

1838 CIRCULAR WARWICK ASSOCIATION

[Ministers present this session were: Elders Richard Pickard, Gabriel Conklin, Amos Harding, Philip C. Broom, H. Hait, William Harding, D. Forshee, T. Bishop, William House, Hezekiah West, Benjamin Pitcher, and St. John.

Associations seated this session were: Lexington, Delaware River, Delaware, Baltimore and Ketchikan. "Voted to solicit a correspondence with the Chemung Association (NY). Brother West, a member of that Association, though not a messenger from it, having already been invited to participate with us, expressed, as an individual, his wish, that a correspondence between the two associations should be opened."]

CIRCULAR LETTER

By

Gabriel Conklin

Of Justification

The Elders and Brethren of the Warwick Association, assembled at Hardeston Church, Sussex County, New Jersey, by appointment, June 13th, and 14th, 1838

To the Churches whose Messengers they are,- Greeting.

Dear Brethren:- In this our Circular Address, we promise calling your attention to the consideration of some part or portion of doctrine of our faith. The **Justification** of the people of God, is an important item in the plan of grace in a link in the chain, which binds the Lord's people to Himself and to each other; therefore it may not be amiss, to offer you a few ideas again on this object, at this time. *Justification* stands opposed to condemnation, and condemnation necessarily follows *transgression*, and transgression implies *sin*: "For where no Law is, there is no transgression." Roman iv.15. Hence when the Justification of the Church is spoken of, the idea of law, transgression and condemnation are clearly and fully implied, though it were not expressed. But it is also abundantly expressed in the Scriptures of Truth – Besides, it is so clearly present to the view of the people of God in their own experience, that their mouths are stopped, and they confess themselves guilty before God.

The children of God, as they stand connected with, and related to Adam their *natural head* are, in view of the Law of God, in the same situation with the rest of mankind, "Dead in trespasses and sins," Ephesians ii.1, "Children of wrath even as others," - Ephesians ii.3. An important enquiry arises here "How shall man be just with God?" Job ix.2, or how shall he be justified in His sight? This question is one of great moment to the poor sensible sinner. Human wisdom suggests the idea of human

justification: but that is foolishness with God. It proposes our own works, and those of our fellow men: it talks of our prayers, our cries, our tears, or agonizing, our fasting, our paying of tithes, our giving alms, our attending to what it terms the ordinances of the Gospel, or the “means of grace” &c. as being weighty in the scales, and if likely to fall a little short, it advises to mix with our own, the righteousness of Christ.

But the poor condemned, guilty, sensible soul, knows better, even though heretofore ignorant of the letter of the Bible; feeling the weight of his guilt, and the justice of his condemnation, in view of the holiness of the Character of God, as set forth in His Law, by the quickening operation of the Spirit of God in his soul; he finds with all his works and service and attempts to keep the Law, and recommend himself to God, he becomes more odious in His sight; instead of becoming better he is growing worse; or of taking one step toward heaven, he is drawing nigh to destruction. If he turns to the Bible his condemnation is ratified and confirmed in his own view, for “*By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*” – Romans iii.20. Thus the people of God are taught directly by the Spirit in their own experience that “*vain is the help of man,*” that all human wisdom, human righteousness, human works, human skill and human schemes, will utterly fail of justifying the soul before God. That the people of God are justified in His sight, is abundantly established in the Word of God, and since it is also established, that they cannot justify themselves – who is their Justifier? Paul answers, “*It is God that justifieth.*” “*Who is he that condemneth?*” Romans viii.33 and 34. It is a matter of small moment to us, who *condemns us*, IF God justifies us. How does God justify His people? He justifies them *freely!* That is, without money and without price: or without any thing *in them*, as a cause, or *from them* as an equivalent or consideration; therefore it must be by grace and not by works. Hence the Apostle observes, “*Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” Romans iii.24. But *when* does He justify them? If we take into consideration the purpose of God, in the salvation of His people, the Scriptures seem to present the idea of their being justified “*before the world was.*” In Paul’s 2 epistle to Timothy, 1:9; we read as follows: “*Who hath saved us and (then) called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which **was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.***”

