Andrew Fuller's Two Conversions

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Session 1

The subject of our four sessions today is Andrew Fuller, 18th-century Particular Baptist pastor. Is he really worthy of this level of detailed scrutiny and interaction?

I learned about Fuller and the revival of evangelical Calvinism in Particular Baptist church life from Dr. Beale at Bob Jones University in the late 1980s. I don't recall, however, recognizing Fuller's significance or, indeed, the importance of the developments in this phase of Baptist history until Michael Haykin, British scholar who taught for a number of years in Canada before settling down at SBTS in Louisville, began publishing about it. He wrote a biography of Fuller's friend John Sutcliff in 1994,[1] in which Fuller appears as a very significant figure. In 2000 Tom Nettles wrote a biographical sketch of Fuller that Haykin included in volume 2 of his four-volume *The British Particular Baptists 1638-1910.*[2] A year later Haykin published a short volume in his spirituality series on the spirituality of Fuller.[3]

An explosion of interest in Fuller has followed. Haykin now heads the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, which publishes a periodical, *Kettering,* holds an annual conference, and is producing a 15-volume collection of Fuller's writings. Over the last fifteen years or so, numerous volumes covering virtually every aspect of Fuller's ministry have appeared, with an excellent modern biography published in 2015 to celebrate the bicentennial of his death.[4]

Of course, I've read all of it. That was my first attempt at humor in this conference. I hope to continue reading and studying Fuller for many years to come. In this conference, I will focus on Fuller's major writings and contributions, hoping to inspire you to get better acquainted with him. We will also seek practical lessons from his life and thought.

To understand Fuller, we must briefly survey his historical and ecclesiastical context.

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[1] *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends, and his times* (Grand Rapids: Evangelical Press, 1994).

[2] Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2000.

[3] *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Peterborough, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001).

[4] Peter Mordern, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815),* Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (London: Paternoster, 2015).

The Context

The British Particular Baptists

By 1644, seven churches in London had begun immersing believers and published the first London Confession to express their separatist ecclesiology and their Calvinist orthodoxy. For the next forty-five years, these Particular Baptists—so named to distinguish them from General Baptists who held to a more Arminian soteriology—expanded across Britain, while experiencing considerable hardship during the reigns of the Stuart kings, Charles I, Charles II, and James II.

When William and Mary promulgated the Act of Toleration in 1689, Particular Baptists from across the kingdom gathered at London to celebrate their new legal freedoms and to publish the Second London Confession, a baptized version of the Westminster Confession that had originally been penned in 1677.

In the last decades of the 17th century, however, a reaction against religion in general and theological precision in particular was setting in across Europe. This was partly a reaction to the so-called Protestant Scholasticism that had reigned for much of the 17th century; it was also likely a reaction against the religious wars that had decimated Europe over the previous several hundred years.

Rationalism spread through the major denominations, taking various forms. Deism and Socinianism (an early variety of Unitarianism) tried to remove the supernatural from Christianity and exerted more influence than the number of their adherents would suggest. Leading Anglicans embraced an Arminianism that was more-or-less a polite humanism, irritated by the Puritans who continued to insist that theology mattered.

The Baptists were not unaffected by these developments. The General Baptists began tolerating heretical views of Christ and were riddled by Socinianism by the middle of the 18th century. Rationalism was the major culprit in this development. The Particular Baptists were slower to slide into heresy, but many of their churches moved in a rationalistic direction nonetheless. Peter Toon has documented the development of Hyper-Calvinism in 17th and18th century Britain,[5] and, while this extreme Calvinism was not limited to the Baptists by any means, it found able exponents among them and became quite influential.

A 17th century theologian in the Anglican Church, Tobias Crisp, extended Calvinism in rationalistic directions, leading him to espouse supralapsarianism,[6]

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[5] *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

[6] Supralapsarianism is the belief that God's decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to his decree to permit the Fall, so that election and reprobation have equal ultimacy, the Fall appears to be the divine mechanism by which God reveals His justice in damning the reprobate.

eternal justification,[7] and antinomianism.[8] His ideas were picked up early in the 18th century by a Congregationalist minister named Joseph Hussey. Hussey took Crisp's theology in a practical direction Crisp had not followed. Hussey argued that faith is not a duty of unbelievers and, therefore, it is unscriptural to demand repentance and faith of the non-elect.[9] In the rationalistic environment of the early 18th century, Hussey's teachings were welcomed by some Presbyterians, Independents (Congregationalists), and Particular Baptists.

Three significant Baptist pastors adopted all or most of this Hyper-Calvinism, and their influence led many Particular Baptist churches into it. They were John Skepp of Cambridgeshire, who was directly influenced by Hussey and became pastor of an influential London church; John Brine of Northamptonshire, who became pastor of the same London church that Skepp had earlier pastored; and John Gill also of Northamptonshire, who held a significant London pastorate for fifty-one years, exerting enormous influence in the denomination.[10] Both Brine and Gill grew up in Kettering in Northamptonshire, so that Hyper-Calvinist emphases were very strong in central England, and, although there were dissenting voices in the capital, London also came to be dominated by this form of Calvinism by the middle of the 18th century.

Hyper-Calvinism

It was in Northamptonshire, where Fuller is going to spend the majority of his ministerial life, that "The Modern Question" was first debated. The question was this: should the gospel be freely offered to unregenerate people without respect to whether or not they may be elect? The majority of Reformed ministers who weighed in on the question—Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist—were in the affirmative. A Baptist, Abraham Taylor, wrote *The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith Examined* in 1735, in which he argued that Christ and the apostles often indiscriminately demanded that their listeners turn from their sins and embrace the gospel.

Already, though, the teachings of Skepp, who died in 1721, and Gill and Brine, who entered upon their pastoral ministries in 1719 and 1727, respectively, had permeated central England and were having significant sway in Northampton and other shires to the north and southeast of London. Numerous pastors published on both sides of The Modern Question from the 1730s to the 1770s. Among the

[7] Eternal justification is the belief that the principal justification of the elect occurs in the mind of God in eternity past. Therefore, conversion is the realization of the elect that they are already justified.
[8] See Toon, 49-69.
[9] See Toon, 70-85.
[10] See Toon, 93-103.

Particular Baptists the influence of Gill was pronounced, and Hyper-Calvinist ideas predominated in certain parts of the country, especially the central shires. Bristol Baptist Academy largely resisted the Hyper-Calvinist logic and exerted wholesome influence in the west and south, but the east, center, and north of the country—including most of the large, wealthy churches in London—adopted it.

I will not here attempt to give a complete picture of Hyper-Calvinism, and it should be remembered that very few pastors held to all the tenets of the system. My focus will be on the two questions that Fuller principally grappled with: is faith a duty required of all men?[11] Is it appropriate to offer gospel promises to all men consequent upon their repenting and believing?

Since we will meet with many of the Hyper-Calvinist arguments in the course of seeing how Fuller responded to them, it will suffice here to state their conclusions in these areas. First, faith is not a duty required of the non-elect. God requires all people to obey His law, which includes love for Him and for one's neighbor. The gospel, however, is not part of God's law; repentance and faith are not duties incumbent on all men but rather gifts given to the elect. This logic effectively leads to the answer of the second question. In its call for repentance and faith, the gospel holds out the promise of forgiveness. No such promise applies to the non-elect, and, therefore, it is wrong to offer it to them. When their opponents pointed out the many examples of obedience, repentance, and faith being demanded of sinners in Scripture, Hyper-Calvinists had resort to a distinction. Toon reports, Hyper-Calvinists "held that God only required legal repentance and common faith of the majority of the people in the crowds but did require evangelical repentance and saving faith of the regenerate, elect people who heard."[12] If that distinction seems a little murky to you, it does to me also. Toon remarks, "They put forward very few passages of Scripture to prove their opinions since they simply applied their hypothesis to all passages that were mentioned and to their own satisfaction they believed that their way of seeing things was the correct one."[13] Fuller will have to address this distinction.

The Evangelical Awakening

As the Particular Baptists were in the throes of trying to reach consensus on The Modern Question, most of the other denominations in Great Britain were experiencing spectacular revival. God unleashed John and Charles Wesley on Britain in 1738, and soon Methodist preachers were swarming the countryside.

[11] "Faith" is often used in the controversy as shorthand for repentance and faith, which were viewed as indissolubly connected to one another.
[12] Toon, 133.
[13] Toon, 134.

Particular Baptists felt little inclination to support these efforts, given the overt Arminian theology of the leaders.

The Wesleys' younger colleague, George Whitefield, was more difficult to assess. He officially affirmed a Calvinism that shared much in common with their own. Nevertheless, several factors contributed to Particular Baptists remaining aloof from the Awakening. First, although the Established Church came to have an adversarial relationship toward the revivalists, neither the Wesleys nor Whitefield contemplated leaving the state church and were quite reluctant to criticize it as an institution. The Baptists, on the other hand, were opposed to the establishment—having been mistreated by it throughout their history—and were disinclined to cooperate with Anglicans. Second, all of the leading evangelists of the Awakening were pedobaptists. Even though Whitefield and the Wesleys consistently urged their listeners to be born again, Baptists believed that infant baptism negatively impacts the gospel. They rarely cooperated with pedobaptists in religious causes. Finally, when they read about the impassioned pleas issued to audiences by Whitefield and his Welsh Calvinist allies, like Howel Harris and Daniel Rowland, Baptists suspected that Arminian theology might be informing their practice, no matter their claims. Therefore, most Particular Baptists stood apart from the Awakening throughout the 1740s, 50s, and 60s. Where Hyper-Calvinism predominated, Baptists condemned the revival as obscuring the gospel and creating false converts.

The result of all of this for Particular Baptists was not good. Between 1715 and 1753, the number of Particular Baptist churches in Britain declined by one-third. In addition, many of the churches had aging memberships with little outreach. Many pastors at the time noted with deep concern a corresponding decline in spirituality and zeal.[14]

Into this environment came Andrew Fuller.

Fuller's Conversion to Christ

Fuller was born on February 6, 1754 at Wicken, a village nearly Ely in Fenland Cambridgeshire, in a small farmhouse. His parents were Robert Fuller and Philippa Gunton. They were dissenters, but Philippa was the more committed of the two. The family moved to Soham, 2 ½ miles from Wicken, in 1761 and joined the Particular Baptist church there (Philippa's mother had been a founding member of the church).

[14] Mordern, 40.

Both sides of Andrew's family traced their lineage back to 17th-century Nonconformists. Andrew's two older brothers followed their father in farming but became deacons in Particular Baptist churches.

Fuller's biographer comments that his "Fenland upbringing helps explain some of the imagery he used ('my hands hung down like a bulrush', he once wrote), together with his enduring countryman's distrust of London. More importantly, his tenacious, determined spirit and a certain independence of thought can be attributed, in part, to his being a 'son of the Fens'."[15]

Andrew too worked as a farmer, developed a taste for athletics, especially wrestling, and was not particularly religious in his teenage years.

In 1752 the Independent church in Isleham had split, when a portion of the congregation separated to form a Baptist church in Soham, which was nicknamed "The Little Meeting." John Eve became the pastor shortly after its being constituted.

From the beginning, Eve and the Soham Baptists were high Calvinists, the dominant theology among Baptists of the Fens. As the Evangelical Awakening raged around Soham, Eve and his church appear to have ignored it.

Fuller later reported that he never heard the gospel from Pastor Eve and "never considered myself as any way concerned in what I heard from the pulpit."[16] At age 14 he read Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,* his marvelous autobiography, and *Pilgrim's Progress* as well as *Gospel Sonnets* by Ralph Erskine, the warmly evangelical Scottish Presbyterian. Through these writings, Fuller came to conviction of his need of salvation. But the thought passed, receiving little or no encouragement from the adults in his life.

In November 1769 at the age of 15, Fuller again came under deep conviction. He wrote,

> The fire and brimstone of the bottomless pit seemed to burn within my bosom. I do not write in the language of exaggeration… I saw, that there was no truth in me. I saw, that God would be perfectly just in sending me to hell, and that to hell I must go, unless I were saved of mere grace, and as it were in spite of myself… I never before knew what it was to feel myself an odious, lost sinner, standing in need of both pardon and purification. [17]

You might wonder how Fuller was coming to this point of conviction. He loved Pastor Eve and was learning many wonderful biblical truths from him. He was

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[15] Mordern, 31.

[16] Mordern, 44. See also Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* in *The complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life* (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1845), xvi.

[17] Mordern, 45. *Memoirs,* xvii.

learning about God's holiness and man's sin, about Christ's substitutionary atonement and the Spirit's power in drawing sinners to Christ. What Pastor Eve did not give him was a direct offer to repent and believe the gospel. Instead, Fuller was looking for a warrant in himself that he was elect. Conscious of his sin, however, it seemed utterly presumptuous to him to look inward and see anything God would want to save.

He went several months in desperate agony of spirit, fearing the wrath of God but not knowing how he could find peace. His own testimony is heart-breaking:

> I was not then aware that *any* poor sinner had a warrant to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, but supposed there must be some kind of qualification to entitle him to do it; yet I was aware that I had no qualifications. On a review of my resolution at that time, it seems to resemble that of Esther, who went into the king's presence, *contrary to law,* and at the hazard of her life. Like her, I seemed reduced to extremities, impelled, by dire necessity to run all hazards, even though I should perish in the attempt. Yet it was not altogether from a dread of wrath that I fled to this refuge; for I well remember that I felt something attracting in the Savior. I must—I will—yes, I will trust my soul—my sinful, lost soul in his hands. If I perish, I perish! However it was, I determined to cast myself upon Christ, thinking, peradventure, he would save my soul.[18]

Fuller found a Savior happy to receive him. He continues,

> In this way I continued above an hour, weeping, and supplicating mercy for the Saviour's sake: (my soul hath it still in remembrance, and is humbled in me!) and as the eye of the mind was more and more fixed upon him, my guilt and fears were gradually and insensibly removed.[19]

Fuller was born again, like Spurgeon 81 years later, at the age of 15.

Eve baptized the now 16-year-old Fuller in April 1770, and the Soham Little Meeting accepted the teenager into membership. Although rather moribund because of its High Calvinism, the church had at least enjoyed a fair amount of unity up until this time. That was about to change.

In 1771, Fuller discovered a fellow church member, John Levit, drinking immoderately. Though a young believer himself, he confronted Levit concerning

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[18] *Memoirs*, xviii.
[19] *Memoirs,* xviii. See also Mordern, 46.

his sin. Levit replied that the power to resist sin comes from grace, and he had not received grace to overcome drinking, and, therefore, it was not his fault. The theological antinomians would no doubt have cringed at this explanation, but this portrayed pretty well the practical antinomianism that was sweeping Hyper-Calvinist churches. If duty is limited to ability, then how can even *believers* be held accountable for godly living? They have no power to live godly lives.

Fuller instinctively knew this was a mere excuse, and he told Levit so. Furthermore, Fuller reported Levit's offense to Pastor Eve. Pastor Eve commended Fuller, and Levit was excommunicated. During the disciplinary discussions, Eve commented that "whilst people had no power in and of themselves to do anything spiritually good, they did have the power to obey the will of God 'as to outward acts.'"[20] Eve appears to have been trying to escape antinomianism by saying people in the church can be held accountable for their conduct even though it will not be evangelical obedience unless God the Holy Spirit works in their hearts.

As high as Eve's Calvinism was, it was not high enough for the majority of the Soham congregation. Joseph Diver, one of the lay leaders of the congregation and a close friend of Fuller, and some other members confronted the pastor and said that believers do not have the power to do right apart from God's enabling. Eve no doubt agreed with that basic contention, but they were using that fact to argue that people cannot be held accountable for their sinful actions. Fuller initially sided with Eve, whom he admired greatly, but gradually he was won over to Diver's view. A fierce controversy ensued, shaking the church for several months. Eve correctly believed his opponents were teaching antinomianism and resigned to take a pastorate in Wisbech before 1771 ended. Mordern comments, "Eve's high Calvinism had not been consistent enough for the majority of his church members. For the dominant party at Soham, any talk of human responsibility was enough to arouse suspicion."[21]

The effect on Fuller was that he was deeply agitated by the dispute and began to harbor suspicions about High Calvinism. But he could not put his finger on the problem and set about investigating it.

The church almost dissolved, but Diver held it together, preaching in the absence of a minister most Sundays. When Diver could not speak, Fuller, although a teenager, filled in. His first effort at preaching was well-received. When his second sermon did not go as well, he did not preach for a year. A very sensitive young man, Fuller struggled to minister without evident approbation from his listeners. By 1773, Fuller was considering moving to London to learn a trade.

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[20] Mordern, 49.
[21] Mordern, 50.

Nevertheless, he consented to fill in for Diver again, the Lord blessed his efforts, and he decided to pursue full-time ministry.

In January 1774, an elderly lady asked Fuller to preach her funeral, which he did shortly thereafter. For the rest of that year, he began to eclipse Diver as the preacher most in demand, and Diver happily yielded the opportunities to him. By the end of the year, the Soham church had determined that Fuller should assume their pastoral duties, and he accepted their call. He was installed as full-time pastor of the small Particular Baptist Church in Soham, Cambridgeshire, on February 19, 1775.

On May 3, several ministers came to Soham to participate in Fuller's ordination. Most significant of these was Robert Hall, Sr., of Arnesby, some 80 miles away. Hall listened to Fuller's account of the High Calvinism of Pastor Eve and recommended that Fuller read Edwards on the will. Fuller determined to do so.

Fuller's Conversion to Evangelical Calvinism

Fuller's conversion to Christ, while obviously the most important event in his life, was the first step in a pilgrimage away from a wrong view of the gospel. Relative to the history of the church, perhaps even more significant was his conversion to evangelical Calvinism from the Hypter-Calvinism in which he was reared.

