# A THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF JOHN GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY IN RELATION TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HYPER-CALVINISM

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by

Jonathan Anthony White

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

A THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL EXAMINATION

OF JOHN GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY IN RELATION TO

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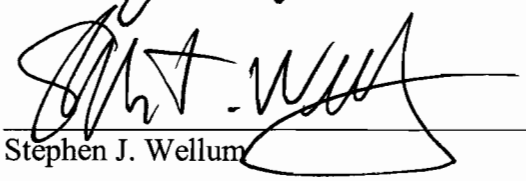

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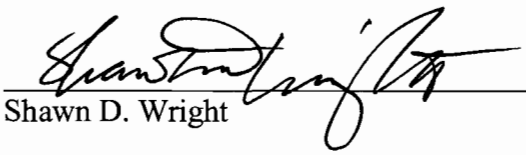

Shawn D. Wright

Date October 1, 2010

To Marseilles:

My helper, my glory,

My friend, my wife

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*BQ* *Baptist Quarterly*

*ConQ* *Congregational Quarterly*

*CTJ* *Calvin Theological Journal*

*DBSJ* *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*

*EvQ* *Evangelical Quarterly*

*JETS* *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*

*JTS* *The Journal of Theological Studies*

*RPM* *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*

# PREFACE

The present work, being a theological and historical study, reminds us of our historical connection to God's people in the past and our connection to God's people in the future. There is much mystery in such abstract thinking. However, the connections to my work in the present are much more concrete. This work would not have been possible without God providing assistance through His people. God has seen fit to move my family numerous times over the years and this mobility has allowed for connections with many believers in various geographical areas. Their prayerful support, encouragement, and in some cases, financial gifts, have provided in ways they probably are not even aware. Jim Gables and the congregation of Oakland Baptist Church started the process with encouragement and tuition assistance, without which this work would not have been possible. My prayer is that their investment in the kingdom will bear much fruit.

Special thanks to Dr. Tom Nettles, my supervising professor, for the time and effort that made this a better dissertation. At my initial interview regarding my acceptance into the Ph.D. program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Nettles saw the potential for this project, was willing to undertake the role of being my supervisor, and encouraged the pursuit of the study of Gill along the way. Also, his display of Christian scholarship is a worthy model for all. He is a gentleman and a scholar.

Victoria, Spencer, and Andrew, our precious gifts from God, have been extremely patient and supportive while I have completed this work. I could not ask for better children. The hardest part of this process, by far, has been the long hours of work and study that have taken me away from my family. They are a reminder of the importance of the family to kingdom work. More specifically, they have helped me to keep things like this dissertation in perspective. This work means nothing in comparison to them, and its influence, I predict, will be negligible in comparison to their influence for God's kingdom.

Of all God's people, the most influential in my life is my wife, Marseilles. She was the first to recognize in me the potential for a Ph.D. and was the greatest encourager over the years. Without her sacrificial love for me and incredible display of godly motherhood, I would not have been able to complete this work. She alone knows the extent of the sacrifices involved. Next to the gift of salvation in Christ, her oneness with me is God's greatest gift to me. This degree is as much her accomplishment as mine.

Finally, of course, all praise goes to the Father, Son, and Spirit. May He accomplish His purposes in glorifying His Name through this dissertation. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21).

*SOLI DEO GLORIA!*

Jonathan A. White

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2010

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Was John Gill a Hyper-Calvinist? John Gill's relationship to Hyper-Calvinism is a much debated issue for historical theology. Many historians confidently conclude he was indeed a Hyper-Calvinist. Some charge that he did not preach the gospel to unbelievers and that he was instrumental in the decline of membership in his church, as well as other churches. However, does an examination of Gill's theology yield the conclusion that he was a Hyper-Calvinist? This dissertation demonstrates that a theological and historical examination of Gill's soteriology argues against classifying him as a Hyper-Calvinist.[1] Although Gill's writings contain theological overlap and affinity with historical Hyper-Calvinism and Gill had close relationships with some classified as Hyper-Calvinists, both his theology and his practice make a strong case against labeling him in such a manner.[2] While taking into account doctrinal overlap with some aspects of historical Hyper-Calvinism, such overlap does not imply full-scale agreement with the

[1]Both the theological and historical aspects are important. The historical context argues for Gill's inclusion within historic Calvinism. In fact, the historical context argues the correct view is to see Gill as a defender of Calvinism. The theological distinctives also argue against Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist.

[2]The phrase "historical Hyper-Calvinism" implies a position in history that is at deviance with orthodox Calvinism. Both the term and idea of Hyper-Calvinism prove to be complex. Chap. 2 will discuss its definition. In the meantime, the phrase "historical Hyper-Calvinism" recognizes the existence of such a traditionally designated position without necessarily granting that the term is the best designation for the position.

position. Further, it is demonstrable that the very term "Hyper-Calvinism" is problematic in the eighteenth-century context.[3]

The present work seeks to understand Gill in his historical context, so it is important to evaluate opinions by Gill's contemporaries, as well as historical treatments of him. A thorough evaluation of Gill's soteriology in relation to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism requires a careful examination of his writings and practice in relation to the doctrine and practice of what is often characterized as eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism. John Gill's complex theology, as well as the difficulty of defining Hyper-Calvinism, requires more than a simplistic evaluation of both. This examination begins with a brief introduction to John Gill himself.

## Background

John Gill (1697-1771) was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, on November 23, 1697.[4] As a young boy Gill proved to be extremely intelligent, as evidenced by his reading through the Greek New Testament by ten years of age. Having accomplished this, he then began teaching himself Hebrew using only a grammar and lexicon. At about twelve years of age he was converted but waited to be baptized until he was nearly nineteen. Soon after his baptism he began to preach on a regular basis and eventually became pastor of one of the leading Particular Baptist churches in the city of London, the church founded by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704).

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[3]A comparison of the beneficial and detrimental aspects of the term for any period is needed. The present study, however, concentrates on the eighteenth century, and the usage of the term is based on that period.

[4]The foundational biographical information on Gill is found in John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838).

Gill soon began a writing career that would propel him into history as an influential theologian and biblical exegete, even receiving an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of Aberdeen in recognition of "his knowledge of the Scriptures, of the Oriental languages, and of Jewish antiquities."[5] Among his popular works are *The Cause of God and Truth, Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* and *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity.* Gill should receive significant credit for his orthodox stand in a theological climate of latitudinarianism.[6] His writings have been influential for nearly three hundred years, not only in England but also in America. Regrettably, his influence may have been weakened by characterizations of him as Antinomian and Hyper-Calvinist, as well as claims of agreement with Gill's theology by some anti-missionary leaders.[7]

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[5]Ibid., 59.

[6]Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 21:

> English General Baptists succumbed so thoroughly to Socinianism that the entire denomination had become Unitarian by 1770. Only a small remnant survived the apostasy. . . . Congregationalists and Presbyterians also suffered decline, not only in numbers and churches but in maintenance of orthodox Christianity. Only the English Particular Baptists remained unscathed by the theological apostasy. . . . Much of the credit for this unswerving allegiance to the doctrines of Scripture, under God, must be attributed to John Gill, known affectionately as "Dr. Voluminous."

Elsewhere, in *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity,* vol. 1: *Beginnings in Britain* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), Tom Nettles says,

> His instructive method as well as his polemical engagement warded off the attempts of many to discredit the orthodox Baptist witness that he held so dear. Many generations following felt a genuine indebtedness to the voluminous Gill. . . . Gill gave no comfort to the insipid latitudinarianism bleeding the strength out of Christian churches. The moralism and philosophical orientation of many ministers he exposed and challenged relentlessly both from his pulpit and in a large body of polemical literature. Waves of Deism and Socinianism sweeping over Christian churches brought about Gill's determined efforts to erect orthodox breakwaters to frustrate the erosive forces at work (240).

[7]Concerning his influence, Robert Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian (1697-1771)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1954), 307, says,

> Gill was unquestionably the most influential man among Particular Baptists for a period of at least

However, beginning with the last half of the twentieth century there has been a growing resurgence of interest in Gill. This resurgence, coupled with a renewal of Calvinism in the contemporary Christian world, will bring increased discussion of what is often termed High, or Hyper-Calvinism.[8] The beneficial influence of John Gill's writings should not be lost because of the label "Hyper-Calvinist," although this label is often attached to Gill.[9]

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thirty years. Indeed, he was a sort of unofficial archbishop over a sizable following. From about 1745 to the time of his death, he was the senior and the presiding minister over many of the affairs relating to the denomination. His opinion was highly regarded; before any important decisions were made, he was consulted. Young men coming into the denomination were enveloped by Gill's theological bias. They looked up to him as the personification of all the attributes needed for a successfully ministry, and they accepted his every word as oracular. Several persons who knew him as their Pastor later became ministers themselves.

Curt Daniel argues that "Seymour (pp. 294, 307, 313) incorrectly says that Gill's influence was almost entirely among Particular Baptists. But Gill was quite popular with Calvinistic Independents, some General Baptists, and others (see Rippon, p. xix)." Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 9.

The early Baptists of America viewed his commentaries on the Bible as especially important. The Philadelphia and Charleston Associations desired to disseminate his commentaries into as many of the ministers' hands as possible by encouraging the churches to provide copies of Gill's commentaries for their pastors. See Thomas K. Ascol, "John Gill's Approach to New Testament Exposition," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 114-15; Gregory Wills, "A Fire That Burns Within: The Spirituality of John Gill," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 192 n. 3. Alan P.F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 77, comments, "Walter Wilson did not doubt that Gill, 'for the value and extent of his writings will be considered by future generations as one of the Fathers of the church' – a prophecy which it cannot be said has widely been fulfilled." See Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southwark; including the Lives of Their Ministers, From the Rise of Nonconformity to the Present Time*(London: W. Button and Son, Paternoster Row, 1814), 4:221. As the paradigm shifted to Evangelical Calvinism Gill became more suspect in the eyes of some, thus weakening the influence of his writings.

For the claims of the anti-missionary leaders, see Cushing Biggs Hassell, *History of The Church of God, From The Creation To A. D. 1885* (Middletown, NY: Gilbert Beebe's Sons, 1886), 651, where he describes Gill as "the only man that ever hunted and drove out Arminianism from the explanation of every verse in the Bible." See also Wills, "A Fire That Burns Within," 191-92.

[8]Regarding the difference between "High-" and "Hyper-Calvinism," some conflate the two terms and use them as synonyms while others make a distinction between them. This difference will be discussed further in chap. 2. Usually the distinction concerns the offer of the gospel, which will be addressed further in chap. 7.

[9]All of Gill's published works, including his commentaries, are available in print, on computer software, and the Internet.His commentaries and *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* were recently republished in print form by The Gospel Standard Bearer, Inc. Also, an increasing examination of his

## Historical Evaluations

Leon McBeth summarizes the common historical view of John Gill by stating that "Most historians consider John Gill the major English Baptist example of hyper-Calvinism."[10] As will be demonstrated, examples of this type of evaluation abound. On the other hand, many positive testimonies give evidence of Gill's influence.[11]

### Early Baptist Evaluations

Andrew Fuller's (1754-1815) evaluation of John Gill is a legitimate place to begin the historical survey because the typical historical opinion sees his influence as the primary reason for the Particular Baptist shift away from Gill's dominant theology. While

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theology is taking place in Christian academia. Concerning Gill's influence, see Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771)*; Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory* especially 22-23; Nettles, *The Baptists,* 1:185-242; George Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, England: Go Publications, 1995); Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983); Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 77-101; Clive Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?" in *Recycling the Past or Researching History*, ed. Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 231-61; Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

The resurgence of Calvinism has been detailed in the recent book by Colin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

[10]Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 117. Elsewhere, McBeth says Gill "was so jealous to maintain the sovereignty of God that he refused 'to offer Christ' to unregenerate sinners and taught others to make the same refusal." Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 176. McBeth's primary source at this point is Joseph Ivimey.

[11]For love of Gill's congregation for him, see Sell, *The Great Debate*, "As Horton Davies has more recently reminded us, Gill's people loved him, and 'the church was prepared to raise a mortgage and go into debt in order to have a portrait made of Dr. Gill,from which mezzo-tints might be provided for every member of the congregation'" (78). For sermons preached on the occasion of his death, see John Gill, "Sermons and Tracts" [on-line]; accessed 10 January 2010; available from http://www.pbministries.org/books/gill/gills_archive.htm. Internet.For the testimony of friends, two examples are Augustus Toplady and James Hervey. Toplady's often quoted judgment can be found in Rippon, *A Brief Memoir,* 136-39. Hervey said, "When I was at London, he was so friendly as to visit me at my brother's, (who lives not far from the Doctor's) and always left me wiser; and I am sure it was not owing to his incapacity or negligence, if I was not better." George M. Ella, *James Hervey, Preacher of Righteousness* (Durham, England: Go Publications, 1997), 136. Also, Rippon,*A Brief Memoir,* called him "one of the greatest and best of men," (1); see Wills, "A Fire That Burns Within," 191 n. 2.

Fuller was a Calvinist, his brand of Calvinism had some nuanced differences from Gill's approach – so much so that a historical debate arose between some who became known as Gillites and some who became known as Fullerites.[12] Nonetheless, Fuller's view of Gill is, in the main, positive. For instance, Barry Howson refers to the three works of Fuller that address the Hyper-Calvinistic issue in relation to Gill. He says, "It is interesting that in all three of these works all except two of the references to Gill are positive, primarily using Gill to support his position that it is the duty of all people to believe on Christ for salvation, and therefore the gospel should be offered to all indiscriminately."[13] It is certainly true that Fuller disagreed with Gill at important points but his overall evaluation of Gill was positive.

Other evaluations from this early period include Robert Hall (1764-1831), who spoke degradingly of Gill's writings, calling them "a continent of mud."[14] On the other

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[12]David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2001), 135-44; George, "John Gill," *Baptist Theologians,* 78; Hassell, *History,* 760; "On the Approaching Annual Meetings," *The Baptist Magazine,* 12 (1820): 240-41: "The differences of opinion respecting the manner in which the guilt of the unconverted is to be viewed, and the way in which the invitations of the gospel are to be addressed to men, have completely disappeared."

[13]Barry Howson, "Andrew Fuller's Reading of John Gill," *Eusebia* 9 (2008): 75. In his concluding observations on pp. 86-87, Howson makes five observations:

> 1) Fuller wisely uses Gill in support, and does not look to disagree with him; 2) His use of Gill is a fair interpretation of Gill's writing, but sometimes using it for his own advantage and not taking into account all that Gill meant. . . or misreading him . . . 3) He only directly challenges Gill in two places which have to do with eternal justification. . . . 4) His tone of disagreement is one of respect but also honesty. . . . 5) He only reacts with him in 22 places in his voluminous writings.

Naylor says, "Andrew Fuller, in his definitive work *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,* first published in 1785, smote high Calvinism hip and thigh, yet treated Gill more leniently than he did John Brine and Lewis Wayman, both classic high Calvinists of the earlier part of the eighteenth century. Perhaps Fuller, who lived nearer to Gill's time, was a touch more perceptive than later writers, permitting us a degree of reserve when we come to Ivimey's castigations." Peter Naylor, *Picking up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace Publications, 1992), 158-59. On Ivimey, see below.

[14]Sell, *The Great Debate,* 77.

hand, John Rippon (1751-1836) says that the writings of Gill "will live, and be admired, and be a standing blessing to posterity, when their opposers are forgotten, or only remembered by the refutations he has given them." He believes there will be a lasting influence of Gill's works, commenting that "while true Religion, and sound Learning have a single friend remaining in the British Empire, the works and name of *Gill* will be precious and revered."[15]

Another important evaluation from this time is from John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1823). Michael Haykin says, concerning Baptist historiography, "the traditional favorite" reason cited for the decline among Particular Baptist churches in England in the eighteenth century "has been the hegemony of High Calvinism and the influence of the eighteenth-century theologian regarded as the doyen of this theological position, namely, John Gill." He says that it was John Ryland, Jr. who "helped initiate this historiographical perspective." Haykin says Ryland claimed that because of "the influence of Gill and . . . John Brine (1703-1765), the opinion 'spread pretty much among ministers of the Baptist denomination' that 'it is not the duty of the unregenerate to believe in Christ.'"[16] Ryland made this evaluation in 1816. By this time, there had been such a foundational shift in the theological paradigm that the majority evaluation of Gill came to be, at least in the quarters of those who would write the history of this period, predominantly negative. The following evaluations will illustrate the historiography concerning Gill from the vantage point of the historians.

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[15]Rippon, *A Brief Memoir,* 140.

[16]Haykin, *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 1-2.

**Historians' Evaluations**

The Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey (1773-1834) published the first volume of his *A History of the English Baptists* in 1811. Three other volumes followed in subsequent years. Writing in 1823, Ivimey regards Gill as the representative High-Calvinist who defended a "non-application and non-invitation" system.[17] Hung-Gyu Park argues that Ivimey tended "to look at Gill from a narrow perspective, that is, the evangelistic one rather than the broad intellectual and theological context." Pointing out that Ivimey was a friend of Fuller, Park says Ivimey "wants to read the history of the

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[17]Ivimey's evaluation of Gill in relation to Hyper-Calvinism can be found in Joseph Ivimey, *A History of English Baptists*, (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:272-75. Ivimey says John Skepp held to the "*non-invitation, non-application* scheme" and in fact "introduced it among the Baptists" (267). He also says "it is certain" that Gill "adopted the non-invitation scheme, and could preach whole sermons without saying, *But now God hath commanded all men everywhere to repent.* He never said to a wicked man, while his heart was set upon the gratification of his wicked passions, *Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of thy heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,* Acts vii. 22, 23. It appears, that neither the Doctor, nor his brethren, Messrs. Skepp or Brine, had so learned Christ as Paul and Peter had understood him" (273). This criticism of Gill is unfair. Certainly many men have preached entire sermons without saying, "God has commanded all men everywhere to repent." While an examination of Gill's view of addressing sinners will come later, it is sufficient to point out at present Gill's commentary on one of the referenced verses, Acts 8:22 (Acts 17:30 will be examined later), where Gill says,

> Though he was in a state of nature, the apostle exhorts him to the duty of prayer; for prayer is a natural duty, and binding upon all men, though none but a spiritual man can perform it in a spiritual way: and though this sin of Simon's was a very heinous one, and came very near unto, and looked very much like the sin against the Holy Ghost, yet it was not the unpardonable one; it might be pardoned by the grace of God, and through the blood of Christ; and therefore Peter, *who wished his salvation and not his damnation*, put him upon prayer for it; which was possible, though difficult, but not certain: the apostle says not this, as doubting; if it was a case wholly to be despaired of, then he would not have directed him to the means; and yet the wickedness was so horribly great, and he in such a wretched hardened state, that there was no great hope or expectation of his repentance, and so of the application of pardon to him: however, this advice was not given ironically: Peter was too grave and serious to speak sarcastically, or break a jest upon a man in such circumstances; whom no doubt *he heartily pitied*, though he abhorred his sin (Italics added).

Interestingly, Gill represents Peter as "wishing" for the salvation of Simon. A "non-invitation, non-application" charge against Gill does not adequately take into account his theological concerns in regard to certain approaches to presenting the gospel.

Ivimey has further criticism of Gill in *History,* 4:24-25. Naylor, in *Picking up a Pin for the Lord,* says, "It might be that John Gill, great scholar and divine that he was, has been the target of more harsh and even malicious criticism than any other English Baptist of similar attainments. Joseph Ivimey, indeed, seems to have taken every possible opportunity to attack the Southwark pastor" (158).

Baptists from the perspective of expansion and revival, and does not hesitate to categorize Gill and his fellows as High or false Calvinists and Antinomians."[18]

Approximately the same time as Ivimey was giving his evaluation, Walter Wilson (1781?-1847) gave his assessment of Gill in 1814. Wilson also takes notice of Gill's denial of the free offer by saying, "In one point he differed from most of his brethren. It was not his practice to address unconverted sinners, nor to enforce the invitations of the gospel." He claims that "this arose out of the view he took of the Divine decrees" and that upon "which point he was in opposition to Dr. Crisp." He also states that Gill should be viewed as "a supra-lapsarian." Yet, in spite of some labelling Gill as "an Antinomian," Wilson says, "It is certain, however, that he constantly denied the unfavourable consequences which some were disposed to draw from his reasonings, and always maintained the necessity of good works to the character of a real Christian."[19] Shortly after Wilson, David Bogue (1750-1825) and James Bennett (1744-1862) criticize Gill, saying, "This denomination received injury from the writings of Dr. Gill. . . . Nor does Dr. Gill himself appear to have escaped without injury. Zealous for what he

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[18]Hong-Gyu Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001), 10. Park also claims that Ivimey "finds the origin of High or Hyper-Calvinism outside the Particular Baptists, that is, in Tobias Crisp (1600-43) and Joseph Hussey (1659-1726) rather than the so-called Antinomian tradition that goes back to the 17th century Baptist tradition. In a historical perspective, whereas it is Fuller who formulated a concept [of]'High or Hyper-Calvinism' and traced its origin to Hussey, it is Ivimey who historicized this idea. . . . Ivimey's narrowly focused idea has been widely accepted as a definite historical fact by the historians and theologians along with the interpretation of Gill as a predestinarian determinist or fatalist." Evidence for a sympathetic relationship between Ivimey and Fuller can be found in Ivimey,*History*, 169, 529, 532, but especially George Pritchard, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Joseph Ivimey* (London: George Wightman, Paternoster Row, 1835), 82.

[19]Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses,* 222.

conceived the honor of the divine decrees, he seems afraid lest God should save more than the elect; and would not venture to call a sinner to repentance."[20]

Later in the century, J. M. Cramp (1791-1881) says in his *Baptist History* that Gill "abstained from personal addresses to sinners, by inviting them to the Saviour, and satisfied himself with declaring their guilt and doom, and the necessity of a change of heart. It is not surprising that the congregation declined under such a ministry."[21] Thomas Armitage (1819-1896), in *History of the Baptists,* says of Gill, "He could not invite sinners to the Savior, while he declared their guilt and condemnation, their need of the new birth; and held that God would convert such as he had elected to be saved, and so man must not interfere with his purposes by inviting men to Christ."[22]

In the twentieth century, H.C. Vedder (1853-1935) says, in *A Short History of the Baptists,* Gill believed that "because of God's election Christians must not presume to interfere with his purposes by inviting sinners to the Saviour." Vedder's evaluation is that "this is practically to nullify the Great Commission; and, in consequence of this belief, Calvinistic Baptist preachers largely ceased to warn, exhort, and invite sinners" and that "to invite people to believe was useless, if not an impertinent interference with the prerogatives of God."[23] John T. Christian (1854-1925), in *A History of the Baptists,*

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[20]David Bogue and James Bennett, *The History of Dissenters From the Revolution to 1808*(London: Frederick Westley and A.H. Davis, 1833), 2:321-22.

[21]J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History* (Philadelphia: N.p., 1869; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2001), 509; 499.

[22]Thomas Armitage, *History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan Taylor and Company, 1887), 561. Note the similarity between Armitage and Cramp at this point. Earlier Armitage says, "Calvinism had taken a most repulsive form, which presented God in a severe and magisterial light only, and which led men to look upon him with mistrust, as oppressive and unjust" (559-60).

[23]H. C. Vedder, *A Short History of Baptists* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907), 240-41. Vedder assisted Armitage with his *History of the Baptists;*note Armitage *History,* v.

writes that Gill "did not invite sinners to the Saviour, while preaching condemnation, and asserted that he ought not to interfere with the elective grace of God" and speaks of "the withering effect of such a system of theology."[24] W. T. Whitley (1861-1947) "has some fun at Gill's expense, saying that he 'drowned in Hebrew except when he woke to fulminate at Wesley' (whilst Brine 'exaggerated hyper-Calvinism till he only had thirty of the elect left' in his congregation)."[25] W. R. Estep, Jr. (1920-2000) charges that Gill was "a hyper-Calvinist" and repeats the claim that he "never addressed the ungodly or offered an invitation for the lost to trust Christ as Savior."[26] A. C. Underwood (1885-1948), in *A History of the English Baptists*, says John Gill "never addressed the ungodly."[27]

There is the need to recognize several concerns with these historical evaluations. First, it is important to note that many of the preceding evaluations come from writings that were published nearly, or more than, one hundred years after Gill (among the historians Ivimey, Wilson, Bogue and Bennett being the exceptions).[28] This

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[24]John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of theSouthern Baptist Convention, 1922), 347-48.

[25]W. T. Whitley, *The Baptists of London* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1928), 52, quoted in Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 13.

[26]W. R. Estep, Jr., "Gill, John," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 1:560.

[27]A. C. Underwood, *A History of English Baptists* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1961), 135. Robert Oliver regards Whitely and Underwood as causing confusion in evaluating Gill, he says "confusion seems to have arisen because of dependence upon the interpretations of two earlier twentieth-century British Baptist historians, W. T. Whitely and A. C. Underwood. Neither of these historians were sympathetic towards Calvinism and neither of them are safe guides in the interpretation of the theology of John Gill or that of its major critic, Andrew Fuller." Robert Oliver, "John Gill: His Life and Ministry," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 29.

[28]This despite E. A. Payne's remark that Cramp "grew up near enough to them [Gill and Brine] to interpret their attitude with understanding." See E. A. Payne, "The Evangelical Revival and the

fact does not mean that the evaluations are necessarily wrong– only that it should be noted that they are far removed from the time of John Gill. In addition, Ryland, Ivimey and Wilson are clearly sympathetic to the Evangelical Calvinist position in opposition to the "Gillite" position, while others are also possibly prejudiced against Gill's position. Second, in most cases it is not clear what specific sources were consulted for these evaluations since sources are not usually given. Third, the terminology that is used to describe Gill is important to note. The primary descriptions are that he never addresses the ungodly and he does not invite sinners to the Savior.[29] This unified representation of Gill implies that the authors may be drawing upon previous authors' descriptions of Gill, meaning that there may be a bias against Gill, especially if Wilson set the trajectory in the historiography of the terminology concerning Gill.[30] Because of shifting paradigms,

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Beginnings of the Modern Missionary Movement,"*ConQ* 21 (1943): 223-36.

[29]All of the descriptions use very similar terminology. This description is even reproduced in a modern work by R. Phillip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival, 1760-1820* (Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1989), where Roberts refers to Gill and Brine as "the two best-known proponents of non-invitational Calvinism." He also describes their approach as a "'non-universal' and restricted offer of the Gospel," 40. Note the following similarities in the aforementioned references. The dates are included to show the comparison across history (italics added): Wilson (1814): "It was not his practice to *address unconverted sinners*, nor to enforce the *invitations* of the gospel"; Ivimey (1823): "non-application, non-*invitation*"; Cramp (1869): "abstained from personal *addresses to sinners*, by *inviting them to the Saviour*, and satisfied himself with *declaring their guilt and doom, and the necessity of a change of heart*"; Armitage (1887): "He could not *invite sinners to the Savior*, while he *declared their guilt and condemnation, their need of the new birth* and held that *God would convert such as he had elected* to be saved, and so man must not *interfere with his purposes by inviting men to Christ*"; Vedder (1907): "*because of God's election* Christians must not presume to *interfere with his purposes by inviting sinners to the Saviour";* John T. Christian (1922): "did not *invite sinners to the Saviour, while preaching condemnation, and asserted that he ought not to interfere with the elective grace of God*"; W. R. Estep (1958): "never *addressed the ungodly* or *offered an invitation* for the lost to trust Christ as Savior"; A.C. Underwood (1961): "never *addressed the ungodly.*" Every one of the evaluations includes the idea of inviting sinners, except for Underwood, who uses the terminology of "addressing." The description of "addressing" is also in Wilson and Cramp. Wilson and Cramp are very similar; Cramp and Armitage even more so; Armitage and Vedder are also similar. Christian is very similar to Armitage. Estep is similar to all with the idea of a lack of invitation to the lost and Estep and Underwood are similar to each other as well as Wilson and Cramp in regard to the lack of addressing sinners or the ungodly.

[30]This criticism is not to lay all of the blame on Wilson but to argue that the paradigm for evaluating Gill in this manner was set by Fuller, Rippon, Sutcliff, Ryland, Jr., and others with what became

theological distinctions and emphases, and the movement of history, the cleavage between the older paradigm of Gill and the newer paradigm of Fuller became much more pronounced in later history. The new paradigm won out, looking more successful than the older paradigm. Because of this paradigm shift, many people often stamp Gill with the Hyper-Calvinist label and not being present to defend himself nor to interact with the new paradigm, history is only left with the task of interpreting his voluminous writings – a task mainly done by those in the new paradigm.

Before moving to more modern evaluations of Gill, it is important to note that not all older evaluations of Gill have been negative. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), who in 1854 was called to pastor the same church that Gill had served as pastor, speaks both critically and admirably of Gill: "Gill is the Coryphaeus of hyper-Calvinism, but if his followers never went beyond their master, they would not go very far astray."[31] William Cathcart (1826-1908) speaks highly of Gill, saying, "He has sometimes been called the

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known as Evangelical Calvinism being set in opposition to what became known as High, or Hyper-Calvinism. This has resulted in harsh criticism of Gill. Thomas Nettles says that "nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberals such as Clarke, Matthews, and Fosdick have received greater expressions of appreciation and sympathy from Baptist historians than has Dr. Gill." Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory,* 32.

[31]Charles Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1876), 24 [on-line]; accessed 5 January 2010; available from http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/c&c11.htm; Internet; see also Spurgeon's introduction in Godfrey Holden Pike, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1870), 7-8; B. W. Carr, "The Ceremony of Laying the First Stone of the New Tabernacle," *New Park Street Pulpit*[on-line]; accessed 5 January 2010; available from http:// www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0268.htm; Internet; Charles Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1898), 1:310.

> The system of theology with which many identify his name has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has led them to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus – but for this, Dr. Gill must not be altogether held responsible, for a candid reader of his Commentary will soon perceive in it expressions altogether out of accord with such a narrow system; and it is well known that, when he was dealing with practical godliness, he was so bold in his utterances that the devotees of HyperCalvinism could not endure him. "Well, sir," said one of these," if I had not been told that it was the great Dr. Gill who preached, I should have said I had heard an Arminian."

Dr. John Lightfoot of the Baptists. This compliment, in the estimation of some persons, flatters Dr. Lightfoot more than Dr. Gill."[32]

**Modern Evaluations**

The modern study of Gill essentially began in 1954 with a doctoral thesis by Robert E. Seymour.[33] His evaluation of Gill is that he was in fact a Hyper-Calvinist.[34] Olin C. Robison also evaluated Gill as one whose views of God's sovereignty caused him to be non-evangelistic.[35] E.F. Clipsham says that both John Brine and John Gill "were so afraid of Arminianism and Pelagianism that they made no attempt to awaken the consciences of the unconverted lest they robbed God of the sole glory of their conversion." However, he then seems to moderate this evaluation by pointing out that Fuller commended both men, and Spurgeon also spoke highly of Gill.

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[32]William Cathcart, "Gill," in *Cathcart Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2001), 452-54.While speaking highly of Andrew Fuller, Cathcart also criticizes him, saying, "His views of the atonement, however, were innovations to the English Baptists of his day, which stirred up vigorous opposition" (442). Pointing to the division between Fuller and Gill's theology he says,

> Dr. Gill was the theological teacher of one section of his denomination and Mr. Fuller of the other. In regard to the doctrine of the atonement Fuller has been very influential with English and American Baptists, though there are still some among us who regard Dr. Gill, in the main, as approaching nearer to Paul's representation of the nature of Christ's glorious propitiation than the profound theologian of Kettering. These brethren agree with Mr. Fuller in using every Christian effort to bring sinners to Jesus, and to spread the gospel throughout the whole earth.

[33]Estep and Underwood overlap this time but this was the beginning of a renewed interest in Gill.

[34]Robert E. Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian" (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1954). For a critique of Seymour, see Park, "Grace and Nature," 12-13.

[35]Olin C. Robison, "The Particular Baptists in England 1760-1820" (Ph.D. diss., Regent's Park College, Oxford University, 1963). See also Robison, "The Legacy of John Gill," *BQ* 24 (1971-1972): 111-25, which is an article drawn from his dissertation. Michael A. G. Haykin comments on this perspective in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 2. Park critiques Robison's dissertation. See Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill,"13-14.

> The truth seems to be, that in the writings of these and other leading teachers of the hyper-Calvinist school, are to be found statements, emphases and tendencies, in themselves unfortunate, misleading, and even false, but considered in the light of their whole theology, mere blemishes. Such blemishes in themselves are to be deplored, since they had the effect of stifling all evangelistic endeavour in the ministries of their authors. However, the real damage was done by their disciples.[36]

Peter Toon published *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism* in 1967, in which he considers Gill a Hyper-Calvinist.[37] Michael Watts, in *The Dissenters,* follows Toon in directly connecting Gill to Hussey and Skepp and thus, considers him a High Calvinist.[38] In 1983, Curt Daniel published an influential dissertation declaring that Gill is indeed a Hyper-Calvinist.[39] Raymond Brown, in *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* claims that, Gill's "preoccupation with election" was "detrimental to persuasive evangelism."[40] Tom Ascol, while not clearly calling Gill a Hyper-Calvinist, takes the position that in regard to duty-faith, "Gill's exposition of the covenant of grace provides justification for closely identifying his views with the hyper-Calvinist position on this question."[41]

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[36]E.F. Clipsham "Andrew Fuller," *BQ* 20 (1963): 101.

[37]Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967), 98-99, 131-38, 144-52. However, Toon's definition of Hyper-Calvinism is lacking. See chapt.2 below.

[38]Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 457.

[39]Curt D. Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill"(Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983). For critiques of Daniel, see Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill," 16-18; Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 36; chap. 2 of the present dissertation.

[40]Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 73.

[41]Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 260. He also says, "The effective excision of men as responsible participants in the covenant places Gill much closer to the unabashed hyper-Calvinists of his day than to genuine federal theologians like Owen and Witsius" (260-61). For a critique of Ascol see Park, "Grace and Nature," 19.

From another perspective, Thomas Nettles argues that "a candid investigation of his influence, his reputation, and his personal persuasions uncovers some unfortunate misrepresentations marring the visage of Gill." He then chastises some of the evaluators of Gill by pointing out that Gill suffered "calumny and disparagement from Baptist brethren who should be grateful for his effective apologetic in their behalf" and argues that "perhaps no one has had more unchallenged criticism leveled against him in his absence than the learned Dr. Gill."[42] Nettles concludes his evaluation of Gill by saying

> One can accuse Gill of "non-invitation, non-application" only by clinging to an unbiblically narrow concept of "invitation," as if it were a call to physical activity at the end of a preaching service. If Gill were antinomian, may God grant the church a deeper holiness produced by this kind of "antinomianism." The nomenclature of hyper-Calvinist in speaking of Gill must be questioned seriously in light of his clear, perceptive zeal for the gospel, his earnestness of desire for the salvation of his hearers, his statement regarding the perpetuity of the law as exhibited in the gospel, and his belief concerning the blameworthiness of rejecting the gospel message and all it contains. And perhaps, rather than imputing blame upon Gill for the leanness of the times, he should be credited with preserving gospel purity, which eventuated in the efforts to use means for the conversion of the heathen.[43]

In a later writing, Nettles nuances his defense of Gill by saying that "Gill differed at several points from identifiable Hyper-Calvinists of the century. There is a central point, however, in which he appears to hold the Hyper-Calvinist view." In a footnote, Nettles says, "Although I think the judgment should still be surrounded with cautions and caveats, there may be compelling evidence that Gill held to the distinctive Hyper-Calvinist tenet."[44]

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[42]Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory,* 76.

[43]Ibid., 106-07.

[44]Thomas Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 152-53; idem, *The Baptists,* 226. This "distinctive Hyper-Calvinist tenet" will be discussed further in chaps.2 and 5.

Other evaluations include the following: John Broome, who assesses Gill from a Gospel Standard perspective, rejecting the idea of Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist and speaking favorably of him.[45] Peter Naylor, even though he calls Gill a High Calvinist, is reserved and balanced in his assessment of Gill.[46] Michael Haykin refers to Gill as a High Calvinist and is critical of Gill at points but is reserved in that criticism.[47] Iain Murray, in *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism,* holds that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist.[48] Robert Oliver says, "Recent attempts to argue that Gill was not a High Calvinist have not been convincing."[49] On the other hand, Richard Muller argues that "the frequent identification of Gill's

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[45]John Broome, *Dr. John Gill* (Harpenden, Hertfordshire: Gospel Standard, 1991). This booklet is based on an address given at the Annual General Meeting of The Gospel Standard on May 19, 1990. Broome says, "We are constantly maligned as Hypercalvinists and we need to stand unashamedly in the position where Gill, Brine, Huntington, Gadsby, Warburton, Kershaw, MacKenzie, Tiptaft, Philpot, Joseph Hatton, J. K. Popham and J. H. Gosden stood firmly in their day"(9).

[46]Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord,* 155-59; 165-91.

[47]Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul* (Durham, England: Evangelical, 1994), 17-33, 41-42, 71, 77-79, 138-39, 319.

[48]Iain Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 120, 125-33. Murray claims that Spurgeon was "over-generous to Gill" (127) and "it is hard to see how Nettles' defence of Gill can be sustained" (130-31 n. 2) although he provides no evidence, other than Joseph Ivimey, as to why it cannot be sustained.

[49]Robert Oliver, "John Gill (1697-1771): His Life and Ministry," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 29. He also claims that

> Gill with all his gifts moved in the direction of High Calvinism. At this point he was not immune from the rationalism of his day. The impact of High Calvinism on the Particular Baptist churches as a whole has been disastrous, although Spurgeon has pointed out that much of the trouble has risen with those who have pushed Gill's teaching farther than the London pastor would have done (49).

Oliver critiques Nettles' appraisal of Gill by saying, "Dr. Nettles' tentative conclusion deserves consideration" but concludes that "when Gill's writings are considered, the weight of the evidence supports the traditional view that he was a Hyper-Calvinist." (Banner of Truth, May 1987), 30-32. Also, Oliver writes similar words in "John Gill (1697-1771)," *The Particular Baptists (1638-1910),* vol. 1, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist, 1998), 145-65. However, while arguing for Gill's Hyper-Calvinism he also says in regard "to whether John Gill was a Hyper-Calvinist" that he believes "preoccupation with this issue has promoted a tendency to overlook his important contribution to Orthodox Dissent and the Particular Baptist community." His conclusion is that "to reject John Gill's Hyper-Calvinism does not mean that we have to denigrate him or ignore his place in history." Therefore, he is "convinced that his positive contribution to eighteenth-century Dissent and the Particular Baptist community has too often been ignored" (161-62).

thought as 'Hyper-Calvinist' are, at best, less than helpful."[50] Gregory Wills seeks a balanced evaluation of Gill, saying, "Gill's views on invitations to sinners were complex and historians have commonly misconstrued them."[51] Alan Sell praises Gill for his accomplishments but criticizes him as well, agreeing with Cramp's evaluation while refraining from blaming Gill as the sole cause of the decline of the Particular Baptists in England in the eighteenth century.[52] While expressing reservations regarding the way Gill has been treated by some historians, Peter Morden still reflects negatively on Gill, saying, "attempts to defend him from the charge of Hyper-Calvinism are ultimately unconvincing."[53]

Further evaluations include Timothy George, who recognizes the complexity of the issue at hand stating, "Recent research has shown that it is inaccurate to lump together indiscriminately Crisp, Hussey, Skepp, Brine, and Gill. Each of these theologians presented a nuanced discussion of the doctrines of grace with distinctive corollaries and diverging consequences." Yet Gill holds some responsibility for the

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[50]Richard Muller, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 52.

[51]Gregory Wills, "The Spirituality of John Gill," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill,* 205: "Gill's own method was rather finely textured. Gill did not favor a universal invitation to faith in Christ. In this he agreed with the Hyper-Calvinist Baptists. But he held that all who heard the gospel were obligated to repent and believe in Christ. In this he agreed with Fuller and the 'evangelical Calvinists.'"

[52]Sell, *The Great Debate,* 82-83.

[53]Morden, *Offering Christ*, 15. Yet the scholarship shows that there are a growing number of people who have reservations with the label of Hyper-Calvinism for Gill, and some are in fact convinced that Gill should not be labeled as a Hyper-Calvinist. Morden's treatment of Gill can be found on pp. 12-17. Morden says, "The debate turns on whether Gill's theology choked the evangelistic life of the denomination, or whether he helped to keep Particular Baptists orthodox (particularly on the Trinity), in an age where Unitarianism was a very real threat. Probably both these propositions are true to some degree, although the extent to which churches so little involved in evangelism can properly be called 'orthodox' is another question. My own view is that Gill's High Calvinism had a generally adverse effect on Particular Baptist life, as will become clear," (15 n. 37). However, while an important corollary issue, this issue is not really what the debate turns on. The issue is whether Gill's theology and practice is identifiable with a historically contextualized definition of Hyper-Calvinism.

"atmosphere in which the forthright promulgation of the missionary mandate of the church was seen to be a threat to, rather than an extension of, the gospel of grace." George's evaluation of Gill concerning Hyper-Calvinism is that "Gill did not go so far as the real hyper-Calvinists; but he was so preoccupied in defending the gospel from dangers on the left that he did little to stay the erosion on his right."[54] George Ella takes a very positive approach toward Gill, defending him against the charge of Hyper-Calvinism.[55] Barry Howson says, "The question of Gill's Hyper-Calvinism is debated among scholars, but the majority recognize him as one."[56] Hong-Gyu Park argues, "The criticism of Gill as a High or Hyper-Calvinist should be revised" and that Gill should be viewed as standing in the Reformed tradition.[57]

What is clear from these evaluations is that during Gill's life, and continuing to the present, he has his detractors as well as his supporters. Following his death until the late twentieth century the majority evaluation of Gill is that he is a Hyper-Calvinist. The late twentieth century brings a re-evaluation of Gill resulting in a number of scholars referring to Gill as a High Calvinist instead of a Hyper-Calvinist, as well as a more respectful tone toward him. In addition, some reject the idea that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist and argue that he is misunderstood. A great part of the issue revolves around the definition of Hyper-Calvinism, as well as certain views of evangelism and missions.

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[54]George, *Baptist Theologians,* 94.

[55]George Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, England: Go, 1995).

[56]Barry Howson, "Andrew Fuller's Reading of John Gill," *Eusebia*5 (2005): 88 n. 3. See also pp.72-75 for Howson's references to Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist.

[57]Park, "Grace and Nature," 23.

In light of these evaluations it is important to look at the actual writings of Gill in the historically contextualized setting of theological issues with which he interacted to attempt to understand what Gill actually set forth. A number of the above evaluations are not necessarily helpful in the debate concerning whether Gill was a Hyper-Calvinist beyond giving us the evaluation of historians from a different era. Some of the evaluations do give us insight into Gill's theology, but it is still important that we examine Gill's theology, and particularly his soteriology, in order to determine his beliefs in relation to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism.

## Methodology

The focus of this dissertation will be on Gill's soteriology in relation to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism. His *Doctrinal Divinity*, *Practical Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, his *Commentary on the Old TestamentandNew Testament*, various treatises, and his extant sermons, reflect his soteriology. The writings of others that he commended, as well as the way in which he referenced others' works, also give insight into his beliefs. Though Gill wrote a massive amount during his lifetime, only those parts of his corpus related to soteriology will be examined in the present dissertation. Specifically, a careful, contextualized definition of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism must form the background for examining Gill's relation to the distinctive peculiarities of historical Hyper-Calvinism. It is important not to read modern ideas back into the context of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism, and in particular, eighteenth-century Particular Baptist Hyper-Calvinism.[58] It is also important to suggest,

[58]Again, the term is used with the recognition that "Hyper-Calvinism" was not in common usage during the eighteenth century. It is used in recognition of the historical and theological evaluation of a theological position that has been assigned this label. However, as will be argued, the term is laden with

and argue for, a historically informed, working definition of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism.

difficulty, especially in relation to the eighteenth century and specifically in relation to John Gill. The entire discussion raises the issue of evaluating the usefulness of the term. Because of its common usage the term will be used throughout this work with the understanding that the theological position needs to be severed from the pejorative usage with which the term has become burdened.

# CHAPTER 2

# TOWARD A DEFINITION OF HYPER-CALVINISM

In discussing John Gill's relationship to Hyper-Calvinism, what definition of Hyper-Calvinism should be used? While it is true that Hyper-Calvinism is complex and difficult to define, it is important to arrive at a working definition in order to examine Gill's proximity to it. By the conclusion of this work, the evidence will show that because of the complexity of defining Hyper-Calvinism coupled with an examination of Gill's soteriology, it is incorrect to label him as a Hyper-Calvinist. While the definition is difficult, this chapter will assert that the essence of what has been labeled as eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism consists is the absence of present human responsibility to believe in Christ for salvation based on the idea that such responsibility never existed.

## The Difficulty of Defining Hyper-Calvinism

The difficulty of examining Hyper-Calvinism is apparent from the outset, with an agreed upon definition of both the *word* and *idea* tangled in debate. Until recent times, the term itself has not been the normal way of referring to the idea under discussion. Instead, there have been numerous terms employed throughout history to deal with varieties within Calvinistic theology – terms that attempt to capture differences from the accepted norm for Calvinism in a certain time and place.[1]

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[1]Curt D. Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 746-67. Daniel *finally* examines the definition for the term "Hyper-Calvinism" on p. 746 of his massive dissertation. He then spends twenty-one pages discussing the definition, referring to the many

Curt Daniel, in discussing the definition of Hyper-Calvinism, focuses on the linguistic nature of the word "Hyper."

> The word "Hyper" is usually defined by lexicographers as meaning "above" or "beyond", from the Greek word HUPER. The English word "super" is related to it, though we have yet to find anyone use the phrase "super-Calvinism". Those who contend that the word has no meaning must acknowledge that linguistically the word is valid if it can be proven that there is a form of Calvinism that goes beyond the "Calvinism" of John Calvin (the proper sense of the term) or those styled "Calvinists".[2]

Here Daniel wants to connect the linguistic validity of the term to Hyper-Calvinism's departure from Calvin's Calvinism or that recognized as historic Calvinism.[3] The five points of Calvinism have consistently defined Calvinism in its soteriological aspects: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. This will be the definition of Calvinism used throughout this work.[4]

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terms used throughout history to designate such a movement. He says,

> "Hyperism" has often been used. Sometimes "Hyper-Calvinism" is capitalized, sometimes not; it is nearly always hyphenated. Occasionally one reads of the word "Hyper" being used as an adjective by itself, but more often a "Hyper" is a "Hyper-Calvinist" or a "Hyperist." We have found a unique occurrence of "Hyper-Hyper-Calvinism"; unfortunately, it is unexplained (the author probably meant what we would call Hyper-Calvinist, and his term "Hyper-Calvinist" means what we call "High Calvinist"). There has also been a solitary use of "thy-per-Calvinistic," (751-52).

[2]Ibid., 752.

[3]This seems to imply that historic Calvinism is in line with John Calvin. Yet Daniel states that Calvin "did not teach limited atonement" and therefore "those who do are not Calvinists on the subject of the extent of the atonement. The same applies to the matters of faith, assurance and the offer of the Gospel in relation to the atonement. Hence, it is fully proper to speak of some as High and Hyper-Calvinists on the subject, for they went beyond and against Calvin on one of the so-called 'Five points of Calvinism'" (827).

[4]For treatments of Calvinism, see Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973); Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative – Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1982); R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997); Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006); Ernest C. Reisinger and D. Matthew Allen, *Beyond Five Points* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2002); R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God: Know God's Perfect*

The present concern is primarily with eighteenth-century Calvinism, and in particular with John Gill's relationship to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism. The question is whether John Gill departed from historic Calvinism by embracing some brand of Calvinism that would align him with Hyper-Calvinism. It is at this point that the picture gets much more complicated because Hyper-Calvinism needs definition in relation to historic Calvinism and John Gill's theology needs examination in light of both. Because of the need for clarity, it is important to find the essence of Hyper-Calvinism (which is what defining something does) and to determine whether Gill agreed with that essence.[5] In order to do so, it will be necessary to clear away some of the confusion concerning Hyper-Calvinism. Examining various attempts to define Hyper-Calvinism will help to accomplish this task.

## Attempts to Define Hyper-Calvinism

Defining the movement labeled as "Hyper-Calvinism" is challenging, not only because of the difficulty of defining the term itself but also the difficulty of arriving at a clear, coherent, and concise definition that focuses on the essence of the movement. Most definitions of Hyper-Calvinism prove, under examination, to be inadequate.

James Leo Garrett understands the importance of definition and therefore attempts to define Hyper-Calvinism. Garrett says, "Before discussing the subject of Calvinism, it is imperative that one should attempt [a] definition, lest the discussion be

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*Plan for His Glory and His Children* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986); R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York, 1931); R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

[5]The term "essence" refers to the crucial element. That is, the element (or elements) that must be present to set a person, belief, or movement apart as a Hyper-Calvinist or as Hyper-Calvinism. It is this element (or elements) that distinguishes it from something else, in this case Calvinism.

marked by unclarified confusion and misunderstanding."[6] Garrett refers to four different meanings of the term "Calvinism." The first meaning refers to "the teachings of John Calvin." The second refers to "the entire Reformed theological tradition in general, as distinguishable from the Roman Catholic, the Anglican or the Lutheran traditions." The third meaning refers to "the professed teaching of certain eighteenth-century English Congregationalists and Particular Baptists, a group believing that only the 'elect' could be saved."[7] The fourth meaning is "perhaps the most pertinent meaning of the term 'Calvinism.'"This meaning "has reference to the distinctive teachings of the Reformed Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which was assembled in the Dutch city to give refutation to the teachings of James Arminius (1560-1609) and his followers, known as the Remonstrants."[8] It is the third of Garrett's four categories that is the present concern. Garrett's short description illustrates the difficulty of arriving at a definition for such a movement.

Phil Johnson's "Primer on HyperCalvinism" is a popular modern discussion of Hyper-Calvinism.[9] In the introduction to his document, Johnson states that he is "a five-

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[6]James Leo Garrett, Jr., "Baptists and Calvinism: An Informational Examination," *The Alabama Baptist,* 2 August 2007 (reprint in booklet form, Birmingham, AL: The Alabama Baptist, 2007), 5.

[7]Ibid., 6. "These teachings we now properly label 'Hyper-Calvinism.'" This description is problematic. All Calvinists agree that only the "elect" can be saved.

[8]Ibid.: "The teachings of Dortian Calvinism are five in number and have been conveniently, if not altogether accurately, summarized through the acronym of the TULIP: Total depravity of all humankind; Unconditional election by God of only certain humans for salvation; Limitation of the intention of the atonement (death of Christ) to the elect only; Irresistibility of God's grace by humans elected for salvation; Perseverance of all the elect (true believers or saints) unto salvation."

[9]Phillip R. Johnson, "A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism" [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm. Internet.This article is often referenced by web sites and blogs in popular discussions of Hyper-Calvinism. It is included in the present discussion because it attempts to define the meaning of the term and is apparently accepted by many as a legitimate definition of Hyper-Calvinism.

point Calvinist" and that he affirms"without reservation the Canons of the Synod of Dordt." He does not want to be "pejorative" but says he is using the term "in its historical sense." His concern is that "hyper-Calvinism is as much a threat to true Calvinism as Arminianism is." He states, "Virtually every revival of true Calvinism since the Puritan era has been hijacked, crippled, or ultimately killed by hyper-Calvinist influences."[10]

Johnson states his "simple" definition of Hyper-Calvinism:

> Hyper-Calvinism, simply stated, is a doctrine that emphasizes divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility. To call it 'hyper-*Calvinism'* is something of a misnomer. It is actually a rejection of *historic* Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism entails a denial of what is taught in both Scripture and the major Calvinistic creeds, substituting instead an imbalanced and unbiblical notion of divine sovereignty.[11]

However, Johnson then states, "Hyper-Calvinism comes in several flavors, so it admits no simple, pithy definition."[12] It quickly becomes apparent that Johnson attempts to define a complex idea in a simple manner and then has to attempt a more complex definition. A simple definition often misrepresents the complexity of the idea and the complex definition often misses the essence of the idea. Yet, the essence of the idea must be determined.