When it is declared that God justifies freely by His grace, we understand *that grace* to be a *justifying grace*, and when again it is declared, that *that grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*” we understand it was given to us before time, or in eternity; and here we pause and wonder, and admire, and where the grace came to clear our sins. That the eternal purpose of God, in His eternal purpose and grace did indeed determine the justification of His people, yea, that He positively and actually gave them the grace by which they were and are justified, in Christ Jesus before the world began; causes us to seek the way by which He could do this. This act of Jehovah giving us justifying grace in Christ, before time, in eternity, tells us of a wonderful relationship, “*His strange acts.*” But is it proper to call it an “act?” A decree of flesh is

properly called an act. To illustrate: a decree of the Congress of the United States is legally termed an “act of Congress.” So too, in the “State of New York” – thus the sovereign people, through their elected Representatives Assembled, determine, decree and ordain, which in other words are termed, “*Acts passed.*” Hence from the use and language and definition of words, it is proper to term a decree, an Act.

Again, the Lord by the Prophet declares, “*He will bring to pass His Act.*”- Isaiah : 21. In this passage and its connection, our minds are carried forward to Gospel times, to the coming of Christ. Here the Lord reveals something of His purpose, relative, both, to the salvation of His people, and the destruction of His and their enemies. Hear Him saying, “*Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner Stone, a sure foundation.*” Again, “*Your Covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand,*” &c. verse 13. “*For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the Valley of Gibeon.*” See verse 21. Should the following objection arise viz., that the circumstance of Christ’s coming in the flesh, His life, death, resurrection, &c., for the salvation and justification of His people, *is the Act*; then the inquiry is, What is the *bring to pass the act*?- Is it not clear that *the Act*, is first, and then the bring to pass? Consequently, that the decree or purpose of Jehovah, in relation to the justification of His people, was an *Act*, and *His Act before time*, or in eternity, and that in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, &c., and in all that Jesus has done and performed, and will do and perform, Jehovah is yet bringing to pass His “*Act, His strange act!*” None who “*receive the Truth in the love of it,*” will deny that Jehovah purposed, determined or decreed the justification of His people; if so, it was an act, in eternity, or before time.

Moreover He gave them the justifying grace **in Christ** before the world began. We have already remarked, that this was one of His “*strange acts.*” Strange that He should decree their justification, “*when as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world,*” nor given to them their actual being. *Strange* that He should give them justifying grace in Christ *before* they were actually condemned, in Adam when in view of their **union to Christ their spiritual Head**, they needed no justification. But in this “*strange Act*” of Jehovah His people were held in view in their relation to Adam their natural Head, in the ruin of the fall, condemned by His law, and under sentence of death. Their being justified (freely by His grace) *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*,” is the bringing to pass *this strange Act*, or the accomplishment of the purpose. The redemption was not “*with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*” 1 Peter 1. 19,20. Again, the Apostle speaking of the “*purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*” observes, “*but is now made manifest, (that is, the purpose and grace) by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ – who hath abolished death, and brought Life and Immortality to light through the Gospel.*” – Again, “*Who only hath immortality*” (1 Tim.vi.16.- Again, “*that*

through death, He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Hebrews ii.14-15,- And lastly, “*Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our **justification**,*”- Romans iv.25. In view of the Scriptures, then, we see how admirably the purpose of God, and the accomplishment of that purpose; or in other words, the Act of God, and the bringing to pass that Act – or again, the grace of God, and the Revelation or manifestation of that grace are linked together, in the Justification and Salvation of His people, - May the Lord open our understanding to understand the Scriptures, and then shall we see eye to eye, in the things of the Kingdom.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all. Amen.

Amos Harding, *Moderator.*

Gabriel Conklin, *Clerk.*