Early Wrestling

Settling into the pastorate at the Little Meeting in Soham, Fuller devoted himself to reading and theological reflection. He never had the opportunity to receive formal theological or ministerial instruction, but he had a very active mind and was determined to dig to the bottom of things.

He sought out the Edwards work recommended to him by Hall and found *Veritus Redux* by John Edwards of Cambridge. It was fine, but he didn't see how it had anything to do with High Calvinism. It would be two years before he discovered that he had the wrong John Edwards. In the meantime, he read Gill's *Body of Doctrinal Divinity,* from which he learned a great deal. He also began working through the writings of John Bunyan, who had gained fame in nearby Bedfordshire. Fuller was struck by the differences between Gill and Bunyan.

> I perceived, however, that the system of Bunyan was not the same with his [Gill]; for that, while he maintained the doctrines of election and predestination, he nevertheless held with the free offer of salvation to sinners

> without distinction. These were things which I then could not reconcile, and therefore supposed that Bunyan, though a great and good man, was not so clear in his views of the doctrines of the gospel as the writers who succeeded him. I found, indeed, the same things in all the old writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that came in my way. They all dealt, as Bunyan did, in free invitations to sinners to come to Christ and be saved; the consistency of which with personal election I could not understand.[22]

Fuller, therefore, continued to preach High Calvinism, which is what his church in Soham expected, but he was wracked by doubts and pursued a vigorous regimen of reading. He studied Puritan writers, including Stephen Charnock, Thomas Goodwin, and, above all, John Owen. Each seemed to be fully and consistently Calvinist and yet breathing different air from what he found in Gill.[23]

In the autumn of 1775, he read Abraham Taylor's 1735 work on "The Modern Question." Fuller was not particularly impressed by Taylor's argumentation overall, but Taylor's appeals to the preaching of Christ and the apostles made a major impression. It sure seemed that John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the apostles called on unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel. The Lord began bringing additional influences into Fuller's life.

Probably through the encouragement of Robert Hall, Fuller led his church to join the Northamptonshire Baptist Association on June 8, 1775. The Association had begun in 1764 (Hall was one of the original members) and reflected a tendency towards fellowship that resulted from the evangelical revival. High Calvinist churches often rejected membership in any such association. It is probably a sign of the Soham church's confidence in Fuller that they voted unanimously to join the Association, even though the congregation was still quite committed to Hyper-Calvinism. The Association included churches in Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire (including Soham), in Leicestershire (where Arnesby was located), and elsewhere. The small number of Particular Baptist churches led to this geographically widespread fellowship. The annual meetings were generally held in May or June, and it was in connection with the Association that Fuller made two of his most important friendships.

John Sutcliff became the pastor of the Baptist church in Olney in Buckinghamshire in 1775. Within a year, he and Fuller had become acquainted. That same year, Fuller met John Ryland, Jr., the pastor of the Baptist church in Northampton since 1771. Fuller says of Ryland and Sutcliff, "In them I found familiar and faithful brethren; and who partly by reflection, and partly by reading

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[22] *Memoirs,* xxv.
[23] Mordern, 83.

the writings of Edwards, Bellamy, Brainerd, &c., had begun to doubt of the system of false Calvinism to which they had been inclined when they first entered on the ministry, or rather to be decided against it."[24] Fuller then hastens to add that they lived sixty or seventy miles from Soham, so he was not able to interact with them very often. He pursued his studies largely alone, but it was very encouraging to know other pastors in the Association were entertaining the same doubts and arriving at many of the same conclusions.

In 1777 Fuller finally came into possession of *The Freedom of the Will* by the American Congregationalist pastor Jonathan Edwards. In the next session, when we analyze Fuller's argumentation against the Hyper-Calvinists, we will look at the influence of Edwards on Fuller. Suffice it to say now that Edwards was profoundly influential on all four men we have mentioned: Hall, Sutcliff, Ryland, and Fuller. Probably, none of them understood Edwards so deeply or appropriated him so pervasively as Fuller. Between 1777 and 1779, the combination of all of these influences, but especially Fuller's close attention to the text of Scripture, led Fuller to a major break with the Hyper-Calvinism he had always known.

Soham Pastorate

Fuller was not doing these investigations in a vacuum, however. He was leading a busy and sometimes difficult life. In December 1776, he married Sarah Gardiner, a godly member of the Soham church. They seem to have had a happy marriage. God blessed them with four children during their first four years, but three of them died early. As common as infant mortality was in the 18th century, it nevertheless caused Andrew and Sarah great grief. Added to these difficulties was Fuller's small salary of 13 pounds per year, which he attempted to supplement by running a shop and then a school, but unsuccessfully. He received 5 pounds per year from the Particular Baptist Fund in London, but the young family still struggled to make ends meet.

The Little Meeting had 35 members when Fuller became pastor in 1775. By 1779, it had grown to 45 members, but it did not grow beyond that point during his pastorate. On the one hand, the church probably couldn't afford to pay him much more. On the other hand, his growing evangelical convictions could not have been missed by his congregation, who had run off their previous pastor over his insufficiently consistent Hyper-Calvinism (and Eve had been a Hyper-Calvinist!).

Fuller became convinced of evangelical principles by 1779 and slowly began introducing gospel invitations into his preaching. Ryland reported, "A tinge of false Calvinism infected some of the people, who were inclined to find fault

[24] *Memoirs,* xxv.

with his ministry, as it became more searching and practical, and as he freely enforced the indefinite calls of the gospel."[25] Members of the church reproached him for his inconstancy. He was only 25 years old, and he was already abandoning time-honored truths. A very sensitive person, Fuller found these personal attacks very trying.

He knew how important these issues are, and he knew how liable he was to err. He wrote in his diary, "Lord, thou hast given me a determination to take up no principle at second-hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of thy word. Yet, Lord, I am afraid, seeing I am as liable to err as other men, lest I should be led aside from truth by mine own imagination."[26] Fuller was here struggling with a tension that all thoughtful Baptists have faced. He was a priest before God and determined to reason out the issues for himself. This was a sacred responsibility. Nevertheless, the safest place to discover theological truth is in connection with venerable church historical traditions. If we seek to reinvent the wheel, we will usually drift off into error.

Fuller's preaching took on a new earnestness, given his new theological commitments. "A pulpit seems an awful place!—An opportunity for addressing a company of immortals on their eternal interests—Oh how important! We preach for eternity."[27]

Fuller's preaching began to draw people from outside the church to hear him. The congregation barely approved of what he was doing and was certainly not inclined to expand the building to handle the crowds. Word spread throughout the Association of this dynamic young thinker and preacher.

Decision and Transition

Before 1779 closed, the church in Kettering, in Northamptonshire, which had already moved in an evangelical direction, invited Fuller to become their pastor. It was a larger, healthier church, but he declined, being committed to Soham. Pastors in those days rarely changed churches, and doing so was usually regarded as an admission of failure.

Three issues, however, were festering in Soham. (1) Opposition to his developing evangelical Calvinism; (2) the Fullers' inadequate salary, which was becoming desperate; (3) and discipline problems, involving the exclusion of several members for drunkenness and one for adultery. Relative to this third issue, antinomian attitudes always complicate church discipline.

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[25] Mordern, 71.
[26] *Memoirs,* xxviii.
[27] *Memoirs,* xxxii.

Kettering came calling again in the fall of 1781. They seemed uninterested in finding a different pastor. They wanted Fuller. Robert Robinson of Cambridge was asked for an opinion, and he recommended that Soham increase Fuller's salary to 26 pounds per year, and that Fuller stay in Soham for a 12-month trial. Hall and Sutcliff were disappointed by this advice, but Fuller notified Beeby Wallis, the lead deacon in Kettering, that he would not be able to come.

Nevertheless, things in Soham did not improve, and, after much agonized soul-searching, Fuller decided to accept the Kettering invitation in May 1782. The Fullers moved on October 2, causing considerable regret in the Soham congregation, who finally seem to have awakened to what they were losing. Kettering was 60 miles west of Soham in Northamptonshire. The transition reflected the even bigger transition in his theology.

By this time, Fuller had completed a work that encapsulated his theological studies of the previous seven years: *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. It appears to have been completed by 1781, although Fuller did not publish it until 1785.

In his inaugural sermon at Kettering, Fuller unambiguously declared the radical change that he had embraced.

> I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it. And, as I believe the inability of men to spiritual things to be wholly of the moral, and therefore of the criminal kind—and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him for salvation, though they do or no—I, therefore, believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them, to be not only consistent, but directly adapted, as means in the hands of the Spirit of God to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty, which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.[28]

Lessons

What do we learn from these two conversions in the life of Andrew Fuller? Among other lessons, consider these:

1) The Word of God must be the principal catalyst for spiritual and theological change. Fuller emphasizes in his *Memoirs* his relative

[28] Thomas Nettles, "Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)" in Michael A. G. Haykin, *The British Particular Baptists 1638-1910,* Vol. 2 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2000), 116.

isolation in tiny Soham so that readers will recognize that by far the most important influence on his thinking was the Scriptures. In 1780, while still at Soham, he penned a private covenant addressed to God. In it he says,

> O Let not the sleight of wicked men, who lie in wait to deceive, nor ev'n the pious character of good men (who yet may be under great mistakes), draw me aside. … Nor do thou suffer my own fancy to misguide me. Lord, thou hast given me a determination, to take up no principle at second hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountainhead, thy Word.[29]

2) Formal education may not be essential for effective gospel ministry, but reading and thinking are. The corollary to the first point is that everyone, no matter how brilliant, needs help figuring out divine truth. Fuller wrestled hard with the Scriptures, but he also kept up a steady diet of reading. It is arrogant to do theology in a vacuum, and Fuller was humble enough to learn from Bunyan, Owen, Edwards, many other Puritans, often, even John Gill.
3) Fuller, Ryland, Sutcliff, Robert Hall, Sr., and, later, Robert Hall, Jr., William Pearce, and William Carey were brothers in Christ who regularly sharpened one another as iron sharpens iron. What a powerful tool friendship can be!
4) Finally, pastors of small churches can make a big difference. It was not the London pastors who led in this revival. Most of them were entrenched in High Calvinism and looked down their noses at a commoner from the fens like Andrew Fuller. But God doesn't need big men to do His work. He likes to work through small men, and Fuller certainly desired God to get all the glory for both of his conversions.

[29] Mordern, 80.

Principal Resources

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Andrew Fuller Between Two Fires
Battling Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism

Dr. David Saxon

Session 2

In session 4, we will look at Fuller's busy ministry as a pastor and missionary statesman. Had he written nothing, he would appear in our history books as a very important Particular Baptist pastor at a very important time in Baptist history.

As we saw in session 1, however, Fuller was given a mind by God that questioned, challenged, and eventually rejected what passed as orthodoxy in his ecclesiastical tradition. Despite his lack of formal training, assiduous attention to the biblical text combined with wide and discriminating theological reading led Fuller to embrace the role of weighing in on the disputed theological topics of his day. Brief acquaintance with his writings will demonstrate that his theological interests were overwhelmingly practical. He thought and wrote as a pastor, not as an ivory-tower theologian (I almost said, "as a professor," but that would be a bit close to home for many of us). If Fuller perceived something as a threat to his people or, more broadly, to the gospel, he was going to study until he thought he understood it, and then he was going to publish a refutation.

He never, however, wrote a book specifically on Calvinism and Arminianism. As we will see, he interacted extensively with an Arminian, Baptist pastor Dan Taylor, but he made no effort to be comprehensive in his responses to Taylor. Similarly, his *magnum opus,* while targeting Hyper-Calvinism, does not attempt to give a full explanation of Calvinism. One author suggests that Fuller believed that "too much had already been written on the subject."[1]

Nevertheless, in defending the gospel for his generation, he sought to chart a biblical path between Hyper-Calvinism on the one hand and Arminianism on the other. Of course, this drew fire from both. An early biographer, John Morris, put it this way: Fuller found himself "between two fires; the Hyper-Calvinists on the hills and the Arminians in the vallies [sic.]."[2] By following Fuller down this path between Hyper-Calvinism and Taylor's brand of Baptist Arminianism, we can get a clearer picture of Fuller's variety of evangelical Calvinism, a variety that,

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[1] Clint Sheehan, "Great and Sovereign Grace: Fuller's Defence of the Gospel against Arminianism" in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (London: Paternoster, 2004), 88.

[2] Quoted in Peter Mordern, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815),* Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (London: Paternoster, 2015), 123.

whatever flaws it may have, God used to energize Particular Baptists to be the trailblazers of the Great Century of Christian missions.

The Gospel Worthy

When Fuller assumed the pastorate of the Baptist church in Kettering in 1782, he brought with him a manuscript he had recently completed during all the turmoil of leaving Soham. It was a short treatise entitled *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, or the Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ.* Therefore, Fuller completed his *magnum opus* when he was twenty-seven years old, somewhat like Calvin at the same age publishing the first edition of his *Institutes.*

Unlike Calvin, however, Fuller was quite reluctant to send his manuscript out into the world. He knew he would ruffle feathers with his arguments and did not desire to get sidetracked into endless polemical discussions. After all, he was a busy pastor. When he shared his work with Ryland, Sutcliff, and Hall, however, they urged him to publish it. He finally acquiesced, and *Gospel Worthy* went to the presses in 1785. We will first consider briefly the chief arguments of his book.

Fuller's Foundation

As Fuller begins, he positions himself as a firm Calvinist. He affirms belief in all five points of Calvinism, specifying, in particular, that he holds to unconditional election. In the process, though, he argues for a basic philosophical stance that already begins to separate him from the higher Calvinists among his readers. "God," he writes, "has ever maintained these two principles: *All that is evil is of the creature, and to him belongs the blame of it;* and *all that is good is of himself, and to him belongs the praise of it."*[3] Many of the Hyper-Calvinists with whom Fuller was contending were much more willing to speak of election and reprobation in terms that smacked of equal ultimacy. Gill, for instance, could write, "The sole, moving and impulsive cause of [reprobation][4] (is) what Christ has expressed, 'Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.'"[5] Fuller, instead, employs an asymmetric way of expressing the difficult question of God's relation

[3] *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in *The complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life* (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1845), 151. Italics in the original.
[4] His language is "such a decree," but in the context he is discussing reprobation.
[5] Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967), 110, quoting John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Vol. I, p. 288. Earlier in the section, Gill expresses the same idea with these words: "The moving, or impulsive cause of God's making such a decree by which he has rejected some of the race of Adam from his favor, is not sin, but the good pleasure of his will" ("Of the Decree of Rejection, of Some Angels, and of Some Men" 2C2).

to evil. As a Calvinist, Fuller held to God's sovereignty over all things, and, therefore, that sin is finally part of God's plan, permitted for sufficiently wise reasons. Unlike the supralapsarians, however, he scrupulously avoided language that directly charges God with causing evil.

Fuller's other interesting observation in his preliminary remarks anticipates many discussions to be held in the aftermath of publishing the book. The Hyper-Calvinists, whom he labels "Antinomians," deny the responsibility of unbelievers to believe. Why? Because they lack the ability to do so. The Arminians, on the other hand, affirm the ability of unbelievers to believe because they have the responsibility to do so.[6] Fuller comments, "Thus, as in so many other cases, opposite extremes are known to meet. Where no grace is given, they are united in supposing that no duty can be required; which, if true, *'grace is no more grace.'"*[7]

Although the heart of Fuller's case, as suggested in the full title of the book, addresses faith as a duty, his concern for practical theology is evident as he begins. Hyper-Calvinists, in effect, teach that saving faith consists in a person's believing that he is elect. One should not believe he is elect unless there are evidences of the Spirit's work in his heart to give him warrant for so believing. Therefore, faith, in Fuller's description of their position, "consists in a persuasion of our interest in Christ and in all the benefits of his mediation."[8]

Fuller believes this understanding of faith is theologically wrong and pastorally wrong-headed. First, he queries how a person can be saved by believing something that is not revealed in Scripture. It is obvious that the specific interest that an individual person has in Christ is not revealed in Scripture. Fuller's right about this: I've scoured the Scriptures and have yet to find myself mentioned by name there. "Nothing," Fuller argues, "can be an object of faith, except what God has revealed in his word."[9] In telling or implying to people that they should trust that they are elect, Hyper-Calvinists are directing people away from objective truth and encouraging them to focus on their subjective feelings.

Related to his first argument, Fuller pushes further along the same lines and insists that saving faith in the Scriptures always has an object that lies outside the

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[6] This is my language. Fuller expresses the idea in a slightly more complex way: "The Arminian, though he professes to take the blame of the evil upon himself, yet feels no guilt for being a sinner, any further than he imagines he could, by the help of Divine grace, given to him and all mankind, have avoided it. If he admit the native depravity of his heart, it is his misfortune, not his fault; his fault lies, not in being *in* a state of alienation and aversion from God, but in not making the best use of the grace of God to get out of it." *Gospel Worthy*, 151.

[7] *Gospel Worthy,* 151.

[8] *Gospel Worthy,* 152.

[9] *Gospel Worthy,* 153.

believer. It is the Object that renders any faith effectual, and the Object of saving faith must be Christ, not the sinner's internal state.

The critique becomes more devastating as Fuller goes deeper yet. "The grand object on which faith fixes is the glory of Christ, and not the happy condition we are in, as interested in him. … If we be concerned only for our own security, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins."[10] In a twist that no doubt caused real pain to Hyper-Calvinists, Fuller is accusing them of producing a man-centered gospel that fails to focus faith on the glory of Christ. Urging people to look inward for warrant that they are elect would certainly seem to have that effect. Fuller gladly acknowledges that real faith will lead to consolation (he cites Romans 5:1), but the object of faith can't be my own well-being.