Johnson looks at other definitions for Hyper-Calvinism before giving his own five-fold definition which takes into account five varieties of Hyper-Calvinism.

> A hyper-Calvinist is someone who either:
> Denies that the gospel call applies to all who hear, OR
> Denies that faith is the duty of every sinner, OR
> Denies that the gospel makes any "offer" of Christ, salvation, or mercy to the non-elect (or denies that the offer of divine mercy is free and universal), OR
> Denies that there is such a thing as "common grace," OR

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

Denies that God has any sort of love for the non-elect.[13]

One problem with Johnson's approach is the broaddefinition that makes it difficult to differentiate between people holding to one of these aspects and yet rejecting the essence of Hyper-Calvinism. In spite of an attempt to look at this subject historically, Johnson has confused the definition and blurred the historical understanding of the issue. Further, despite his attempts to nuance the statements, the broad categories create confusion. Such vague statements as Hyper-Calvinism being "a doctrine that emphasizes divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility" are usually not very helpful. But neither does Johnson's more detailed definition get to the essence of the issue.

Attempts at defining Hyper-Calvinism tend to lack needed technicality and precision. Often, a definition is not even given, or there is a blurring of Hyper-Calvinism with other doctrinal, or even practical, positions. Even scholars are sometimes guilty of this inadequate approach. An example is found in Iain Murray's *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism.*

> The final conclusion has to be that when Calvinism ceases to be evangelistic, when it becomes more concerned with theory than with the salvation of men and women, when acceptance of doctrines seems to become more important than acceptance of Christ, then it is a system going to seed and it will invariably lose its attractive power.[14]

Murray's vague description does not allow for any concrete application of the term.

Another difficulty for precisely defining Hyper-Calvinism is the many nuances involved in defining the issues contained in, and related to, Hyper-Calvinism. Connected to this difficulty is the reality that Calvinism itself consists of a spectrum, or web, of

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[13]Ibid.

[14]Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 120. This is in reference to Hyper-Calvinism.

beliefs with various nuances within the web.[15] Thus, some hold to certain nuances of beliefs within the web while others do not. In addition, there are certain emphases some people major upon while others do not. In light of this diversity, the very term "Hyper-Calvinism" is problematic.

Paul Helm's assessment of the charge of Hyper-Calvinism against Gill illustrates some problems with attempts to define Hyper-Calvinism. Helm mentions some of the normal criteria for Hyper-Calvinism, including the denial of the place and use of the law in the Christian life, the doctrine of eternal justification, whether belief in the Gospel is a duty, the denial of the "free offer" of the Gospel, and the denial of the distinction between the secret and revealed will of God. Helm says that these "features" have commonality in "an underemphasis on human responsibility and initiative amounting to a denial of such responsibility in some respects." Along with these is "a correspondingly heightened emphasis on sovereign grace in election, justification and regeneration." However, he cautions that "care is needed in approaching this territory." This care is needed because "while some of these matters, such as eternal justification, are straightforwardly doctrinal, others of them, such as preaching the law and its uses, and the 'offer' of Christ, have to do with practice, with ministerial or pastoral emphasis." Because of this, "making an emphasis is a matter of judgment, and does not necessarily indicate the denial, as a matter of principle, or the opposite emphasis."[16] Such general emphases or descriptions prove to be of little help in clearly defining Hyper-Calvinism.

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[15]Soteriologically, the five points of Calvinism are normally set forth as the parameters of understanding Calvinism. However, among those considered five-point Calvinists, there are various theological emphases and nuances concerning doctrines connected with these five points. There is also the issue of those who would like the title of Calvinist and yet only hold to four of the five traditional points.

[16]Paul Helm, "Analysis 22 – The Gift of Gill" [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available

Leon McBeth's description of Hyper-Calvinism is another example of a general description without needed precision. McBeth does not give a particular definition but instead describes his view of Hyper-Calvinism.

> Early in the eighteenth century, many Particular Baptist hardened their theology to "hyper-Calvinism." They so exaggerated certain aspects, such as election and predestination, that these came to dominate their entire theology and all else had to be judged in that light. Because they gradually put more stress on the Calvinistic aspects of their faith, and less upon the evangelical, they gradually lost their zeal for evangelism and vital church life. At their most extreme, Particular Baptists would not preach or apply the gospel to the unsaved. Some of them also fell into Antinomianism, an extreme form of Calvinism which assumed that even personal behavior was foreordained, thus excusing individuals for any lapses in moral conduct. It should be noted that, while much Particular Baptist theology tended to Antinomianism, most of their leaders claimed they did not intend this.[17]

This lack of precision in defining Hyper-Calvinism makes it difficult to recognize individuals or groups that may be part of such a movement.

Peter Toon is guilty of relying on such an "emphasis" definition when he focuses upon the emphases of the system for his definition.

> It was a system of theology . . . which was framed to exalt the honour and glory of God and did so at the expense of minimising the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners to God. It placed *excessive emphasis* on the immanent acts of God – eternal justification, eternal adoption and the eternal covenant of grace. In practice, this meant that "Christ and Him crucified," the central message of the apostles, was obscured. It also often made no distinction between the secret and the revealed will of God, and tried to deduce the duty of men from what it taught concerning the secret, eternal decrees of God. *Excessive emphasis* was also placed on the doctrine of irresistible grace with the tendency to state that an elect man is not only passive in regeneration but also in conversion as well. The *absorbing interest* in the eternal immanent acts of God and in irresistible grace led to the notion that grace must only be offered to those for whom it was intended. Finally, a valid assurance of salvation was seen as consisting in an inner feeling and conviction of being eternally electedby God. So Hyper-Calvinism led its adherents to hold that evangelism was

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from http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2008/12/analysis-22-gift-of-gill-john-gill-1697.html. Internet.

[17]Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*(Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 172.

> not necessary and to place much emphasis on introspection in order to discover whether or not one was elect.[18]

This description is not a very helpful definition in that it does not definitively categorize Hyper-Calvinism. Such a definition would allow for someone to be categorized as a Hyper-Calvinist based on certain emphases and not upon purely doctrinal positions.[19]

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[18]Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967), 144-45. Italics added. Elsewhere Toon says, "It is because men like John Gill taught the doctrines of eternal union and justification as immanent acts of God, and denied that sinners have a duty to believe the gospel unto salvation, that they have earned for themselves the title of 'hyper-Calvinists'. These emphases are not to be found in any book written by Calvin or in any Reformed Confession of Faith." Peter Toon, "The Lime Street Lectures," *EvQ,* 41 (1969), 47. J. I. Packer, in the Preface to Toon's *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism,* 7-8, says the eighteenth century saw a reaction against the rationalistic trends that existed in England, which was

> a reaction which saw itself as a rediscovery of the true line of Reformed development. But, in an increasingly rationalistic age, the reaction itself was as rationalistic, within the Reformed supernaturalistic frame, as the movements away from that frame had been. In its teaching about man, sin and grace (always the staple themes of Reformed interest), this reaction fairly ran the thought of God's free sovereignty to death. It earned itself the name, "Hyper-Calvinism".

[19]Jim Ellis, "What is Hyper-Calvinism?" *RPM* 10 (2008) [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/jim_ellis/jim_ellis.Hyper.html. Internet. Ellis critiques R.T. Kendall's definition of Hyper-Calvinism. Kendall defines Hyper-Calvinism as,

> a spirit that militates against evangelism and the free offer of the gospel. It has its roots in High-Calvinism but goes beyond it. Many High-Calvinists would still hold to the free offer of the gospel – that you should offer the gospel to everyone even though Christ did not die for everyone. Hyper-Calvinism holds that one must not say "Christ died for you" lest one should not be telling the truth. The most that the hyper-Calvinist feels that he can do is to say "Christ died for sinners" and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit. Hyper-Calvinism does not essentially differ from high-Calvinism except in actual practice, which is why I define Hyper-Calvinism as a spirit. R.T. Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted,* (London: Hodder and Sloughton, 1984), 120.

Ellis critiques Kendall by saying,

> Kendall adds to the problem by suggesting that 5 point Calvinism is somehow the same in essence as hyper-Calvinism. To reduce the distinction merely to one of 'spirit' and overlook any distinction in essence is a reflection of Kendall's personal opinion rather than historical or theological accuracy. Moreover, Kendall mistakenly identifies an unwillingness to tell the unregenerate man that Christ died for him as the central issue in hyper-Calvinism. This is an issue in the discussion of 'for whom Christ died,' i.e. limited versus universal atonement, within historic Calvinism; it's certainly not a defining feature of hyper-Calvinism.

Not only the lack of precision, but also the lack of concision has been detrimental in the quest for a definition of Hyper-Calvinism. Curt Daniel's attempt is too verbose to be a working definition.

> Hyper-Calvinism is that school of Supralapsarian "Five Point" Calvinism which so stresses the sovereignty of God by over-emphasizing the secret over the revealed will and eternity over time, that it minimizes the responsibility of Man, notably with respect to the denial of the word "offer" in relation to the preaching of the Gospel of a finished and limited atonement, thus undermining the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly with the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ died for them, with the result that presumption is overly warned of, introspection is overly encouraged, and a view of sanctification akin to doctrinal Antinomianism is often approached.[20]

Daniel then summarizes this definition by setting forth what he apparently sees as the essence of Hyper-Calvinism, saying, "It is the rejection of the word 'offer' in connection with evangelism for supposedly Calvinistic reasons."[21] He also quotes Errol Hulse as saying, "The essence of hyper-Calvinism is to minimize the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners" and comments that "Hulse and others specifically relate this minimization of human responsibility to the rejection of the free offer doctrine, an element contained in almost every definition of Hyper-Calvinism."[22] Although the definition that Daniel ends up with is not adequate, it is a courageous attempt to arrive at the essence of Hyper-Calvinism while recognizing that there are various characteristics

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[20]Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 767.

[21]Ibid. He says, "The only real tangible thing which differentiates the Hyper from the high Calvinists is the word 'offer.'"

[22]Ibid., 765. The quote is from Erroll Hulse, *The Free Offer* (Sussex, UK: Carey, 1973). Elsewhere, Hulse gives a different definition, writing, "The essence of Hyper-Calvinism is to deny common grace of the love of God to all men. In other words, God only loves the elect and only hates the non-elect. Further, Hyper-Calvinism denies the sincere free offers of the Gospel to all men," Erroll Hulse, *An Introduction to the Puritans* (Pensacola: Mt. Zion, n.d.), 16. Since this work is based on a 1996 article, the date of *An Introduction to the Puritans* is much later than *The Free Offer*.

and emphases of Hyper-Calvinism.[23] However, this dissertation contends for a definition that sets forth in a more precise and concise way the essence of Hyper-Calvinism,which will also fit into the context of the eighteenth-century debate.

If there is not already a clear-cut definition of Hyper-Calvinism, how can an agreed upon definition be arrived at?[24] This lack of a precise definition is part of the problem that leads to a foundational aspect of the argument of this dissertation. The very fact that a generally agreed upon, clear definition is difficult to arrive at should give hesitancy in categorizing a person with the term, unless the person is clearly within the parameters of the essence of the movement. It is clear that there is some type of movement that emphasizes the aspects of what has become known as Hyper-Calvinism. It is important to keep in mind, however, the differences between essences, characteristics, tendencies, connections, and implications.[25] They should not be confused.

So taking notice of characteristics, tendencies, connections, and implications of Hyper-Calvinism and attempting to define the essence of Hyper-Calvinism should be

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[23]Daniel recognizes the difficulty. He says, "To define Hyper-Calvinism one not only needs to compare and contrast it with other schools of Calvinism, as we have done, but also to set it against the backdrop of a definition of Calvin's Calvinism. And that is not as easy a task as is thought in some quarters" ("Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,"759). At another point he says, "Since the aim of this study is to arrive at a workable definition of 'Hyper-Calvinism' in terms of its theology and, to a lesser extent, its history, it is also vital to keep in mind that the Hyper river contains many cross-currents. The historical side of this has been hinted at in this Introduction, but the doctrinal network is far more complex" (39).

[24]John Frame says, "Language is a flexible organism, and it can tolerate numerous varying definitions of terms, as long as speakers make reasonable efforts to make themselves clear" John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 76.This is helpful to keep in mind with the present subject but the plethora of ideas regarding the definition of Hyper-Calvinism results in confusion concerning the classification of a person as a Hyper-Calvinist.

[25]There is general agreement that there are some who are not Hyper-Calvinists who hold some doctrines held by Hyper-Calvinists. The definition of Hyper-Calvinism largely determines the degree to which this is the case.

differentiated.[26] Clint Jarvis argues, "The distinctions . . . were very subtle ones and people could and did accept the same doctrinal positions only to respond differently to them." He adds, "the true difference between a high-Calvinist and an evangelical Calvinist may be one of comparative response rather than doctrine . . . we are attempting here to distinguish shades of grey not primary colours."[27] He references W. R. Ward describing "how difficult it is to distinguish between high-Calvinism and what came to be known as Fullerism (evangelical Calvinism): 'I doubt whether the difference between the highs and the Fullerites will yield to a structural theological analysis.'"[28] Jarvis points out that the context and nature of the historical debate bears this out.

> By 1771 both Gill and Brine had died and their cause, if in truth there was one, did not survive them. They did not hold Particular Baptists enslaved to high-Calvinism, they were rather the main advocates of an identifiable theological strain amongst English Particular Baptists that we may identify as high-Calvinist and which those involved referred to as "The Modern Question." No great debate followed their demise; Gill was succeeded at Horsley Down by John Rippon, an evangelical Calvinist, and Gill's written works remained the staple diet of Bristol students well into the nineteenth century. If we look back and see stark differences between high and evangelical Calvinists it is not apparent that these distinctions divided them while they were alive.[29]

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[26]Later sections of this dissertation will look at the characteristics, tendencies, connections, and implications of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism in relation to John Gill. The present chapter examines the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.

[27]Clive Jarvis, "The Myth of High-Calvinism?" in *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths,* ed. Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 236.

[28]Ibid., 237.

[29]Ibid., 238. There were no doubt debates amongst these Baptists but debate is different from division. Jarvis says that "it seems likely that the Calvinism of John Gill was more rigid than the likes of Fuller, Sutcliff and John Ryland, Jr., as representatives of those who succeeded him. It was distinct enough to be recognized, but not so distinct as to cause dissension and division among Particular Baptists, all of whom considered themselves Calvinists, and all of whom held John Gill and his writings in high regard" (252).

The difficulty of identifying Hyper-Calvinism is pronounced because of the complexity of the issue at hand. Hyper-Calvinism itself is complex because there are many important theological concepts connected to it that have been debated throughout history that are not the essence of Hyper-Calvinism. Therefore, one can hold to some of these theological issues and not be a Hyper-Calvinist in essence.[30]

But there is still the need to attempt a working definition for Hyper-Calvinism. What methodology should be used? Curt Daniel's approach illustrates the need for correct methodology. He says, "The best way to define a theology is to investigate the individual writings of those represented by that general theology, specifically those writers categorized by others as belonging to the class associated with that theology." He then gives a list of those he has classified as Hyper-Calvinists and says he arrived at this list because "either by their own express statements which are in keeping with the accepted definition of that system, or who by logical deduction from their writings (or the reputable statements of other) have been found to be Hyper-Calvinists."[31] Such a list

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[30]The idea of arriving at the essence of Hyper-Calvinism is problematic in itself. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free, 2004), 70, in the context of discussing the difficulty of defining God, says,

> To define means to limit, as the word itself indicates. When we define any object, we include it in a certain class, place it in the category of a known universal, in order then to distinguish it from other objects in the same class by mentioning its distinguishing characteristics. It is all but impossible to define the essence of anything for the simple reason that we cannot form a clear concept of the meaning of *essence.* We may say that the essence of a thing is *that which it is*, or its *substance,* or *hypostasis,* the substratum of all the necessary qualities and attributes of a thing, that in which they all subsist. But we feel that all of these attempts at definition do not really succeed in clearly limiting for our mind the concept *essence,* or *being.* The difficulty seems to be that essence must itself be an ultimate concept, than which we cannot find a wider, more comprehensive universal.

However, it is possible to compare Hyper-Calvinism with Calvinism to attempt a definition of Hyper-Calvinism (although the likelihood of agreement concerning the definition is not very strong). The difficulty arises in that Calvinism itself, once it moves beyond the soteriological limitations of the five points, is itself difficult to define.

[31]Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 757.

assumes an accepted definition, an assumption, as we have seen above, that is not easily arrived at. Also, the issue of categorizing someone based on the way others have categorized them is problematic. They may have been unfairly categorized in this way and the definition used by the person doing the categorizing may not be the best definition. This approach easily allows for the distortion of the definition of Hyper-Calvinism and thus an unfair categorization of individuals as Hyper-Calvinists.[32] Daniel further distorts the understanding of Hyper-Calvinism by describing it as that "which has gone beyond Calvin while claiming to develop Calvin's theology along lines which the Reformer would have approved."[33]

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[32]Ibid., 759. This is the beginning assumption of Daniel's work and therefore points to a flaw in his conclusion regarding John Gill. One problem with Daniel's work is that he makes the assumption that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist and then says "in studying the relevant doctrines in Gill's writings we aim to reach a workable definition of Hyper-Calvinism itself," 11. Daniel says he arrives at this "by a thorough examination of the works of those usually cited as Hyper-Calvinists." By doing so "a definite pattern can be detected and through an investigation of the pertinent doctrines a definition of the term 'Hyper-Calvinism' can be attained" (x).

[33]Ibid., 764. The fatal flaw in the argument of Daniel and others on this point "is that they presuppose, as a primary point of reference, the fundamentally flawed explanation of later Reformed theology as a deviation from Calvin's thought . . . it is also rather presumptuous to explain the theology of an eighteenth-century thinker like Gill in terms of a purported sixteenth-century problem, particularly given the breadth, depth, and detail of Gill's learning and diversity of the sources of his theology." Richard Muller, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 52. Hong-Gyu Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001), 15, calls Daniel's, as well as Toon's, approach the "Calvin against Calvinists" model. Park's analysis is helpful:

> According to this model, Post-Reformation Reformed theology, that is, Reformed scholastic or orthodox theology is a High Calvinism in that it is a deviation from so-called 'authentic Calvinism' of the Genevan thinker, Calvin, whereas the theology of Gill is a Hyper-Calvinism in that it is not only a deviation from Calvinism, but also a deviation from High-Calvinism. In other words, it sets Calvin's theology as a primary point of reference for research and applies it directly to the evaluation of Gill's theology beyond that of late 16th and 17th century Reformed Protestant theology. Just like the model of Fuller and his fellows, however, this method has the weakness that it approaches Gill's theology from a dogmatic perspective or agenda rather than a historical perspective. It is, strictly speaking, a misuse of the historical materials in that it overstates not only the role of Genevan thinkers such as Calvin and Beza in the developmental process of Reformed Protestant theology, but it is also anachronistic in that it ignores the historic and intellectual context in which Reformed theologians like Gill developed their theologies. . . . Indeed, it is a much worse case than the perspective Fuller and his fellows used, for it was biased by their own theological views along with

The present approach to establishing a working definition is to find the essence of the debate that occurred in the eighteenth century. It is possible to discover the essence by examining the documents concerning the controversy. This method does not mean a universal definition can be agreed upon, but instead highlights the difficulty of the project, as well as the necessity for judicious hesitancy before categorizing someone with an uncomely tag. As has been demonstrated, most definitions do not arrive at the essence of the doctrine. The equating of emphases with essence tends to confuse and muddy the category of Hyper-Calvinism, as does conflating the characteristics of Hyper-Calvinism with the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.[34]

Still another complicating factor is the tendency to look back from the perspective of the present context to a historical context that did not have the same emphases. For example, it is possible to look back from the present age which emphasizes evangelism and worldwide missions and allow this present emphasis to color the theological categorization of those who lived in a different context. Clive Jarvis mentions this problem.

> The difficulty in making "evangelistic activity" the means by which the orthodoxy of Gill or any other eighteenth-century Calvinist may be judged is that even among "evangelical Calvinists" their commitment to the doctrine of predestination placed

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the evangelistic agenda of Fuller and his fellows.

[34]Curt Daniel quotes William Palmer's letter to Charles Spurgeon written at a time when the differences between the movement that had become known as Hyper-Calvinism and what had become known as Evangelical Calvinism were more clearly defined and expressed, where Palmer "noted that the main difference lay in points of application and emphasis on three specific doctrines: 'The three differences between you and us, shall I say, are these: 1st, The nature and extent of moral obligation; 2nd, The nature and extent of the atonement; 3rd, The nature and extent of gospel invitations. These are cardinal points of difference, tangible, and easily understood. Considered as facts or doctrines, there is no difference of opinion between you and us; but when nature, mode, extent, application, and other particulars come under critical examination, differences spring up and we are divided," Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 764. However, in eighteenth-century England this clarity did not exist. Pre-Fuller the issue was not primarily with the atonement but the responsibilities of the preacher and hearer. Therefore, it seems best to look to the responsibility issue as identifying the essence of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism.

> severe limits on their understanding of the term. One can hardly expect Gill to prove his Calvinistic orthodoxy by demonstration of an Arminian approach to evangelism. High-Calvinism evolved because it was a viable extension of the Calvinistic position, a variant of it, even if we judge it to have become a heresy, a judgement which may prove to be overly harsh.[35]

## Approaches to Defining Hyper-Calvinism

What should be the approach to arriving at a definition for Hyper-Calvinism? One possible approach is to view Hyper-Calvinism (and even Calvinism itself) as a spectrum of doctrinal beliefs with a certain person or group being on one end of the spectrum. This person or group could then be used as a foil to compare all other persons or groups. Thus, whoever is chosen as the person or group on the far end of the spectrum receives the label "Hyper-Calvinist" and becomes the foil. An example of this approach is Curt Daniel, partly arriving at his definition by comparing the common denominator between the theologies of John Gill, William Huntington, and John Philpot.

> One can draw a line through these three points alone and reach a fairly accurate view of Hyper-Calvinism. Huntington was not a Baptist, so this means that Hyperism has not been limited to Baptists. Philpot and Huntington were doctrinal Antinomians in a way which Gill was not, thus negating the theory that Hyper-Calvinism is synonymous with Antinomianism in every respect. But all three rejected free offers and Duty-faith and that rejection is the vital ingredient of the Hyperist system.[36]

Daniel understands John Gill as the one who brought cohesion to Hyper-Calvinism.[37]

A second approach is to view Hyper-Calvinism as a grid or web. Two varieties of approaches can be discerned here. In the first variety, the approach is that the entire doctrinal web is Hyper-Calvinism. Each strand of the web would be considered as

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[35]Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?", 234-35.

[36]Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 751.

[37]Ibid., 9.

definitive of Hyper-Calvinism. Therefore, anyone holding to *any* of the strands of Hyper-Calvinism would be considered a Hyper-Calvinist. A representative example of this approach is the aforementioned Phil Johnson. Johnson's attempt to define Hyper-Calvinism places the emphasis on the denial of the sincere offer of the gospel. He approvingly refers to Peter Toon's definition of Hyper-Calvinism in the *New Dictionary of Theology* saying, "this is virtually the epitome of the hyper-Calvinist spirit: *it is a denial that the gospel message includes any sincere proposal of divine mercy to sinners in general."*[38] However, in his actual discussion of a definition Johnson expands this idea to include other aspects.

C. Matthew McMahon, in his "A Critique of Hyper-Calvinism," further illustrates ambiguity that results in labeling positions and people as Hyper-Calvinist without needed clarity. For example, in his discussion of the history of Hyper-Calvinism he claims that Gill's *The Cause of God and Truth* is Hyper-Calvinism, stating that it is "one of Hyper-Calvinism's 'greater works.'" In fact, he terms Gill's approach as "unbridled Hyper-Calvinism." When he attempts a definition of Hyper-Calvinism he states that some have attempted "to sum up this theological monstrosity in 5 easy steps, or 3 concise points. The animal simply will not be caged in this manner. There are a variety of ideas and points which Hyper-Calvinism purports, borrows, twists and skews out of orthodox doctrine." He then makes accusations such as Hyper-Calvinists "simply do not understand how to reconcile the Sovereignty of God and the human responsibility of man. *That is why Hyper-Calvinism exists* . . . unwarranted curiosity in the decrees and

[38]Johnson, "A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism." Emphasis in original. Because the offer of the gospel is such an important aspect in many attempts at defining Hyper-Calvinism a substantial portion of this work will be devoted to a discussion of it.

counsel of God has caused them to enter a realm where God has not revealed Himself." After a lengthy discussion of different emphases he considers Hyper-Calvinistic, his conclusion is that "a Hyper-Calvinist would be one who holds any of the following points due to their logical extensions." He then lists nine different criteria, *any* of which would make one a Hyper-Calvinist.

> 1. That God elects or damns without considering men as fallen creatures.
> 2. That the mind of man, due to the fall, is utterly destroyed.
> 3. That fallen men have no duty to believe in the Gospel by faith.
> 4. That men must have a subjective theological knowledge of regeneration before they can believe the Gospel.
> 5. That the Gospel should not be universally tendered or offered to all men, everywhere.
> 6. That the Gospel should not be offered to men except they are regenerate.
> 7. That God does not have a general love for all men in His indiscriminate providence.
> 8. That Limited Atonement must be believed in order to hear the Gospel, and be saved and converted.
> 9. That God cannot desire things He has not decreed, or decree things He has not desired.[39]

Such an approach to Hyper-Calvinism paints with an extremely broad brush and does not deal with the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.

The second way to view the grid, or web, approach to defining Hyper-Calvinism is to consider the *core* of the theological web as most important for a person or group's inclusion or exclusion. Thus, certain doctrines that have affinity with Hyper-Calvinism can be held without agreeing with core Hyper-Calvinist beliefs. The core of the web is most important in categorizing Hyper-Calvinism. The Hyper-Calvinist

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[39]C. Matthew McMahon, "All House and No Doors: A Brief Critique of the False Teachings of Hyper-Calvinism" [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/McMahonABriefCritiqueOf Hyper-Calvinism.htm. Internet. Emphasis in original.

category should not include a person who holds some doctrines that are associated with Hyper-Calvinism while rejecting the core of Hyper-Calvinistic theology.[40]

For instance, Timothy George says a Hyper-Calvinist departs from "the heart of evangelical faith" on at least five key doctrines. First, Hyper-Calvinists teach the doctrine of eternal justification. Second, "they deny the free moral agency and responsibility of sinners to repent and believe." Third, "they restrict the gospel invitation to the elect." Fourth, "they teach that sinners have no warrant to believe in Christ until they feel the evidence of the Spirit's moving in their hearts." Fifth, "they deny the universal love of God."[41]

James Leo Garrett also says there are five distinctive teachings of Hyper-Calvinism, although his five are different in some respects than George's five. First, Hyper-Calvinism holds to "God's decree from eternity to elect some human beings for salvation and reprobate (or eternally damn) others as being logically the first of God's decrees (a teaching known as supralapsarianism)." Second, Hyper-Calvinism consists of the belief in "an eternal covenant among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the redemption of elect humans through the Son (covenant of redemption)." The third aspect of Hyper-Calvinism is "the eternal justification of the elect without the requisite faith on

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[40]This approach gets to the idea of what defining a term or idea should accomplish. See Miriam Webster Online Dictionary [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/defining. Internet. The etymology for "define" comes from the Latin, definire, which in turn is from de- and finire, meaning, "to limit" or "end" and is from finis, which refers to "boundary" or "end." Therefore, to define is "to determine or identify the essential qualities or meaning of." Italics added. According to the 1828 Webster's Dictionary the noun form, "definition," is "a brief description of a thing by its properties" or "in logic, the explication of the essence of a thing by its kind and difference" or "in lexicography, an explanation of the signification of a word or term, or of what a word is understood to express" [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/ word,definition. Internet.

[41]George, *Amazing Grace*, 90-91. George rejects the interpretation that sees Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist. See Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 77-101.

the part of the elect in history (eternal justification)." Fourth, Hyper-Calvinism involves "the discouragement of the preacher's 'offering of grace' indiscriminately to his hearers (no offers of grace)." Fifth, Hyper-Calvinism teaches, "Christians are not obligated to obey the moral law of the Old Testament (antinomianism)."[42] However, both George and Garrett still have not approached the essence of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism but have only set forth some of the doctrines held by some who are named as Hyper-Calvinists by contemporary standards.

In comparing the two approaches to Hyper-Calvinism under the idea of a grid, or web, the first approach sets forth a broader definition of Hyper-Calvinism thereby putting more people outside the mainstream of Calvinism. The resulting tendency is to marginalize those who otherwise could be influential. The second approach sets forth a narrow definition of Hyper-Calvinism which allows for a broader orthodox Calvinism and tends to allow for wider differences within the broadness of this orthodox Calvinism. The latter is the present approach.

## Attempts to Find the Essence of Hyper-Calvinism

There have been more successful attempts at defining Hyper-Calvinism according to its essence. Brian Stanley argues, "the central tenet of the current (eighteenth-century) hyper-Calvinist creed" was "that unconverted sinners were under no moral obligation to repent and believe the gospel, since they were rendered incapable of

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[42]Garrett, "Baptists and Calvinism," 5. Garrett says, "John Gill, the leading Particular Baptist theologian of the 18th century, clearly espoused the five doctrines of Dort. He was either three-fifths or four-fifths a Hyper-Calvinist, not being an antinomian and being ambiguous on supralapsarianism." Amazingly, Garrett also claims that "Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) who strongly advocated repentance and faith as duties, supported only two of Dortian Calvinism's five points: limited atonement and irresistible grace."

doing so by total depravity, and could not justly be held accountable for failing to do what they were unable to do."[43]

Jim Ellis defines Hyper-Calvinism as "a denial of the duty of fallen man to repent and believe the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ coupled with the denial that we should beseech all men indiscriminately to believe the gospel." Later he concludes, "we now have what I believe is a more precise description of hyper-Calvinism in its technical sense. Simply stated, hyper-Calvinism consists of two fundamental errors: a denial of duty-faith and a denial of the universal offer of the gospel." Again, "In my opinion, we have successfully closed on a clear technical definition of hyper-Calvinism. Simply stated, it consists of two fundamental errors: a denial of duty-faith and a resultant denial of the universal call of the gospel."[44]

Peter Naylor, in *Picking Up a Pin For the Lord* equates Hyper-Calvinism with High-Calvinism saying,

> "High Calvinism" was a theological system which would appear to have co-ordinated two denials. First, there was the denial that God calls all who hear about Christ to believe in him; no man is obliged as a matter of duty to trust in Christ as a condition of salvation. . . . Second, high Calvinism denied that it is the responsibility of the churches to call upon all men indiscriminately to repent and to believe in Christ for the salvation of their souls.[45]

Thus, Stanley, Ellis, and Naylor are similar in their descriptions of the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.

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[43]Brian Stanley, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992), 5.

[44]Ellis, "What is Calvinism?" In differentiating the effects of Hyper-Calvinism from the essence of Hyper-Calvinism he says, "The sad effect on evangelism is not the defining error, but a symptom."

[45]Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace, 1992), 145.

David Engelsma's approach to defining Hyper-Calvinism consists of three denials and a manifestation. Concerning the gospel, it is "the denial that God in the preaching of the gospel calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe." Concerning the church, "it is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching." Concerning the unregenerate, "it is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe." Its manifestation is seen "in the practice of the preacher's addressing the call of the gospel, 'repent and believe on Christ crucified,' only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration and, thereby, of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation."[46]

Stanley, Ellis, Naylor, and Engelsma have all attempted to define Hyper-Calvinism with the essence of the system. Stanley views the central issue as lack of ability/responsibility while Ellis, Naylor, and Engelsma add the denial of the duty of gospel preaching to call on the unregenerate to repent and believe (though with different wording and nuances).

Perhaps an even more fundamental aspect of the essence of Hyper-Calvinism is identifiable. Tom Nettles sees the "teaching of the absence of current ability, and thus responsibility, *on the basis of its original absence"* as "the most pivotal theological idea of the Hyper-Calvinist doctrine."[47] Nettles' point is important because the reason for the

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[46]David Englesma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1994), 15-16.

[47]Tom Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 153 n. 60. Emphasis in original.See also Nettles, *By His Grace,* 427: "According to the true hyper-Calvinist, this lack of ability 'to any spiritual good whatever' does not arise from the fall. It is, rather, an ability with which man was never endowed, and it contemplates activities that in his unfallen state were both not required and not necessary." Nettles says that with "the responsibility of man, I believe we find the sum and substance of hyper-Calvinism" (425).

absence of responsibility rests on the belief that such responsibility never existed and therefore such responsibility does not exist in the present. This issue appears to be the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.[48]

At this point, a brief reference to Andrew Fuller's view of Hyper-Calvinism can be helpful.[49] Fuller does not simplify the complex issue of defining Hyper-Calvinism but instead makes the complexity more apparent. Yet, Fuller is important at this point for two reasons. First, he is apparently the first on record to make use of the term in this historical context.[50] Second, he is in the historical context of arguing against the

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[48]It is possible to argue that what is lacking in Nettles' evaluation of the essence of Hyper-Calvinism is that this denial of responsibility is normally coupled with a denial to call on people to believe savingly in Christ. Because special faith, in the Hyper-Calvinist view, is supernaturally added to a person and does not come from themselves, preachers are not duty-bound to call indiscriminately such persons to believe savingly in Christ. This opens the possibility of a person holding to the first aspect of the definition without holding to the second. Whether or not they can do so consistently is another matter. This second aspect of the definition is the manifestation of what was the greatest point of concern for Andrew Fuller in his attack against Hyper-Calvinism. Countering this argument is the idea that the second aspect of the definition is in fact the manifestation of a more fundamental essence of Hyper-Calvinism. But this again points to the complexity of assigning the label of Hyper-Calvinism.

[49]This raises another issue in the difficulty of arriving at an adequate definition for Hyper-Calvinism: the issue of historiography concerning the movement that became known as Hyper-Calvinism. When should the examination of Hyper-Calvinism, from a historical perspective, commence? Should it begin with Tobias Crisp, the Marrow Men, or the eighteenth century? The present focus will be the eighteenth century, not to argue for this as the beginning of Hyper-Calvinism, but because this is the immediate historical context of John Gill.

[50]See, for example, John Ryland, Jr., *The Life and Death of Andrew Fuller* (London: Button and Son, 1816), 50-51. Fuller here equates High Calvinism with Hyper-Calvinism:

> With respect to the system of doctrine which I had been used to hear from my youth, it was in the High Calvinistic, or rather Hyper Calvinistic strain, admitting nothing spiritually good to be the duty of the unregenerate, and nothing to be addressed to them in a way of exhortation, excepting what related to external obedience. Outward services might be required, such as an attendance on the means of grace; and abstinence from gross evils might be enforced; but nothing was said to them from the pulpit, in a way of warning them to flee from the wrath to come, or inviting them to apply to Christ for salvation.

A footnote explains why this is termed "High" or "Hyper" Calvinism: "That is, going as far *above* or *beyond* Calvinism as Arminianism falls below it." Michael Haykin sees the possibility of Fuller allowing for a distinction between the Hyper-Calvinism category and High Calvinism. He says,"that high Calvinism was seen as a step towards a form of Calvinism that had problems with the evangelization of all and sundry, but not exactly equivalent to the latter. I have, therefore, chosen to retain the use of the term hyper-Calvinism." Michael A. G. Haykin, "Hyper-Calvinism and the Theology of John Gill" [on-line]; accessed

movement that would become known as Hyper-Calvinism. A contextually important factor concerning Fuller is that he is centered at the culmination of the eighteenth-century debate. This proximity certainly does not give him the absolute right to define the movement, especially since he was opposed to it, and also because then the assumption is that he understood it correctly and also presented it correctly.[51] Jarvis says,

> Andrew Fuller looked back disparagingly on the high-Calvinism of his upbringing, but he did so not only as one who had abandoned high-Calvinism for evangelical Calvinism, but as the one who championed the cause of evangelical Calvinism to the extent that it was renamed Fullerism, at least in its Baptist form. He looked back also from a time when the gains made by Baptists from 1770 onwards far outstripped anything that had occurred between 1715 and 1770.[52]

But because of his proximity to the debate, as well as his understanding of it, his description should carry substantial weight.[53]

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22 April 2010; available from http://www.andrewfullercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/hyper-calvinism-and-the-theology-of-john-gill.pdf. Internet.

Curt Daniel does mention an Oxford English Dictionary usage from 1674 (751). Again, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between term and idea. Although the term is absent in earlier history the idea does seem to be present, albeit not in as clear a manifestation as later.

[51]One of the problems with an accepted definition of Hyper-Calvinism is, who gets to decide the definition? This is not easy to answer. However, a definition that attempts to arrive at the essence of Hyper-Calvinism seems to be what fulfills the terms of a definition. Fuller can contribute to this but such contribution should be viewed with critical discernment, especially in regard to the Fullerite paradigmatic evaluation of Gill's theology and practice. See Park. "Grace and Nature":

> Historically speaking, to look on Gill through the eyes of Fuller and his fellows without taking account of their own specific context cannot avoid being an anachronism. This does not mean that Fuller's theological perspective or judgement on Gill was absolutely wrong. It rather indicates that it is quite difficult and is indeed a dangerous business to accept Fuller's judgement or his theological point of view uncritically or to use it to understand and evaluate Gill and his theology. Indeed, in Fuller's attack against High or Hyper-Calvinism, especially, in relation to the theology of Gill, it cannot be denied that the evangelistic agenda has overshadowed Gill's other important theological aspects. However, almost all the historians who have treated Gill have accepted the judgement of Fuller and his fellows, in many cases, as a definite historical fact, without careful investigation of Gill's works in their own context, despite the chronological, contextual, and methodological gap between them (8-9).

[52]Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?" 250.

[53]For discussions of Hyper-Calvinism in eighteenth-century England, see Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill"; George Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham: Go, 1995);

Fuller's view is that Hyper-Calvinists argued that it was not Adam's duty to fulfill spiritual or evangelical duties because he was under a covenant of works. This view holds that he was not suited to live unto God through a Mediator and so his posterity are under no obligation to live by faith in the mediator Christ.[54] Fuller rejects this view and calls it "false Calvinism."[55] Fuller speaks of his pastor, Mr. Eve, "who being what is termed *high* in hissentiments, or tinged with false Calvinism, had little or nothing to say to the unconverted." He seems to equate "high" Calvinism with "hyper" Calvinism.[56]

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Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliffe of Olney, His Friends, and His Times* (Durham, UK: Evangelical, 1994); McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*; Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003); Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace, 1992); Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity,* vol. 1(Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005); Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*; Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771-1892: From John Gill to Charles Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006); R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival, 1760-1820* (Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1989); Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998); Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*; Clive Jarvis, "The Myth of High-Calvinism?" A thorough evaluation of the relationships of individuals to Hyper-Calvinism is beyond the purpose of this dissertation. However, careful and judicial evaluation of an individual's relationship to Hyper-Calvinism in historical context is necessary for historical accuracy.

[54]See Barry Howson, "Andrew Fuller's Reading of John Gill," *Eusebia 9* (2008): 76; T.E. Watson, "Andrew Fuller's Conflict with Hypercalvinism," *Puritan Papers,* vol. 1, *1956-1959,* ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000), 271-82; Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin,* 193-202.

[55]Ryland, *The Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 10. See also, Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 2:367:

> Neither Augustine nor Calvin, who each in his day defended predestination, and the other doctrines connected with it, ever appear to have thought of denying it to be the duty of every sinner who has heard the gospel to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Neither did the other Reformers, nor the Puritans of the 16th century, nor the divines at the Synod of Dort (who opposed Arminius) nor any of the nonconformists of the 17th century, so far as I have any acquaintance with their writings, ever so much as hesitate upon this subject.

[56]As mentioned earlier, there is debate whether to have two distinct categories: "hyper" and "high," or to use the terms synonymously. Fuller seemed to use them synonymously, others, such as Toon and Daniel, have separated them. Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism,* 144says,

> The terms "False Calvinism" and "High Calvinism" were used in the latter part of the eighteenth

> This view of things did not seem to comport with the ideas which I had imbibed concerning the power of man to do the will of God. I perceived that the will of God was not confined to mere outward actions, but extended to the inmost thoughts and intents of the heart. The distinction of duties, therefore, into internal and external, and making the latter only concern the unregenerate, wore a suspicious appearance.[57]

Accordingly, Fuller sees the issue as the lack of duty of the unregenerate to do any spiritual good and therefore the unregenerate are not to be exhorted except by way of doing external duties. He sees the denial of the free offer of salvation to sinners without distinction as a departure from sixteenth and seventeenth century writers and this is why it is "false" Calvinism.[58]

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> century to describe what we have described as "Hyper-Calvinism." It was only in the nineteenth century that the expression Hyper-Calvinism came to be generally used to describe the same doctrinal system which some people in the eighteenth century called High Calvinism. Yet men like Andrew Fuller, who made use of the latter term (as well as "False" and "Hyper-Calvinism") did not make any deliberate distinction between the theology of Calvin and that found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Thus they did not feel the need of a term to distinguish the "Calvinism" of the Puritans from that of Calvin. But since there is a difference between Calvin's theology and that of men like William Ames and John Owen, and between these orthodox Puritans and men like John Gill and John Brine, there is need for three terms. We have used "Calvinism," "High Calvinism" and "Hyper-Calvinism." It would be preferable to use a term to describe the theology of Hussey, Skepp, Wayman, Gill and Brine which did not make use of Calvin's name, but since these men did use the term "Calvinism" to describe their own theology, to avoid a term that dispensed with his name would not be practicable.

In light of Haykin's comments in n. 51, an interesting study would be to determine if there was development in Fuller's understanding and use of the term over time.

It seems clear that there are distinctions among individuals that would put them in different categories, according to the definition of the terms. However, there are so many nuances and so much lack of understanding concerning the differences it seems best to evaluate each individual in accordance with a spectrum of held beliefs rather than a confusing label. Calvinism lends itself to an easy definition of five points of belief but even here there is debate within those five points and there is misunderstanding as to what a Calvinist is. So much more is the case if we begin to add a number of other labels to those who hold to the five points of Calvinism.

[57]Ryland, *The Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 51-52. Park, in "Grace and Nature," says,

> In regard to the criticism of Gill as a High or Hyper-Calvinist, there is a question whether Fuller used the term in pointing directly to the theology of Gill. It is certain that Fuller did not directly criticise Gill, when he wrote his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* which has been thought of as having debunked 'High or Hyper-Calvinism' in the late 18th century. However, he had obviously a suspicion of Gill's position in the evangelical calling to sinners (6).

[58]Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 9. Fuller speaks of many of the ministers who "began, independently of each other, to examine this question for themselves, and were convinced that they

Ellis seems to agree on this point. "I hope it is clear that hyper-Calvinism is not to be considered a legitimate form of Calvinism, for it is not. By the same token, however, it should also be clear that honest theological discussion should refrain from labeling legitimate variations within orthodox Calvinism as 'Hyper-Calvinism.'"[59] Andrew Gunton Fuller, the son of Andrew Fuller, wrote that the system of doctrine his father battled was "a caricature of Calvinism" and that Fuller rescued "many of the churches." He led "them to recognize the perfect consistency of the most elevated views of the sovereignty of Divine grace with the most extensive obligations of men to moral and spiritual duties, and the most unlimited invitations to unconverted hearers of the gospel."[60] Apparently, the distinction between Evangelical Calvinism and High, or

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had needlessly deviated from the scriptural path, in which the most orthodox of their predecessors had been used to walk." The "question" Fuller refers to is what is known as "The Modern Question." John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838), 45-48, 71, defined one of the primary issues in the debate as the "Free Address to unconverted Sinners." Interestingly, Rippon sees this as an intra-Calvinistic debate.

Fuller also seems to make a connection between certain views of imputation and substitution as part of the High Calvinist position. He puts Crisp's approach into this category. However, how early Fuller made this connection is not known. For a discussion of Fuller's view of the atonement, see Carl Trueman, "John Owen and Andrew Fuller," *Eusebia* 9 (2008): 64-66. By 1803, Fuller attempted to make a distinction between Calvin's view and the High Calvinist's view on this issue. Speaking concerning Calvinists, he says, "They held the doctrines of imputation and substitution so as to feel at liberty to exhort sinners, without distinction, to repent and believe in Christ: Mr. B. does not. Have I not a right, then, to infer that his ideas of these doctrines are different from theirs, and that what is now called Calvinism is not Calvinism?" He instead calls this "Crispism" and says this approach "undermines all ground for confession or repentance." See "On Calvinism" letter in *The Works of Andrew Fuller,* 2:711. However, it seems best not to view this as the essence of the definition of Hyper-Calvinism.

Also, Park, "Grace and Nature," sees Fuller as theologically connecting Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism: "His writings on Antinomianism reveal that he did not see any actual theological differences between High or Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism. In other words, he did not feel any difficulty in associating High or Hyper-Calvinism with Antinomianism" (6). His footnote references Andrew Fuller, *Antinomianism Contrasted with the Religion of the Holy Scriptures,* in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 2:737-62 and *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in *Works*, 2:328-461.

[59]Ellis, "What is Hyper-Calvinism?"

[60]Fuller, *Complete Works,* 1:1.

"Hyper" Calvinism became more pronounced with Fuller and those who followed in the stream of Fuller.

However, those who are typically labeled as Hyper-Calvinists hold to the historic definition of Calvinism, i.e., the five points. Attempting to argue the illegitimacy of those within the spectrum of Calvinism must be on other grounds than rejecting them as Calvinists. Hyper-Calvinism, it seems, is a subset of Calvinism. Many Calvinists deny it as a biblical form of Calvinism but it still falls within the spectrum of the historic definition of Calvinism. This understanding is not indiscriminate approval of the theology and practice of those who hold to Hyper-Calvinism but is a fact of historical theology. From this vantage point, distinctions and arguments can now be set forth.

To complete the task of formulating a working definition for the present study, examining documentation from the Modern Question debate that transpired in eighteenth-century England is helpful.[61] This debate primarily transpired in a number of writings throughout the century. By examining these sources, it is possible to ascertain the essence of the debate. At the time, the issue under debate was not referred to as Hyper-Calvinism. However, that is the way later historical and theological discussions normally reference it.

As the debate developed throughout the century, the essence of the issue became clearer. Although there continued to be many important corollary issues, an examination of the documents shows a primary issue emerged that was central to the

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[61]A more thorough examination of the content of the debate will be presented in chap. 5, where the writings will be referenced.

argument. This issue should be understood as the essence of the debate and thus, for the present work, the essence of eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism.[62]

Based on an examination of the documentation, the definition that will function as the working definition for Hyper-Calvinism is the denial of the duty of unregenerate man to believe the gospel for salvation based on man's original lack of ability to believe the gospel for salvation. Coupled with this denial, a consequential denial of the duty of a preacher of the gospel to call indiscriminately on all people to believe savingly in Christ is the normal Hyper-Calvinistic tendency. This tendency flows from the essence. The basis of these denials is that man considered either in his fallen or unfallenness does not have the ability to believe savingly in Christ and therefore does not have the duty to believe in Christ. Also, there is the corollary belief that since faith is supernaturally added to a person they must wait to have the faith added which means they must come to believe that Christ died for them in particular. Although seeming to be present at points, this latter aspect is not entirely clear in the writings of the Modern Question controversy.

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[62]The documents that help to determine the definition arrived at include Matthias Maurice, *A Modern Question Modestly Answer'd* (London: James Buckland, 1737); Lewis Wayman, *A Further Enquiry After Truth* (London: J. and J. Marshall, 1738); John Brine, "A Refutation of Arminian Principles, Delivered in a Pamphlet Entitled, 'The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith, Examined with Candor' etc. In a Letter to a Friend," in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007); idem, "Motives to Love and Unity Among Calvinists, Who Differ in Some Points," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007); Alverey Jackson, *The Question Answered* (London: J. Ward, 1752); Andrew Fuller, *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* published in 1785 found in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988); William Button, *Remarks on a Treatise Entitled Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (London: J. Buckland, 1785); Andrew Fuller, *A Defence of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation; Containing a Reply to Mr. Button's Remarks, and the Observations of Philanthropos* found in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* vol. 1; John Martin, *Thoughts on the Duty of Man Relative to Faith in Jesus Christ; in which Mr. Andrew Fuller's Leading Propositions on that Subject are Considered* (London: W. Smith, 1788).

A brief examination of the primary documents will demonstrate the accuracy of this definition. Matthias Maurice's *A Modern Question Modestly Answered* began the written debate in earnest. Maurice argues against the view that claims it is not the duty of unconverted sinners who hear the gospel to believe in Jesus. Instead, he affirms, "that God does by his Word plainly and plentifully make it the duty of unconverted sinners who hear the Gospel, to believe in Christ."[63] Maurice then examines a number of Scripture passages supporting his position. The essence of his argument is that whatever God commands becomes a duty of those commanded. He argues, "Who in the fear of God can say, that tho' God did command them, yet it was not their duty?"[64] Not only does God command sinners to believe in Christ, but also God *intends* those who hear the gospel to believe it. On Isaiah 45:22, Maurice says this is "a very clear command to believe in the Messiah: Nor can any poor sinner that hears it, justly say that he is not intended in it."[65] Whether or not a person has the power to believe in Christ is not the issue. A passage such as Ezekiel 33:11 does not "suppose that they have *power* to turn themselves, yet it is a plain command that makes it their *duty* to turn to God."[66]

Lewis Wayman responded to Maurice with *A Further Enquiry After Truth.* In this document, Wayman presents clear evidence for the distinctive element of the debate, and thus the definition for Hyper-Calvinism in the present work. Wayman argues if it is the duty of the unconverted to believe in Christ it is their duty to believe while

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[63]Matthias Maurice, *A Modest Question Modestly Answered,* 4.

[64]Ibid., 6. "The whole duty of every man is intended; therefore, let not any man, who hears the Gospel, say it is not his duty to believe in Christ, for God commands it, and tis impossible to fear God without it" (8).

[65]Ibid., 11.

[66]Ibid., 12. Italics in original.

unregenerate.[67] This view apparently creates a problem for Wayman since Calvinists normally view regeneration as the cause of faith and not vice versa. From Wayman's perspective, a solution to the problem presents itself in the form of a proper biblical understanding of different kinds of belief. Part of the problem in Maurice's position is the failure to recognize the distinction between natural, common, or historical faith and supernatural or special faith.[68] In addition, Wayman argues that this mistaken notion of the duty of the unregenerate to exercise saving faith results in an incorrect idea of the cause of damnation. He holds that just as non-election is not the cause of damnation neither is the lack of election-grace the cause of damnation. This view results in giving "too much countenance to that mistake that conceives Christ to have set our score in Adam even." The result of such a view is "that now justice deals with men only for their actual sins, which they may atone for by their own faith and repentance."[69] Instead, it is because of sin that man is already condemned.[70]

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[67]Lewis Wayman, *A Further Enquiry After Truth,* vii-viii.

[68]Ibid.

> By natural and common faith, I mean such a faith as is attained in the natural and ordinary way of our knowing and believing; and I call it common because men may have it who perish, or whilst in unregeneracy, as well as those who are saved by grace, *being born again; Simon Magus* as well as *Peter: Then* Simon *himself believed also;* and *devils* are said to *believe also* and *tremble.* And this faith hath for its object that which is equally evident to all who have the same natural and external advantage and opportunity of knowing and believing (4).

