King of kings and Lord of lords. The blessed and only Potentate: denoting Him to be independent and supreme, superior to all accountability and law, separate

and undivided from the infallible principles of rectitude, reigning in Himself. In this elevated character, and according to His sole prerogative as such, the Divine being displays Himself openly in the exercise of grace. Romans ix. 19,24. Among the Divine attributes are ranked Omniscience and spotless purity. Isaiah lvi. 9,10, 2 Peter iii. 3,8. Habakkuk i.13. We cannot, therefore, without derogating from the Divine Character, for a moment imagine, that He was, *from eternity*, in the least unacquainted with the subsequent history of man. Nor yet that natural man, as an apostate sinner, could have been the object of His *essential* complacency and good pleasure. Previous to the apostasy, human affairs did not admit of a manifestation of what we have denominated *grace*.

Man, it is true, stood in the favor of God; but, it was in virtue of innocence as a perfect and holy being, on the condition of sinless obedience to the just requisitions of Heaven. In this state, the *essential* complacency of the Deity resplendently shines, He pronounces every thing “good,” yea, “very good,” and not until the forfeiture of this blessing, and a lamentable change in the scene, was there room found for the *actual* revelation of His *Sovereign* good pleasure. But from the period of the apostasy until this, God hath seen fit to declare the *sovereignty* of His grace. Saying, “*I will call them My people which were not My people, and her beloved which was not beloved.*”

In scrutinizing the operation of Divine grace, the discrimination peculiar to it cannot fail to arrest our attention. Some created intelligence, within the circuit of the universe, may be imagined to occupy the place of *spectator*, as some view the deity uninvolved in daily affairs of men. In this situation he discovers two distinct species involved in apostasy: that of fallen Angels and fallen man. The one is left to reap the consequences of rebellion, Jude vi, the other chosen and raised from this condition to a state of endless felicity. But on approaching a step nearer, the *spectator* perceives the discriminating principle to operate somewhat more minutely. In that, although *all* of the human race are on an equal footing as to guilt and danger, yet only *a part* share in the everlasting benefits of grace. In view of this phenomenon, might not astonishment prompt the enquiry, “*Who maketh thee to differ?*” To what other that the *Sovereignty* of God in the daily affair of grace, can we repair from a satisfactory solution of this mystery? “*Wherefore* hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth.” Particularly with regard to man we say:

GRACE IS SUITABLE

It is so on account of its peculiarly propitious character. According to the most correct and frequent definitions, *grace* is synonymous with *favor*, a term, which from its currency, no one acquainted with our language can fail to understand (sic – SCP!). As such it stands remote from every thing painful and injurious, however legitimate the source, and contemplates the benefit of all concerned.

Of the various and multiplied evils distracting the Universe, which can be charged to the operations of grace, and denominated a consequence necessarily flowing from it? Not one! On the other hand, *sin* is the prime source of all misery; and grace stands solely connected with holiness, truth, justification, salvation, peace, and every thing happy, of which we can conceive. It regards man as an immortal intelligence, qualified either to occupy everlasting felicity, or suffer endless pain. It looks at, weeps over, and provides against, the desperate miseries which awaits the elect sinner, giving assurance not merely of rescue from Hell, but an admission into Heaven. This salvation, which is the burden of the song of free grace, and to which, all its provisions lead, is worthy the enterprise of Heaven, and no less suited to the attributes and state of man. Every thing (however good) bounded by the narrow confines of time, falls far short of our real necessities. Matt. xvi. 26. Nor is any thing beneath the prospect of an happy immortality, essentially sufficient to allay the thirst of an immortal mind. Reflect on the uneasiness of mere worldly men, in a career of sin, and in near prospects of eternity: The Scriptures, contemplating their state, are not silent or ambiguous; but depicts most lucidly, the disquietude and disappointments which attend the sinners path. Eccl. li.11; Psalm iv. 6. The ungodly (it is admitted) do cherish in their bosoms an expectation of happiness. As such they are addressed, Isaiah lv.2. The natural expectations

of the sinner are *therefore* vain and delusive. “*For God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all be damned.*” But blessed be God, although sin and sublunary things fail to answer the sinners need, *free grace is all-sufficient*. It discloses the spring, whose quality, fullness and perpetuity, warrant our confidence. John iv.14. The provisions of grace are as for the hungry, food; for the thirsty, drink; the naked, clothing; the mourning, comfort; contending, triumph; the weak, strength; the humble, favor; the sick, health; the poor, riches; the defenseless, safety; the foolish, wisdom; the weary, rest; the benighted, light; the suffering, sympathy; the captive, liberty; the injured, retribution; and the defiled, purity. By these and corresponding metaphors, the Scriptures amply and appropriately set forth free grace’s peculiar excellency and adaptedness to relived our wants.

GRACE IS FREE

It contemplates man, although needy, to be utterly undeserving of any thing favorable from God, and on this ground it wholly proceeds. The supposition of goodness in us, whether in principle or action as a prerequisite to it, is esteemed hostile to its very nature; and subversive of its fundamental laws. So that every effort employed to blend grace and works, must be worse than useless. Rom. 11.6. Indeed the remuneration of toil is very distinct from grace, an act rather of pure equity, in which the parties concerned are under *mutual obligation*. Luke x.7; Rom. iv.4. In opposition to the freeness of grace (it is well known) the self-righteous maintain that they possess inherent virtue, and the ability to do at best something good. To reconcile this with revealed truth, seems to us rather difficult. For how can the sinner, condemned already, a child of wrath, whose seasons and means are forfeited, perform the smallest condition, either to obtain, or having already obtained eternal life, by which to merit the blessing of Heaven? Nor is the sentiment (however widely at variance with the scriptural account of man) a whit more acceptable with the necessity implied in the revelation of *grace*. Matt.ix.12. Grace, furthermore, from its unalienable freeness, is contrasted with the law, both as to nature and design. We are not aware that the law, strictly speaking, any where proposes to man, even in his state of innocence, any higher than sublunary good. Be that as it may, it certainly never descends below the level of justice to confer benefit, Romans x.5. In our present degradation, instead of suggesting *ought*, by which our state may be improved, its province is to convict and condemn. Galatians iii.10. Happily for us, compared with it, grace is a perfect contrast, and a most profound gift. For although the law is limited by justice and desert, grace gratuitously proposes good to the *guilty* and *undeserving*, Romans iii. 21 and 24. To illustrate (as it were) this feature of grace, the Almighty has made the most unlikely and unworthy in the esteem of the law, the *recipients* of His mercy: Such as King Manasseh, Mary Magdalen, and Saul of Tarsus. In these and other examples of the like description, we have plain and irrefragable testimony to the freeness of grace. The representations made of it in the Scriptures, are moreover uniformly accordant with the same.

The servant in debt, who had *nothing to pay* his Lord frankly forgave him all. The Prodigal Son, reduced to extreme *indigence* was received by his father, joyfully. “*Ho! Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money come, buy and eat: yea come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.*”

Zelotes Grenell, *Moderator*.

Thomas Powell, *Clerk*.