Fuller closes his case against the Hyper-Calvinist idea of having a warrant to believe by citing various New Testament passages in which people believe in Christ, not in their own internal state of already being blessed. His examples come from the Gospels, and Fuller admits that they are not perfectly analogous to saving faith.[11] The situations are sufficiently parallel for Fuller to conclude, "A persuasion of Christ being both able and willing to save all them that come unto God by him, and consequently to save us if we so apply, is very different from a persuasion that we are the children of God, and interested in the blessings of the gospel."[12]

Duty Faith

The second major section of the book deals with duty faith, the crux of the debate between Fuller and the Hyper-Calvinists. Fuller provides six "arguments to prove that faith in Christ is the duty of all men who hear, or have opportunity to hear, the Gospel."[13] His first argument, which extends for twenty-three paragraphs, some of which are substantial, is purely exegetical. "Unconverted sinners are commanded, exhorted, and invited to believe in Christ for salvation."[14] After citing numerous passages in which such offers occur, Fuller addresses the attempt by Hyper-Calvinists to evade the clear meaning of these texts.

> It is a grievous misapplication of such language to consider it as expressive of a mere attendance upon the means of grace, without any spiritual desire

[10] *Gospel Worthy,* 153.
[11] It is curious that he did not use the Philippian jailer or other examples from Acts that, it seems, would have demonstrated his point more precisely. He appears to have wanted examples in which Christ offers Himself directly as the object of faith.
[12] *Gospel Worthy,* 153.
[13] *Gospel Worthy,* 157.
[14] *Gospel Worthy,* 157.

> after God; and to allow that unregenerate sinners comply with it. Nothing can be further from the truth. The Scriptures abound in promises of spiritual and eternal blessings to those who thus *hearken, hear,* and *seek* after God: such exercises, therefore, must of necessity be spiritual, and require to be understood as including faith in Christ.[15]

Fuller's second argument is that "every man is bound cordially to receive and approve whatever God reveals."[16] If God demands that men love Him, if He demands that men repent of their sins, if He demands that men believe the gospel, what right do the Hyper-Calvinists have to turn to the sinner and say, "Don't worry about what God has commanded you to do. Unless you detect internal warrant that you are elect, you have no power to comply with these commands and are, therefore, exempt from doing so"?[17] Gill and Brine, among others, felt the force of this. They acknowledged in their writings that all men are responsible to love God with all their hearts, minds, and souls, and to live in accordance with such love. Sinners' failure to do so exacerbates their guilt.[18] To solve this dilemma, they had recourse to the distinction, already mentioned, that God demands "legal repentance" and "common faith" but not the evangelical, saving varieties of either one. Fuller scoffed at this obvious evasion of the clear import of God's commands for repentance and faith. It is pure sophistry to argue that the same command issued to a group of people is a call for mere intellectual faith to the subset who are non-elect but is a call to saving faith to the elect.

Third, "Though the gospel, strictly speaking, is not a law, but a message of pure grace; yet it virtually requires obedience, and such an obedience as includes saving faith."[19] This is an extension of the previous point, highlighting the fact that many of the commands God gives sinners are issued in connection with the promises of the gospel if the sinners obey. Interestingly, Fuller calls on John Owen, who clearly rejects the Hyper-Calvinist distinction and argues for the necessity of universal obedience to God's commands. Fuller also cites the NT usage of expressions like "the obedience of faith," "obeying the gospel," "obeying the truth," and "obeying Christ." "*Obedience* supposes previous obligation."[20]

Fuller's fourth argument complements the third. Throughout Scripture failure to believe is attributed to voluntary ignorance, pride, dishonesty of heart,

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[15] *Gospel Worthy,* 158.
[16] *Gospel Worthy,* 159.
[17] This question expresses Fuller's more detailed argument in my simplified terms.
[18] In their Reformed context, these theologians believed sinners are still bound to the Covenant of Works. "The moral law is binding on all people in its demand for love to God and man." Toon, 132.
[19] *Gospel Worthy,* 161.
[20] *Gospel Worthy,* 161.

and aversion of heart. Unbelievers have "an evil heart of unbelief," Hebrews tells us. But if they have no obligation to believe, it can hardly be described as a sin not to do so.

God, however, has promised to inflict terrible punishments on sinners precisely because they are unbelievers. Many passages use such language. What could be clearer than John 3:18: "He that believeth not is condemned already, *because* he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."[21] Scarcely less clear is 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, which include these words: "they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. … that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Fuller cites several other passages with similar import.

Fuller's sixth and final argument is that "other spiritual exercises, which sustain an inseparable connexion with faith in Christ, are represented as the duty of men in general."[22] He proves that God demands that all men love Him, that all be thankful, that all glorify Him as God, that all love Christ, that all fear God, that all repent, and that all be humble. These are all spiritual duties, and the fact that natural man can do none of them does not in the least make him less liable for failing to do them.

Defending Evangelical Calvinism

The completed argument is clear, biblical, and logically rigorous. One might even say unanswerable. But, of course, it did not go unanswered. As Fuller had expected, he was greeted with a deluge of communications from angry Hyper-Calvinists, many of whom lived within shouting distance in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and London. Fuller's son reports that many of the letters to him were bereft of argumentation and "fraught with doggerel of the very lowest grade."[23] Four pastors, however, wrote serious and respectful challenges to Fuller's work: William Button, a Hyper-Calvinist Baptist pastor in London; Abraham Booth, a respected High Calvinist Baptist pastor, also in London; Archibald McLean, a Scotch Baptist pastor influenced by the Sandemanians (we will consider McLean next session); and Dan Taylor, the General Baptist pastor mentioned earlier.

Fuller expended considerable energy responding to each of these correspondents between 1785 and 1800, developing and occasionally revising his

[21] Emphasis in the original.
[22] *Gospel Worthy,* 165.
[23] Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* in *The complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life* (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1845), xlii.

argumentation in the process. In 1801, he issued a revised edition of the *Gospel Worthy*. The main argument remained largely unchanged, but he appended a lengthy section in which he responded to the chief objections he had encountered. We will notice the most important of these, especially since his answers dig down into his fundamental theological and philosophical commitments.

Priority of Exegetical Theology

Fuller begins with a summary statement: "The principal objections that are made to the foregoing statement of things are taken from—the nature of original holiness, as it existed in our first parents—the Divine decrees—particular redemption—the covenant of works—the inability of man—the operations of the Spirit—and the necessity of a Divine principle in order to believing."[24] He fully intends to interact with each of these concerns and do his best to counteract them. First, though, he makes a comment that frankly endeared him to me: "It also deserves to be considered, whether objections drawn from such subjects … in which we may presently get beyond our depth, ought to weigh against that body of evidence which has been adduced from the plain declarations and precepts of the Holy Scriptures."[25] In other words, don't let arguments from systematic theology override exegetical theology!

Before proceeding with the objections, Fuller further endears himself to me by arguing from church history. By this time, Fuller had sampled many of the reformers and seventeenth-century Puritan theologians. He was astonished by how novel Hyper-Calvinism was and how out of step with both the Reformed and Particular Baptist traditions. He wryly comments, "The writings of Calvin himself would now be deemed Arminian by a great number of our opponents."[26]

Second, he makes an observation regarding holding apparently conflicting doctrines in tension that I believe deserves to be quoted in full. So, with apologies for the long quote:

> Were a difficulty allowed to exist as to the reconciling of these subjects, it would not warrant a rejection of either of them. If I find two doctrines affirmed or implied in the Scriptures, which, to my feeble understanding, may seem to clash, I ought not to embrace the one and to reject the other because of their supposed inconsistency; for, on the same ground, another person might embrace that which I reject, and reject that which I embrace, and have equal *Scriptural authority* for his faith as I have for mine. Yet in

[24] *Gospel Worthy,* 167.
[25] *Gospel Worthy,* 167.
[26] *Gospel Worthy,* 168.

> this manner many have acted on both sides: some, taking the general precepts and invitations of Scripture for their standard, have rejected the doctrine of discriminating grace; others, taking the declarations of salvation as being a fruit of electing love for their standard, deny that sinners without distinction are called upon to believe for the salvation of their souls. Hence it is that we hear of *Calvinistic* and *Arminian texts;* as though these leaders had agreed to divide the Scriptures between them. The truth is, there are but two ways for us to take: one is to reject them *both,* and the Bible with them, on account of its inconsistencies; the other is to embrace them both, concluding that, as they are both revealed in the Scriptures, they are both true, and both consistent, and that it is owing to the darkness of our understandings that they do not appear so to us.[27]

Answering Objections

After addressing an objection relative to Adam that I will omit,[28] Fuller deals with a fundamental problem with the Hyper-Calvinist position. These false Calvinists, as he calls them, base their duty on God's secret, sovereign will rather than on His revealed will. Trying to do so leads them into positions that are both unscriptural and impossible to practice consistently. On the latter point, Fuller wonders why Hyper-Calvinists employ means to do many temporal things: to dress and go to work, to eat and sleep, to study and memorize Scripture, to take medicine, etc. If God has decreed the results of all these activities, why bother doing them? The truth is, Hyper-Calvinists believe in the necessity of means for everything except conversion. More importantly, though, they are also unbiblical. Fuller says, "[Paul] believed the doctrine of Divine decrees, or that God 'worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;' but he had no idea of making these things any part of the *rule of duty;* either so as to excuse his countrymen from the sin of unbelief, or himself from using every possible means that might accomplish their salvation." He then cites several passages that show Paul both condemning his countrymen for sins and striving to win them.[29]

More complex is Fuller's response to the third objection, which relates to penal, substitutionary atonement. Fuller interpreted the Hyper-Calvinists as arguing that the death of Christ purchased the exact number of the elect, paying the

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[27] *Gospel Worthy,* 168. Emphases in the original.

[28] Hyper-Calvinists made the odd claim that Adam in the Garden was not expected to live by faith in the Mediator and so faith in the Mediator can be no part of the Covenant of Works expected of unbelievers. Fuller more-or-less dismisses this objection as speculative.

[29] *Gospel Worthy,* 170.

exact price for their sins.[30] A corollary for many Hyper-Calvinists was that since Christ did not pay the price for the sins of the non-elect, they are under no obligation to repent of their sins.

Fuller continued to speak of the atonement as penal and substitutionary, and he held firmly to the limited design of the atonement, i.e., that God designed the atonement to save only the elect. In both respects, he remained solidly within the boundaries of traditional Calvinism.[31] Nevertheless, he was keen to see implications for duty faith and the universal offer of salvation in Christ's atoning work. Therefore, he began to mix into his discussions of the atonement governmental language that he was finding in the New England New Divinity theologians. In the 1790s, Fuller read Joseph Bellamy's *True Divinity Delineated,* Jonathan Edwards, Jr.'s *Free Grace and Atonement,* and Stephen West's *The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement Proposed to Careful Examination.* All three books taught a robust Governmental Atonement.

What prompted Fuller to move in this direction? The General Baptist Dan Taylor had responded to the first edition of *Gospel Worthy* with *Observations on the Rev Andrew Fuller's late pamphlet entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation.* Among many other criticisms, Taylor attacked Fuller's belief in limited atonement. If Christ's death, Taylor argued, provided saving benefits only for the elect, on what basis can you justify preaching the gospel to all men? Taylor, of course, presented an Arminian General Atonement in which Christ died for all men, but only those benefit from His death who choose to accept it.

Fuller firmly rejected Taylor's Arminianism. Unlike the New Divinity men he would read in order to sort out Taylor's objection, he was not prepared to give up specific design in the atonement. He was, however, prepared to shift the focus of the particularity. When Fuller wrote *A Defense of a Treatise* in 1788, he was prepared to argue that, as Mordern explains,

> The particularity of redemption consisted 'not in the degree of Christ's suffering (as though he must have suffered more if more had been finally saved) … but in the sovereign purpose and design of the Father and the Son.' The sufferings of Christ, [Fuller] continued, 'are of infinite value, sufficient to have saved all the world, and a thousand worlds, if it had

[30] I could not find that Gill expresses the extent of the atonement in this precise, transactional language in *The Body of Doctrinal Divinity,* but it is easy to see how Fuller would have seen Gill's arguments tending in this direction. For instance, Gill writes, "If Christ died to redeem all men, and all men are not saved by his death, so far his death must be in vain: if he paid a ransom for all, and all are not ransomed; or if he has paid the debts of all, and they are not discharged, the price is given, and the payment made, in vain." "Of the Objects of Redemption by Christ," 7a2c (Monergism Books, Kindle edition).

[31] Mordern, 207.

> pleased God … to have made them effectual to this end.' Fuller was now locating the particularity of redemption in the application of the atonement, or more precisely 'in the design of the Father and the Son, respecting the persons to whom it shall be applied.' This enabled him to continue to speak of a 'special design' in the death of Christ, because those to whom the atonement would be applied had been decided in the purposes of God before time, not because God had foreseen that people would believe, but because 'God eternally purposed in himself that they should believe and be saved.'[32]

In shifting the particularity of the atonement from the provision to the application, Fuller sought ways to explain the provision as general, and the New Divinity theologians of New England pointed him to the Governmental Atonement. "On the cross, Christ was not so much 'putting to rest' God's wrath against sin as 'putting to right' God's sense of moral justice."[33] Christ died for all sinners in the sense that God's justice relative to all sinners was displayed.

Here is Fuller's statement of his position from the *Gospel Worthy* in 1801,

> If the atonement of Christ proceed not on the principle of commercial, but of moral justice, or justice as it relates to *crime*—if its grand object were to express the Divine displeasure against sin, (Rom. viii. 3,) and so to render the exercise of mercy, in all the ways wherein sovereign wisdom should determine to apply it, consistent with righteousness (Rom. iii. 25)—if it be in itself equal to the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to embrace it—and if the peculiarity which attends it consist not in its insufficiency to save more than are saved, but in the sovereignty of its application—no such inconsistency can justly be ascribed to it.[34]

The evangelist, therefore, can tell each sinner, "Christ died for you," in the sense that the cross demonstrated to each sinner how much God hates sin and loves sinners, and in the sense that a price was paid that is sufficient for every sinner who believes. Fuller states, "If all the inhabitants of the globe could be persuaded to return to God in Christ's name, they would undoubtedly be accepted by him."[35]

If I may insert myself briefly, in the Man, Sin, and Salvation class that I teach at MBU, I use *The Cross and Salvation* by Bruce Demarest as one of my textbooks. He argues for a distinction between the extent of the atonement and the intent of the atonement, or, to use other language, between its provision, which

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[32] Mordern, 132.
[33] Mordern, 202.
[34] *Gospel Worthy,* 170-171.
[35] *A Defence of a Treatise* in *Fuller's Works,* 231.

Demarest argues is universal, and its design, which Demarest argues is particular. If one holds to unconditional election, it is hard to image an atonement doctrine in which the design is universal, since the two would seem to be incompatible. However, Demarest (and I) believe many passages of Scripture posit an atonement that sure looks universal. Rather than abandon election, which also seems to be well-attested in Scripture, Demarest introduces the extent/intent distinction (which *may* lie behind the enigmatic language in 1 Timothy 4:10, that Christ is the savior of all men but especially of believers).[36] Like Fuller, I am not prepared to concede that such an atonement is not penal or substitutionary, just because it cannot be made to fit a *quid pro quo* transactional model.

Abraham Booth, a venerable London pastor and leader among the Particular Baptists nationally, attacked Fuller's atonement theology in *Divine Justice Essential to the Divine Character* in 1803. Among other objections, Booth complained that Fuller's atonement model does not allow for forensic justification, since only those sins can be imputed to Christ that are actually paid for. That is, imputation requires a limited atonement in the fullest sense. Fuller responded that a person is justified only by the imputed righteousness of Christ,[37] and *that* imputation is what is crucial to forensic justification. Nevertheless, there are passages that teach that Christ was made sin for us, He bore out transgressions, He was the Lamb of God, etc. Recognizing that this language could support the High Calvinist logic, Fuller went in a direction that I am uncomfortable with but still assessing.

In 1806, Fuller responded to Booth and, among other things, addressed the nature of imputation. Imputation, he said, can be literal in cases where the thing reckoned "properly belongs" to the person in question. A judge imputes guilt to a prisoner because the prisoner has actually committed the crime.[38] However, the word also has a figurative sense when what is charged or reckoned "does not properly belong to them, as though it did."[39] "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and *holdest* me for thine enemy?" in Job 13:24 uses the verb (in the LXX) in this figurative sense.

In which sense is Christ said to have our sins imputed to Him? In the same sense, Fuller argues, that believers are said to have righteousness imputed to them. Believers are considered righteous although they are not; similarly, Christ was

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[36] Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation.* Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books,1997), 189-193.

[37] In common with most Calvinists of his day, he accepted the covenantal idea that both the passive and active righteousness of Christ were imputed in justification.

[38] Fuller cites 1 Samuel 1:13; Nehemiah 13:13; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 10:11; and Romans 8:18 for literal uses of the word. Nehemiah 13:13, for instance, says, "Hanan and Mattaniah, the treasurers, were *counted* faithful."

[39] *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth* in *Fuller's Works,* 319.

considered sinful, although He was not. Therefore, there is no question of how many sins, or whose, were imputed to Him. Fuller believed it was nonsensical to say Christ was guilty of sins because He did not commit any. But the Father *regarded* Him as guilty of sins, and, as the Son of God, He could give His life as a payment sufficient for all men's sins.