> By supernatural and special faith I mean, that faith which none ever had, or was ever possible for any to have, but those who were from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the Truth. . . . And this I call supernatural. (1) Because it is not attainable by mere nature or reason. (2) Nor in the ordinary way of our knowing and believing: Neither, (3) Are its objects those things that are equally evident to all who have the same latitude of mind, and the same outward advantage and opportunity (5-6).

[69]Ibid., 16.

[70]Ibid., 17.

> God hath not saved all by the covenant of grace; nor by the Gospel propounded a remedy for

However, all of these issues – the distinction between natural and supernatural faith, incorrect views of condemnation, and a conditional gospel – find their root in the view of Adam in his state of innocence. For Wayman, it is wrong to view man as condemned for lacking special faith because "condemnation doth not come upon them that hear and receive the report of the Gospel for their not believing with the faith of God's elect; because it was not in the power of man, in his best estate, before the fall."[71] Adam only knew God as "Creator and Benefactor." He did not know him as Savior since there was no need for such a relation.[72] Wayman argues that it was not the case that Adam had special faith before the fall and lost it. He says, "What Adam had we all had in him; and what Adam lost we all lost in him; and are debtors to God on both accounts; but Adam had not the faith of God's elect before the fall, and did not lose it for his posterity; therefore they are not debtors to God for it while in unregeneracy."[73] Instead, Adam never possessed this special faith before the fall. Faith "is a spiritual blessing given in Christ. The weight of this reason lies here, that all spiritual blessings were given in Christ, to be communicated to his mystical body, and none but them."[74] Adam had a

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all upon conditions: I do not therefore see reason to think that men are condemned for not believing in Christ according to the sense of that term in the question; nor yet, that it will be an aggravation of the guilt and punishment of those that perish, that they have not believed in Christ, any more then their not being chosen in him is (18-19).

[71]Ibid., 51.

[72]Ibid., 51-52.

[73]Ibid., 54. On pp. 55-57, Wayman references John Owen and Thomas Goodwin for support.

[74]Ibid., 59. Wayman gives various arguments as to why maintaining a distinction between Adam and Christ is necessary. Included in his arguments is that it is wrong to assign to Adam spiritual blessings and capacities when he only had earthly blessings and capacities (60-61); it is not the image that Adam possessed that is restored in Christ, but a heavenly image (61-62); and, if Adam had possessed the grace of faith he would have been as the angels and should have been confirmed in that state because such a principle of faith is a persevering faith (62-66).

disposition to believe whatever God revealed and in that respect had faith. That is, he had the capacity for special faith but not such faith itself. In order to have special faith Adam needed an internal revelation – but this revelation would have produced an inward change.[75] In answering the objection that the law commands love of God and therefore commands faith, Wayman points out that Adam had the duty of love and so does his posterity. However, Adam could love God without a Redeemer.[76] In response to the objection, "the gospel is a blessing where it comes and affords an opportunity for all to be saved if they will," Wayman asks,

> Does the Gospel effectually bring salvation to all? Or only offer an opportunity to all? It is evident it does not effectually save all; and to make it an opportunity of salvation upon conditions, is to destroy the nature of the Gospel, and make it a new law, offering life and salvation upon terms and conditions to be perform'd by the creature, notwithstanding what may be said to the contrary.[77]

Further, Adam would not have understood the gospel because he did not need it.[78]

Wayman's position is that "faith, which is a new covenant blessing, was not put into man as any part of the creation endowment." It is true that the law commands man "to abstain from immoralities." However, this assertion is not the same as supposing, "The law commands faith." Wayman says, "It is no fair way of reasoning, that because the law requires of man what God put into his hand, therefore it requires what he never

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[75]Ibid., 68-70. Wayman argues that a revelation of Christ to Adam as his Redeemer and Adam's subsequent assent to Christ would require an internal change. In other words, he would have needed regeneration (77-79).

[76]Ibid., 70-71.

[77]Ibid, 73: "But why must it be supposed, that God offers an opportunity to all to be saved? And, how can we understand it to be a privilege and blessing, to have an opportunity upon impossible conditions? And especially, seeing the duty supposed to arise from this opportunity is required under pain of damnation?"

[78]Ibid., 79-80.

put into his hand." The proper understanding is that "man was endowed with all moral perfections before the fall; but was not made a partaker of new covenant blessings, of which faith is one."[79]

Thus, although there are corollary issues in the debate, for Wayman the foundational issue is the state of Adam in his innocence. There is a connection in some way between all of the issues in the debate to this foundational issue. In particular, there is an intimate connection between the primary issue in the debate – the duty of unregenerate sinners to believe in Christ – and the view concerning Adam's nature in the state of innocence.

A quick summary of John Brine's *A Refutation of Arminian Principles* will also show this conclusion to be accurate.[80] Brine says, "with respect to special faith in Christ, it seems to me, that the powers of man in his perfect state were not fitted and disposed to that act."[81] He then states his reasons for this view. First, special faith was unnecessary. He says, "The communication of such a power to man, in his primitive state, would have been in vain; for there was no necessity, nor use of believing in Christ in that state." Second, "God could not require man, while in a perfect State, to put forth such an Act, as special Faith in Christ is." The reason for this lack of requirement is that "this act necessarily supposes a dependence on Christ for salvation, as creatures lost and miserable in ourselves." However, until the fall man "could not exercise such a trust in

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[79]Ibid., 141.

[80]Brine, *A Refutation of Arminian Principles.*

[81]Ibid, 4.

Christ, as a Redeemer."[82] Third, "special faith in Christ, belongs to the new creation, of which he as Mediator between God and his people . . . and therefore, I apprehend, that a power of acting this special faith in him, was not given to man, by, or according to the law of his first creation." Fourth, it seems strange "that man should be furnished with a power, he could not exercise in his perfect state; and in his corrupt state be deprived of that power, wherein alone the exertion and exercise of it can be necessary or useful."[83] As with Wayman, Brine's concern is with man's present lack of ability to believe in connection to Adam's lack of ability in his innocent state.

Alverey Jackson, in *The Question Answered,* argues against Wayman and Brine. Again, the important aspect of this issue, according to Jackson, is the issue of Adam's lack of obligation for saving faith before the fall – the hinge point in the definition used to evaluate John Gill's relationship to Hyper-Calvinism.

> The *only argument* produced to prove, that faith in Christ is not a duty, is both unscriptural, and utterly destructive of all true religion . . . and because those who are resolved to maintain, that faith in Christ is not a duty can find no word of God to prove their position, or to defend their notion, they are at last constrained to seek another foundation; and have determined, for want of a better support, to venture the weight of *their whole building* on the crazy bottom of *one single human argument*, which, in a few plain words, is only this: Adam had not faith in Christ, nor was obliged to have it, before the fall; and neither did, nor could lose it, either for himself, or for his offspring; and therefore none of his fallen posterity are obliged to believe in Christ. And since *so great a stress is laid upon this argument*, it may not be improper for us to try the strength of it, and see what wonders it can work.[84]

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[82]Ibid., 5: "Therefore, if it is supposed that God furnished man, in a state of innocence, with a power of acting this special faith in a Mediator, it must, I think, be allowed that he gave man an ability, which so long as he continued to possess it, he could not require him to exert. Whether this is likely, I leave to your judicious and impartial inquiry.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Alverey Jackson, *The Question Answered,* 48-49. Italics added.

Thus, it is clear that the major players in the debate were cognizant of the central issue in the debate, as well as the corollary issues. However, even with all of the discussions concerning the corollary issues, the debate consistently returned to the defining issue of man's obligation in relation to Adam's ability in the state of innocence.

Andrew Fuller's contribution to the debate continues the same theme. In his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,* Fuller attempts to be comprehensive in his discussion of the issue. In connection to the debate, he deals with the nature of original holiness, the divine decrees, particular redemption, the covenant of works, the inability of man, and the operations of the Spirit. Fuller argues that it is wrong to use "objections drawn from such subjects as the above . . . to weigh against that body of evidence which has been adduced from the plain declarations and precepts of the holy scriptures."[85] In order to combat the view that Adam did not have the duty to believe in his state of innocence, he argues that since it is not possible to understand fully the nature of Adam it is not wise to base a position on what cannot be known.

> What if, by reason of darkness, we could not ascertain the precise nature of the principle of our first parents? It is certain that we know but little of original purity. Our disordered souls are incapable of forming just ideas of so glorious a state. To attempt, therefore, to settle the boundaries of *their* duty, by an abstract inquiry into the nature of their powers and principles, would be improper; and still more so to make it the medium by which to judge *our own*.[86]

It is obvious that Fuller sees this issue as primary in the debate as is evidenced by his later interactions with William Button.

Responding to Fuller's comprehensive approach, William Button speaks of Adam in his state of innocence having holy, spiritual dispositions that were not

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[85]Fuller, *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, 76.

[86]Ibid., 76-77.

evangelical. That is, because he loved God he had holy, spiritual dispositions. However, because he had no need of the gospel these distinctions were not evangelical.[87] This issue drives the debate. When Fuller replies to Button's response, he highlights what he sees as the essence of the issue. Fuller says, "Upon this single point of Adam's incapacity to do things spiritually good, Mr. B. rests almost all his arguments."[88] This issue is manifest as the central issue in the debate that takes place throughout the eighteenth century.

Although there are corollary issues involved in the debate, the central issue is whether Adam had the ability to believe in his state of innocence. Those who claimed that man does not have the ability to believe because he never had the ability to believe are often called Hyper-Calvinists. Because of this connection, the above-mentioned definition of the essence of Hyper-Calvinism becomes the working definition in an evaluation of John Gill's relationship to Hyper-Calvinism.

Arriving at this definition is important to the thesis in light of the need to combat the lack of precision in defining the term and the lack of clarity in arriving at the essence of Hyper-Calvinism. At the same time, the reality of the limitation of arriving at an accepted definition is recognized. Most attempts at defining the term and idea have been, in the end, unhelpful. However, once a definition more in line with the essence of

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[87]Button, *Remarks on a Treatise Entitled Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation,* 70.

> On the whole, if spiritual dispositions, which lead to spiritual obedience, differ from *natural* and *truly holy* dispositions, and were what Adam never had (as I shall endeavor more clearly to shew by and by) nor what the law requires, and are what no man would ever have possessed, had it not been for the undertaking of Christ, and work of the Holy Spirit, who bestows them in a way of sovereign and distinguishing grace on the elect only, I conclude they are not incumbent on unregenerate men, nor are they anywhere represented as the duties of men in general; and consequently there is no reason to assert that *special faith* is required of all men (73-74).

Button's reply also deals with the issue of Adam's ability in a state of innocence (67-86).

[88]Andrew Fuller, *A Defence of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All*

Hyper-Calvinism is determined, an examination of a historical figure such as John Gill in relation to this definition is then possible. Still, it is important to keep the overarching designation of Calvinism in mind. The argument here is, first, even if a person held to Hyper-Calvinism he would remain within the historical definition of Calvinism, although most other Calvinists may reject his particular theology. Second, it is important to avoid identifying a person with a potentially slanderous label, especially when it is not altogether clear whether such a person holds to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism. Third, avoiding guilt and condemnation by association is vital. It can be helpful to examine historically one's relationships with others but one can have relationships with others without embracing their theology and practice. Fourth, holding to some tenets, placing emphasis in some areas over other areas, and not participating in some practices, should not result necessarily in placing a certain label on a person. Care is called for in categorizing an individual, especially when it comes to such a reputation shattering term as Hyper-Calvinism. Finally, all of the preceding reasons argue for dropping the label of Hyper-Calvinism altogether. The present work grudgingly makes use of the term because it is part of the accepted nomenclature. However, the term is used with the hope of advancing the argument for its eventual abandonment. With the complexity of both the term and the idea as evidenced by the present survey of attempts to define Hyper-Calvinism, it is questionable whether the term is helpful. Instead, the label arguably does more harm than good with regard to historical evaluations.[89]

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*Acceptation,* 213. See Fuller's discussion on pp. 213-24.

[89]Sam Storms has also suggested the possibility of doing away with the term Hyper-Calvinism. "For the sake of clarity (and even charity) perhaps we ought to drop the label hyper-Calvinist and simply refer to those who hold that view as wrong" [on-line]; accessed 14 December 2009; available from

## Conclusion

Because of the complexity both of the subject and Gill's theology, as well as the historical context, labeling John Gill a Hyper-Calvinist is unwise. Such a label has been harmful to Gill's reputation. John Gill does not deserve the historical, or theological, label of Hyper-Calvinism. Disagreement with Gill is certainly permissible and it is advisable to read his works with acumen. However, debate should take place with an understanding of his writings, his context, the historical parameters of Calvinism, a clear definition of the essence of Hyper-Calvinism,[90] and the potential for harm that comes from the Hyper-Calvinism label.

The remainder of the dissertation will examine Gill's soteriology in relation to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism. This examination will show that while Gill held some theological positions at odds with other Calvinists these certainly were not to the degree to place him outside of historic Calvinism. Gill should be placed within historic Calvinism, though arguably some will place him at an extreme position on the spectrum. The present approach is to view Gill as an ally of the historic truths of Calvinism and not as one who is antagonistic towards those truths.[91]

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http://www.enjoying god ministries.com/article/what-is-hyper-calvinism. Internet.

[90]It is possible that the label of Hyper-Calvinism arose historically because some Calvinists were complaining of Arminian tendencies at work among other Calvinists and some of those other Calvinists claimed they did not possess Arminian tendencies. Instead they claimed to be true Calvinists while the extreme form of Calvinism was labeled as "false" or "Hyper"-Calvinism.

[91]Later in this work, there will be an examination of whether Gill's practice was antagonistic to the impulses of Calvinism.

# CHAPTER 3

## ETERNAL ASPECTS OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

John Gill bases his soteriology on eternal aspects with five areas that factor into a discussion of his relationship to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism: God's decrees, predestination, the covenant of grace, eternal union with Christ, and eternal justification.[1] These are areas that Gill's critics charge him with overemphasizing,[2] yet they provide the foundation for his understanding of the rest of his soteriology. As such, it is important to grasp Gill's understanding of these doctrines.[3] Along with explanations of his perspective on these doctrines, this chapter will argue that the best understanding is that these are foundational and not the totality of Gill's soteriology. In addition,

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[1]Eternal adoption is another doctrine concerning the eternal aspects of Gill's soteriology. However, because of its similarity in Gill's view to predestination and justification as immanent acts of God, it will not be discussed in this dissertation. For Gill's view of adoption as an immanent act of God see John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London: 1893; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 201-03.

[2]These aspects certainly do carry an emphasis in Gill's writings. However, an examination of his works finds that while these ideas permeate his writings they do not replace discussions of all aspects of theology as are found in his *Doctrinal Divinity* plus many other areas that are covered in his *Practical Divinity*. Also, the "whole counsel of God" is covered in his commentaries where every verse in the Bible is examined. The charge of "overemphasis" must be examined in light of his entire corpus, although it is no doubt true that these aspects are foundational to his soteriology.

[3]See Richard A. Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*," *Foundations* 24 (1981).

> Gill's importance as a thinker rests upon his reformulation of the federal system around the principles of the eternal decree, the absolutely free and unmerited gift of grace in salvation, and justification of the elect from eternity – the last of these principles serving to rule out any taint of synergism in the salvation of the individual. These doctrines, together with the equation of the covenant of grace with the eternal covenant of redemption or *pactum salutis* between the persons of the Trinity, tended in Gill's system to become the basis for interpreting all other doctrine (4).

forthcoming evidence will show that other theologians have held to these various doctrines – theologians not normally categorized as Hyper-Calvinists.

## The Decrees of God

Foundational to understanding Gill's soteriology is his view that God is eternally active. Thus, "the thoughts of his heart were always employed in devising, forming, and settling things that should be done in time." These thoughts he puts under the category of the acts and works of God, which are to "be distinguished into internal and external." The external acts are those done in time such as creation, providence, and redemption. The internal acts are those done in eternity, the acts having reference to the thoughts of God. He further divides the internal acts into personal and essential. The personal internal acts are peculiar to each Person of the Trinity and thus have to do with the interaction between the different Persons of the Trinity. The essential internal acts are common to all the Persons of the Trinity. Gill refers to these as the decrees of God.[4]

For Gill, these decrees are "not merely ideas of things future, but settled determinations concerning them" and God was never "without the thoughts of his heart, the acts of his understanding, and the volitions of his will."[5] It is possible to deduce these decrees from God's nature as revealed in Scripture.[6] Especially important is understanding his decrees in relation to His sovereignty, specifically in relation to His

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[4]Gill, *Body Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 172-73.

[5]Ibid., 173.

[6]Gill sub-titles his work on theology *A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures.* This does not mean he lacks Scriptural proof-texts for the doctrines he presents but that he sees a place for deducing, or inferring, from Scripture certain doctrinal positions. In fact, for scriptural proof for the decrees Gill references Isa 14:24, 27; 46:10; Dan 4:17; Zeph 2:2; Acts 2:23; Rom 9:11,19; Eph 1:9,11; 3:11.

independency as nothing can happen without or contrary to the will of God. In addition, Gill says, "the immutability of God requires eternal decrees in him, concerning everything that is in time." Third, the knowledge and wisdom of God requires such external decrees.[7]

Concerning the extent of the decrees, Gill argues that the eternal decrees of God encompass everything, including all aspects of the created order, every event of human history, and every spiritual part, including sin. While he says, "Everything that comes to pass in this world, from the beginning to the end of it, is pre-ordained" and this includes "everything, good and bad," it is important to note Gill's nuanced distinctions in the decrees of God. God's effective decrees bring about the good and his permissive decrees bring about the evil, "by which he suffers things to be done; and which he overrules for his own glory."[8]

Gill also discusses the properties of God's decrees with the most important for the present discussion being the "immanent" nature of the decrees. He says God's decrees are internal to God and as such they are immanent, meaning they are "in God, and remain and abide in him." As such, "they put nothing into actual being" until they are actually "brought forth into execution."[9] It is at this point that "they pass upon their respective

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., 173-75.

[9]Note that Gill defines "immanent" as acts within God that bring nothing into actual existence. Bavinck defines it as bearing "no relation to anything that exists or *will exist outside of God,* but occur within the divine being and concern the relations existing among the three persons" (italics added). These he refers to as "purely" immanent works of God. However, he seems to allow for other immanent works of God "that relate to the creatures who will exist outside of his being." These he distinguishes as inward and outward. The inward are the decrees and "establish a connection between the immanent works of the divine being and the external works of creation and re-creation." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* vol. 2(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 342. This is Gill's understanding of the "immanent" decrees of God – such immanent decrees include some relating to creation and re-creation. See also Robert Lewis Dabney,

objects, terminate on them, and issue in actual operation; and then they are called 'transient' acts."[10]

This understanding of God's decrees is in line with Reformed theology, for as Berkhof points out, it is Reformed theology that emphasizes God's decrees. In fact, "Reformed theology stands practically alone in its emphasis on the doctrine of decrees."[11] Gill's view of God's decrees is classic Reformed theology and therefore there is no reason on this point to think of his theology in terms of Hyper-Calvinism.[12]

## Predestination

Gill divides the doctrine of predestination into two parts, election and reprobation.[13] In his discussion of election, he examines the election of angels and the

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*Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company of St. Louis, 1878; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 211; Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free, 2004), 221; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 311.

[10]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 175-76. The decrees are also eternal, which means that since God is eternal, the decrees must be eternal "for, as some divines express it, God's decrees are himself decreeing." This means "if the particular decree of election was before the foundation of the world, as it was, Ephesians 1:4, the same must be true of all the decrees of God, which are all of a date; for no new will, nor new act of the will of God, arise in him in time." The idea of the decrees being free means they are "without any force or compulsion," i.e., not influenced. The immutability of God means the decrees are not subject to change and thus are unalterable. The omnipotence of God means they are effectual.

[11]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 100.

[12]See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2:337-82; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 100-08; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887; reprint, Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 115-24; William Cunningham, *Historical Theology,* vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1870), 416-30; Dabney, *Systematic Theology,* 211-23; John L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 102-10; Charles Hodge (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1873), 535-49; Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 219-28; William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology,* vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1889) 393-462; Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 353-70; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 311-21.

[13]The "double predestination" discussion is often confusing because both the Supralapsarian and the Sublapsarian can be accused of holding to it. The distinctions are sometimes made with discussions between equal ultimacy and whether or not God actively works in the reprobate. R. C. Sproul,*Chosen by God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1986), says,

election of men. Concerning the election of angels, the efficient cause of their election is God, and as such, God makes a distinction between the elect and non-elect.[14] In Gill's view, when God elects the angels he does so viewing them as a pure mass and therefore Gill faces the charge of Supralapsarianism. The angels are either elect or non-elect as viewed in their pure mass "since the elect angels never fell, never were in any corrupt state, and could not be so considered." In addition, the preservation of the elect angels from apostasy and the confirmation of their original state by God was a "consequence of their election; and therefore must be previous to the fall of the rest, who, with them, must be considered in the pure mass of creatureship." This view of election means, "The choice of the one, and the leaving of the other, must be entirely owing to the sovereign will of God."[15]

Under the discussion of whether or not God considers men as fallen or unfallen, Gill presents the differences between Supralapsarianism and Sublapsarianism.[16]Supralapsarianism says God considers men in the decree of election as

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> Equal ultimacy is based on a concept of symmetry. It seeks a complete balance between election and reprobation. The key idea is this: Just as God intervenes in the lives of the elect to create faith in their hearts, so God equally intervenes in the lives of the reprobate to create or work unbelief in their hearts. The idea of God's actively working unbelief in the hearts of the reprobate is drawn from biblical statements about God hardening people's hearts (142).

Sproul goes on to equate this with Hyper-Calvinism. He sees the difference between orthodox Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism in these terms. For him, Calvinism takes a "positive-negative" approach to predestination while Hyper-Calvinism takes a "positive-positive" approach (141-53). Even though this distinction does not properly constitute Hyper-Calvinism, it should be noted that Gill opts for the "positive-negative" approach.

[14]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 176. Gill says some angels are "preserved from apostasy, and continued in their first estate; the other left to fall into sin, and from their former state, and reserved unto judgment."

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., 182-85. See also John Gill, "Truth Defended, Being An Answer To An Anonymous Pamphlet, Entitled, 'Some Doctrines In The Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined By The Word of

"in the pure mass of creatureship, previous to it; and as to be created." There are differences among the Supralapsarians, particularly in regard as to whether "man was considered, as to be created, or creatable" or whether man was considered "as created, but not fallen." He thinks the first option is the more viable of the two. As he examines the Supralapsarian approach, Gill distinguishes between "the decree of the end and the decree of the means." This distinction is important to understanding Gill and explains why some believe Gill to be a Supralapsarian while others believe him to be Sublapsarian. The decree of the end regards the glory of God. The eternal happiness of the elect must be subordinate to the ultimate end, which is the glory of God. However, Gill puts the two together, saying the ultimate purpose "is a state of everlasting communion with God, for the glorifying [of] the riches of his sovereign grace."[17] The

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God,'" *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

The lapsarian debates deal with the logical (not chronological) order of God's decrees. The Supralapsarian view traditionally (there are differences among Supralapsarians) holds the order of decrees as: (1) the decree of the election of some and reprobation of others; (2) the decree to create; (3) the decree to permit the fall; (4) the decree to redeem the elect; (5) the decree to apply redemption to the elect. The Sublapsarian (sometimes categorized as Infralapsarianism) order is: (1) the decree to create; (2) the decree to permit the fall; (3) the decree to elect; (4) the decree to redeem the elect; (5) the decree to apply redemption to the elect. The Amyraldian order is: (1) the decree to create; (2) the decree to allow the fall; (3) the decree to provide salvation for all; (4) the decree to elect; (5) the decree to apply redemption. The Arminian order is: (1) the decree to create; (2) the decree to permit the fall; (3) the decree to provide salvation for all; (4) the decree to call to salvation; (5) the decree to elect believers. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 826, 918 identifies the Amyraldian scheme with Sublapsarianism and the Sublapsarian view as listed above as Infralapsarianism. In this he follows A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology,* 3:777-79, although Strong mentions only Supralapsarianism and Sublapsarianism.

[17]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 183. Gill says the Supralapsarians think their approach answers the slanderous charge that "God made man to damn him." The correct understanding is that "God decreed to make man, and made man, neither to damn him, nor save him, but for his own glory." Theodore Beza says, "The final end of God's counsel is neither the salvation of the elect, nor the damnation of the reprobate: but the setting forth of his own glory." See Beza, *A Brief Declaration of the chief Poyntes of Christian Religion* [on-line]; acessed 14 December 2009; available from http://www.covenanter.org/Beza/bezas_table.html. Internet. In pointing to the difference between the decree to the end and the decree of means Gill says the Supralapsarians "argue that the end is first in view, before the means." When it comes to the actual working out of the intention of God "what is first in intention, is last in execution: now as the glory of God is the last in execution, it must be first in intention." This means that "men must be

decree of the means "includes the decree to create men, to permit them to fall, to recover them out of it through redemption by Christ, to sanctify them by the grace of the Spirit, and completely save them." However, these are not to be considered as "many decrees, but as making one formal decree." Neither are these decrees subordinate to other decrees. Instead, they are "coordinate means," considered as one decree of means.[18]

Under his discussion of the Sublapsarian position, which says the decree of election considers man as created and fallen, Gill rejects some of the main arguments for the position. Specifically, to argue this position from John 15:19, where Jesus says, "I have chosen you out of the world," is wrong because "this text is not to be understood of eternal election, but of the effectual calling; by which men are called and separated from the world." Second, Sublapsarians argue, "the elect are called 'vessels of mercy' which

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considered, in the decree of the end, as not yet created and fallen; since the creation and permission of sin, belong to the decree of the means." The alternative approach – God decreeing without regard to the end – means that God "first decreed to create man, and suffer him to fall, and then, out of the fall chose some to grace and glory." This means "he must decree to create man without an end, which is to make God to do what no wise man would . . . and it cannot be thought that the all-wise and only-wise God should act otherwise; who does all his works in wisdom, and has wisely designed them for his own glory." For Scriptural proof for this position Gill references Prov 16:4; Rom 9:11, 15, 19-20, 22. The reference to Jacob and Esau as not having done anything good or evil should be taken as predestination viewing men in the "pure mass" instead of as already created, and thus in the corrupt mass. The illustration of "the unformed clay of the potter, out of which he makes one vessel to honour, and another to dishonor" also argues for the Supralapsarian approach. Gill says Beza's argument is "that if the apostle had considered mankind as corrupted, he would not have said, that some vessels were made to honour, and some to dishonour; but rather, that seeing all the vessels would be fit for dishonour, some were left in that dishonour, and others translated from dishonour to honour." A further Supralapsarian argument is "that elect angels could not be considered in the corrupt mass, when chosen; since they never fell." A reasonable conclusion is that both the elect and reprobate angels "were considered in the same pure mass of creatureship; and so in like manner men." A final argument for this position is the election of the human nature of Christ, which "could not be considered in the corrupt mass, since it fell not in Adam, nor never came into any corrupt state; and yet it was chosen out of the people, Psalm 89:19 and consequently the people out of whom it was chosen, must be considered as yet not fallen and corrupt; and who also were chosen in him, and therefore not so considered." Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 183-84. See also Gill's arguments in John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (London: W. H. Collingridge, 1855), 156.

[18]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 183. "For it is not to be supposed that God decreed to create man, that he might permit him to fall; nor that he decreed to permit him to fall, that he might redeem, sanctify, and save him; but he decreed all this that he might glorify his grace, mercy, and justice" (183).

supposes them to have been miserable, and so sinful, and to stand in need of mercy." However, Gill's response is that while "through various means the elect are brought to happiness, which are owing to the mercy of God . . . and so fitly called 'vessels of mercy'" this does not mean they were considered in this fallen and needful state in the decree of election.[19] Third, it is argued, "that men are chosen in Christ as Mediator, Redeemer, and Saviour." The implication is that sin has been committed and reconciliation is necessary, "all which supposes men to be sinful." In response, Gill argues that this approach confuses the decrees of the end and means because "men are chosen in Christ, not as the meritorious cause of election, but as the means, or medium, of bringing them to the happiness they are chosen to." A further argument from the Sublapsarian position is that if mankind is considered as a fallen, corrupt mass when it comes to the decree of election, God appears to be "more mild and gentle" than in the Supralapsarian position. This view also "best accounts for the justice of God; that since all are in the corrupt mass, it cannot be unjust in him to choose some out of it to undeserved happiness; and to leave others in it, who perish justly in it for their sins." Since all deserve God's wrath because of their sin, Gill asks, "where is the injustice of appointing some not unto the wrath they deserve, but unto salvation by Christ, when

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[19]Ibid., 184. In "Truth Defended," 8-9, Gill discusses the debate concerning election as an act of mercy. The Supralapsarians argue that election is an act of grace, not mercy. While salvation as a whole can be ascribed as an act of mercy, election is never described in such a way (Rom 9:15 says that salvation is of God, who shows mercy). The primary reason for this being that mercy entails viewing man in a "miserable" condition. He says, "The act of election does not presuppose men sinners and in miserable, nor indeed can it" because to do so would be to "presuppose sin" which "would presuppose the decree of the permission of sin; and the permission of sin would be first in God's intention" and therefore "would be last in execution; than which nothing can be thought of more absurd." The distinction between the decree of the end and means continues to be important for Gill as the end should be kept in mind: "the decree of the end is, the glorifying of the grace and mercy of God, tempered with justice." It is the decree of the means that "provides for the bringing about of this end, which includes creation, the permission of sin, the mission of Christ, sanctification, and complete salvation; so that the elect of God may well be called *vessels of mercy*." Yet, "in the decree of the end, they are considered as not yet created and fallen."

others are foreordained to just condemnation and wrath for their sins?" Yet, Gill counters, "what reason also can there be to charge God with injustice, that inasmuch as all are considered in the pure mass of creatureship, that some should be chosen in it, and others be passed by in it; and both for his own glory?"[20]

It is apparent that Gill did not think the differences over this issue were worth dividing over. In fact, he saw much agreement between the two positions.[21] Whatever differences there were between the two positions were not matters of material importance. In addition, as mentioned earlier, he attempted to incorporate both positions

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[20]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 184.

[21]Ibid., 184-85.

> The difference is not so great as may be thought at first sight; for both agree in the main and material things in the doctrine of election; as
> 1.That it is personal and particular, is of persons by name, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.
> 2.That it is absolute and unconditional, not depending on the will of men, nor on anything to be done by the creature.
> 3.That it is wholly owing to the will and pleasure of God; and not to the faith, holiness, obedience, and good works of men; nor to a foresight of all or any of these.
> 4.That both elect, and non-elect, are considered alike, and are upon an equal footing in the decree of predestination; as those that are for the corrupt mass they suppose that they were both considered in it equally alike, so that there was nothing in the one that was not in the other, which was a reason why the one should be chosen and the other left; so those that are for the pure mass, suppose both to be considered in the same, and as not yet born, and having done neither good nor evil.
> 5.That it is an eternal act in God, and not temporal; or which commenced not in time, but from all eternity; for it is not the opinion of the sublapsarians, that God passed the decree of election after men were actually created and fallen; only that they were considered in the divine mind, from all eternity, in the decree of election, as if they were created and fallen; wherefore, though they differ in the consideration of the object of election, as thus and thus diversified, yet they agree in the thing, and agree to differ, as they should, and not charge one another with unsoundness and heterodoxy; for which there is no reason. Calvin was for the corrupt mass; Beza, who was co-pastor with him in the church at Geneva, and his successor, was for the pure mass; and yet they lived in great peace, love, and harmony. The Contra-remonstrants in Holland, when Arminianism first appeared among them, were not agreed in this point; some took one side of the question, and some the other; but they both united against the common adversary, the Arminians. Dr. Twiss, who was as great a supralapsarian as perhaps ever was, and carried things as high as any man ever did, and as closely studied the point, and as well understood it, and perhaps better than anyone did, and yet he confesses that it was only "apex logicus", a point in logic; and that the difference only lay in the ordering and ranging the decrees of God (Ibid.).

into his theology with an understanding of the distinction between the decree regarding end and the decree regarding means.

> For my own part, I think both may be taken in; that in the decree of the end, the ultimate end, the glory of God, for which he does all things, men might be considered in the divine mind as createable, not yet created and fallen; and that in the decree of the means, which, among other things, takes in the mediation of Christ, redemption by him, and the sanctification of the Spirit; they might be considered as created, fallen, and sinful, which these things imply; nor does this suppose separate acts and decrees in God, or any priority and posteriority in them; which in God are but one and together; but our finite minds are obliged to consider them one after another, not being able to take them in together and at once.[22]

Gill's approach to the lapsarian issue has led to a debate as to whether it is more correct to view him as a Supralapsarian or a Sublapsarian.[23] However, it seems best to see Gill as a Supralapsarian concerning the decreed end but when viewing the plan of God concerning means he incorporates the Sublapsarian scheme.

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[22]Ibid., 185.

[23]The fact that such a debate exists shows that Gill was not a vocal, rigid Supralapsarian. Rippon points out that Augustus Toplady, Gill's friend, "would commonly say, that in the writings of Gill the scale preponderated in favour of Sublapsarianism." See John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838), 50. In light of this, George Ella says, "it is obviously as futile to brand Gill a Supralapsarian as it is to consider Supralapsarians as being by their very nature Hyper-Calvinists." See George Ella, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism," *BQ*, 36 (1995), 164. Ella believes that Rippon would categorize Gill as a Sublapsarian while Curt Daniel points to the same passage in Rippon for support that Gill is a Supralapsarian. See Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 173; Rippon, *A Brief Memoir,* 49-51. However, Rippon clearly says, "And as to our author, there is a section which seems as much as any other, to determine what was his personal opinion respecting the *Supra* and the *Sub*-lapsarian schemes." He then references Gill saying "for my own part, I think both [schemes] may be taken in" (51). Daniel also uses Brine's "Remarks Upon a Pamphlet Entitled, Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined by the Word of God" as evidence that Gill held to Supralapsarianism. However, Brine's reference to Gill is not in regard to Supralapsarianism proper but in regard to God's eternal love for the elect. See John Brine, "Remarks Upon a Pamphlet Entitled, Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined by the Word of God" (5), in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).Tom Nettles, after discussing Gill's view, says, "categorizing Gill, in light of such evidence, as rigidly supralapsarian arises from ignoring Gill's own statements, though he evidently preferred that view." See Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 39. Failure to understand Gill's distinctions between eternal and temporal, the end and the means, and God's works in relation to his creation before the Fall and post Fall leads to a lack of understanding of Gill's view of God's decrees.

Regarding the doctrine of reprobation, Gill prefers to speak of "rejection" rather than "reprobation," while seeing two stages to this "rejection."[24] The first stage is a non-election or preterition – a passing over. Concerning angels, God "determined to choose some and leave others, and both for his own glory." With the election of some, "the others were passed by or rejected" and this is "wholly owing to the sovereign will of God."[25] The second aspect of this rejection by God is the actual appointment to wrath, wherein the fallen angels are viewed as fallen creatures.[26]

The same distinction between the decree of preterition and wrath is true concerning men, although as Gill points out some people can accept the idea of the rejection of angels and not so readily accept the same rejection of man.

> We can hear and read of the non-election and rejection of angels, and of their preordination to condemnation and wrath, with very little emotion of mind: the devils may be cast down to hell, to be everlastingly damned, and be appointed thereunto, and it gives no great concern; no hard thoughts against God arise, no charge of cruelty, want of kindness to his creatures and offspring, and of injustice to them; but if anything of this kind is hinted at, with respect to any of the apostate sons of Adam, presently there is an outcry against it; and all the above things are suggested. What is the reason of this difference? It can be only this, that the latter comes nearer home, and more nearly affects us.[27]

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[24]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 192. "I make use of the word "rejection" in this article, partly because it is a scriptural phrase and ascribed to God . . . but chiefly because the other word reprobation, through wrong and frightful ideas being affixed to it, carries in it with many a sound harsh and disagreeable" (Ibid.).

[25]Ibid.: "To some angels God decreed to give, and did give grace to confirm them in the state in which they were created; these are the elect angels. . . . To others he decreed not to give confirming grace, but to deny it to them; and which he was not obliged to give."

[26]Ibid., 192-93.

[27]Ibid., 193. Gill says, "From the election of some, may fairly be inferred, the non-election of others. Common sense tells us, that of persons or things, if some are chosen, others must be left: if there is a remnant of the sons of men, according to the election of grace, then there are others not included in it, which are left unchosen, and are called the rest"(Ibid.). Loraine Boettner says, "Those who hold the doctrine of Election but deny that of Reprobation can lay but little claim to consistency. To affirm the former while denying the latter makes the decree of predestination an illogical and lop-sided decree." Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 105. Gill, in his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* makes reference to Matt 7:23, saying,

As with the angels, there are two stages to this rejection. The first stage is preterition, or passing by, whereby God considers man "as in the pure mass of creatureship, or creability." Those who are rejected, being passed by, "are left, even just as they are found, nothing put into them; but were left in the pure mass, as they lay, and so no injury done them." However, God is not unjust toward them because sin does not come into consideration at this point. Instead, men are considered "as not created, and so not fallen" and "as unborn, and having done neither good nor evil." Therefore, this rejection is purely an act of God's sovereign will and since it is the negative side of God's predestination, it is sometimes called "negative reprobation."[28]

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> Hence they are represented as "not" loved, which is meant by being hated: "Esau have I hated"; that is, had not loved him, as he had Jacob; for it cannot be understood of positive hatred, for God hates none of his creatures, as such, only as workers of iniquity; but of negative hatred, or of not loving him; which, in comparison of the love he bore to Jacob, might be called hatred: in which sense the word is used in Luke 14:26 (193).

[28]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 194. In "Truth Defended,"10, Gill says, "Though the Supralapsarians do not consider reprobation as an act of justice, but of sovereignty, yet not of injustice; nor does their way of stating it at all strike at the justice of God." God determined "to leave them to their own will, and deny them that grace which he is not obliged to give" (Ibid.). There is no injustice in this. See also "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated," where Gill says,

> This decree, we say, is according to the sovereign will of God, for nothing can be the cause of his decree but his own will, let the object of that part of the decree, which is called *Preterition,* be considered either in the corrupt or pure mass of mankind, as fallen or unfallen creatures, they are to be considered in the same view, and as on an equal foot and level with those that are chosen and therefore no other reason can he given, but the will of God, that he should take one, and leave another. And though in that branch of it, which is an appointment of men to condemnation, sin is the cause of the thing decreed, damnation; yet; it is the will of God that is the cause of the decree itself, for this invincible reason; or otherwise he must have appointed all men to damnation, since all are sinners: let any other reason be assigned if it can be, why he has appointed to condemn some men for their sin, and not others (12).

See John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth,* 149, where Gill answers a similar objection raised by Daniel Whitby. In response to John Wesley, Gill, in "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), answers the objection that God created men in order to damn them by saying,

> Not that God made man to damn him; the Scripture says no such thing, nor do we; nor is it the sense of the doctrine we plead for; nor is it to be inferred from it. God made man neither to damn him, nor save him, but for his own glory, that is his ultimate end in making him, which is answered whether he is saved or lost: but the meaning is, that God has appointed all things for his glory, and

Gill calls the second part of the decree of predestination concerning retribution "pre-damnation." Gill says, "Pre-damnation is God's appointment, or preordination of men to condemnation for sin; and is what is spoken of in Jude 1:4." God's condemnation of such wicked people demonstrates the righteousness of God. While election manifests God's love, reprobation manifests his hatred.[29] Thus, "the act of election is an act of God's love, and flows from it" while reprobation "flows from his hatred, which is an appointment to wrath." This approach means that God's "hatred of sin" is the basis of reprobation. But this hatred of sin "is no ways contrary to his being a God of love and goodness."[30] This aspect of God's decree is sometimes referred to as "positive reprobation."[31] This view of reprobation means that people are chosen or not chosen based on God's good pleasure and people are damned based on their sin.[32]

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particularly he has appointed the wicked man to the day of ruin and destruction for his wickedness (12).

[29]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 194.

[30]Gill, "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated," 18.

[31]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 195. Positive reprobation should not be confused with the idea that God works sin in a positive manner in men's hearts. Gill says that "God hardens some men's hearts . . . not by any positive act, by infusing hardness and blindness into the hearts of men; which is contrary to his purity and holiness, and would make him the author of sin." Instead this hardening is accomplished "by leaving men to their natural blindness and hardness of heart . . . which is increased by habits of sinning." Because men choose sin "God, as he decreed, gives them up to their own wills and desires, and to Satan, the god of the world . . . who blinds their minds yet more and more." God also hardens "by denying them that grace which can only cure them of their hardness and blindness, and which he, of his free favour, gives to his chosen ones, Ezekiel 36:26,27 but is not obliged to give it to any." To some of these sinners "God sends strong delusions, and they are given up to believe a lie, that they might be damned; not that God infuses any delusion or deceit into them, but because of their disbelief of, and disrespect to him and his Word, he suffers their corruptions to break forth and prevail, not giving restraining grace to them . . . and being easy and credulous, they believe lies spoken in hypocrisy; which issue in their damnation; while others, beloved of the Lord, and chosen from the beginning to salvation, obtain the glory of Christ, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14. . . . This is the sense of Proverbs 16:4 for the meaning of the text is not, nor is it our sense of it, as some misrepresent it, as if God made man to damn him; we say no such thing, nor does the text; our sentiment is, that God made man neither to damn nor save him; but he made him for his own glory . . . nor that he made man wicked, in order to damn him; for God made man upright; men made themselves wicked by their own inventions; which are the cause of damnation" (Ibid.).

[32]In "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated," Gill says,

While Gill's view of reprobation may sound harsh, historically considered it is part of orthodox Calvinism and thus does not qualify as Hyper-Calvinism.[33] In fact, many orthodox Calvinists have been Supralapsarians.[34] Schaff and Berkhof even consider

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> The doctrine of reprobation, considered in this light, has nothing in it contrary to the nature and perfections of God. Harsh expressions, and unguarded phrases, which some may have used in speaking or writing about this doctrine, I will not take upon me to defend: but as it is thus stated, I think it is a defensible one, equally as the doctrine of election, and is demonstrable by it. The Scriptures are indeed more sparing of the one than of the other, and have left us to conclude the one from the other, in a great measure, though not without giving us clear and full evidence; for though reprobation is not so plentifully spoken of, yet it is clearly spoken of in the sacred writings (13).

Gill says that this doctrine can be reconciled with God's justice because in preterition whether God's creatures are "fallen or unfallen, it puts nothing into them; it leaves them as it finds them; and therefore does them no injustice." In regard to damnation it "is only but for sin" and thus there is no injustice in God. "If it would have been no unrighteousness in him to have condemned all men for sin, and to have determined to have done it, as he doubtless might; it can be no ways contrary to his justice to condemn some men for sin, and to determine so to do" (15).

In Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* Gill says that man's "incapacity to love, fear, and obey God" comes "from sin, and the corruption of nature" and therefore should not "be ascribed to the decree of reprobation" (150). Reprobation does not render man incapable of pleasing God – sin does. Reprobation denies grace but does not ordain men to be sinful.

[33]In regard to Supralapsarianism and its relationship to Hyper-Calvinism, George Ella says "It must be stressed that such speculative theology was not intended by the Dutch divines as a yardstick for orthodoxy and certainly not to distinguish Hyper-Calvinism from Calvinism. The Dutchmen simply strove to define what plain, ordinary Calvinism was." Ella, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism," 163. However, the equation of Supralapsarianism with Hyper-Calvinism abounds in some circles. A. H. Newman says, "A large proportion of the Particular Baptists of England during the latter half of the eighteenth century, by way of reaction against Socinianism and the missionary movement, became involved in a hyper-Calvinistic (supralapsarian) type of thought that involved making God responsible for evil." A. H. Newsom, "Antinomianism and Antinomian Controversies," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge,* ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:198.But the equating of Supralapsarianism with Hyper-Calvinism is incorrect.

[34]For discussions of Supralapsarianism, including references to those who have held the position see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2:361-66; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 118-25; Dabney, *Systematic Theology,* 232-34; Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 231-37; Reymond, *Systematic Theology,* 488-502; Turretin, *Institutes,* 341-50, 417-30; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915), 28-33; Jonathan Edwards, "Decrees, Predestination, Supralapsarians, Sublapsarians," *Miscellanies,* 704[on-line]; accessed 4 March 2010; available from http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xNzo0OjIwMy53amVv. Internet.

Calvin to be a Supralapsarian,[35] while Augustus H. Strong argues that he was not a Supralapsarian.[36]

## Eternal Union with Christ

Gill's view of eternal union with Christ is not novel nor is it a doctrine that should categorize a person as a Hyper-Calvinist. Gill points to Goodwin and Witsius as two examples of men who held to eternal union.[37] Yet it is true the majority of theologians throughout church history have not held to Gill's understanding of eternal union. A brief examination of Gill's approach to eternal union will help explain his view.

Responding to Abraham Taylor, Gill says there is agreement between them concerning "persons who are united to Christ, that these are God's elect, and they only."

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[35]Ella, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism," 163.

[36]Strong, *Systematic Theology,* 3:777. Strong holds to the Sublapsarian view while declaring that Supralapsarianism is Hyper-Calvinism. Strong equates Beza with other Hyper-Calvinists while claiming that in Calvin's later works, his commentaries, Calvin held to universal atonement. Therefore, Strong claims that "Supralapsarianism is therefore hyper-Calvinistic, rather than Calvinistic." Concerning the sovereign will of God concerning election and reprobation, Gill does not differ with John Calvin. In commenting on Rom 9:18, "God has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills," Calvin says, "Do you see how Paul attributes both to God's decision alone? If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except that it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will." Also, "Those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:947. In his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 76, Gill says,

> It may be clearly discerned, that foreseen faith, holiness, and good works, cannot be the cause of God's will in the election of any to eternal life; and so the contrary, no cause of his will in the rejection of others. . . . The will of God, for this same reason, is not conditional; for then it would be dependent on the condition to be performed; and not the will of God, but the performance of the condition, would be the first and chief in the attainment of the end thereby. And, to say no more, if, for instance, God willed to save all men conditionally; that is, on condition of faith and repentance; and to damn them if these conditions are wanting; who does not see that this conditional will, to save and to destroy, is equally the same? Destruction is equally willed as salvation; and where is the general love of God to men, so much talked of? There is none at all to any.

[37]John Gill, "The Doctrines of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect, And Their Eternal Union with Christ," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 13-16.

They also agree "about the nature of the union itself, that it is an union of the whole persons, souls and bodies, of God's people to the whole person of Christ." In addition, "it is complete and perfect, and not gradual, or brought about by degrees, but finished at once." The points of disagreement regard the timing of the union of God's elect in Christ and "what is the bond of their union in him." Gill says, "It is generally said that they are not united to Christ until they believe, and that the bond of union is the Spirit on Christ's part, and faith on ours. I am ready to think that these phrases are taken up by divines, one from another, without a thorough consideration of them." In light of this description, Gill asks, "Why must this union be pieced up with faith on our part? This smells so prodigious rank of self, that one may justly suspect that something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it."[38]

According to Gill, the eternal union of the elect with Christ is different from our union with him in time or in future glory. This eternal union consists of four aspects. First, there is a representative union of the elect in Christ. Thomas Goodwin held this view. This elective aspect "presupposes love" and means the recipients receive "all spiritual blessings in him" even though they do not have actual being.[39] Second, there is conjugal union - that is, Christ as surety in the marriage relation to the church. Even though there are "open" and "public" aspects of this marital relationship exhibited at

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[38]Ibid., 16-17.

[39]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 199. In "Truth Defended," 40, Gill says that "the real existence of the persons of the elect" was not "necessary to their real union to Christ, only that they should certainly exist." Gill terms this a real union "for surely the love of Christ to the elect, from everlasting, was real, which is the bond of union, though their persons . . . did not really, or actually exist." In referencing 2 Tim 1:9, Gill says, "if we were *in* Christ when this grace, or promise of grace, was given, we were united to him" because it would not be possible for us to "be considered *in him,* without union to him."

conversion and the final gathering in of the elect, there is a "secret act of betrothing" that was in eternity. This "secret act of betrothing" is "when Christ, being in love with the chosen ones, asked them of his Father to be his spouse and bride." The elect were given to him and "he betrothed them to himself in loving-kindness, and from thenceforward looked on them as standing in such a relation to him." The third aspect is the federal, or covenantal, union of Christ with the church. This covenant of grace, of which Christ is the Mediator, is made with Christ as a common head and not as a single person. It also means, "Christ represented his people in this covenant" and therefore functions in relationship with the Father on their behalf. This federal union means that "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." Fourth, there is the legal union that makes Christ's payment of the debt for the elect the bond, which involves viewing Christ and His elect as one.[40]

It is important not to confuse this eternal union with the union of the elect with Christ in time, the eternal union being the basis of any other aspect of union with Christ. Thus, it is not the Spirit that is the bond of union between Christ and the elect because "the Spirit is sent down, and given to God's elect, in consequence of an antecedent union of them to Christ." Therefore, the Spirit's "operations and influences of grace in them, is the evidence, and not the efficient cause of their union." The Scriptural evidence for this is 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord, is one spirit." Gill states,

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[40]Gill, "Truth Defended," 30; idem, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love," 17.

> The sense of the text is evident, and admits of no difficulty. . . . The Spirit of Christ dwells in all that are united to him, sooner or later, but the question is, whether the indwelling of the Spirit is antecedent to their union, or in consequence of it? If it is in consequence of it, then that is not the bond of union; if it is antecedent to it, it must be before faith.[41]

Gill affirms, "That faith is not the bond of union to Christ." He argues, "Those who plead for union by faith" should "tell us whether we are united to Christ by the habit or act of faith." If the bond of union with Christ is the act of faith, the question is "whether our union is by the first, second, third, etc. acts of believing?" On the other hand, "if union is by faith as an habit, it is not by faith on our part, because faith, as such, is the gift of God; and if it be by faith as an act of ours, it is by a work; for faith, as such, is a work; and then not by grace, since works and grace cannot be blended."[42]

Instead, Gill's position is that the bond of union is the everlasting love of the Father, Son and Spirit. He references Ephesians 1:4 as proof "that there is an election-union in Christ from everlasting" that is evidenced by the election of a people considered in Christ. As such, "how they could be considered in Christ, without union to him, is, what I say, is hard to conceive." Therefore, since "eternal election is a display of God's everlasting love to his people" it is also a display "of their eternal union to Christ."[43]In other words, election is evidence of eternal union but the ultimate bond of the union itself is the everlasting love of the Father, Son and Spirit. The original bond of the eternal

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[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 32. idem, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love," 17.

[43]Gill, "Truth Defended," 37.

union itself is everlasting love and because of this original bond, there are many different displays of this everlasting love throughout the plan of redemption.[44]

Some of Gill's biblical support can be seen when John Wesley, in "Predestination Calmly Considered," challenges Gill for proof of the doctrine – to which Gill responds,

> And then he asks where it is written? And in what part of Scripture this covenant is to be found? Now not to inform or instruct Mr. *Wesley,* but for the sake of such who are willing to be informed and instructed, read Psalm 40:6-8; Isaiah 49:1-6 and 53:10-12; Psalm 89:3, 4, 28-36, in which will appear plain traces and footsteps of a covenant, or agreement, of a stipulation and re-stipulation, between the Father and the Son.[45]

Although eternal union is a minority position in church history, Gill's understanding of the doctrine does not place him in the realm of Hyper-Calvinism.[46]

## The Eternal Covenant of Grace

The eternal covenant of grace, deals with the interpersonal relations, in eternity, between the members of the Triune Godhead while the decrees of God deal with the eternal mind of God, both the internal and immanent aspects. The eternal covenant of grace "ordered in all things to advance the glory of all the Three Divine Persons; who are

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[44]Ibid., 37-38.

