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Christian theology, indeed, objective truth is only possible because the triune God of Scripture is there, he has created and governs this world according to his plan, and he has spoken to us, to borrow from the thought of Francis Schaeffer. As a result of God’s spoken word-revelation to us through prophets and apostles and made permanent in Scripture, the church has a strong epistemological warrant for truth and theology. For this reason, Scripture alone (sola Scriptura) is our final authority for all of our theological and doctrinal thinking about God, ourselves, and the world. Scripture alone is sufficient for all we need in this life for faith in Christ and to live lives that are pleasing to our triune Creator and Lord to the praise of his glory and grace.

However, in rightly and properly emphasizing the importance of God’s word-revelation to us for us to know truth and to do theology, Christian
theology also stresses the importance of tradition, learning from the past, and standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. We must never think that with our right emphasis on *sola Scriptura* and its normative role in the church that this rejects the vital role that tradition and learning from the past serve in our thinking and lives. To conclude such a thing would be a grave mistake. The proper balance between Scripture and tradition is that Scripture is “magisterial” and tradition is “ministerial.” But for something to be “ministerial” still means that it has a crucial role to play. In fact, the Reformers made this point against the elevation of tradition by the Roman Catholic Church. Rome wrongly elevated tradition to a “magisterial” role along with Scripture, and the Reformers rightly rejected this view. Only the triune God and his word are “magisterial;” everything else is only “ministerial.” We must learn from tradition, historical theology, and our forefathers in the faith, but tradition must always be placed under the authority of God’s word.

The proper balance between Scripture and tradition is important for us to remember today. Sometimes in the church, we can forget the vital role that tradition plays, especially given the pressures of our present culture. If we are not careful, we, as the church, may imbibe our current cultural views that are now in the process of overturning everything we can learn from the past. Given the application of a radical individualism which began in the Enlightenment, and which now in postmodernism, has turned inward and toxic, anything from the past is viewed with suspicion. The cry of our day is to tear down the past and to replace it, sadly, with the relativism and subjectivism of postmodern thought. Today, we are told that history and tradition is a long story of oppression, hence the reason to become revolutionaries and to throw off the past. But what this breeds is ultimately not freedom and liberation from the past, but, especially when hinged to postmodern thought, more oppression and totalitarianism.

For Christian theology and the church, the view of our present-day culture must be rejected. Instead, we must return to the true and authoritative standard of God’s word to evaluate everything, as we do not turn away from the past but learn from it in light of the norm of Scripture. As 21st century Christians, we are part of a heritage of faithful theology, confessional orthodoxy, and Christian role models that help us navigate our present age. We ignore learning from the past and our forefathers to our spiritual peril.

Why do I begin this way in an issue devoted to the life and theology of
John Gill? For this reason: I want to remind us that to spend time looking at the life and theology of a Christian man, husband, father, pastor, and theologian from the past is not a waste of time. Instead, it is most valuable, despite the fact that all people, including Gill, have various strengths and weaknesses. But nonetheless warts and all, we may still learn from such an individual lessons for us today both positively and negatively, and Gill is an excellent person to retrieve and learn from today.

When the name John Gill is mentioned it often is received with a mixed sentiment. For some, Gill is a hero, a towering intellect, an astute theologian, and someone who has much to teach us. For others, Gill is viewed as a dangerous person since he is often identified with hyper-Calvinism. In fact, for some, Gill is the reason why many who imbibed his theology did not freely offer the gospel to all people. No doubt, in thinking about Gill’s life and theology, there is justification for both of these sentiments, which, again is a reminder that all people, whether past or present, have various strengths and weaknesses. However, it is our conviction that Gill fits more in the former category than the latter. Although we need to reject his view of eternal justification and some of its implications for the indiscriminate preaching of the gospel, this is not all that John Gill is known for. In fact, given the period of time in which he lived, Gill was crucial in responding to the Enlightenment rationalism that surrounded him, and helping the church to stand against the acids of modernity that attempted to erode the theological confidence of the church in his day. Gill’s work on this front shored up the church for generations to come, and there is much we can learn from him for us today as we face similar challenges.

Specifically, as the articles in this issue of *SBJT* will demonstrate, Gill is an excellent role model for us in how to defend theological orthodoxy for such foundational doctrines as the Trinity, Christology, and the doctrines of grace. As in his day, so in ours, these doctrinal areas are in trouble as evidenced by various polls and theologically weak churches (for example, see “The State of Theology” poll at https://thestateoftheology.com/ and the confusion within the evangelical church on these foundational doctrines). In addition, as a number of articles will demonstrate, Gill’s love for the truth, his love of God and not fearing man, and his pursuit of godliness are areas that we also need to emulate today. In a time that has lost the very grounds for truth, and in a day that seems more willing to compromise the truth than
to stand firm on God’s word, Gill serves as an example for us of those who were willing to sacrifice their to learn from those who have gone before us, so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. My prayer is that this issue on John Gill’s life and theology will encourage us to this end.
Remembering Baptist Heroes: The Example of John Gill

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Should Christians have heroes? It is very tempting in an age besotted with celebrities from the realms of entertainment and sport to answer this question with a resounding no, were it not for one fact—the Scriptures speak otherwise. The Bible is filled with narratives that are designed, among other things, to display patterns of life to emulate and ways of behavior to avoid.¹ The author of the letter to the Hebrews, for example, has a lengthy section of his work devoted to past heroes of the faith—what we know as Hebrews 11—that calls upon the original readers to live wholeheartedly for God by encouraging them through the lives of past saints who were faithful to God through thick and thin.² And in Hebrews 13:7 the readers are urged to
“remember” those who originally spoke the Word of God to them. They are to do this by spending time reflecting on aspects of these leaders’ lives so that they might imitate their faith-filled character. As John Piper has noted by way of this verse, “God ordains that we gaze on his glory, dimly mirrored in the ministry of his flawed servants. He intends for us to consider their lives and peer through the imperfections of their faith and behold the beauty of their God.” Hebrews 13:7 is thus nothing less than an exhortation to read church history through the lens of Christian biography.

This essay takes up this challenge through a reading of the life of one of the giants of Particular Baptist history: John Gill (1697–1771). This reading begins with an overview of the way Gill was regarded as a hero in his own day. This is followed by a brief biographical sketch of the Baptist divine. Then, this essay looks first at those areas where Gill’s influence was applauded by some—notably his development of Calvinistic thought—but regarded with concern by others. This portion of the essay reveals that our heroes, even the best of them, are flawed individuals. The essay concludes, though, on a positive note, as Gill’s piety is shown to be deserving emulation and his robust defense of Trinitarianism is seen to be a critical factor in the preservation of the people he served for most of his life, the English Calvinistic Baptists.

“**The Celebrated Baptist Minister**”

In September, 1753, Samuel Davies (1723-1761), a Presbyterian minister from Virginia, left his home for Great Britain on what would turn out to be an arduous, though highly successful, fund-raising expedition for the then-fledgling College of New Jersey (later to be renamed Princeton University). He was gone for a total of eighteen months, and met quite a number of key British evangelicals and churchmen, among them the leading Baptist theologian of the era, John Gill. In his diary he recorded some details of a visit he made to Gill on the morning of Wednesday, January 30, 1754. Describing him as “the celebrated Baptist Minister,” he found Gill to be “a serious, grave little Man,” who looked “young and hearty,” though Davies guessed rightly when he estimated his age to be “near 60.” Gill was quite willing to lend his support to the College, but he thought his “name would be of little service” and he warned Davies not to expect much from the English Calvinistic Baptists as a whole: “in general,” he said, they “were unhappily ignorant of the Importance of learning.”
Davies was not the only one who considered Gill something of a celebrity. One of the members of Gill’s congregation, Richard Hall (1728–1801), born and bred in Southwark and a hosier, had taken the time to write down all of Gill’s sermons that he had heard over twenty-five years and had them bound for his own reading and edification. When Gill died in 1771, Hall commented:

Great is his loss in the Church and much felt by me. It is a great affliction when we know the worth of our privileges by the want of them, especially our spiritual mercies. It is possible to set too great an esteem on man—perhaps I did not prize my faithful Minister as I ought to have done. I wish I had improved more under his sound Ministry. I now will greatly miss him. Will the Lord be pleased, as a token for good to me, to bring me into a good fold and give me an appetite for His Word and Ordinances. I desire to be thankful I have my pastor’s works to consult, which I much value.⁸

In fact, in the year following Gill’s death Hall had printed, at his own expense—£1.14.6—200 copies of What I remember of Dr Gill, which he then proceeded to give to friends and acquaintances, but of which sadly there appears to be no surviving copy.⁹ Yet another fan of Gill was William Williams Pantycelyn (1717–91), one of the central figures of eighteenth-century Welsh Calvinistic Methodism and the author of “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah.” When Williams was dying in 1791, he thanked God for the “true religion” that he had found particularly in the writings of “Dr. Goodwin, Dr. Owen, Dr. Gill, Marshall, Harvey, [and] Usher.”¹⁰ Four of these authors, are of course, Puritan figures—the two leading Independent theologians, Thomas Goodwin (1600–79) and John Owen (1616–83), the Anglo-Irish Episcopalian James Ussher (1581–1656), and the English Presbyterian Walter Marshall (1628–80). “Harvey” is the Anglican Calvinist James Hervey (1714–58), one of the members of the Wesleys’ Oxford Holy Club, famous in his day for a defense of Calvinism, Theron and Aspasio (1755), and a close friend of Gill. That Gill should appear in the company of four Puritans says much about his way of doing theology as well as the form of his publications. In a day when brevity was highly prized as a literary quality, Gill’s works read and definitely looked like the massive tomes of the baroque print culture of the Puritan era. In part, this may have had something to do with Gill’s character. As Rippon noted in his memoir
of Gill, “The Doctor considered not any subject superficially, or by halves. As deeply as human sagacity, enlightened by grace, could penetrate, he went to the bottom of everything he engaged in.” In part, it also reflected Gill’s deep love for the Word of God and the very Puritan conviction that all of divine revelation needed to be taught to the people of God.

But for some of his contemporary Christians, Gill’s bent for systematic theology was off-putting. Surely it is this lack of interest in the systematizing that attracted Gill which lies behind the famous remark of the younger Robert Hall (1764–1831) about Gill’s writings. Hall was once in conversation with the Welsh Baptist preacher Christmas Evans (1766–1838) when the latter expressed his profound admiration of Gill and said that he wished that Gill’s works had been written in Welsh. Hall, ever the vivacious conversationalist, quickly retorted, “I wish they had, sir; I wish they had with all my heart, for then I should never have read them. They are a continent of mud, sir.” In point of fact, this is a singularly unfair remark that tells us more about Hall than it does about Gill. Few of those who read Gill in the eighteenth century would have described his work thus, even those who were critical of some of Gill’s theological emphases, authors like Andrew Fuller (1754–1815). For many, he was “the great & good Dr Gill,” as Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–78) described the London divine not long after his death.

**Eruditione pietate ornatus: A Biographical Sketch**

Gill was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, in 1697, at the very close of the Puritan era. His early schooling at a local grammar school came to an abrupt end in 1708 when the school’s headmaster demanded that all of his pupils attend Anglican morning prayer. Gill’s parents were decided Dissenters and consequently withdrew their son from the school. Due to the fact that his parents had limited financial resources—Gill’s father Edward was a woolen merchant—they could not afford to send their son to a Dissenting Academy and so Gill’s formal education was over. But this did not check his hunger for learning.

Gill had acquired a good foundation in Latin and Greek before leaving school, and by the time that he was nineteen he was not only adept in both of these languages, but he was also well on the way to becoming proficient in Hebrew. Knowledge of these three languages gave him ready access to a wealth
of Scriptural and theological knowledge, which he used to great advantage in the years that followed as he pastored Goat Yard Chapel, Southwark (later Carter Lane Baptist Church), in London from 1719 till his death in 1771.

During this long pastorate, Gill wrote a number of significant works. The first was a youthful exposition of the Song of Songs (1728), which approached this portion of Holy Scripture from the vantage-point that it was an allegory of the love between Christ and his church, a perspective that had a long pedigree all the way back to the patristic era, and which, according to John Rippon (1751–1836), who succeeded him as pastor, “served very much to make Mr. Gill known.” Then, in the late 1730s, Gill issued a robust defense of the so-called five points of Calvinism, *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–8). Written at a time when English Calvinism was very much a house in disarray, it helped to make Gill known as a prominent defender of the Reformed cause and revealed his deep indebtedness to seventeenth-century Reformed thought. The story is told that when Gill was about to send this defense of Calvinism to the press, one of the members of his church told him in no uncertain terms that publication of the book would lead to the loss of some of Gill’s best friends as well as the loss of income. Gill’s reply was terse and gracious, but very much to the point: “I can afford to be poor,” he said, “but I cannot afford to injure my conscience.” This anecdote says much about the man, in particular, his determination to stay the course when it came to cleaving to biblical truth. It also provides us with a central reason for his greatness as a Christian theologian, namely, his refusal to be shaped by pragmatic concerns. What mattered above all was the truth and its proclamation. Later in his life, when Gill published a solid critique of the views of John Wesley (1703–91) on the perseverance of the saints and predestination, Wesley referred to Gill as one who “fights for his opinions through thick and thin.”

