

1793 Circular Warwick Association

Written by
John Caton

[Ministers present: John Caton, John Dodge, Thomas Montanye, Reuban Garrison, Silas Southworth, Elias Lee, Enoch Farris, Benjamin Montanye, Lebbeus Lathrop, John Stanford, and Isaac Roads.

Receive correspondence from Kent and Sussex Association in England.

Query from Warwick Church: “Is it consistent with the Gospel for two churches lying advantageous to each other, both being small, to form one body, and in the future to be known as one church? Answer: This association not only considers it lawful, but would recommend it wherever it can be done in fellowship of the Gospel.”

Two letters received and read, both calling themselves the Pecks-Kill church. This association went into an investigation of the matter, and found that a division had taken place among themselves, respecting the doctrine held by this association: and that a number of our churches being solicited attended at Pecks-Kill, at which time they mutually agreed to be two people, and as *Isaac Roads*, and those members with him still hold to the doctrine of this association, they were unanimously considered the church.

The Subject of the following Circular Letter is **Justification**. It is well worth reading and studying, in that it is written long before either Gilbert Beebe or Gabriel Conkling appears on the scene, and it ties Eternal Justification to Eternal Vital Union. –SCP].

CIRCULAR LETTER

*The Elders and Brethren of the several Churches met in Association, at Bedford,
October 15, 1793,*

To the Churches with whom they are connected, Greeting.

Beloved Brethren,

The design of our annual meeting, is to give you counsel, and inform between truth and error; it is therefore with the greatest pleasure, that we address you this year, on the all important and glorious **Doctrine Of Justification**.

No point in the Christian religion more misconstrued: the reason obvious; the *degeneracy* of our hearts, and its being an *act of God* in a way mysterious even to Angels. Were we left to the light of nature, or human conception to judge the ways of God, we would never determine the subject to a certainty; therefore we do not look to nature wishes, neither own hearts suggestions in guiding our pen; but the unadulterated Word of Truth: which presents the **doctrine in close union with that of Election in Christ**, found in the Will of God; which is the Sovereign in the Divine Essence. Hard and harsh expressions ought to be avoided, but Truth maintained. As an **immanent act of God** we would just observe: the **union of Zion to the Mediator can never be considered with the least propriety in impurity**; for how can spotless innocence dwell

with sin: or God in His Holiness take delight in a contrariety with His own nature? Consequently, in that the elect seed stood complete in Christ not only decreatively, but in a mystical union: illustrated by the Poet,

“Then were our characters decreed,
Blameless in love, a Holy seed;”

Confirmed by the Scripture, “*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.*” Romans 8:33. It must necessarily follow: that as its original was the Divine mind, it is, and must **be eternal**; and as they bore the epithet of *elect* from eternity, Christ accepted and they justified and acquitted; we must clearly see the propriety of the doctrine. – That the patriarchs, prophets and saints of God under the former dispensation, were justified by the same imputed righteousness of Christ that believers under the Gospel are now; none pretend to deny, Rom. 3:25, which was long before Christ’s actual death, or righteousness being actually brought in; it naturally follows, that as thousands of them went triumphing to glory in that righteousness, it was upon the footing of Christ’s Suretyship engagement; there is therefore the same equal propriety of the elect standing in the same in the eternal covenant.

2dly. As a **declarative justification** appears in the Sacred Scriptures, it will not be amiss to elucidate its nature, which is in Christ the Head of the Church: consisting of three parts. First, the non-imputation of sin to them; Rom. 4:8. Secondly, In the imputation of their sins to Christ, Isaiah 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:12. Thirdly, In the manifestation of Himself in the world as their Sponsor, surety and substitute, wherein He suffered, bled, and died; having fulfilled the law by a tantamount obedience to its requirements, His passive sufferings in His death finished the redemption of all His people; and on the rising morn was acquitted and discharged, and as He suffered, bled and died, not as a single Person, (i.e.) not for Himself; but as both the Head and Representative of His people, He arose also as such; now as He was acquitted or justified in this the work He had done, it not being for Himself but for His people, they were not only owned in this obedience, but also discharged acquitted and justified in Him. Romans 4:25.

3dly. **Manifestive, or Justification by faith**, not as a condition; but as an instrument that exercises itself in the plan of grace. Ephesians 2:8.

Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, is a doctrine essential in the Christian religion; it was this in the Reformation struck at the very root of popish superstition, cut off all penances and purgations in any other channel, for which many lives were taken; so high was it esteemed, that one called it the main sinew of the church, and another, that the health and prosperity of Zion were connected with its pure administration; the third, that by its reception in the church, the state of religion might be known and understood.

It stand opposed to justification by the law; debases the creature, and puts the crown on the head of Zion’s King. By it we do not understand that internal enjoyment of the

soul, in the sweet experience of heavenly grace; neither does it consist in any thing wrought **in the soul** by the Eternal Spirit: this would confound justification and sanctification together. Were we in possession of the rectitude of elect Angels, and the law of God not fulfilled, we on Scripture grounds, could have no well-founded hopes of heaven: - therefore, the regenerating grace of God does not relieve sinners from the execution of wrath in the law; but fits them to behold by faith, the matter of their justification out of themselves, and to entertain holiness within; to dwell with Christ in full fruition, beyond the grave.

Justification stands opposed to a state of condemnation; it is a *judicial term*, and has reference to affairs in a judicial court, wherein the necessities of one are relieved in another; so the sinner is acquitted, justified, and freed by the obedience and death of Christ. It is presenting the guilty in a state of righteousness before God, as pure as the law; and as free from the guilt of sin, as though they had never sinned; and in standing, more secure.