Does this figurative understanding of imputation destroy penal substitution? Booth certainly thought so, and some other Calvinists have agreed. It was novel language to be sure, not found among either Particular Baptist or more broadly Reformed theologians of the 18th century. Nevertheless, Mordern makes a case that in Fuller's theology Christ still stands in sinners' place, bears the wrath they deserve, and achieves their atonement. That this is so because God regards Him as guilty rather than His actually being guilty does not undermine penal substitutionary atonement.[40] Perhaps. I will leave the subject for you to ponder.

I will omit consideration of the fourth objection, in which Fuller deals with the Covenant of Works. The fifth objection, however, once again leads us into deep waters, this time the philosophical waters of Jonathan Edwards's *The Freedom of the Will.*

As we noted in the first session, Ryland directed Fuller to this work, and the Soham pastor read it in 1777. In Edwards Fuller found a distinction that he found persuasive and enormously useful: the distinction between natural ability and moral inability.[41]

Fuller uses this distinction primarily to refute the Hyper-Calvinist claim that faith and repentance cannot be duties of sinners because sinners are unable to comply. Are sinners really unable to comply, Fuller asks? God has given them intellect by which they may grasp the facts of the gospel message. God has given them affections with which they may feel the threatenings of the law and the promises of the gospel. God has given them volition by which they may choose to do right. They have no right to say to God, "I *cannot* comply with your commands. I *cannot* repent and believe." No, Fuller argues, they *cannot* because they *will not.*

Fuller got this line of reasoning directly from Jonathan Edwards, who wrote in *The Freedom of the Will,* "To ascribe a non-performance to the want of power or ability, is not just; because the thing wanting is not a being *able*; but a being

[40] Mordern, 205-207. Mordern cites Chris Chun, *Legacy of Edwards in the Theology of Fuller* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[41] See Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 341-343 for a discussion of this distinction and 608-611 for consideration of how the distinction was utilized in the New Divinity of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

willing. There are faculties of mind, and a capacity of nature, and every thing else, sufficient, but a disposition: nothing is wanting but a will."[42]

Fuller argues that a natural inability would remove culpability. One could hardly punish a blind man for not being able to see if his impediment to seeing were natural. Since the Scriptures do command blind men to see, the impediment must be moral. If men are spiritually blind, they must have chosen to be spiritually blind. When men stand before their just Judge, they will not be able to impugn His justice by blaming Him for not giving them the ability to do right. They will have to acknowledge that they had the ability, but they did not *want* to do right.

Of course, with Edwards, Fuller argues that this moral inability is universal. *All* men will not exercise their faculties to repent and believe the gospel. Without exception, every one will turn astray and go after his own way. In his responses to the Arminian, Taylor, Fuller rejects the notion that if man were morally unable to respond, that fact would somehow excuse him. Man's moral inability is, by definition, his own fault. Echoing Edwards, Fuller argues that man always chooses in alignment with his greatest inclination. The prevailing inclination of every unregenerate person is evil. One commentator summarizes Fuller's thought, "Only if the old prevailing inclinations to evil are replaced by a new set inclined to good will a man ever respond favourably to the gospel."[43] Therefore, the natural tools a sinner has with which to respond to the gospel will never overcome his moral disinclination to glorify God. His moral inability will always trump his natural ability.

Against the Hyper-Calvinists, on the other hand, Fuller argues that man's natural ability is the basis upon which Scripture can press on sinners the duty of repentance and faith. Preachers and evangelists will likewise call on sinners to respond, even though they are dead in trespasses and sins, because everything the sinner requires to hear, understand, and respond is naturally in place, if only he will. The transformation of the will that makes preaching effectual is the domain of God's Spirit, who works regeneration in the heart, overcoming the sinner's moral inability.[44]

Some have lodged significant objections to Edwards's distinction and especially Fuller's use of it. The main push back against the idea is that it ignores the effects of original sin. If culpability depends on natural ability, it would seem that infants and mentally disabled people are not sinners. The reformers and 17th-century theologians (both Continental Reformed and Puritans) did not resort to such a distinction to establish universal guilt. They simply said all men sinned in

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[42] Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), I:11.
[43] Sheehan, 103.
[44] See Fuller's full discussion of this distinction in *Gospel Worthy,* 171-173.

Adam and are rendered dead, unable to respond to the gospel or do anything that pleases God. Furthermore, God's position as Creator and Sovereign automatically makes men accountable to Him; they need no natural ability to do so. Not only does this distinction seem to ignore or under emphasize original sin, but it also undermines total depravity. It seems to say that the faculties of man are not themselves corrupted, but only the *use* of the faculties. Finally, knowing that Fuller was deeply influenced by New Divinity theologians like Edwards, Jr., Bellamy, and Hopkins, these critics argue that this distinction easily slides down into the denial of original sin and depravity, ending eventually in Taylorism (named for N. W. Taylor of the Yale Divinity) and Finneyism, a theology that bypasses Arminianism and plunges directly into Semi-Pelagianism or worse.[45]

These are serious objections. It must be admitted that Fuller seems to allow the very principle that he is constantly at pains to reject, that is, that responsibility is limited to ability. At the very beginning of *Gospel Worthy,* he says, "It is no part of the controversy whether unconverted sinners be able to turn to God, and to embrace the gospel; but what kind of inability they lie under with respect to these exercises; whether it consists in the want of natural powers and advantages, or merely in the want of a heart to make a right use of them. *If the former, obligation, it is granted, would be set aside;* but if the latter, it remains in full force."[46] If a person, Fuller says, lacks "natural powers and advantages," then he would not be obligated—it would not be his duty—to turn to God.

Relative to "normal" people, who *have* natural powers and advantages, this becomes a merely speculative question. Faith is their duty, but they fail to believe because they don't want to: moral failure. What about infants and the mentally disabled? Priest calls out Fuller's position relative to these special cases: "It is interesting that Fuller … exempts infants and imbeciles from guilt because they have no natural ability to respond to the gospel. But how does this absolve them from original guilt? Are they somehow exempt from Adam's sin simply because of the absence of natural powers of reason? These are questions Fuller does not answer."[47]

First, Fuller, like Edwards,[48] clearly holds to original sin and its impact on all children of Adam. In his debate with Dan Taylor, he rejects Taylor's Arminianism with this argument:

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[45] For a cogent statement of these and other objections, see Gerald L. Priest, "Andrew Fuller, Hyper-Calvinism, and the 'Modern Question'" in *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word,'* 66-72.
[46] *Gospel Worthy,* 151. Emphasis added.
[47] Priest, 69, fn94.
[48] *On Original Sin* is one of the classic treatments of the subject. Edwards exempts no human from the guilt of original sin.

> Infants are not to blame in a *personal* capacity; but if there be a union between the parent of mankind and his posterity, through which their depravity is derived, as it is supposed there is, they must be to blame *relatively.* No one, I suppose, can be to blame in a personal capacity, till he is capable of the knowledge of right and wrong; but it does not follow thence that, till then, he is *in every sense* blameless, for that would be the same thing as to be sinless; and if so, I see not how they can be said to be born *in sin.* If there is not blame some where, it will be very difficult to account for the misery and death to which infants are exposed, and for the apostle's mode of reasoning [in Romans 5:13-14].[49]

Fuller is cautious here and refuses to say infants are directly blameworthy because of Adam's sin. Nevertheless, he says they are sinners and that they die as a result of Adam's sin, which surely implies a sharing of the guilt of Adam's transgression, especially as he cites Romans 5:13-14 to prove his case. The case of the mentally disabled would follow the same logic.

How does this relate to the natural ability/moral inability argument? Fuller's case against the Hyper-Calvinists is that people who *do* have natural ability cannot excuse themselves from the duty of trusting in Christ by saying they are unable to do so. Infants do not have such natural ability and obviously do not have duty to believe. Nevertheless, on other grounds—namely, their union with Adam in original sin—they are condemned as sinners and need grace. Therefore, I do not believe Fuller overlooked original sin or used his logic to exempt those without natural ability from its taint.

The second major objection listed above is that man need not have natural ability to be accountable to God. He is accountable simply because God is his creator and sovereign. This objection seems to attribute to "natural ability" a character that Fuller does not intend. He repeatedly speaks of faculties that are in themselves gifts of God—rationality, emotion, volition—and that cannot be lost without a person ceasing to be a functioning human. The objection implies that Fuller thought unbelievers could reason *rightly* and have *rightly-ordered* affections and choose *aright.* If man had no reasoning, feelings, or ability to choose, could he be placed under obligation to understand, feel, and choose the gospel? Fuller says he could not, and, remember, Fuller's issue is man's *duty.* He does not constantly stop in his argument and address the effect of original sin on infants and the mentally disabled. With Edwards, Fuller is simply saying that no man who has a functioning mind, heart, and will can excuse himself from the duty of repenting and believing in Christ. If he cannot, it is because he will not.

[49] *A Defence of a Treatise,* 216.

Third, the objector believes Fuller is denying total depravity.[50] Fuller, I believe, would have been disappointed to hear this. In his reply to Taylor, he speaks of the grace that is necessary for any person to be saved (he is objecting to the Arminian use of *grace* as the provision of the ability to respond if only the person will). "The term *grace* implies that the subject is totally unworthy, altogether inexcusable, and destitute of any claim; and all this previously to, and independent of, its bestowment; otherwise grace is no more grace."[51] Elsewhere, he gives an explicit definition of total depravity: "The human heart is by nature totally destitute of love to God, or love to man as the creature of God, and consequently is destitute of all true virtue."[52] Whatever this natural ability is, Fuller by no means regards it as canceling man's complete alienation from God and inability to save himself.

If I may observe, it seems to me that there is a parallel between Fuller's view and the image of God. The fall seriously marred the image of God in man, so that man by virtue of being in God's image has no capacity to love God as He demands or do anything that God regards as meritorious. Nevertheless, *structural* aspects of the image of God remain: intellect, volition, moral nature. Man did not cease to be man when he became a sinner. As man, he has duty to love God, and he has all the necessary equipment to do so. But as sinner, he refuses to love God and is culpable for this refusal.

The final objection is that the New Divinity, with which Fuller seemed to be in sympathy, was on a trajectory that, within two generations, would produce Nathaniel W. Taylor and Charles G. Finney. Fuller, however, did not embrace the New England Theology uncritically. As noted, he remained committed to the doctrine of original sin. There is much of Fuller I have yet to read, but I have not seen a preoccupation with God's love as "disinterested benevolence." Unlike the New Divinity men, Fuller did not jettison penal substitution when he began using

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[50] Priest writes, "It is the doctrine of imputation that is so crucial to understanding man's culpability and his inability to respond to the gospel. And Fuller fails to adequately treat this. He instead falls back on moral inability and defines total depravity only in those terms, which leaves him open to the criticism of teaching partial depravity" (67).

[51] *A Defence of a Treatise,* 220.

[52] *Dialogues and Letters between Crispus and Gaius* in *Fuller's Works,* 301. Fuller gives an extensive discussion of total human depravity in pages 300-308. He concludes with these words: "What then, it will be asked, can sinners do? If they go forward, destruction is before them; if on this hand, or on that, it is the same. Whither can they go? and what must they do? All the answer which the Scriptures warrant us to make is included in the warnings and invitations of the gospel:—'Repent, and believe the gospel.' … If the answer be, We cannot comply with these things; our hearts are too hard; advise us to any thing else, and we will hearken;—if this, or something like it, I say, should be the answer, the servant of God, having warned them that what they call their *incapacity* is no other than a wicked aversion to God and goodness, that they judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, and that their blood will be upon their own heads" (308, emphasis in the original).

Governmental Atonement language. Fuller used the New England theologians as a resource, but he slavishly followed no one. Second, I have seen no historical evidence that Fullerism led to anyone in Britain approximating a Charles Finney. This objection appears to partake of the Slippery-Slope Fallacy.

The bottom line is that these objections alert us to the fact that Fuller utilized the natural ability/moral inability distinction for practical and pastoral purposes. He wanted a theological reason to insist that unbelievers obey the gospel. To the Hyper-Calvinist who said unbelievers can't and, therefore, have no duty to do so, Fuller pressed man's natural ability. To the Arminians who said unbelievers have the ability to obey the gospel if only they will, Fuller pressed man's moral inability. Of course they have the ability, but "if only they will" is an insuperable obstacle because depraved people *will not.*

Finally, one might ask, which aspect of the question did Fuller emphasize more, man's natural ability and, therefore, responsibility, or man's moral inability and, therefore, blameworthiness? Certainly, in his debates with Hyper-Calvinists, the former question was prominent. Fuller believed a clear statement of man's natural ability would establish man's duty and motivate evangelism and missions. Nevertheless, in his weekly ministry of preaching to God's people, his great thrust was our inability to do anything acceptable to God apart from Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. For instance,

> Is it not manifest that the godly in all ages have considered themselves insufficient to perform those things to which nevertheless they acknowledge themselves to be obliged? The rule of duty is what God requires of us; but he requires those things which good men have always confessed themselves, on account of the sinfulness of their nature, insufficient to perform. … When the sacred writers speak of the Divine precepts, they neither disown them nor infer from them a self-sufficiency to conform to them, but turn them into prayer.[53]

Conclusion

From 1781, when he completed the first edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* until his death in 1815, Fuller strived to find biblical ground between two fires: Hyper-Calvinism, which burned away man's sense of duty to believe and to evangelize; and Arminianism, which burned away man's recognition of his utter need of grace.

[53] *Gospel Worthy,* 173.

Fuller may not have found the perfect answer to every question. No one does. But his love for God and His Word, and his love for people, believers and unbelievers, drove him to his knees and then to the writing desk, from which he produced a God-honoring theology suitable for world mission. Or, as Phil Roberts puts it, "Andrew Fuller, the man who exercised the single greatest theological influence on English Particular Baptists in their pilgrimage to becoming a missionary people."[54]

Additional Resources

In addition to the resources listed for Session 1:

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Freedom of the Will.* In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* Vol. 1. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.

McClymond, Michael J. and Gerald R. McDermott. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

[54] Phil Roberts, "Andrew Fuller," in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 34.

Andrew Fuller Against the Sandemanians

Dr. David Saxon

Session 3

As Andrew Fuller was traveling in Scotland on behalf of the BMS in 1799, he met a group known as the Scotch Baptists. Their founder was Archibald McLean (1738-1812). McLean and the Scotch Baptists welcomed Fuller and supported the mission. However, McLean and Fuller differed strongly on a key aspect of the gospel, namely, the nature of saving faith.

McLean had published his views on justification in 1785, the same year Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* appeared, in *The Commission Given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles Illustrated.* When they met, Fuller was preparing his second edition of *Gospel Worthy,* and he attached an appendix to it that addressed McLean's view. Although Fuller valued McLean as a fellow believer, a keen theologian, and a supporter of the mission, he believed that the theological issue could not be ignored.

McLean had learned his theology of faith and justification from a Scottish sect founded in 1728 by John Glas (1695-1773), a sect that subsequently became known as Sandemanianism, named for Glas's son-in-law Robert Sandeman (1718-1771). Fuller read Sandeman's works and decided a more thorough refutation was called for. In 1810 he published *Strictures on Sandemanianism.* This somewhat obscure Scottish group made sufficient waves in eighteenth-century British and American church life that John Wesley (1703-1791), Welsh evangelist William Williams (1717-1791), Isaac Backus (1724-1806), and Bible commentator Thomas Scott (1747-1821) penned responses to it. It is generally conceded, however, that Fuller's work is the "definitive" refutation of its theological system.[1]

While the precise combination of errors present in Sandemanianism might be difficult to find today, aspects of their reasoning and conclusions have persisted in a variety of religious expressions since their day, and Fuller's arguments in refuting the system are still quite instructive.

In what follows, I will briefly trace the history of Sandemanianism and delineate its leading ideas. We will then consider more fully Fuller's refutation of its key errors. Finally, I will suggest areas of relevance for today.

[1] Michael A. G. Haykin, "Andrew Fuller and the Sandemanian Controversy," in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *"At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist,* Studies in Baptist History and Thought 6 (Carlisle, GB: Paternoster Press, 2004), 228.

History of Sandemanianism[2]

The context for the emergence of Sandemanianism is the complex Scottish ecclesiastical life resulting from a National Kirk built on national covenants that nevertheless was Presbyterian. Presbyterian churches, of course, are supposed to be ruled by their elders. The national church entailed considerable involvement by Scottish nobles in the churches (for instance, in procuring pastors) and considerable ecclesiastical involvement in the government.

John Glas

In 1719 a twenty-four-year-old Scottish minister, John Glas, received his first ministerial appointment at Tealing, near Dundee, about fifty miles north and slightly east of Edinburgh. He soon became frustrated with the political overtones of Scottish Covenant theology, becoming convinced that the church is a spiritual body made up only of real believers and that Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church. Glas was an able and popular preacher, gaining considerable popularity in Tealing and also drawing people from the surrounding areas into his sphere of influence.

By 1726 Glas was attacking the Scottish national church, arguing for a separation of church and state. He denied the right of magistrates to interfere in church affairs. Therefore, he essentially rejected the viability of a national church. After a series of trials and confrontations, he was disciplined out of the Scottish Church in April 1728. Expelled from his church in Tealing, despite considerable support from his parishioners there, he moved to Dundee and started an independent congregation.

His battles with the Establishment had gained him sufficient following that other groups of believers began to form in affiliation with his work in Dundee. Their opponents called them Glasites. A Glasite church was formed in Edinburgh in the 1730s, and Glas found himself the head of a new Scottish denomination.