The 1740s saw the publication of Gill’s critical commentary on the entire New Testament (NT)—his profoundly learned *Exposition of the New Testament*, published in three folio volumes between 1746 and 1748. Gill’s companion to this commentary, his four-volume *Exposition of the Old Testament* did not appear for another fifteen years or so (1763–66). Together, these two sets became a central feature of the libraries of Baptist ministers throughout the British Isles. Also occupying a prominent place in those libraries was Gill’s *magnum opus*, *The Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, issued in 1769–70, which was the definitive codification of his theological perspective.
The Pactum Salutis

As a Reformed theologian, Gill inherited the theological concept of an intra-Trinitarian covenant of salvation called the pactum salutis, which was made in eternity past and which had been a feature of Reformed thought since the sixteenth century. However, Gill was also aware that while previous Reformed theologians like Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633–98), Louis de Dieu (1590–1642), Johann Cocceius (1603–69), Hermann Witsius (1636–1708), and John Owen (1616–83) had treated this eternal covenant at some length, they had focused their attention only on the involvement of the Father and the Son in this covenant. Justification for this focus had been found by these theologians in Zechariah 6:13, where it is stated that there shall be a “counsel of peace” between the Lord of hosts and the priest-king, namely, the Lord Christ. But Gill, who, as has been noted, was a key defender of the complete sovereignty of God’s grace, and was also robust in his advocacy of Trinitarianism in a day when rationalistic forces were seeking to undermine the biblical concept of the doctrine of the Trinity, sought to interpret the eternal covenant from a distinctly Trinitarian perspective. As Gill explained:

[1]t was in Jehovah the Father’s thoughts, to save men by his Son; he in his infinite wisdom saw he was the fittest person for this work, and, in his own mind, chose him to it... Now in the eternal council he moved it, and proposed it to his Son as the most advisable step that could be taken, to bring about the designed salvation; who readily agreed to it, and said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God”, (Heb. 10:7) from Psalm 40:7, 8; and the Holy Spirit expressed his approbation of him, as the fittest person to be the Saviour, by joining with the Father in the mission of him,...and by forming his human nature in time, and filling it with his gifts and graces without measure.

The Spirit was not “a mere bystander, spectator, and witness” of this eternal covenant, as previous theological discussions of the pactum salutis had implied since they did not clearly explicate his role in it. The divine Spirit was very much “a party concerned” in this everlasting covenant.

Gill found support for this inclusion of the Spirit in the pactum salutis from such biblical assertions as the Spirit’s involvement in shaping the humanity of Christ within the womb of Mary (Matt 1:18–20), his empowerment of Christ
during his earthly ministry (e.g., Matt 12:28), and his enablement of Jesus to offer himself as a propitiatory sacrifice to the Father (Heb 9:14). Gill also reasoned from the fact that since the Spirit is described in Ephesians 1:14 as the “Holy Spirit of promise,” he must be the one who makes real in the lives of the elect all of the promises made for them in eternity, things such as justification, pardon of sin, and adoption. But this would not happen if the Spirit had not “approved of and assented to” those very promises in eternity past when, together with the Father and with the Son, he made the everlasting covenant.

The Spirit, therefore, makes the blessings promised to the elect in eternity past by means of the everlasting covenant a reality in time. For example, one of these blessings is the blessing of justification. The Holy Spirit brings this blessing into the lives of the elect by the preaching of the gospel and by setting it “in the view of an awakened sinner.” The “illumination of his [i.e. the Spirit’s] grace” then “works faith” in the elect “to receive it.” The same is true with regard to forgiveness of sins and adoption. And without the “special energy of the Spirit,” the “most comfortable doctrines and precious promises of the gospel,” even when preached with great vehemence, will be of no avail to the one who hears of them. “In short,” Gill emphasized, “all the grace given to the elect in Christ, before the world began, all the things that are freely given them of God in the covenant, the Spirit in time makes known unto them, and declares their interest in them.”

Richard Muller has pointed out that because the seventeenth-century expression of the eternal pactum salutis did not explicitly include the Spirit, it thereby allowed the elect to be involved in their conversion. They could not co-operate in the covenanting of the Father and the Son for their eventual salvation, for that was done in eternity past. But as the Spirit made this eternal plan a reality in time, the conversion of the elect did not take place without the exercise of their faith and the commitment of their will. Gill, however, wished to be consistent in setting forth a completely monergistic view of salvation. The explicit inclusion of the Holy Spirit within the eternal council of peace removed any possibility of synergism and the human response of the elect to divine grace.

**Eternal Justification**

Gill’s desire to exalt God’s grace his doctrine of salvation can be seen most clearly in the London Baptist’s defense of the concept of eternal justification.
According to Gill, just as God’s determination to elect a people for salvation actually constitutes their election, so his purpose to declare them righteous in Christ is their actual justification. The pronouncement in time within the heart of a believer that he or she has been justified is simply then a repetition of “that grand original sentence of it, conceived in the mind of God from all eternity.”

Eternal justification thus precedes faith, and, in fact, a person’s faith is a product of his or her being justified. As Gill forthrightly stated:

Faith adds nothing to the esse, only to the bene esse of justification;...it is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, without the being or consideration of faith, or any foresight of it; a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God; and after he does believe, his justification does not depend on his acts of faith.

In his tract *The Doctrines of God’s Everlasting Love to his Elect, and their Eternal Union with Christ*, Gill simply stated that:

union to Christ is before faith ... Vital union is before faith ... Faith does not give us a being in Christ, or unite us to him; it is the fruit, effect, and evidence of our being in Christ, and union to him.

If justification is actually antecedent to faith, though, why does the NT—for example, Galatians 2:16; Romans 5:1—regularly speak of faith as a prerequisite to justification? Gill rejects the argument that faith *per se* is able to save anyone, for he knows that by faith “Christ, and his righteousness” is “apprehended, received, and embraced.” What these texts must mean, then, is that faith is needed to know that one is justified and to revel in this fact.

The doctrine of eternal justification also means that the status of the person who is both among the elect and yet to be converted must be viewed from two different angles. On the one hand, this person is under God’s condemnation and as such needs to be regarded as a child of wrath. But, as one who has been justified from eternity past, in Christ they are “always viewed and accounted righteous.” Theoretically this argumentation could open the door to genuine antinomianism. Little wonder that Gill had to fend off charges of antinomianism at a number of points in his ministry.

With regard to spirituality, there is also little doubt that Gill’s doctrine of eternal justification helped to foster a climate of profound introspection. To
come to Christ for salvation, one first had to determine if one was among the elect justified in eternity past. The net effect of this teaching—though unintended by Gill—was to place the essence of conversion and faith not in believing the gospel, but in believing that one was among the elect. Instead of attention being directed away from oneself towards Christ, the convicted sinner was turned inwards upon himself or herself to search for evidence that he or she was truly elect and therefore able to be converted. And by making eternal justification so central to his soteriology, Gill essentially reversed the biblical order in which one must believe in Christ before one is capable of knowing that he or she is among the elect.38

It is also important to note that in the most influential Baptist confessional statement in Baptist history, the Second London Confession of Faith (1677/89), Gill’s seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptist forebears explicitly rejected the notion of eternal justification. In the article on justification, it is clearly stated that “God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.”39 The strongest theological influences on Gill, however, came through the early eighteenth-century London Baptist John Skepp (d.1721), who participated in Gill’s ordination and whose sole literary publication, A divine energy (1722), was an out-and-out rejection of the free offer of the gospel. Gill reprinted it with a recommendatory preface in 1751.40

**The Free Offer of the Gospel**

It should occasion no surprise that Gill’s development of the doctrine of the everlasting covenant, in which he highlighted the role of the Spirit, along with his tenacious commitment to the notion of eternal justification, should then lead to the rejection of the free offer of the gospel.41 For example, in a tract that he wrote in response to a rejection of predestination by the Methodist leader John Wesley (1703–91), Gill considered biblical verses like Acts 17:30, which states that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” and Mark 16:15, in which there is a command to “preach the gospel to every creature.” Gill did not believe that either of these verses can be used to support the idea of the free offer of the gospel. He admitted that the “gospel is indeed ordered to be preached to every creature to whom it is sent and comes.” But,
Gill observed, it needs noting that God has not seen fit to send the gospel to every person in the world: “there have been multitudes in all ages that have not heard it.” Therefore, Gill stated, “that there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny.” Not even to the elect does God make an “offer” of salvation. Rather, the proclamation of the gospel informs the elect that “grace and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel, and applied by the Spirit.”

In his systematic theology, Gill suggests another way of dodging the plain import of such verses: they are really only speaking about “an external reformation of life and manners,” not “spiritual and internal conversion.” Not surprisingly Gill warns gospel preachers to be careful lest, when they preach repentance, they give their hearers the idea that repentance is “within the compass of the power of man’s will.” To preach like this is what Gill calls the “rant of some men’s ministry, … low and mean stuff, too mean for, below, and unworthy of a minister of the gospel.”

**John Gill and Hyper-Calvinism**

Now, it would be easy to think that Gill had simply allowed his reading of the Bible on these issues to be determined by his theological system. But the truth is more complex than this. Guiding Gill, first of all, was a genuine desire to exalt God and his sovereign grace. What he said early on in his ministry shaped his entire life: “I would not willingly say or write anything that is contrary to the purity and holiness of God.”

Then, his was a day, when the doctrines of grace were under heavy attack from the rationalism of the Deists and the moralism in much of the Church of England. It would have been natural for Gill and his fellow Calvinistic Baptists to view themselves as one of God’s last bastions of truth in England. In such a situation, it is easy to see how one’s defense of certain biblical doctrines—in this case, the doctrines of grace—could become unbalanced, and even produce error.

It is noteworthy that Gill’s day was the so-called Age of Reason, when men and women began to trust in their own abilities and wisdom to understand the world in which they lived and what was incumbent upon them as human beings. Gill would have been horrified to think that his theology was deeply
shaped by this culture that was beginning to trust in human reason alone. But it seems to this reader of Gill’s works, that the Baptist theologian takes Scriptural matters to a logical end beyond what Scripture clearly affirms. Like it or not, Gill was shaped by the rationalism of his day.

However, when all is said and done, Gill’s theology did hamper passionate evangelism and outreach. And not surprisingly, there is a long tradition that regards Gill as the doyen of eighteenth-century hyper-Calvinism. But this is not all there is to Mr. Gill. If it were, it would constitute a dubious reason to see him as a Baptist hero.

**The Piety of John Gill: A Glimpse**

In the debates among historical theologians about whether or not Gill was a Hyper-Calvinist—not at all an unimportant question and one in which the man whom this essay seeks to honor has played no small part—there is a side of Gill that has been far too frequently forgotten, namely, his piety.

Richard Muller, for example, in his fine examination of Gill’s thoughts on the *pactum salutis*, argues that “Gill’s precise systematization … of Christian theology” lacked “the warm piety of earlier Reformed and Puritan thought.” While Christopher J. Ellis, in an otherwise superb study of the history of Baptist worship, contrasts the “warm evangelical spirituality” of the West Country Particular Baptists that was centered on Bristol Baptist Academy with the dominant Hyper-Calvinist tradition of Gill in London which was accompanied, according to Ellis, by “a deep suspicion of the religious affections.” But the actual situation is far more complex.

An excellent entrance-point into Gill’s piety is first of all found in his poignant funeral sermon for his daughter Elizabeth, who died at the age of twelve on May 30, 1738. After preaching on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Gill intended to give some details about his daughter’s conversion, Christian walk, and final days, but the emotion of the moment appears to have overwhelmed him and he added his remarks later. Among the things that Gill especially noted about his daughter was her “great desire after, and a wonderful esteem of the grace of humility.” And to acquire such, Gill observed that his daughter would “retire into corners, to read good books, and to desire of God to give her his grace.” Gill believed that God did indeed answer her prayers, for, he remarked, “to the last she entertained a mean and low opinion of her self.”
In his *Body of Divinity* Gill noted, in the section on humility, that humility entails, among other things, “a man’s thinking meanly and the worst of himself.” He may well have been thinking of his daughter when he wrote this. For Gill went on to say, “pride is the devil’s livery; but humility is the clothing of the servants of Christ, the badge by which they are known.”

This stress on the importance of humility in the Christian life connects Gill to a much larger Christian tradition of spirituality that goes back to such early Christian authors as Basil of Ceasarea (c.330–79) and his sermon *Of humility*, or the emphasis by Augustine (354–430) that ultimately the City of God is a holy community that lives by faith, hope, and self-denying love, and is thus marked by humility and obedience to God. But the major source of Gill’s piety was, after Scripture, Puritan divinity. Evidence of this can be found especially in his early treatise on the Song of Songs, but also at various points throughout his voluminous corpus. For example, he himself practiced and also recommended to his readers and hearers the Puritan discipline of meditation, which, when it forms a regular part of a believer’s walk with God, will, according to Gill, “sweetly ravish our souls, raise our affections, inflame our love, and quicken our faith.” As he explained further:

By meditation a soul feeds on Christ, on his person, blood, and righteousness; and finds a pleasure, a sweetness, and a delight therein; … by it a believing soul feeds upon the gospel, its truths, and promises, and receives much refreshment from thence; … being cleansed in some measure from their former filthiness and uncleanness of their minds, they ascend heavenwards in their thoughts, desires, and affections, which they employ by meditating upon pure, spiritual, and heavenly things; … Meditation fits a man for prayer, and fills him with praise.

