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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 4

**OF THE ETERNAL UNION OF THE
ELECT OF GOD UNTO HIM.**

The union of God's elect unto him, their adoption by him, justification before him, and acceptance with him, being eternal, internal, and immanent acts in God; I know not where better to place them, and take them into consideration, than next to the decrees of God, and particularly the decree of election; since as that flows from the love of God, and is in Christ from everlasting, there must of course be an union to him so early; and since predestination to the adoption of children, and acceptance in the beloved, are parts and branches of it, (Eph. 1:4-6) they must be of the same date. I shall begin with the union of God's elect in Christ.

I shall not here treat of any time acts of union; as of our nature to the Son of God by his incarnation, when he became our brother, our near kinsman, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; and we and he were of one, that is, of one nature, (Heb. 2:11, 14, 16) nor of the vital union of our persons to him in regeneration, when we are quickened by the power and grace of God, Christ is formed in our hearts, and we become new creatures in him, and are in him as living fruitful branches in him, the living vine; which is our open being in Christ, in consequence of a secret being in him from everlasting by electing grace (see Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:17, 12:2). Nor of the more open and manifest union of the saints to God hereafter; who being once in Christ, are always found in him; die in union to him, rise from the dead by virtue of that union; and who will then, in soul and body, be one in God, Father, Son, and Spirit; as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father; whose union to one another is the pattern and exemplar of theirs; and for the open manifestation of which Christ prays (John 17:21, 23).

But I shall consider the union of the elect to God, as it is in its original, and as an eternal immanent act in God; and which is no other than the going forth of his heart in love to them, and thereby uniting them to himself; which love, as it is from everlasting, (Jer. 31:3; John 17:23, 24) so it is of a cementing and uniting nature; and, indeed, is the bond of union between God and his chosen people, or that by which he has taken them into near union with himself: love is the bond of union among men, of friendship one to another; it was this which knit the soul of Jonathan to the soul of David, so that he loved him as his own soul; it is the bond of the saints union to each other; their hearts are "knit together in love": hence "charity", or love, is called, "the bond of perfectness", or the perfect bond, which joins and keeps them together (Col. 2:7 3:14). It was love which so closely cemented the hearts of the first Christians to one another, insomuch that the multitude of them were "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). And now love must operate infinitely more strongly in the heart of God, attracting and uniting the objects of it to himself, giving them such a nearness and union to him which cannot be dissolved; nothing can "separate from the love of God"; not the fall of God's elect in Adam; nor their actual sins and transgressions in a state of unregeneracy; nor their revoltings and backslidings after conversion, (Rom. 8:38, 39; Eph. 2:3, 4; Hosea 14:4). This bond of union is indissoluble by the joint power of men and devils. In virtue of this, the people of God become a part of himself, a near, dear, and tender part, even as the apple of his eye; have a place in his heart, are engraven on the palms of his hands, and ever on his thoughts; the desires and affections of his soul are always towards them, and he is ever devising and forming schemes for their welfare; how great is his goodness which he has laid up and wrought for them! (Zech. 2:8; Ps. 139:17; Song 7:10; Isa. 59:16; Ps. 31:19).

The love of Christ to the elect, is as early as that of his Father's love to him and them, and which, it seems, was a love of complacency and delight; for before the world was his "delights were with the sons of men", (John 15:9; Prov. 8:30, 31) and this is of the same cementing and uniting nature as his Father's; it is this which causes him to stick closer than a brother to his people; and nothing can separate from his love to them, any more than from the love of the Father; having loved his own, he loves them to the end. This bond of union remains firm and sure, and gives such a nearness to him the church wished for; "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm" (Song 8:6; Prov. 18:24; Rom. 8:35). The same may be said of the love of the Spirit; for it is the everlasting love of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, which is the bond of the union of God's elect to the sacred three; they have all three loved the elect with an everlasting love; and thereby have firmly and everlastingly united them to themselves; and hence because of the Spirit's love of them, and union to them, he, in time, becomes the Spirit of life and grace in them (Rom. 15:30). Now of this love union there are several branches, or which are so many illustrations and confirmations of it, and all in eternity; as,

1. An election union in Christ: this flows from the love of God, "electio praesupponit dilectionem", election presupposes love; (see 2 Thess. 2:13) particular persons are said to be chosen in Christ, as Rufus, (Rom. 16:13) and the apostle says of himself

and others, that God had chosen them "in Christ", and that before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Election gives a being in Christ, a kind of subsistence in him; though not an "esse actu", an actual being, yet at least an "esse representativum", a representative being; even such an one as that they are capable of having grants of grace made to them in Christ, and of being blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and that before the world began, (2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:3, 4) and how they can be said to have a being in Christ, and yet have no union to him, I cannot conceive. Besides, in election there is a near relation commences between Christ and the elect; he is given to be an head to them, and they are given as members to him; and as such they are chosen together, he first in order of nature, as the head; and then they as members of him; nothing is more common with sound divines than to express themselves in this manner, when speaking of the election of Christ, and his people in him; particularly, says Dr. Goodwin, "an the womb, head and members are not conceived apart, but together, as having relation to each other; so were we and Christ (as making up one mystical body to God) formed together in the eternal womb of election." And in the same place he says, "Jesus Christ was the head of election, and of the elect of God; and so in order of nature elected first, though in order of time we were elected together; in the womb of election he, the head, came out first, and then we, the members."

