

ANSWER TO THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE ONONDAGA ASSOCIATION.

The appearance of the Onondaga Circular, in connection with the other signs of the times, clearly indicates that the hour has fully come for the universal dissemination of free communion principles. We do not proclaim this in the spirit of boasting, but we desire to acknowledge our deep indebtedness to God for the silent, yet powerful, influence of his Spirit, as exhibited in the manifest increase of Christian union throughout the world; in consequence of which the question is every where agitated: "Who are responsible for dividing Christians at the Lord's table?" All seem to be convinced that the separation is wickedly unscriptural, and therefore all Christians, Close Baptists not excepted, are now praying earnestly to be excused from bearing the responsibility. The Onondaga Association, although composed of close Baptists, now wish the world to believe that theirs "is the only free and open communion in the church or earth!"

Had the Association only been satisfied with attempting to draw their own necks from the responsibility of dividing Christians at the Lord's table, without presuming to compel us to take their place and shoulder the burden, we might have remained silent spectators. But as the case now stands, to remain silent is to render injustice to all the parties concerned. That our position may be fully understood, we proceed to show that in its controversy with Free Baptists, the Circular

I. Begs the question by misrepresenting our views.

It was, doubtless, more through ignorance than design that the Onondaga Association published to the world the gross misrepresentation that the Free Baptists agreed with them in the belief that the observance of baptism was prerequisite to communion. On discovering this vital error in the Circular, we involuntarily gazed at its caption: "A Candid Inquiry." It has ever been our opinion that candor made knowledge prerequisite to assertion, that it required every man to know the truth of what he affirms. In saying that this error was the offspring of ignorance, we have presented the only apology admissible in the case. The Free Baptists have long openly stood upon the ground, which they feel well prepared to maintain, that baptism is not prerequisite to communion—that any true believer in Christ may worthily partake of the Lord's supper—they are willing to receive to communion all, and every one, that God for Christ's sake has received; asking no other questions for conscience sake, than such as are necessary to obtain an evidence that they have been baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit of God. The Free Baptists believe, that the true question at issue between them and the close Baptists, is simply this: Is baptism prerequisite to communion? Or, in other words, Must every Christian be immersed, before he can worthily partake of the Lord's supper? And hence, when the Onondaga Circular took the affirmative as granted by us, it begged the question. But

II. THE CIRCULAR, WHILE IT BEGS THE QUESTION, ALSO ARGUES IT AT LENGTH.

(1.) By endeavouring to prove that Baptism is a prerequisite to communion.

(2.) By arguing that the immersion of a believer is essential to baptism.

With the second premise in the argument Free Baptists have no controversy. Our testimony in its favor has been before the world for centuries. Our attention will therefore be confined to the major premise, in which the circular would persuade the Christian world, by a quotation from the second chapter of Acts, that no one can worthily partake of the Lord's supper, unless he observes, strictly, the following order, step by step, in no case observing the fifth duty named, until he has obeyed the fourth, of course, the same must be true respecting the sixth, if the argu-

ment be good for anything, and we have therefore taken the liberty, in its proper place and order, faithfully to record the same; in perfect accordance with apostolical example and precedent.

"(1.) To be convinced of sin. (2.) To repent. (3.) To be baptized.

(4.) To be added to the church, and continue in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship.

(5.) To attend to the breaking of bread, or the Lord's supper."

(6.) To OBSERVE THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

Let it now be observed, and remembered, that the word of God nowhere states, that the order in which duties are named, is the order in which God requires they should be observed. This is a principle of interpretation invented by man, and is, in our estimation, the strong hold of close communion. The principle, when fairly stated, will be found to stand thus: When any number of duties, are named in succession, in any portion of scripture, the order in which they are named, is the order in which God designed they should be observed; and hence, to observe any duty named, before all that precede it in rotation, have been duly attended to, is a violation of the Divine will. In stating the principle, we say when any number of duties are named in succession. For example, when twenty are named, the principle must be applied to the whole, or to none: to plead for the application in the case of the first fifteen, and refuse it to the remaining five, would be to sin against candor and common sense.

We further say, in any portion of scripture; for, if the principle be applicable to a series of duties recorded in Matthew, it must also be applicable to a similar series if found in Revelations. With these points in view, we will now proceed to test the principle in question.

Because we read, Acts 2: 42. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." It is argued that no christian can worthily partake of the Lord's supper, until he has been received into churchfellowship, i. e., by some local church. Admitting this interpretation of the term fellowship, and reducing the argument to a regular syllogism, to avoid the possibility of misapprehension, we have the following:

The order in which duties are named, in scripture, is the order in which God requires they should be observed. Notice—

In Acts 2: 42, church fellowship is named before communion.

Therefore, if a christian attends to communion before he has been received into church fellowship, he violates God's requirement.

If the foregoing argument is valid, we know of no principles of criticism that can invalidate the following.

In Acts 2: 42, communion is named before prayers.

Therefore, if a christian attends to prayers before he has observed the ordinance of communion, he violates God's requirements! Again,

In Matt. 22: 21, The duty of rendering to Caesar his dues, is mentioned before the duty of rendering to God the things that are God's.

Therefore to attend to the claims of God, prior to those of civil government, is a violation of God's requirement! And again,

In Matt. 10: 8, in Christ's commission to his twelve apostles we read, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils."

Therefore, it was the duty of the apostles to refrain from casting out devils, till they had raised the dead; and to refuse to cleanse the lepers until they had healed the sick!!!

We might test this principle of interpretation, by a multitude of other passages that would exhibit its fallacy in a still stronger light; but enough has already been produced, to convince every sound critic, that the