Gill’s works would have helped, therefore, to nourish elements of a vital piety among Calvinistic Baptists even when other areas of their communal life—such as the free offer of the gospel—were in disarray.

**On the Trinity**

Moreover, it was this man’s theology that was used by God when revival came to the Baptists at the close of the eighteenth century. In a world in which men
were abandoning the main contours of biblical orthodoxy—the infallibility of the Word of God, the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ—Gill held fast to all of these and enabled the Calvinistic Baptists to weather the intellectual storms of the eighteenth century. And in so doing, his fidelity gave form and shape to the coals of orthodoxy upon which the fire of revival fell later in the century through men like Andrew Fuller.

Take, for example, his robust defense of Trinitarianism. As William C. Placher and Philip Dixon have clearly demonstrated, the growing rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a “fading of the trinitarian imagination” and to the doctrine of the Trinity coming under heavy attack. Informed by the Enlightenment’s confidence in the “omnicompetence” of human reason, the intellectual mentalité of this era either dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as a philosophical and unbiblical construct of the post-Apostolic Church, and turned to classical Arianism as an alternate perspective, or simply ridiculed it as utterly illogical, and argued for Deism or Socinianism. Gill’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated*—first published in 1731 and then reissued in a second edition in 1752—proved to be an effective response to this anti-Trinitarianism. In it he sought to demonstrate that there is “but one God; that there is a plurality in the Godhead; that there are three divine Persons in it; that the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; that these are distinct in Personality, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” The heart of this treatise was later incorporated into Gill’s *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1769), which, for most Baptist pastors of that day, was their major reference work of theology.

In Chapter 9, for example, Gill seeks to prove the personhood and the deity of the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, the Holy Spirit acts as a person when he is said to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment [John 16:8]; to comfort the hearts of God’s people [John 16:7]; witness their adoption to them [Rom 8:16]; teach them all things [John 14:26]; guide them into all truth [John 16:13]; assist them in their prayers; make intercession for them, according to the will of God [Rom 8:26–7]; and seal them up unto the day of redemption [Eph 4:30].

In his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* Gill expands on some of these items. For instance, he notes that the Spirit is depicted in the Scriptures not only as “a
Spirit of grace and supplication”—so Zechariah 12:10—and “an helper of the infirmities of the saints in prayer, but as making intercession for them, according to the will of God”—thus Romans 8:26–7. Gill continues: “Now as the advocacy and intercession of Christ, prove him to be a Person, and a distinct one from the Father, with whom he intercedes; so the intercession of the Spirit, equally proves his personality, even his distinct personality also.”

Here Gill clearly departs from his Puritan theological heritage, for the Puritans had argued that Romans 8:26–7 cannot mean the Holy Spirit actually prays for believers, for that would obviate the need for Christ’s intercessory work. It would also indicate, John Owen argued, that the Spirit is not fully God, for “all prayer … is the act of a nature inferior unto that which is prayed unto.” What the passage must then indicate is a parallel to the thought behind Zechariah 12:10: the Spirit is the creator of all genuine prayer. David Clarkson (1622–86), who assisted John Owen for a number of years, has a detailed analysis of this passage along these lines in a sermon entitled “Faith in Prayer.” He speaks for the Puritan tradition when he states:

> It is his function to intercede for us, to pray in us, i.e., to make our prayers. He, as it were, writes our petitions in the heart, we offer them; he indites a good matter, we express it. That prayer which we are to believe will be accepted, is the work of the Holy Ghost; it is his voice, motion, operation, and so his prayer. Therefore when we pray he is said to pray, and our groans are called his, and our design and intent in prayer his meaning…Rom. viii.26, 27.

It appears, though, Gill was never afraid to differ from his Reformed tradition when Scripture led him a different way.

Personal properties are also ascribed by the Bible to the Spirit. “He is an intelligent agent,” and thus he is said to search the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10) and “does all things according to his pleasure and will” (1 Cor 12:11). He is the subject of “personal affections:” he loves the elect (Rom 15:30) and is grieved by “the sins and unbecoming conversation of the saints” (Eph 4:30). Gill also discerns proof of his personhood in his eternal procession from the Father and the Son, his being described by Jesus as “another Comforter” and thus distinct from him, and his being mentioned alongside the Father and the Son in the baptismal formula—“was he a mere power, quality, or attribute, and not a distinct divine person, he would never be put upon an
equal foot with the Father and the Son.”

Seeking then to set forth the Spirit’s deity, Gill argues first from the names given to the Spirit. Gill rightly notes that his being called “Lord” in passages like 2 Corinthians 3:17 bears witness of his deity. It is noteworthy that in this regard he also appeals to 2 Thessalonians 3:5. In Gill’s words,

[the Holy Spirit] is that Lord who is desired to direct the hearts of the saints into the love of God and patient waiting for Christ; where he is manifestly distinguished from God the Father, into whose love, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, into a patient waiting for whom, he is entreated to direct the saints.

This Trinitarian reading of 2 Thessalonians 3:5 ultimately goes back to Basil of Caesarea, who makes the identical argument for the Spirit’s deity in his classic defense of the Spirit’s deity, On the Holy Spirit. Gill also employs this text to prove that the Spirit is the object of prayer, and therefore divine. There are also a few passages, Gill notes, where the Spirit is implicitly called God: Acts 5:3–4, where lying to the Spirit is equated with lying to God, and 1 Corinthians 3:16, where the saints are first described as “God’s temple” and then Paul states that God’s Spirit lives in them, thereby calling the Spirit “God.”

Divine attributes are also ascribed to the Spirit, such as eternity (“eternal Spirit,” Heb 9:14), omnipresence (“Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? And whither shall I flee from thy presence?,” Ps 139:7), omniscience—here Gill has a number of texts—and omnipotence—he formed Christ’s “human nature in the womb of the virgin.” The Spirit also does what only God can do: he creates, “all the miracles which Christ wrought, he wrought by the Holy Ghost,” he regenerates and he sanctifies. Finally, Gill notes that prayer is made to the Spirit (he adduces 2 Thess 3:5 and Rev 1:4–5) and that Paul swears by the Spirit (Rom 9:1), “which is a solemn act of religious worship.”

John Rippon, who followed Gill as pastor, rightly noted in his biographical sketch of his predecessor:

The Doctor not only watched over his people, “with great affection, fidelity, and love;” but he also watched his pulpit also. He would not, if he knew it, admit any one to preach for him, who was either cold-hearted to the doctrine of the Trinity; or who denied the divine filiation of the Son of God; or who objected to conclude his prayers with the usual doxology to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as three equal
Persons in the one Jehovah. Sabellians, Arians, and Socinians, he considered as real enemies of the cross of Christ. They dared not ask him to preach, nor could he in conscience, permit them to officiate for him. He conceived that, by this uniformity of conduct, he adorned the pastoral office.83

He did more than “adorn the pastoral office.” Through such written works as his treatise on the Trinity he played a key role in shepherding the English Calvinistic Baptist community along the pathway of biblical orthodoxy.

Like all heroes, Gill has flaws, as we have seen, but nevertheless D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a keen and ardent student of eighteenth-century church history, was surely right when he stated: “Dr. John Gill was a man, not only of great importance in his own century, but a man who is still of great importance to all of us.”84

1. See, for example, Rom 15:4 and 1 Cor 10:6. Moreover, as historian Sean Michael Lucas has noted, we really cannot “swear off looking for heroes” since “we are wired to ‘look up’ to others, to search for models and patterns, to cherish dreams and aspirations inculcated by others” (Sean Michael Lucas, post May 19, 2006; http://seanmichaellucas.blogspot.com/2006/05/heroes.html; accessed May 13, 2010).

2. One of the clearest windows into the situation of the original readers can be found in Heb 10:32–6, to which Heb 11 is linked by both textual context and theme.


Remembering Baptist Heroes: The Example of John Gill


8. This citation is from a diary of Richard Hall in the possession of one of his descendants and cited by Gary Brady, "Richard Hall 02" (Benjamin Beddome, post October 30, 2008; http://benbeddome.blogspot.com/2008/10/richard-hall-02.html; accessed May 5, 2010). In other posts on this blog that deal with Richard Hall, Brady gives details of other aspects of Hall’s life as gleaned from the diary that Hall’s descendant has allowed him to consult.

9. Brady, "Richard Hall 02.”


11. Rippon, Brief Memoir, 137.


14. The Latin is a portion of the inscription carved onto Gill’s tombstone. Translated it means “Adorned with piety [and] learning.” For the full inscription, see Ella, John Gill, 246–7.


19. John Gill, A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity 2.6 (1839 ed.; repr. Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1889), 211. Subsequent references to this work will refer to it as either Doctrinal Divinity or Practical Divinity, and they will include book and chapter, and, in brackets, the respective pagination from this edition.

20. See discussion below.


22. Gill, Doctrinal Divinity 2.6 (213).

23. Ibid., 2.14 (244).

24. Ibid., 2.14 (244–6).


26. Ibid., 2.14; 6.8 (245, 506).


29. Muller, "Spirit and the Covenant”, 10–12.

30. Gill, Doctrinal Divinity Divinity 2.5 (203 and 205). On this concept in Gill, see especially George M. Ella, John Gill and Justification from Eternity: A Tercentenary Appreciation (Eggleston, Co. Durham: Go Publications, 1998); Peter Naylor, Calvinism, Communion and the Baptists: A Study of English Calvinistic Baptists from the Late 1600s to the Early 1800s (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol.7; Carlisle, Cumbria; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 190–9; and Robert W. Oliver, History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771–1892: From John Gill to C.H. Spurgeon (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 6–8. Ella defends Gill’s teaching on this issue, while both Naylor and Oliver are critical of it.

31. Gill, Doctrinal Divinity 2.6 (209).

32. Ibid., 2.5 (204).


35. Ibid., 2.6 (208).

36. Ibid.


I am indebted to Mark Jones and Gert van den Brink, “Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity” (Unpublished paper, 2010), 9, for this reference.


41. Nettles believes differently; see his “John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening” in Haykin, ed., *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 131–70.


45. Ibid., 41.


Geoffrey F. Nuttall ("Northamptonshire and The Modern Question,” 101, n.4) prefers the term “High Calvinism” to “the now more usual Hyper-Calvinism as less prejudiced and question-begging.” Nuttall also prefers this term since it was in use in the late eighteenth century. As support for the latter point, he refers to the English edition of the New England historian Hannah Adams’ *A View of Religions*, which Andrew Fuller edited and to which he also contributed a few entries, where the term “High Calvinists” appears in an article written by Fuller himself ["Calvinists," *A View of Religions* (3rd ed.; London: W. Button, 1805), 111]. Yet, in the same book, in the article entitled “Puritans”—in a passage that appears to have been added by Fuller—it is stated that in the eighteenth century the Congregationalists and Baptists “first veered towards high Calvinism, then forbore to exhort the unregenerate to repent, believe, or do any thing spiritually good; and by degrees many of them settled in gross Antinomianism” (*View of Religions*, 270–1). From this statement it seems that “high Calvinism” was seen as a step towards a form of Calvinism that had problems with the
evangelization of all and sundry, but not exactly equivalent to the latter. I have, therefore, chosen to retain the use of the term “Hyper-Calvinism.”


51. Ibid., 38–9.

52. Ibid., 39.


54. Ibid., 1.14 (804).


56. Augustine, City of God 19.23.

57. Gill, Solomon’s Song, 32 (commentary on Song of Songs 1:4).

58. Ibid., 171 (commentary on Song of Songs 4:2).


62. John Gill, The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated (London: Aaron Ward, 1731), 203–4. For a good example of the serious light in which Gill viewed deviation from the doctrine of the Trinity, see Sayer Rudd, Impartial Reflections on the Minute Which The Author received, from The Ministers of The Calvinistical Baptist Board, by the hands of Miss. Gill and Brine (London, 1736).

63. Gill, Doctrinal Divinity 1.31.

64. Gill, Doctrine of the Trinity, 192–3.

65. Gill, Doctrinal Divinity 1.31 (167–8).


68. Gill, Doctrine of the Trinity, 193.

69. Gill interprets the phrase “the love of the Spirit” as a subjective genitive. The interpretation of John Calvin, though, is to be preferred. He interprets the phrase as the love “by which the saints ought to embrace one another” [Commentary on Rom 15:30, trans. Ross Mackenzie, The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 317].

70. Gill, Doctrine of the Trinity, 194.
80. Ibid., 202–3.
82. Gill, Doctrine of the Trinity, 203.
84. See Harrison, Dr. John Gill, 31.
“Egregious Folly:” John Gill’s Picture of Roman Catholicism in Proverbs

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Introduction

John Gill felt a deep and visceral resistance to Roman Catholicism. He saw the rise of its spirit and even of its content during the apostolic age when John announced that the spirit of antichrist already was in the world (1 John 4:3). Also, he saw John’s awareness of it by special revelation as he wrote about mystical Babylon the “mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations” (Rev 17:5). This was Roman Catholicism including all of what Gill denominated the “peculiarities” of its systems. Both its ecclesiastical hierarchy and its peculiar doctrines constituted that abomination of religious apostasy known as the Church of Rome, the papal system of authority and doctrine.
This article will describe briefly Gill’s summary of the Roman Catholic system and then examine how he employed his understanding in selected sections of his commentary on Proverbs.