As Glas traced the implications of his position, he reassessed the eldership and became convinced that all elders must be apt to teach, rejecting the category of ruling elders, a mainstay of Presbyterianism and the National Church. He also decided that formal education—human learning—was a less important qualification for elders than being filled and gifted by the Spirit. As the denomination expanded, "being filled and gifted" generally equated to agreeing with Glas's theology. The Glasite churches were thus able to fill their pulpits

[2] For most of the details in this section, see John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

although largely excluded from the Scottish universities. The elders were not to receive any compensation but were to be bi-vocational. Only in this way could the clergy-laity distinction, so pronounced in the National Church, be avoided.

Ultimately, Glas was leading a Restorationist movement. Rejecting any human titles, he called his followers *Christians* or *disciples.* His mantra was "back to the Gospels and Acts" for all conclusions. In this regard, he argued for footwashing, for the love feast before the Lord's Supper, for weekly celebration of the Supper, for the use of lots to make decisions, for the prohibition of eating blood, and for the kiss of charity as a mandatory part of church life (some later New Englanders called Glasites "kissites").[3]

It is, perhaps, surprising that he did not argue for sign gifts, regarding them as limited to the apostolic age. It is also surprising to a Baptist that he retained infant baptism. Acknowledging that it was not explicitly taught in the NT, he nevertheless thought it an important way to retain families in the church. He agreed on this with English Independency as expressed, for instance, in the Savoy Declaration. Rather uniquely, he associated baptism with the universal church and would baptize any convert, whether or not the person contemplated membership in the church. He practiced pouring, which he called "washing," as the mode, but he thought mode unimportant and would accept people regardless of how they were baptized.

Although Glas held to independency, he emphasized elder rule and believed that every church was required to have a plurality of elders. Discipline, however, belonged to the whole church, not to the elders, and decisions at members' meetings had to be unanimous.

This collection of teachings gave the Glasites considerable distinctiveness. Glas exacerbated that by teaching that all other denominations were corrupt. They might contain true believers among them, but ecclesiastical fellowship of any kind with churches of other denominations was sinful. Glas had initially been much more tolerant, but George Whitefield wrote a pamphlet in 1740 urging cooperation among the various denominations for evangelism purposes. As we will see, Glas had other reasons for distrusting and disliking the evangelical revivalists, and he responded to Whitefield's writing by developing a strong sectarian position. He decided that the words in the Great Commission, "teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have commanded you," left no room for disagreement between believers relative to the teachings of Christ. Each believer must be exclusively devoted to his own sect in order to faithfully follow *all* of Christ's teachings. Of course, an implication of this interpretation is that ordinary believers would be

[3] Haykin, 226.

obligated to always agree with their sect's teachers. This is the kind of logic from which cults are constructed.

When confronted with Paul's teaching on Christian Liberty in Romans 14-15, Glas responded that liberty certainly applies relative to Jewish holidays and kosher food, but it had no bearing on "truth and church order," which basically meant everything else.

He did, however, take a surprisingly loose view of personal holiness by the standards of the time. While the Methodists (and most evangelicals) opposed "playing games and socially acceptable recreations, or … attending balls, the theater, or other places of entertainment,"[4] Glas regarded such things as harmless. "Glas's relatively liberal view of the lawfulness of common pleasures brought down upon him and his disciples, from the more puritanically religious, charges of moral laxity and worldliness throughout their history."[5] As we will see, Fuller himself took umbrage with the Glasites for some of these practices.

Robert Sandeman

Glas's son-in-law, Robert Sandeman, had a very aggressive personality and rose to leadership in the movement in the 1750s. The historian of the movement contrasts the two men: "While Glas attracted controversy even as he tried to avoid it, Sandeman seemed to seek it out and to welcome it with fierce exuberance."[6] In England and America, the Glasite churches were called "Sandemanian."

Sandemanians established a church in London in 1761, the first of their churches outside Scotland. Churches appeared in York (1763), Norfolk (1766), Colne, Wethersfield, and Liverpool (1767), and Whitehaven, Trowbridge, and Nottingham (1768). Despite the strong opposition from Whitefield's friends, William Williams, Howel Harris, and Daniel Rowland, a Welsh Glasite church was founded in 1767.[7] While most of these churches remained small, this was rapid expansion. Furthermore, Sandemanian ideas spread beyond their own denomination, entering the formulations of several other groups, including the Scotch Baptists of McLean.

Perhaps not surprisingly, despite their claims to independent polity, Glas, Sandeman, and a small group of elders exercised considerable control over this network of churches. One of the early English converts, James Allen, left the movement over precisely this problem. He complained that the Sandemanian

[4] Smith, 60.
[5] Smith, 60.
[6] Smith, 69.
[7] Smith, 86-87.

"congregational-church principles have very visibly given way in practice to those of presbytery and prelacy."[8]

So Sandemanianism became a very distinctive Christian denomination in the Restorationist mold. Brought to America in 1764 by Sandeman himself, a number of Sandemanian churches sprang up in New England and once again exerted influence on other groups beyond their own fellowship.

Debating the Nature of Saving Faith

It is unlikely Fuller would have interacted with the group very extensively if all they were known for were the issues I've mentioned so far. However, Glas developed a theology of faith and justification that proved very troubling to the evangelicals.

Glas was a convinced Calvinist and was determined to guard the freeness of justification. He defined saving faith as "neither more nor less than a belief of the truth or testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ passively received by the understanding. Therefore, it is not an act of the human will but the production of the divine spirit."[9] He had been trained in the Westminster Standards, but he strongly rejected the Westminster Confession's definition of faith:

> By this faith a Christian believes whatever is revealed in the word to be the true, authentic, authoritative statement of God himself. By this faith the believer also acts according to what particular passages in the word say. By faith the believer humbly submits to and obeys God's various commands. He trembles at God's awesome threats, and eagerly embraces his promises about this life and the life to come. But the chief actions of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting on Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, in the power of the covenant of grace.[10]

Glas believed that this definition imported into the concept of faith more than the biblical idea of faith allowed. He wrote, "The common use of the words 'receiving and resting, or coming or embracing, and trusting,' imparts more into the idea of faith than the scriptures allow."[11] Faith, then, is entirely intellectual; saving faith works exactly as faith does in ordinary uses. A person believes horses have four legs or rocks are hard, and a person believes the gospel. It is wrong to make one of these "faiths" different from the others.

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[8] Smith, 87.
[9] Smith, 39.
[10] Chapter 14, part 2.
[11] Smith, 40.

Sandeman eagerly imbibed his father-in-law's teachings and advanced them aggressively. His major writing is *Letters on Theron and Aspasio,* published in 1757. Two years earlier, a Methodist minister and original Oxford Club member, James Hervey, had published a discussion of justification entitled *Theron and Aspasio: or, A Series of Dialogues and Letters upon the most important and interesting Subjects.* Surprisingly, the book showed that Hervey had come to a moderately Calvinistic understanding of justification. His former mentor, John Wesley, attacked the book for its Calvinism and accused Hervey of advancing a position that leads to antinomianism. At the same time, Wesley was accusing Hervey of Calvinism, Sandeman's response accused him of Arminianism.

Hervey had written, "Because you cannot by your own strength exercise faith, let not this occasion a tame resignation of yourself to infidelity. You must endeavor, diligently endeavor, to believe; and wait and pray for the Divine Spirit. Though it is his office to testify of Christ, *and bring near the Redeemer's righteousness;* yet his influences are not to supersede, but to encourage our own efforts."[12] Wesley saw Calvinism in Hervey's premise that a person has no strength to exercise faith; Sandeman saw Arminianism in Hervey's admonition to diligently endeavor to believe. As we saw in Session 2, when Fuller entered the fray, he was similarly confronted by Dan Taylor from the Arminian side and by several High Calvinists who made opposite accusations against his position.

Sandeman, like Glas, said faith is entirely passive. He opposed all preachers and teachers who presented salvation "not simply on *what Christ hath done,* but more or less on *the use we make of him,* the advance we make toward him … or on something we feel or do concerning him."[13] He used several expressions to make his notion of faith clear. He called it "bare faith," "the simple belief of the truth," "the simple Gospel," and "the bare persuasion of the truth."[14] God infuses this faith into a person while the person is entirely passive. Faith isn't genuine unless it comes to those who are not seeking it. There can be no thought, emotion, or desire in the unbeliever that causes him to have faith; only the gospel causes it. Otherwise, the person is saved on account of his thought, emotion, or desire and not on account of Christ, which would be works salvation.

The Sandemanians, again in agreement with Glas their founder, rejected the Evangelical Awakening taking place in 18th-century Britain. They were convinced that the fervent appeals going out to sinners were all implicitly Arminian, whether they came from express Arminians like the Wesleys, or from supposedly more Calvinistic evangelicals, like Whitefield.

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[12] Smith, 72, emphasis in Hervey's original quotation.
[13] Smith, 72.
[14] Smith, 73.

They also rejected repentance. Repentance Sandeman viewed as an effect of faith, but as an "exertion of the mind and will" repentance "has no place in procuring salvation."[15] This denied repentance in the senses that the doctrine was taught in Methodist, High Calvinist, and evangelical Calvinist circles. These groups did not agree with each other, but all agreed that repentance was a necessary corollary of saving faith. "Bare faith" excluded repentance. Haykin concludes, "Essentially [saving faith] has nothing to do with the exercise of the will in repentance or the engagement of the heart's affections towards God."[16]

Finally, this view of faith affected how Glas and Sandeman understood assurance of salvation. Assurance arises from the truth of the gospel but not from one's consciousness of one's own faith. The only way to know that one has received the gift of faith is to see evidence of the faith in a life of obedience. Since such evidence will always be variable, doubt is "an essential concomitant of faith."[17]

Allow me to briefly compare this account of saving faith with other major 18th-century alternatives. The Wesleyan Arminians (and the General Baptist evangelicals like Dan Taylor) argued that the capacity to exercise faith was purchased for all people by the atoning work of Christ. Therefore, the sinner is quite active in turning from sin and embracing the gospel, and the result of such faith is regeneration and subsequent good works. God would not command unbelievers to repent and believe unless they were able to do so. Any teaching that makes the sinner merely a recipient of the gifts of repentance and faith is implicitly antinomian; by denying man's ability to convert, it denies man's responsibility to do so.

The High or Hyper Calvinists believed faith was a gift given to the elect. Only those who are elect have warrant or authorization to believe. An elect person will detect the working of the Spirit in his or her life, creating understanding, delight, and desire for the gospel. If one is conscious of such indications of regeneration, he or she has warrant to believe. It was Glas's (and Fuller's belief) that the effect of such theology was to lead prospective converts to look inward at the state of their thinking, emotions, and will rather than looking outward to the gospel. High Calvinists denied that God would require unbelievers to repent and believe because they have no ability to do so.

The Sandemanians denied that man has ability to believe, and they denied that unbelievers should look for warrant to believe. Faith is a duty of all men, but man's inability means that he will be completely passive when given the gift of faith.

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[15] Smith, 76.
[16] Haykin, 226.
[17] Smith, 75.

Andrew Fuller represented the view of most evangelical Calvinists (as we saw in an earlier talk, he was a primary architect of the resurgence of evangelical Calvinism among the Baptists). Using primarily his *Strictures on Sandemanianism,* the remainder of this talk will consider how Fuller navigated a course between these three positions.

Fuller's Engagement with Sandemanianism

Initially, Fuller acknowledges points of agreement between his position and that of the Sandemanians. Not only is this good debating strategy, but this explication of the common ground held between them will allow a more precise delineation of their differences as Fuller proceeds.

The Common Ground

Fuller noted several points of agreement with the Sandemanians.

1) The Sandemanians agree that faith is not merely a feeling; it is belief in truth.
2) Sinners are justified by the finished work of Christ and not by anything that they do.
3) "No qualifications of any kind are necessary to warrant our believing in him."[18] Fuller is encouraged that the Sandemanians have not fallen into this Hyper-Calvinist error.
4) Fuller's next point similarly relates to the Hyper-Calvinists: "the first Scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from the gospel, and not from reflecting on the feelings of his own mind towards it."[19] As we have seen, the Sandemanians were extremely distrustful of any reference to the sinner's feelings in the conversion process. On this issue, Fuller is going to try to stake out middle ground between them and the Hyper-Calvinists, who were always encouraging prospective converts to look inward for signs of the Spirit's work.

In general, Fuller is encouraged by the Sandemanian emphasis on the objective nature of conversion. He himself had been battling the subjectivity of the

[18] Andrew Gunton Fuller, ed., *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1845), 256.
[19] Fuller, 256.

Hyper-Calvinists for decades. However, "Subjective religion is as necessary in its place as objective,"[20] and that is where the Sandemanians go wrong.

Strangely, Fuller points out how the Sandemanian rejection of the subjective has a very similar practical effect to the High-Calvinist overemphasis on the subjective. Because, according to Glas and Sandeman, a person is entirely passive when faith is exercised, so that any thought, desire, or action that would indicate a desire to believe makes faith a work, they were opposed to "all exhortations, calls, warnings, and expostulations with the sinner to believe in Christ."[21]

Sandeman's logic went as follows: "It is absurd to suppose that any man can love the gospel, or obey it, till he believe it. Therefore, to urge unbelievers to any shadow of that obedience as preparative to justification by faith, can have no other effect than to lead them to establish their own righteousness."[22] The only way to guard salvation by faith alone—apart from any human merit—is to recognize faith as a bare persuasion of the truth given sovereignly to a sinner by God that then produces holy thoughts, love for God, and every other manifestation of Christian conduct.

Fuller's Critique of Sandemanian Conversion Theology

Fuller attacks this logic in several ways.

First, he notes that Sandeman's "faith" that lacks any love for God and is entirely passive requires that a person become conscious that he is forgiven and thus saved without any "conscious love to the Divine character." The love only follows as a fruit of faith. Fuller makes a telling objection to this construction: "If, indeed, the gospel were an expedient merely to give relief to sinners, and no regard was had in it to the glory of God, a sinner full of enmity to God might receive it, and derive peace from it; but if it be an essential property of it to secure the glory of the Divine character, the belief of it must include a sense of that glory, which cannot consist with enmity against it."[23]

By excluding the love of God from conversion, then, Sandeman has shifted salvation from the glory of God to the relief of man. It is not that a prospective convert should examine his heart to see if there is love for God and then believe if he finds it there. But when a person responds to the gospel by believing, that faith will necessarily include within it love for God. To put the issue negatively, can a person who has no love for God and does not desire to see God glorified really be understanding and believing the gospel? If the gospel means to him only that he

[20] Fuller, 258.
[21] Fuller, 258.
[22] Fuller, 259.
[23] Fuller, 259.

will escape punishment, Fuller would question whether he really believes the true gospel, since the gospel taught in the NT is about God manifesting His glory to people far more than it is about people escaping the judgment due their sins.

Fuller sees two practical corollaries to this Sandemanian "faith." First, he is not surprised to find that many adherents of the sect are "litigious, conceited, and censorious towards all who do not embrace" their position.[24] They believe in God only for the benefits He can provide them; such a "selfish spirit" is not likely to extend love to fellow believers who differ from them in their principles.

Second, in what is probably the harshest language in the entire book, Fuller castigates their distinct lack of zeal for holiness, since the focus in conversion is not on the offended Lawgiver but rather on the benefits of the one receiving the gift. "Those who live near them say there is scarcely any appearance of serious religion in their families, unless we might call by that name the scrupulosity that would refuse to pray with an unbeliever, but would have no objection to accompany him to the theatre. Mr. S. and his admirers have reproached many for their devotion; but I cannot learn that they were ever reproached with this evil in return."[25] I think it is only fair to say that both Glas and Sandeman regularly taught that true faith will lead to holiness of life, but they rejected many of the external standards of holiness maintained in evangelicalism. It is possible, of course, that Fuller's charge here is accurate, and the Sandemanian lack of focus on God and His glory in conversion led to loose living. It is possible, also, that Fuller, who was a very strict Sabbatarian and often inveighed against worldliness, is here betraying his own legalism.[26]

Fuller's second major argument against the Sandemanian notion of "bare faith" relates to its logical inconsistency. Sandeman had emphatically stated, "He who maintains that we are justified only by faith, and at the same time affirms … that faith is a work exerted by the human mind, undoubtedly maintains, if he has any meaning in his words, that we are justified by a work exerted by the human mind."[27] Most popular preachers—i.e., preachers of the Evangelical Awakening—urged people to have an "active advance of the soul" towards God in order to be saved, so that it is this response that saves people rather than the finished work of Christ, Sandeman claims.

Fuller replies that preachers who urge sinners to "close with Christ" (as Whitefield, for instance, commonly had) were not arguing that closing with Christ was the "procuring cause" of justification. Fuller turns Sandeman's argument directly back onto his position: "If there be any weight in Mr. Sandeman's

[24] Fuller, 259.
[25] Fuller, 259.
[26] I'm here using "legalism" in the informal sense of insisting on manmade standards of holiness.
[27] Fuller, 260.

argument, it falls equally on his own hypothesis as on that of his opponents. Thus we might argue, he who maintains that we are justified only by faith, and at the same time affirms, with Mr. Sandeman, that faith is a notion formed by the human mind, undoubtedly maintains, if he has any meaning to his words, that we are justified by a notion formed by the human mind."[28] In other words, if *anything* happens at the point of a person's conversion that is not the finished work of Christ on the cross, one could use Sandeman's argument that that *thing* was adding to Christ's work and nullifying it. The Sandemanian notion of bare faith turns out to be sophistry. In various passages Sandeman himself speaks of faith in the mind and cannot avoid using language that implies that the mind receives the idea, thinks about it, etc., all of which by his definition constitute "works."