> There is a legal union between Christ and the elect from everlasting, the bond of which is the surety-ship of Christ, and so he and they are one, in a law-sense, as surety and debtor are one: and likewise, that there is a federal union between them from everlasting; Christ being considered as head, and they as members with him in the covenant of grace. This writer is of opinion, that the legal and federal union is one and the same; I am content they should be thought so: my design hereby is not to multiply unions, or as though I thought there were so many distinct ones, believing that God's everlasting love is the grand original bond of union, and that these are so many displays of it, proving it; and particularly, that it is before faith, the main thing I had in view. The relations of surety and debtor, head and members, conveying different ideas, I thought it proper to consider them apart; however, I am willing they should go together, provided neither of them is lost (Ibid.).

[45]Gill, "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated," 19.

[46]For a discussion of eternal union see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 447-48.

jointly concerned therein." The purpose is first "to advance and secure the glory of God the Father" and involves "his eternal choice of persons to everlasting life and happiness, in all his purposes and decrees concerning them." Second, it is concerned "to advance the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; who is the Mediator, surety, and messenger of this covenant: the federal head and representative of the body the church, and the Saviour thereof; that in all things he may have the preeminence." Third, its purpose is "to advance the glory of the blessed Spirit; whose office it is to be the applier of the grace of this covenant to take of the things of God and of Christ, and shew them unto those who are interested in them; and to convey and apply all grace, needful for them in time, till they come into an eternal world."[47]

Gill distinguishes between the everlasting council, which he also calls the council of peace, and the covenant of peace.[48] He says the council and the covenant "are generally blended together by divines" and this is because "it is difficult to consider them distinctly with exactness and precision." However, Gill is of the opinion that "they are to be distinguished" with the council of peace "to be considered as leading on, and as

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[47]John Gill, "The Stability of the Covenant," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 15-16.

[48]This council, or covenant of peace, is sometimes termed the *pactum salutis.* In "Truth Defended," Gill answers a critic who denies that the Scripture speaks of the gift of God to his people in the everlasting covenant as an "instance of his love to them before conversion." Arguing from Heb 8:10 and Jer 31:33, this critic says the "covenant is a mutual agreement between God and converted people." Gill responds "that there is not the least evidence from any of these passages, that this covenant is a mutual agreement between God and any people, converted or unconverted." Instead, this covenant is entirely of God, and "seems rather to respect unconverted than converted persons; since one branch of it regards the writing and putting of the laws of God in their hearts and minds, which converted ones have already." This covenant is not "mentioned as the cause or condition of his being their God, but rather, his being their God in covenant, is the ground and foundation of this." Called upon to give scriptural evidence of a covenantal terminology regarding a relationship between God and people "before they are made so by a mutual covenant" Gill produces "*Isaiah* 54:1, 5, 6, where Christ is called *the husband* of the Gentile church, and she *his wife,* long before it was in being" as well as Eph 5:23 where "Christ is said to be the head of the church, even as the husband is the head of the wife; which includes the whole general assembly and church of the first-born, even all the elect, converted or unconverted" (38-39).

preparatory and introductory to the other, though both of an eternal date." The difference between the council and covenant is the difference between everything concerning salvation being "advised, consulted, and contrived" in the council and everything being "adjusted and settled" in the covenant.[49] This council of peace is not an attempt by God to figure things out or as a needed consultation because of a lack of knowledge, nor is it in the same category as consultations between men. The council of peace between the Persons of the Godhead "is as quick as thought, yea, it is no other than his thought." The reason the Scripture refers to this consultation is threefold. First, "to express the importance of it," and by stressing the importance of the council of peace it thereby emphasizes the importance of salvation itself. Second, it displays the wisdom of God in designing and working salvation. Third, it shows the unified nature of salvation between the Persons of the Trinity.[50]

Gill defines the covenant of grace as "a compact or agreement made from all eternity among the divine Persons, more especially between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect."[51] He says, "This covenant of grace, springs from this love of God; and is as early as that. . . . The basis and foundation of this covenant are, the purposes, decrees, and counsels of the most High."[52] Further, this covenant "with respect to the elect, is nothing else but a free promise of eternal life and salvation by

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[49]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 214. "The council before treated of, is the basis and foundation of the covenant of grace, and both relate to the same thing, and in which the same persons are concerned. In the former, things were contrived, planned, and advised; in the latter fixed and settled" (Ibid.).

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Gill, "The Stability of the Covenant of Grace," 14-15.

Jesus Christ, which includes all other promises of blessings of grace in it." As far as the conditional nature of the covenant, it "is absolute and unconditional" concerning the elect. The only conditions relating to the covenant concern Christ's performance – "he and his work are the only condition of it."[53]

> The covenant of grace made between God and Christ, and with the elect in him, as their Head and Representative, is a proper covenant, consisting of stipulation and restipulation; God the Father in it stipulates with his Son, that he shall do such and such work and service, on condition of which he promises to confer such and such honours and benefits on him and on the elect in him; and Christ the Son of God restipulates and agrees to do all that is proposed and prescribed, and, upon performance, expects and claims the fulfillment of the promises: in this compact there are mutual engagements each party enters into, stipulate and restipulate about, which make a proper formal covenant.[54]

Thus, this eternal covenant is an actual covenant that accomplishes its designed purposes.

The covenant of grace is different from the Adamic covenant of works in that the covenant of works never promised eternal life "as the saints enjoy in heaven," only a "natural happy life" and a continuance in it "should he stand the trial of his obedience." The covenant of grace contains a promise of eternal life because the promise was "made to Christ" by God in the eternal covenant of grace, the promise being made to Christ "as the federal Head of his people, to whom it was made." Gill also mentions that this covenant is sometimes called the covenant of redemption. Some make these two distinct covenants, saying the covenant of redemption "was made with Christ in eternity; the covenant of grace with the elect, or with believers, in time." Gill disagrees with this approach because "there is but one covenant of grace, and not two. . . . What is called a

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[53]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 215. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 3:230.

[54]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 216.

covenant of redemption, is a covenant of grace."[55] Yet, Carl Trueman points out that "this position is perfectly consistent with the boundaries of Reformed Orthodox discussion."[56]

This covenant of grace is "the sum of the gospel, which is no other than a transcript of the covenant of grace, is the salvation of lost sinners by Christ; so the covenant, of which that is a copy, chiefly respects that, and that is the result of it" so that Christ "undertook to save, and came to save, and has saved his people from their sins, in consequence of his covenant-engagements."[57] Thus, the covenant of grace and the gospel are intimately connected and yet distinguished.

Gill also includes the Holy Spirit in the eternal covenant of grace.[58] This approach has caused some concern among certain scholars who see in this view a removal of the Holy Spirit's work of application of the blessings of the covenant from the temporal realm to the eternal realm. However, as with other eternal aspects of Gill's

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[55]Ibid., 217.

> The sum and substance of the everlasting covenant made with Christ, is the salvation and eternal happiness of the chosen ones; all the blessings and grants of grace to them, are secured in that eternal compact; for they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and had grace given them in him before the world was; wherefore there can be no foundation for such a distinction between a covenant of redemption in eternity, and a covenant of grace in time (Ibid.).

See also "The Stability of the Covenant," where Gill says,

> The sum and substance of this covenant was from everlasting. David considers the promises of it, and especially that grand promise in it, "everlasting life by Christ," that was made before the world was; as it is expressly said, Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." Now, there could be no such a promise as this, unless there was a covenant so early. All the blessings of this covenant are of as ancient date. They are styled the "grace (or blessings of grace) given us in Christ before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9)" (15).

[56]Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen and Andrew Fuller," *Eusebia* 9 (2008), 64. "Gill is remarkable in being one of the few eighteenth century theologians who continued to articulate a comprehensive and robust theological system rooted in basic Reformed Orthodox paradigms" (Ibid.).

[57]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 219. See also Gill, "The Stability of the Covenant," 19-20.

[58]See Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*."

soteriology, such an emphasis does not remove the applicatory work of the Spirit from the temporal realm. In addition, Gill was not the first to make such an emphasis. Many Reformed theologians have emphasized the Trinity's involvement in the *pactum salutis.*[59]

The covenant of grace is central to Gill's soteriology. In this covenant of grace, Christ became a surety for the elect. "As soon as Christ became a surety, the sins of all those persons, for whom he became a surety, were reckoned and accounted to him; and, if accounted to him, then not to them."[60] It is in this covenant of grace

> That God from eternity willed to punish sin, not in the persons of the elect, but in the person of Christ their surety. That it is the will of God to punish sin, not in his people, but in his Son, is plain and manifest, from his *setting him up* (Rom. 3:25) in his purpose, *to be a propitiation for their sins*.. . . This will was notified to man quickly after the fall, though it did not then begin, for no new will can arise in God; he wills nothing in time, but what he willed from eternity. If it was God's eternal will not to punish sin in his people, but in his Son, then they were eternally discharged, acquitted from sin, and secured from everlasting wrath and destruction; and, if they were eternally discharged from sin, and freed from punishment, they were eternally justified.[61]

The transactions between God and Christ in the covenant of grace include within them the actual justification of the elect in Christ.

## Justification from Eternity

Justification from eternity involves the controversial discussion regarding the timing of justification. In fact, justification from eternity is perhaps the most controversial of the eternal aspects of Gill's soteriology. Gill held to justification from eternity,

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[59]Ibid., 5-6. For a list of theologians who discuss the *pactum salutis* see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 3:213, 227. For an interesting survey and discussion of the *Pactum Salutis*, including the involvement of the Holy Spirit, see Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 1:401-80.

[60]John Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification, by the Righteousness of Christ, Stated and Maintained," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 26.

[61]Ibid., 27.

meaning justification *actually* occurred in the eternal decree of God to justify His elect. To understand how Gill arrives at his particular assertions is to appreciate better the importance he places on this particular doctrine. According to the definition of Hyper-Calvinism in chapter two, this view does not qualify Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist. In addition, understanding that he does not divorce justification in eternity from justification "by faith" may help to alleviate some of the concerns related to his view.

Gill agrees with the Reformers that the centrality of justification by faith alone is essential to understanding the gospel correctly and is a necessary component of Reformation and Puritan theology.[62] Regarding the issue of justification from eternity Gill went further than most Reformed theologians but he was not alone in his approach.[63] In Gill's thought, it is important to connect the whole of contending for orthodox faith with the necessity of guarding justification from any human contribution. This understanding is essential because of the interconnection of all aspects of biblical truth, as well as the foundational aspect of biblical truth to God's sovereignty. In scrutinizing Gill's approach to the doctrine of eternal justification, it is important to examine his definition of justification, his view of the time of justification, and the application of justification to the elect.

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[62]Richard A. Muller, "John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 51-68.

[63]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 205: "This is the sense and judgment of many sound and learned divines." He then lists Twisse (the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly), Maccovius (Johannes Maccovius [1588-1644] was a Reformed theologian who had a part in the Synod of Dort), "and others" as those who held to justification from eternity.

**The Definition of Justification**

Gill defines justification in his sermon, "The Doctrine of Justification By The Righteousness of Christ, Stated and Maintained." In defining justification he distinguishes between justification and the pardon of sin, admitting this distinction is a technical distinction, but that "strictly, and properly speaking, it is not the pardon of sin." Yet, he sees a "strict connection" between them and says they "are not to be separated . . . yet, I think, they may be distinguished."[64] The connection is such that "all who are justified are pardoned; and all who are pardoned, are justified." However, "all this does not prove them to be one and the same." Why not? "Justification is a pronouncing a person righteous according to law, as though he had never sinned; not so pardon." Pardon carries with it the idea of condemnation by the law with forgiveness following. Justification deals with being "tried by the law, and, by it, to be found and declared righteous, as though he had not sinned against it."[65] On the other hand, "though pardon takes away sin . . . yet it does not give a righteousness, as justification does; pardon of sin, indeed, takes away our filthy garments, but it is justification that clothes us with

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[64]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 3. See also Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 203-09; 501-18. His sermon on justification and his *Doctrinal Divinity* parallel each other with the latter obviously using the text of the sermon which was preached earlier (published in 1730). It is noteworthy that this sermon was a special lecture and thus should not be taken as normative for Gill's congregational preaching.

[65]Ibid.. See also Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 501-02:

> Pardon of sin, and justification from it, are very closely connected; the one follows upon the other; according to the position of them in some passages of scripture, pardon is first, and justification next; (as in Acts 13:38, 39; 26:18), though they are not, the one, in reality, prior to the other; they are both together in the divine mind, and in the application of them to the conscience of a sinner; indeed, according to the order of causes, justification by the righteousness of Christ, imputed, may be considered as before pardon; since God forgives sin for Christ's sake; that is, for the sake of his righteousness imputed. Now that for the sake of which a thing is, must be before that for which it is, as the cause is before the effect. . . . But though these are not to be separated, yet they are to be distinguished; and I should choose to consider them, not as distinct parts of the same thing, but as distinct blessings of grace; for though pardon and justification agree in some things, in others they

change of raiment." There is also a difference in the requirements between pardon and justification. "The blood of Christ was sufficient to procure pardon; but, besides, his suffering of death, the holiness of his nature, and the perfect obedience of his life, must be imputed for justification." Also, "though pardon frees from punishment, yet, strictly and properly speaking, it does not give a title to eternal life; that justification properly gives, and is one good reason why the apostle calls it *Justification of life* (Rom. 5:18)."[66] Christ himself illustrates the difference between the two in that "justification passed on Christ, as our head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, but so did not pardon." It is scriptural to say that Christ was justified (1 Tim 3:16) "but we cannot say that he was pardoned." To do so "would sound very harsh in our ears." Gill argues that pardon and justification "be considered as two distinct things."[67] So, Gill's definition of justification is that "justification is an act of God's free grace, whereby he clears his people from sin, discharges them from condemnation, and reckons and accounts them righteous for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which he has accepted of, and imputes unto them."[68]

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differ.

[66]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 4. Gill illustrates this by saying, "If a king pardons a criminal, he does not thereby give him a title to his crown and kingdom; if he will, when he has pardoned him, take him to court, make him his son and heir, it must be by another distinct act of royal favour" (Ibid.).

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid., 5. If "clears his people from sin" refers to pardon, Gill has interestingly included the idea of pardon in his definition despite his concern to distinguish between pardon and justification. In Gill's *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, he says,

> The word 'justify' is never used in a physical sense, for producing any real internal change in men; but in a forensic sense, and stands opposed, not to a state of impurity and unholiness, but to a state of condemnation; it is a law term, and used of judicial affairs, transacted in a court of judicature; (see Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:22; Matthew 12:37), where justification stands opposed to condemnation; and this is the sense of the word whenever it is used in the doctrine under consideration; so in Job 9:2, 3 and 25:4 so by David (Ps. 143:2), and in all Paul's epistles, where the

Where Gill parts company with many, though certainly not all, Reformed theologians is his attempt to explain justification more precisely. As with other eternal aspects of his soteriology, Gill's view of justification from eternity does not place him in the camp of Hyper-Calvinism according to the working definition of Hyper-Calvinism set forth earlier. Yet, it is essential to see Gill's understanding of the timing of justification in order to understand Gill's approach to justification.

**The Date of Justification**

Concerning the date of justification, Gill gives five options. The first sees justification as completed at judgment day. The second views justification beginning at the point of belief. The third says it took place at Christ's resurrection. The fourth approach points to the promise of the Messiah, shortly after the Fall. The fifth approach, Gill's view, sees justification beginning with the covenant between the Father and the Son in eternity.[69]

When speaking of justification from eternity Gill knows he must clarify what he means. Therefore, he sets forth what he is not asserting. He does not mean the elect "had an actual personal existence from eternity, though they had a representative one in

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> doctrine of justification is treated of, respect is had to courts of judicature, and to a judicial process in them; men are represented as sinners, charged with sin, and pronounced guilty before God, and subject to condemnation and death; when, according to this evangelic doctrine, they are justified by the obedience and blood of Christ, cleared of all charges, acquitted and absolved, and freed from condemnation and death, and adjudged to eternal life; (see Rom. 3:9, 19; 5:9, 16, 18, 19; 8:1, 33, 34; Gal. 2:16, 17; Titus 3:7) (503-04).

The confession of faith that Gill drew up for his church in 1729 states "We believe, that the justification of God's elect, is only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, without the consideration of the works of righteousness done by them, and that the full and free pardon of all their sins and transgressions, past, present, and to come, is only through the blood of Christ, according to the riches of his grace." "A Confession of the Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ, in Carter Lane, Southwark," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

[69]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 17.

Christ." He also does not mean "that an actual payment of their debts, or an actual satisfaction for their sins was then made by Christ. . . . On the other hand, I mean more by justification from eternity, than merely God's prescience, or foreknowledge of it . . . more than a mere resolution and purpose to justify his elect in time."[70]

While agreeing with God's decree to justify the elect, Gill goes further than a mere decree to justify. The decree is an actual act of God to justify. More specifically, "this is an act in God, all whose acts in him are eternal." This eternal act "is the grand original sentence of justification." All of the temporal acts, such as "that pronounced on Christ" at his resurrection "and that which is pronounced by the Spirit of God in the conscience of believers, as well as that which will be pronounced before men and angels, at the general judgment, are no other than so many repetitions, or renewed declarations."[71]

The decree to justify is actual justification, while all other aspects of justification in time are declarations of the original justification in eternity. This approach means that the decree to justify is in the same category with the decree to elect and reprobate. On the other hand, Gill carefully distinguishes the decree to justify from the decree to sanctify. What sets justification apart from sanctification is that justification is

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[70]Ibid., 22.

[71]Ibid., 23. See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 203:

> Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object. It is not of this I shall now treat, but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it.

It is not clear who in particular the "divines" are that Gill is referring to although he does say he agrees "with Dr. Ames." Louis Berkhof has a discussion of the difference between active and passive justification (although Berkhof does not agree with eternal justification). See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 517.

alien to us.

> As God's eternal decree of election of persons to everlasting life, is the eternal election of them, so God's will, decree, or purpose, to justify his elect, is the eternal justification of them; though his eternal will to sanctify them is not an eternal sanctification of them; because sanctification is a work of God's grace upon us, and within us, and so requires our personal existence. Justification is an act of God's grace towards us, is wholly without us, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimation, accounting and constituting us righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and so required neither the actual existence of Christ's righteousness, nor of our persons, but only that both should certainly exist in time.[72]

Because justification is alien to us, it does not require our existence. However, because sanctification is internal to us it does require our existence.

Romans 8:33 gives scriptural proof for this doctrine. God's elect are justified "and, if they bore this character of elect from eternity, or were chosen in Christ before the world began, then they must be acquitted, discharged, and justified by God from eternity, so as nothing could be laid to their charge."[73] Also, Ephesians 1:4-6 declares that the elect were in Christ before the foundation of the world.

> And if electing grace then put them in him, they must be considered in Christ as an unrighteous person, or as unjustified, or as in a state of condemnation. And, I think, we may be allowed to argue an eternal justification from eternal election, since eternal justification is a branch of it; and, as such, as one observes, "Is the Father's eternal purpose and agreement with the Son, that the elect should be everlastingly righteous in his sight, in the righteousness of this dear Son of his; in which act he constituted and ordained them so to be." And his act, as the same excellent person observes, is no other than "setting apart the elect alone to be partakers of Christ's righteousness, and setting apart Christ's righteousness for the elect only." I think we may safely conclude, that if there is an eternal election of persons in Christ, there must be an eternal acceptance and justification of them in him; since as he always was the beloved Son of his Father, in whom he is ever well pleased, so he always

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[72]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 23. See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 203: "As God's will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them."

[73]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 23-24. See John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), 8:496: "Observe, that *God's elect*, as such, are the objects of justification; which proves the eternity of it."

has graciously accepted of, and is well pleased with all his elect in him.[74]

In his commentary on Ephesians 1:6 Gill says,

> In him is their acceptance: which is to be understood of the acceptance of their persons, as founded in the blood and righteousness of Christ, and so of their services in him; of God's act of delight and complacency in them, as considered in Christ; who looks upon them, and is well pleased with them, and rests in his love towards them; which is an amazing instance of grace: it was grace that gave them a being in Christ, and which has provided in predestination everything to make them grateful to God; and the very act of acceptance is of mere grace; for internal grace, or grace infused, is not here meant, but the free favour of God.[75]

Since God elects in Christ, the elect are justified in Christ. The scriptural teaching concerning the elects' acceptance in Christ implies eternal justification.

God's elect are justified by Christ's righteousness as manifested in His life, death, and resurrection. However, Gill desires to go further and show that God's elect are justified from eternity. Gill gives two reasons why justification can be pushed beyond the

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[74]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 24. Gill is quoting Richard Davis. See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* where he adds to this by saying that for the elect "'There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ', (Rom. 8:1) and therefore must be considered as righteous, and so justified: 'Justified then we were,' says Dr. Goodwin 'when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and an interest in him'"(205). Gill references Thomas Goodwin's comments on the date ofjustification:

> The first progress, or step, was at the first covenant-making and striking of the bargain from all eternity: we may say, of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ, that *his goings forth are from everlasting.* Justified then we were, when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and interest in him: *You are in Christ,* (saith the apostle) and so we had the promise made of all spiritual blessings in him, and he took all the deeds of all in our name; so in Christ we were blessed with all spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1:3. . . . So as then God told Christ, as it were, (for it was a real covenant) that he would look for his debt and satisfaction of him, and that he did let the sinners go free; and so they are, in this respect, justified from all eternity. And, indeed, if the promise of life was then given us, (as the apostle *Paul* speaks, Titus 1:2) then also justification of life, without which we could not come to life. Yet this is but the inchoation, though it be an estating us into the whole tenure of life (209-10).

For Thomas Goodwin's (1600-1680) discussion of eternal justification see *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Eureka: Tanski, 1996), 8:133-39. Goodwin also connects justification by faith to eternal justification: "So as faith serves not only to give men the knowledge of their eternal justification, but actually to possess them of that in themselves personally which they had before only representatively in another" (406).

[75]Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* 9:62.

actual time of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. First, "the saints under the Old Testament were justified by the same righteousness of Christ, as the saints under the New; and that before the oblation, or sacrifice, was actually offered up."[76] The implication of this insight is that

> If God could, and did, actually justify some, having taken his Son's word as their surety, upon a view of his future righteousness, three or four thousand years before this righteousness was actually wrought out; why could he not, and why may it not be thought that he did, justify all his elect from eternity, viewing the same future righteousness of Christ, which he had engaged to work out for them, and which he knew full well he would work out; since, though they had not then an actual, yet they had a representative Being in Christ their Head?[77]

The second reason Gill holds to eternal justification is that "the justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it." Here he argues against using the phrase "justified by faith" in the sense of faith being counted for justification. He is concerned with a view that would make faith "to be accepted of God in the room of a legal righteousness." He says, "This is the way the *Papists, Socinians,* and *Remonstrants* take." In contrast to this false approach, "sound Protestant divines understand the phrase in an improper, tropical, or metonymical sense."[78] To take the former view is to confuse justification and sanctification.

So if justification is an act of God in eternity, what is the manner of the application of justification to the elect? What is the relationship of faith to justification? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary for Gill to explain the role of faith concerning justification. Dating justification in eternity necessitates justification

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[76]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 27.

[77]Ibid., 28.

[78]Ibid.

preceding faith.

**The Application of Justification**

Still speaking about justification in a "proper" sense, Gill says, "That which is properly justification, is before faith, or antecedent to any act of believing of ours."[79]

> Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified. . . . The reason why some do not believe, is, because they are *not of Christ's sheep;* (John 10:26) they never were chosen in him, nor justified by him, but are justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others do believe, is, because they *are ordained to eternal life,* (Acts 13:48) have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation. . . . Now, if justification is the cause, and faith the effect; then, as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its own cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification.[80]

Gill further states "faith is the act" that is "conversant with" justification, which is the object of faith. He says, "The object does not depend upon the act, but the act upon the object." As such, the "object is prior to the act." Faith does not bring justification into being. "Faith is the evidence, not the cause of justification." This conclusion means justification must exist before faith. "Faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified from the God of its salvation; but then this blessing must exist before faith can receive it."[81]

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[79]Ibid., 18.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid., 19. He further says,

> If any should think fit to distinguish between the act of justification, and the righteousness of Christ, by which we are justified; and object, That not justification, but the righteousness of Christ, is the object of faith; I reply, Either the righteousness of Christ, as justifying, is the object of faith, or it is not: if it is not, then it is useless, and to be laid aside in the business of justification; if, as justifying, it is the object of faith, what is it else but justification? Christ's righteousness justifying me, is my justification before God, and as such, my faith considers it, and says with the church, *Surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength* (Isa. 45:24).

Further evidence of justification preceding faith is the justification of the elect while in an ungodly state. That is, they are justified before they believe. Believers are not referred to as ungodly. The ungodly do not have Christ nor do they have grace. Gill's conclusion is "if God justifies his elect when they are ungodly, then he justifies them before they believe."[82]

Faith is the means to the application of justification. However, for Gill, a person's act of faith is *not* what justifies a person. What justifies a person is the *object* of the act of faith – the righteousness of Christ. Faith is actually a part of sanctification.[83] In referring to Abraham's faith credited as righteousness in Romans 4, Gill says that Paul "means not the act, but the object of faith, even the righteousness of Christ, which God, in verse 6, is said to impute without works."[84] This faith is to be viewed "objectively, as it looks to, receives, apprehends, and embraces Christ's righteousness for justification. And

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[82]Ibid., 20.

[83]Ibid., 8. Gill sees an active role for the Holy Spirit in the application of justification. In Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* he speaks of the Holy Spirit, saying,

> He brings near the righteousness of Christ; not only externally, in the ministry of the word; but internally, by the illumination of his grace; this is one of the things of Christ he takes and shows to souls enlightened by him; he shows them the fulness, glory, and suitableness of the righteousness of Christ, how perfect it is, how adequate to all the demands of law and justice, and how suitable to them; to cover their naked souls, to secure them from condemnation and death, to justify them before God, and render them acceptable in his sight, and entitle them to eternal life. He works faith in convinced and enlightened persons, to look at the righteousness of Christ, and take a view of its glories and excellencies; to approve of it, desire it, and to lay hold on it, and receive it as their justifying righteousness. Such a faith is of the operation of God, of the Spirit of God; it is what he works in the saints, and enables them to exercise it; hence he is called, "the Spirit of faith" (Col. 2:13; 2 Cor. 4:13). He bears witness to their spirits, that they are interested in the righteousness of Christ, and are justified by it; and he pronounces the sentence of justification in their consciences, or declares them justified, in the name of Christ, and on account of his righteousness; and which is the meaning of their being justified 'in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor. 6:11) (506).

[84]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 8. In Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, he says, "As it is to faith the righteousness of Christ is revealed, and by faith it is received, hence believers are said to be justified by faith; so this faith, as well as righteousness, is of Christ; as he is the object of it, 'Ye believe in God, believe also in me'; so he is the 'author' and 'finisher' of it (John 14:1; Heb. 12:2)" (506).

let it be observed, that though we are said to be justified by faith, yet faith is never said to justify us."[85] In other words, since this faith is a gift from God there is nothing meritorious, or "justifying" in faith. Thus, Gill wants to move away from using the term "justifying faith."[86]

To think of faith as a condition of justification is wrong. The gift of faith is a blessing of the covenant of grace.

> Nor are faith, repentance, and new obedience, the terms of it, and required by it, as conditions of men's acceptance with God; faith and repentance, as doctrines, are gospel doctrines, and parts of the gospel ministry; and as graces, are not terms and conditions required in it, to be performed by men of themselves; they are blessings of grace, declared in it, and are gifts of grace bestowed on men; faith is the gift of God, and repentance is a grant from him; and both they, and new and spiritual obedience, are provided for in the covenant of grace (Ezek. 36:26, 27).[87]

Faith is not what initiates, or brings about justification.

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[85]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 9. For Gill the proper understanding is to see the righteousness of Christ as the object of faith

> as in Galatians 3:23. *But before faith came, etc.* that is, before Christ, the Object of faith, came: so that we may be said to be justified by faith objectively, the act of faith being put for the object of it; the reason of which is, because it is to faith that this object is revealed. Faith is the recipient of it; it is the grace by which the soul lays hold on, apprehends, and embraces Christ's righteousness, as its justifying righteousness before God. So that when we are said to be justified by faith, it is to be understood not in a proper, but in an improper, tropical, or metonymical, sense; faith being not our justification itself, but the evidence of it (28).

See also Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 743.

[86]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 9-10.

> Give me leave to correct a vulgar, though but a verbal mistake, in calling faith, justifying faith. I am well satisfied sound divines have used this phrase without any ill meaning; and no less a person than the great Dr. *Goodwin,* whose works I much value and esteem, has entitled one of his treatises, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith:* But why it should he called justifying faith, any more than adopting or pardoning faith, I see not; since it has just the same concern in adoption and pardon, as it has in justification. Are we said to be justified by faith, or, by faith, to receive the righteousness of Christ for justification? We are also said, by faith, to receive the remission of sins, and to be the children of God, by faith, in Christ Jesus. (Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:26) Besides, what do we, or can we say more of the righteousness of Christ; than that it is a justifying one? In one word, it is God, and not faith, that justifies.

[87]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 510.

Along with this understanding of the role of faith, it is also important to understand the "matter" of justification. The "matter" by which God justifies a person is the righteousness of Christ. By the "righteousness of Christ" Gill means "that which consists of what is commonly called his active and passive obedience."[88]

The way the righteousness of Christ justifies us is by God imputing Christ's righteousness to us. "So when God is said to impute Christ's righteousness to us, the meaning is, that he reckons it as ours, being wrought out for us, and accounts us righteous by it, as though we had performed it in our own persons." We are not justified by an inherent righteousness because such righteousness would be imperfect because it is within us but "the righteousness by which we are justified is a righteousness without us."[89]

Imputation is necessary because "the righteousness of another cannot be made ours, or we be justified by it, any other way than by an imputation of it." Imputation is the "way Adam's sin became ours, or we are made sinners by it" and "Christ's righteousness becomes ours, or we are made righteous by it." Not only is imputation the way Adam's sin became ours and Christ's righteousness became ours, but imputation is

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[88]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 10-12. Gill adds a third aspect of the righteousness of Christ: "the holiness of his human nature is imputed to us for justification" (11). He expands on this idea in Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*:

> Holiness of nature: some consider this only as a qualification for his office, and the due performance of it in human nature; whereby he was capable of yielding sinless obedience to the law, and was qualified as an high priest to offer himself a spotless sacrifice, and to be a proper advocate for sinners, being Jesus Christ the righteous; but this not only fitted him for his work, but made him suitable to us, 'Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless'; the law required an holy nature in conformity to it; it is wanting in us, it is found in Christ (512).

[89]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 16.

"the same way that our sins became Christ's."[90]

For Gill, one must understand the distinction between justification and faith. "Faith adds nothing to the *esse,* but to the *bene esse* of justification. Justification is a complete act in God's eternal mind, without the being or consideration of faith."[91] Faith does not affect man's standing with God because "a man is not more justified after faith, than he is before faith, in God's account." Faith, however, "is of great use for our comfortable apprehension of it; without this grace we neither know, nor can claim, our interest in it; nor enjoy that peace of conscience, which is the happy result of it."[92]

Gill says that faith, in regard to justification, is not the

> moving cause of it, for that is the grace of God; nor the efficient cause of it, for it is God that justifies; nor is it the matter of it, for that is the obedience and blood of Christ; nor is it an instrument, or instrumental cause of it, which is no other than a less principal efficient cause. . . . Nor is it *causa sine qua non,* or that without which a man cannot be justified in the sight of God. For, I hope, I have already proved, that all God's elect are justified in his sight, and in his account, before faith; and if before faith, then without it. Besides, all elect infants, dying in infancy, are completely justified, who are not capable of the *to credere,* or act of believing in Christ, whatever may be said for the habit of faith in them.[93]

So what is faith's role? "Faith is the sense, perception, and evidence of our

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[90]Ibid., 17. In Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill makes a distinction between redemption and justification. Redemption, satisfaction, reconciliation, and atonement, are all accomplished by Christ's sufferings and death.

> Justification proceeds upon redemption. . . . The complete justification of a sinner, does not seem to be finished by Christ until his resurrection, after his obedience and sufferings of death; for he "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). In short, the righteousness by which we are justified, as Dr. Ames says, is not to be sought for in different operations of Christ, but arises from his whole obedience, both active and passive (514).

[91]What Gill means by "a complete act" is that it is an immanent act of God. See chap. 3 for the discussion of this idea.

[92]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 28.

[93]Ibid., 28-29.

justification."[94] However, the *strict* or *proper* understanding of justification does not include faith as causative of justification. Faith is not "properly our justification." He illustrates by pointing out that the accomplishment of the pardon of a criminal is when the king decides upon it, not when the criminal receives the word. The latter aspect is necessary for the carrying out of the pardon but it is properly speaking not his pardon. "For a man may be truly and legally acquitted, and yet not have a copy of his indictment. For a man to have the copy of his indictment may be of great service in some cases, and be a good testimonial of his acquaintance; but it is not the thing itself." The same is true regarding justification. To make justification dependent upon faith is to say that believers "could be without it, since they may be without those intimations of the blessed Spirit, and a comfortable sense and perception of their justification by faith which seems to be the case of *David,* when he said, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit* (Ps. 51:12)."[95]

**Objections Answered**

Gill answers nine objections to his view of justification from eternity.[96] It is

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[94]Ibid., 29.

> It is that grace whereby the soul, in the light of the divine Spirit, beholds a complete righteousness in Christ, having seen its guilt, pollution, and misery when it is enabled to renounce its own righteousness, and submit to the righteousness of Christ; which it puts on by faith, as its garment of justification: which it rejoices in, and gives him the glory of; the Spirit of God bearing witness with his Spirit, that he is a justified Person, And so he comes to be evidently and declaratively *justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God* (Ibid. Italics in original).

[95]Ibid., 29-30.

[96]John Flavel (1627-1691) raised some of these objections in his discussion of Antinomianism. See *The Works of John Flavel* (W. Baynes and Son, 1820; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 3:559-68. John Brine answered many of these same objections and others in "A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007). Berkhof recognizes a category of Reformed theologians holding to eternal justification who do not hold to Antinomian doctrine. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 518.

important to examine these because in his responses to the objections he clarifies his understanding of justification.

The first objection that Gill answers is that it is not possible for a person to be justified before they exist. In referencing Maccovius, Gill says that first, because of God's foreknowledge, it is certain that the elect will come to exist. Second, the elect have "a representative being in Christ." This representative being means that they are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3)" and that grace was given "in Christ before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9)." Third, "Justification is a moral act, which does not require the present existence of the subject; it is enough that it shall exist some time or other." Gill says, fourth, that if the subject was the aspect of justification that "is declared to, and passes upon the conscience, by the Spirit of God, and is received by faith" it would be correct to say that "this requires the actual existence of the subject on whom it terminates but we are not speaking of justification as a transient, but as an immanent act."[97]

The second objection against the justification of God's elect from eternity is that this view would mean that they are justified before they sin. Gill answers this charge by pointing out that the doctrine of imputation suffers from this same objection. That is, there was an imputation of the sins of the elect to Christ before the elect committed them.[98]

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[97]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 31. In Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 207, in parallel with what he has said in the sermon, he adds, "To which I answer, whatever is in this objection, lies as strongly against eternal election, as against eternal justification; for it may as well be said, how can a man be elected before he exists? He must be before he can be chosen, or be the object of choice" 207.

[98]Ibid., 31-32.

The third objection attempts to differentiate between the decree of justification and justification itself. Gill replies by saying, "That as God's decree to elect certain persons to everlasting life and salvation, is his election of them to everlasting life and salvation; so his decree, will, and purpose to justify any, is his justification of them."[99] Thus, the immanent acts of God include election and justification from eternity. Transient acts, on the other hand,

> produce a real, physical and inherent change upon the subject. It is one thing for God to will to act an act of grace concerning us, and another thing to will to work a work of grace in us. God's will in the former instance, is his act; in the latter it is not: wherefore though God's will to justify is justification itself, because justification is a complete act, in his eternal mind without us: yet his will to sanctify is not sanctification, because this is a work wrought in us. Hence it appears, that there is not the same reason to say, we were created, called, sanctified or glorified from eternity; as to say, that we were justified from eternity.[100]

The decree to justify is the act of justification itself due to the legal nature of justification. *The decree is the action.* However, in the decree to sanctify God does not actually sanctify but He only determines that He will sanctify since sanctification must actually take place in the person. In this case, *the decree is a decree to take action.*

The fourth objection is that Gill's approach distorts the biblical *ordus salutis* of Romans 8:30, where calling comes before justification. Gill's reply is that this passage does not set forth a strict order. Elsewhere, in 2 Peter 1:10, calling is before election. In addition, salvation appears before calling in 2 Timothy 1:9. The teaching of Romans 8:30, taken as an *ordus salutis,* would only apply if it "is meant the declarative sentence of it upon the conscience, by the Spirit of God, and received by faith."[101]

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[99]Ibid., 32.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Ibid., 33. See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* 8:495. Gill seems to

The fifth objection is that in many places the Scripture says that God's elect are justified by faith and therefore faith is a "prerequisite to justification." This view rejects the idea of justification from eternity. Gill responds that these verses do not argue against justification before faith. "If by a prerequisite, is meant a prerequisite to the being of justification, it is denied that those scriptures teach any such thing; for faith adds nothing to the being of justification: but if by it, is meant a prerequisite to the sense and knowledge of it, or to a claim of interest in it, it will be allowed to be the sense of them."[102] Again, Gill sets forth his belief that justification has already occurred before faith exists. Faith is necessary as far as understanding that a person has been justified. However, faith is not necessary in order to bring justification into being.[103] In Gill's

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understand this declarative aspect of justification as the normal usage in the letter.

[102]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 33-34.

[103]Ibid., 34-35.

> Perhaps the words of my text may be thought . . . to furnish out an objection against justification, before faith; when the apostle says, *And by him all that believe are justified.* From whence it can only be inferred: that all who believe are justified persons, which no body denies; and they may be justified before they believe, for aught that the apostle here says. And if anyone should think fit to infer from hence, that those who believe not, are not justified, it will he allowed that they are not declaratively, or evidentially justified: that they do not know that they are; that they cannot receive any comfort from it, nor claim any interest in justification; but that they are not justified in God's sight, or in Christ the Mediator, cannot be proved. Again, the apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:11, says of the *Corinthians,* that they were *now justified,* as if they were not justified before. But this I conceive, does not at all militate against justification before faith: for they might be justified *in foro Dei,* and in their Head, Christ Jesus, before *now,* and yet not till *now* be justified in their own consciences, and by the Spirit of God; which, it is plain, is the justification the apostle is here speaking of. But the grand text, which is urged to prove justification a consequent of faith, is Galatians 2:16. *Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.* Here the apostle is speaking of justification, as it terminates upon the conscience of a believer; and this is readily granted to follow faith, and to be a consequent of it; for that none are justified by faith until they believe, is acknowledged by all. The apostle's meaning then is, that we have believed in Christ, or have looked to him for justification, that we might have the comfortable sense and apprehension of it, through faith in him; or that we may appear to be justified, or to expect justification alone by his righteousness, received by faith, and not by the works of the law. In the same light may many other scriptures, of the same kind, be considered (Ibid.).

For a fuller treatment of Gal 2:16 see Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* 9:7-8.

thought, faith is evidentiary, making manifest that Christ has justified a person. However, faith is not the cause of justification.

The sixth objection is that if a person is justified before faith that justified person is a child of wrath. Such verses as 1 John 3:8, 14 and Galatians 5:21 would argue against a person under wrath being justified. Gill answers that "God's elect may be considered under two different *Heads,* and as related to two different covenants at one and the same time." Being "descendants of *Adam,* they are related to him, as a covenant-head, and as such, sinned in him . . . and so they are all, by nature, children of wrath, even as others." However, "as considered in Christ, they were loved with an everlasting love: God chose them in him before the foundation of the world; and always viewed and accounted them righteous in Christ, in whom they were eternally secured from eternal wrath and damnation." Considered in Adam, under the covenant of works, the elect "are under the sentence of condemnation." Considered "in Christ, and according to the covenant of grace, and the secret transactions thereof, they are justified and freed from all condemnation." Gill points out that anyone who views God as loving His elect from eternity faces the same seeming contradiction concerning His loving them with such a love while at the same time they are children of wrath. In addition, "Jesus Christ was the Object of his Father's love and wrath at one and the same time; sustaining two different capacities, and standing in two different relations when he suffered in the room and stead of his people."[104]

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[104]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 35. He says, "The objects of justification are described by the quality of them, or by their state and condition. Before conversion, they are represented as ungodly; and after conversion, as believers in Christ" (38). Also, "That we are in our own persons ungodly, who are justified, for God *justifieth the ungodly;* (Rom. 4:5) if ungodly, then without a righteousness, as all *Adam's* posterity are; and if without a righteousness, then if we are justified, it must he by some righteousness imputed to us, or placed to our account; which can be no other than the righteousness of Christ" (16).

The seventh objection is "this doctrine makes assurance to be of the essence of faith." Gill agrees there is some degree of assurance essential to justifying faith. By this assertion he means that justifying faith is the belief "that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ for him; and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies, and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification: though this act of his may be attended with many doubts, fears, questionings, and unbelief. And what is short of this I cannot apprehend to be true faith in Christ, as the Lord our righteousness."[105]

The eighth objection is that justification preceding faith eliminates the need for faith. Gill responds that though faith itself does not justify us, since it is not the "cause or condition of our justification; yet, as it apprehends and receives Christ's righteousness for our justification, it brings much peace, joy, and comfort into our hearts." It is in the answer to this objection that Gill makes clear his view of how a person comes to Christ in relation to justification:

> The awakened sinner, before faith is wrought in his soul, or be enabled to exercise it on Christ, finds himself in a state of bondage, and under a sentence of condemnation; as he really is, as a descendant of *Adam,* and according to the open rules of God's word: so that there is nothing else but a fearful expectation of fiery indignation to consume him. But when the Spirit of God brings near Christ's righteousness, and puts it into the hand of faith, and declares the justifying sentence of God, upon the account of that righteousness, in the conscience, his mind is unfettered, his soul is set at liberty, and filled *with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.*[106]

Faith is thus passive.[107] God is active in salvation. He, by His Spirit, brings Christ's righteousness, places it in the receiving hand of the awakened sinner, and thus declares

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[105]Ibid., 35-36.

[106]Ibid., 36.

[107]See Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,"336-37. Faith is passive in that it is a receiving agent.

that God has justified the sinner. Faith is that which receives and rejoices in the realization of God's justification of the sinner.

The ninth objection is that 1 Corinthians 6:11 states, "Now ye are justified" and thus there was a time when they were not justified. Here Gill uses a distinction between different aspects of justification. He says that they may in fact have been justified before in the sense of being justified "'*in foro dei*', in the court of God." In God's mind, or in His decrees, the elect are viewed as justified. Also, "in Christ their Head and Surety, and especially when he rose from the dead." Therefore, justification, in these senses, definitely precedes faith. However, in another sense, justification is to be considered "'*foro conscientiae*', in their own consciences, and by the Spirit of God; which is the justification the apostle is there speaking of."[108]

For Gill, eternal justification means that faith will never fail. However, Gill seems to understand that his approach to justification could bring charges of Antinomianism. He says that while a person can never fall from the righteousness that justification brings, "a righteous man may fall into sin, yet he shall never fall from his righteousness, nor shall he ever enter into condemnation, but be eternally glorified." However, though justification "frees persons from sin, and discharges them from punishment due unto it, yet it does not take sin out of them. By it, indeed, they are freed from sin, insomuch that God sees no iniquity in them to condemn them for it." God sees "all the sins of his people, *in articulo providentioe,* in respect of providence, and chastises them for them; yet *in articulo justificationis,* in respect of justification, he sees

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[108]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 209. Daniel asserts that Tobias Crisp popularized a justification consisting of three stages, or levels: (1) Eternal justification in election; (2) virtual justification in Christ's resurrection; (3) actual justification in the conscience of the believer. See Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 309.

none in them; they being acquitted, discharged, and justified from all." Elect, justified, and regenerated people still have indwelling sin. In addition, the law, with all of its demands, is still in place. Good works are also encouraged in God's Word "for this doctrine of grace teaches men, 'That denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world'(Titus 2:11, 12)."[109]

The great concern for Gill in stressing the doctrine of eternal justification is his desire for correct theology. A great emphasis of theology, as Gill understands it, is the glory of God. The doctrines of grace glorify God. Nothing should detract from the emphasis of God's glory. The covenant of grace is indeed a covenant that magnifies God's free grace. Since salvation is all of grace, justification is of grace.

Justification, therefore, is an act of God's free grace. Justification is an alien work of God that is completely void of man's work. The accomplishment of justification before we ever existed is clear proof that it is fully a work of God. It is clear enough that there is some sense in which this justification took place through Christ's atoning death on the cross. However, consistent deduction from Scripture, implication from other scriptural doctrines, as well as the teaching of Scripture itself, argues, from Gill's perspective, for an eternal aspect of justification.[110] This eternal aspect does not merely mean a decree to justify but that justification itself took place in eternity.

Justification is comparable to election. God's decree to elect means election actually takes place. God's decree to justify means justification actually takes place. Gill recognizes there are differences between election and justification. Justification will

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[109]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 40-41.

[110]See Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 306-07.

manifest, or "declare," itself in various ways throughout salvation history. The death and resurrection of Christ is an obviously important declaration of justification. The application of justification, by faith, to our consciences also declares justification. The normal way Scripture speaks of justification is by faith. However, not believing in justification from eternity would seem to open up the door for a justification based upon man's faith.[111]

Gill's own words at the conclusion of his sermon on justification display the importance of justification from eternity.

> To conclude: If your souls are under the powerful and comfortable influence of this doctrine, you will, in the first place, bless God for Jesus Christ, by whose obedience you are made righteous: You will value his justifying righteousness, and make mention of it at all proper times; you will glory alone in Christ, and will give the whole glory of your justification to him; and will be earnestly and studiously desirous of having your conversations as become the gospel of Christ, and this truth of it in particular.[112]

## Conclusion

While Gill's controversial views concerning the decrees of God, predestination, the eternal covenant of grace, union with Christ, and justification from eternity find a strong emphasis in his writings, the importance placed on these views does not imply that there were not other important emphases in his writings. The transient acts of God are also important. The works of God in his decrees manifest in the works of God in his creation and providence. The eternal covenant of grace finds application of the blessings of the covenant in the elect. The immanent acts of God in predestination, union

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[111]This is what John Wesley contended for. See Tom J. Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 131-70.

[112]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification," 41.

with Christ and justification from eternity find their outworking in effectual calling, union with Christ in time, and justification in time. The eternal acts of God serve as a basis for the temporal acts of God. Despite any disagreements with Gill's emphases at this point, none of these eternal aspects of Gill's soteriology should earn him the label of Hyper-Calvinist.[113]

[113]Andrew Fuller disagreed with Gill on eternal justification. However, while there was debate over these doctrines in the eighteenth century the primary theological distinctions were between Calvinism and Arminianism. There is no reason to think that the debates between Calvinists over these issues were dramatic enough to set up clear categorical differences, at least not in the eighteenth century.

# CHAPTER 4

# GODWARD ASPECTS OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

The God-ward aspects of Gill's soteriology are less controversial than the previously examined eternal aspects of his soteriology. However, there are elements that need closer examination and explanation in order to clarify his relationship to eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism. The two theological areas that require discussion deal with God's attributes and actions toward people, specifically the love and grace of God. The concerns in relation to Hyper-Calvinism tend to deal with whether God loves all people and whether or not there is such a thing as "common grace."

Although included in some modern definitions of Hyper-Calvinism, these elements are not included in the eighteenth-century "Modern Question" debates. Therefore, the categorization of Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist based on these elements is mistaken. In addition, others shared his views in the eighteenth century, as well as other Reformed theologians in history. However, since these elements are controversial in the modern discussion of Hyper-Calvinism and they relate to Gill's overall soteriology it is important to examine them briefly.

## The Love of God

According to Gill, God loves himself and his creation with an unchanging and perfect love. Since "the principal object of the love of God is himself," the question of the appropriateness of such self-love must be addressed. Gill argues that "self-love is in all

intelligent beings" and it is not to be condemned "when it is not carried to a criminal excess, and to the neglect of others." He says, "none are obliged to love others more than themselves, but as themselves, Matthew 22:39." Since God loves himself, "his happiness lies in contemplating himself, his nature and perfections." God has "love, complacency and delight" in himself. As such, there is not "anything out of himself that can add to his essential happiness." This love is an intra-Trinitarian love.[1]

Concerning creation, God loves all the works of creation and he manifests his love by upholding his creation by His providence and "is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Concerning rational creatures in particular he cares for, loves, and delights in them. This providential concern includes holy angels, to whom he has shown "his love to them in choosing them to happiness . . . by making Christ the head of them . . . and by admitting them into his presence." Further, God loves "even the devils" as creatures of God. His hatred for them is based on their apostasy. He also loves all men as creatures.[2]

When it comes to a general love of humanity Gill views this love as a creative love and not a redeeming love. The manifestation of this love is God's providence. Thus, God "supports them, preserves them, and bestows the bounties of his providence," as indicated in Matthew 5:45 and Acts 14:17; 17:28. In contrast, God has "a special love to elect men in Christ." This love "is distinguishing and discriminating,"[3]and is only toward

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[1]John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London: 1893; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 78-79.

[2]Ibid., 79.

[3]Ibid. In Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), he says,

"the objects of redemption" and "flows from the love of God and Christ." In addition, this "love is not that general kindness shown in providence to all men, as the creatures of God; but is special and discriminating; the favour which he bears to his own people, as distinct from others."[4] Gill strongly rejects the Arminian notion of universal love saying it "lessens" God's love and "reduces it to nothing."[5] Interestingly, Andrew Fuller is of the same mind concerning this issue of the discriminating love of God.[6] Though not always defined with the same detail as Gill defines it, a special discriminating love for the elect is the hallmark of Calvinism.

Since there is no cause of love outside of God himself, the basis of his love is

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He loves himself; there is an entire love between the three divine Persons, who are in the strictest, and in the most inconceivable and inexpressible manner affected to each other; their love is natural and essential: God loves all his creatures as such, nor does he hate any of them, as so considered; and he bears an everlasting, unchangeable, and invariable love to his elect in Christ Jesus (9:647).

[4]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 461.

[5]Ibid., 463.

The universal scheme greatly reflects on the love of God to men: it may, at first sight, seem to magnify it, since it extends it to all; but it will not appear so; it lessens it, and reduces it to nothing. The scriptures highly commend the love of God, as displayed in the death of his Son, and in redemption by him; but what kind of love must that be, which does not secure the salvation of any by it? It is not that love which God bears to his own people, which is special and distinguishing; when, according to the universal scheme, God loved Peter no more than he did Judas; nor the saints now in heaven, any more than those that are damned in hell; since they were both loved alike, and equally redeemed by Christ; nor is it that love of God, which is immutable, invariable, and unalterable; since, according to this scheme, God loves men with so intense a love, at one time, as to give his Son to die for them, and wills that they all should be saved; and afterwards this love is turned into wrath and fury; and he is determined to punish them with everlasting destruction. What sort of love must this be in God, not to spare his Son, but deliver him up to death for all the individuals of mankind, for their redemption; and yet, to multitudes of them, does not send them so much as the gospel, to acquaint them with the blessing of redemption by Christ; and much less his Spirit, to apply the benefit of redemption to them; nor give them faith to lay hold upon it for themselves? Such love as this is unworthy of God, and of no service to the creature (Ibid.).