Principles Foundational to Roman Catholicism

Tradition over Scripture
Gill viewed the foundation of the great apostasy of Rome as its departure from the sole authority of Scripture and its enshrinement of tradition as the only true and clear source of doctrine. Commonly received doctrines of orthodoxy derived clearly from Scripture and affirmed in the history of councils Gill embraced. The common ground of the Trinity, the eternal generation of the Son, the deity of Christ, the double procession of the Holy Spirit, the death of Christ as the foundation of forgiveness of sins, the resurrection, the return of Christ to judge the living and dead, and the revelatory status of Scripture, Gill received as biblically revealed and necessary for the confession of all Christians.

Peculiarities, however, were of a different kind from revealed truth and arose from an alien source. “That, unwritten traditions with the Papists are equally the rule of faith and practice, as the holy scriptures, will not be doubted of by any conversant with their writings.” To place any post-apostolic proposition whose only authority is tradition, a word or practice of a so-called apostolic father or the biblically unwarranted canon of a council, is fatal to truth and a corruption of both the church and the gospel message of redemption. Gill cited the teaching of the Council of Trent (1545-63), the theologian Bellarmine (1542-1621), and Bailey the Jesuit as more confident of Tradition than of Scripture. Gill observed that they did not see the biblical idea of tradition as that revelation handed down from the apostles, but “distinct from it, and out of it; unwritten tradition, apostolical tradition, as they frequently call it, not delivered by the apostles in the sacred scripture, but by word of mouth to their successors, or to the churches.” Such tradition, so they claimed, was given in order to keep the church from mistakes in interpretation. It is more necessary, therefore, according to Rome, than the Scripture itself.

The Peculiarities of Rome
Out of this Pandora arise all the errors of the Romish papal system. What may not be confirmed by such a rule? No matter how “foolish, impious,
and absurd,” any stray religious opinion may be tested and approved by this rule. “The essentials of Popery, or the peculiarities of it, are all founded upon this,” so Gill argued. Gill summarized the peculiarities of popery into a two-fold manifestation. First, it is a “hierarchy, an usurped jurisdiction, and tyrannical domination over others.” Second, it involved “a system of antichristian doctrines and practices.”

In the first of these we find Rome’s extra-canonical developments appearing early in the history of the church. Among these is the domineering spirit over other bishops and churches. This led to a claim of the title Pontifex Maximus and an eventual capitulation to the assumption of the universal power of the Roman bishop. Not satisfied with grasping overarching ecclesiastical authority, the bishop of Rome applied all the leverage he could muster to gaining control of the state. The hierarchializing of power by the bishop of Rome led to the multiplication of offices in the church beyond the local church offices of pastor and deacon. Lack of real spiritual life in the churches led to a misguided quest for spirituality outside the congregation and produced the monastic life that enshrined the disaster of a required celibacy, and the multiplicity of societies arising from the monasteries and nunneries.

The second peculiarity, the manifestation of antichristian doctrine also developed completely apart from scriptural revelation. Some of the chief “principles and practices which are now reckoned popish ones” were in development and held by specific individuals before “the popes of Rome arrived to the full power they had long been aiming at.” By this method of development and eventual canonization of religious practice they have given us “the adoration of images and relics; the invocation of saints; the worship of the sign of the cross; the sacrifice of the mass; transubstantiation; the abrogation of the use of the cup in the Lord’s Supper; holy water; extreme unction, or the chrism; prayers for the dead; auricular confession; sale of pardons, purgatory pilgrimages, monastic vows, &c.”

In The Rise and Progress of Popery, Gill mentioned several key corruptions and “doctrines of devils” that appeared early and developed into grotesque damning superstitions. The worshiping of angels and praying to departed saints developed into a religion of invincible idolatry. Forbidding to marry, the superiority of celibacy, was celebrated by even the orthodox Athanasius (296-373) who called virginity a “never-failing opulence, ... a never fading crown, ... the temple of God, ... and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit,”
and commended continence as “the joy of the prophets and the boast of the apostles, ... the life of angels, and the crown of saints.” Abstaining from meats and the development of an elaborate system of fasts as a source of merit, adopting practices from a number of early groups of heretics, was given warrant through tradition. Failure to observe these humanly-imposed fasts, especially connected with Easter, resulted in deposition of bishops and excommunication of the laity. “Popish festivals” constituted the fourth doctrinal departure and involved elaborate observance of Christmas, Easter, celebrations of the deaths of martyrs including the veneration of their relics. The fifth doctrine of devils was the concept of “Limbus patrum, purgatory, and praying for the dead.” Sixth, the “popish notion of transubstantiation had its rise from the old hereticks, and was cherished and strengthened by the unguarded expressions and erroneous sentiments of the ancient fathers, even before the man of sin arrived to his manhood.” Baptism, including its proper subjects, its proper method, and its proper purpose constituted another decline begun early and brought to dogmatic status by Rome.

In both of these ways, usurpation of authority and corruption of doctrine, the Roman system had a very early beginning. The apostles saw its presence and John, in the Apocalypse, saw an increasingly full development, its grossly antichristian idolatry, and its certain demise. It was the great whore of the book of Revelation that deceived the nations, but whom the nations would destroy by special arrangements of divine providence. “That God should put it into the hearts of these kings to fulfil his will, in destroying the whore of Rome is easily received.” They do not do it for righteous purposes, but out of the evil cupidity and vengefulness of their own will, while God accomplished his will through their sin, even as in the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 13:27).

The entirety of Revelation 18 is a prophecy of the destruction of the Roman Catholic system, its popes, its traditions, its idolatries, its riches, its masses, and all of its counterfeit to the true gospel, the true church, and the true Christ. Commenting on Revelation 18:3, Gill wrote “such [“merchants of the earth”] are the cardinals, archbishops, and bishops; though the inferior clergy of the Romish church, who are under these, may be included.” Their wares are specified as “the souls of men” plainly indicating that these merchants are deceptive religionists. They “make merchandise of men, and pretend to sell them heaven, and the salvation of their souls; these are they that deal in pardons and indulgences, which they sell to ignorant people, and for a
sum of money say Mass to fetch souls out of purgatory.” All things are for sale for the right price: “crucifixes, priests, altars, temples, prayers, heaven, Christ, yea, God himself.” These idolatries and wicked practices will bring about Rome’s destruction. As he commented on 18:23, “by they sorceries all nations were deceived,” Gill observed, “meaning her false doctrines, traditions, idolatry, superstition, and will-worship, with which as another Jezebel, she has bewitched, allured, and deceived the nations of the empire, and the kings thereof.” As he remarked on the implications of her shedding the blood of the prophets and saints and of all that were slain on the earth, Gill commented, “Another reason for her destruction, besides her luxury and idolatry, namely, her shedding the blood of the saints, with which she is said to be drunk, and therefore blood is now given her to drink ... for she will be found guilty of slaying the witnesses, who are meant by the prophets and saints, that have been from the beginning of the apostacy; ... not only of those that have been slain in the city of Rome, but of all those that have been slain throughout the empire; they being slain by her order, or with her consent, and she conniving at it, encouraging, and therefore will be justly chargeable with it all.” (Rev 18:1-24, 9:828-836).

Rome and Proverbs

Gill’s Interpretive Framework
This view of the eschatological importance of Rome leads Gill to see its imprint on many texts of Scripture. One of the most striking places where Gill sees foolishness and moral perversity of Rome is in the instructions in Proverbs about whoredom and fools. In this OT book, Gill investigates the warnings about man’s sinful perversion of God’s intention in sexuality and then applies these descriptions and warnings to spiritual whoredom. The prophets do this frequently in describing the spiritual apostasy of Israel (e.g., Ezek 23:14-21; Hosea 1:2; ch. 3; 4:11-15; 9:1), and Gill follows their lead in applying these texts to the work of Christ for the final purity of his bride.

The greatest earthly folly in the moral and physical realm consists of taking up with the sexually unfaithful in this world, abandoning oneself to the pursuit of physical lust, thus becoming susceptible to the wrath of husbands, fathers, and mothers, the punishment of the magistrate, and the corruption of body here and eternal punishment from God hereafter. By analogy, far
greater folly consists in communion with the whore of Rome—her riches, her corruptions of worship, her usurpation of power both political and ecclesiastical, her perversions of doctrine, her idolatries, her promotions of salvific merits, her isolation of grace to her own powers of the priesthood, and thus her complete perversion of the way of salvation through Christ alone, engaged by faith alone, prompted by sovereign grace alone. The book of Proverbs, therefore, provides a rich field for warning against both physical and spiritual whoredom. Gill takes full advantage.

In chapter 8, Gills explains that “this chapter contains the instructions of Wisdom or Christ; shewing the excellency of them, and the author of them, in opposition to the harlot and her allurements, in the preceding chapter.” Chapter eight, therefore, represents the epitome of wisdom both in instruction and in the eternal personhood of the Son of God. The preceding chapter presents, therefore, the epitome of rascality, immorality, and foolishness. This is seen in literal instruction with the sexual perversity of the harlot and the foolish men who fall into her trap. Typologically, it refers to Rome and those who blindly follow her perverse unbiblical schemes.

**Papalism and Proverbs**

Gill recurrently insists that the wisdom of Proverbs is the wisdom of the gospel, evangelical truth as found in Christ alone and as revealed through Scripture. “Particularly the doctrines of the gospel may be meant, which are eminently so [instructive], and exceed the understanding of a natural man, and which are only understood by a spiritual man; the means of knowing which are the Scriptures, under the guidance and direction of the spirit of God.” (Prov 1:2; 4:329) And in verse 22, Gill notes on the words, “Fools hate knowledge,” that this refers to “the knowledge of the Gospel, and the truths of it; they hated the light of it, and did not care to come to it, but rather loved the darkness of the law, and even of error and infidelity; they hated Christ, the teacher of true and useful knowledge; they hated his person, ... they hated him in his offices, as a Prophet to instruct them, as a Priest to be the propitiation for them, and as a King to rule over them.” (22; 4:333) All wisdom is contained, therefore, in Christ himself and is distributed in the knowledge about him, in the perfect fitness of his person to be a redeemer, and the various facets of his work that constituted a perfect redemption.

For the man who utters evil, Gill considered that it could be, in light of
Revelation 13:56, “the man of sin, antichrist, who has a mouth speaking blasphemies against God.” (2:12; 4:340). The “strange woman” of verse 2:16, however, more clearly is a reference, by type, to the “whore of Rome, from whose fornication, or spiritual adultery, that is, idolatry, will-worship, and antichristian doctrines, the Gospel delivers men.” (16; 4:340) On the other hand, “antichrist, and all false teachers and heretics, with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” The chief deceiver is the Pope of Rome, for she has forsaken the “guide of her youth” (17; 4:340).

“So the church of Rome has forsook Christ, who was her guide in her first settlement, and her husband she professed to be espoused to, as a chaste virgin; and has followed other lovers and become the mother of harlots.” (17; 4:341) Her final abode is death for “the second death will be the portion of the whore of Rome and all her followers (Revelation xiv 10, 11, and xvii 8, and xix. 20.” (18; 4:341)

Chapter 5: We find the theme of the spiritual unfaithfulness of Rome renewed in chapter 5 as Solomon gave an invitation to wisdom, understanding, discretion, and knowledge as a means of warning against adultery and the “strange” or “forbidden” woman (5:3; 4:359). Though the warnings certainly are true and wholesome revelations in a literal sense, “it is applicable enough to the whore of Rome; who, by the blandishments of pomp and grandeur, and the allurements of wealth and riches, draws many into her idolatrous practices; which are spiritual adultery” (3; 4:359). Despite the external inducements of this woman, bitterness of hurt reside in her; such will be the case of “the worshippers of the beast, or whore of Rome; who will gnaw their tongues for pain, and be killed with the two-edged sword that proceedeth out of the mouth of Christ (Rev. xvi.10 and xix.15, 21” (4; 4:359). As the adulteress’s feet go down to death in the path of Sheol, “such is the whore of Rome, notwithstanding all her boasted knowledge and wisdom.” Her way leads to perdition, the second death, the lake burning with fire and brimstone, and “hither she brings all that follow her idolatrous practices, Rev. xvii. 8 and xix.20 and xxi.8” (5; 4:359). Hell finally is the certain portion of the harlot and those who follow her “unless reclaimed by the grace of God”. So it will be with “the worshippers of antichrist, or who give into the idolatries of the church of Rome; or commit fornication with her, Rev. xix. 9-11” (5; 4:359).