More importantly, Fuller spends a while adducing passages in the New Testament, concluding that "the whole tenor of the Bible exhorts sinners to forsake their ways and return to the Lord, 'that he may have mercy upon them;' to believe in the light, 'that they may be children of light;' and to come to him 'that they may have life.'"[29] By Sandemanian principles, every one of these expressions would be advocating salvation by works.

Fuller understands why Glas and Sandeman have gone in this extreme direction. Arminians, like the Wesleys and his contemporary, the General Baptist Dan Taylor, argued that faith is an act of the soul that unregenerate people are capable of. People are unable to do the perfect works requisite for acceptance with God, but they are able to repent and believe, and so that is all God requires of them. Fuller spends a fair amount of time countering Arminian arguments, but he doesn't believe the Sandemanian solution is viable. It replaces one error with another. "Assuredly," Fuller writes, "there is no necessity for reducing faith to a nullity, in order to maintain the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. While we hold that faith justifies, not in respect of the act of believing, but for the righteousness on which it terminates, or that God's pardoning and receiving us to favour is in reward, not of our believing, but of his Son's obedience unto death, every purpose is answered, and all inherent righteousness is excluded."[30]

As a word of personal testimony, this question vexed me as a young person. I remember being told by my Bible teacher in Christian high school that we are saved by faith, not by works. He then clearly taught that everyone is capable of believing, and I asked him why exercising this capability did not constitute works. He replied that the NT says faith is not a work, and he thought that a sufficient explanation. But he had no explanation of the inner logic of why believing is not a

[28] Fuller, 260.
[29] Fuller, 260.
[30] Fuller, 261.

work. I have since found discussions of this topic in many theological writers, but the work that first clarified the question for me was *What Is Faith?* by Gresham Machen. Machen, of course, does not fall into the Sandemanian error of describing a person as entirely passive when he or she receives faith. But he did explain that the nature of faith is to receive, not to do. The reason for this is that the value of faith depends entirely on the object of faith. To the precise extent that someone thinks his act of faith is saving him, he is not trusting the object of his faith to save him. Fuller, in the quote above, expresses precisely this idea.

Third, Fuller challenges the idea that repentance follows faith and is never present at the point of faith (because repenting would be a work). Sandeman's position results in a "believer" who is not sorry for his sin and does not love God. Fuller agrees that a person cannot repent of his sin without a saving view of the Savior, and in this sense faith must precede repentance. On the other hand, a person is not truly seeing the Savior unless he sees Him as having died for his sins. "In the order of cause and effect, whatever may be said as to the order of time, repentance precedes as well as follows the faith of Christ; and … faith in Christ cannot exist without repentance for sin. A sense of sin appears to me essential to believing in the Saviour; so much so, that without it the latter would not only be a mere 'notion,' but an essentially defective one."[31]

Fuller argues that many scriptural representations of repentance include the idea of faith, and many examples of faith include repentance. The temporal order may vary from person to person, but theologically they are inseparable and cannot be viewed in terms of causation. In fact, when the two facets are placed in order in Scripture, it is usually repentance first, an order the Sandemanians invariably reverse. This usually Scriptural order teaches us that no one will believe the gospel, that Christ died for His sins so that he could be delivered from condemnation, unless he first recognizes that he is sinful and deserves condemnation. Fuller goes on,

> As faith must needs correspond with truth, it is impossible that we should believe the doctrine of salvation by grace in an impenitent state of mind, or without feeling that we have forfeited all claim to the Divine favour. We cannot see things but as they are to be seen; to suppose that we first believe in the doctrine of free grace, and then, as the effect of it, perceive the evil of sin, and our just exposedness to Divine wrath, is like supposing a man first to appreciate the value of a physician, and by this means to learn that he is sick.[32]

[31] Fuller, 269.
[32] Fuller, 269.

Again targeting their inconsistency, Fuller points out that the Sandemanians struggle to express the state of an awakened sinner without using repentance language. They speak of sinners becoming conscious of their estrangement from God, of their unworthiness, etc. Fuller argues that they are surrendering the case, showing inadvertently that one must recognize condemnation under divine law (repentance toward the Lawgiver) in the process of believing (faith toward the Savior).

So far, Fuller has argued that the Sandemanian system focuses on the salvation of man and neglects the glory of God; he has refuted the Sandemanian notion that saving faith is a bare or simple persuasion of truth; and he has proven that genuine faith cannot be separated from repentance.

Fourth, he digs a little deeper into Sandemanianism and explores the relationship between knowledge and disposition. While Fuller himself, as we have noted earlier in the day, was significantly shaped by the Enlightenment currents of his day, in this area the Sandemanians showed their rationalism. They argued that faith was simply knowledge infused into the mind by God; all spiritual dispositions—attitudes or frames of mind—result from this knowledge. More fundamentally, the Sandemanians argued that the intellect or understanding ought always to determine the will or choices; any time this is not the case, sin has distorted the natural order, allowing other faculties to override the understanding.

Fuller objects, arguing that one's disposition may in fact determine one's judgment. Since love for God and other sanctified feelings can cause one to understand, it is not clear that this "inversion" is caused by sin. A meek person may understand the Scriptures better than a Bible commentator. Disposition, indeed, is crucial to understanding, and, of course, understanding affects disposition. It is not a matter of simple understanding producing disposition, as the Sandemanians suppose.

Fuller further distinguishes "simple knowledge," mere intellectual apprehension, with a more comprehensive knowledge, which contains within it approbation or disapproval of the object. For instance, the Lord "knows" the righteous in this sense but does not know the wicked, clearly not a reference to mere awareness. Simple knowledge is a mere human attainment and has no merit or demerit in it; but comprehensive knowledge requires illumination by the Spirit.

It is this comprehensive knowledge that is portrayed in Scripture as involved in salvation. Fuller proves this by arguing that saving knowledge is the opposite of spiritual blindness, as in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 or Ephesians 5:8. Spiritual blindness is obviously not simple ignorance but rather aversion to the truth. Second, he argues that the objects of saving knowledge in Scripture require it to be comprehensive and not simple.

> The very essence of Scriptural knowledge consists in the discernment of Divine beauties, or the GLORY of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To speak of faith in Christ antecedent to this is only to speak at random. The reason given why the gospel report was not believed is, that, in the esteem of men, the Messiah had no form nor comeliness in him, nor beauty, that they should desire him. To say we must have a spiritual principle before we can discern Divine beauties, is, therefore, the same thing in effect as to say we must have a spiritual principle before we can believe the gospel.[33]

Fuller's fifth argument against the Sandemanian system examines the notion of passive faith, the idea that faith is simply knowledge of the truth impressed on the mind by the Spirit. The Kettering pastor finds the whole idea of passive faith absurd. Believing a truth involves perceiving the truth, considering evidence adduced to support the truth, and finally assenting to the truth. A faith that is "passive" is not faith in any normal sense of the word.

How does a depraved sinner do all of this, though? At this point, Fuller asserts the classic Calvinist contention that regeneration precedes faith. The Sandemanians taught that regeneration is an effect of faith from various passages, such as 1 Peter 1:23, James 1:18, and 1 Corinthians 4:15. Fuller argues that these passages need not strictly mean that faith precedes regeneration because they refer to the Word, the gospel, etc., so that they are general references to the whole process rather than specific explanations of the order of salvation. Other passages, in Fuller's opinion, seem to point to regeneration leading to faith, such as John 1:11-13, John 3:3, and 1 Corinthians 2:14. Regeneration preceding faith allows Fuller to argue that God convicts the heart, opens the mind, and stirs the will, so that a person is quite active—not passive at all—at the point of conversion, but this activity is the fruit of a renewed heart, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

If one places faith before regeneration, then one is forced to choose between making it active and thus a work, like the Arminians, or passive, like the Sandemanians.

I am hesitant to insert myself into this thorny issue. However, exegetically I do not find Fuller's efforts to answer the faith-leads-to-regeneration passages very effective, and I am not convinced that his regeneration-leads-to-faith passages prove his case. Of course, good men differ. For what it's worth, I'm inclined to follow Bruce Demarest and others who distinguish the effectual call, which opens the mind and enables repentance and faith, from regeneration that follows repentance and faith. This allows divine initiative but does justice to the exegetical

[33] Fuller, 274.

evidence that conversion precedes regeneration. Fuller, however, represents here the dominant and typical Calvinist tradition relative to the *ordo salutis*.

Finally, Fuller refutes the Sandemanian doctrine of conversion by tracing it to its effects, and he more broadly looks at Sandemanian churches, which he believes are suffering the deleterious effects of their strange beliefs.

Fuller, of course, had been engaged in a ferocious battle with the Hyper-Calvinists for many years over whether faith is a duty for all men. As we have seen, Hyper-Calvinists typically denied it on the basis that God could not require a duty of people unable to perform it. The Sandemanians, on the other hand, say that they agree that unbelievers are commanded to repent and believe and, therefore, officially agree with the evangelical position.

Nevertheless, when they argue that faith is infused into people who are entirely passive so that it includes no connection to love for God, hatred of evil, or desire to obey, Fuller argues that they arrive at the same point as the Hyper-Calvinists via a different road.

> If faith be merely light in the understanding, unbelief must be merely the absence of it; and if the former include nothing pertaining to the will, neither does the latter. To say that though unbelief contain a voluntary rejection of the truth, yet faith contains no voluntary reception of it, is saying that belief and unbelief are not opposites, which is equal to denying a self-evident proposition. If the one be purely intellectual, so is the other; and if there be no obedience in the former, there is no disobedience in the latter.[34]

The Hyper-Calvinists tell sinners to look inward to see if the Spirit is convicting and drawing them. If they see warrant for believing they are elect, they have the right to repent and believe. The Sandemanians tell sinners that any desire to be saved, any approach to God is an attempt to establish self-righteousness; instead, they should be utterly passive, and perhaps God will bestow the gift of faith on them. The effect is similar. Sinners are not told to obey the command of God to repent and believe. Both groups emphatically denied being Antinomian because theologians in both camps typically urged believers to live holy lives (as we have seen, Hyper-Calvinist churches often adopted antinomian attitudes anyway), but in this important particular—that they will not command sinners to obey God—they embraced a virulent form of antinomianism that deadened evangelism.

Fuller extends this critique by exposing the actual practice of Sandemanian preachers and how different it was from that of Christ and the apostles. Fuller

[34] Fuller, 264.

writes, “On this principle, calls, invitations, and exhortations to believe have no place in the Christian ministry. To call, invite, or exhort a man to that in which his will has no concern is self-evident absurdity.”[35] He cites Sandeman’s argument that preachers should present to sinners “all the evidence furnished … by the gospel,” but it is not the preacher’s job to press the claims of the gospel on sinners. No Hyper-Calvinist could express it better.

I have intentionally omitted the exegetical evidence Fuller adduces to disprove these positions, but it is considerable. Christ and the apostles, not to mention OT prophets, constantly and consistently urge sinners to respond rightly to their preaching. Between the Hyper-Calvinists and the Sandemanians, Fuller found much of his life-work devoted to convincing believers to beseech people on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

Other Sandemanian Issues

Fuller is not surprised that the Sandemanians, having built their doctrine on faulty premises, go wrong in lots of other areas as well. As I noted earlier, it is unlikely Fuller would have gone to all this trouble writing a refutation of the Sandemanians had they simply been an odd group that got the gospel basically right but had distinctive patterns of church life. It wasn’t his job, after all, to fix every ecclesiastical aberration. The two factors that led him to confront them with such vigor were their effect on Scotch Baptists, which Fuller had personal encounters with, and the crucial fact that they undermined the very doctrine that Fuller spent his life defending: the fact that saving faith is a duty. Once he engaged them, however, he saw many ecclesiastical fruits of their aberrant way of thinking about Scripture.

The last four letters (chapters) in *Strictures on Sandemanianism* address these wider concerns.

Fuller first elaborates several of their peculiar practices, such as footwashing, the agape feast, and the kiss of charity. They don’t concern him much, and he would certainly not go to war with them over them. However, the attitude with which they are held is a very different matter. He writes,

> When the reflecting Christian considers what contentions have been maintained about things of this nature, what divisions have been produced, and what accusations have been preferred against those who stand aloof from such strifes, as though they did not so much as profess to observe all things which Christ has commanded [recall that this was Glas’s justification

[35] Fuller, 265.

> for insisting on absolute adherence to his interpretations], he will drop a tear of pity over human weakness. But when he sees men so scrupulous in such matters that they cannot conscientiously be present at any worship but their own, yet making no scruple of joining in theatrical and other vain amusements, he will be shocked, and must needs suspect something worse than weakness; something which strains at a gnat, but can swallow a camel; something, in short, which, however good men may have been carried away by it, can hardly be conceived to have had its origin in a good man's mind.[36]

Fuller turns to considering the cultish structure of the denomination that specifies what church life should look like in minute detail and insists on conformity. Recognizing that the Scriptures do indeed specify a great deal about church life, Fuller explains what New Testament church life should look like—what follows is a solid discussion of Baptist polity—but he then says that a great many details are left to the common sense and wisdom of the churches. The Sandemanians instead regulate every detail and require conformity to their dictates.

Fuller zeroes in on the fact that they require unanimous votes in all church business meetings. If there is any dissent on any issue, they discuss it until the minority gives up their view. If they refuse to do so, they are regarded as disagreeing with the Word of God, and they are excommunicated. As a Baptist, this practice horrifies him:

> This forced unanimity is the highest refinement of spiritual tyranny. It is a being compelled to believe as the church believes, and that not only on subjects clearly-revealed, and of great importance, but in matters of mere opinion, in which the most upright minds may differ, and to which no standard can apply. What can he who exalteth himself above all that is called God do more than set up his decisions as the word of God, and require men on pain of excommunication to receive them?[37]

This kind of authoritarianism often leads to cutting oneself off from the great Christian tradition, which inevitably leads to novel interpretations of Scripture and great error. It also leads to another cult-like characteristic: "From the days of Glass [sic] and Sandeman until now, it does not appear to have been their object to convert men to Christ from among the ungodly, but to make proselytes of other

[36] Fuller, 286.
[37] Fuller, 289.

Christians."[38] Making converts to oneself rather than to Christ has always been a mark of false teachers.

Finally, Fuller contrasts the spirit of Sandemanianism with that of New Testament Christianity. As he begins, he generously concedes that not all adherents of the system fall prey to all of these tendencies, and his discussion is not about personalities. Rather, the system itself leads to attitudes that are inconsistent with the gospel.

His initial concern is a good warning to all religious groups—I'm thinking about Fundamentalists at the moment—who find themselves embattled. Religious movements that arise strictly from negative considerations—even if they are opposing error—never amount to anything. They do not arise because they love truth but because they love opposing error.

> By the strain of writing and conversation which prevails in this connexion, it would seem that the supposed absurdities of others are the life of their religion, and that if these were once to cease, their zeal would expire with them. It is the vulture, and not the dove, that is apparent in all their writings. Who will say that Mr. Sandeman sought the good of his opponents, when all through his publications he took every opportunity to hold them up to contempt, and with evident marks of pleasure to describe them and their friends as walking in a devout path to hell? The same is manifestly the spirit of his followers, though they may not possess his sarcastic talents. But are these the weapons of the Christian warfare?[39]

Second, it may be that separation from other Christians is sometimes necessary. But a good man will practice separation with a grieved heart. He will seek

> to diminish the breach rather than to widen it; to consider the things wherein he agrees with others, and, as far as he conscientiously can, to act with them. If we see individuals, or a community, who, instead of such regret, are only employed in censuring all who follow not with them, as enemies to the truth; and instead of acting with them in things wherein they are agreed, are studious to render the separation as wide as possible, and glory in it—can we hesitate to say this is not Christianity?[40]

[38] Fuller, 290.
[39] Fuller, 292.
[40] Fuller, 293.

As soon as a religious movement is built on all the ways it differs from other Christians, as soon as it confines its prayers and good wishes for those who agree with it, and it interacts with other groups only "in a way of censure and dispute,"[41] it becomes sectarian and little better than the Pharisees who compassed sea and land to make others proselytes who followed them rather than God.

What is needed is meekness and humility, zeal to heal, and a willingness to recognize one's debt to the great doctrines held in common with all Christians. No denomination is perfect, and none would avoid some measure of censure should Christ Himself give His critique. But the solution is not the path laid out by Glas and Sandeman. "On the contrary, if we may judge from its effects during the last fifty years, it would lead the Christian world, if not to downright infidelity, yet to something that comes but very little short of it.[42]

Takeaways

Relative to Glas and Sandeman:

1. If our interpretation of a central doctrine of the faith is far removed from the mainstream of Christian thought throughout the history of the church, we are probably wrong, and our teaching is probably dangerous. The Sandemanian idea that faith is infused into a passive mind without any thought, desire, or action on behalf of the believer was quite novel and quite wrong.
2. Cultic thinking rarely confines itself to one area of doctrine. The turn of mind that thinks it has the right and responsibility to redefine doctrine apart from the history of interpretation will feel unfettered in other areas and follow many wrong paths.
3. This turn of mind is usually authoritarian and sectarian, feeling that it is right and all others wrong.
4. Pragmatic and numerical success—especially initially—is no proof of God's blessing. People are always looking for something new and ingenious.

Relative to Fuller:

5. The same doctrine can be undermined in many ways. Our defense of the faith is never finished.
6. Problems should be confronted at their first principles and not only at their effects, as much as is possible.

[41] Fuller, 293.
[42] Fuller, 293-294.

7. Our practical theology, especially our preaching and evangelism, flows out of our biblical and systematic theology. Fuller didn't just address the Sandemanian refusal to address sinners; he traced this refusal back to their peculiar version of Calvinism.