[6]Andrew Fuller, "On the Love of God, and Whether It Extends to the Non-Elect," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller with a Memoir of His Life by Andrew Gunton Fuller* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands and Co., 1833), says, 2:861: "It appears to me an incontrovertible fact that God is represented in His Word as exercising goodness, mercy, kindness, long-suffering, and even love towards men as men. The bounties of Providence are described as flowing from *kindness* and *mercy"* (2:861). In answering the question, "What is the love which God has for those whom he has not chosen to eternal life?" Fuller says, "It is the goodwill of the Creator, whose tender mercies are over all His works" (862).

his sovereign will. There are no "motives and conditions in men" that cause God to love.[7] Instead, "the love of God purely flows from his good will and pleasure."[8] This approach prompts some to argue that love is primarily in God's will and not his nature. For example, Curt Daniel says, "Gill, in effect, prefers to locate divine love in the will rather than in nature. Grace is first sovereign; sovereignty takes precedence over grace. Because God does not have to love all men, He does not love all men, if only to show that He is free so not to do. This, in a nutshell, is the Hyper-Calvinist concept of grace."[9] However, this conclusion is an incorrect understanding of Gill's view as well as Hyper-Calvinism. Sovereign grace is a primary concept in Calvinism and not merely Hyper-Calvinism.

The attributes of love and grace belong to God's very nature and yet God is sovereign in his operations of both love and grace. Since God is sovereign, he is sovereign in all of the manifestations of his nature.[10] Thus, God's will is not separate

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[7]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 642.

[8]Ibid., 80.

[9]Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 693.

[10]John Brine, "Grace Proved to be at God's Sovereign Disposal," in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), points to the necessity of God's sovereignty in grace – a necessity that applies equally well to God's love:

> If grace is not God's own, and at His sovereign disposal, He hath nothing that is so. For, what claim, can an unholy creature have upon God to communicate holiness to him? If you shall say, that it is fit, convenient, and becoming, that God should bestow grace upon, or communicate holiness unto a lapsed creature, I will prove, that He cannot but give grace to apostate spirits, and unto men universally. If you inquire how. I answer thus: God cannot omit doing what is fit, convenient, and becoming, that He should do it. And, therefore, if it is fit, convenient, and becoming, that He should communicate holiness to a fallen creature, he cannot but bestow his grace upon, or communicate holiness, unto apostate spirits and men universally, without distinction, or difference. The reason is most clear, which is this: It is not possible with God, ever to omit doing, what it is fit, proper, and becoming, He should do. As it is impossible with Him to do what is improper, unfit, and unbecoming, that He should do it. So, it is impossible with Him not to do what is fit, proper, and becoming, that He should do it. Since, therefore, He does not bestow His grace upon, or make all His fallen creatures partakers of His holiness; but some only: It is evident, that the reason why He bestows His grace upon some, is not because it was fit, convenient, and becoming, that so He should do; but because such was His sovereign pleasure, concerning them, He was at full liberty to dispense

from his nature.[11] Concerning God's love, it "enters so much into the nature of God, that it is said, 'God is love.'"[12] As such, he loves himself and all good things since love flows from his goodness.[13] However, he exercises or manifests his love according to his sovereign will. Concerning election, God chooses the elect as an act of love flowing from God's delight in them. His elective choice is not in order to make them objects of his love and delight but because he does love and delight in them.[14]

In discussing God's nature, Gill organizes the examination into a discussion of particular aspects of God's nature, his active and operative aspects, his faculties, his qualities and virtues, and the complement of the whole. God's nature consists of his

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> with God, to love, do good unto; and render eternally happy, guilty and sinful creatures, or the contrary, as He Himself, pleases to determine, in nothing can His will be at liberty, in his resolutions about grace to *Paul,* and not to *Pharaoh:* To communicate holiness to *Peter,* and not to *Judas.* Because, the communication of holiness unto, or the bestowment of grace upon an unholy creature, is not due from God, by reason it is fit, that He should bestow it. And, therefore, to make a sinful creature holy, by a communication of grace and holiness, is a pure sovereign act of God; if it is not, no divine act is such (10-11).

[11]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, says, "The will of God is no other than God himself willing; it is essential to him; it is his nature and essence; it is not to be separated, or to be considered as distinct from it, or as a part of it, of which it is composed; which would be contrary to the simplicity of God" (71). Herman Bavinck, in *Reformed Dogmatics,*says,

> His love is self-love and therefore absolute divine love. And that absolute self-love is nothing other than a willing of himself: the supreme and absolute divine energy of this will. Hence the object of God's will is God himself. Not, however, in the sense that he is the product of his own will, as if he had produced himself and were his own cause. . . . It is not a capacity or force in God. It is the case rather that the subject, action, and object of that will coincide with God's very being (2:232).

> When Augustine, Thomas, Calvin, and others said that there was no "reason (*causa*)" for the divine will, they meant that the will of God, as being one with his essence, has no "causa" behind or above it on which that will would be independent. . . . God's will is one with his being, his wisdom, goodness, and all his other perfections (2:240).

[12]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 78.

[13]Ibid. Gill says, "Having treated of the love, grace, mercy, and long-suffering of God, it will be proper to take some notice of his *goodness*, from whence they all proceed" (91).

[14]John Gill, "Truth Defended, Being An Answer To An Anonymous Pamphlet, Entitled, 'Some Doctrines In The Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined By The Word Of God,'" *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 44.

spirituality, immutability, and infinity. His active and operative components refer to his life and omnipotence. His faculties are divided into understanding, will, and affections, with the understanding consisting of his omniscience and wisdom, the will consisting of his acts and sovereignty (these determine how his nature will be communicated), and his affections consisting of love, grace, mercy, hatred, anger, patience, and long-suffering. His qualities and virtues consist of goodness, holiness, justice, truth, and faithfulness. God's affections flow from his qualities. The complement of the whole deals with God's perfection or self-sufficiency, glory, and blessedness.[15]

The affections of God, including love and grace, are not "properly speaking" affections because "there are none in God." However, "there are some things said and done by him, which are similar to affections in intelligent beings" and so "they are ascribed to him."[16] This view means God's "affections" should not be understood from

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[15]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 30-125.

[16]Ibid., 78. In Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, (London: W. H. Collingridge, 1855), he speaks to the issue of anthropopathy:

> Such desires are ascribed to him in the same way as human passions and affections are; as anger, grief, repentance, and the like: nor do such wishes and desires declare either what God does or will do; but what he approves of, and is grateful to him; as are an heart to fear him, and a constant and universal obedience to his commandments (42).

John Calvin, also addresses anthropopathy, in Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis,* trans. John King[on-line], accessed 20 March 2010; available from http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xii.i.html. Internet.

> Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity. Wherefore, there is no need for us to involve ourselves in thorny and difficult questions, when it is obvious to what end these words of repentance and grief are applied; namely, to teach us, that from the time when man was so greatly corrupted, God would not reckon him among his creatures. . . . Meanwhile, unless we wish to provoke God, and to put him to grief, let us learn to abhor and to flee from sin. Moreover, this paternal goodness and tenderness ought, in no slight degree, to subdue in us the love of sin; since God, in order more effectually to pierce our hearts, clothes himself with our affections. This figure, which represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called ἀνθρωποπάθεια.

an anthropomorphic perspective.[17] Instead, these "affections" should be understood as "natural and essential to God; yea, it is his nature and essence."[18] Thus, these "affections" that are in God are not reactionary, responsive, and mutable as are the "affections" of intelligent beings but as belonging to God are immutable and actually flow from God's character, or essence. Gill is consistent in his application of this idea as there are similar descriptions given by him concerning the mercy of God,[19] the longsuffering of God,[20]

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See Calvin also on Deuteronomy 5:29; Psalm 81:13; Isaiah 63:9; Lamentations 3:33; Hosea 11:8. See also Paul Helm, "Divine Impassibility: Why Is It Suffering?" [on-line], accessed 20 March 2010; available from http://www.rpcbmt.org/DivineImpassibility.html. Internet.

[17]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* 476-77.

> As to the love and mercy of God, these are to be considered, not quoad *affectus, as* affections, or passions, in him; which are to be moved, raised, and influenced, by anything out of himself, as the misery or goodness of an object; so to think of God, is to conceive most unworthily of him, to *take him to be altogether such an one as ourselves,* and savors rankly of Atheism, and scarcely deserves another name; but they are to be considered quoad *affectus, as* to their effects; which are guided by the sovereign will of God, to whatsoever objects he pleases, for he *will have mercy on whom he will have mercy* (Ibid. Italics in original).

[18]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 85. Here he is referring to the mercy of God.

[19]Ibid., 85-86.

> It is not to be considered as a passion, or affection in God, as it is in men; attended with grief and sorrow, with anguish and anxiety of mind for the party in misery. . . . Hence the stoic philosophers denied mercy to belong to good men, and so not to God; and, indeed, it does not, in such sense, unless by an anthropopathy, or speaking after the manner of men; since he is free from all passion and perturbation of mind. . . . It is no other than a propensity of his will to help persons in distress, whether in a temporal or spiritual way; and this is as essential to him as is his goodness; of which it is a branch: and therefore as God is essentially, originally, independently, and underivatively good, so is he in like manner merciful. This is one of the perfections which are in some measure imitable by creatures; "Be ye merciful as your Father is merciful", Luke 6:36. . . .But though mercy is natural and essential to God, it is not naturally and necessarily bore towards, and exercised on every object in misery: for then all would share in it, that are in misery, even all wicked men and devils; whereas it is certain they do not; but it is guided in the exercise of it by the love of God; and is governed and influenced by his sovereign will; who "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy", Romans 9:15, 18 just as omnipotence is essential to God, but is not necessarily put forth to do everything it could; but is directed and guided by the will of God; who does whatsoever he pleases (Ibid.).

[20]Ibid., 89.

> God is sometimes called, "the God of patience", Romans 15:5 not only because he is the author and object of the grace of patience, and that is grateful to him; but because he is patient, or longsuffering in himself, and towards his creatures, and is a pattern of patience to them; for this is one of the

anger,[21] joy,[22] and blessedness.[23] All of these "affections" in God are perfect and where man has such affections they are but a shadow of God's perfection.[24]

Since the love of God is eternal, it endures forever as the bond of union between God and Christ and the elect. This eternal love also means God's love is

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attributes of God, in which he may in some measure be imitated; see Ephesians 4:1, 2; Colossians 3:12. This is not to be considered as a quality, accident, passion, or affection in God, as in creatures; who bear with patience things grievous, distressing, and torturing to them, Colossians 1:11 but it is the very nature and essence of God, which is free from all passion and perturbation, from all suffering, grief, and pain; it springs from his goodness, and is as essential to him as that, and is joined with it, Romans 2:4 it is no other than a moderation of his anger, a restraint of that, a deferring the effects of it, at least for a while, according to his sovereign will; it is an extension and prolongation of mercy for a season; for mercy is always in it and with it; and in this it differs from it, that the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting; but the longsuffering of God, as to the exercise of it, is only for a time, until some certain end is answered, and in which it issues; either in the damnation and destruction of the wicked, when they are fitted for it, Romans 9:22 or in the salvation of God's elect, 2 Peter 3:15 for it is exercised towards both, till each take place (Ibid.).

[21]Ibid., 95.

The scriptures everywhere ascribe anger to God. . . . But then anger is to be considered not as a passion, or affection in God . . . we are not to imagine, when God is said to be angry, that there is any commotion or perturbation in God's mind; that he is ruffled and discomposed, or that there is any pain or uneasiness in him, as in human minds; so it may be in finite created spirits, but not in an infinite and uncreated one, as God is: and much less is this to be considered as a criminal passion in him, as it too often is in men; for God is a pure and holy being; without iniquity: besides, there may be anger in men without sin; we are exhorted to be angry and sin not, Ephesians 4:26 and it is certain there was anger in the human nature of Christ, in whom there was no sin, nor was he conscious of any, Mark 3:5 and so there may be in the divine mind, without an imputation of weakness or sin (Ibid.).

[22]Ibid., 102. Gill says, "Joy, which is often attributed to God in the scriptures, bears some resemblance to the affection of joy in men; but is, by some philosophers denied of him; and, indeed, is not to be considered as a passion in him, as in them" (Ibid.).

[23]Ibid., 124.

It has been observed, that properly speaking, there are no affections and passions in God to be wrought upon, or worked up, so as to disturb and disquiet him, as there are in creatures; such as grief and sorrow indulged, and wrath and anger provoked, and raised to a pitch; these are only ascribed to God, speaking after the manner of men; and because some things are done by God similar to what are done by men, when they are grieved and provoked to wrath, etc. otherwise, he is invariably and unchangeably the same, and so most blessed for evermore (Ibid.).

[24]Ibid., 276. Gill says, "The soul carries some shadow of likeness to God in its powers and faculties, being endowed with understanding, will, and affections; which are, in some respects, similar to what is in God; or there is that in God which these are a faint resemblance of." In describing Adam in his state of innocence, he says, "His affections flowed in a right channel, towards their proper objects; and there were no sinful motions and evil thoughts in his heart" (Ibid.).

immutable. Gill is aware of the distinction between love of benevolence by which God wishes good to man, love of beneficence by which God does good to man, and love of complacency, which is when delight takes place, but rejects this approach because it makes God changeable.[25] He says, "The love of God admits of no degrees, it neither increases nor decreases." Since this love is eternal and unchangeable, "there never were any stops, lets, or impediments to this love." It did not change because of "the fall of Adam" or "the actual sins and transgressions of God's people, in a state of nature" or because of "all their backslidings, after called by grace." There is change in God's people, such as in conversion but this change does not bring "change in the love of God." Even when "God changes his dispensations and dealings with them," he does not change his love toward them. "He sometimes rebukes and chastises them, but still he loves them; he sometimes hides his face from them, but his love continues the same." Thus, "the manifestations of his love are various; to some they are greater, to others less; and so to the same persons at different times; but love in his own heart is unvariable and

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[25]Ibid., 81-82. Hong-Gyu Park argues that Gill "accepts the distinctions of the love of God commonly used by Reformed theologians, that is, *amor benevolentiae*, *amor amicitiae* and *amor complacentiae*." Hong-Gyu Park. "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001), 211. But Gill does not speak positively of these distinctions because he believes this points toward a change in God's love. The argument Park makes is in regard to the manifestations of God's love. Thus, "when God's chosen people are in a natural state and are under the wrath of God, God's love towards them is expressed by *amor benevolentiae*, but not by *amor amicitiae* and *amor complacentiae*. The reason is not because of the mutability of God's love towards them, but because of their sinful condition. However, when they become believers, the love of God towards them is expressed by *amor amicitiae* and *complacentiae*." It is true that Gill sees differences of manifestations in the love of God but he doesn't use these terms to refer to this. Also, Gill is clear that there is a benevolent love of God and a complacent love of God that is toward the elect both before and following conversion. John Gill, "The Love of God, Considered," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 9-10; idem, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,*9:105, 648; idem, *Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song,* in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 2:254; idem, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 104. This love of complacency is especially important to understanding the immutability of God's love. See idem, "Truth Defended," 42; idem, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 458-59. This complacency and delight shows itself in various acts.

unchangeable."[26]

Since God loves, he also hates for "where there is love of any person or thing, there will be a hatred of that which is contrary to the object loved." Contrary to some who argue that the concept of God's hatred is bad, Gill argues that it is good since "good men, as they love those that are good . . . so they hate that which is evil." In addition, it is a virtue for "good men to hate sin that dwells in them." If this hatred for sin is in man, it must be a grace of God to hate sin and if a grace of God, it is a good thing. It is important to understand that God does not hate his creatures as creatures but as sinners. His hatred is toward sin and sin is not something God created. Therefore, God hates sinful men, "not as men, but as sinful men." This understanding of God does not mean he hates "all that sin, or have sin in them" since he loves the elect, even when they sin. God hates the sin within his elect but he loves the elect, which he is able to do because he has an everlasting love for his elect in Christ.[27]

This understanding highlights the previously mentioned difference between a general and discriminating love. The general love God has for all people manifests itself in providence, which is based on his sovereign will. Thus, for the reprobate there is only a love that manifests itself in providential dealings with them.[28] However, for the elect there is a special, "discriminating" love. This love is eternal and unchanging. God loves the elect the same before conversion as after conversion because conversion does not

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[26]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 80-81; idem, "Truth Defended," 48.

[27]Ibid., 100-01. Gill also speaks to God's hatred "of some persons antecedent to sin, and without the consideration of it," specifically Esau. This hatred should not be understood as a "positive hatred . . . but of a negative and comparative hatred of them." This is preterition, which in comparison to the love of election is hatred. It is the same sense of Luke 14:26. Preterition is not a consequence of sin but of God's "sovereign will and pleasure, since he is under no obligation to confer benefits.

[28]Gill, "The Love of God, Considered," 6.

make a change in God, but only in the elect. There will be differences in the way God's providence deals with the elect but these differences do not mean God's love changes.[29]

Gill recognizes that it is difficult to "digest" this doctrine and thus people will attempt to speak of different distinctions in the love of God, which, according to Gill, are unhelpful in that they tend to present God's love as changing.[30] He says,

> God's love is invariably the same, as his nature and essence are. It does indeed appear more in some acts of God than in others and is more clearly manifest at one time than another; but in itself it is always the same. All the difference between God's love before, and after conversion, lies in the *manifestation* of it. It is manifested at, and after conversion; and that sometimes more, and sometimes less; but was not at all manifested before. But the change is in us, and not in God's love.[31]

Because God is unchanging, his love is unchanging.

Gill answers various objections to this doctrine. One objection is that "God must love his people in their sins," probably an objection based on God's holy hatred of sin. Gill answers, "Where is the hurt of saying he does? It would have been miserable, to all intents and purposes, with you and me, had he not done so." The second objection is that "God takes pleasure in the sins of his people." Gill replies that there is no reason to reach this conclusion and asks, "Can no distinction be made between God's taking delight in the *persons* of his elect, and his taking delight in their *sins?*" He points out that just such a "distinction is allowed after conversion." That is, "that God loves the persons of his people, though he hates their sins." So "why may not the same distinction he allowed before, as after conversion?" The third objection regards "how is it possible that

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[29]Ibid., 8-9.

[30]Ibid., 9-10.

[31]Ibid., 10.

a person should be a child of wrath, and an object of love, at one and the same time?" Since "the elect of God are by nature children of wrath even as others: how then at the same time can they be the objects of Love?" Gill's answer is to point out that Jesus Christ was "the object of his Father's love and wrath, at one and the same time." Christ, therefore, "stood in two different relations to his Father." The first relation was "that of a Son and the second that of a surety." In his relation as "the Son of God, he was always the object of his love and delight." In his relation as "the sinner's surety, he was the object of his wrath and displeasure." The fourth objection is that this doctrine may tend "to encourage licentiousness; or to discourage the performance of good works; or to prejudice true humiliation for sin." Instead, Gill charges, the consideration "that God loved me, before I loved him; nay, when I was an enemy to him . . . lays me under ten thousand times greater obligations to serve, fear, and glorify him, than a supposition that he began to love me, when I began to love him."[32]

There are various views concerning the love of God under the Calvinistic umbrella. Gill's approach is definitely within that broad umbrella which finds a place for a distinctive, special love of God for the elect.[33] Gill's view of the love of God does not

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[32]Ibid., 10-11. In regard to the reality of God relating to persons with both love and wrath, Gill says,

> But yet even when he poured forth his wrath upon him to the uttermost, on account of the sins of his people; when he ordered Justice to draw the sword, and sheath it in him, his love towards him was not in the least abated. Thus also the elect of God, considered in different views, may be truly said to be the children of wrath, and yet objects of love at one and the same time. Considered in Adam, and under a covenant of works, they were *children of wrath;* exposed to the curses of God's righteous law, and liable to the wrath of God. But as considered in Christ, and under the covenant of grace, they always were, and ever will he the objects of God's love (Ibid.).

For a description of God's special love for his people that Gill believed would engender people to lovingly obey God see Gill, "A Good Hope Through Grace," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007),4-5.

[33]For discussions concerning the love of God see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

place him in the category of Hyper-Calvinism, especially eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism.

## The Grace of God

Gill's discussion of the grace of God is very similar to his discussion of God's love. Like love, grace resides within God himself and thus is part of his nature and essence. It can also "be considered as displayed in acts of goodness toward his creatures, especially men, and is no other than his free favor and good will to men." God's grace is an attribute that "wholly and only resides in God and is only in men, as to the sense and perception of it, and the effects of it upon them and in them." This aspect of grace "is only exhibited and displayed through Christ."[34]

"With respect to creatures," as they are "the objects of" grace, there are important distinctions that "are made concerning it." It is important to keep in mind the distinction between natural and supernatural grace. Natural grace is what Adam enjoyed before the fall. He enjoyed the grace of God and yet it was a natural grace.[35] For us, to have "life, and the preservation of it, and the mercies of life, as food and raiment, which men are altogether unworthy of, are gifts and favors; and so may bear the name of grace,

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(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:342; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887; reprint, Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 93-98; John L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1982), 76-82; William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Edinburgh, 1889), 1:385-9. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 241-42.

[34]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 81-82.

[35]Ibid., 82. Note that Gill is willing to call this natural favor and kindness of God "grace": "What Adam enjoyed, in a state of integrity, above the rest of creatures, was all owing to the unmerited kindness and goodness of God, and so may be called grace" (Ibid.). This included being made in the image of God, possessing holiness and righteousness, knowledge and understanding, the communion with God, and Adam's dominion. The possession of knowledge, holiness and righteousness, which is integral to the image of God, in Adam, is natural grace. This is why Gill says Adam did not possess supernatural grace. For Gill, supernatural grace comes through the blessings of the covenant of grace – specifically, in Christ.

though only natural blessings." Supernatural grace, on the other hand, "includes all the blessings of grace bestowed upon any of the sons of fallen Adam." Gill believes that Adam did not have any supernatural grace in his state of innocence.[36]

Gill distinguishes between common, or general, grace and special, or particular, grace. Common grace is "what all men have." It includes the light of nature, reason, and temporal blessings of life that Gill calls the bounties of providence and which the Bible calls the riches of God's goodness, or grace (Rom 2:4). Also included in this category of grace is the continuance of life. Thus, for Gill, there is a common grace that is in the natural realm and is not to be confused with salvific grace. It operates in the realm of the natural as well as in providence. It is not to be confused with blessings of salvation in Christ.[37]

Only the elect receive special grace. This grace is "special, discriminating and distinguishing."[38] Gill says, "Grace is a rare thing; for the generality of men have it not; only those to whom it is given."[39] Concerning this special, or particular, grace some distinguish it into imputed grace and inherent grace. Imputed grace refers to the holiness, obedience, and righteousness of Christ imputed for justification. Inherent grace enters the

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[36]Ibid.

[37]For discussions of common grace see Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free, 2004), 1:334-6, 378-81; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 432-46; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 657-65; Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace"[on-line], accessed 20 March 2010; available from http://www.contra-undum.org/books/Calvin.pdf . Internet; Barry Gritters, "Grace Uncommon: A Protestant Reformed Look at the Doctrine of Common Grace" [on-line], accessed 20 March 2010; available from http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_55.html.Internet; Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); David J. Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free, 2003).

[38]Daniel, 704.

[39]Gill, "The Elect of God, Chosen Vessels of Salvation, Filled With the Oil of Grace," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 6.

heart at regeneration, by God's working.[40] Gill discusses many others distinctions given to the grace of God such as, restraining external gifts, sufficient, preparing, preventing, operating, co-operating, and subsequent. However, he argues that the best distinctions are efficacious and persevering grace.[41] It is this efficacious grace that is able to "abound over the abounding of sin" in man.[42]

This grace is manifested in conversion and regeneration, which is a discovery of sinners of the immutable grace of God. This "abounding" grace as a "river of God's love and grace ran under-ground from all eternity, and is now broke up in effectual

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[40]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 82.

[41]Ibid., 84-85. In his sermon, "The Elect of God, Chosen Vessels of Salvation, Filled With the Oil of Grace," Gill makes another distinction between extraordinary and ordinary grace in believers, especially in relation to spiritual gifts. In referencing the filling of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, he says this "denotes that they had superior gifts of the Spirit, whereby they are capable of defending the truth against opposers, with boldness, courage and intrepidity of mind" and since "the church consisted of all nations, who spake different languages, so they were filled with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, especially that of speaking with divers tongues." However, while it may be that "some have been filled with the gifts and graces of the Spirit in an extraordinary way, others have been so, in an ordinary way, as common believers." This ordinary filling comes when "the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit; when they are full of joy and peace in believing, and are filled with the knowledge of the will of God in Christ, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (12).

[42]Gill, "The Glory of God's Grace Displayed in its Abounding Over the Aboundings of Sin," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

> Now where sin has thus abounded, grace in effectual vocation superabounds; for by powerful efficacious grace, in conversion, the stony heart is taken out of the flesh, and an heart of flesh is given; new principles of life and love infused, and all sorts of grace implanted; the will is subdued and brought into subjection to Christ, the judgment is informed, and the understanding enlightened; nay, an understanding given to know him, whom to know is life eternal; the mind and conscience *are purged from dead works to serve the living God*, and the affections set upon things which are above. What an amazing, surprising change is this! O, abounding, superabounding grace (11-12)!

Also, this "abounding" grace is seen in God's giving grace to the Gentiles and also in the many particular examples of individuals in Scripture. See Ibid.,12-13. Gill points to the human nature of Christ as being full of grace for our benefit:

> Now our Lord Jesus Christ, in the fullness of time assumed the same human nature; because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; (Hebrews 2:14) and the nature which Christ assumed, was attended with all sinless, though not sinful infirmities; therefore he is said to be sent in the likeness of *sinful flesh*, and not in sinful flesh itself; now in this nature Christ appeared *full of grace and truth*; there is an infinite, inexhaustible, overflowing, and

vocation, and comes with its full flows into the sinners heart; which is now plentifully filled therewith, having as much as its narrow vessel can receive."[43] This grace is also manifested in justification, the forgiveness of sins, adoption, and glorification.[44] It is a composite of God's working, such that "the grace of God in the heart, consists of faith, hope, love, and other fruits of the Spirit."[45]

Even though salvation is fully a work of God's grace there is an important place for the means of grace in Gill's soteriology. He says, "gifts of grace . . . may be increased by using them: gifts neglected decrease, but stirred up and used, are improved and increase." Even though "men are to be thankful for their gifts, and be contented with them, yet they may lawfully desire more, and in the use of means seek an increase of them." He argues,

> There is such a thing as growth in grace, in this sense; every grace, as to its act and exercise, is capable of growing and increasing; faith may grow exceedingly, hope abound, love increase, and patience have its perfect work, and saints may grow more humble, holy, and self-denying: this is indeed God's work, to cause them to grow, and it is owing to his grace; yet saints, should show a concern for this, and make use of means which God owns and blesses for this purpose, such as prayer, attending on the word, and looking over the promises of God, for an increase of faith; recollecting past experiences, and looking to the death and resurrection of Christ for the encouragement of hope, and to the love of God and Christ, for the stirring up of love to both, and to the saints; considering the sufferings of Christ, the desert of sin, and the glories of another world, to promote patience and self-denial, and the pattern of Christ, to excite to humility; though "grace" may also intend the Gospel, the knowledge of which is imperfect, and may be increased in the use of

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superabounding fullness of grace dwells in him, that we from thence might receive grace for grace. Thus in the same kind of nature, *where sin abounded, grace does much more abound* (11).

[43]Ibid.,13.

[44]Ibid.,14-16; Gill, "The Free Grace of God Exalted in the Character of the Apostle Paul," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007),16-17, for a discussion of every aspect of salvation as grace.

[45]Gill, "The Elect of God, Chosen Vessels of Salvation, Filled With the Oil of Grace," 7.

> means, and which is a special preservative against error, a growth in which saints should be concerned for.[46]

Contrary to claims that Gill overemphasizes God's part in salvation in Gill, throughout his writings there is an emphasis on both God's action and man's response.

Grace is central to God's work because the reason why God has permitted sin is to display his glory in his grace in the salvation of sinners. Thus, "God voluntarily permitted the sin of Adam, and that with a design to magnify the glory of his grace in the salvation of sinners." Sin allows God "an opportunity of displaying the perfections of his grace and mercy."[47] This permission of sin is what Gill calls "God's grand design in the contrivance, accomplishment, and application of man's salvation" and its design is "to set forth and magnify the glory of his grace." This design is "effectually answered; for grace reigns, and reigns gloriously in every part thereof."[48]

Concerning grace, Gill's view is within the mainstream of Calvinistic theology. While there are differences with some other Calvinists concerning common grace, Gill's view of the discriminating grace of God is the teaching of Calvinism and there is no reason at this point to place Gill's within the confines of Hyper-Calvinism.

## Conclusion

Therefore, concerning the God-ward aspects of Gill's soteriology in relation to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism, there is no reason to treat Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist.[49]

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[46]Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* 9:614.

[47]Gill, "The Glory of God's Grace Displayed in its Abounding Over the Aboundings of Sin," 16.

[48]Ibid., 19.

[49]For evidence of similar accepted views existing among Baptists in the same general period as Gill, see the circular letter of 1805 for the Philadelphia Baptist Association by Rev. Silas Hough in *Minutes*

Gill is within the parameters of historical, orthodox Calvinism, promoting a discriminating love and grace of God. However, the anthropological aspect of Gill's soteriology is one area that comes closer to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism and thus needs close examination.

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*of the Philadelphia Baptist Association from A. D. 1707 to A. D. 1807,* ed. A. D. Gillette (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 416.

# CHAPTER 5

# ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS

# OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

The discussion of the anthropological aspects of Gill's soteriology faces more difficulty than the other areas examined to this point. There are two specific reasons for this difficulty. One is a lack of understanding regarding the terminology and use of phrases by Gill can cause confusion. His presentation of the anthropological aspects of his theology, specifically his soteriology, is historically and theologically contextualized. Without an understanding of the context, it becomes more difficult to understand the issues Gill is addressing, especially with an anachronistic discussion of later Hyper-Calvinism in relation to Gill's views.

Second, and more importantly, Gill does not clearly explain what he means by some of his discussion concerning this aspect of his soteriology. This lack of explanation can create a lack of clarity and the possibility of confusion in attempting to understand him. Gill's theology, as evidenced by prior discussion, can be difficult to grasp simply because of the depth of some of the issues but also the manner in which he discusses them. Thus, his theology alone sometimes results in great complexity. In addition to this difficulty, Gill's lack of clarity in communicating certain ideas can make understanding him a daunting task. This difficulty is clearly the case because many scholars, while thoughtfully examining Gill on these issues, arrive at conflicting conclusions. Therefore,

even though the anthropological aspects of his soteriology are the closest to the working definition for Hyper-Calvinism, Gill's complexity at this point is still another reason for caution in labeling him a Hyper-Calvinist.

As mentioned, it is at this point that Gill is the closest to the prescribed definition for Hyper-Calvinism. If one is looking for an area where he would match up with Hyper-Calvinism, it is possible to find some connection in this area. However, a connection should not equate to a categorization. It is not always easy to put Gill into certain categories. While at this point Gill comes closest to Hyper-Calvinism it is also at this point that his soteriology is most complex. Further, on this present point, his writings do not show him to be in agreement with others who appear more clearly aligned with the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.

However, he apparently did not see the need for an intense debate over this issue. In fact, he declares that he is not concerned with the debate that was taking place at the time, saying, "A controversy has of late been moved, or at least revived, by some ministers of the Independent denomination, about the duty of unconverted persons to believe in Christ, or about the nature of that faith which such are obliged to; a controversy in which I have had no immediate concern."[1] This lack of debate is even more amazing in light of Gill's lack of timidity when faced with theological controversy. However, it is possible Gill strategically picked his battles on the basis of the importance

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[1]John Gill, "The Necessity of Good Works Unto Salvation," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 2-3. It is also interesting that Gill sees the debate revolving around duty/responsibility, which matches the essence of the definition given in this dissertation.

of the issues. In addition, there are certain times that are better for entering debates than other times.[2]

The specific historical debate concerning this issue is what has been termed "the Modern Question" controversy.[3] This controversy was not a controversy over Hyper-Calvinism, since "Hyper-Calvinism" did not exist at this time, but a debate within Calvinism.[4] Nuttall comments on this debate by saying,

> The question at issue was whether the unconverted have a duty to believe the Gospel. It arose directly out of the logic of High Calvinism. The belief that Christ died for the elect alone seemed to demand as a corollary that none but the elect have the power to repent and believe; and if not the power, then not the duty to do so. Yet, on the other hand, Scripture seemed to commend the practice of seeking to convert the unbeliever by preaching the Gospel, and experience to indicate that at times such preaching achieved its end; and this, in turn, demanded the power in the unconverted to believe, and if the power, then the duty. Those of us in whose thought the doctrine of election is not prominent may perhaps regard the issue as but a theological aspect of the insoluble conflict between determinism and free will; but for the High Calvinist, by whom the doctrine of election was seen as fundamental, both as proceeding from and as safeguarding God's glory and the freedom of grace, the question raised was genuine and disturbing.[5]

While keeping this intra-Calvinistic context in mind, a survey of the controversy can help to define the essence of the issue, as well to appreciate the complexity of the debate. This approach will then allow for a discussion of Gill's doctrine in relation to this issue.

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[2]For example, see Gill's letter written near the end of his life to J.C. Ryland, dated 20 March 1771, where he rejects a call to enter into a debate concerning baptism, saying "I have done with all controversies and especially about baptism; I have exhausted that subject all I can." *Baptist Autographs in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1741-1845* ed. and transcribed Timothy Whelan (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 10-11.

[3]For a discussion of the Modern Question controversy see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question:* A Turning-Point In Eighteenth-Century Dissent." *JTS* 16 (1965): 101-23.

[4]Ibid., 101. In n. 4, Nuttall says, "I prefer the term High Calvinism, which was in use in Fuller's time . . . to the now more usual Hyper-Calvinism as less prejudiced and question-begging. One does not speak of a Hyper-Churchman." Again, it is debatable whether the Modern Question controversy should be labeled with the term "Hyper-Calvinism."

[5]Ibid., 102.

The Modern Question controversy finds its igniting source in Matthias Maurice's *A Modern Question,* published in 1737.[6] Maurice argues that the question does not involve the issue of power or inclination in unconverted sinners, nor whether these sinners are to give their assent to the report of the gospel, nor what power is necessary to work them up into that faith. Instead, Maurice states the question as "whether God does by his word make it the duty of unconverted sinners who hear the gospel preached or published, not only to believe Christ, but to believe in Christ?"[7] No matter the form the question took and although there was a discussion of many corollary issues, as the debate waged back and forth throughout the century the defining issue became the ability of Adam in his state of innocence.[8] Evidence for this understanding is in Lewis Wayman's

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[6]Matthias Maurice, *A Modern Question Modestly Answer'd* (London: James Buckland, 1737). It is possible to trace the beginnings of the controversy to Joseph Hussey's *God's Operations of Grace: But No Offers of His Grace* (London: D. Bridge, 1707). See Gerald Priest, "Andrew Fuller's Response to the 'Modern Question' – A Reappraisal of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,*" *DBSJ* 6 (2001): 45-73. However, it was Maurice's treatise that really ignited the controversy. Rippon says, "Some of the best of men, about the year 1707, and after 1730, took different sides on this question; as men, equal in learning and piety to each other, have since done." John Brine describes one instance of division caused by this controversy. John Brine, "A Refutation of Arminian Principles," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 3-4.

The "Modern Question" was called this because it was seen as a novel and modern issue. This is Ivimey's argument: "So far as I have been able to discover, this subject had never been made a question by our ministers, previously to the end of the last reign." Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:260. However, this needs to be explored further. Certainly, the question as posed does not seem to exist before the eighteenth century but the principles underlying the issue are present earlier. For instance, William Kiffin (c. 1616-1701) dealt with the duty issue in relation to prayer in the seventeenth century. See Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity,* vol. 1: *Beginnings in Britain* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 137-38. Also, once the issue is expanded beyond Baptist borders, the Puritans were dealing with the warrant of faith even earlier.

[7]Maurice, *A Modern Question,* 3-4. The Modern Question is formulated in different ways. For instance, Rippon states it as, "Whether it is the duty of unconverted men, who are favored with the sacred Scriptures, to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ to the saving of their souls?" John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838), 43. Jackson says it is "whether saving faith in Christ, is a duty required by the moral law, or all those who live under the gospel revelation?" Alverey Jackson, *The Question Answered* (London: J. Ward, 1752), 3. Fuller says it is "whether faith be required of all men who hear, or have opportunity to hear, the word?" Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 18.

[8]One of the corollary issues in the controversy is the very definition of faith. Rippon,

response to Maurice in 1738 with *A Further Enquiry After Truth* in which he agrees that the question is about the duty of unregenerate men but argues that these unregenerate men do not have the power or inclination to do so.[9] Wayman argues for a correct understanding of special faith, which requires a differentiation between natural and supernatural faith; thus Adam never had the ability to believe in a supernatural way in his state of innocence.[10] Thus, Wayman insists that the real question is whether it is the duty of unregenerate sinners to have and believe with special faith.[11] After Maurice's death in

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*Memoir,* says,

> The controversy has been supposed very much to turn on the definition which should be given of *believing,* or, of believing *in* Christ. Some of those who have maintained the *high* side of the question, as it is termed, seem to have thought, that special faith is no other than a sinner's personal assurance that Christ died for him in particular, and is unquestionably his, with all the blessings of his mediation. This faith, say they, is not the duty of any unconverted person. True, reply the people on the *low* side of the question, we maintain this as much as you, and assert that it is *not* the duty of any *one,* in a state of unregeneracy, *so* to believe; but, they add, you misapprehend our statement, and also what we conceive to be the meaning of Scripture when *believing in Christ* is mentioned. To believe in Christ, is not for the sinner to assure himself that Christ died for *him* in particular, which every *Arminian* who maintains *universal* redemption must certainly do, though multitudes of such give demonstrable evidence that they have not the faith connected with salvation; but *to believe in him,* is to give such a practical credit to the Scriptural testimony concerning Christ as is connected with our personal application to him that he may save us. Thus, to believe in Christ, say they, is the duty of all who hear the Gospel report concerning him; and if any, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, according to the divine testimony, as sinners helpless and entirely lost in themselves, are enabled in this manner to apply to him, they *shall be saved* (4-5).

Another corollary issue is the difference between natural and moral inability. Rippon, says,

> Capable judges, who were temperate, and by no means the partisans of either side, have expressed it as their opinion, in which, perhaps, they have been correct, that had some of the gentlemen in this controversy but carried to the full length such of their *own* views which their opponents admired, and considered as fundamental to a fair statement and decision on the subject; *both* sides agreeing in a cardinal point, and pursuing it to its legitimate consequences, might certainly have approximated considerably nearer to each other, if they had not entirely settled and relinquished the dispute. The *one* point to which those refer who have so temperately observed both sides, is the essential difference that *subsists* between a *natural* and a moral inability of doing what is spiritually and evangelically good in the sight of God (Ibid., 45-46. Italics in original).

[9]Lewis Wayman, *A Further Enquiry After Truth* (London: J. and J. Marshall, 1738).

[10]Ibid., 14-18.

[11]Ibid., 21.

1738, his *The Modern Question Affirm'd and Prov'd* was published posthumously in 1739.[12] In addition, in the same year, Abraham Taylor wrote his *Address to Young Students.*[13] Later that year Wayman responded with his *Defense of the Further Enquiry After Truth.*[14] John Gill also wrote a reply to Taylor during the same year although he did not address the Modern Question.[15] Three years later, in 1742, Taylor anonymously authored *The Modern Question Examined.*[16] John Brine entered the debate with a response to Taylor in 1743 with *A Refutation of Arminian Principles, Delivered in a Pamphlet, Entitled, The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith, Examined with Candor, etc., in a Letter to a Friend.*[17] In 1752, Alverey Jackson wrote *The Question Answered.*[18] Jackson argues that the only reason Adam did not believe was that he did not have a revelation of Christ. If the law or light of nature revealed Christ to him, he would have been obligated to believe in him.[19] There were no other major writings on this topic

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[12]Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and The Modern Question," 114.

[13]Ibid., 115.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 115-20. Gill's work was entitled, "The Necessity of Good Works Unto Salvation Considered: Occasion'd by Some Reflections and Misrepresentations of Dr. Abraham Taylor in a Pamphlet of His Lately Published, Called, An Address to Young Students in Divinity, By Way of Caution Against Some Paradoxes, Which Lead to Doctrinal Antinomianism." *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

[16]Nuttall, 117. This treatise would later have a dramatic effect on Andrew Fuller's view of this issue.

[17]Ibid. See also, John Brine, "A Refutation of Arminian Principles, Delivered in a Pamphlet Entitled, 'The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith, Examined with Candor' etc. In a Letter to a Friend"; Brine, "Motives to Love and Unity Among Calvinists, Who Differ in Some Points," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

[18]Alverey Jackson, *The Question Answered* (London: J. Ward, 1752).

[19]Ibid., 6.

until Fuller's *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* was published in 1785.[20] William Button responded to Fuller later in that year with *Remarks on a Treatise Entitled Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation.*[21] Fuller then replied to Button in 1787.[22] Fuller and Button's exchange evidences respectful disagreement. It is clear that while Fuller strongly disagrees with Button's view he does not put him in a category outside of Calvinism.[23] In addition, while a number of theological and expositional issues are addressed between them, it is apparent that the underlying issue is the ability of Adam in his innocent state.[24] Finally, John Martin wrote a response to Fuller in 1788[25] and Fuller

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[20]Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* vol. 1(Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988). See Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptist from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace, 1992), 193-202. For Fuller's theological journey see Barry Howson, "Andrew Fuller's Reading of John Gill," *Eusebia* 9 (2008), 72-75; E. F. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism," *BQ* 20(1963), 99-114; Clipsham, *BQ* 20 (1963), 146-54; Clipsham, *BQ* 20 (1964), 214-25; Clipsham, *BQ* 20 (1964), 268-76; Brain Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992), 5; Gerald L. Priest, "Andrew Fuller's Response to the 'Modern Question' – A Reappraisal of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,*" *DBSJ* 6 (2001), 45-73.

[21]William Button, *Remarks on a Treatise Entitled Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (London: J. Buckland, 1785).

[22]Andrew Fuller, *A Defence of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation; Containing a Reply to Mr. Button's Remarks, and the Observations of Philanthropos*in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller,* vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988).

[23]Ibid., 175. "I speak with the greatest sincerity, when I say I have high esteem for Mr. B. and many others of his sentiments. I do not account them as adversaries, but as brethren in Christ, as fellow-laborours in the gospel; 'and could rejoice (as was said before) to spend my days in cordial fellowship with them.'"On p. 177 there is an interesting footnote where Fuller references John Brine's *Motives to Love and Unity* in order to warn those who "claim to themselves the title of Calvinists, exclusively" (Ibid.). This implies that Fuller is not charging Button, Brine, and others in their camp as being outside of Calvinism. Whether Fuller later developed a more hostile view, or whether Fuller's followers became more hostile toward this view, needs to be examined further.

[24]Ibid., 213. "Upon this single point of Adam's incapacity to do things spiritually good, Mr. B rests almost all of his arguments" (Ibid.).

[25]John Martin, *Thoughts on the Duty of Man Relative to Faith in Jesus Christ; in which Mr. Andrew Fuller's Leading Propositions on that Subject are Considered* (London: W. Smith, 1788).

wrote a response to Martin in 1789.[26]

A question at this point is, where does Gill fit in this debate? On the one hand, it is difficult to place Gill on one side. Both Rippon and Fuller seem to think that he fits better on the "high" side, or the "negative" side of the question.[27] Most people who place him here see inconsistency on his part. Therefore, it is entirely possible that Gill does not fit neatly into the competing systems and this lack of clear allegiance could certainly be because of a lack of consistency on his part.[28] However, it is also possible that Gill was

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[26]Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 52-63.

[27]See Rippon, *Life and Writings,* 47; Andrew Fuller, *A Defence of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, says, "Dr. Gill took no active part in the controversy. It is allowed, that the negative side of the question was his avowed sentiment, and this appears to be implied in the general tenor. At the same time, it cannot be denied, that, when engaged in other controversies, he frequently argued in a manner favourable to our side; and his writings contain various concessions on this subject, which, if anyone else had made them, would not be much to the satisfaction of our opposing brethren" (177). This is further evidence that Gill should not be put in the camp of Hyper-Calvinism. Also, Fuller himself was willing to make discriminating use of Gill's writings.

[28]Peter Naylor, *Picking up a Pin for the Lord,* argues that Gill is inconsistent with his view of law and faith. He references Gill's comments on Rom 1:5 and argues that this obedience must require some kind of "law" (188). But in John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), he does not disagree with the idea of obedience being a duty, even "obedience of the faith." Gill says this calling of apostleship for "obedience of the faith" is for the purpose

> that men might be brought by the ministry of the word to obey the faith, Christ the object of faith; to submit to his righteousness, and the way of salvation by him, and to be subject to his ordinances or to obey the doctrine of faith, which is not barely to hear it, and notionally receive it, but to embrace it heartily by faith, and retain it, in opposition to a disbelief and contempt of it; and which is the end and design of the Gospel ministration to bring persons to it. Moreover, by *obedience to the faith*, or "obedience of faith", as it may be rendered, may be meant the grace of faith, attended with evangelical obedience; for obedience, rightly performed, is only that which is by faith, and springs from it (8:415).

This approach is perfectly consistent with Gill's distinction between obedience to the law and faith, or "performance of duty" and "exercises of grace." Naylor, in *Picking up a Pin for the Lord,* also sees inconsistency in Gill's distinctions between blessings of grace and conditions of the covenant of grace. Naylor asks, "Why cannot certain blessings also be conditions? May we not suppose that Gill allowed logic to lead him to conclusions which were perhaps beyond Scripture? In some confusion, he fell back upon his distinction between 'legal' and 'evangelical' repentance" (189). But, of course, the "logic over Scripture" argument can be applied to Naylor as well. Perhaps Gill did allow logic to bring unscriptural conclusions, but so also may those who disagree with Gill. Naylor also assumes "confusion" on Gill's part. However, the confusion may be in not understanding Gill's approach. It is not in "confusion" that Gill "fell back" on the distinction between "legal" and "evangelical" repentance. This is a consistent distinction in Gill. In

being perfectly consistent in his approach, only allowing for an area of mystery, especially in the area of Adam's constitution and relationship to God in his state of innocence – the very point of concern in the "Hyper-Calvinistic" debate. A thorough reading of Gill shows that despite caricatures of dogmatism he seems comfortable in presenting a number of approaches to an issue or passage of Scripture, sometimes picking one as his preference and on other occasions allowing the reader to choose, and thus leaving the final answer unsettled.[29]

What are some ways that Gill differs with those on the negative side of the modern question? The usual label for those on the negative side of the modern question is Hyper-Calvinist. One of their arguments is that spiritual duties are only required of spiritual men. However, it is important to note that Gill saw God as requiring spiritual duties of all men. For example, included as duties of all men is prayer,[30] singing of

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Gill's view, the duty of man is for "legal" repentance not "evangelical" repentance. Evangelical repentance is a blessing of the covenant of grace. It is not a condition to enter the covenant of grace but a blessing because one is already included in the covenant of grace. Naylor also says "Gill claimed that 'the ministry of reconciliation . . . does not propose to men to make their peace with God,' *a truly chilling statement.*" (Ibid. Italics added). However, the remainder of Gill's statement in his *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1893; reprint; Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), says, "but declares that peace is made by the blood of Christ, and that reconciliation, atonement, and satisfaction for sin, are made by the sufferings, death, and sacrifice of Christ" (929). See also Ibid., 210-11; 235. This shows that Gill views the "ministry of reconciliation" as a publication of the covenant of grace made between the Father and the Son – a publication that peace with God has been made and this peace is not conditioned on man's faith. Naylor, in *Picking up a Pin for the Lord,* does ask an interesting question: "Would Gill have been able to disagree with Andrew Fuller's sentiments to the effect that although the gospel, in the strict sense of the term, might not be a law but, rather, a declaration of God's grace, it requires in practice faith as an expression of obedience" (Ibid.). Apparently, Gill's answer would be a nuanced "yes."

[29]The present author believes that Gill probably saw himself as consistent, only that his emphasis was upon the principle of revelation rather than an emphasis upon Adam's state of innocence. This will be addressed later in the chapter.

[30]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 39. See also pp. 958 and 963. Elsewhere in his *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* Gill sets forth different aspects of this duty of prayer. He mentions "public prayer in the house of God" and private prayer, including private prayer meetings, family prayer, and "the closet" (444). Gill also applies this duty to praying for the pardon of sin. He says, "Prayer itself is a moral duty, and incumbent on all; and the light of nature will direct persons in distress to pray to God for relief . . . it is natural to them to pray unto him to forgive them, and deliver them out of present

praises,[31] hearing the Word of God,[32] and worship.[33] In fact, it was Adam's duty to worship, serve, and glorify God.[34] While it is true that only spiritual people can perform

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troubles, or what they fear are coming upon them" (500-01). Concerning the question of "whether pardoned sinners should pray for the pardon of sin?," Gill says,

> That either these pardoned ones have a comfortable sense and perception of the pardon of their sins, or they have not; if they have, they have no need, at present at least, to pray even for the manifestation of it to them, since they have it already; if they have not a comfortable view of it, which is sometimes the case of pardoned ones . . . they will then see it both their duty, and privilege, and interest, to pray for a comfortable view and fresh manifestation of it: and whereas saints are daily sinning in thought, word, or deed, Christ has directed to make a daily petition of it, that when we pray that God would give us "day by day our daily bread", that he would also "forgive us our sins", Luke 11:3, 4 and it appears to have been the practice of saints in all ages to pray for the pardon of sin in some sense, and as it seems in the sense suggested . . . it must be understood in an explained sense, consistent with the nature of pardon, as procured by Christ, and passed by God; it cannot be supposed that saints should pray that Christ's blood may be shed again to procure fresh pardon for them; nor that any fresh act of pardon should be passed in the divine mind, since God has forgiven all trespasses through the blood of his Son, shed once for all; but that they might have fresh manifestations, discoveries, and application of pardon, as they stand in need of them, being continually sinning against God: in no other sense can I understand that pardon of sin can be prayed for by the saints (Ibid.).

Also, though prayer is a duty of all men it does not mean if they pray they are praying in a "spiritual" manner. Gill says,

> For prayer is a natural duty, and binding on all men, who are to pray as well as they can, though none but spiritual men can pray in a spiritual manner; and yet even such are not always under the gracious influences of the Spirit, and such, when destitute of them, should pray for them; for "our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him"; and when men are in darkness and distress, without the light of God's countenance, the communications of his grace, and the influences of his Spirit, they stand in the more need of prayer, and should be more constant at it (945).

Gill also says that prayer must be done in faith in order to please God (946).

[31]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 1901.

[32]Ibid., 933.

[33]Ibid., 120. Gill says it is the duty of men to worship God "and that in a spiritual manner." Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller," (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), asks, "How can worship of God in any sense be required without the concomitant duty of faith in Christ? . . . It is scripturally untenable to speak of 'duty worship' in any sense originating from the moral law without a corresponding 'duty faith' from the same origin" (244). However, in Gill's theology, this worship would be the type of worship Adam had in his state of innocence – a "natural" worship. Though this does require "faith," it is a "natural faith" – this is the only kind that Adam possessed before he fell into sin.

[34]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 310-11. "As Adam had a right knowledge of God, and knew it was his duty to worship, serve, and glorify God, he took every opportunity of doing it in the garden" (Ibid.).

spiritual duties,[35] all men are required to perform spiritual duties regardless of their abilities.