The harlot wanders around, lives in such ignorance that she gives no thought to the paths of life. Instead she is enmeshed in ways of “deceivableness
of unrighteousness; and her chief care is to keep persons in ignorance, and from pondering the path of life or true religion, and to retain them in her idolatry, 2 Thess. ii.9, 10.” (6; 4:360) A particularly strong plea from Solomon, insisting on the dangers of the harlot, call the young man to listen to his words, that is to “avoid the whorish woman; the doctrines of Christ, the truths of the Gospel: these should not be forsaken, but abode by” (7; 4:360). When this is not done severe warning is in order as in the case of Christ’s warning to the church at Thyatira that “she suffered the woman Jezebel, the Romish harlot, to teach and seduce the servants of Christ” (8; 4:360). The kings of the earth have lost their honor—their wealth and power—in their submission to the Pope. They have committed fornication with “the whore of Rome, giving their power and strength to the beast, Rev xvii.2, 13” (9; 4:360). The “merchants of Rome” are skilled at extracting wealth from others “through the abundance of her delicacies and adulteries,” and “everyone knows what vast riches are brought into the temples or churches of the Papists by idolatry.” (10; 4:361).

When Solomon speaks of the observable physical results of a life of fornication, “which the sin of uncleanness brings upon persons, which affect the several parts of it; the brain, the blood, the liver, the back, and loins, and reins; an even all the parts of it, expressed by flesh and body,” he infers that this may express the great tribulation such shall be cast into that commit adultery with the Romish Jezebel, Rev. ii.2” (11; 4:361). In speaking of the public nature of the shame of an adulterer, Gill commented, “Both the sins and punishment of those that commit fornication with the whore of Rome will be public and manifest, xviii.5 and xiv. 10” (14; 4:361). In clinging always to one’s wife and finding one’s pleasure only in her, Gill made excellent points from the literal meaning but did not fail also to warn that one must cleave to the “pure apostolic church of Christ ... with delight and pleasure, and not follow the antichristian harlot” (18; 4:362). The pure church is “very different from the apostate church of Rome.” While the one is lovely and loving, the other is “a cruel and savage beast.” (19; 4:362) Both the physical reality of adultery with failure to receive instruction and the ease with which one is led astray, Gill called “egregious folly” (23; 4:365).

Chapter 6 also provides rich opportunities to insert criticisms of Romish religion as the greatest of all follies. Verses 12-19 deal more with crooked speech than with infidelity. The worthless man of crooked speech in verse
12 is likened to the “man of sin and son of perdition” in 2 Thessalonians 2 who speaks against both reason and the light of nature, but especially perverse lies in the matter of law and gospel: “So antichrist has a mouth opened in blasphemies against God and his saints, Rev. xiii. 5, 6.” (6:12; 4:366). Other references in this passage are similar when moving from the foolish man who speaks perversely to the larger eschatological application. “This character of art and cunning, dissimulation and deceit, fitly agrees with the man of sin, 2 Thess. ii. 10 Rev. xiii.11” (13; 4:366). Again in 14, “in which sort of work the man of sin, antichrist, has been very busy.” (14; 4:366). The calamity that comes on this deceitful communicator is “sudden, inevitable, and irreparable; so antichrist will come to his end, and none shall help him. Dan. xi. 45” (15; 4:367). The three abominations of verse 17 “are plainly to be seen in the son of Belial, antichrist, who exalts himself above all that is called God, the kings and princes of the earth; he and his followers speak lies in hypocrisy; and is the whore that is drunk with the blood of the saints, 2 Thess. ii.4. 1 Tim. iv. 2. Rev. xvii. 6” (17; 4:367). The same application is made of the evils described in verse 18: “wicked thoughts and designs, both against God and men, are intended, which are forged and fabricated in the wicked heart of man; and may respect the depths of Satan in the antichristian beast of Rome, Rev. ii. 24” (18; 4:367).

Verses 20-35 pick up the theme again of the fool who is seduced by the adulterous woman. The character of the evil woman “well agrees with the idolatrous church of Rome, or antichrist, represented by a whore, Rev. xvii i, 2, 5” (24; 4:368). This work of the smooth-tongued adulteress (24) is like that of the man of sin. Gill described the art of deceitful language at length.

So the religion of this false church is delivered in a strange language the people understand not, by which they are kept in ignorance and deception; now the word of God read and explained in the mother-tongue, and especially the gospel part of it, the doctrines of wisdom, is a means of preserving persons from the errors and heresies, superstition and idolatry, of the church of Rome, and from being carried away with their false glosses, and gaudy worship, and all its deceitable way of unrighteousness. (24; 4:368)

Gill goes on to apply the warning against being captivated by “the sparkling of her eyes” as applied to the antichristian church, that is “the outward
pomp and grandeur of it, its pretensions to antiquity, to the apostolic see, to infallibility, miracles, great devotion &c” which are attractive to men like the Circean cup that bewitches but makes swine of men (25; 4:368).

The adulteress, the wife of another man, hunts down lives and destroys them in the way that “the precious souls of men are part of the wares of anti-christ, Rev. xviii.13” (26; 4:368). The price for such dalliance, however, goes far beyond the dangers of this life. Gill frequently refers to the temporal dangers it involved: “she brings him into the hands of her husband, who avenges himself by slaying the adulterer; or into the hands of the civil magistrate by whom this sin of adultery was punished with death; nay, is the occasion of the ruin of his precious and immortal soul to all eternity” (26; 4:368). It is certainly fitting, therefore to see how clearly this is analogous to the sentence of death for embracing the heresy and abominations of Rome: “the lake of fire and brimstone, everlasting burnings, will be the portion of those that commit fornication with the whore of Rome, Rev. xiv. 10, 11” (28; 4:369). God is a jealous God “in matters of worship, and will not suffer idolatry to go unpunished, which is spiritual adultery.” (35; 4:370)

Chapter 7: Having set his method of discussing the literal meaning of warnings against the adulteress woman and the prostitute and then extending them by analogy to the whole system of Roman Catholicism, Chapter 7, given totally to this subject, sees the epitome of foolishness in this iniquitous path of life. Likewise, the height of spiritual folly is bound up in Rome, its system, its professional advocates, and its blind followers.

In Gill’s comments on verse 7:5, we find this dual application set forth as a pattern of interpretation:

Nothing has a greater tendency than Christ and his gospel, and an intimate acquaintance with them, and a retention of them, to keep from all sin, from all fleshly lusts, from the sin of uncleanness; and also from all the errors, heresies, idolatry, superstition, and will-worship, of the whore of Rome; a stranger to God and true godliness, to Christ and his truths, the Spirit and his operations. (5; 4:371).

He follows this pattern in verses 6-8 seeing real warnings against the stupidity of being tantalized by the allurement of an adulteress. Even so one must beware of “the darkness of Popery” and all the “intrigues of the Romish harlot, and behold all the follies of those that commit fornication with her, Rev. ii.
13.” (6; 4:371). Just as we should abstain from evil wherever it appears and “from everything that leads to sin,” the same circumspection needs to be applied to avoid “false doctrine and false worship; the synagogues of Satan and Popish chapels” (8; 4:371).

Gill used verse 9 about twilight, evening, and black darkness to give a historical narrative of the “gradual and progressive growth of Popery.” Gill indicates a sense of discouragement in his analysis. The gospel brightness of the apostolic age quickly gave way to twilight. The twilight of the gospel yielded to darkness, a sunset that “issued in the gross darkness of Popery.” To some degree this was removed by “the morning-star of the Reformation,” only to be succeeded by another twilight. It is neither dark nor light, so opined Gill, but “a dark black night is hastening on” and many are “marching on in a stately manner to the harlot’s house, or are verging to Popery, whether they design it or not” (9; 4:372).

Verse 10 describes the attire and deceitfulness of the prostitute. Gill moves rapidly to identify this woman with “the woman of a scarlet-coloured beast, the mother of harlots, who, though she pretends to be the spouse of Christ, is an arrant whore.” Her alluring and form-fitting clothes, denoting her clearly as “the whore of Rome,” represent the “outward pomp and splendour of the Romish religion designed to captivate weak and unwary minds, Rev. xvii.4.” Her wiliness and subtlety of heart, so convincing to young men under her charm, spiritually refers to the “subtlety of the popes, priests, jesuits, and other emissaries of Rome, to deceive the hearts of the simple.” The deceit of unrighteousness is characteristic of the coming of antichrist, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, so Gill warns his readers (10; 4:372).

Her loudness (11) perhaps refers to her abusiveness to her husband to drive him away, so she will be free to pursue her wanton desires. Gill comments “all which agree with the whore of Rome, who is rebellious against Christ, whose spouse she professes to be, is perfidious to him, disobedient to his commandments; is gone out of the way of his truths and ordinances, and publishes and encourages everything that is contrary thereunto; as well as has a mouth speaking blasphemies, Rev. xiii. 5, 6.” (11: 4:372) The aggressive peregrination of the whore is consistent with “the diligence and industry, art and cunning, of the Romish emissaries to gain proselytes to their idolatrous worship, who everywhere lie in wait to deceive.” (12; 4:372)

The whore’s pretensions to religion, having made vows and offered
sacrifices (14) was too rich in its significance for Gill to ignore. She was a “holy religious harlot ... and such is the church of Rome, which makes great pretensions to devotion and religion, yet is the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth, Rev. xvi.7.” Such false and hypocritical worship is in the bosom of the church of Rome in the form of “vows of virginity and celibacy, through a shew of which the most shocking iniquities are committed by the members of the church of Rome” (14; 4:373).

The highly stylized ruse described in verse 15 was “no doubt a lie:” and even so, “it is no unusual thing for the whore of Rome to speak lies in hypocrisy.” She seemed so joyful, as if it were a kind providence, to meet the young man. In that way also “conversions to the antichristian church, which are the artifice of hell, are ascribed to the divine being.” As the harlot has decorated her bed and filled it with fragrance in order to give further enticement to the fool, “so the church of Rome adorns the places of worship in the most pompous manner; which are the beds in which she commits adultery, Rev. ii. 22, and also her images to strike the minds of people, and draw them into her idolatrous worship.” Also carved images set up in Romish churches along with all the wares of Babylon described in Rev. xviii. 13 signify that the church of Rome is the quintessential deceiver laying traps of death for the gullible, easily deceived, pleasure seekers of this world (15-17; 4:373).

The journey of “the man” away from home has offered the opportunity for the confident frolic of the adulteress and her willingness to set up another in his place. Gill looks at the “good man of the house” as Christ, and his journey is his ascension into heaven where he is taking a kingdom for himself, and then will return. In the meantime, “the church of Rome, who professes herself the true church and spouse of Christ, is committing fornication with the kings of the earth.” She has set up a substitute in his stead, “whom she calls Christ’s vicar on earth.” She “flatters herself and her lovers with impunity” since the vicar has “a right to do as he pleases.” (19; 4:374) Christ has an appointed time to return. Assuming it is at a great distance “wicked men and seducers, and such as the apostate church of Rome” make use of the interim to “encourage themselves in their wickedness, in hopes of impunity.” (20; 4:374)

This deceit will cost both the woman and her victim their lives. Like a bird in a snare, the seduced fool is caught, and this is the aim of Rome, the antichrist. “The souls of men and the ruin of them, are what the whore of Rome deals in Rev. xviii. 13, she goes into perdition, into the bottomless
pit, herself, and carries all her worshippers with her, Rev. xvii, 8 and xiv. 9-11.” (23; 4:375.)

The antidote to this deceit and allurement, the way in which these corruptions may be detected and rejected, is to listen to the words of Wisdom itself, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children.” He calls for attention now and will present his narrative of true, essential, and personified wisdom through his speech in chapter 8. His words are the “best preservative from the allurements of the whore of Rome” (24; 4:375). Whoever listens to her goes astray from “God and his law; from Christ and his gospel; and from the true church of God; and from the right path of faith, duty and worship.” (25; 4:375)

**Condensed to Its Essence**

In lieu of wisdom, Rome has provided corruption, encouragement in idolatry, a false church, false healing from sin, a false Christ, a false gospel and a sure path to perdition. In summarizing the epitome of deceit manifested as egregious folly throughout the world Gill wrote:

“All the world have wondered after the whore of Rome; kings of the earth and mighty men have committed fornication with her; high and low, rich and poor, have been ruined by her; thousands have gone to hell by her means; and some of her sycophants of Rome have even said, that if the pope of Rome should send thousands to hell, of which they seem themselves to be conscious, no one should say to him, What doest thou? (26, 4:376).

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1. This is the alternative spelling used by Gill. I have conformed to his preference.
3. Ibid., 2:566. From “Rise and Progress of Popery.”
4. Ibid., 2:584.
5. Ibid., 2:512, 513. This is from his sermon, “Infant Baptism, A Part and Pillar of Popery.”
6. Ibid., 2:575.
7. Ibid., 2:580.
8. Ibid., 2:582.
Mathews & Leigh Strane, 1810, reprinted in 9 volumes by Paris AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989) Revelation 17:17. 9:828. When citing this set of commentaries, the reference will remain in text, identified within parentheses by verse and then volume and page. E.g. (Rev 17:17; 9:828).