Relative to our contemporary setting:

8. The specific cluster of beliefs associated with Sandemanianism would probably be hard to find today, i.e., High Calvinism with infused, passive faith and Restorationist ecclesiology. But many of their teachings are still around. Faith as strictly intellectual and not moral; repentance as having no role in faith and following faith as an effect (for instance, Earl Radmacher writes, "Repentance is not a condition of eternal salvation and is neither a synonym for faith in Christ not a necessary precursor to faith in Christ"[43]); leadership that assumes it has the right to dogmatize on "all things whatsoever I have commanded you"; sectarian delight in criticizing others rather than meekly learning from others. And the list could go on. In many of these matters, Fuller is a sure guide; in all of them, he is a great example of a faithful polemicist.

Additional Resources

In addition to the resources listed for Session 1:

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors.* Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987. Chapter on "Sandemanianism," pages 170-190.

Smith, John Howard. *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

[43] Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 938. Note that the above quotation comes from a list of three possible interpretations of repentance, but Radmacher subsequently endorses this option. See full discussion, pages 938-944.

Andrew Fuller, Pastor and Missionary Statesman

Dr. David Saxon

Session 4

The appearance of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in 1785 gave Fuller, although the pastor of a small Particular Baptist church in a small town, national notoriety. The book was read well beyond the boundaries of his denomination and homeland, even making its way over to New England. This provided Fuller a platform for responding to other challenges to the gospel. Between 1785 and his death thirty years later, he wrote a major refutation of Deism,[1] several responses to Socinianism,[2] a response to Universalism,[3] his famous work on Sandemanianism,[4] and a steady stream of works related to Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism.[5] It would seem that he would have little time for much else. This final presentation will set all of this polemical work in the context of Fuller as a family man, a local church pastor and a leader of world missions.

Fuller as a Family Man

When we left Fuller's biography back in session 1, he was married to Sarah and had a daughter Sally but had lost three other children in infancy. Sarah soon also bore a son, Robert. Over the next decade, she will bear six more children. Fuller's theological conflicts with the Soham congregation, their refusal to give him a decent salary, and what he believed was clear leading from the Lord caused the young family to move to Kettering in 1782 to assume the pastorate there.

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[1] *The Gospel Its Own Witness; or, the Holy Nature and Divine Harmony of the Christian Religion Contrasted with the Immorality and Absurdity of Deism* in Andrew Gunton Fuller, ed., *The complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life* (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1845), 1-49 (hereinafter, *Works).*

[2] *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to Their Moral Tendency, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Friends of Vital and Practical Religion,* in *Works,* 50-109; *Socinianism Indefensible on the Ground of Its Moral Tendency*, 110-130; *Reflections on Mr. Belsham's Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise on Christianity* (1798), 131-132 (Belsham was a Unitarian).

[3] *Letters to Mr. Vidler on Universal Salvation* in *Works,* 133-149.

[4] *Strictures on Sandemanianism, in Twelve Letters to a Friend* in *Works,* 256-294.

[5] *A Defence of A Treatise Entitled 'The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation,'* in *Works,* 191-233; *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace,* 234-255; *Dialogues and Letters Between Crispus and Gaius*, 294-308; *Conversations Between Peter, James, and John*, 309-317; *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth,* 317-325; *Remarks on Mr. Martin's Publication, Entitled 'Thoughts on the Duty of Man Relative to Faith in Jesus Christ in Five Letters to a Friend,* 325-334; *Antinomianism Contrasted with the Religion Taught and Exemplified in the Holy Scriptures,* 334-346.

Kettering had about 3500 people, and most were involved in the wool trade. After 1785 new, large textile factories in the north began to drive the small markets, like Kettering, out of business. The economy suffered, and the town shrunk to a little over 3000 people by 1795. The alternative was shoemaking, but Northampton was already the center for that. Life in Kettering was tough. Nevertheless, the people loved their new pastor and paid him an adequate salary to support his family.

The church had 88 members when Fuller became pastor and 174 at his death in 1815. It had accepted 232 new members and had 146 come off the roll via death, moving away, or discipline. This does not tell the whole story, however. As Fuller gained fame as a writer, people from the other churches in town and from the surrounding villages often came to hear him. On a given Sunday after 1805, attendance might be over 1000. It was fairly typical of Particular Baptist churches of that era to have attendance of four or five times the actual membership. The building was enlarged in 1786, and then a new structure was built in 1805 to handle the growing crowds.

In addition to losing several infants—infant mortality in the era was ghastly—Fuller suffered other family losses. In December 1785, not long after beginning his service in the town, Fuller's 6-year-old daughter Sally fell ill with the measles. As her condition worsened, Fuller was deeply concerned for her and confided in his journal: "I think if God should take either of my children from me…I could scarcely sustain it. On this account I have many fears."[6] Fuller and Sally were very close, with Fuller often carrying the sick girl into a nearby meadow to read the Scriptures and pray with her. After several agonizing months, Sally came to the point of death. Fuller fell ill himself, being wracked by a fever, and while he was in this condition, Sally died. He was almost too overcome by grief to attend the funeral, which was preached by John Ryland, Jr., his closest friend. Fuller was comforted that Sally came to know Christ before her passing, but her death haunted him for many years.

Fuller was a deeply emotional person, and the losses of children, attacks by enemies, and stresses of church life began to take their toll in the 1780s. His diary gives evidence of spiritual struggles, self-doubt, self-recrimination, and sadness. His modern biographer, Mordern, goes so far as to argue that between 1786 and 1789 Fuller may have experienced clinical depression. "Evidence includes terrible dreams, bouts of insomnia, dramatic mood swings, frequent tears and despair that was so deep and pervasive it led to physical illness."[7] Fuller experienced wild emotional swings—weeping with joy as he preached on grace and dejected and

[6] Peter Mordern, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815),* Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (London: Paternoster, 2015), 156.
[7] Mordern, 164.

feeling alienated from God just a couple of days later. Tragedy triggered particularly deep periods of darkness.

Fuller had inherited a High Calvinist spirituality that embraced the 17th-century Puritan emphasis on striving for assurance through self-assessment but lost the typical Puritan pastoral balance. High Calvinists focused on feelings as indices to God's favor, on dreams as ways God communicates, and as chastisement as the likely explanation of most misfortune. Despite shedding the worst theological emphases of High Calvinism, Fuller was strongly shaped by this spirituality, and it contributed to his constant negative self-assessment in his diary.[8]

I'm not sure how to assess this aspect of Fuller's life. One cannot read his journal entries without noting the extreme swings between glorying in the presence and love of God and wondering aloud if he's ever been a recipient of saving grace and whether his daring to function as a pastor might not call down God's wrath. On the other hand, Fuller had read and greatly valued the Diary of David Brainerd, which is filled with many of the same features. Indeed, baring one's soul, including the depth of one's depravity, was something of a feature of 18th-century journaling. During this period of supposed depression, Fuller continued to be a faithful husband, loving father, dedicated pastor, productive writer, and keen theologian and denominational leader.

In any event, he appears to have begun to emerge from this "dark night of the soul" by the early 1790s. Unfortunately, just as he did so, more tragedy struck. In March 1791, his old friend and mentor Robert Hall passed away. It was a great loss to the Northamptonshire Baptists and to Fuller personally. A year later, he lost a dear friend and one of his strongest allies in his church, Beeby Wallis, the deacon who had been most instrumental in persuading Fuller to move from Soham to Kettering.

Three months after Wallis's death on April 2, 1792, Fuller recorded in his journal that his wife Sarah had become "very ill." She was pregnant again with their eleventh child, but it seems she was suffering from mental illness. The next several months were filled with terrible scenes, as she alternated between various states of hysteria. For a while, she expressed great love for her husband but was convinced that Andrew was not her husband. At other times, she would become hysterical whenever Fuller would leave her, so he would have to remain by her side all day. Throughout the illness, she was pregnant, and Fuller feared for both his wife and prospective child. Only three of their previous ten children were living.

On August 23, Sarah gave birth to a daughter, whom Fuller named Bathoni, but the effort in giving birth so weakened her that she died later that day. Bathoni

[8] Mordern, 166-167.

lived only three weeks. Sarah was 46 years old. The 48-year-old Fuller was left quite bereft and wrote a tragic poem about her that you're probably glad I have not included in these notes.

Later in this talk, we will review the famous events surrounding the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society. Let me just remind you here that Carey's great sermon and the meeting in Kettering to establish the BMS occurred in 1792 and were sandwiched around this illness and death of Fuller's beloved wife Sarah. Seventeen-ninety-two was a year Fuller never forgot. Mordern suggests that the founding of the BMS may have rescued Fuller emotionally. As he poured himself into supporting the mission, he seems to have emerged from the recurring bouts with depression that had characterized the previous decade.

Two years later, in 1794, God gave Fuller a new wife, Ann Coles, daughter of a Baptist minister in Maulden, Bedfordshire. They married on December 30, 1794, and Fuller wrote in his journal,

> This day I was married; and this day will probably stamp my future life with either increasing happiness or misery. My hopes rise high of the former; but my times and those of my dear companion are in the Lord's hand. I feel a satisfaction that in her I have a godly character as well as a wife. .... I bless God for the prospect I have of an increase of happiness.[9]

His hopes seem to have been fulfilled. They had a strong and loving relationship for the remaining twenty years of his life. Andrew Gunton praised his mother as "a true help-meet to her husband, not only as an amanuensis, but a discreet adviser, and tenderly mindful of his health and comfort amidst his multifarious labours."[10]

Ann bore Fuller six children, but three more died in infancy. The three surviving children were a daughter Sarah, and two sons William and Andrew Gunton. The latter became a pastor, collated his father's memoirs, and wrote a biography of him. We know nothing about William, but Sarah was a godly young woman who grew ill and died in 1816, barely surviving her father.

Fuller's greatest family trial was with his son Robert by his first wife. In 1796 Robert failed at an apprenticeship in London that Fuller had arranged with a godly Baptist layman, and then again at an apprenticeship in Kettering. He had no discipline. Against Fuller's wishes, he joined the army in 1798 but was discharged. He joined the Marines a year later, but quickly convinced his dad to purchase his

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[9] Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* in *The complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life* (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1845), lix.

[10] Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 76. Cited in Matthew Haste, "Marriage and Family in the Life of Andrew Fuller," SBJT 17.1 (2013): 31.

release. In his journal Fuller confided, "The sorrows of my heart have been increased…to a degree almost insupportable."[11]

Robert got a place on a merchant ship, but the Royal Navy press-ganged him. In 1804 he deserted in Ireland. When he was caught, they gave him 350 lashes and then discharged him because of his severe injuries. Fuller procured medical help for him in London, but after returning to health, Robert ran off to join the Marines again. "He was never seen by his family again."[12]

Fuller wrote to Robert in 1808:

> Do not despair. Far as you have gone, and low as you are sunk in sin, yet if from hence you return to God by Jesus Christ, you will find mercy. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of sinners. If you had been ever so sober and steady in your behaviour towards men, yet without repentance towards God and faith in Christ, you could not have been saved. And if you return to God by him, though your sins be great and aggravated, yet you will find mercy.[13]

Word came that Robert had died off the coast of Lisbon, Portugal in 1809. Fuller wept in the pulpit the next Sunday as he told the congregation of his son's death, and his congregation wept with him. In 1845 Fuller's son Gunton met a man who claimed to have served with Robert on his last voyage; the man assured Gunton that Robert had been converted and was a fine Christian. Mordern writes, "This ending is not as implausible as it first appears, as letters written by Robert to his father and half-sister Sarah (which are now lost), together with a report from the ship's captain, gave Fuller himself some hope that his son had come to repentance and faith at the end of his life."[14]

In all, Fuller fathered seventeen children, only five of whom outlived him. John Morris, a close friend and one of Fuller's earliest biographers, described Fuller's qualities as a family man: "In domestic life, he was calm and tranquil, reposing in the bosom of his family with great contentment and satisfaction. No man more enjoyed the softened pleasures of 'home, sweet home,' or entered with greater feeling into its interests and concerns."[15] Gunton Fuller described his father's love for his children as "remarkably intense."[16] Despite his own sufferings

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[11] Mordern, 240.
[12] Mordern, 241.
[13] Mordern, 241.
[14] Mordern, 242.
[15] J. W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (ed. Rufus Babcock; 1st American ed.; Boston, MA: Lincoln & Edmands, 1830), 308. Cited in Haste, 28.
[16] Fuller, *Andrew Fuller,* 68. Cited in Haste, 28.

and the massive workload that he carried, Fuller worked hard at being a faithful husband and father.

Fuller as a Pastor

Part of that massive workload was the normal daily and weekly tasks of being a local church pastor. Fuller took his pastoral duties very seriously. He maintained a notebook in which he recorded the names and various information about every family in his church. He visited them regularly. Among them were a number of poor people, especially as the Kettering economy declined, and he had a special burden for them.

Like most pastors, his most important public ministry was preaching. Fuller's church had Sunday services in the morning, afternoon, and evening, and Fuller presided and preached at all three every week. He also spoke at funerals and occasional weekday meetings.

Fuller's Preaching

Evaluations of Fuller's preaching are mixed. On one hand, it is said that he devoted limited time to preparation of his weekly sermons, and his delivery was "heavy" and lacked "fluency" (as compared, for instance, to his friend Pearce). He also preached with few notes and depended on extempore inspiration quite a bit. Nevertheless, after 1790 he adopted an expositional method, preaching through books of the Bible (notably Genesis and Revelation, which were published), and his preaching improved. Mordern reports, "From this date Fuller went through Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Job, Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John, Revelation, Acts, Romans and 1 Corinthians as far as chapter 4 verse 5."[17]

When he spoke on special occasions, such as ordinations—he was a very popular ordination preacher—Association meetings, etc., Fuller would devote extra time to preparation, and he was quite effective. After the publication of *Gospel Worthy,* invitations began to pour in for Fuller to speak around the country. For instance, as early as September 1785, he reports on a two-week period in which he preached in six different towns in three different counties (Bedfordshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire).[18] His deepening friendships with Robert

[17] Mordern, 261.
[18] Mordern, 122.

Hall, John Ryland, and John Sutcliff meant that the four men often spoke in one another's pulpits and recommended each other for other opportunities.

Whatever his shortcomings as a pulpit orator, when one reads his sermons, including the published expositions of Bible books, one senses a powerful mind and a warm heart. Sutcliff said of him that his heart always shone in his preaching, and Particular Baptists in Kettering, throughout Northamptonshire, and across Britain loved him.

Fuller's Ideals for a Pastor

Many of his ordination sermons were published, and Michael Haykin and Brian Croft have collected nineteen of them for publication in a book on pastoral ministry.[19] Reading these sermons gives one some idea of Fuller's priorities as a pastor. Consider some of the themes that appear often in his charges to young pastors.

In almost every sermon, Fuller focuses on the personal religion of the aspiring minister. In an ordination sermon in Bedfordshire in 1787, Fuller encouraged Robert Fawkner,

> The studying of divine truth as preachers rather than as Christians, or, in other words, studying it for the sake of finding out something to say to others, without so much as thinking of profiting our own souls, is a temptation to which we are more than ordinarily exposed. If we studied divine truths as Christians, our being constantly engaged in the service of God would be friendly to our growth in grace. … But if we study it only as preachers, it will be the reverse. Our being conversant with the Bible will be like surgeons and soldiers being conversant with the shedding of human blood, till they lose all sensibility concerning it.[20]

Earlier in the same sermon, Fuller urged attention be given to a personal walk with Christ. Through interactions with men, we may improve our "gifts and parts; but it is conversing with God that must brighten our graces."[21] Indeed, having gifts can be a great temptation and destroy a man's usefulness if the man does not take heed unto himself spiritually. "A man may have gifts, so as to shine in the eyes of the

[19] Michael A. G. Haykin and Brian Croft, *Being a Pastor: A Conversation with Andrew Fuller* (Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 2019).
[20] Haykin and Croft, 103.
[21] Haykin and Croft, 92.

multitude, almost as bright as he does in his own eyes; and yet possess little or nothing of *spiritual* light—light, the tendency of which is to transform the heart."[22]

What will make a pastor useful to his church and to the kingdom of Christ in general is spiritual character. "I think it may be laid down as a rule, which both Scripture and experience will confirm, that eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness."[23] Fuller suggests three ways this spirituality can be maintained in a minister's life.

First, beware of thinking large thoughts about yourself. Humility is crucial to usefulness in ministry. "Hundreds of ministers have been ruined by indulging a thirst for the character of the great man, while they have neglected the far superior character of the good man."[24]

Second, this humility will manifest itself in the minister's life through love. The pastor will see himself on the same level as his people and thus be able to minister effectively among them. Fuller used Paul as an example of this truth: "The apostle Paul did not value himself upon those things wherein he differed from other Christians; but upon that which he possessed in common with them—charity, or Christian love."[25]

The minister, third, must not only study the Scriptures but live upon them.

> The best way to hold fast the truth as a minister is to live upon it as a Christian. Attempt to keep it anywhere but in your heart, and it will go. If it be merely in the memory, it is not safe. He that is reasoned into the truth may be reasoned out of it. It is living upon the truth as a Christian that will cause the heart to be established with grace.[26]

A substantial portion of every ordination sermon relates not to official duties of the pastorate but to the private relationship that a pastor must maintain with his Lord. He often addresses the minister's prayer life, and he urges the pastor to be attentive to his wife and children, cultivating a solid home base for ministry.