When attempting to understand Gill one must see his overarching concern for clarity concerning the gospel. Because of this desire for clarity, he is very concerned with correct terminology and categories. A case in point is the way Gill speaks of "performance of duty" and "exercises of grace."[36]

It will be helpful to delineate five different ideas Gill sets forth in regard to man's duty. The first of these ideas is that revelation determines obligation. The next four ideas all have to do with distinctions. For Gill, it is important to keep in mind distinctions between law and gospel, natural and supernatural, natural faith/repentance and supernatural faith/repentance, and God's will of command and God's will of decree, even though each of these categories overlap with others.

## Revelation Determines Obligation

The first idea is that revelation determines obligation. Concerning the discussion of man's duty, this idea is a fundamental principle in Gill. Gill says, "It is the

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[35]John Gill, "The Law Established by the Gospel," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 12. "Believers, or such as have true faith in Christ and his righteousness, are the only persons that are capable of yielding spiritual obedience to the law, or of performing good works in a spiritual manner" (Ibid.).

[36]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 555. Gill speaks of both "the exercise of the graces of faith, love, patience, humility, etc. and in the discharge of duty." See pp. 558-59, 712, 728, 832, 943. Gill says, "The disposition and ability to perform any duty aright, are owing to the efficacious operation of the Spirit of God" (Ibid., 726). He points to the importance of faith, saying, "faith is not only of the greatest importance in duty, service, and worship, without which it is impossible to please God; but it has the greatest influence on other graces, it sets them all at work, and as that is in exercise so are they more or less" (Ibid., 745). Gill speaks of the importance of the Spirit to the performance of duty and exercise of grace, saying, "The Spirit of God also is equally the object of hope, as of faith and confidence; that he will assist in the exercise of every grace, and the performance of every duty; and particularly, that he will carry on and finish the work of grace upon the soul" (Ibid., 754). See idem, "A Good Hope of Grace," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.,

duty of all men to love the Lord" based on being his creation and also because of "the care of his providence, and supplied by him with the blessings of life." As long as men are alive "the obligation to love him continues, and would have continued, had there been no redemption at all by Christ." Interestingly, Gill argues, "redemption by Christ lays a fresh obligation on those who are interested in it, to love the Lord." Because of the revelation of the redemption of Christ to them in a particular way, they are now obligated to believe in him. However, also, "those who have no interest in that special blessing of grace, have reason to love the Lord upon the account of it." This reason to love the Lord because of the special blessing of grace is because of "Christ's engagement to redeem his own people, that the rest are continued in their being, and supplied with the blessings of providence, which were forfeited by sin." It is true that "such cannot be obliged to love the Lord for that redemption which never was intended for them, nor for that grace which will not be vouchsafed to them." However, for those "to whom the gospel revelation comes" they have an obligation "to love the Lord" in a further way, that is, "on the account of redemption by Christ; since all who see their need of it, and are desirous of interest in it, have no reason to conclude otherwise, than that Christ died for them, and has redeemed them by his blood."[37]

Specifically, on what basis will people be condemned? Gill says that men "will not be condemned and punished for their unbelief, but for their sins committed against

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2007), 3; idem, "The Doctrine of Grace Cleared," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 4.

[37]John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth,* (London: W. H. Collingridge, 1855), 483. See John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), 8:45, where he comments on John 12:48.

the law and light of nature."[38] However, with further revelation comes the responsibility to believe that revelation. Thus, "the whole of divine revelation is to be believed . . . whether of the Old or of the New Testament." The summation of this divine revelation is in the words of Jesus, "believe the gospel," which is found at Mark 1:15. Gill says, "Not to believe this, is the damning sin of unbelief, so much spoken of in the New Testament; this was the sin of the Jews . . . that they believed not the Jesus was the Messiah . . . this is the sin of all, to whom the external revelation of the Gospel comes, and they believe it not." In fact, "this is the sin" of anyone "who either neglect to examine the evidence of it, or notwithstanding the evidence of it, reject and condemn it." For those who neglect or despise the gospel of Christ rather than obeying and embracing it there will be the punishment of "everlasting destruction."[39]

It is important to understand that this unbelief manifests the sinful heart of man, whether it is the heathen without any special revelation of Christ, or anyone who has the gospel revealed to them – it is unbelief manifesting itself regardless of the external revelation. Without any special revelation man stands condemned because of his depravity. While the rejection of revelation is a sin, at the same time, it is a manifestation of the depravity of the heart. Because this unbelief manifests the sinfulness of man's heart it is a damnable sin. However, it is not because of the lack of special faith, which is a gift of God, that a person will be condemned. Gill says, "This sort of unbelief, and not

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[38]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* 568. Gill says, "the heathens will not be condemned and punished for their ignorance of that revelation which was never vouchsafed to them . . . nor for not believing in Christ, of whom they have never heard, only for those sins which they have committed against the law and light of nature" (Ibid., 584).

[39]John Gill, "Faith in God and His Word," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 16-17.

want of special faith in Christ, is the cause of men's damnation. No man will be lost or damned, because he has not this faith."[40]

Gill sees the need for a personal revelation, which he calls a "particular interest," in the death of Christ as obligation to believe savingly in Christ.

> If the Spirit of God reveals to a man his particular interest in the death of Christ, or that Christ died for him in particular, he ought to believe it. All which perfectly accords with the doctrine of particular redemption, and is no ways inconsistent with God's decrees of giving the necessary aid of his grace to some, to enable them to believe unto salvation, and of denying it to others.[41]

Again, whether general or special, with revelation there is an accompanying obligation. The basis of the condemnation of man is the rejection of God's revelation to man and thus is perfectly consistent with the doctrine of election, effectual calling, and particular atonement.

It is at this point that Gill comes closest to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism.[42] He has some very strong words for those who would "say that God will damn any man because he has not this special faith in Christ." To do so "is to represent him as *the most*

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[40]Ibid. In Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* he points out that even though God commands that all who have heard the gospel "believe in the Son of God" this faith "enjoined and required is proportionate to the revelation that is made of Christ; for no man is bound to believe more than what is revealed." If Christ is revealed as "the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior of the world, as was to the Jews, credit should be given thereunto." When such a revelation is given it is possible to believe in Jesus as revealed, "though they could not believe unto salvation, without superior power and grace." On the other hand, "if Christ is represented, to any persons as a proper object of faith, trust, and confidence; it becomes such persons to believe in him, and rely upon him; and such are, by the grace of God, enabled so to do" (568). Gill prefers "special" to "saving" faith perhaps because he wants to stress the saving nature of the object of faith. Faith is not what saves.

[41]Ibid., 568-69.

[42]Tom Nettles, who has defended Gill in the past against charges of Hyper-Calvinism, evaluates this quote placing Gill as holding to Hyper-Calvinism. In a footnote, he says, "Although I think the judgment should still be surrounded with cautions and caveats, there may be compelling evidence that Gill held to the distinctive Hyper-Calvinist tenet." Thomas Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," 152-53. In Nettles, *The Baptists,* he explains why there should be "cautions and caveats." He says, "Gill differed at several points from identifiable hyper-Calvinists of the century. . . . Concerning the specific intent of gospel preaching, however, and the nature of the vocabulary employed by the preacher, Gill did not share common ground or biblical interpretation with the hyper-Calvinist" (226-27).

*cruel of all beings*, as the Arminians say we make him to be." This approach would be for God "to damn a man for that which is solely in his power to give; for no man can believe in Christ with this sort of faith, unless it be given him of his Father." Yet God has determined not to give special faith to the non-elect. In fact - and here are the key words - this kind of faith "man never had in his power to have or to exercise, no, not in the state of innocence."[43]

It is important to compare and contrast this quote with another quote where Gill seems to say the opposite:

> That Adam, in a state of innocence, had a power of believing in Christ, and did believe in him as the second Person in the Trinity, as the Son of God, cannot well be denied; since with the other two Persons, he was his creator and preserver; the knowledge of which cannot well be thought to be withheld from him. And his not believing in him as the Mediator, Savior, and Redeemer, did not arise from any defect of power in him, but from the state, condition, and situation in which he was, and from the nature of the revelation made unto him; for no doubt, Adam had a power to believe every word of God, any revelation that was, or might be made unto him.[44]

Yet a careful comparison of the two quotes in the context of Gill's soteriology, and assuming that Gill is consistent at this point, yields an agreement between the two. According to the second quote, Adam had the power to believe anything God revealed to him. The reason he did not believe in Christ as Savior was because there was no revelation of Christ as Savior (because there was no need). Had there been a need *and* a revelation of special faith he would have believed. He had the capacity to believe if God had given him special faith.

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[43]John Gill, "Faith in God and His Word," 17.

[44]John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth,* 474.

When Gill says, in the first quote, that Adam did not have the power to have or exercise faith (meaning special faith) in the state of innocence he seems to mean this lack of power was the case because such faith is supernatural. The former quote agrees with the latter quote because the meaning is that Adam did not have the ability to believe (though he had the capacity) because God did not reveal, or give, special faith to him.

Technically, this view could push Gill into Hyper-Calvinism as defined in this dissertation. However, there are nuances in Gill, as well as complexity in the theological debates of the eighteenth century, that call for caution in labeling Gill a Hyper-Calvinist. The most amazing nuance is that while Gill rejects the idea of man's condemnation for lack of special faith (which only God can give), he accepts the idea that man is condemned for "contempt of his gospel."[45]

A further explanation, though somewhat repetitious, may be helpful. Gill says, "As is the revelation which is made to men, such is the faith that is required of them." This view means, "If there is no revelation made unto them, no faith is required of them." This idea also means that "unbelief, or want of faith in Christ, will not be their damning sin." Again, what is the basis of man's damnation? Not "for their want of faith in Christ, or his gospel, which they never heard of, but for their sins committed against the law and light of nature." However, "if a revelation is made" it will either be "external or internal." If it is "only an external revelation" then "the faith required is an assent unto it, and a reception of it." If those who receive this external revelation neglect it "or reject and

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[45]Gill, "Faith in God and His Word."

> So, though if it pleases God to give men special faith in Christ, for the remission of their sins, they will certainly be saved; but then it is not the want of this faith in the blood of Christ, for the pardon of sins, that is the cause of any man's condemnation and death, but the transgressions of the law of God, and the contempt of his gospel they have been guilty of (16-18).

despise it," they will be damned. Apparently, this neglect or rejection of the external revelation will become their damning sin. If God makes an internal revelation "and reveals his Son in them, as well as to them; this sort of revelation comes with such power and influence upon the mind, as certainly to produce a true and living faith in the soul." This fact of internal revelation means "of such persons, and such only, acts of special faith in Christ, are required."[46]

How are Gill's views concerning ability to be reconciled? He clearly sees that God can rightfully condemn a man for requiring what is not within man's ability to perform. Yet, concerning special faith he rejects such a notion. The key seems to lie in his view that special faith is "solely" within God's power to give. Man has the natural ability to perform but not the moral ability.[47] Thus, it is his moral inability, which is a sinful lack of willing, that is condemnatory. However, when it comes to special faith, this kind of faith was never within man's natural ability since God supernaturally gives it to him. Man has the ability to believe and is required to do so. Thus, he can perform acts of belief but unless there is special grace given by God this faith will never be special faith. Still, failure to believe is a damning sin, though this belief is not special faith. Man did

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[46]Ibid. Gill, in speaking of believers, says,

> Though the sin of unbelief is often found in them, it is such as is consistent with true faith in Christ, and which in the issue is overcome by it: this is the sin of unbelief, that is opposite to special faith, and obstructs it in its acts; but partly because it is pardoned with the other sins of believers, and partly because it is finally subdued and vanquished, it is never the damning sin of any. So I think the truth of things stands (Ibid.).

[47]In *Cause of God and Truth,* 52, Gill points out the importance of making a distinction between natural and moral liberty of the will. An interesting point here is that he is predating Jonathan Edwards's published distinction between natural and moral ability in *Freedom of the Will.* Edwards had read Gill as is evidenced by a footnote on p. 374. See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will,* ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University, 1957). It seems that the distinction between natural and moral was much older than merely an eighteenth-century discussion. Gill has a footnote reference at this point to Theophilus Gale's, *The Court of the Gentiles*, published in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

have, and does have, the responsibility to believe whatever God reveals to him. In response to this revelation, man's lack of ability to believe is man's own sinful fault. This responsibility is true concerning the gospel as well. However, special faith is a special category, and is solely in God's hand to give and thus men are not responsible for producing this kind of faith, although they are responsible to exercise it once the internal revelation is given to them. Men are condemned based on the revelation they are given, not for the revelation they are not given.

Concerning the duty of man, what he does affirm is that all men have obligations before God but the revelation of the gospel only comes to certain people. Among those, only certain ones – the elect – will respond spiritually and correctly to the gospel. The reason for this correct response is the work of the Spirit. On the other hand, the basis of the condemnation of those who refuse to obey God is their sinfulness before God and their failure to respond to the revelation God has given them. They will not be condemned for lack of revelation. According to Gill, man is obligated to believe the gospel as it is revealed to him. If it is only an external revelation that is what he is obligated to believe.[48] He is not obligated to produce special faith since he cannot produce it. In other words, man is not obligated in the supernatural realm, only in the natural realm.[49]

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[48]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth.*

> The duty required by God, in the places referred to, does not design internal conversion, but external reformation; which latter, men may be capable of effecting, though not of the former. Though admitting internal conversion is meant, God's requiring it does not suppose man's ability to perform it, but his need of it (341).

[49]Ibid., 340. Gill says,

> Nothing is more certain, than that God does both require of us to do, and he himself promises to do, the whole work of conversion; which he does not by persuasion, or laying before us inducements to

On the one hand, Gill appears to be in technical agreement with the definition of Hyper-Calvinism. On the other hand, his position on the distinction between natural and moral ability is in agreement with Fuller – a position which came to Fuller through Jonathan Edwards.[50] Thus, Gill sees the duty to obey as present even with the lack of ability that comes from sin. People are condemned for failure to obey God. God has revealed himself to *all* through his law. He reveals himself to *some* through the external ministry of the Word (the gospel preached). To *some* of these he reveals himself in grace with an internal revelation. For Gill, supernatural, saving grace is technically not a duty. It appears that Gill's concern with the denial of special faith as a duty has to do with guarding against faith causing regeneration and rejecting faith as a condition to the covenant of grace. The only people called to exercise saving faith as a duty are the elect because they are the only people who receive an effectual calling to faith, thus regeneration not only precedes faith, but also produces faith. Therefore, man is not obligated in the supernatural realm (until he has such supernatural revelation), but only in the natural realm.[51]

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> it, as is suggested, but by unfrustrable influence. And yet his command to do it does not imply that we are gods, or have equal power with him, as is intimated; nor does praying to him for the performance of what he requires of us, and he has promised, suppose a desire to be excused from obeying his commands. The commands of God show his authority, and man's duty; the promises of God discover his grace and power, and are a relief to man's weakness, which no way lessen his obligation to duty (Ibid.).

[50]See n. 47 no p. 142 of this dissertation. For the influence of Jonathan Edwards on Andrew Fuller see Nettles, *The Baptists,* 263-66.

[51]Paul Helm, "Analysis 23," [on-line], accessed 16 April 2010; available from http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/01/analysis-23-nemo-obligatur-ad.html. Internet. Helm quotes Gill's *Cause of God and Truth,* 453:

> However, there are many things which may be believed and done by the reprobates, and therefore they may be justly required to believe and obey; it is true, they are not able to believe in Christ to the saving of their souls, or to perform spiritual and evangelical obedience, but then it will be difficult to prove that God requires these things of them, and should that appear, yet the impossibility of doing,

## Law and Gospel

The second idea is the distinction between law and gospel. Gill does not place the law and gospel in opposition to each other but distinguishes between them. "The Gospel agrees with the law" concerning condemnation of sin and exhortation toward righteousness.[52] Gill points out that the law of God "takes in the whole duty of men."[53]

All laws are moral in nature and speak to man's morality, having been "written upon the heart of man before his fall, when he had sufficient strength and power to keep them." These laws rightfully remain in force even "though man has lost his power to obey them, and cannot obey them without the assistance of divine grace." God is not obligated to give grace to man to fulfill the law and "God's withholding, and his decree

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arises from the corruption of their hearts, being destitute of the grace of God, and not from the decree of reprobation.

Helm says "Gill appears unnaturally to restrict spiritual obedience only to the gospel." But Gill is referring to obedience flowing from grace and salvation. This spiritual obedience is not required of the reprobate because it is only required of the elect. Elsewhere Gill speaks of other spiritual duties so he does not restrict spiritual obedience only to the gospel. But in this context the concern is the gospel. Helm does understand Gill correctly in that "there are different grades of ability, and so different grades of obligation." Helm also says that it "seems that he has not quite made up his mind on this issue." This may be true – Gill may not have made up his mind on this issue. Helm's verdict is that "there is some inconsistency in Gill's attitude to the principle that ought implies can. In some cases not covered by straightforward cases of physical impossibility he seems to imply that ought does imply can, in other cases not. This inconsistency is unfortunate; nevertheless, it makes it harder to pin the label of 'hyper-Calvinist' on Gill." This may be inconsistency. However, this could also be Gill allowing for mystery concerning this issue.

[52]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 78. Under a discussion of the "perfection" of the Scriptures, Gill speaks of "the essential parts of them" being "the Law and Gospel." Gill then compares these two parts:

> The Law is a perfect rule of duty; it contains what is the "good, acceptable, and perfect will of God", Romans 12:2. What he would have done, or not done; the whole duty of man, both towards God and man; all is comprehended in these two commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, etc. and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", Matthew 22:37-40.The Gospel is the "perfect law", or doctrine "of liberty", the apostle James speaks of, James 1:25 which proclaims the glorious liberty of the children of God by Christ; and it is perfect, it treats of perfect things; of perfect justification by Christ; of full pardon of sin through his blood, and complete salvation in him; and contains a perfect plan of truth; every truth, "as it is in Jesus"; all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: it is the whole, or all the counsel of God, concerning the spiritual and eternal salvation of men, Acts 20:27 (Ibid., 75).

to withhold that assistance, being neither of them the cause of man's disability, but his own vitiosity." The continuance of the law is for the purposes of keeping

> up the authority of the lawgiver, to assert his dominion over man, to declare his will, to show the vile nature of sin, and what satisfaction is requisite for it; to discover the impotency of man, without the grace of God; for the direction of such who have it in their walk and conversation; for the restraint of others under the influence of common providence; and for the declaration of his displeasure and indignation against sin, and his strict justice in punishing of it.[54]

Therefore, all of the responsibility and thus culpability for obeying the law falls upon man regardless of present ability to obey the law. Further, because greater knowledge of the will of God should advantageously result in reasonable creatures obeying that law, when man sinfully disobeys the law the result is a greater display of his disobedience. Therefore, God is right to display his justice against such sinfulness.[55]

In answering a criticism which charges that, "pressing men to duty" is "legal preaching," Gill says "pressing men to duty, can be no other than legal preaching" because "duty can be referred to nothing else but the law." Preaching the duties of the law is part of the ministry of the Word. These duties "should be opened and explained; men should be taught their duty to God and one another; they should be pressed." Here,

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[53]Ibid., 370.

[54]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 559-60.

[55]Ibid., 560. Specifically, Gill says,

> Though the knowledge of the will of God does not give men power and ability to do it; yet it puts men in a better situation, and in a better capacity of doing it, than men wholly ignorant of it are; and it may be more reasonably expected, that such should be disposed to do it, be desirous of it, and implore that assistance which is necessary to it; and therefore, when, on the contrary, such persons *hate* the very *knowledge* they have, and *choose not the fear of the Lord,* but say, *depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;* it can never be inconsistent with the justice of providence to aggravate the sins of these men on this account. So the sins of men who enjoy the Gospel revelation, being committed, against greater light and stronger motives to perform their duty, than ever were vouchsafed to the heathen world, must be an aggravation of them, notwithstanding their inability to perform it; since that inability does not arise from the decree of preterition, but from their own wickedness (Ibid. Italics in original.).

Gill explains his view of preaching law and gospel. Men should be "exhorted" to fulfill their duties under the law but this exhortation should be "with gospel-motives and arguments, such as the apostles frequently make use of in their epistles." However, they should also be instructed "where grace and strength lie, and are to be had to assist them in it." This type of preaching is not only for believers but for the unconverted as well. Gill states, "The preaching of the law is of use both to saints and sinners." The purpose of the preaching of the law is so that the Holy Spirit would use it to bring people to the knowledge of sin, "though by it is no knowledge of a Saviour from sin." The law's purpose is to show "the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the deformity of nature, the imperfection of man's obedience, and what is requisite to his justification before God; though it leaves him ignorant of that righteousness which can only answer its demands." The law is also of use as "a rule of walk and conversation to believers."[56]

Gill attaches great importance to keeping this distinction between the law and gospel. He says, "All duty belongs to a law; grace and promises of grace, belong to the gospel, but precepts and duty to the law."[57]

> I am entirely for calling things by their right names; preaching duty, is preaching the law; preaching the free grace of God, and salvation by Christ, is preaching the gospel; to say otherwise, is to turn the gospel into a law and to blend and confound both together. Some very worthy divines, whose names I forbear to mention, did formerly talk of gospel-commands, gospel-threatenings, and gospel-duties, which, to me, are contradictions in terms; and I fear that this loose and unguarded way of talking, tended to pave the way for *Neonomianism* among us, which some few years ago, gave the churches so much disturbance, and the bad effects of which we still feel.[58]

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[56]John Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 47-48.

[57]Ibid., 48.

[58]Ibid. See also John Brine, "The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ Asserted," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 153-54. Brine quotes Witsius as arguing that all of the Reformed hold to this distinction between law and gospel.

Gill's comments on Acts 13:38 speak to the difference between preaching the law and preaching the gospel. He says, "Forgiveness of sins . . . is an act of free grace and mercy" that comes to believers "through the blood of Christ." He calls this "a principal doctrine of the Gospel," a doctrine "which the light of nature and law of Moses know nothing of." The existence of a God is "known by the light of nature." In addition, concerning the law of Moses, it "declares what is good, and gives knowledge of evil, yet admits not of repentance as a satisfaction for sin committed; nor does it represent God as merciful, but as just, and so accuses, condemns, and kills." On the other hand, "the doctrine of forgiveness is a pure doctrine of the Gospel; and when it is preached aright, it is preached through Christ, not through the works of the law, not through repentance, nor through faith, nor through the absolute mercy of God, but through Christ, through the blood of Christ."[59]

Gill emphasizes that the law requires duty. But how is it that the law is presented to man? God put the law on Adam's heart and therefore it is innate to him. Even after the fall, man has innate remnants of the law and this remnant is why Paul speaks of Gentiles having the law written on their hearts.[60] As for the Israelites, they have the law revealed through Moses, which "takes in the whole duty of men."[61] With the coming of the gospel comes instruction in the right practice of our duty. At regeneration

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[59]Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* 8:269-70.

[60]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 4. Gill says, "every man, as a creature of God, is subject to him, its Creator and Lawgiver; and to his law: to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man; and is the duty of every man; and was the duty of Christ, as man" (397). See also idem, *Cause of God and Truth,* 436; idem, "The Law Established by the Gospel," 14; John Gill, "The Law in the Hand of Christ," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 12.

[61]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 370.

God writes anew his perfect law on the hearts of the saints.[62] The Spirit gives grace and assistance in the exercise of graces, the combination of these bringing about the right performance of duty among God's saints.[63] The result of the saints exercising grace and performing duties is sanctification. However, it is important that the performance of duty not be confused with faith and the gospel.[64]

## Natural and Supernatural

The third idea is the distinction between natural and supernatural. Adam stood in the natural category, although this category does not mean there was no revelation

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[62]Ibid., 71-72. Gill says that Christ, by the external ministry of the word shows "what is their duty in obedience to him" (434-44).

[63]Gill, *Exposition of Old and New Testaments,* 4:489. Gill speaks of

> A heart purified by faith in his blood, a new heart and a new spirit, in which his laws are put and written; a heart to know him, fear him, love him, and believe in him: and as he requires the heart in the exercise of every grace, as faith, fear, and love; so in the performance of, every duty, which, without the heart, is of no avail; as in prayer, singing of praise, and hearing the word, and other religious services (Ibid.).

[64]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 485: "His people do obey from the heart the doctrines and ordinances delivered to them; yet it is not by their obedience of faith and duty, that they obtain the forgiveness of their sins; but through the blood of Christ, shed for many, for the remission of sins." In speaking of the command to be holy, Gill, in *Cause of God and Truth,* says,

> The words (1 Peter 1:16.) referred to, are not a command to all men to be holy, but an exhortation to the Israel of God, to such who were called, by the grace of God, to be holy and unblameable, to which they were chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world; but admitting they are a command to all men to be holy, God's command only expresses what is his will should be man's duty, not what he has determined shall be done. It may be every man's duty to be holy, and yet God may resolve not to give his grace to some persons to make them holy, without which they cannot be so (452).

See also p. 454.

John Brine, "A Treatise on Various Subjects," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), clarifies this idea of sanctification: "The other branch of sanctification consists, in an attendance to holy duties, and the exercise of grace therein. The performance of duty, without the exercise of grace, brings no glory to God, nor any spiritual advantage to our souls" (92).

made for there certainly was as "a divine revelation was necessary to Adam."[65] According to this "natural" revelation to Adam, his duty was set forth "to worship, serve, and glorify God."[66] When God "first made and gave laws to man, he was in a capacity to obey them; they were not impossible to be performed by him, he was not then in his lapsed estate." Thus, there is a difference, which all would affirm, between Adam in his state of innocence and in his fallen state.

Obviously, God is right to place laws into effect in the period of Adam's innocence. However, God also has the right to continue to require obedience to his laws in the fallen state of man. The law of God manifests God's authority "though man has lost his power to obey." In fact, "man's present impossibility to fulfill the law of God" is not caused by "the nature of that law." Instead, man's impossibility of fulfilling the law of God comes "from that vitiosity and corruption which he has contracted by sin." This corruption means, "It is not unsuitable to divine justice to punish for that which man cannot do, or cannot avoid." Therefore, Gill holds the view that God can rightfully punish man for failure to fulfill his duties even if he is unable to accomplish these duties.

Gill also says that it is not "unsuitable to the sincerity of God, nor in vain, that he makes use of motives, as promises and threatenings, to excite men to duty, which he knows cannot work upon them without his powerful grace." This use of promises and threatening "more fully points out the duty of man, admonishes him of it, expresses more largely the vile nature and dreadful consequences of sin, leaves the impenitent inexcusable, and, by the power of his grace accompanying these means, brings his own

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[65]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 23-25.

[66]Ibid., 310-11.

people effectually to himself."[67]

### Distinction Between Natural Faith/Repentance and Supernatural Faith/Repentance

The fourth idea is the distinction between natural faith or repentance and supernatural faith or repentance. Another way to refer to this distinction is to speak of the distinction between legal and evangelical faith/repentance.[68] Man's duty is to love God and obey God. However, we are not obligated to exercise grace outside of God's grace. Evangelical faith and repentance are not our duties because they are gifts of grace.[69] The distinctions are not always clear in Gill, but this lack of clarity is partly because they will not always be clear in reality. Thus, things may appear to be the same in one who has evangelical repentance and one who has mere natural conviction of sin.[70]

Concerning "exhorting to repentance," Gill believes it is important to specify what kind of repentance is being discussed "or upon what considerations an exhortation to it is given." This distinction is important because there is both "an evangelical and a

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[67]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* 518. For further discussion concerning this and many of the other ideas discussed in this chapter see John Brine, "A Refutation of Arminian Principles, Delivered in a Pamphlet Entitled, 'The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith, Examined with Candor' etc. In a Letter to a Friend"; idem, "Motives to Love and Unity Among Calvinists, Who Differ in Some Points," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 11-31; idem, "The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ Asserted," 73.

[68]John Calvin describes this distinction. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles.*The Library of Christian Classics,* vols. 20-21,(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:596-97.

[69]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 375-77.

[70]John Brine, in "A Treatise on Various Subjects," points this out:

> There is a great difference in the obedience of a person who is the subject of a legal conviction, and that of a spiritual person. This difference is not in the external matter of it; for that, I grant, may be the same in both, as to abstinence from sin, and the practice of duty. The one may be as outwardly regular, and religious as the other. But still there is a vast difference in the obedience of these persons (122).

legal repentance." Gill then defines what he means by these: "evangelical repentance has God for its object, and is called repentance toward God (Acts 20:21)" and "is the gift of Christ, who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31)." This repentance is a godly sorrow for sin. Exhortations to repentance were made by "John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), Christ, and his apostles." Gill did not believe in preaching this evangelical repentance *only* to awakened people. Instead, exhortations to repentance were to show "the necessity of repentance, or to encourage the exercise of this grace in the saints, or to stir them up to an open profession of it, and to bring forth fruits in their conversation meet for the same."[71]

On the other hand, "legal repentance is a work of the law, and consists in outward confession of sin, and external humiliation for it, and an inward horror, wrath and terror, upon the account of it." Like evangelical repentance, legal repentance "is a sorrow and concern for sin." However, it differs from evangelical repentance in that it does not view sin "as it is in its own nature exceeding sinful, or as it is an offense to God, and a breach of his law, but as it entails upon the sinner ruin and destruction."[72] An example of this distinction is in Gill's commentary on Acts 2:37-38. In speaking of the command to repent, Gill says,

> This the apostle said, to distinguish between a legal and an evangelical repentance; the former is expressed in their being pricked to the heart, on which they were not to depend; the latter he was desirous they might have, and show forth; which springs from the love of God, is attended with views, or at least hopes of pardoning grace and mercy, and with faith in Christ Jesus: it lies in a true sight and sense of sin, under the illuminations and convictions of the Spirit of God; in a sorrow for it, after a godly sort, and because it is committed against a God of love, grace, and mercy,

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[71]Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect," 49.

[72]Ibid.

> and it shows itself in loathing sin, and in shame for it, in an ingenuous acknowledgement of it, and in forsaking it.[73]

Gill, therefore, agrees with the preaching of repentance, and even the exhortation to repentance. The differentiation in the life of a person between the two kinds of repentance is not for the preacher to make – although he may inform the hearer of the difference – but is manifested by the heart response of the hearer, as the Holy Spirit works in him.[74] A good example of the differentiation is in Gill's commentary on Acts 2:38 where Peter commands his hearers to "repent." Gill says,

> Change your minds, entertain other thoughts, and a different opinion of Jesus of Nazareth, than you have done; consider him, and believe in him, as the true Messiah and Saviour of the world; look upon him, not any more as an impostor, and a blasphemer, but as sent of God, and the only Redeemer of Israel; change your voice and way of speaking of him, and your conduct towards his disciples and followers; a change of mind will produce a change of actions in life and conversation: bring forth fruits meet for repentance; and make an open and hearty profession of repentance for this your sin. And this the apostle said, to distinguish between a legal and an evangelical repentance; the former is expressed in their being pricked to the heart, on which they were not to depend; the latter he was desirous they might have, and show forth.[75]

However, the issue Gill has with preaching repentance is when it is presented "as within the compass of the power of man's will, and as a condition of the covenant of grace, and

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[73]Gill, *Exposition of Old and New Testaments,* 8:160.

[74]The preacher may emphasize the difference between the two, including the danger of only having legal repentance. However, the external command to repent is given to all.

[75]Ibid. This differentiation also seems to be the best way to understand Gill on Acts 3:17-26. He moves through this passage on two tracks: one deals with external, legal repentance for the nation of Israel and the other track deals with evangelical repentance. He says,

> These Jews had crucified the Lord of glory, and for this sin were threatened with miserable destruction; the apostle therefore exhorteth them to repentance for it, and to a conversion to the Messiah, that so when ruin should come upon their nation, they might be delivered from the general calamity; when it would be terrible times to the unbelieving and impenitent Jews, but times of refreshment, ease, peace, and rest from persecution, to the believers, as is next expressed (168).

a term of acceptance with God, and in order to make peace with God, and gain the divine favor." This kind of preaching, he says, is "unworthy of a minister of the gospel."[76]

> Repentance being represented as a command, does not suppose it to be in the power of men, or contradict evangelical repentance, being the free grace gift of God, but only shows the need men stand in of it, and how necessary and requisite it is; and when it is said to be a command to all, this does not destroy its being a special blessing of the covenant of grace to some; but points out the sad condition that all men are in as sinners, and that without repentance they must perish: and indeed, all men are obliged to natural repentance for sin, though to all men the grace of evangelical repentance is not given: the Jews call repentance . . . "the command of repentance", though they do not think it obligatory on men, as the other commands of the law. The law gives no encouragement to repentance, and shows no mercy on account of it; it is a branch of the Gospel ministry, and goes along with the doctrine of the remission of sins; and though in the Gospel, strictly taken, there is no command, yet being largely taken for the whole ministry of the word, it includes this, and everything else which Christ has commanded, and was taught by him and his apostles (Matthew 28:20).[77]

This quote is somewhat confusing when compared with Gill's answer to the question, "whether repentance is a doctrine of the law or of the gospel?" His answer is that since repentance is a command and is thus a duty "it belongs to the law, as all duty does." However, the law does not "admit of it as a satisfaction for it; nor gives any encouragement to expect that God will receive repenting sinners into his grace and favour upon it."[78]

> This is what the gospel does, and not the law; the law says not, repent and live, but do and live. Moreover, there is what may be called a legal repentance and contrition; for by the law is the knowledge of sin, without which there can be no repentance; and it works a sense of wrath in the sinners conscience, and a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation from an incensed God; but if it stop here, it will prove no other than a worldly sorrow, which worketh death. The Spirit of God may make use of this, and go on and produce spiritual repentance, such a repentance as is unto life, even life eternal; and unto salvation, which needeth not to be repented of:

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[76]Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect," 49-50.

[77]Gill, *Exposition of Old and New Testaments,* 8:312.

[78]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 376.

> but such a repentance is not the work of the law; for life and salvation come not by any work of the law; but true repentance, which has salvation annexed to it, is, as faith, a blessing of the covenant of grace; a grant from God, a gift of Christ as a Saviour, and with it remission of sins; a grace produced in the soul by the Spirit of Christ, by means of the gospel, which only encourages to the exercise of it; see Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Galatians 3:2.[79]

Further, Gill desires to keep a clear distinction between law and gospel.

> The gospel, taken in a large sense, as has been observed in the beginning of this chapter, includes both the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel; and the one, as well as the other, are taught, and directed to be observed; yea, all good works, which the law requires, are moved and urged unto in the ministry of the gospel, upon gospel principles and motives: the gospel of the grace of God, which brings the good tidings of salvation, instructs and urges men to do good works, and to avoid sin, Titus 2:11, 12; 3:8. But the gospel, strictly taken, is a pure declaration of grace, a mere promise of salvation by Christ. All duty and good works belong to the law; promise and grace belong to the gospel; the works of the law, and the grace of the gospel, are always opposed to each other, Romans 3:20, 24, 28; Ephesians 2:8. And if there were any works distinct from the law, and not required by it, which, if not performed, would be sin; then the apostle's definition of sin, as a transgression of the law, would not be a full and proper one, 1 John 3:4 since then there would be sins which were not transgressions of the law; wherefore, as all evil works are transgressions of the law, all good works are required and enjoined by it.[80]

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[79]Ibid. Gill explains his view further:

> And so is a doctrine of the gospel, and not of the law, as appears from the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who exhorted and encouraged to repentance from gospel motives; and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4. But what has the law to do either with baptism or the remission of sins? His ministry was evangelical, and ran in the same strain with the apostles, as appears from their answer to a question put to them; "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" A serious question, put upon thought and reflection by persons upon the bottom of a covenant of works, as the Jews really were; and especially under a sense of guilt, as those were, desirous to know what must be done by them, that they "might be saved"; as it may be supplied from the jailor's words, when in the same case; or whereby they might make atonement for, and obtain the pardon of so great a sin, of which they were guilty: to which a proper answer is returned, putting them off of legal works for such purposes, and directing them to evangelical ones;"Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, for the remission of sins," Acts 2:37,38.And this is also clear from the story of Christ himself; who came, not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance; which was not a legal, but evangelical repentance. He began his ministry thus; "Repent, and believe the gospel", see Matthew 9:13; Mark 1:15. With which agrees the ministry of the apostles in general; who, by the direction of Christ, preached repentance and remission of sins in his name; which most certainly was the gospel; the one, as well as the other, a doctrine of the gospel, Luke 24:47. And the apostle Paul, who was a most evangelical preacher, divides his whole ministry into these two parts; "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," Acts 20:21 (376-77).

[80]Ibid., 377.

Gill also makes a distinction between natural and supernatural faith. He says it is "our duty to believe in Jesus when Jesus is preached but this does not mean it is our duty to exercise the grace of special faith." Here he places an important nuance in his understanding of faith. He says, "Faith, as an act of ours, is a duty." This idea means this act of faith is a requirement of the law. However, this act of faith is not a justifying faith.[81]

Instead, man is justified by the righteousness of Christ. Faith is not that righteousness. This fact applies whether considering faith "as a duty performed, or as a grace exercised by the believer."[82] For Gill, faith is both a duty and a gift. He says, "faith as such is a work of the law, as it is the gift of God, and a grace bestowed upon us; it is a part of the covenant of grace." That is, "as it is a duty required of us, and performed by us, it belongs to the law and is done in obedience to it."[83] Gill references two Scripture passages in order to show this convergence of duty and grace:

> [Faith] is called the commandment of God. This is his commandment, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, 1 John 3:23. It is called the work of God, John 6:28, 29 not only because it is wrought in us by God, but also because it

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[81]Gill, "The Doctrine of Justification by the Righteousness of Christ Stated and Maintained."

> For whatsoever we do, in a religious way, we do but what is our duty to do; and, if it is a duty, it belongs to the law; for, as all the declarations and promises of grace belong to the gospel, so all duties belong to the law; and if faith belongs to the law, as a duty, it is a work of it, and therefore by it we cannot be justified; *for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified* (9).

[82]Gill, "The Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness."

> The just man is said to live by his faith, Hebrews 17:5. And says our Lord to the woman of Canaan, O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt, Matthew 5:28. And says the apostle, James 2:28 shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. But now the righteousness by which a man is justified before God, is not his own, but another's, and therefore imputed to him. Hence the apostle Paul desired to be found in Christ, not having on, says he, mine own righteousness, which is of the law, Philippians 3:9. Whereas if faith had been his righteousness, he should have desired to have on his own righteousness, and not another's (8).

[83]Ibid.

> is required of us by him; every command and all duty belongs to the law, as every promise and all grace does to the gospel. Now if faith, as an act of ours, is our justifying righteousness, then we are justified by a work of the law, whereas the scripture says, Romans 3:20: By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.[84]

How does faith function in this capacity? Gill says, "Faith is the hand which receives the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of our salvation." For this reason, "faith is that grace to which this righteousness is revealed, and by which the soul first spies it. When beholding its glory, sufficiency and suitableness, it approves of it, and renounces its own righteousness." It is by the grace of faith that "a soul puts on Christ's righteousness as its garment, and rejoices therein, by which all boasting in a man's own works is excluded, and by which all the glory of justification is given to Christ."[85]

The clearest explanation from Gill concerning this issue is in a section in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* where he addresses "whether faith is a duty of the moral law, or is to be referred to the gospel?" His answer is "that as the law is not of faith, so faith is not of the law."[86] It is here where understanding Gill's distinctions is important. He says,

> There is a faith indeed which the law requires and obliges to, namely, faith and trust in God, as the God of nature and providence; for as both the law of nature, and the law of Moses, show there is a God, and who is to be worshipped; they both require a belief of him, and trust and confidence in him; which is one part of the worship of him enjoined therein: moreover the law obliges men to give credit to any revelation

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[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid., 10. Evidence that Gill did not see a time separation between regeneration and faith can be found in his *Exposition,* 8:225, on Acts 9:11: "God has no stillborn children; as soon as any are quickened by his grace, they cry unto him; prayer is the breath of a regenerate man, and shows him to be alive. He who before was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, now breathes after communion with Christ and them." Also, ibid., 246, on Acts 11:18: "True repentance is an evidence of spiritual life, and it begins with it, for as soon as ever God quickens a sinner, he shows him the evil of sin, and gives him repentance for it: 'repentance' here designs the grace of evangelical repentance, which is attended with faith in Christ."

[86]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 376.

> of the mind and will of God he has made, or should think fit to make unto them at any time.[87]

Therefore, there is a faith in God that is required by the law of God, but the faith that is required by the law is not "special faith in Christ as a Saviour, or believing in him to the saving of the soul." This kind of faith "the law knows nothing of, nor does it make it known; this kind of faith neither comes by the ministration of it, nor does it direct to Christ the object of it, nor give any encouragement to believe in him on the above account." Instead, special faith "is a blessing of the covenant of grace, which flows from electing love, is a gift of God's free grace, the operation of the Spirit of God." This special faith "comes by the hearing of faith, or the word of faith, as a means, that is, the gospel." The gospel "is that which points out Christ, the object of faith; and directs and encourages sensible sinners under a divine influence to exercise it on him; its language is, 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' Acts 16:31."[88]

Gill discusses the many kinds of faith that are possible and then turns to a discussion of special faith, calling it "a special and spiritual faith, to which salvation is annexed."[89] The gospel declares that this special faith brings salvation to a person. It is the gospel that "directs and encourages sensible sinners to look to Christ, and believe in

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[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., 376. In *Cause of God and Truth,* Gill says,

> Though what God commands is the rule of man's duty, yet not the measure of his strength. It is no good arguing from God's commands, to man's power in his present state. God requires men to keep the whole law; it does not follow from thence, that they are able to do it. So, though it is *his commandment, that we should believe in his Son Jesus Christ, and repent;* yet it is certain, that faith is *not of ourselves,* it is a *gift* of grace, and *of the operation of God;* and the same may be said of repentance. Moreover, though believers are active in the exercise of the graces of faith and repentance; for it is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes; yet in both men are purely passive in the first production and implantation of them in their hearts (334).

[89]Gill, "Faith in God and His Word," 4-7.

him, assuring them they shall be saved." Gill desires that the phrase "saving faith" be done away with "since it seems to derogate and detract from the glory of Christ, who is the only Savior, and to carry off the mind from the object of faith, to the act of it." This special faith does not originate with man as "it is expressly denied to be of man; *that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8) . . . those that have it, have it not from nature, but by the grace of God." [90]

Again, this special faith is distinct from the law. Gill says, "Neither is faith of the law; the law is not so much as the means of it, nor does it reveal the object, nor require the act, or direct and encourage to it; it is not the means of true faith in Christ; faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17)." He says it is "not the law, but the gospel; received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith (Galatians 3:2)? That is, by the preaching of the law, and works of it, or by the preaching of the doctrine of faith? By the latter, and not the former." Believers do not receive the Spirit by the law nor "the graces of the Spirit, and particularly faith." Gill asks, "How should it come this way, since the law does not reveal the object of it, Christ, or give the least hint concerning him? By the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20); but not the knowledge of a Savior from sin." Since the law "knows nothing, and makes known nothing of the object of faith, how can it be thought it should require the act of it? Does it require an act upon an unknown object? Does it require men to believe in an object it does not reveal, or give the least discovery of?" In addition, the law does not "give any direction or encouragement to souls to believe in Christ; its language is, *do this and live*

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[90]Ibid., 7-9.

(Galatians 3:12), but not *believe in Christ and be saved* (Acts 16:31); this is the voice of the gospel, and not of the law."[91]

In summary, all men are under the same obligation as Adam to obey God at all points, regardless of ability. All humans are under the same covenant of works. Repentance is a command for all in that "all men are indeed bound, by the law of nature, to a natural repentance."[92] When the gospel is preached and therefore people "are encouraged and influenced to repent of sin, and turn to the Lord from the promise of pardoning grace" the sinners who are "converted" and "penitent" will have the forgiveness of sin manifested to them. Such an understanding means that "the most that can be made of such an exhortation is only this; that it is both the duty and interest of men to repent and turn to God, that they may have a discovery of the remission of their sins through the blood of Christ, and not that they shall hereby procure and obtain the thing itself."[93] God gives evangelical repentance only to the elect – anyone else can only have natural repentance. Evangelical repentance comes because of a work of the Spirit, natural repentance only from man. So when Jesus is presented to man as Messiah, Lord, and Savior, man is required to believe in him.[94] Unwillingness to believe and inability to

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[91]Ibid.

[92]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* 128. In reference to Acts 17:30, "God commands all men everywhere to repent," Gill says this verse does not

> extend, as here expressed, to every individual of mankind; but only regards the men of the then present age, in distinction from those who lived in the former *times of ignorance:* for so the words are expressed: *and the times of this ignorance God winked at;* overlooked, took no notice of, sent them no messages, enjoined them no commands of faith in Christ, or repentance towards God; *but now*, since the coming and death of Christ, *commandeth all men, Gentiles* as *well as Jews, everywhere to repent;* it being his will, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations: (Luke 24:47) (Ibid.).

[93]Ibid., 128-29.

[94]Ibid. Gill takes a controversial reading of Acts 3:19, "Repent, therefore, and be converted,

believe do not negate the obligation. Failure to obey the revelation results in punishment for disobedience. However, it is important for Gill that this obligation not be confused with a requirement to get oneself under, or in, the covenant of grace.

### Will of Command and Will of Decree

The fifth idea is the distinction between the will of command and the will of decree. The Scripture, which contains the will of command, gives knowledge of the law of Moses, "but more especially of the gospel" and thus gives "light all around, both with respect to doctrine and duty."[95] Gill says that this will of command, which he also calls "God's will of precept," is "what should be done by men . . . this is the rule of men's duty; which consists of the fear of God, and keeping his commands." Even though most people do not obey this will of God and no one who is obedient to it is perfectly obedient to it, "when it is done aright it is done in faith, from love, and to the glory of God." God's

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that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord," which is the verse he is dealing with in this section of *Cause of God and Truth.* He says,

> Neither evangelical repentance and internal conversion, nor the grace of pardon are here intended; not evangelical repentance and internal conversion, as has been before observed, nor the spiritual blessing and grace of pardon; for, though pardon of sin is signified by blotting it out, Psalm 51:1, 9; Isaiah 43:25, and Isaiah 44:22; yet forgiveness of sin sometimes means no more than the removing a present calamity, or the averting of a threatened judgment, Exodus 32:32; 1 Kings 8:33-39; and is the sense of the phrase here. These Jews had crucified the Lord of glory, and for this sin were threatened with miserable destruction; the apostle therefore exhorts them to repent of it, and acknowledge Jesus to be the true Messiah; that so when *wrath* should come upon their nation *to the uttermost,* they might be delivered and saved from the general calamity; which, though these would be terrible times to the unbelieving Jews, yet would be *times of refreshing* to the people of God from troubles and persecutions. Though the last clause may be considered, not as expressing the time when their iniquities should be blotted out, but as a distinct additional promise made to penitents, and be read with the other thus: *that your sins may be blotted out, that the times of refreshing may come;*. . . and is the reading preferred by Lightfoot; and the sense is this, "Repent of your sin of crucifying Christ, acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah, and you shall not only be saved from the general destruction of your nation, but shall have the gospel and the consolation of Israel with you. Jesus Christ, who was first preached unto, you, shall be sent down unto you in the refreshing consolatory ministry of the word, though he in person must remain in heaven, *until the times of restitution of all things*" (Ibid.).

[95]Ibid., 22, 72.

will of command "shows what he approves of, and what is acceptable to him, when done aright; and is made to render men inexcusable that do it not, and to make it appear right in justice to inflict punishment on such persons." However, even though termed "the will of God" this will of command is not properly considered the will of God. Only the will of decree is "properly speaking, his Will; the other is his Word." This will of decree "is the rule of his own actions; he does all things in heaven and earth after his will."[96] It "is sometimes fulfilled by those who have no regard to his will of precept, and have no knowledge of this, even while they are doing it." Examples of this will of decree include "Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Jews and Gentiles, in doing what they did against Christ, Acts 4:27, 28."[97] A passage such as Acts 13:36 brings together the will of command and the will of decree, "For David after he served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep." Gill says, "David lived according to the will of God's command, and he died by the will of his decree."[98]

## Conclusion

So, on the one hand, a technical presentation of the definition of Hyper-Calvinism could argue for Gill's inclusion. However, Gill's nuances, along with complicating definitional factors concerning Hyper-Calvinism muddy the water and create uncertainty for categorization. Gill should not be categorized as a Hyper-Calvinist, for the following reasons. First, Gill does not fit into a neat category. In some areas, he may fit with others that are categorized as Hyper-Calvinists, but in other areas he does

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[96]Ibid., 72. See also *Cause of God and Truth,* 65.

[97]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 72.

[98]Gill, *Exposition of Old and New Testaments,* 8:269.

not. Second, he agrees in many areas with Andrew Fuller, so much so that Fuller uses Gill against those on the opposite side of the Modern Question. Yet, it is true that Gill also agrees with areas opposed to Fuller's "side" of the Modern Question.

What has been set forth as Gill's view is that Adam had the ability to believe in Christ in whatever way God revealed himself. However, this ability would not have included saving faith since there was no sin. With the fall into sin, Adam lost his moral ability and thus was now unable to believe. The foundational condemnation of man is his sin *and* his unbelief. It is clear that God does not reveal the gospel to all. However, to those who have the gospel preached to them there is a requirement to believe in Christ as he is revealed. As God's Word calls for repentance people are thus commanded to repent. This repentance is "legal" and this faith is "notional," or "historic." This faith is the only kind they can have by nature since saving faith is a gift from God. Thus, it is not a requirement for the non-elect to believe with this special faith in Christ since such belief is grace. In addition, to require saving faith of the non-elect would require they believe in Christ as their Savior when He did not die for them.

Gill's soteriology, in the anthropological sphere, displays tendencies and connections to Hyper-Calvinism. Yet, when Gill is viewed in the context of the difficulty of delineating Hyper-Calvinism, when the Modern Question debate of the eighteenth century is understood as an intra-Calvinistic debate, and when the anthropological aspects of his soteriology are correctly understood, the best approach is to refrain from placing him in the Hyper-Calvinist camp.

In addition, since an agreed-upon definition for Hyper-Calvinism is difficult to arrive at, and a technically precise definition may not satisfy nuances or blurring of lines

concerning disagreement on issues related to Hyper-Calvinism, it is best to refrain from labeling Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist. The complexity of definition is why the earlier discussion of Hyper-Calvinism proposed a web of doctrinal beliefs with an essence at the center. However, even where a person's doctrinal web has a connection to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism, it is not necessarily fair to categorize him in such a manner.[99]

[99]One of the concluding proposals of this dissertation suggests discontinuing the use of the label of Hyper-Calvinism, at least concerning eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism, as any positive reasons for using it are far outweighed by the negative. If there is disagreement on the issue of special faith, as between Gill and Fuller, that difference should be debated without resorting to a label that is so easily misunderstood. The same can be said for disagreements with other issues.

# CHAPTER 6

## LEGAL ASPECTS OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

Antinomianism, a term that means "against the law," is often connected to definitions or descriptions of Hyper-Calvinism.[1] Antinomianism "rejects the moral law in general and the Decalogue in particular as regulative for Christian behavior."[2] Geoffrey F. Nuttall, in an article entitled "Calvinism in Free Church History," comments that,

> Antinomianism is not Calvinism; but it is Calvinism's peril. Every religious system has its peril. Catholicism can degenerate into superstition, Protestantism into a thin humanism. Therefore, Calvinism can degenerate into antinomianism of a dry, doctrinal kind, in which God's predetermination of all things not only precedes human action, including obedience to God's law, but also precludes it, makes it gratuitous for those already predestined to salvation. The curious thing is that Calvinism's opposite, whether Arminianism, universalism or enthusiasm, can also degenerate into antinomianism, though of a more practical kind. Here an emphasis on the unconditioned love of God for all men, or on the ability of men, by their reason or their innate goodness, to have some share in their salvation, at least by way of response to God's grace, can breed a tolerant compassionateness, and then a

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[1]A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1961), 133, seems to imply this when he says "Antinomianism has always been the dark shadow cast by the more extreme forms of Calvinism." Curt Daniel, Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 618, lists other sources for this equation of Antinomianism and Hyper-Calvinism.