10. Matthew Henry’s commentary written around fifty years prior to Gill, and whom Gill often consulted, was void of any reference to “the whore of Rome” in the passages of Proverbs under consideration. Though the sixteenth century Reformers and those following often identified the Pope as the antichrist, Gill’s pervasive application of that idea to a wide variety of biblical texts seems to be his own hermeneutical method. Because of this phenomenon, citations from Gill on Proverbs will include his intra-textual reference to NT passages in support of his application to Rome.
John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism: Assessing Contemporary Arguments in Defense of Gill in Light of Gill’s Doctrine of Eternal Justification

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For Baptists, John Gill has great historical significance.¹ He pastored a church meeting at Goat Yard, Horsleydown, in Southwark, and this meeting later became the Metropolitan Tabernacle famously led by Charles Spurgeon. Gill was the first Baptist to write a commentary on every book of the Bible and the first Baptist to compose a comprehensive systematic theology. Both his pastoral work and extensive writing ministry allowed him to exercise considerable
influence among Particular Baptists during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{2}

Though recognizing Gill’s importance, historians disagree over the nature of his theology. Some consider him a hyper-Calvinist who did not offer the Gospel freely and who denied duty faith, that is, the belief that all sinners have a duty to respond positively to the Gospel. Others defend him from this charge and present him as a model evangelical pastor.\textsuperscript{3} Debate over Gill’s theology has even appeared in the pages of \textit{Baptist Quarterly} and, given Gill’s significance, remains an important issue in the study of Baptist history.\textsuperscript{4}

Much of this disagreement originates from the fact that historians have rarely examined Gill on his own terms. Arguments that portray him as a hyper-Calvinist rely often on guilt by association, incorrect claims about his theological convictions, or preconceived understandings of what constitutes genuine Calvinism.\textsuperscript{5} As I will demonstrate, arguments offered in defense of Gill fare little better. They often fail to interpret Gill’s soteriology accurately.

Students of Baptist history should seek to discern Gill’s true theological identity by carefully examining his theological convictions. I aim to contribute to this cause by surveying his primary theological focus—a desire to minimize human agency in the reception of salvation—and its chief accompanying doctrine, eternal justification.\textsuperscript{6} I will then probe how Gill’s soteriology affected his understanding of Gospel offers and duty faith. I will conclude by interacting with Gill’s primary defenders, demonstrating how a failure to read his soteriology correctly has often led to inaccurate portrayals of his true convictions. This approach will reveal that Gill indeed denied Gospel offers and duty faith. Put another way, it connects Gill with a theology that many label hyper-Calvinism.

\section*{Relevant Aspects of John Gill’s Soteriology}

\subsection*{Eternal Justification}

The time in which Gill ministered, often labeled the “Age of Reason,” witnessed considerable theological upheavals, and Gill was, overall, troubled by these changes. He believed that the era’s strong commitment to rationalism created theologies that deemphasized the necessity of divine grace. The popularity of such theologies—most notably various forms of deism and the theology of Daniel Whitby—pushed him into a defensive position.\textsuperscript{7}

Gill responded by creating a theology that sought to magnify divine
grace. He feared any position that resembled synergism, and he constructed a theological system that took “the entire economy of salvation up into eternity” and “rendered it impervious to the will of the creature.” Such a move provided Gill a way to speak of salvation in a manner that allowed for minimal human participation.

In Gill’s system, election creates an eternal union between the elect and God. Gill believed that just as election “flows from the love of God” eternally, so “there must of course be an union to Him so early.” Eternal union is therefore an “eternal immanent act in God” in which there is “the going forth of his heart in love to them [i.e., the elect], thereby uniting them to himself.”

Such a union is possible because election creates for the elect an eternal “being in Christ, a kind of subsistence in him.” This is not an actual being, an esse actu, but a representative being, an ess representativum. Through this representation, the elect “are capable of having grants of grace made to them in Christ.” Gill cited texts such as 2 Timothy 1:9 and Ephesians 1:3 to support his position. He noted that such verses claim the elect are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and that before the world began” and contended that the reception of such spiritual blessings requires an eternal union between the elect and Christ.

The pactum salutis explains how the elect are able to receive these spiritual blessings in this eternal union. In an agreement between the members of the Trinity, the Son promised to serve as surety for the elect; that is, he pledged to atone for their sins at the time of the Father’s choosing. The Son’s promise to do so was so secure that the Father applied the benefits of the atonement to the elect within the eternal union, before Christ’s actual death on the cross.

Gill highlighted two particular spiritual blessings the elect receive in this union—eternal adoption and eternal justification. Of these, eternal justification received the majority of his attention. He claimed that it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them [i.e., the elect], is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity.

Therefore, for Gill, justification begins not at the moment a person exercises faith or even at the moment of Christ’s death on the cross. It is an immanent...
and eternal act of God.

Though the elect are justified from eternity, before their faith in Christ and their conversion they are unaware of their justification. For this reason, Gill made a distinction between active justification and passive justification. Active justification, or justification *in foro Dei*, is “strictly and properly justification.” It is eternal justification, justification as an immanent and eternal act of God. Passive justification, or justification *in foro conscientiae*, is “declarative to and upon the conscience of the believer.”\(^\text{13}\) It occurs in time. Active justification is therefore what one should consider true justification; it is God’s declaration that the elect are righteous in his sight. Passive justification, on the other hand, is merely one’s personal recognition that one has been eternally justified.

In this scheme, active justification is the form of justification that precedes conversion and regeneration in the *ordo salutis*. It also precedes faith. God justifies the elect from eternity, and this fact is true regardless of whether the elect have yet to place their faith in Christ’s atoning work. Gill wrote, “Faith adds nothing to the *esse*, only to the *bene esse* of justification; it is no part of, nor any ingredient in it; it is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, without the being or consideration of faith.”\(^\text{14}\) Admitting that some biblical texts appear to place faith prior to justification in the *ordo salutis*, he explained, “What scriptures may be thought to speak of faith, as a prerequisite to justification, cannot be understood as speaking of it as a prerequisite to the being of justification; for faith has no causal influence upon it, it adds nothing to its being, it is no ingredient in it, it is not the cause nor matter of it.”\(^\text{15}\)

Only in relation to passive justification, the *bene esse* of one’s justification, does faith have relevance. Texts that connect faith and justification “can only be understood as speaking of faith as a prerequisite to the knowledge and comfort of it.”\(^\text{16}\) Faith in Christ is therefore only necessary to obtain the assurance that one is justified; it is not necessary for one’s actual justification.

While presenting justification in such a manner is unconventional, Gill personally saw great value in his position. Primarily, he believed that it preserved sovereign grace by completely divorcing justification from human effort. The elect do not exercise faith to receive justification; God simply declares them justified through their eternal union with Christ. Gill remarked, “Justification is an act of God’s grace towards us, *is wholly without us*, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimation, accounting and constituting us righteous.”\(^\text{17}\)
Gill even delighted in the fact that his position upended a more traditional understanding of justification by faith. He used harsh language to describe the traditional position, fearing that it would lead to the synergistic forms of salvation that he so often combatted. In a defense of eternal justification and eternal union presented to Abraham Taylor, he registered his disagreement with theologians who espoused the traditional perspective and questioned why they would hold to such a position. He wrote,

> It is generally said that they [the elect] are not united to Christ until they believe, and that the bond of union is the Spirit on Christ’s part, and faith on ours. I am ready to think that these phrases are taken up by divines, one from another, without a thorough consideration of them…Why must this union be pieced up with faith on our part? This smells so prodigious rank of self, that one may justly suspect that something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it.18

He followed this statement with a lengthy argument that sought to overturn the traditional understanding of justification by faith.19

**Gospel Offers and Duty Faith**

Gill was a systematic theologian who operated in the style of the seventeenth-century Protestant scholastic theologians he admired, and as such he desired a coherent theological system.20 His desire for doctrinal consistency led him to shape his understanding of evangelism in accordance with his convictions about eternal justification. Here in his thought, one finds strong denials of Gospel offers and duty faith.

Concerning the offer of the Gospel, Gill wrote,

> The gospel is not tendered to the elect, but is *the power of God unto salvation* to them. The grace of God is bestowed upon them, applied to them, and wrought in them, but not offered. And as for the non-elect, grace is neither offered to them, nor bestowed on them, and therefore there can be no falsehood or hypocrisy, dissimulation or guile, nothing ludicrous or delusory in the divine conduct towards them, or anything which disproves God’s act of preterition or reprobation.21

Gill provided two reasons for his rejection of Gospel offers in this statement. In regard to the elect, he feared that an offer of the Gospel might suggest that
the elect must do something to obtain salvation. An offer might imply that a response is required. Rather than receiving an offer of the Gospel, the elect should instead realize that salvation is “bestowed upon them” in eternity.

In relation to the non-elect, Gill claimed that an offer of the Gospel does not comport with the doctrine of reprobation. Put simply, how might one offer the Gospel openly to all people when not all people are the recipients of saving grace? Gill therefore believed that universal offers of grace are insincere, both on the part of ministers who make the offers and, ultimately, on the part of God.

Rejecting Gospel offers, Gill preferred instead to speak of two distinct Gospel callings. An external call, which he described as the ministry of the word, goes out to all who have access to special revelation. It presents the Gospel message. On its own, however, it is incapable of granting salvation. For salvation to occur, one must receive an internal call, a drawing from the Holy Spirit. Such a calling goes to the elect only, often though not always in conjunction with the ministry of the word. It is effectual.

While this distinction between internal and external calling is not unique to Gill, it is interesting to note how his theology of eternal justification shaped his understanding of these two callings. The internal call goes only “to such who have a work of grace already begun in them.” With this statement, Gill referred to the fact that the elect, even before the internal calling of the Spirit, are the recipients of such spiritual blessings as eternal justification. The internal call therefore assists them in realizing their justified status by leading them to place their faith in Christ, thereby granting them passive justification. It also directs them to attend to the means of grace so that they might grow in sanctification.

Those who receive only the external call, by contrast, have no certain hope of salvation. They receive information about the Gospel as revealed in the ministry of the word but, lacking any internal call of the Gospel, do not know whether they have been eternally justified. They gain no assurance from the external call.

Most important, the internal call, given as it is to those who are already justified, carries with it an obligation to “not only to the means of grace, but to partake of the blessings of grace.” By contrast, the external call lacks such an obligation. Given to sinners in a “state of nature and unregeneracy,” it is not
a call to them to regenerate and convert themselves, of which there is no instance; and which is the pure work of the Spirit of God: nor to make their peace with God, which they cannot make by any thing they can do; and which is only made by the blood of Christ: nor to get an interest in Christ, which is not got, but given: nor to the exercise of evangelical grace, which they have not, and therefore can never exercise: nor to any spiritual vital acts, which they are incapable of, being natural men and dead in trespasses and sins.25

This distinction between callings is vital; it demonstrates Gill’s denial of duty faith.

The external call only obliges its recipients to perform the “natural duties of religion; to a natural faith.” These duties include such activities as giving mental assent to the truths of the Gospel; the avoidance of sin, which Gill stated “even the light of nature dictates;” and prayers of gratitude. It also obliges its recipients to “the outward means of grace, and to make use of them.” Describing these outward means of grace, Gill explained that they involved a duty “to read the holy scriptures, which have been the means of the conversion of some; to hear the word, and wait on the ministry of it, which may be blessed unto them, for the effectual calling of them.” He further explained that, by attending to the means of grace, recipients of the external call receive an understanding of the Gospel and then the “the whole” will be left “to the Spirit of God, to make application of it as he shall think fit.”26

In short, the external call directs its recipients to moral reform and religious activities so that they might potentially later receive an internal call. It does not explicitly issue a command to exercise faith in Christ; it only calls recipients to receive the ministry of the word so that they “might wait on the ministry of it.” As they wait, God may make application of the external call—that is, God may provide an internal call of the Gospel—as “he shall think fit.”

One might wonder what value the external call has if it does not oblige its recipients to come to faith in Christ. Gill answered this question by pointing some of the positive benefits it might convey. He stated that by it, many

become more civilised, and more moral in their conversation, are reformed, as to their outward manners; and through a speculative knowledge of the gospel, escape the grosser pollutions of the world; and others are brought by it to a
temporary faith, to believe for a while, to embrace the gospel notionally, to submit to the ordinances of it, make a profession of religion, by which means they become serviceable to support the interest of it.27

Therefore, though it “comports with the wisdom of God that there should be such an outward call of many who are not internally called,” the external call can at least create a notional faith, and this faith can benefit individuals and even the broader society.28

**Sensible Sinners and Repentance**

While Gill’s position on these matters seems sufficiently clear, two additional aspects of his thought merit brief attention because they further elucidate his convictions. When discussing the doctrine of repentance, he made a sharp division between legal repentance and evangelical repentance. Legal repentance involves only outward moral reform. According to Gill, the citizens of Nineveh during the ministry of Jonah illustrated this type of repentance. Although they temporarily modified their behavior, they experienced no lasting spiritual change, and they eventually suffered divine judgment. By contrast, evangelical repentance operates by divine grace. It is given only to the elect, and it assists them as they turn from sin as they receive passive justification.29

Gill made use of this distinction because it allowed him to account for Scripture passages that appear to call all people to repent and turn to God with saving faith. Given his denial of Gospel offers and duty faith, he could not recognize such universal calls to repentance, so he frequently claimed in his polemical writings and even in his biblical commentaries that broad calls to repentance were merely calls for individual or corporate moral reform, not calls pertaining to personal salvation.30

In order to preserve consistency with his convictions, then, he claimed that those who receive an external call have an obligation only to legal repentance, not to evangelical repentance.31 They have no obligation to repent and trust Christ in a saving way; they must only modify their behavior and await an internal call. Only when they receive the internal call that assures them that they are one of the elect are they responsible for evangelical repentance.