Now what relation can well be thought of nearer, or more expressive of a close union, than this of head and members? Christ is the chosen head of the church, the church the chosen body of Christ, the fulness of him that fills all in all, (Eph. 1:22, 23) hence is the safety and security of the saints, being in Christ through electing grace, and united to him; and therefore said to be "preserved in" him; herein and hereby put into his hand, made the sheep of his hand, out of whose hands none can pluck them, nor they ever fall (Jude 1:1).

2. There is a conjugal union between Christ and the elect, which also flows from love, and commenced in eternity. By the institution of natural marriage, the persons between whom it is contracted become one flesh, as did Adam and Eve: and a nearer union than this cannot well be conceived of; whose marriage was a shadow and representation of that between Christ and his church; whom, having espoused, he nourishes and cherishes as his own flesh; and they become one, and have one and the same name, Christ, that is, Christ mystical, (Eph. 5:29-32; 1 Cor. 12:12). Now though the open marriage relation between Christ and particular persons takes place at conversion, which is the day of their espousals to him, (Jer. 2:2) and the more public notification of it will be when all the elect of God are gathered in, and shall in one body be as a bride adorned for her husband, and the marriage of the Lamb shall be come; and this declared in the most open manner, and the nuptials solemnized most magnificently (Rev. 21:2). Yet the secret act of betrothing was in eternity, when Christ, being in love with the chosen ones, asked them of his Father to be his spouse and bride; and being given to him, he betrothed them to himself in lovingkindness, and from thenceforward looked on them as standing in such a relation to him; and which is the foundation of all other after acts of grace unto them: hence, because of his marriage relation to his church, he became her surety,

and gave himself for her, shed his precious blood to sanctify and cleanse her from all the impurities of the fall, and other transgressions; that he might present her to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; even just such a church, and in such glory he had viewed her in, when he first betrothed her, (Eph. 5:25-27). Song with the Jews there was a private betrothing before open marriage, and the consummation of it; at which betrothing the relation of husband and wife commenced, (Deut. 22:23, 24) and so Christ is said to be the husband of the Gentile church before she was in actual being (Isa. 54:5).

3. There is a federal union between Christ and the elect, and they have a covenant subsistence in him as their head and representative. The covenant flows from, and is the effect of the love, grace, and mercy of God; these are spoken of along with it as the foundation of it, (Ps. 89:2, 3, 33, 34; Isa. 54:10) hence it is commonly called the covenant of grace, and this was made from everlasting; Christ was set up as the mediator of it, and his goings forth in it were so early, (Prov. 8:23; Mic. 5:2) eternal life was promised before the world began, and blessings of grace so soon provided, (Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:9) all which proves the antiquity of this covenant, of which more hereafter. Now this covenant was made with Christ not as a single person, but as a common head; not for himself, or on his own account only, but for and on the account of his people; as the covenant of works was made with Adam, as the federal head of all his posterity; hence he is said to be the figure or type of him that was to come, (Rom. 5:14) so the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the federal head of his spiritual offspring; and for this reason a parallel is ran between them in (Rom. 5:1-21; 1 Cor. 15:1-58) as if they had been the only two men in the world, the one called the first, the other the second man. Christ represented his people in this covenant, and they had a representative union to him in it; all that he promised and engaged to do, he promised and engaged in their name and on their account; and when performed it was the same with God, as if it had been done by them; and what he received, promises and blessings of grace, he received in their name, and they received them in him, being one with him as their common head and representative.

4. There is a legal union between Christ and the elect, the bond of which is his suretiship for them, flowing from his strong love and affection to them. In this respect Christ and they are one in the eye of the law, as the bondsman and debtor are one in a legal sense; so that if one of them pays the debt bound for, it is the same as if the other did. Christ is the surety of the better testament; he drew nigh to God, gave his bond, laid himself under obligation to pay the debts of his people, and satisfy for their sins; who being as such accepted of by God, he and they were considered as one; and this is the ground and foundation of his payment of their debts, of his making satisfaction for their sins, of the imputation of their sins to him, and of the imputation of his righteousness to them. In short, it is the saint's antecedent union and relation to Christ in eternity, in the several views of it in which it has been considered, which is the ground and reason of all that Christ has done and suffered for them, and not for others; and of all the blessings of grace that are or shall be bestowed upon them, and which are denied to others: the reason why he became incarnate for them, and took upon him human nature with a peculiar

regard to them, was because they were children given to him; and why he laid down his life for them, because they were his sheep; and why he gave himself for them, because they were his church; and why he saved them from their sins, because they were his people, (Heb. 2:13, 14; John 10:14, 15; Eph. 5:25; Matthew 1:21). In a word, union to Christ is the first thing, the first blessing of grace flowing from love and effected by it; and hence is the application of all others; "of him are ye in Christ Jesus", first loved and united to Christ, and then it follows, "who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption", (1 Cor. 1:30). Song Dr. Goodwin observes, that union with Christ is the first fundamental thing of justification and sanctification and all. Christ first takes us, and then sends his Spirit; he apprehends us first; it is not my being regenerate that puts me into a right of all these privileges; but it is Christ takes me, and then gives me his Spirit, faith, holiness, &c.