When Fuller advises pastors about public duties, he urges the pastor to keep his focus on Christ as the Chief Shepherd of the church. Humility again is the key. Fuller says he has observed "on the part of ministers … an abuse of their office of ruling, a fondness for power, aspiring to the exercise of dominion over their brethren. It has always grated in my ears"—Fuller writes—"to hear such language

[22] Haykin and Croft, 111.
[23] Haykin and Croft, 104.
[24] Haykin and Croft, 94.
[25] Haykin and Croft, 90.
[26] Haykin and Croft, 153.

as this: '*My* church,' '*my* deacons,' etc., as if churches were made for them, rather than they for churches. Do not emulate this empty swell."[27]

The church is to be constructed as a habitation for God. "It must be God's house, not yours. Beware that you go not about it as Nebuchadnezzar went about Babylon. 'This is the house which I have built'—this is my house!"[28] The corollary of keeping one's focus on God and considering oneself merely a lowly servant in God's service is, perhaps ironically, great boldness. If this is God's work, what does it matter what man thinks of it? "Shall we cowardly desert the truth, or shun the avowal of it, merely lest the indifferent should call us bigots, or infidels, or enthusiasts?[29] There is not a more dangerous foe to the truth than indifference."[30] Focusing on the glory of God frees the minister from concerning himself with consequences.

> You must not calculate consequences as they respect this life. If you would preach the Gospel as you ought to preach it, the approbation of God must be your main object. What if you were to lose your friends and diminish your income; nay, what if you lose your liberty, or even your life—what would this all be, compared with the loss of the favour and friendship of God? Woe unto us, if we shun to declare any part of the counsel of God! He that is afraid or ashamed to preach the whole of the gospel, in all its implications and bearings, let him stand aside; he is utterly unworthy of being a soldier of Jesus Christ.[31]

In preparing sermons, Fuller urges the young ministers to think for themselves. Don't borrow other men's systems of interpretation wholesale. Investigate, dig, burrow down into the Scriptures, searching for treasures. Not every preacher had the mind and gifts that Fuller had, but this advice is sound nevertheless: "Learn your religion from the Bible. Let that be your decisive rule. Adopt not a body of sentiments, or even a single sentiment, solely on the authority of any man—however great, however respected. Dare to think for yourself."[32]

When you enter the pulpit, preach earnestly and practically, but most of all, preach doctrinally. It is the great doctrines of the faith that will change hearts and produce evangelical obedience. Furthermore, make sure the people understand

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[27] Haykin and Croft, 188.
[28] Haykin and Croft, 132.
[29] *Enthusiasts* was the 18th-century word for fanatics.
[30] Haykin and Croft, 206.
[31] Haykin and Croft, 147.
[32] Haykin and Croft, 121.

what the authority is for your message. Passages from two ordination sermons make this point quite clearly:

> Give Scriptural proof of what you teach. Do not imagine that mere assertion will do. Evidence ought to form the body of your discourses. Such expressions as "I say," uttered in the most magisterial tones, will, after all, prove nothing except the unwarrantable confidence of the preacher.[33]

> Do not advance sentiments without being able to support them by Scripture evidence. Many content themselves with assertions without proof, and make vehemence supply the place of evidence. But this will cause you to be despised by men of understanding.[34]

Finally, and most of all, urge people to come to Christ will all your might, and trust God to do the work. As Fuller became known as the great theologian of duty faith, and then as Fuller traversed the British Isles proclaiming Christian missions, he became known as a preacher who emphasized evangelism and who urged pastors to preach on evangelism. In a sermon preached after 1806, Fuller said,

> The gospel is a feast, and you are to invite guests. You may have many excuses and refusals. But be you concerned to do as your Lord commands. And when you have done your utmost, there will still be room. Dwell on the freeness, and fulness, and all-sufficiency of his grace, and how welcome even the worst of sinners are, who, renouncing all other refuges, flee to him.[35]

As ministers go about this great work, they can be confident that God will go before them, actually doing the work. "God, we may be certain, will not labour in vain; and if we labour with him, neither shall we."[36]

Fuller actively tried to live out his own advice to these young pastors in his ministry in Kettering for thirty years. By 1811, his body was wearing out, and Robert Hall's nephew John Keen Hall joined him as an assistant pastor. But Fuller never retired. He was first and foremost a pastor.[37]

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[33] Haykin and Croft, 126.
[34] Haykin and Croft, 135.
[35] Haykin and Croft, 166.
[36] Haykin and Croft, 144.
[37] For extensive treatment of these and other pastoral themes in Fuller, see Keith S. Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Renewal of Evangelical Pastoral Theology* (London: Paternoster Press, 2013).

Fuller as a Missionary Statesman

The final aspect of Andrew Fuller's life and ministry that we will consider is his enormous influence on the explosion of missionary activity among the Particular Baptists at the end of the 18th century, an impetus that caught up every other evangelical denomination in the English-speaking world by the early 19th century and led to the 19th century being, in Kenneth Scott Latourette's memorable phrase, "the Great Century of world missions." Of course, Fuller was not alone in this endeavor. God was moving on many hearts, and no doubt the work would have moved forward with or without Fuller. He played a pivotal role, however.

In the 1780s, the Northamptonshire pastors were kept abreast of developments in New England primarily by a Scottish Presbyterian theologian, John Erskine, who corresponded regularly with John Ryland and sent him packets of books that he received from the New World. In April 1784, Erskine sent a collection to Ryland that included a short book written in 1748 by Jonathan Edwards with vast implications for world missions. The title of the book was *An humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom on earth, pursuant to Scripture-promises and prophecies concerning the last time.* The title of the work largely explains it. Edwards held a postmillennial hope that the church would expand around the world, conquering the globe by, Edwards estimated, AD 2000.

Fuller and his friends shared Edwards's postmillennial eschatology and were deeply moved by his call to prayer for world missions. The Northamptonshire Baptist Association (NBA) began setting aside the second Tuesday of every other month for fasting and prayer for missions. On June 2 at the NBA annual meeting, Fuller preached a sermon entitled "Walking by Faith" in which he urged prayer for missions directly along the lines laid down by Edwards. Fuller's friend John Sutcliff, who pastored in Olney and had embraced evangelical Calvinism partly through the influence of John Newton, issued a formal "Call to Prayer" the next day. Fuller set up monthly Monday night meetings at his church to discuss, sing about, and pray about revival and world mission. The Northamptonshire Baptists would continue praying for world mission for years to come, and in time this effort spread out to Particular Baptist churches across Great Britain.[38]

Fuller published *Gospel Worthy* less than a year after this prayer movement began, and between 1785 and 1791 he engaged in extensive conversation with Hyper-Calvinists and his evangelical allies about the proper approach to

[38] Mordern, 172. See also Michael A. G. Haykin, "John Sutcliff (1752-1814)" in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The British Particular Baptists 1638-1910,* Vol. 3 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 27-31.

evangelism and missions. By 1791, Fuller had no doubt that the time had come for Particular Baptists to add feet to their prayers.

On April 27, 1791, Fuller preached at John Morris' church in Clipstone in Nottinghamshire on "The Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion." Fuller aggressively responded to the idea that Baptists were not yet ready to do overseas mission work. His language was powerful:

> When the Lord Jesus commissioned his apostles, he commanded them to go and teach 'all nations' and preach the gospel to 'every creature'; and that notwithstanding the difficulties and oppositions that would lie in their way. The apostles executed their commission with assiduity and fidelity; but, since their days, we seem to sit down half contented that the greater part of the world should remain in ignorance and idolatry. Some noble efforts have indeed been made; but they are small in number, when compared with the magnitude of the object.
>
> Are the souls of men of less value than heretofore? No. Is Christianity less true or less important than in former ages? This will not be pretended. Are there no opportunities for societies, or individuals, in Christian nations, to convey the gospel to the heathen? This cannot be pleaded as long as opportunities are found to trade with them, yea, and (what is a disgrace to the name of Christians) to buy them, and sell them, and treat them with worse than savage barbarity? We have opportunities in abundance; the improvement of navigation, the maritime and commercial turn of this country, furnish us with these; and it deserves to be considered whether this is not a circumstance that renders it a duty peculiarly binding on us.
>
> We pray for the conversion and salvation of the world, and yet neglect the ordinary means by which those ends have been used to be accomplished. It pleased God, heretofore, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed; and there is reason to think it will still please God to work by that distinguished means. Ought we not then at least to try by some means to convey more of the good news of salvation to the world around us than has hitherto been conveyed? [39]

Fuller then quotes Romans 10:14-15. The key idea here is that God uses means to bring about His purposes, and this is a point that Fuller had been promoting since 1781 and will spend the rest of his life insisting on.

[39] Mordern, 175-176.

Most of the pieces were in place for the founding of a Baptist missions agency. Nevertheless, I have not yet mentioned arguably the most important factor. Fuller was not the primary force in starting the Baptist Missionary Society, as both he and Ryland freely acknowledged. That was William Carey. Carey was seven years younger than Fuller and had not embraced Baptist views until 1781. He was baptized by Ryland, joined Sutcliff's church, and regarded Fuller as a mentor. Despite his lack of formal education (like Fuller) and his poverty, Carey was a very quick study and had already moved to evangelical Calvinism (primarily through the writings of Robert Hall) before Fuller published *Gospel Worthy*. As a pastor in Moulton (1785-89) and then Leicester (1789-93), Carey joined the NBA and regularly agitated the group to begin sending out missionaries. In 1792 Carey published *Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.* It is hard to tell which book, Fuller's or Carey's, has had the greater influence.[40] Priest insightfully says, "If Carey's *Enquiry* ... was the ethical impetus for the missions movement, Fuller's *Gospel Worthy* was the doctrinal basis for it. Whereas Fuller made it a duty for sinners to accept the gospel, Carey obligated Christians to take the gospel to them."[41]

Between Fuller, Ryland, Sutcliff, Carey, and a dynamic young preacher named Samuel Pearce, by the early 1790s the tide had turned in Northamptonshire and the surrounding counties. For instance, of the twenty-one Particular Baptist churches in Northamptonshire, only four or five remained High Calvinist.

Carey preached his famous sermon "Expect Great Things; Attempt Great Things" at the NBA annual meeting at Friar Lane, Nottingham, on May 30, 1792. The next morning Carey urged Fuller to take action, and the Kettering pastor submitted the following resolution, "that a plan be prepared against the next ministers' meeting at Kettering, for forming a 'Baptist society for propagating the Gospel among the Heathen."[42] In other words, in classic Baptist fashion, they appointed a committee!

On October 2, five months later, fourteen men met together in the back parlor of the home of Martha Wallis, Beeby Wallis's widow, in Kettering. Fuller was the host of the meeting. With thirteen of the men paying dues—Carey was too poor—the men established the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen, shortened to Baptist Missionary Society.

Andrew Fuller was selected to be the first General Secretary of the BMS, and he immediately began fundraising. The Yorkshire Baptists in the north, led by

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[40] At the time, Fuller's book was much more widely read.

[41] Gerald L. Priest, "Andrew Fuller, Hyper-Calvinism, and the 'Modern Question'" in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (London: Paternoster, 2004), 50, fn19.

[42] Mordern, 179.

John Fawcett, participated enthusiastically. Not so with the London Baptists, many of whom were still high Calvinists and most of whom distrusted provincials. Fuller was stung by this rejection and harbored some resentment against the Londoners for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, enough money was raised to send Carey and Dr. John Thomas to India, causing Fuller great joy.

Some years later, while riding in a coach with a friend (probably Ryland), Fuller used a famous metaphor:

> Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which had never before been explored. We had no one to guide us; and while we were thus deliberating, Carey, as it were, said, 'Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope'. But before he went down…he, as it seemed to me, took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect – that 'while we lived, we should never let go of the rope.' You understand me. There was great responsibility attached to us who began the business.[43]

Over the next twenty-three years, Fuller took this business very seriously. As secretary of the society, Mordern summarizes his activities as secretary of the BMS.[44] I will provide the information as a list:

- He managed the *Periodical Accounts of the Society,* which provided regular updates on the activities of the missionaries. To do so, he had to maintain correspondence with the various mission fields.
- He was the main source for missionary news to several denominational papers, including John Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register, The Evangelical Magazine,* and *The Baptist Magazine.*
- He was actively involved in selecting and approving missionary candidates.
- He crisscrossed Great Britain raising awareness of missions and soliciting prayer and financial support. Of course, this effort required considerable correspondence and organization.
- Finally, he emerged as the champion of missions both against denominational opponents, especially in London and the southeast who remained committed to Hyper-Calvinism, and in interactions with the government that often threatened to shut the mission down.

[43] Mordern, 243.
[44] Mordern, 244.

His journeys took him away from Kettering an average of three months a year, and he visited every county in England, in addition to trips to Ireland and Wales, and five trips to Scotland.[45] He was an unabashed fundraiser, with a stated goal of bringing in a pound a mile. Fuller strongly believed in what Carey and the Serampore team were doing, and he had no reluctance to ask funds from virtually anyone. He was a strong Baptist and would not celebrate the Lord's Table with Pedobaptists, but if Presbyterians wanted to support the mission, he'd gladly take their money.

In all of these areas, Fuller worked tirelessly. His friends worried that he was going to kill himself working so hard. Robert Hall, Jr. wrote to Ryland, "If he is not more careful he will be in danger of wearing himself out before his time. His journeys, his studies, his correspondencies [sic.] must be too much for any man."[46] Despite the workload, he showed wisdom, tact, and a deft hand in diffusing problems, soothing feelings, and encouraging support for the young missions. Carey, Marshman, and Ward never had a better ally.

Fuller did all of this because he loved souls and wanted to see as many reached as possible. When he learned of the conversion of Krishna Pal, the first convert of Serampore Mission, Fuller wrote to him:

> In you we see the first fruits of Hindustan, the travail of our Redeemer's soul, and a rich reward for our imperfect labours. You know, beloved, that the love of Christ is of a constraining nature. It was this, and only this, that constrained us to mediate the means of your conversion. It was this that constrained our brethren that are with you to leave their country and all their worldly prospects, and to encounter perils, hardships and reproaches. If you stand fast in the Lord and are saved this is their and our reward.[47]

Fuller's Final Days and Legacy

Although in his last couple of years, Fuller began to suffer from significant problems with his health, possibly tuberculosis or cancer, he barely slowed down. He planned a trip in 1814 that would have exhausted a man half his age. It was too ambitious, and much of it had to be canceled. But he was still traveling, preaching, and collecting money for the missions. Ann wished he would slow down, but by this time in his life, he had only one gear.

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[45] Ireland in 1804, Wales in 1812, and Scotland in 1799, 1802, 1805, 1808 and 1813 (Mordern, 245).
[46] Mordern, 250.
[47] Mordern, 260.

On June 22, 1814, Sutcliff died. This was a blow to Fuller emotionally, and it also added to his workload. In February 1815 he wrote his last letter to Carey, "I scarcely know how to get on from week to week: The death of dear brother Sutcliff adds to my labours, and my strength decreases and the years are come in which I have but little pleasure in them. It is some comfort to me, however, that the Cause of God lives and prospers."[48]

Fuller preached his last sermon on April 2, celebrating communion although extremely weak and frail. He knew he was dying. After that service, he was confined to bed.

On April 28, he wrote his last letter to Ryland.

> We have some, who have been giving out, of late, that if 'Sutcliff, and some others, had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.' If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is. It is very singular that the Mission to the East should have originated with men of these principles; and without pretending to be a prophet, I may say, if it ever falls into the hands of men who talk in this strain, it will soon come to nothing.[49]

Fuller also asked Ryland to preach his funeral: "I am a poor, guilty creature; but Christ is an almighty Saviour. I have preached and written much against the abuse of the doctrine of grace; but that doctrine is all my salvation and all my desire. I have no other hope than from salvation by mere sovereign, efficacious grace, through the atonement of my Lord and Saviour."[50]

He was suffering intense pain, but unlike earlier in life when sickness caused him depression, he was at peace. On Sunday, May 7, he heard singing from the service (the manse was attached to the church). Sarah was attending him, and he said to her, "I wish I had strength enough." She asked, "To do what, father?" And he replied, "To worship, child." With help, he sat up in bed for about half an hour in order to join the singing. Falling back to the bed, he passed away at the age of 61.[51]

At Fuller's request, Ryland preached his funeral from Romans 8:10: "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." He was survived by three sons and two daughters, although his

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[48] Mordern, 292.
[49] Mordern, 293.
[50] Mordern, 293.
[51] *Memoirs,* lxxxiv-lxxxv.

daughter Sarah died a year later; by his mother, who also died just months after his passing; and by Ann, who lived ten more years until 1825, dying at the age of 62.[52]

Calvinism declined in Britain in the 19th century, and the heirs of the Hyper Calvinists, the Strict and Particular Baptists, blamed Fuller. Causation is pretty hard to establish, but given the decline of Calvinism in evangelical circles throughout the English-speaking world, it is unlikely Fuller is primarily to blame. Instead, Fuller deserves at least some credit for the fact that a great many 19th-century missionaries, both Baptist and Presbyterian, that fill the missionary annals with spectacular feats of courage and sacrifice, went to the field confident that God was calling out a people for His name but that He would do so by means of their praying and preaching the gospel.

My friend Pastor Ralph Warren read this paper and suggested I close the day by reading 2 Corinthians 3:5, which I think quite appropriate.

> "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

Or, to put the same idea in the words of Andrew Fuller's constant refuge:

> "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
> And lean not unto thine own understanding.
> In all thy ways acknowledge him,
> And he shall direct thy paths."

Additional Resources

In addition to the resources listed for Session 1:

Grant, Keith S. *Andrew Fuller and the Renewal of Evangelical Pastoral Theology.* Studies in Baptist History and Thought 36. London: Paternoster Press, 2013.

Haykin, Michael A. G. and Brian Croft. *Being a Pastor: A Conversation with Andrew Fuller.* Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 2019.

[52] *Memoirs,* xci-xcii.