Gill also made a distinction between sensible sinners and non-elect sinners. He defined sensible sinners as elect people who have experienced
regeneration but who have yet to receive full assurance. They are aware of their own sinfulness due to divine grace, and they are actively seeking a sense of passive justification in order to receive assurance. Sinners who are not among the elect, by contrast, are not the recipients of any spiritual blessings from God. They are therefore not fully aware of their need for justification because God has not revealed to them their sinful condition.

Gill stated that while he knew of “no exhortations to dead sinners [that is, the non-elect], to return and live” in Scripture, he acknowledged that pastors should “encourage and exhort sensible sinners to believe in Christ.” This statement merits attention because with it Gill maintained his conviction that offering the Gospel is inappropriate. He recommended here only that pastors exhort sensible sinners to trust in Christ. He did not instruct them to offer salvation to sensible sinners.

Even more important, though, is the fact that with this statement Gill also revealed that he was not comfortable exhorting listeners to respond positively to the Gospel if he deemed them not elect. Careful readers will note that he claimed that he knew of no exhortations to trust the Gospel going out to uninterested or dead sinners and stated that one should provide Gospel exhortations only to sensible sinners.

Such a position often made Gill unwilling to recognize universal exhortations to trust the Gospel, even when he found such exhortations in Scripture. Throughout his body of works and even in his sermons, he frequently interpreted universals calls to salvation as calls given only to sensible sinners and not calls given to all people. This fact demonstrates just how chastened a view of evangelism he possessed.

**Summary**

Gill desired to remove human participation from the act of salvation. He therefore constructed a theological system in which justification occurs as an immanent and eternal act of God. This system led him to reject the more traditional understanding of justification by faith. For Gill, faith only allows one to become aware of one’s justified status; it is not a condition for the reception of actual justification. In his practical theology, he denied universal offers of the Gospel and even denied the legitimacy of duty faith. He formulated his convictions about sensible sinners, external and internal calls of the Gospel, and evangelical and legal repentance in light of this
rejection of both Gospel offers and duty faith.

In Gill’s understanding of evangelism, therefore, one makes a proclamation of the Gospel, an external call. Those who are already justified receive an internal call as they hear the Gospel proclaimed, and this internal call reveals to them that they need passive justification. Such people are sensible sinners. An evangelist can exhort these sensible sinners to trust in Christ to receive passive justification but cannot offer them salvation. In contrast, the non-elect receive only the external call to the Gospel and are obligated to perform only legal repentance—outward moral reform—and attend to the means of grace in the hopes that they might later receive an inward call to salvation. In Gill’s system, one neither offers them the Gospel nor exhorts them to trust in the Gospel and must profess that they have no duty to believe the Gospel.

Assessing Recent Defenses of Gill

Several noteworthy scholars attempt to defend Gill from the charge of hyper-Calvinism. The most significant are Thomas Nettles, Timothy George, and George Ella.34 While their works display many commendable qualities, their contributions do suffer from a failure to appreciate just how Gill’s soteriology shaped his understanding of Gospel preaching.

Thomas Nettles

Nettles’ research on Gill centers around two key publications. In By His Grace and For His Glory, a work that features his first significant published work on Gill, Nettles rightly acknowledges that Gill did not believe in the free offer of the Gospel.35 However, he does claim that Gill “affirmed that it was the duty of all men to repent of sin and the duty of all who heard the Gospel to believe it.”36 He contends that this fact frees Gill from the charge of hyper-Calvinism.

In claiming that Gill did not deny duty faith, Nettles does not sufficiently explore Gill’s soteriology. Though he surveys some aspects of Gill’s thought—Gill’s ordering of the divine decrees, his understanding of sanctification, and his pastoral ministry practices—he fails to probe Gill’s desire to frame salvation as an eternal act of God that requires minimal human participation. Most notably, he does not address the doctrine of eternal
justification in a significant manner even though it was a key component of Gill’s theological project.

This neglect causes Nettles to misrepresent Gill on the matter of duty faith. For example, Nettles cites a passage from Gill’s *Cause of God and Truth* that he admits *prima facie* appears to deny duty faith. Gill wrote, “God does not require all men to believe in Christ; where he does it is according to the revelation he makes of them.” Nettles tries to soften the implications of this statement by arguing that Gill intended only “to highlight man’s responsibility for that which is available to him.” Per Nettles, Gill wrote merely about those who have no access to the Gospel. He argued that such people are responsible only for what they receive through general revelation.

Though Gill indeed addressed this particular topic in this passage, Nettles leaves unaddressed the next sentence in Gill’s work. There Gill wrote, “Those who only have the outward ministry of the word, unattended with the special illuminations of the Spirit of God, are obliged to believe no further than the external revelation they enjoy, reaches.” Put simply, Gill indeed stated that people only have a responsibility for the revelation that they receive; those who receive no access to the Gospel are accountable only for the general revelation that they have, but those who receive only the external call are obligated only to perform legal repentance and not trust in Christ for salvation. Gill makes this point even more explicit in the subsequent sentences in which he contrasts the mere legal obligations attending the external call with the salvific obligations attending the internal call. Nettles’ argument, then, takes Gill out of context. It does so because Nettles has not sufficiently explored Gill’s work on the external and internal callings as well as the soteriological convictions that undergird them.

In a subsequent publication, Nettles attempts to associate Gill with those who participated in the Evangelical Revival. A lack of adequate attention to Gill’s soteriology also appears here, however, when Nettles implies several times that Gill held to the traditional understanding of justification by faith rather than the more eccentric position of eternal justification. This fact is troubling given Gill’s repeated protestations against justification by faith.

Most interesting is the fact that in this publication Nettles nuances his earlier defense of Gill. He admits, “There is a central point, however, in which he [Gill] appears to hold the [h]yper-Calvinist view [regarding duty faith].” He offers as evidence a quote from Gill’s sermon entitled *Faith in God and*
His Word in which Gill claimed, “Man never had in his power to have or to exercise [faith in Christ], no, not even in the state of innocence.” Nettles then admits, “Theoretically, Gill held that the non-elect were not obligated to evangelical obedience, because the necessity of such obedience did not exist in unfallen humanity as deposited in Adam.”

Surprisingly, despite this admission, Nettles remains cautious about labeling Gill a hyper-Calvinist, and he does not retract his earlier claim that Gill affirmed duty faith. He even continues to praise Gill, arguing that Gill’s works exhibit “the central concerns and zeal of the Great Awakening.”

Nettles does so because he claims that Gill was only theoretically a hyper-Calvinist. He argues that in Gill’s scheme “while many [people] exhibit … only a legal repentance and a historical faith, and the non-elect may not be theoretically obligated to the ‘faith of God’s elect,’ ministers of the Gospel preach repentance and faith in a Gospel way.” Nettles reduces his argument to the contention that, even though Gill denied all people have an obligation to respond to the Gospel, at the practical level he still preached the Gospel, and this fact means that his hyper-Calvinism was merely hypothetical.

I have the utmost respect for Nettles and his contribution to Baptist scholarship, but I find this argument is unpersuasive. As noted, Gill’s commentaries and sermons reveal that his soteriological convictions often caused him to interpret Scripture in such a way that he minimized universal calls to respond to the Gospel. Such an act displays that he held his principles at more than just a theoretical level; they regularly affected his preaching and exposition of Scripture.

The differences between Gill’s ministry and that of the evangelists of the Evangelical Revival, those to whom Nettles wishes to compare Gill, are therefore stark. Gill constructed a ministry philosophy that emphasized encouraging only sensible sinners to respond to the Gospel and often eschewed giving Gospel exhortations to all people. The evangelists of the Evangelical Revival did not.

With Nettles, then, readers find a contradictory portrayal of Gill. While throughout his works Nettles maintains that Gill denied Gospel offers, in one work he claims that Gill did not deny that all people have an obligation to respond to the Gospel. In another, without retracting this claim, he admits that Gill likely held to the hyper-Calvinist tenet of denying duty faith. He deems this point irrelevant, though, and incorrectly believes that it did not shape
Gill's ministry. Nettles could have avoided these errors by more completely examining how deeply Gill's soteriology formed his thought and practice.

Timothy George
Out of all of Gill's defenders, the respected Baptist theologian Timothy George offers the most interesting arguments, yet he is also the most restrained in his praise of Gill. While he does not label Gill a hyper-Calvinist, he holds this conclusion rather tentatively, and in several places admits that Gill's theology possessed unhelpful tendencies.44

He especially criticizes the dangers posed by Gill's doctrine of eternal justification. He writes that with eternal justification Gill stressed the “priority of justification over faith,” that “the doctrine was a stumbling block to many who could not square it with the necessity of conversion as a personal experience of grace,” and that it was a “perilous teaching, insofar as it encouraged sinners to think of themselves as actually justified regardless of their personal response to Christ and the Gospel.” The Second London Confession, a document that drew heavily from the Westminster Confession of Faith, explicitly rejected eternal justification, and George remarks, “Happily, on this controversial issue most Particular Baptists followed the fathers of the Second London Confession rather than John Gill.”45

George's willingness to address Gill's statements on eternal justification is commendable. Unfortunately, he fails to explore how Gill's stance on eternal justification shaped his understanding of duty faith and evangelism. George does not address the concept of duty faith in Gill's thought, a disappointing omission in an otherwise excellent essay. He also neglects Gill's statements on such matters as evangelical repentance and sensible sinners, convictions that originated primarily from Gill's doctrine of eternal justification.

One receives the impression in George's work that Gill proclaimed the Gospel clearly with no constraint; however, by not connecting Gill's doctrine of eternal justification to its implications for evangelism, such a portrayal is not entirely accurate. In one place, George quotes from an ordination sermon that he claims demonstrates Gill's healthy evangelistic ministry. During the sermon, Gill charged the ministry candidate,

Souls sensible to sin and danger, and who are crying out, What shall we do to be saved? you are to observe, and point out Christ the tree of life to them; and
say…Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, Acts 16:31. Your work is to lead men, under a sense of sin and guilt, to the blood of Christ, shed for many for the remission of sin, and in this name you are to preach the forgiveness to them.46

Such a quote does not demonstrate what George desires. One should note to whom Gill instructs the young ministry candidate to direct his evangelistic appeals—to “souls sensible to sin and danger.” One therefore finds Gill’s doctrine of sensible sinners on full display.

George goes on to point to additional passages in which Gill warned young ministers that if they did not preach Christ, the blood of their listeners would be on their hands. He further cites a citation from Gill’s The Cause of God and Truth in which Gill stated that ministers are to “preach the gospel of salvation to all men, and declare, that whosoever believes shall be saved: for this they are commissioned to do.”47

While one can express gratitude for Gill’s willingness to call ministers to preach the Gospel, when assessing such quotations one must remember Robert Oliver’s helpful remarks on Gill’s preaching. Oliver explains that a

cause of confusion arises from the popular view that hyper-Calvinists are never concerned for the salvation of sinners…Gill was one [who possessed such a concern] and examples can be produced of him expressing a concern for such and pressing those who were awakened to turn and seek salvation. His hyper-Calvinism appears in the absence of direct exhortations and appeals to the unconverted to turn from their sin in repentance and cast themselves upon Christ.48

Oliver rightly explains that the preaching of the Gospel is not the issue in the debate over Gill’s hyper-Calvinism; hyper-Calvinists such as Joseph Hussey and John Brine both preached the Gospel. Instead, the issue is how one understands Gospel offers and duty faith as well as the accompanying doctrines of sensible sinners and evangelical repentance. Considering this fact, merely pointing Gill’s charge to preach the Gospel is not sufficient.

In fact, one must receive Gill’s call to “preach the gospel of salvation to all men, and declare, that whosoever believes shall be saved” within its proper context. That statement appears in a work that contains some of the strongest statements against the legitimacy of Gospel offers and duty faith
in Gill’s corpus. In the very sentence from which George draws this quote, Gill denied Gospel offers by writing that the Gospel minister “ought not to offer and tender salvation to any.” Even more troubling, in the sentences immediately preceding it, Gill denied duty faith when he wrote, “None are bound to believe in Christ, but such to whom a revelation of him is made and according to the revelation is the faith they are obliged to.” He explained that people who “have only an external revelation of him by the ministry of the word”—that is, people who hear the Gospel preached through the external call but do not receive an internal call of the Spirit—are required to believe “no more than is included in that revelation, as that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who died and rose again, and is the Saviour of sinners &c., but not that he died for them, or that he is their Saviour.” The external call can only obligate its recipients to give mental assent to the truth of the Gospel; apart from the internal call the preaching of the Gospel cannot appeal for any person to exercise faith.

One can likely account for George’s misreading of Gill by noting that, for his statements on Gill’s convictions on evangelism, he relies heavily on the work of Thomas Nettles. As demonstrated, Nettles does not address Gill’s doctrine of eternal justification in a significant manner, and this fact leads him to misinterpret Gill’s convictions about evangelism. Though George explores Gill’s doctrine of eternal justification and rightly sees its dangers, when he assesses Gill’s evangelistic practices he relies on a source that does not do so, and the incorporation of the Nettles material gives George’s presentation of Gill an unbalanced feel. George is right on Gill’s understanding of eternal justification, but he is wrong in assuming that eternal justification had no relevance for Gill’s understanding of Gospel proclamation.