[2]Gabriel Fackre, "Antinomianism," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 27. On Gill and Antinomianism see Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," 608-91; Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity,* vol. 1(Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 153; Timothy George, "John Gill," *Baptist Theologians,* ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), says, "Antinomianism is the view that, since Christ both bore the penalty of sin and fulfilled the law, those under grace are not required to obey the moral law" (92). For theological discussions of Antinomianism see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 3:399, 530-31, 568-69; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 514-15, 517-18, 543, 611; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 2:141-45.

loose permissiveness, wholly antipathetic to the fulfillment of law divine or human.[3]

Thus, antinomianism consists of two categories: doctrinal and practical. No one believes in classifying Gill as a practical Antinomian.[4] Most evaluators of Gill do not regard him as a doctrinal Antinomian, either. However, historically, there are some who have charged him with antinomianism.[5] Among modern writers, Thomas Ascol argues that Gill moves in the direction of doctrinal antinomianism.[6] On the other hand, Curt Daniel says, "Gill is most certainly in the mainstream of Reformed thought regarding the law."[7] Timothy George says, "Anyone who has examined Gill's *Body of Practical Divinity* or looked at his sermons on 'The Law Established by the Gospel' and 'The Law

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[3]Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Calvinism in Free Church History" *BQ* 22 (1967-68), 425.

[4]Curt Daniel, "John Gill and Hyper-Calvinism," 656: "As for Gill, he was certainly innocent of even the slightest hint of libertinism."

[5]Underwood, *History of the English Baptists,* claims that Gill and others have "often been called Antinomians" (135). Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller," (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 230, says the same as does Robert E. Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian, 1697-1771," (Ph.D. diss. Edinburgh University, 1953), 70. Daniel, "John Gill and Hyper-Calvinism," points out that "Gill often denied all charges in a controversial manner. For example: 'If this is to be an Antinomian, I am quite content to be called one; such bug-bear names do not frighten me.' 'I am a Baptist, he may call me, if he pleases, a new Baptist, or an Old Calvinistic one, or an Antinomian; it is a very trifle to me by what name I go.' '[I] had chosen to suffer reproach, the loss of good name and reputation, to forego popularity, wealth and friends, yea to be traduced as an Antinomian, rather than to drop or conceal, any branch of truth respecting Christ and free grace'" (614). Nonetheless, Gill did deny the charge and many historians since have denied that he was an Antinomian, either practically or doctrinally. Daniel gives one example of an Antinomian charge against Gill made by an anonymous treatise entitled, "A Sufferer for Truth," which "contended that Gill's theory of the problem of evil minimized divine holiness and opened the door for Antinomianism. He claimed that Gill's doctrine of reprobation and the permission of sin in the secret will provided an excuse for sinners on Judgment Day. Gill denied this conclusion" (210). Also, John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838), says that "some persons" raised "an hideous outcry of Antinomianism against him" (30).

[6]Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace," 173.

[7]Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 187; Daniel, "John Gill and Hypercalvinism," believes that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist but for reasons other than Antinomianism, says, "Gill never denies that the Law is a rule or standard, but he never says it is the only rule or standard. The Law and Gospel are both rules, each in their own place" (639).

in the Hand of Christ' will know how spurious is the charge of antinomianism against him." George also says that Gill could not "be an antinomian, because he denied the axiom which they affirmed, namely, that the moral law did not apply to believers as their rule of conduct."[8] This chapter will demonstrate that it is wrong to categorize Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist concerning the issue of antinomianism. Because of the charges against Gill and because there is often a close connection made between antinomianism and Hyper-Calvinism, a brief evaluation of Gill in relation to antinomianism will be helpful.[9]

## Gill's Publications Relating to Antinomianism

In responding to Abraham Taylor's charge of antinomianism in relation to his view of eternal union with Christ, Gill published "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love" in 1732.[10] Gill argues that Saltmarsh, Crisp, and others were not, in fact,

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[8]Timothy George, "John Gill," *Baptist Theologians,* 92.

[9]Clipsham states concerning Brine and Gill that "neither was a dangerous Antinomian, though both were called such because of the tendency of their teaching." E. F. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism. The Development of a Doctrine." *BQ* 20:3 (1963), 101; Alan Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), says, "Like many High Calvinists before them Gill and Brine were accused of antinomianism; and like most High Calvinists they were blameless as far as practical antinomianism was concerned." He also says, "although Gill might be thought to have added fuel to the fire by re-publishing Crisp's *Works* in 1755, thereby giving a further lease of life to what John Fletcher was to call 'Crispianity', his avowed intention was to *clear* Crisp of the charge of antinomianism by annotating the works" (79). For a discussion of Gill and antinomianism, see Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian, 1697-1771," 70-82, 215-17; Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace," 230-40; Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 171-190, where Daniel has a historical discussion including listing a number of sources on antinomianism. See Hong-Gyu Park. "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001), 66-69, where Park discusses the Antinomian tradition in relation to Particular Baptists.

[10]John Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect, and Their Eternal Union with Christ," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007); Robert W. Oliver, "John Gill (1697-1771): His Life and Ministry," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997). Oliver says that Taylor "argued that to teach that the elect are justified before faith opens the door to Antinomianism, although he was careful not to accuse Gill of Antinomianism. His later writings indicate that he believed that Antinomianism would be the inevitable result of this teaching" (25).

Antinomians[11] and that it is wrong to make a connection between eternal union and antinomianism. Taylor's great concern is with the "joining the harmless doctrine of eternal union with that hurtful one, as it may be taken, of sin's doing a believer no harm." In response, Gill charges that Taylor's design must be "to bring the doctrine of eternal union into disgrace, and an odium upon the asserters of it, as if there was a strict connection between these two, and as if those who espoused the one, held the other." He says that the idea of sin "doing a believer no harm, was never a received tenet of any body or society of Christians among us; no, not even those who have been called *Antinomians.*"[12]

Gill says that while he affirms it, the doctrine that "God sees no sin in his people" is misunderstood, stating, "When it is asserted that God sees no sin in his people, the meaning is not, that there is no sin in believers, nor any committed by them, or that their sins are no sins, or that their sanctification is perfect in this life." Instead, "sin is in the best of saints; to say otherwise is contrary to scripture, and to all the experience of God's people." Scripture proof is in 1 John 1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[13] Further, "sin is not only in the best of saints, but is also committed by them." Thus, as Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "There is not a just man upon earth, that does good and sins not." This idea also means that there is not

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[11]Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love," 3-4.

[12]Ibid., 10. See Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 180-81. Concerning Gill's discussion in this treatise, Park, "Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)," argues that "it is quite dangerous to make an attempt to understand Gill only through the eyes of the 17th century Antinomian controversy, since Gill, in his temporal and theological context, consistently makes an effort to maintain doctrinal continuity with the Reformed tradition, avoiding the Antinomian pitfall. Here we can see how deeply Gill was immersed in the Reformed tradition" (47).

[13]Gill, "The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love," 35-36.

any sin "but what has been, or may be committed by believers, excepting the sin against the Holy Ghost." The fact that Christians have "daily slips and falls" coupled with "their frequent prayers for the discoveries of pardoning grace, and the application of Christ's blood . . . confirm the truth of this."[14] In addition, the sins of believers are truly sins and the sanctification of believers does not result in perfection in this life.[15]

Gill also stresses, secondly, that the doctrine that "God does not see sin in his people" does not refer to God's omniscience. God knows all the sins of his people. Instead, this doctrine refers to the doctrine of justification, meaning that God "does not see any iniquity in them with his eye of *justice,* or so as to *punish* them for their sins, or require satisfaction at their hands for them."[16] Third, the doctrine that "God does not see the sin of his people," means that "though God does not punish his people for their sins, yet he *chastises* them in a fatherly way; he takes notice of their sins, lays his hand upon them, in order to bring them to a sense and acknowledgement of them."[17] The fourth point in Gill's discussion of this doctrine includes the distinction between God seeing sin in His people in a fatherly way and not seeing sin in them in a judicial way.

> Though God sees sin in his people, as being but in part sanctified, yet he sees no sin in them, as they are perfectly justified; though he sees sin in them, with his eye of omniscience, yet not with his eye of revenging justice; though he sees them, in respect of his providence, which reaches all things, yet not in respect of justification; though he takes notice of his people's sins so as to chastise them in a *fatherly* way, for their good; yet he does not see them, take notice of them, and observe them in a *judicial* way, so as to impute them to them, or require satisfaction for them. . . . Was God to see sin in his people in this sense, and proceed against

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[14]Ibid., 36.

[15]Ibid., 37.

[16]Ibid., 37-38.

[17]Ibid., 38.

> them in a forensic way, he must act contrary to his justice and set aside the satisfaction of his Son.[18]

Gill also addressed the issue of antinomianism in, "The Doctrine of Grace Clear'd from the Charge of Licentiousness" in 1737. Gill says that his purpose "is to vindicate the doctrine of grace from the charge of licentiousness."[19] Instead, this doctrine is a doctrine that is in "accordance with godliness." He explains that by godliness he means "the whole of practical religion, both external and internal, the exercise of every grace, and the discharge of every duty." In spite of this focus on godliness, the doctrine of grace faced charges of "libertinism." He answers the objection that "if God has chosen some . . . and made a covenant with them in Christ, to give them grace and glory, in an absolute and unconditional way . . . and they are justified alone by his righteousness, and being called by his grace shall never perish," people will sin as they wish. Yet, Gill argues, this "reasoning is borrowed from" Satan himself. Instead, passages like Romans 6:1-2 should be the guide for the believer: "What shall we say then, Shall we continue in

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[18]Ibid., 38-39.

[19]John Gill, "The Doctrine of Grace Clear'd from the Charge of Licentiousness," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 2. Gill defines the doctrine of grace as

> that system of evangelical truths which is commonly called Calvinistical; as, that God has from all eternity loved some of the human race, and has chosen them unto everlasting salvation, by Jesus Christ; that he has made a covenant of grace with his Son on the behalf of the chosen ones, which is absolute and unconditional; that Christ in the fullness of time assumed human nature, suffered and died, to redeem a special and peculiar people to himself; that by bearing their sins, and all punishment due unto them, he has made full satisfaction to the justice of God; that a sinner's justification before God is only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, without any consideration of works done by him; that pardon of sin is only through the blood of Christ, and for his sake, according to the riches of his grace; that God sees no sin in his justified and pardoned ones, so as to condemn them for it; that regeneration and conversion, are by the powerful and efficacious grace of God; and that those who are effectually called by grace, shall persevere to the end, and be eternally saved (3).

See Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 181.

sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"[20]

Gill is not surprised with the charges made against Calvinists regarding antinomianism because the Jews charged Jesus himself with being both a doctrinal and practical Antinomian.[21] It is true that there are abusers of the doctrine of grace; however, "Should the examination be strictly made, the above persons will be found, if not to a man, yet by far the greatest part, Arminians, if capable of giving any account of their religious sentiments."[22] However, abuse of the doctrine does not make the doctrine wrong.[23] In fact, Gill says it is a strange thing "that this innocent doctrine, so friendly to holiness and good works, should be thought to open a door to licentiousness!"[24]

In "The Law Established by the Gospel," published in 1739, Gill says that those opposed to "the doctrines of grace attribute it, at least, in part, to that scheme of truths which we justly esteem the gospel of Christ." They believe these doctrines "open the door to libertinism, and give men a lease to live at pleasure, in all manner of impiety." He says the primary doctrine these opposers are particularly concerned with is "the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, imputed by God the Father." The suggestion is, "If this doctrine is true, the law is made void, obedience to it becomes

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[20]Gill, "The Doctrine of Grace Clear'd from the Charge of Licentiousness," 4-6.

[21]Ibid., 5-6. Reference is made to the charge of doctrinal antinomianism at Matt 5:17 and practical antinomianism at Matt 11:18-19.

[22]Ibid., 7.

[23]Ibid.: "Be it so, that some who have notionally received and professed the pure doctrine of grace, have abused it to vile purposes; the doctrine itself is not to be rejected on that account, but the abusers of it."

[24]Ibid., 11.

unnecessary, and good works are insignificant things; and that it can be of no other use than to discourage good men in the performance of duty."[25]

Gill says, "There is a lawful and there is an unlawful use of the law." He proceeds to say, "The unlawful use of the law is to seek for life, righteousness and salvation by it." He then lists the lawful uses of the law "and which are not made void by the doctrine of faith." First, the law's design is "to inform us of the mind and will of God." He calls the law "a transcript of his holy nature and unchangeable will." Gill's view of the law, as discussed in chapter five, "points out to us our duty both to God and man." Second, the law convinces of sin. The law, by itself, does not "spiritually and savingly, convince of sin; for this is the work of the Spirit of God: but then the Spirit of God makes use of the law to work in men thorough convictions of their sinful, lost, and miserable condition by nature." A third use of the law is "to be as a glass to believers themselves." This third use means the law shows believers "the deformity of their souls by sin, and the imperfection of their obedience; whereby they grow out of love with themselves, and quit all dependence on their own righteousness for justification." A fourth "use of the law," also to believers is "to make the righteousness of Christ more dear and valuable to them for when they see how imperfect their own righteousness is." A fifth use of the law is as "a rule of life." It shows the saints how they are to act, walk, and converse. A sixth use of the law is in Gill's discussion concerning the law. However, this use is for unbelievers. While believers are no longer under the condemnation of the law, for those outside of Christ the law pronounces them guilty "and accurses them . . . it

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[25]John Gill, "The Law Established by the Gospel," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 2. See Daniel, "John Gill and Antinomianism," 181-82; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 41-42.

is the killing letter, the ministration of condemnation and death unto them. Thus the law, as to these uses of it, both to saints and sinners, is not made void by the doctrine of faith."[26]

There is a sense in which the law is abolished and that is "the law, as a covenant of works, is abolished, and done away; in this sense, it is made void to believers."[27] Another sense in which the law is abolished is as a Mosaic administration. The law is now to be considered in the hands of Christ and not the hands of Moses.[28] Third, "the law is destroyed as a yoke of bondage."[29]

> As it was a covenant of works, and as administered under the former dispensation, it *tended to bondage,* and induced a servile spirit on those that were under it, It was not only a rigid schoolmaster, but a severe taskmaster; not only setting hard lessons, but requiring strict and perfect obedience, without giving any strength to perform, or directing where it is to be had; but now, in Christ's hands, it is *a perfect law of liberty;* (James 1:25) and such as are called by grace, are made a *willing people in the day of* Christ's *power* upon them; not only to he saved alone by him, but to yield a cheerful obedience to the law, as given forth by him. In this view of it, its

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[26]Gill, "The Law Established by the Gospel," 14-16. Gill has a very similar list in "The Law in the Hand of Christ," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 17-19.

[27]Gill, "The Law Established by the Gospel," 17. Gill explains the law's relationship to the covenant of works:

> *Adam* was a covenant head and representative of all his posterity, in which he was a figure of him that was to come; the law was given to him and to all mankind in him, promising life on condition of obedience, and threatening with death in case of transgression. *Adam* soon broke this covenant, whereby sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men! for in him all have sinned, (Romans 5:12, 14) God's elect themselves not excepted. These were considered in *Adam,* their natural and federal head; they sinned in him, and fell with him; the sentence of death passed on them as on others; the reason why it was not, and never will he executed upon them is, because Christ, in the everlasting covenant, became their surety and substitute: engaged to bear the punishment of their sins, and make satisfaction to the law and justice of God for them; which he has done by his sufferings and death; and so has delivered them from the law, as a covenant of works; and from all that misery, destruction and death, it entailed upon them wherefore they are *not under the law,* as a covenant of works, but *under grace,* the covenant of grace (Ibid.).

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., 18.

> commandments are not grievous; this *yoke is easy,* and this *burden is light;* the saints serve it with pleasure.[30]

Still another sense in which the law is abrogated is in "respect to justification." He says, "We are not to seek for, and expect life and righteousness by obedience to it; and should we, our seeking would be in vain, and our expectation would be disappointed." Instead, "there can be no justification by the deeds of the law; this use of the law is entirely abolished."[31]

Gill summarizes his view of the abrogation and continuation of the law by saying,

> Though the law is made void as a covenant of works, it still continues a rule of action, walk and conversation; though it is done away as to the form of the administration of it by *Moses,* the matter, the sum and substance of it remains firm, unalterable, and unchangeable in the hands of Christ; though it is destroyed as a *yoke of bondage,* it is in being as a perfect *law of liberty;* and though believers are delivered from the curse and condemnation of it, they are not exempted from obedience to it; and though they are not to seek for justification by it, they are under the greatest obligations, by the strongest ties of love, to have a regard to all its commands.[32]

In Gill's view, "the law is established by the grace and doctrine of faith."[33] The gospel works obedience to the law in the saints. Thus, "obedience to the law by believers, is enforced upon them by the best of motives, and yielded to it by them, under the best of

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[30]Ibid. Further, he says,

> It is a terrifying law, as it is a cursing and damning one; wherefore, to such, who desire to be under it . . . it speaks wrath and vengeance, cursing and bitterness: it is a voice of words, of terrible words; which they that heard at Mount Sinai in treated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore; for they could not endure that which was commanded. But now the case is different with us under the gospel-dispensation; the scene is altered; the face of things is changed; we hear a different voice; love, grace and mercy, instead of wrath and vengeance: blessing and salvation, in the room of cursing and condemnation (Ibid.).

[31]Ibid., 19. Gill has a similar list in "The Law in the Hand of Christ," 15-17.

[32]Gill, "The Law Established by the Gospel," 19-20.

[33]Ibid., 20.

influences; it is enforced on gospel motives and principles."[34] However, the foundational reason for the establishment of the law is Christ himself. He fulfills the law and enables his people to obey the law under the influence of the gospel.[35] Gill's final exhortation is, "Let us make it appear, throughout the whole of our conduct, under the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, that we have a proper regard to the unchangeable law of God, as to the everlasting gospel of Christ Jesus."[36]

The publication of Gill's "The Necessity of Good Works unto Salvation Considered" took place in 1739. This work was his second response to Abraham Taylor, being a response to Taylor's *An Address to Young Students in Divinity, By Way Of Caution against Some Paradoxes, Which Lead To Doctrinal Antinomianism.*[37] Nettles summarizes Gill's approach in this treatise as affirming "that good works were not necessary as the causes of salvation and were not necessary as a means of procuring or of applying salvation." However, "because God had commanded them for the evidence of the genuineness of faith, for the certainty of election and calling, and for the magnifying

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[34]Ibid., 21.

[35]Ibid.

> By the doctrine of faith we establish the law, or make it stand; because we place it in the best of hands, and upon the surest foundation. The law was put into the hands of *Adam;* but it did not long continue there; it was quickly transgressed and broken. The two tables of stone, with the law written on them, were put into Moses's hands; but he, as he came down from the mount, cast them out of his hands, and broke them to pieces beneath it: but now the law, according to the doctrine of faith, is put into the hands of Christ; and there it stands, and will stand firm and sure to all generations; yea, it will stand unchangeable and unalterable to all eternity (Ibid.).

[36]Ibid., 22.

[37]John Gill, "The Necessity of Good Works unto Salvation Considered" *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

of grace to our neighbors, good works must be maintained."[38] Gill's approach to good works in this treatise is historic Calvinism.

The publication of another sermon where Gill addresses this issue, "The Law in the Hands of Christ," took place in 1761.[39] In this sermon, Gill speaks to "the firmness, stability, and duration of the law, which is invariable, unalterable, unchangeable, and eternal." The laws "were made to continue forever; and they do, and will continue forever . . . they are more unalterable and unchangeable than the laws of the Medes and Persians." This view of the law means, "The law is not destroyed by Christ but fulfilled by him." The law is in such effect that anyone who "teaches men to break, the least of the commandments of it, *shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven,* be reproved and chastised, if not punished for it." There is a sense in which the law has ceased and that is "with respect to the ministry of the law by *Moses;* as such as it has ceased." As a ministry of Moses, the law "concerned the Jews only." Therefore, it "ceased as such when their church and civil state were at an end." Now the "gospel-dispensation" is in place. He explains that the proper understanding of the continuance of the law is "not of the ministry of it, but of the matter of it, and that as moral." The ceremonial nature of the law can be "disannulled" but the moral nature "is unchangeable and eternal; whatever was *holy, just, and good,* under the former dispensation, or in ages past, is so now."[40]

In looking at the Decalogue, Gill argues, "the first table of the law concerns the

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[38]Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, 39-40. See also Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 182-83.

[39]John Gill, "The Law in the Hands of Christ," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007); Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 183.

[40]Gill, "The Law in the Hands of Christ," 7-8.

worship of the one true and living God." It is true that "the time and place of worship, and the outward forms and rites of it are alterable things, yet worship itself, as it is of a moral and spiritual nature . . . is the same in all ages, unchangeable and unalterable." The second table of the law deals with relationships and conduct toward others, "and whatever was injurious to their characters, persons and properties in former times, is so still, and ever will be, and to be carefully avoided."[41]

However, the proper understanding of the law is primarily Christocentric.

> The firmness, the constancy, stability, and durableness of the law, are to be understood of it, as it is in the hands of Christ, the king and lawgiver in his house, where it abides firm and sure, unalterably fixed, and is held forth by him as a rule of walk to his people under the gospel-dispensation; so that they are *not without law to God, but under the law to Christ* (1 Corinthians 9:21).[42]

Further, "the law of God is the same, let it be where and when it will." Again, Gill is making reference to the moral law and as such this moral law, does not change."[43]

> The same law as moral was written on the heart of *Adam* in innocence: and the remains of the same law are to he observed by the Gentiles . . . and the same is written again by the Spirit of God in the hearts of his people in conversion; and it is the same law which was in the heart of Christ, and he became subject to, and is the fulfilling end of, for righteousness to those that believe in him.[44]

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[41]Ibid., 8.

[42]Ibid. For further evidence of Gill's approach to the Decalogue see his "A Compendium or Summary of the Decalogue or Ten Commands," which was probably his last writing to be published, and which reveals the importance of the law for Gill. See John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London: 1893; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), 991-94.

[43]Gill, "The Law in the Hands of Christ," 9.

[44]Ibid., 9-10. In reference to the law in the heart of Christ, Gill says,

> The being of the law in the heart of Christ, of which he himself says to his God and father, *Thy law is within my heart;* (Psalm 40:8) where it was in a much higher sense than it was in the hearts of the Gentiles, who by nature do the things in it; or than it was in heart of *Adam* in his innocent state or than it is in the heart of a regenerate man. And its being in his heart, is expressive of the perfect knowledge he has of it: as a divine person, he is omniscient and knows all things, as mediator; the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in him; and the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and knowledge rest upon him; as man, he was filled with wisdom, and increased in it; and as he spoke such words of wisdom and grace as never man did, being full of doctrines of grace and

Even Jesus was subject to the law. Being a Jew, "he was under the civil law." This subjection meant he "was subject to the laws of his country." This civil aspect of the law included Israel as part of the Roman Empire. Thus, Christ paid "tribute to the Roman governors, and which he did not refuse to do; for as he taught men to give to *Caesar* the things which were *Caesar's,* he did the same himself." Not only was Christ subject to the civil law, but "as he was a son of *Abraham,* he was under the ceremonial law, and subject to that." This ceremonial aspect covered his whole life, "circumcised the eighth day, presented by his parents to the Lord in the temple at the proper time, and went up to *Jerusalem* with them to keep the pass-over, when but twelve years of age." He was often "at the Jewish festivals in their synagogues and temple, attending the service of them; and one of the last actions of his life was keeping the pass-over with his disciples before he suffered."

Jesus was also subject to the moral law "as a creature, as a man . . . as every man is and ought to be." This moral aspect means he was "under obligation to do duty and service, to *fear God and keep his commandments,* which is *the whole duty of man,* (Ecclesiastes 7:13)." However, he was especially "under this law, and obliged to obey it, as he was the surety of his people." The only way to fulfill being the surety of his people and fulfilling his obligations in the covenant of grace was to fulfill the law. This fulfillment of the law was "a principal part of the will of God, which he agreed to do," that is, to sacrifice himself in order to atone for sin. Thus, he "was to offer himself a

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truth, so he had such knowledge of the law as never man had. . . . It denotes also his strong and cordial affection for it. . . . Yea this includes and supposes complete conformity of heart and nature, of life and conversation in Christ unto it (10-11).

victim to divine justice, and be subject both to the precepts and penalty of the law." His subjection "to the precepts of the law" was what made him "fit to be a sacrifice for sin, since in him was no sin: he was not guilty of any breach of the law, in thought, word, or deed." Not only did he obey the precepts of the law but also "he was subject to the penalty of it; for though, as a mere creature, and a sinless man, he was only bound to keep the commands of the law; yet as a surety for sinners he was obliged to bear the penalty of it in their room and stead . . . which penalty is death."[45]

Gill argues that Jesus himself was accused of being an Antinomian. He says, "Some of the Jews thought that Christ was an Antinomian . . . just as some ignorant persons now reckon the faithful ministers of the gospel to be." Since Jesus himself was called such it is not "strange that his faithful followers should have" such a "brand of infamy fastened upon them." However, "certain it is, that Christ came not with such an intent, nor did he do anything in doctrine or practice which tended to destroy the law, but everything which served to fulfill it."[46]

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Gill gives no evidence of being an Antinomian, neither a practical nor doctrinal one. His life, preaching, writings, and his church's practice, are all strong evidences against antinomianism. Thomas Nettles says, "Gill strongly rejected the error of antinomianism, lived a pure life, and sought to maintain a disciplined church. He should not be accused of the errors of some who did not hold his doctrine but like to use

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[45]Ibid., 11-13.

[46]Ibid., 14.

his name."[47] Gill's views of the law and of good works are clearly in the mainstream of historic, orthodox Calvinism. This orthodoxy being the case, and keeping with the definition of Hyper-Calvinism, it is wrong to charge Gill with Hyper-Calvinism.

[47]Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, 42.

# CHAPTER 7

## EVANGELISTIC ASPECTS OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

Another area where Gill faces the charge of Hyper-Calvinism concerns the offer of the gospel.[1] As mentioned earlier, most negative historical evaluations of Gill focus on Gill's view of the offer of the gospel.[2] Therefore, the issue addressed in this chapter is, did John Gill believe in the offer of the gospel to the unconverted? This chapter will argue that John Gill did not believe in *an offer of grace at all* but that he did believe in the responsibility of God's servants *to proclaim the gospel to all.* The issue of the offer of the gospel does not reach to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism even though it is a corollary doctrine. Yet here again there is much misunderstanding regarding Gill's doctrine and practice.[3] It is important to understand John Gill's view of offering the

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[1]Curt Daniel in "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill," (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), has popularized this approach to Gill. Defining Hyper-Calvinism as the rejection of the offer of the gospel Gill is charged with being a Hyper-Calvinist. However, as mentioned earlier, this depends on a certain definition of Hyper-Calvinism, a definition the present work argues is inadequate.

[2]See chap.1. E. F. Clipsham is surely wrong when he says that both Brine and Gill "were so afraid of Arminianism and Pelagianism that they made no attempt to awaken the consciences of the unconverted lest they robbed God of the sole glory of their conversion." E. F. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism," *BQ* 20 (1963), 101.

[3]The present discussion will concentrate on Gill's context. There have been more modern debates concerning the offer of the gospel. These debates have different nuances to them, thus different terms are engaged in the arguments. These terms include "the free offer of the gospel," "the well-meant offer of the gospel," and "the sincere offer of the gospel." For "the free offer of the gospel" see "The Free Offer of the Gospel," report submitted to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1948) [on-line]. Accessed 23 April 2010. Available from http://www.opc.org/GA/free_offer.html. Internet.This report consists of a majority report by Arthur W. Kuschke, Jr., John Murray, and Ned B. Stonehouse, and the minority report submitted by William Young and Floyd E. Hamilton. For an examination of "the well-meant offer" see Raymond A. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation," *CTJ* 35 (2000), 37-65.

gospel by noting his careful distinctions concerning the issues surrounding this topic.[4] He took issue with the idea of a gospel offer but he did believe in proclaiming the gospel.

**The Distinction Between Offers of Grace and the Proclamation of the Gospel**

Gill says, "That there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny."[5] It is this quotation from Gill's sermon, "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated,"[6] which many point to as one of the primary evidences of his failing to believe in offering the gospel to the unconverted. It is important to note, however, that the quote is from a response to an objection that the doctrine of predestination is incompatible with God's sincere desire for all men to come to Christ. Gill says, "This doctrine is said to agree very ill with the truth and sincerity of God, in a thousand declarations, such as these, Ezekiel 18:23, 32:32; Deuteronomy 5:29; Psalm 81:12; Acts 17:30; Mark 16:15." Gill's response is, first, that a correct understanding of the Scripture passages is necessary. Some of these passages are dealing with particular people or situations and thus "concern the Jews only, and not all mankind; and are only compassionate inquiries and vehement desires after their civil and temporal welfare." Others must be taken as God's revealed will but not His secret will - as noted earlier this

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[4]This entire discussion must also be kept in the context of Gill's view of the threat of Arminianism to the gospel. The conditional nature of the gospel offer, the disjunction of the blessings of the covenant from the securing of the blessings by Christ, and the context of the emphasis of man's ability in Arminianism, were all dangerous influences that were interconnected in Gill's mind. John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (London: W.H. Collingridge, 1855), iv; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral: Founders Press, 2006), 425-27; George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth*, 205-34.

[5]Quoted in Ian J. Shaw, *High Calvinists in Action: Calvinism and the City Manchester and London, c.1810-1860* (New York: Oxford Press, 2002). Shaw uses this portion of Gill's quote to claim that Gill "rejected making indiscriminate calls to 'evangelical repentance' and the universal offer of the gospel" (15).

[6]John Gill, "The Doctrine of Predestination Stated, and Set in the Scripture Light," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

distinction is important for Gill. "Others only shew what is God's will of command, or what he has made the duty of man; not what are his purposes man shall do, or what he will bestow upon him."[7]

Second, the gospel, though commanded to be preached to all, has not actually been universally preached. The reason for this lack of universality, from Gill's Calvinistic perspective, must be that God's sovereign will and providence has not sent the gospel to all. "The gospel is indeed ordered to be preached to *every creature* to whom it is sent and comes; but as yet, it has never been brought to all the individuals of human nature; there have been multitudes in all ages that have not heard it."[8]

Third, understanding that the gospel is to be preached to all to whom God sends it does not mean there is an offer of grace given to all.

> And that there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men I utterly deny; nay, I deny they are made to any; no, not to God's elect; grace and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel, and applied by the Spirit; much less are they made to others wherefore this doctrine is not chargeable with insincerity on that account. Let the patrons of universal offers defend themselves from this objection; I have nothing to do with it; until it is proved there are such universal offers.[9]

God does not work a partial grace in salvation, doing his part and leaving the response to man. God's grace in salvation is complete and total. The preacher, in proclaiming the gospel, must not present the gospel in a manner that would leave the hearer thinking that God's grace is not effectual, or that God is impotent to effect salvation in people. This

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[7]Ibid, 17.

[8]Ibid. The phrase "to whom it is sent and comes" seems to refer to God's sovereignty and providence in directing the spread of the gospel. This should be understood as an affirmation of God's sovereignty and not as a denial of the minister of the gospel's responsibility to proclaim the gospel indiscriminately.

[9]Ibid.

effect is what "offering" the gospel brings about. On the other hand, proclaiming the gospel involves commanding repentance and faith while encouraging the hearers with the promises of the gospel of Christ.

So Gill did not believe in an offer of grace. Yet Gill did believe in the universal proclamation of the gospel. One of Gill's reasons for rejecting offers of grace is that grace is not *offered* – not even to the elect. Grace, rather, is *given* to the elect.[10]

> It is certain, that for those who shall not be saved, salvation was not purchased, nor should it be offered to them, nor indeed to any. Such for whom salvation is purchased, are the church whom Christ has purchased with his own blood; and to these, this salvation is not offered, but applied. The Gospel is not an offer, but *the power of God unto salvation*, to these persons. And as for others, they will be condemned at the last day, for their sins and transgressions against the law of God. And such who have had the opportunity of hearing the Gospel, and have neglected, despised, and reproached it, their condemnation will be thereby aggravated.[11]

Gill clearly says that neither salvation nor the gospel is offered. The reason that salvation is not offered is because Christ purchased salvation for the elect. As such, salvation is applied to the elect. As mentioned in chapter three, the tight connection between all

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[10]See Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, 426:

> Grace cannot be "offered." Grace is purely within the sovereign prerogatives of God. . . . To offer grace is to determine human responsibility from a supposed knowledge of the divine intentions toward all men in particular. . . . Neither the evangelist nor the sinner need have guarantees that grace accompanies their interaction for the responsibility of either to be established. It is enough that both know that God commands all men everywhere to repent and has highlighted the absolute seriousness of the matter in the entire Christ event culminating in the resurrection from the dead. Grace is the sovereign bestowment of salvific blessings; its appearance among men is purely a matter of sovereign discrimination. Such an understanding is nothing less than historic evangelical Calvinism. An "offer" of grace, therefore, presupposes a redefinition of the word *grace.*

[11]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 103. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory,*says that

> Normally the word *offer* has too dormant a connotation to incorporate the vivid and active images picturing the effectuality of gospel preaching: the blind see, the dead live, the sleepers awaken . . . . In apostolic examples of preaching, we see little of what might be called "offer" and much of what is called "command." Men are commanded to lay down arms and surrender to God, who demonstrates His sovereign holiness in all His actions – creation, providence, and redemption – and promises of forgiveness encourage those who truly comply. The unabridged version of the gospel simply cannot be contained within the normal connotations of the word *offer* (425-26).

aspects of the covenant of grace is important for Gill. The gospel is the power of God to bring salvation in the lives of God's elect. Therefore, the gospel is not an offer. Efficacious grace makes the important distinction between grace offered and the gospel preached. God is not insincere in his offers of grace because He does not even offer grace. However, the gospel is proclaimed to all in order that the elect can be drawn to Christ by the Word of God in the effectual calling of the Spirit upon the elect.

Despite his rejection of the idea of offering grace, there are a number of references by Gill to publishing the gospel. These references show that Gill did believe in proclaiming the gospel without any indication that he withheld it from certain people.

> Gospel ministers, who bring good tidings of good, are said to publish peace, and to publish salvation (Isa. 52:7). . . . The gospel is called, the gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself (Eph. 1:13; Acts 13:26 28:28), because it gives an account of Christ . . . and of the salvation itself . . . and because it describes also the persons that share in it, sinners, sensible sinners, and who believe in Christ; and who, according to the declaration of it, shall certainly be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:30,31), and because it is, not only the means of revealing, but of applying salvation; for it is to them that believe "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).[12]

Gospel ministers "publish" salvation. The gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" and thus the means to reveal Christ to sensible sinners, as well as to apply salvation to them. Again, there is no indication that Gill recommends withholding the gospel from anyone.

In speaking further concerning the gospel, Gill connects the effective power of the Holy Spirit with the preaching of the ministers of the gospel and in doing so states that it is the business of ministers to preach the gospel to all.

> It may be said likewise, to come from the Holy Spirit of God . . . who leads the ministers of it into all the truths thereof; and makes their ministrations of it powerful

[12]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 373.

> and successful; and whereby he and his grace . . . are conveyed and received into the hearts of men. The instruments of declaring, publishing, and proclaiming the gospel, and its truths, to the children of men, are . . . the apostles of Christ, who had a commission from him to preach the gospel to every creature; and all ordinary ministers of the word, whose business it is to publish good tidings of good things.[13]

Additionally, there are statements made concerning the indefiniteness of the gospel declaration in *The Cause of God and Truth.* For instance, he says, "The gospel declaration is indefinitely made, 'Whosoever believeth shall be saved' (Mark 16:16) . . . the Gospel is preached or published to all men."[14] Elsewhere, he clearly states that this preaching is "promiscuously to all" and one of the reasons for such promiscuous preaching is because we cannot know whom God elects to salvation until we see the gospel applied to their lives.

> The apostle Paul, with the rest of the apostles, had a commission to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning with the Jews, which, as it was designed to gather in the elect of God among them, so it was faithfully executed by them. They preached these doctrines of grace promiscuously to all, not knowing who were ordained to eternal life and who were not, or who would believe and who would not; the judgment they were able to form in anywise of these things, did not arise from any special or extraordinary revelation, but from the success of their ministry.[15]

Thus, Gill was clearly committed to preaching the gospel to all.

### The Importance of the Covenant of Grace

The *unconditional* aspect of the covenant of grace is essential to Gill.[16] Since the blessings of the covenant of grace are freely given, they cannot be offered to people

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[13]Ibid., 374.

[14]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 152. This quote is in the context of a discussion of the decree of reprobation. Gill's point is that if a person neglects and despises the gospel the cause of this is the person's sin, not the withholding of grace by God. The decree of reprobation does not withhold the preaching of the gospel nor is it the cause of the sinful neglect of the gospel preached to a person.

[15]Ibid., 90.

[16]While the covenant of grace was discussed in chap.3, here the connection between the nature

with the view that they can either accept or reject them. However, because the gospel is the God-appointed means of the elect coming to Christ it is to be proclaimed. This element in Gill's thinking is seen in the following quote: "Though Christ did not offer or tender the blessings of grace to any, much less to them in general; but as a preacher of the Gospel, published the truths of it to all."[17] To prescribe conditions to the covenant of grace is to distort the covenant of grace itself.

> The promise of pardon is not made to any, no not to the elect, upon a condition to be performed by them; it is an absolute unconditional one, and runs thus; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 8:12) and though this promise is made to faith, yet not as a condition of it, but as descriptive of the persons who enjoy it, and as the hand by which they receive it. And, it is so far from being made upon a condition to the non-elect, that it is not made to them at all, the promise of pardon being a new covenant one, reaches to no more than to those who are in that covenant, and they are only the elect of God, and much less upon a condition rendered impossible by the act of preterition; since not that, but the corruption of nature, renders faith, repentance, conversion, or whatever else of a spiritual kind that may be thought to be the condition, impossible without the powerful grace of God.[18]

Gill also says, "Pardon of sin is never ascribed to any condition performed by men, but to the free grace of God . . . evangelical obedience springs from, and is influenced by,

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of the covenant of grace and preaching the gospel is emphasized.

[17]Ibid., 88.

[18]Ibid., 156. Later, Gill says,

> Some men, indeed, plead for offers of Christ, and tenders of the gospel; but the offer or tender of the new covenant, is what I never met with in other writers. If this covenant is tendered, upon the conditions of faith and repentance, to all to whom the gospel is vouchsafed, how can it be said to be *established* in the blood of Jesus? It must be very precarious and uncertain, until the conditions of it are fulfilled by those to whom it is tendered. The doctrine of man's disability to do what is spiritually good, may seem inconsistent with the covenant of grace, to such who have no other notions of it, than that it is a conditional one; that faith, repentance, and obedience, are the conditions of it; and that these are in the power of man to perform; but not to those who believe, and think they have good reason to believe, that the covenant of grace is made with Christ, as the head and representative of the elect, and with them in him, and with them only; and that, with respect to them, it is entirely absolute and unconditional, to whom grace is promised in it, to enable them to believe, repent, and obey (513-14).

discoveries of pardon, but is neither the cause nor condition of it."[19]

For Gill, the application of the covenant of grace in the life of sinner is intricately tied to the entire work of redemption. The Father has elected a people for Himself, the Son redeemed the elect people,[20] and the Spirit regenerates the elect, giving them the blessings that flow from the covenant of grace, which include repentance and faith. To condition the application of the covenant of grace on repentance and faith, that may or may not be exercised by the individual, is to disjoin one aspect of the covenant of grace. To remove repentance and faith from the accomplished covenant of grace is to place it in the hands of men and allow for the opportunity of failure.[21] In speaking of this disjunction Gill says, "It must be very precarious and uncertain, until the conditions of it are fulfilled by those to whom it is tendered." Instead, in his view, "the covenant of grace is made with Christ, as the head and representative of the elect, and with them in him, and with them only; and that, with respect to them, it is entirely absolute and unconditional, to

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[19]Ibid., 74.

[20]Gill argues against grounding gospel exhortations in a general atonement.

> It is said, "that this doctrine (of general redemption) gives life and energy to all our exhortations to the sinner, to return and live; whereas, the contrary persuasion robs them of their strength and virtue." I reply; for my own part, I know of no exhortations to dead sinners, to return and live, in a spiritual manner. Those referred to in Ezekiel 18, I have often observed, respect civil and temporal, and not spiritual and eternal things; we may, and should indeed, encourage and exhort sensible sinners to believe in Christ, and testify their repentance, by bringing forth fruits meet for the same; and to such exhortations the doctrine of particular redemption gives life and energy, and cannot rob them of any strength and virtue; since it ascertains complete salvation, continuance in grace here, and glory hereafter, to all that repent and believe: whereas the other doctrine does not; for, according to that, persons may repent and believe, and yet finally and totally fall away, and at last he damned. Let any unprejudiced person judge which doctrine gives most life and energy to these exhortations, or robs them of their strength and virtue (Ibid., 486-87).

[21]See Francis Turretin, *On the Atonement,* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1859): "The object in procuring salvation could be none other than its application, and it cannot but be in vain, if it fails to accomplish this object. Christ needed to die for men, not to procure them pardon and salvation under a condition which it is impossible for them to comply with but to obtain for them actual pardon and redemption" (149).

whom grace is promised in it, to enable them to believe, repent, and obey."[22]

The subjects of the covenant of grace, as well as the nature of the covenant of grace, make it untenable to suggest that God would offer this grace of the covenant to those outside of the covenant. It is also untenable to suggest an offer to those within the covenant because the reception of an offer is not the way the blessings of the covenant are applied.

> This covenant of grace is neither made with, nor tendered to all that live under the Gospel dispensation; it is only made with God's elect in Christ, and that not upon conditions of faith and repentance; for these are blessings of grace secured for them in this covenant. Hence the decrees of absolute reprobation, and of denying the aid of grace to some persons, are not at all inconsistent with this covenant, and the promulgation of it in the Gospel. We also know of no such covenant made with, nor of any tender of it, nor of any publication of it to the heathen world; but rather, that all that are destitute of revelation, are *strangers to the covenant of promise* (Eph. 2:12), which passage likewise acquaints us, that such as are *without* the knowledge of *Christ*, and *God* in Christ, are *without hope.*[23]

> Now faith and repentance are blessings of the covenant, gifts of God; the graces of the Spirit go together in the doctrine of salvation, and have a great concern in it; though they are not meritorious, procuring causes, nor conditions of it, yet in this way God brings his people to salvation; they enter into and are descriptive of the character of such that are saved; there is so close a connection between these and salvation, that none are saved without them.[24]

Gill does not believe a person normally could be regenerate without means and without accompanying faith and repentance.[25] There is a connection between regeneration and the ministry of the Word, as well as to the display of faith and repentance. The effectual

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[22]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 184.

[23]Ibid., 210.

[24]Ibid., 19.

[25]John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), 8:522. Gill leaves open the possibility of infants, as well as others who cannot hear the gospel, receiving saving grace without the outward hearing of the word of God.

calling of God upon the soul of one of the elect immediately produces faith and repentance. In addition, this effectual calling is in connection with the ministry of the Word. Thus, a "sensible sinner" is exhorted by the ministry of the Word to believe in Christ. Specifically, it is the preaching of the law that brings a sinner to a "sensible" state.

Again, what is important for Gill is that faith and repentance are not conditions for the covenant of grace. In addition, not making offers is important, as this approach would possibly present the mistaken idea of conditional grace – grace based on human action. There is a *connection* between repentance/faith and salvation but they are not *conditional* for salvation.

> I do not think that any man will be punished for not accepting offered grace, he could not comply with or embrace, for want of further grace, because I do not believe that grace was ever offered to them; but then they will be punished for their willful contempt and neglect of the gospel preached unto them; and for their manifold transgressions of the righteous law of God, made known unto them; and surely this doctrine can never be derogatory to the glory of God's justice.[26]

Therefore, in Gill's view, punishment comes not for rejecting grace but for rejecting the revelation of God that has given to them.[27]

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[26]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 181. Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory,* comments on this very quote: "Gill does not pretend that grace is something that is offered to all men. This belief, in particular, labels him in the eyes of Curt Daniel as a hyper-Calvinist. Whether that item should be the strategic element of the definition of hyper-Calvinism can well be called into question. This becomes especially debatable when we observe that Gill did not reject the reality of duty-faith and duty-repentance. Rather, all men are called upon and have an obligation to repent and believe. Grace, however, by its very character as the undeserved bestowment of salvific gifts, comes only to some and effectually on them. Grace itself is not offered" (27-28).

[27]See chap.5.Although Gill would disagree with his conclusions concerning the offer of grace, Paul Helm, in "Language and Theology of the Free Offer" [on-line], accessed 26 April 2010; available from http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/02/language-and-theology-of-free-offer.html. Internet, has some insightful comments:

> It is generally held that the free offer is necessary for evangelism, and that it is therefore part of a rounded gospel ministry.
>
> There is first of all the basic fact that a preacher must not intentionally say something that is false. It is false that a fallen human being has the innate or natural ability to turn to Christ. He or she is in bondage to sin and needs to be released by the illuminating and regenerating work of Christ's Spirit. The grace of the Spirit is not merely an aid which the sinner may accept or refuse, but when it comes it is effectual.

Before concluding this section, it is important to examine a critique of Gill's position concerning the offer of the gospel. Tom Ascol helpfully evaluates Gill's view of the offer of the gospel in relation to the covenant of grace.[28] Ascol correctly argues that Gill does seem to deny what federal theology allows, which is "a legitimate promise of eternal life within the pre-fall creation covenant."[29] What Gill holds is that Adam would have received a "natural" life without end but not "eternal" life in the sense of redeemed saints.[30] However, in his evaluation, Ascol does make some problematic assertions. For instance, he says that Gill's "emphasis upon the eternal drama obscures the real history of God's dealings with man," a charge that could be brought against any Calvinist. In addition, in challenging Gill's views on eternal union, adoption and justification, Ascol says, "history becomes little more than a charade. It is the outworking of that which has already been accomplished (and not merely planned) in eternity." Although perhaps differing with Gill on this point, all Calvinists believe God's plan will result in its accomplishment and are therefore open – from the non-Calvinist perspective – to the

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> There is a difference, then, between saying that Christ will receive a person whenever he comes to him, and saying or implying that they have a natural ability to come to Christ whenever they choose to do so. So it would seem to follow, in order not to speak falsely, that those wishing to 'offer' the Gospel must also affirm that fallen human beings are unable of themselves to come to Christ. So in the issue of the free offer, it is not so much what is said as what else is said, and built upon.
>
> The word 'offer', which does not occur in the NT in connection with gospel preaching but is present in some catechetical documents – is suspect to some because it suggests the power to reject the offer. Offers may be refused, it is true, but it is also true there are some offers that are too good and too persuasive to be refused. So provided that the idea of innate ability is explicitly denied, there cannot be anything wrong with the use of the language of 'offer', surely. We must obey the law of God from the heart, but can't. Christ offers his grace to sinners, but they can't take it.

[28]Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 143-45.

[29]Ibid., 144.

[30]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 651.

charge that history is a "charade." Further, Ascol maintains, "With the centrality of redemption's fulfillment firmly rooted in the historical process, classic covenant theology carefully guards against such confusion of the eternal purpose with the temporal actualization." Even though "the covenant of grace is enacted in eternity," nonetheless, "it is executed in time and its blessings of justification and adoption are bestowed in history."[31] However, the nuances are the only differences here. Gill would agree with an eternal purpose with temporal actualization. The nuanced difference concerns which aspects are actualized in eternity and which are actualized in history. While it is true that nuances can make one be in error, these nuances in Gill's theology do not place him in the defined category of Hyper-Calvinism. All Calvinists, including Gill, agree that there are aspects to these doctrines that are actualized in history and therefore, history is not a charade, but is part of God's outworking of His glorious eternal plan.

Ascol argues that by making the covenant of grace between the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the gospel simply a *manifestation* of this covenant toward men and not an *actual* covenant with man, "the nerve of hortatory proclamation is unavoidably cut." This approach means, "The theological basis for exhortation to the unconverted is destroyed." Thus, the argument is that "if God executes his saving covenant with sinners simply by manifesting it to them then the elect sinner has nothing to do except wait for the discovery of that which has always been and forever will be true of him – namely, that God has included him in the covenant of grace."[32] However, this perception is a distortion of Gill's theology. On this point the theological basis for the exhortation to the

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[31]Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace," 144.

[32]Ibid., 175-76. For further discussion from Ascol concerning stipulations and promises of the covenant of grace and covenant of redemption see pp. 188-95; 205-207.

unconverted, in Gill, is the connection between the gospel and faith. The gospel proclamation is the means by which the Spirit awakens faith in the elect to receive the righteousness of Christ. Faith is active. Though it is a gift it is still man's faith to be exercised and it must be exercised as all graces are to be exercised. Certainly, those who disagree with Gill at this point would not deny an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son that assures the eternal salvation of all of the elect. Gill's approach to the covenant of grace and covenant of redemption does not necessitate a denial of universal exhortations of the gospel.[33]

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[33]It is true, as Ascol says, that Herman Witsius holds that the covenant of grace is contracted between God and the elect sinner. Ibid., 178, n. 18. However, Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), also says that the "divines explain themselves differently as to the CONDITIONS of the covenant of grace. We, for our part, agree with those who think, that the covenant of grace, to speak accurately, with respect to us, has no conditions properly so called." He then explains himself further:

> *A condition* of a covenant, properly so called, is *that action, which, being performed, gives a man a right to the reward*. But that such a condition cannot be required of us in the covenant of grace, is self-evident; because a right to life neither is, nor indeed can be founded on any action of ours, but on the righteousness of our Lord alone; who having perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law for us, nothing can, in justice, be required of us to performin order to acquire a right already fully purchased for us. And indeed in this all the orthodox readily agree (296).

He also says,

> In the covenant of works, something is required of man as a condition, which performed entitles him to the reward. The covenant of grace, with respect to us, consists of the absolute promises of God, in which the mediator, the life to be obtained by him, the faith by which we may be made partakers of him, and of the benefits purchased by him, and the perseverance in that faith; in a word, the whole of salvation, and all the requisites to it, are absolutely promised (46).

Although Gill would disagree with the use of offer terminology, nonetheless, Paul Helm, in "Language and Theology of the Free Offer" [on-line], accessed 26 May 2010; available from http:// paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/02/language-and-theology-of-free-offer.html. Internet, makes comments on the preaching of the gospel that are helpful:

> The free offer is the offering of Christ to anyone, not to everyone. The gospel is to be preached indiscriminately, and unconditionally, in order that God's elect (presently unknown) may be effectually called by the word of grace and brought to penitence and faith. The preacher does not know who will respond, and he must (following the Great Commission) play his part in preaching the gospel to every nation. It seems to me that the language of unconditionality and freeness, declared in a warm and urgent way, suffices for the offering of the gospel freely; it integrates with other doctrinal elements in the faith, it does not turn people in on themselves in concern as to whether or not they are 'qualfiied' to come to Christ, and it does not get us unnecessarily entangled

**The Distinction Between Natural and Spiritual**

In relation to the issue of offer versus command, it is important to understand the distinction between natural and spiritual in Gill. To understand this distinction one must understand Gill's view concerning man's responsibility. Man is condemned for rejecting the revelation given to him and not for the absence of revelation.[34]

Gill seems to be concerned that the universal offer view necessitates a view of condemnation to hell based on rejection of the gospel. The result, if pushed far enough, is a salvation that is effected for those who never had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Gill is careful to anchor the condemnation of sinners in their sin, regardless of whether they ever hear the gospel.