This is an act of God's free grace in acquitting the guilty, and in owning them righteous in His sight, through the imputed righteousness of Christ, imputed to them for their own righteousness, in their justification, and received by faith alone. Roman 3: 26,27,28.

That the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, appears not only evident by the Scripture, where He is called "our Righteousness," – Jer. 23:6, and the church in union with Him, in her mystical relation; "*and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness*"- Jer. 33:16. This union being so near, "*bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh,*" she (the church) is entitled to all He (her Husband) possesses, found in His divine will by the Spirit. "*All is yours;*" but from the nature of that righteousness God justifies us in. Here it is necessary to distinguish particularly that righteousness which is imputed, from the righteousness of the Mediator, peculiar only to Himself in that capacity.

1st. Christ's essential righteousness, comprehends His divine essence; His eternity, immensity, and immutability – John 1:1 wherein as God He took part in the great plan of redemption, and was found meet to atone for others; which righteousness God never designed to part with, being jealous of His own nature; neither did we stand in need of it, in order to our justification. This would rob God of His glory and deify the creature.

2^{sly}. Christ, as man, possessed a righteousness, being the fruit of the Spirit, in an ineffable, mysterious, incomprehensible generation; being *holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners*, in which true body and reasonable soul, He shewed a familiarity with the children of men, in holiness, purity, and perfection.

3^{dly}. Christ was righteous as the Redeemer of God's elect, wherein His humanity was taken into union with His divine Person: John 1,14. and He constituted a Mediator in His Mediatorial character, being co-equal with the Father and consubstantial with the

Holy Ghost, in which our Redeemer was capacitated, to work out that righteousness by which we are justified, and wherein He doth appear possessed of power and ability to forgive sin, and acquit the guilty; which righteousness was wrought out by His active obedience, and passive sufferings; and being completed by His death, He hath it to part with, having no necessity of His own, and doth make it over, reckon it to our account, or impute it to us for our justification. This righteousness accepted of God is now made manifest in the Gospel, as an act of the Father: Romans 4:6. “*Of Him (i.e., God the Father), are ye in Christ Jesus,*” chosen and united to Him; “*who of God is made unto us righteousness;*” that is, made over to us for our justification.

Christ is the Author of this righteousness, as the Head and as Representative of His people; they are acquitted in Him. As Adam’s posterity sinned in him, and with him fell under the condemnatory sentence of the law; even so all the spiritual seed and offspring of Christ, were justified in Him; He being delivered up to death and divine Justice in their room, and for their transgressions; when the law released Him, He having answered all demands that were against them; in Him they were discharged.

The Divine Spirit enlightens elect sinners into the nature of their justification, by convincing them of the need they stand in of righteousness; in opening to their view the weakness, imperfection, and insufficiency of all acts of their own to justify; and that their righteousness is filthy rags, which will not be accepted before God, and at the same time assuring them of the necessity of a better one. It is the office work of the Spirit to bring near the best robe in the instrumentality of the Gospel, and by the illuminating influences of divine grace presents the fitness and fullness of this righteousness, as commensurate to all the demands of law and justice; this is one of the things of Christ shewn to the soul, how speedily faith centers in this glorious garb; looks at its purity; views its excellency, claims a right in its sufficiency, and appropriates it as their justification. Romans 3:1,2.

The Spirit witnesses in their hearts that they are freed from the curse of the law. ‘Tis now they feel the sentence against them removed, and justification manifested in their conscience, 1 Cor. 6:11. “*And such were some of you: but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*”

Thus dear Brethren lit it suffice, least we should exceed the limits of a letter; and from the above glorious doctrine reflect: 1st. How amazingly different the standing of the Church now from that of our primeval rectitude! Tho’ then in innocence; yet loveable, for the first man Adam was of the earth earthly, in his mutability you and we sunk under the curse of the law. But our second Adam, the Lord from Heaven was a quickening Spirit, in whom we have a better, yea, the best robe, which being unchangeable in its nature, fixes our standing in Christ in a state of immutability.

2dly. The completeness of this righteousness – Justifies from all things, original sin; impurity of nature; all actual transgressions before conversion; sins of whatever nature

or kind we are charged with; for he that believeth in Christ “*is justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.*”

3dly. While passing through this world of sorrows, we have manifold distresses from the threefold troop: and are many times almost sinking amidst the clamors of nature, and the feelings of our own hearts; yet in this righteousness we have confidence, every charge is removed, God having accepted is in His Son will acquit all His people; and Jesus Christ will present them as a pure virgin without spot or wrinkle in this all-sufficient righteousness.

4thly. In this righteousness all boasting is excluded, for it is not by righteousness we have done, either in the works of the law, or in any condition of our own in spiritual graces; but in the Lord we have righteousness and strength: and in Him only.

5thly. All our professions even in the pure religion of Christ, the sincerity of our intentions; the holy exercises of our minds together with the purity of our hearts, are not the matter of justification before God; but the obedience and death of the Friend of sinners set to our account; therefore let us count all things “*but loss, dross and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord;*” and manifest our justification by the purity of our lives.

6thly. To conclude, arise in your graces; adore the riches of His mercy; in which a naked soul may triumph in a dying hour, and ascend to bliss supreme even in the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The Spirit wrought my faith and love
And hope and every grace;
But Jesus spent His life to work:
The robe of Righteousness.”

Signed by order and in behalf of the Association,

John Dodge, *Moderator*:

Benjamin Pelton, *Clerk*.