Because of this concern, Gill follows a principle of condemnation based on the level of revelation. That is, a person is only condemned for what is revealed unto him. Those "who have only an external revelation of him by the ministry of the Word, are obliged to believe no more than is included in that revelation, as that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who died and rose again, and is the Savior of sinners, etc., but not that he died for them, or that he is their Savior." It is in this context that Gill again makes the distinction between "offers" and "preaching the gospel." He says, "It is true, the ministers of the Gospel, though they ought not to offer and tender salvation to any, for which they have no commission, yet they may preach the gospel of salvation to all men, and declare, that *whosoever believes shall be saved.*" He addresses the purpose of this indefinite

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in the secret and the revealed will of God. It is not part of the presentation of Christ freely to say that God sincerely desires the salvation of everyone, and to say such a thing makes preaching sermons on definite atonement and eternal election all the more difficult, leading to unnecessary perplexity.

[34]This was discussed in chap.5 but is discussed in the present context in relation to the offer of the gospel.

preaching of the gospel to all as especially directed toward the elect in that it is "designed, and blessed, for the effectual gathering of them to Christ; and does become the *power of God* to their *salvation*, and to theirs only."Thus, those that do not have Christ revealed to them are not condemned for their unbelief in Christ because the extent of the revelation to them comes in the form of "the law and light of nature."[35]

What about those people who hear gospel preaching but reject it?

> For such who have enjoyed the external revelation of the gospel, and yet have remained finally unbelievers, as the Jews and others, they will be condemned, not for not believing that Christ died for them, or that he was their Savior; but they will be condemned, and die in their sins, for their not believing that he was God, the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior of the world, and for the contempt of his gospel, and for their transgressions of the law of God.[36]

A person is responsible only for the revelation made to him. If a person is not a subject of the covenant of grace, that lack of membership in the covenant of grace is not the basis for their condemnation. However, he is condemned for rejecting Christ as he is declared to him. Persons who are not a part of the covenant of grace can sin against Christ as Savior but not against him as their personal Savior. "Now Christ can be a Savior to no more than to them who are saved; and to such who are not saved, he is no Savior; and yet such may be capable of sinning against him as a Savior, though not as their Savior." There is also a distinction between sinning against redeeming love and sinning against providence. "Christ may be sinned against by these persons as a Savior, in a way of providence, though not in a way of grace; and their sins may be aggravated, as being committed against his providential goodness, if not against his redeeming love."[37]

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[35]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 468-69.

[36]Ibid., 469.

[37]Ibid., 308. "Though strictly and properly speaking, sin is not against Christ as a Savior, but

Not only is the distinction between natural and spiritual in Gill's thought seen in his view of the responsibility of man but also in the distinction between the external and internal call of the gospel. Here Gill is firmly in line with historic Calvinistic theology concerning the necessity of an internal grace that effectually makes use of external preaching that otherwise could only produce external (or legal) repentance. Gill says that "the calls, invitations, and messages of God to men, by his ministers, may be sometimes (for they are not always) sufficient inducements to procure an external reformation, an outward repentance, as in the people of Nineveh" but God's powerful grace must be wedded to these external inducements in order "to produce true faith in Christ, evangelical repentance towards God, and new spiritual obedience, in life and conversation."[38]

The external ministry of the Word does not actuate evangelical repentance and special faith unless the effectual work of the Spirit accompanies it. The preaching of the Word externally calls the elect and the Spirit calls them internally, a calling that carries with it the "sufficient" means of salvation. However, if God does not effectually call a person that person will not, and cannot, obey the gospel. However, the condemnatory reason they will not obey the gospel is their own sinfulness, not their lack of evangelical

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against God as the Lawgiver; and not against redeeming love, but a law of righteousness."

[38]Ibid., 67. It is possible that Gill changed his view in regard to Nineveh's repentance. In *Cause of God and Truth* published in 1735 he views the repentance of Nineveh as an external repentance. See pp. 67 and 107. He takes the same view in his commentary on Matthew 12:41. See John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), 7:138. This was published in 1741. However, in his commentary on Jonah, he seems to view their repentance as an evangelical repentance and their belief as saving. See John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2005), 6:543, 545. This was published in 1763. However, the later editions of *Cause of God and Truth* do not contain a change in this passage, which conceivably could have been overlooked in regard to the needed change.

repentance and special faith, which can only come from God. They are not condemned for lacking the blessings of the new covenant (which includes repentance and faith) but they are condemned for not responding to the revelation they have already been given.[39]

For Gill, there is "special," or saving, faith that only the elect come to possess.[40] Only "the elect of God become true believers . . . through the efficacy of his grace" and "faith is given in consequence of this choice" because God "bestows faith upon them." Since this faith is a result of regeneration "none but such who are made spiritually alive believe in Christ." Regeneration is a consequence of God's election and faith is a consequence of regeneration, therefore, "there must be first spiritual life before there can be faith."[41] Only the elect receive special faith because they are in the covenant of grace. Again, grace is given, not offered, to the elect who then believe on Christ.

It is also in this context that an important aspect of Gill's evangelism argues against the charge of Hyper-Calvinism. In his discussion of the causes of faith, he lists God as the efficient cause, the free grace of God as the moving cause, and the Word and ministers as the usual means and instruments of faith in the hand of God. It is this third "cause" of faith that is important for the current discussion.

> The end of the word being written is, that men "might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God" (John 20:31), and the word preached is, the word of faith; and so called, with other reasons, because faith comes by it (Rom. 10:8,17), this has often been the effect and consequence of hearing the word preached (Acts 17:4; 18:8), and the ministers of it are the instruments by whom and through whose word, doctrine, and ministry, others believe (John 1:17,20; 1 Cor. 3:5), but this is only

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[39]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth,* 470.

[40]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 731.

[41]Ibid., 741.

when it is attended with the power and Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:4,5).[42]

Gill also makes a close connection between the gospel "when attended with the power and Spirit of God" and "the regeneration of men, who are said to be born again by the word of God, and to be begotten again with the word of truth (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18)."[43]

In Gill's view, man is not condemned for not being able to produce special faith and therefore God makes no offers for man to produce something he is incapable of producing. Instead, the preaching of the gospel is the instrumental means for the regenerate elect of God to believe on Christ revealed in the gospel. Peter Naylor argues that Gill believed salvation is "conditional upon their individual faith. . . . Not only does saving faith become a condition of salvation, it is also an act, something which sinners 'do' (Gill's word)."[44] However, this insight is merely picking up on Gill's approach to faith as the instrumental means to embracing Christ. In Gill, faith is not a means to regeneration but it is a means to embracing Christ for the pardon of sins.

## Gill's Approach in the Book of Acts

Gill's commentary on Acts is helpful in determining his approach to this issue. An examination of a select number of passages that relate to the preaching of the gospel will illustrate Gill's view of preaching the gospel to all. On Acts 5:20, Gill says, "The Gospel is to be preached to all; the Spirit of God makes it effectual to some, and others

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[42]Ibid., 743. For Gill's view of the necessity of faith see Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Commenting on Rom 10:13-14 he says, "The same Lord was ready and willing to dispense his grace . . . suggests, that it was therefore absolutely necessary, that the Gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews . . . that hearing they might believe, and so call upon the name of the Lord, and be saved . . . for there was a real necessity for it" 8:522.

[43]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 374.

[44]Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace Publications, 1992), 191.

are rendered inexcusable." In fact, Gill says "all the doctrines of the Gospel" are "to be spoken out, fully, freely, and faithfully, with all boldness and constancy." Therefore, the full gospel is to be preached to all people. None of it is "to be dropped or concealed." This preaching is to be done even though these doctrines "cannot be comprehended by reason, and are rejected by learned men, and the majority of the people." One reason for preaching the gospel to all is that the gospel is "the means of quickening dead sinners."[45]

On Acts 10:24, Gill mentions the desire of "the salvation of others." This desire "shows the true grace of God in him, which wherever it is, puts a man on seeking after the spiritual and eternal welfare of all with whom he is concerned, and especially his relatives and friends." This statement argues against the caricature of Gill as cold and having a lack of desire for the salvation of others.[46]

Gill summarizes his view of the gospel and preaching the gospel in his comments on Acts 10:36. He says that since this Word is sent from God it "ought to be received, not as the word of man, but as the word of God." When God sends his messengers with the gospel, it is really God who preaches "through them the doctrine of peace and reconciliation, by the blood of Christ." Even though sinful man "has neither disposition, nor ability to perform it . . . a council of peace was held, in which the scheme of it was drawn; a covenant of peace was entered into, between the Father and the Son." Further, in time, "Christ was provided, promised, and prophesied of, as the peace maker; he came into the world for this purpose; the chastisement of our peace was laid on him, and he procured it by his obedience, sufferings; and death and this is what the Gospel

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[45]Gill, *Exposition of Old and New Testaments,* 8:183.

[46]Ibid., 238.

publishes." The gospel does not speak of a "peace made by men, by their repentance, humiliation, and works of righteousness; but made by Christ, the Prince of peace, by his blood and sacrifice." Second, it does not speak of peace as "to be made by him, or any other, but as already made." Third, it does not speak of "only a plan drawn, but executed, a finished work." Fourth, it does not speak of a conditional peace that comes "if men will repent, believe, and obey, but absolutely, as a thing done, and not dependent on any condition required of man." This peace brings "with it a train of other blessings." Gill then speaks to the universal nature of this proclamation by saying that "these doctrines of peace with God by the blood of Christ, and reconciliation for sin by his sacrifice, were to be preached to them that were afar off, and to them that are nigh, both to the Jews and Gentiles."[47]

On Acts 10:42, "and he commanded us, to preach unto the people," Gill comments that this passage means not only the Jews, but also the Gentles: "to all nations, to the whole world, and every creature." He sees this phrase as a reference "to the commission given to him, and the rest of the apostles, after Christ's resurrection, (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16)." On the following verse, Acts 10:43, "that through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive the remission of sins," Gill says, "the meaning is, that whoever believes in Christ with a right and true faith" will receive "the free and full forgiveness of his sins, through Christ." However, this faith will come to him "as a gift of God's grace" and "not as what his faith procures or deserves." Christ "shed his blood" for the purpose of forgiving the sins of his people. It is this message that "is published in the everlasting Gospel, that whoever believes in Christ, not with an

[47]Ibid., 242.

historical or temporary faith, or in profession only, but with the faith of God's elect, which is the gift of God, and the operation of his Spirit . . . shall receive it as a free gift."[48]

What is the gospel? On Acts 13:26 Gill describes the gospel as that "which gives an account of the author of spiritual and eternal salvation, of his person, and of his manner of obtaining it, and of the nature of salvation, and who the persons are to whom it belongs." This approach means that "the Gospel is not a proposal of terms, by complying with which men may be saved, as faith, repentance, and good works, which are not terms of salvation, but either blessings, parts or fruits of it; but it is a declaration of salvation itself, as being a thing done by Christ." The preaching of the gospel is the publication of salvation and "is the means of applying the salvation it declares." While the gospel is being proclaimed, "the Spirit of God comes by it . . . falls upon, and conveys himself into the hearts of men." Thus, regeneration occurs through the preached Word as "faith comes by hearing." Not only does regeneration occur with the preaching of the gospel but also "sanctification is promoted and increased by it."[49] Gill's comments on Acts 13:39-40 show that he believed in preaching the gospel to the unregenerate since what they reject is the Gospel.[50] Also, on Acts 13:46, Gill says, "the Jews, by this act of theirs in rejecting the Gospel, did as it were pass sentence upon themselves, and determine against themselves that they ought not to be saved, since they despised the means of salvation."[51]

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[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., 265-66.

[50]Ibid., 270.

[51]Ibid., 272.

On Acts 15:9, Gill speaks to the importance of preaching the gospel, saying, "They are exhorted to it, in order to make them sensible of their pollution, and their need of cleansing, that they may apply where it is to be had."[52]

With Lydia at Acts 16:14, Gill's understanding of regeneration, and of faith, is displayed. He comments that Lydia heard the apostles' preaching and yet, "at first only externally, and not so as to understand and receive what she heard, until the efficacious grace of God was exerted upon her."[53] This grace of God is described with the "Lord opened her heart." Gill vividly describes the depravity of the sinful heart by saying her heart

> was before shut and barred, with the bars of ignorance, hardness, and unbelief. The heart of a sinner before conversion, is like a house shut up, and wholly in darkness; whatever degree of natural or moral light is in it, there is none in spiritual things; it is empty of the grace of God, of the fear of him, and love to him; it is without proper inhabitants, without God, Christ, and the Spirit; and is the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, who delight in dark and desolate places; it is bolted and barred with unbelief, and walled up, and even petrified and hardened with sin, and is guarded and garrisoned by Satan, and its goods are kept in peace by him: and this had been the case of Lydia.[54]

Gill then describes how God regenerated Lydia:

> But now the Lord opened her understanding, and put light into it, which was before darkness itself; as to spiritual things; by which she saw her wretched, sinful, and miserable state by nature, the insufficiency of all ways and means, and works, to justify and save her, and the necessity, suitableness, and fullness of grace and salvation by Christ; which was done by the same divine power, that at first created light in darkness: moreover, the Lord wrought upon her affections, and engaged them to divine and spiritual things; creating love in her soul to Christ, to his people, truths and ordinances; which was done by his almighty hand, taking away the stony heart, and giving an heart of flesh: he also removed the bar of unbelief, entered in himself, dispossessed Satan, and worked faith in her, to look to him, lay hold on

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[52]Ibid., 283.

[53]Ibid., 296.

[54]Ibid.

> him, and receive him, as her Saviour and Redeemer; making her willing in the day of his power, to be saved by him, and to serve him.[55]

Gill says that once Lydia's heart was opened she heard the things concerning the gospel "in another manner than she had done." Before her heart was opened, "she heard, but did not attend to what she heard." However, with "faith coming by hearing, now she hears with the hearing of faith, and understands what she hears, and cordially receives and embraces it, and put into practice what she heard, submitting to the ordinance of Christ."[56]

On Acts 16:25, Gill speaks of Paul and Silas in prison, praying and praising God. He says their praying and singing were vocal that they "might be chiefly for the sake of the prisoners" in order "that they might hear and be converted; or at least be convicted of the goodness of the cause, for which the apostles suffered."[57] On Acts 16:29, Gill says that the Philippian jailor "came trembling" primarily "through the horror of his conscience, and the dreadful sense he had of himself as a sinner, and of his lost state and condition by nature; the law had entered into his conscience, and had worked wrath there; the Spirit of God had convinced him of his sin and misery." He then inquires as to what he must do in order to be saved. Gill says that "most persons under first awakenings" are inclined toward works. In Gill's description of this account, he shows that he believes this jailor has been awakened to his sinful condition, but he has not believed in Christ and

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[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid., 300.

thus apparently is not yet regenerate. He is sensitive to his sinful condition but is not yet sure how to get relief from this sinful condition.[58]

In his comments on Acts 16:31, "and they said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," Gill says this belief was "not with a bare historical faith, as only to believe that he was the Son of God, and the Messiah, and that he was come in the flesh, and had suffered, and died, and rose again, and was now in heaven at the right hand of God, and would come again to judge both quick and dead, for there may be such a faith and no salvation." Instead, this call to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ means, "to look unto him alone for life and salvation, to rely upon him, and trust in him; to commit himself, and the care of his immortal soul unto him." Having believed in Christ, the jailor can "expect peace, pardon, righteousness, and eternal life" from Christ. Thus, the conditional element to *experiencing* salvation is faith since "between believing in Christ, and being saved with an everlasting salvation, there is a strict and inseparable connection (Mark 16:16)." However, salvation is not conditional in that "not faith, but Christ is the cause and author of salvation." Faith spies "salvation in Christ, goes to him for it, receives it from him, and believes unto it." In commenting on verse 32, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord," Gill says what they spoke was the gospel, which is the publication of salvation by Christ and the proposal of him as the object of faith. It also "encourages souls to believe in him."[59]

How should the gospel minister view the people to whom he is preaching? Gill says, "That ministers, in exhorting men to believe in Christ, do not, and cannot consider

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[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid., 301.

them as elect or non elect, but as sinners, standing in need of Christ, and salvation by him." Further, these sinners are then viewed as either "sensible, or as insensible of their state and condition." If they are insensible, they are not exhorted to believe in Christ because, "I do not find that any such are exhorted to believe in Christ for salvation." This approach is based on Gill's view that a sinner must see his sinful condition in order to see his need of a Savior. Instead, those who are exhorted to believe in Christ are those who are "sensible" of their condition. An example would be the jailor in Acts 16:30-31 "who *trembling said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" He was exhorted to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Gill also holds that believers are also exhorted with the gospel, saying "such who have believed already, and do know that Christ has died for them, and that they are of the number of God's elect may be rationally exhorted to walk on in Christ, as they have received him, and to go on believing to the saving of their souls."[60]

In Gill, the ground for the proclamation of the gospel is not God's desire for the salvation of all people. Instead, God desires the salvation of the elect and thus he sends the gospel to them. Gill argues strongly against the idea that God desires the salvation of all. In answering the objection based on verses such as Matt 23:37, Gill incorporates the distinction between the internal and external call of the gospel. He says, "That the *gathering* here spoken of does not design a gathering of the Jews to Christ internally, by the Spirit and grace of God; but a gathering of them to him externally, by and under the ministry of the word, to hear him preach." This external gathering could have brought "conviction of and an assent unto him, as the Messiah." This assent would

[60]Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 469.

not have been "saving faith in him" but "would have been sufficient to have preserved them from temporal ruin."[61] The purpose of the passage is to condemn the leaders of the Jews for their rejection of God's Messiah.

In summary, Gill's view is that preachers are to preach the gospel indefinitely, even declaring "whoever believes shall be saved," but only those made sensible of their condition by the law and convicting power of the Holy Spirit are exhorted to believe in Christ for salvation. The gospel is to be declared – not offered. Faith is an instrument of receiving, not procuring. Faith does not bring about salvation, but it does receive the blessings of salvation.

## Conclusion

An examination of Gill's discussion of the public ministry of the Word gives evidence that he did not restrict the preaching of the Word of God only to the elect.[62] Gill says the public ministry of the Word is to be used "for the enlargement of the interest of Christ in the world." Evidence of this use of the ministry is seen in the early history of the church as the kingdom of Christ spread throughout the world. Second, "the ministry of the word is for the conversion of sinners; without which churches would not be increased nor supported, and must in course fail, and come to nothing." However, with the Lord's blessing upon ministers, "many in every age believe and turn to the Lord, and are added to the churches." This blessing upon the preaching of the gospel means preachers are "to set forth the lost and miserable estate and condition of men by nature," the danger sinners

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[61]Ibid., 108-09. The first edition has "internally" twice. In later editions the second "internally" is corrected with "externally." See also Gill, *Exposition,* 7:282-83.

[62]Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity,* 924-32.

face, "the necessity of regeneration and repentance," the righteousness of Christ, and "of faith in Christ." These are the things that "are blessed for the turning of men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God."[63]

Gill also says that the ministry of the gospel involves "the gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself; it is a publication of salvation by Christ." It is the declaration that "Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners," and thus "there is salvation in him, and in no other; and that whoever believes in him shall be saved: this is the gospel every faithful minister preaches."[64]

John Gill did not believe in an offer of grace to anyone. However, the presentation of evidence from his writings shows he did believe in the necessity of preaching the gospel to all. There is no indication that Gill believed in withholding the gospel from people. Nor is there any indication that his theology resulted in his not preaching the gospel to the unsaved. Although the issue of the offer of the gospel raises great popular concern about Gill, Gill's view of preaching the gospel to all should alleviate concerns that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist.

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[63]Ibid., 931-32.Gill says the other purposes are the perfecting of the saints, the edifying of the body of Christ, and the glory of God.

[64]Ibid., 929-30.

# CHAPTER 8

# PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY

Besides the doctrinal issues some present as reasons for classifying John Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist, there are sometimes practical concerns expressed concerning Gill and Hyper-Calvinism. These usually have to do with a perceived inactivity toward evangelism and missions. Gill is sometimes even classified as anti-evangelistic and anti-missions. Along with these charges, sometimes accusations are made that Gill was at least partially responsible for the decline of the Particular Baptists in eighteenth-century England. An examination of these more practical aspects of Gill's ministry in relation to his soteriology follows.

## Gill and the Evangelical Revival

First, what explains Gill's lack of activity concerning evangelism and missions? This question is very difficult to answer since we are lacking evidence to give a clear answer. However, it is a pertinent question, especially in light of Gill's proximity to the Evangelical Awakening. The Evangelical Awakening "began in the mid-1730s and in which the open-air preaching of George Whitefield (1714-1770), John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1708-1788), Howell Harris (1714-1773) and Daniel Rowland (1711-1790) to literally thousands played such a prominent part."[1]

[1]Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Baptist Identity: A View From the Eighteenth Century," *EQ* 67:2 (1995), 141. On the Evangelical Awakening see Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 221-44; Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain*

Peter Naylor ponders why Gill never mentions Whitefield.[2] He conjectures that it may be because he was "suspicious of the lasting worth of Whitefield's work," quoting Wesley's comments that supposedly came from Whitefield himself that "in a few years, the far greater part of those who had once 'received the word with joy,' yea, had 'escaped the corruption that is in the world,' were entangled again and overcome."[3] Michael Haykin has a similar view:

> For close to forty years the Particular Baptists were generally quite cool, indeed one might say frigid, towards the revival and its leaders. In part this coolness can be traced to the fact that two of the key figures in the revival, the Wesleys, were firmly committed to Arminianism, which most Particular Baptists, if not all, regarded as a damnable heresy alongside Arianism, Deism, and Roman Catholicism. Whitefield, though, like many of the other leaders of the revival, was a Calvinist. Yet, only a handful of Particular Baptist pastors – among them Andrew Gifford (1700-1784) in London and John Oulton in Leominster – openly associated with him. Many Particular Baptists had distinct problems with Whitefield's pressing men and women to put their trust in Christ, and complained of his "Arminian dialect" and "Semi-pelagian addresses"![4]

It is entirely conceivable that the theological issues were the most important reasons for Gill's lack of cooperation with Whitefield and Wesley. Though agreeable in

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*Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson: 1995), 331-40; Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981), 382-84; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003); Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: God's Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1990).

[2]It should be noted that there were many influential men that Gill does not mention, or rarely mentions. Often when he does mention someone it is in a footnote referencing a work by the person. Sometimes he mentions someone in his opposition to them. The fact that he does not mention Whitefield really does not tell us anything at all, either good or bad, in regard to his thoughts of Whitefield.

[3]Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace, 1992), 203-04.

[4]Haykin, "The Baptist Identity: A View From the Eighteenth Century," 141. Haykin references L. G. Champion, *Farthing Rushlight. The Story of Andrew Gifford 1700-1784* (London, 1961), 26; George Whitefield, Letters to John Oulton, 6 April 1742 and 27 May 1742 in *Letters of George Whitefield for the period 1734-1742* (N.p., 1771; reprint Edinburgh, 1976), 381-82, 393-94. For the Particular Baptist description of Whitefield's preaching, see Joseph Ivimey, *A History of English Baptists*, (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:280.

the main with Whitefield, Gill would have had definite problems cooperating with Wesley. Wesley is the personification of one of the primary theological problems Gill battled against throughout his ministry – Arminianism. Tom Nettles says, "Every aspect of Gill's doctrine of security was either rejected or amended by the great Methodist awakener."[5] Although possible, it is doubtful Gill would have seriously considered cooperating with Whitefield because of his proximity to Wesley. However, far from being uninterested in what was happening with the Evangelical Awakening in England and the Great Awakening in the colonies, Nettles argues that Gill was aware of, and at least interested in, what was transpiring. He contends, "Gill's opposition to Wesley did not arise from a negative view of revival and itinerant preaching." He points out that Gill was acquainted with both Wesley and Whitefield and that their acquaintance may have come through Gill's friendship with James Hervey. He references the account of a breakfast and worship service where Wesley, Whitefield, Hervey, Gifford, Cudworth, Romaine, Cennick, and Gill were present. Gill actually gave a short exhortation to the assembled men.[6] Nettles also relies on Gill's admiration for Richard Davis, especially shown in Gill's re-publication of a volume of Davis' hymns, to show that Gill would not have been opposed to the idea of itinerant preaching, saying "Gill could hardly have objected to Wesley, or Whitefield, on grounds to which he formerly had been congenial

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[5]Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity,* vol. 1*: Beginnings in Britain* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005) , 228. See also Tom J. Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklyke Brill, 1997), 131-70.

[6]Ibid. In a footnote Nettles says this meeting probably occurred in September, 1751. If Nettles is correct, it is interesting that Gill's written debate with Wesley occurred the following year. For an evaluation of this debate see Nettles, *The Baptists,* 230-36. The account of the meeting is found in *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon* (London: William Edward Painter, 1840), 162.

in Davis."[7] Further, Nettles points out that Gill was aware of what was transpiring in America and was supportive of the evangelistic growth that was taking place among the Baptists there.[8]

While Whitefield would have been, in the main, accepted by the Particular Baptists because of his Calvinistic theology, his ecclesiology was another matter. On the one hand, Whitefield was an Anglican, the official Church of England, and on the other hand, he "eschewed any attempt to make ecclesiological issues, central to his preaching." Whitefield's "evangelical catholicity was perceived by many Particular Baptists as a threat to their identity. . . . The revival, if embraced, might topple the walls of their 'enclosed gardens' and submerge their treasured identity in a sea of non-denominational evangelicalism."[9] In addition, Gill, as a Dissenter, had written against the Church of England.[10] E. A. Payne, in speaking of Fuller, Carey, Ryland, and Sutcliff, says, "These men were not under the influence of John Wesley. Far from it. For long the Wesleyan Revival was regarded in Baptist, as in other circles, with much suspicion." In the footnote he shows that, this concern with Wesley may not have been merely a theological reason but also a Dissenting issue, quoting A.W. Harrison who says, "John Wesley, in spite of

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[7]Nettles, *The Baptists,* 228-30.

[8]Ibid., 230.

[9]Haykin, "The Baptist Identity," 141-42. Haykin quotes Benjamin Walin's *The Folly of Neglecting Divine Institutions* in order to give evidence for this. Haykin says, "Outer form and inner vitality were, in the minds of many Particular Baptists, fused together in an infrangible union" (143).

[10]"The Dissenter's Reasons for Separating From the Church of England," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

his Nonconformist ancestry, had a distinct dislike for Dissent and was particularly out of favour with Baptists and Quakers."[11]

Differing views on the ordinances of the church may have been part of Gill's issue with the Evangelical Revival. This idea is especially possible in view of Gill's strong Baptist views concerning the ordinances. The issue of baptism was a definite dividing point. For Gill, who had been involved in a number of baptismal controversies, this issue would have been a very important matter. He had clearly voiced his opposition to infant baptism. Because of this opposition, it would have probably been seen as a point of compromise had he spoken approvingly of Whitefield. In addition, the issue of baptism – as interpreted by the Particular Baptists – as a necessary prerequisite to the Lord's Supper might have been a factor. Naylor mentions that William Eltringham wrote *The Baptist against the Baptist* in 1755 in which he "developed his earlier objections to immersion as a necessary pre-condition for communion," and that "John Gill was taken to task frequently." Eltringham employed Bunyan's arguments against Gill and therefore "John Bunyan's ghost had been called up to anathematize John Gill."[12] In light of this controversy it seems the Particular Baptists, and specifically Gill, would have been very hesitant to cooperate closely with those who had starkly different views of the ordinances. Naylor alludes to this saying, "Perhaps inevitably in the glare of the Evangelical Awakening, controversy among Particular Baptists concerning terms of admission to communion revived."[13] Thus, while there was kinship between Gill and

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[11]F. A. Payne, "The Evangelical Revival and the Beginnings of the Modern Missionary Movement," *ConQ* 21(1943): 226.

[12]Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord,* 76.

[13]Ibid., 103.

certain Anglicans, for instance Augustus Toplady and James Hervey, and this affinity was the case with other Particular Baptists in their relationships to Anglicans, it seems that Baptist ecclesiology may have kept them from cooperating on a close level.[14]

Another suggested reason for Gill's distance from the Evangelical Awakening is the "enthusiasm" involved in the Awakening. John Piper claims, "The effect of this rationalistic distortion [Hyper-Calvinism] of the biblical Calvinism was that the churches were lifeless."[15] Later, Piper says, "one example of the emotional fallout of High Calvinism is seen, first, in the fact that Whitefield and Wesley were accused of 'enthusiasm' which was defined vaguely and abusively as any kind of religious excitement, and second, in the fact that John Gill, in his *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, said that spiritual joy 'is not to be expressed by those who experience it; it is better experienced than expressed.'"[16] However, the context of the

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[14]He was good friends with Augustus Toplady, who upon Gill's death desired to officiate at his funeral but was respectfully turned down so that Baptists could officiate because "Dr. Gill was conscientiously a Dissenter." See John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: J. Bennett, 1838), 135-36.

[15]John Piper, "Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision: Andrew Fuller's Broadsides Against Sandemanianism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Global Unbelief" [on-line], accessed 27 April 2010; available from http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/ 1977_Holy_Faith_Worthy_ Gospel_World_Vision. Internet. A question which is raised with this evaluation is, how is "lifeless" defined? Were they really lifeless? Gill's approach argues against such a charge. In "The Form of Sound Words to be Held Fast," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), Gill says,

> The manner in which the form of found words is to be held fast; *in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus*: which words may be connected with the phrase *which thou hast heard of me*. Timothy had heard the apostle preach those found doctrines with great faithfulness; for he was a faithful minister of the gospel, who *kept back nothing that was profitable, and shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God*; he had heard him speak the truth in love, with great warmth of affection, with much vehemence and fervency of spirit.

[16]Ibid., found in n. 32. The quote is from Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life. (*Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 20. Morden says, "In its historical context, this remark was almost certainly an implicit criticism of the Evangelical Revival" (20-21). Morden here references Haykin using the same quote in a

quote, Gill's chapter on spiritual joy, argues against such an interpretation. Specifically, the quote from Gill is taken out of context. In fact, shortly before this quote Gill, speaking about the everlasting love of God, says

> every thought concerning it, meditation upon it, and discovery of it, fills with joy unspeakable; a thought of it is with the greatest pleasure and delight; meditation on it is sweet; and while musing upon it, the fire of divine love is inflamed, and burns within, and *breaks forth in expressions of joy and gladness*; and nothing can yield greater satisfaction than to be remembered with the favour God bears to his own people; and the love of God is to be remembered more, and is more exhilarating to the soul, than wine is to the animal spirits, Song of Solomon 1:2,4; Zechariah 10:7.[17]

The quote from Piper, Morden, and Haykin is also not totally correct. The correct and full quote is under the discussion of the different qualities of this spiritual joy. Gill says,

> It is unspeakable; not to be fully[18] expressed by those who experience it; it is better experienced than expressed; it is something like what the apostle Paul felt when caught up to the third heaven; and it is "full of glory", being concerned with eternal glory and happiness; it is a "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God", 1 Peter 1:8; Romans 5:2.[19]

It seems best to understand this quote as meaning that one of the qualities of this spiritual joy is the frequent lack of expressive ability adequate to the experience. In fact, the manner in which Gill normally uses the term "enthusiasm" is to answer the charge that Christianity, or at least certain aspects of Christianity, is based on "enthusiasm." Enthusiasm seems to have referred to that which neglects or by-passes the rational process. Gill connects the miraculous and spiritual aspects of Christianity with the

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discussion of this "enthusiasm." See Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliffe of Olney, His Friends, and His Times* (Evangelical, 1994), 31.

[17]John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London: 1893; reprint, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1984), 775. Italics added.

[18]Morden and Piper leave out "fully," while Haykin has it correct, with the word "fully" included.

[19]Ibid., 781.

rational aspect. He does not deny either but affirms both. Therefore, Gill would not have been opposed to expressions of joyful Christianity, although he no doubt would have been concerned with excesses in the Evangelical Revival.[20]

## Gill's View of Pastoral Duties

Some have also argued that Gill was not involved in evangelism because he was withdrawn and only interested in his studies. Some make the charge that he did not even visit his congregation much. Gill says that ministers "ought not to spend their time in an unprofitable manner, or in needless and unnecessary visits." Many church members have the mistaken notion "that they must be visited, and that very often." For this type of person, "if ministers are not continually calling on them they think themselves neglected, and are much displeased; not considering, that such a frequency of visits, as is desired by them, must be the bane and ruin of what might otherwise be a very valuable ministry." Not only that, but it also "furnishes an idle and lazy preacher with a good excuse to neglect his studies, and that with a great deal of peace and quietness of conscience, whilst he fancies he is about his ministerial work." Yet Gill clearly says, "I would not be understood, as though I thought that visits were needless things, and that they are no part of a minister's work: I am sensible, that he ought to *be diligent to know the state of his flock*; and that it is his business to visit the members of the church, at proper times, and on proper occasions." His concern is where "too great frequency of visits as is desired,

[20]The absence of any writing from Gill in opposition to the movement should caution against forming an opinion that Gill was opposed to Whitefield.

and when they are unnecessary."[21] From these statements, we must assume that Gill did visit, if he practiced what he preached.

On another occasion Gill, in addressing the duties of pastors, says, "You will be called upon sometimes to visit sick persons, who are not members of the church." He gives direction on making such visits. These visits may involve non-church members as well as those "who may be strangers to the grace of God, and the way of salvation by Christ." They could consist of either "profane persons" or those "resting upon their civility and morality," convinced "that they have wronged no man, and have done that which is right between man and man" and in their "dying circumstances, hope, on this account, things will be well with them." In such a situation their "relatives may be afraid of your saying anything to interrupt this carnal peace." Gill's exhortation to the minister in such a situation is to "be faithful, labor to show the one and the other their wretched and undone state by nature; the necessity of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, in his blood, righteousness, and atoning sacrifice, for peace, pardon, justification, and salvation."[22]

### Gill's Attitude toward Evangelism and Missions

Although some insinuate that Gill was actually anti-evangelistic and anti-missionary, the evidence presented throughout this work, including this chapter, verifies that this charge was not the reality. Olin Robison admits, "A careful study of his sermons supports the view that the never knowingly discouraged presentation of the gospel to

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[21]John Gill, "The Duty of a Pastor," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

[22]John Gill, "The Work of a Gospel Minister," in *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007).

'sinners,' and his published views on the duties of the Christian minister support this conclusion." Somehow Robison amazingly concludes that, "Gill and Brine actually felt that the minister did have an evangelistic responsibility, but that this responsibility was only to the 'elect,' and that any real evangelistic emphasis was far overshadowed by questions concerning the nature of election."[23] This conclusion does not seem to be the case at all. Robison does point out that Gill's *Declaration of Faith and Practice*, while thoroughly Calvinistic, contains no hint of the high-Calvinism of which he is accused. Indeed, according to Robison, it differs in no material degree from the Rules and Articles of the Particular Baptist Church published in 1855.[24] This evidence is further reason for viewing Gill within the confines of orthodox Calvinism. Though his gifts and activities were different than others who were more engaged in evangelism, nonetheless Gill was evangelical in outlook, exhibiting a strong reliance on the preaching the gospel.

There is a surprising area of Gill's theology that may have discouraged mission activity. James A. DeJong argues that Gill's eschatology contributed to the discouragement of fervent mission work. According to DeJong, Gill believed the great missionary activity of the church would come after the fall of the Antichrist, which would be sometime in the future. For the short term this view was an impediment to missions, but there were principles contained within Gill's optimistic eschatology that would engender positive attitudes toward missionary activity. DeJong says, "While the logical deductions made from the doctrine of election . . . have frequently been judged as

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[23]Olin C. Robinson, "The Legacy of John Gill," *BQ* 24 (1971): 117-18.

[24]Ibid., 120. Clive Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?" in *Recycling the Past or Researching History*, ed. Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 236-37.

impediments to evangelism" there has been "little recognition . . . of the strongly evangelistic note in Gill's eschatology." While noting, "The Particular Baptists were the pioneers in foreign missions in the 1790's," he says, "Gill's eschatology undoubtedly contributed to that rebirth of missions."[25] Although Gill's writings did not immediately produce missionary efforts, "ultimately, however, it was the total impact of a fresh interpretation of many Biblical promises to meet new situations that contributed new life to the missionary movement."[26] In the meantime, DeJong thinks Gill's eschatology fostered complacency concerning missions as people waited for God to act.[27]

**Gill's Influence on the Decline of Particular Baptists**

A further discussion concerns whether Gill's influence caused a decline among Particular Baptists. While a standard interpretation among many, it is a view that has

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[25]James A. DeJong, *As The Waters Cover The Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640-1810* (Laurel, MS: Audubon, 2006), 156. DeJong explains that Gill believed when the Antichrist fell many ministers would go forth, bringing about a massive number of conversions that would begin the spiritual reign of Christ and toward the end of the spiritual reign Christ would appear "to begin his personal reign" (157). DeJong says,

> Gill did not speculate on the date of Antichrist's fall. He and other high Calvinists waited patiently, trusting God to make plain when his corps of elite ministers should go into action. And when the impetuous William Carey tried to force the divinely-determined pace for history in his famous sermon to the Northamptonshire Association, he was dutifully reminded of this truth. But with the outbreak of the French Revolution it appeared to many that God had begun that decisive battle against Antichrist for which they had been waiting (Ibid.).

[26]Ibid., 158.

[27]Ibid., 176. Barry H. Howson, "The Eschatology of the Calvinistic Baptist John Gill (1697-1771) Examined and Compared," *Eusebia* 5 (2005), 34-35. Howson references John Ryland, Sr.'s rebuke of William Carey as having "as much to do with his eschatology as it does his soteriology." See Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), 189-97; Crawford Gribben, "John Gill and Puritan Eschatology," *EQ* 73 (2002):

> A pivotal figure in the development of the Calvinistic millennial hope, Gill bridges the intense optimism of seventeenth-century puritan premillennialism and the intensely pessimistic nineteenth-century faith by happily embracing essential elements of both within his anticipation of the course of providential history. Standing on the shoulders of the radically millenarian Benjamin Keach, whose pulpit he inherited, and anticipating the robustly premillennial faith of C. H. Spurgeon, who would succeed him in the same pastorate, Gill exercised an important influence on the gradual molding of the millennial faith among English non-conformists (325-26).

been challenged.[28] Michael Haykin argues that it is wrong to consider Gill "and Brine as the leading culprits for the spiritual leanness of many of the Calvinistic Baptist churches of the time. Such a view is an oversimplification. There were other causes at work in the declension of the Calvinistic Baptists besides High Calvinism."[29] He states, "The Act of Toleration had effectively confined Calvinistic Baptist preaching to the meeting-house, in which the congregation met to worship God." On the positive side, this legal action gave Baptists freedom to organize and worship as they saw fit. On the negative side, "only those buildings registered as meeting-houses . . . could serve as places of evangelism and worship." In addition, the Act "did not give them full civil rights" and resulted in obstacles to full participation in society. Haykin says, "Noncomformists, Baptists included, were clearly in a position of social inferiority throughout the eighteenth century." Such discrimination "helped to contribute to their failure to attract new members."[30] A second factor in the decline of Particular Baptists in eighteenth-century England was doctrinal controversy. According to Haykin, these controversies included hymn-singing and Hyper-Calvinism.[31] A third factor in the decline is the issue of isolation and lack of communication. Geographical limitations, church autonomy, and the

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[28]Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?" 239, says, "It must be acknowledged that the importance of high-Calvinism as a doctrine is measured only in as much as it is an explanation for the decline of English Particular Baptists in the early to mid-eighteenth century."

[29]Haykin, 19. See also idem, "'A Habitation of God, Through the Spirit': John Sutfcliff (1752-1814) and the revitalization of the Calvinistic Baptists in the late eighteenth century" *BQ*7 (1992); Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World,* 7-17; E. F. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism," *BQ* 20 (1963), 100-01.

[30]Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 19-22.

[31]Haykin, 22. Haykin's discussion on John Johnson's brand of Hyper-Calvinism may point to one of the reasons for Fuller's, et. al, concern over Hyper-Calvinism and yet his respect toward men such as Gill, Brine, and Button. Fuller, and the other "Evangelical Calvinists," had personally experienced the bad effects of certain theology in the wrong hands.

lack of denomination structure all worked to limit the influence of Particular Baptists in eighteenth-century England.[32] As Haykin points out, Gill himself recognized this time was a period of decline:

> The harvest is great, and faithful and painful ministers are few. There are scarcely any that naturally care for the estate and souls of men, and who are heartily concerned for their spiritual welfare. . . . And what adds to the sorrow is, that there are so few rising to fill the places of those that are removed; few that come forth with the same spirit, and are zealously attached to the truths of the everlasting gospel. Blessed be God, there is here and there one that promises usefulness, or otherwise the sorrow and grief at the loss of gospel ministers would be insupportable.[33]

However, because of the paucity of statistics the extent of the decline is unknown. In fact, Clive Jarvis has questioned the decline itself. He says, "What I want to address here is whether there was such a period of decline and stagnation amongst Particular Baptists. The term 'high-Calvinism' has come to describe the 'stagnation of mid-eighteenth century English church life', not just Baptist church life, but I believe that this widely accepted consensus needs to be challenged."[34] Jarvis questions, based on Roger Hayden's thesis, "the extent to which high-Calvinism can be said to have been the

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[32]Haykin, 23-24.

[33]John Gill, "A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Samuel Wilson," *The Collected Writings of John Gill* [CD-ROM] (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007). The quote is found in Haykin, 24. See also, idem, "'A Habitation of God, Through the Spirit': John Sutfcliff (1752-1814) and the revitalization of the Calvinistic Baptists in the late eighteenth century" *BQ* (1992), 305, where Haykin addresses the same issues, saying, "there were a variety of factors at work: political and sociological, as well as theological." These factors may have included "ongoing legal restrictions, which effectively confined Baptist preaching to the meetings house." Also, according to Deryck W. Lovegrove, there is the issue of isolation. Lovegrove says, "The very strength of independency, the internal cohesion of the gathered church, became its weakness as geographical remoteness conspired with autonomy and lack of common purpose to foster numerical decline." Haykin also points to Isabel Rivers who "sees a loss of identity as a key factor in the decline of Baptists." She says, "The experience of . . . persecution and heroic leadership must have given a sense of identity and commitment to the nonconformists not shared by the succeeding generations of dissenters." Thus, "the decline of the Baptists during the early 1700s cannot be simply attributed to one cause" (304-05).

[34]Clive Jarvis, "The Myth of High Calvinism?" 234.

prevailing theology among English Calvinists in the early- to mid-eighteenth century." Hayden argues that evangelical Calvinism "was predominant in the influential Western Association from where it spread into other associations, not least through the ministers trained at the Bristol Baptist Academy."[35]

Jarvis seeks to demonstrate that growth did begin in the latter part of the eighteenth century.[36] If this assertion is the case, the evangelical Calvinism of Fuller did not cause the growth because the growth was already taking place and Fuller and others would then have ridden the wave of growth that was already occurring.

## Conclusion

The practical ministry of Gill is not a reason to classify him as a Hyper-Calvinist. In fact, it is entirely possible that many of the caricatures of him in regard to the practical aspects of his ministry are simply wrong. Currently, evidence that would allow for clear evaluation is lacking concerning practical aspects of his ministry. Therefore, caution should be used in evaluating this aspect of Gill.

Regardless of the speculation concerning these areas, the view of Gill in his day was that of a champion of orthodoxy. Haykin says,

> Gill's theology did hamper passionate evangelism and outreach. But, in the long run, this man's theology was used by God when revival came to the Baptists at the close of the eighteenth century. In a world in which men were abandoning the main contours of biblical orthodoxy – the infallibility of the Word of God, the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ – Gill held fast to all of these and enabled the Calvinistic Baptists to weather the intellectual storms of the eighteenth century. And in so doing, his fidelity gave form and shape to the coals of

[35]Ibid., 239.

[36]Ibid., 239-49. Jarvis does mention a decline in the Northamptonshire area from 1772-84.

> orthodoxy upon which the fire of revival fell later in the century through men like Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, Jr., and William Carey.[37]

One of the arguments of the current work is if this influence was true for Gill's day, it can also be true for the present. Instead of viewing Gill with such suspicion that people are discouraged from reading him, it is better to view him as having much to contribute to the theological and exegetical discussion of our day. As such, people should be encouraged to read and make use of Gill's writings and perhaps such devotion to the truth as personified by Gill will once again help to give "form and shape to the coals of orthodoxy upon which the fire of revival" will fall once again.

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[37]Michael A. G. Haykin, "Hyper-Calvinism and the Theology of John Gill," 16 [on-line], accessed 28 April 2010; available from http://www.andrewfullercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/hyper-calvinism-and-the-theology-of-john-gill.pdf. Internet.

# CHAPTER 9

# CONCLUSION

A foundational concern for this work is that John Gill has much to contribute to the spiritual life of the church in our day. He was robustly theological, as well as genuinely experimental, in both his theology and life. In his writings, he was both precise and complex. He struggled for consistency and yet recognized the difficulties in understanding God's revelation. No doubt he was a man with faults and shortcomings. Yet, while writing a number of major works throughout the course of his life, including a commentary on every verse of the Bible, a systematic and practical theology, and a major theological treatise in *The Cause of God and Truth,* he displayed an amazing consistency in his views. He was a gift from God to the church and should be viewed as such even in our own day.

A major reason for his consistency could be that his soteriology was central to his theology and that his soteriology remained constant throughout his life. His soteriology is consistent, orthodox Calvinism. Nevertheless, he was a thinker and thus arrived at some theological conclusions that differ from others. Yet, as has been argued in this work, these differences do not place him outside of Calvinism. There may be some implications to his theology that some have taken to extremes, or have distorted to the degree that their new theology does not fit within the confines of Calvinism. However, to argue against the implications of a position is not necessarily to argue against the position

itself. Gill's positions do not necessarily equate to the implications and positions of others who followed him. Gill cannot be blamed for where others go. He must be measured on the merits of his positions.

The present work does not argue for a wholesale acceptance of Gill. He, like any other theologian, writer, or preacher, should be studied with discernment. However, he should not be viewed with a "hyper" sensitivity. Instead, he should be seen as an orthodox champion, a warrior on the side of gospel truth, whose theological and exegetical purpose is to produce experimental Christianity in the lives of God's elect in order that God would be glorified in the accomplishment of his eternal purposes.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the following three proposals are presented. First, the epithet of Hyper-Calvinism, especially in relation to John Gill, should be dropped from categorical usage. The wholesale rejection of the word is a dramatic proposal in light of how the term has taken root in the vocabulary of Christians. However, historians should take the lead in this linguistic exercise and theologians should quickly follow suit. If this proposal appears too far reaching, further study is called for to deal with later periods in order to evaluate those periods in light of the proposal. Unless proof is provided for the beneficial usage of the term that would outweigh the destructive potential of it, the term itself should be annihilated from historical and theological usage. If the term continues to be used its employment should be with a clear definition and beneficial usage. Regardless, its use in relation to John Gill is damaging to the church because it minimizes the potential for his positive influence in the church.

Because the term only came into use in the late eighteenth century and because the debates of the eighteenth century were primarily intra-Calvinistic debates, a term such

as Hyper-Calvinism is not helpful to describe what was in existence. In addition, because the term itself is laden with such emotional, slanderous baggage it tends to be more harmful than helpful. The term itself conjures up dreadful ideas and images. Therefore, it is not generally conducive for the types of discussions that should be taking place in historical and theological studies regarding eighteenth-century theological debates.

It has also been argued that the difficulty of arriving at an agreed upon definition makes the use of the term problematic and less than helpful. Moreover, it is not merely that there are differences in the definition of the term. The differences are dramatic, resulting in definitions that are all over the theological landscape. So the lack of historical precision, lexicographical agreement, and theological confusion, as well as, slanderous usage and emotional reactions, all argue against continued usage of the term. As previously asserted, once thoroughly examined in his context, Gill does not easily fit the mold of a Hyper-Calvinist. A man who has and can contribute so much to the life of the church should not be labeled with such an offensive term that would then curtail his usefulness to the church.

So, what should replace the term, "Hyper-Calvinism"? The term "High Calvinism" would seem to be a category that would encompass a lot of the emphases as well as take into account historical designations (e.g., he was on the "high" side of the question, etc.). This term is also one many people already use. Whatever term is used, people and positions should be evaluated on their own merit and not based on a historically transposed term that is laden with caricature.

The second proposal is for further study of Gill in his historical context. Although there has been a growing interest in academic circles in the study of Gill in

recent years, much more work is needed. This research not only includes the works of Gill, but also his context. Further areas of needed research include those who influenced Gill, those connected with Gill during his life, and those influenced by Gill. Further comparisons between eighteenth-century contemporaries of Gill need examination, including Fuller, Edwards, Ryland, Sr., etc. The Particular Baptists as a whole, in the context of dissent and their relationships to other Christian denominations of their day, need further examination. Much of what transpired in the eighteenth century finds Gill and his influence connected with it in some way.

The third proposal is for further interaction with Gill's theology and biblical exposition. It is possible that Gill is the foremost Baptist theologian. It is especially important for Baptists to interact with his theology, thus learning from him. However, Gill is not only a theologian; he is also an exegete of the biblical text. Pastors and teachers should consult his commentaries often. There are reasons why so many throughout history have loved and relied upon Gill. The modern church should not miss the privilege of being able to learn from someone with the giftedness of Gill.

John Rippon, writing some years after the death of Gill, pays tribute to him by expressing his desire that the readers of his *Life of John Gill* would celebrate "that sovereign Grace, which its departed Champion so largely experienced –to which he was so distinguished an ornament – and of which he was so able a defender."[1]

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[1]John Rippon *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.*(London: J. Bennett, 1838), 140.

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ABSTRACT

A THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL EXAMINATION
OF JOHN GILL'S SOTERIOLOGY IN RELATION TO
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HYPER-CALVINISM

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010
Chair: Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

This dissertation is a theological and historical examination of John Gill's soteriology that argues against classifying him as a Hyper-Calvinist. Gill's complex theology, as well as the difficulty of defining Hyper-Calvinism, argues against labeling Gill as such. Chapter 1 is a survey of historical evaluations of Gill concerning his relationship to Hyper-Calvinism. Evidence is presented showing that many of the evaluations are suspect due to a historiographically-biased paradigm.

Chapter 2 surveys numerous approaches to defining Hyper-Calvinism. This displays the incredible lack of agreement on a definition and therefore is problematic concerning labeling Gill as a Hyper-Calvinist. A working definition is suggested, based on an evaluation of the Modern Question controversy.

Chapter 3 examines eternal aspects of Gill's soteriology. It is argued that while foundational to Gill's soteriology, these aspects are not the totality of his soteriology and thus he remains within the confines of historic Calvinism.

Chapter 4 examines God-ward aspects of Gill's soteriology. His view of the love and grace of God is presented, especially concerning the discriminating aspects between the elect and non-elect.

Chapter 5 examines the anthropological aspects of Gill's soteriology, specifically dealing with man's responsibility. The complex nature of this aspect shows the difficulty of the issue. On this point Gill does show some affinity with Hyper-Calvinism. However, his nuanced position cautions against a simple categorization of his position as Hyper-Calvinism.

Chapter 6 examines the legal aspects of Gill's soteriology, specifically the issue of Antinomianism. Gill is easily defended against the charge of either doctrinal or practical Antinomianism.

Chapter 7 deals with evangelistic aspects of Gill's soteriology, specifically his view concerning the offer of the gospel. Careful examination of this aspect shows that while Gill rejected the idea of "offering" the gospel, he accepted the idea of preaching the gospel to all.

Chapter 8 deals with practical aspects of Gill's soteriology. Issues of Gill's view of evangelism and missions, as well as his relationship to the perceived decline of Particular Baptists in eighteenth century England are examined. Chapter 9 sets forth some proposals resulting from the study.

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