George’s strong reliance on Nettles becomes especially evident in the several instances in which he uses Nettles to assert that Gill held to different convictions than Joseph Hussey, a man whom George considers a genuine hyper-Calvinist. Nettles’ chief argument for distancing Gill from Hussey is his contention that Gill did not consistently argue that prelapsarian Adam possessed an inability to believe the Gospel. Nettles identifies this understanding of Adamic inability as one of hyper-Calvinism’s key features. He appears to assume that if Gill did not hold to an important hyper-Calvinist tenet associated with Hussey that Gill might remain free from the charge of hyper-Calvinism.
This comparison with Hussey has little relevance, however, because Hussey never explicitly argued for Adam’s incapacity to believe the Gospel. That teaching arrived later in the hyper-Calvinist controversy, primarily around the time of the Modern Question debate. Hussey’s hyper-Calvinism originated instead from a commitment to eternal justification—interestingly, the same theological position that powered Gill’s hyper-Calvinism.

George Ella

George Ella is perhaps the most passionate of Gill’s defenders. Interestingly, though Ella expresses great displeasure with those who label Gill a hyper-Calvinist, in his most recent work he does not deny the fact that Gill rejected Gospel offers and duty faith. Ella therefore helps to confirm—and does not disprove—that Gill held to such convictions. In addition, Ella holds convictions similar to Gill’s, and he presents Gill as a model for contemporary pastors to emulate, hoping that they too will reject Gospel offers and duty faith. The question raised by Ella’s work, then, becomes that of normativity—is the no-offer, no-duty faith position normative, or does it represent a departure from traditional Reformed soteriology and deserve a descriptor such as hyper-Calvinism? The latter is correct, and throughout his works Ella does not convincingly demonstrate the contrary.

Conclusion

John Gill offered a soteriology that magnified the role of divine grace and minimized the significance of human action. His doctrine of eternal justification illustrates this fact well. Gill’s soteriology led him to deny the legitimacy of Gospel offers and duty faith, and recent attempts to argue otherwise remain unpersuasive. Gill’s final position, then, accords well with the theology that many of his critics label hyper-Calvinism.

1. This article is an expanded version of David Mark Rathel, “Was John Gill a Hyper-Calvinist?: Determining Gill’s Theological Identity,” Baptist Quarterly 48, no. 1 (2017): 47–59. I express here my gratitude to the editors of Baptist Quarterly and to Taylor and Francis Publishing for their willingness to have it republished and to Stephen J. Wellum and Michael A. G. Haykin for accepting it in The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology. I also express appreciation to Dr. Stephen R. Holmes, my supervising professor, for his feedback during the construction of this paper.


10. Gill, Complete Body, 1:286. One wishes that Gill had further clarified his statements about the elect possessing an eternal subsistence in Christ. Unfortunately, he did not do so. One can find other remarks on this subject in Gill, Collection of Sermons and Tracts, 2:88; 3:168.

11. See Gill, Complete Body, 1:293. For work on Gill's doctrine of the pactum salutis, see David Mark Rathel, "Innovating the Covenant of Redemption: John Gill and the History of Redemption as Mere Shadow" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, Texas, 15 November 2016).


13. This statement appears in The Doctrine of Justification. See Gill, Collection of Sermons and Tracts, 3:150.
15. Ibid., 298.
16. Ibid.
18. This statement appears in Gill’s tract entitled The Doctrines of God’s Everlasting Love to His Elect. See Gill, Collection of Sermons and Tracts, 3:198. For background on the exchange between Taylor and Gill, see Alan P. F. Sell, Hinterland Theology: A Stimulus to Theological Construction (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 57–61.
22. Gill mused that it would be possible for the elect to receive an effectual internal call to salvation without also receiving an external call. For his statements on this issue as well as his most thorough treatment of the internal and external calls, see Gill, Complete Body, 2:121–127.
24. This is the logical outflow of Gill’s position, and he developed it in Gill, Complete Body, 2:121–131. See also the section in The Cause of God and Truth in which Gill addressed conditional statements in preaching, that is, statements such as, “If you will repent, you will receive forgiveness.” Concerning these statements and their relationship to the external call, Gill wrote, “I utterly deny that there is any promise of pardon made to the non-elect at all, not on any condition whatever.” This fact means that no hope of assurance can emerge from the external call in and of itself. See Gill, Cause of God and Truth, 39.
26. Ibid., 122–123.
27. Ibid., 124.
28. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 317. Gill’s usage of the term sensible sinners carried with it different connotations than that of Puritan theologians such as John Bunyan. C.f., John Bunyan, A Discourse Upon the Pharisee and Publican. (London: Blackie and Son, 1873), 187, 237.
33. See, for example, Gill, Cause of God and Truth, 38, 294, 317; Gill, Complete Body, 1:127, 531. It is revealing that Gill used the phrase sensible sinners 49 times in his New Testament commentaries and 80 times in his Old Testament commentaries. In many, though perhaps not all of these occurrences, he used the phrase to qualify what appear to be universal calls to respond to the Gospel. For example, when commenting on the apostolic preaching in Acts, he often stated that apostolic calls to receive salvation were given only to sensible sinners and not to all people. E.g., John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 2:168.
34. I select these historians and theologians because they have published significant pieces on Gill. Three noteworthy research projects that have not yet received publication do merit brief comment, however. Clive Jarvis provides a defense of Gill in his doctoral thesis on Particular Baptist life in Northamptonshire, and his analysis of Gill’s contribution relies heavily on the work of George Ella. By critiquing Ella’s convictions in this article, I can also interact with many of the claims made by Jarvis. See Clive Jarvis, “Growth in English Baptist Churches: With Special Reference to the Northamptonshire Particular Baptist
John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism

36. Ibid. 42.
37. Ibid. This quotation originally appears in Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 307.
39. Surprisingly, Nettles quotes this sentence but does not address it. See Ibid., 42-44.
43. Ibid., 154.
44. George writes that the historic presentation of Gill as a hyper-Calvinist is “a hasty judgment that may need to be reconsidered.” Italics added. He further explains that, though he does not count Gill as a hyper-Calvinist in the vein of Hussey or Brine, “We cannot quite exonerate Gill of all responsibility in the fostering of an atmosphere in which the forthright promulgation of the missionary mandate of the church was seen to be a threat to, rather than an extension of, the gospel of grace.” George, “John Gill,” 28–29.
45. Ibid., 26–27.


48. Robert Oliver, “John Gill," in The British Particular Baptists, 1638–1910, ed. Michael A.G. Haykin (Springfield: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 161–162. I have added italics to this quote to highlight the people for whom Gill expressed concern—those who “were awakened,” that is, those who were sensible sinners. See my remarks on Gill’s doctrine of sensible sinners in this article for more information.


50. While George cites Nettles several times, he cites him twice in reference to Gill’s relationship with hyper-Calvinism. Both citations carry great weight in his argument. See George, John Gill," 28n, 29n.

51. Ibid., 29n.

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John Gill and the Continuing Baptist Affirmation of the Eternal Covenant

Daniel D. Scheiderer

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This article uses John Gill as a primary example of the theological rigor with which the doctrine of the everlasting covenant was expounded and defended by Baptists. The article presents the doctrine of the everlasting covenant in Gill’s three major works: A Body of Divinity, The Cause of God and Truth, and his commentaries. Presenting the doctrine this way allows the reader to see how Gill stated the doctrine on its own, and then how he used it in theological discourse and biblical exposition. After looking at Gill’s exposition and integration of the doctrine of the everlasting covenant, the article then offers a demonstration of subsequent Baptists affirming this doctrine. Though it may be uncommon to see much incorporation of the everlasting covenant in Baptist works today, Gill, his predecessors, and his successors all gave due attention to this weighty doctrine.
John Gill’s Works

In the following pages, I survey the three major works Gill produced: *A Body of Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, and his commentaries.

*A Body of Divinity*

John Gill’s articulation of the covenant of grace occupies considerable space in his *A Body of Divinity*. Due to three key facts, it would far extend the constraints of this article to comprehensively define how Gill makes use of this doctrine. First, Gill follows Benjamin Keach in arguing for one covenant of grace made in eternity. Thus, while many theologians would distinguish as the covenant of redemption from the covenant of grace, Gill includes in his exposition of the covenant of grace. Second, Gill believes the covenant of grace was manifested in time, beginning in Genesis 3:15. From here, a student of Gill’s theology might interact with his work on the temporal aspect of the covenant of grace. Third, Gill integrates the covenant of grace with his treatment of a variety of doctrines throughout both parts of his *A Body of Divinity*. Thus, one might especially consider the way Gill rests his treatments of Christology, soteriology, eschatology, Christian spirituality, and the doctrine of baptism on his particular understanding of the covenant of grace. Rather than attempting such a feat, I will simply offer a survey of the sixty-five pages in which he treats the aspect of the covenant of grace that typically falls under the heading of the “covenant of redemption,” or *pactum salutis*. Gill has three main parts to his exposition: the eternal council, the names and properties of the covenant, and the parties of the covenant.

*The Everlasting Council*

As he begins treating the “council and covenant of God, respecting the salvation of men,” Gill intimates that he has at this point finished his treatment of the internal and immanent acts in the divine mind. He admits that the two—council and covenant—“are generally blended together by divines; ... but I think they are to be distinguished, and the one [council] to be considered as leading on, and as preparatory and introductory to the other [covenant], though both of an eternal date.” In speaking of a “council,” he clarifies that God is not missing some bit of knowledge, nor is he seeking to increase his knowledge in some way, nor is the Father lacking knowledge the Son and
Spirit subsequently provide him, nor, finally, ought someone to consider the council as a temporally sequential event. Rather, we speak of a council and of counsel in reference to God’s salvation of man to indicate the importance of the decision, the fact that it is an expression of God’s wisdom, and the fact that all three divine persons are in agreement. After addressing the terminology of “council/counsel,” Gill presents various texts to demonstrate Scripture’s consistent testimony that there was such a council/counsel. He argues from various biblical texts (e.g., Eph 3:10–11, Acts 20:27, 2 Cor 5:19, Gen 1:26, and Zech 6:13) to show that everything done in creation and redemption happens according to God’s foreordination, and, moreover, that the “consulting, contriving, and planning the scheme of it [redemption] ... contains the sum of what we mean by the council of peace.” Next, he emphasizes that “none but the blessed Three in One were of this council, and fit to be of it,” thus neither angels nor men were consulted. Finally, Gill explains what was addressed. He says the council concerns the manner in which the elect would be saved rather than who would be saved, since the latter was determined in the decree of election. The Father determined to save man in the Son, “who readily agreed to it ... and the Holy Spirit expressed his approbation of him, as the fittest person to be the Saviour, by joining with the Father in the mission of him,” by forming a human nature and filling him with “gifts and graces without measure.” Thus, all three persons—and they alone—were the parties of a council, which simply expresses the eternal determination of how the elect would be saved, and each of the parties agreed to that manner of salvation.

*The Names and Properties of the Covenant of Grace*

“The council” says Gill, “is the basis and foundation of the covenant of grace, and both relate to the same thing and in which the same persons are concerned. In the former, things were contrived, planned, and advised; in the latter, fixed and settled.” Gill’s treatment of the covenant of grace begins and ends by looking at the various aspects of the covenant, while the large middle portion considers the roles of each party in the covenant. Since the parties occupy such a large portion of his argument, I treat it separately in the next subsection.

First, Gill considers the term “covenant” in Scripture and theological discourse. He outlines various etymological proposals for *berith* and *diathēkē*.
His treatment of the etymology of *berith* provides a glimpse of his method in general, whether in his commentaries or theology. Some have suggested that the word comes from “*barar*, which signifies, to *purify*.” Admitting the point they make about Christ being the Purifier, Gill is not keen to accept that etymological proposal for *berith* in particular. Rather, he provides two others: *bara* and *barah*. He prefers the latter, but Gill is only concerned that all three roots signify “select” and “choose.” This “well agrees with a covenant, into which persons, of their own will and choice, enter; choose the persons to be concerned with them, the terms and conditions on which they covenant with each other, and the things and persons they covenant about; all which entirely agrees with this federal transaction, or covenant of grace we are about to treat of.”

Gill then makes six points he finds important about covenants appear in Scripture. He says a covenant may refer to (1) an ordinance or precept, (2–3) a mere promise, (4) a situation in which man and man are involved in stipulation and restipulation—(5) which could never be the case between man and God, and (6) the covenant of grace between God and Christ. Significantly, points four and five state that a covenant between man and man with stipulation and restipulation (4) cannot occur between God and man (5) since man already owes God anything God might require of him. He asks, “[W]hat can man restipulate with God, which is in his power to do or give to him, and which God has not a prior right unto?” On the terms applied to this particular covenant (of grace) in Scripture and theological discourse, Gill includes four terms: covenant of life (Scripture), of peace (Scripture), of grace (theology), and of redemption (theology), and he says the latter two are simply one and the same.

[Distinguishing them] is very wrongly said; there is but one covenant of grace, and not two, in which the Head and Members, the Redeemer and the persons to be redeemed, Christ and the elect, are concerned; in which he is the Head and Representative of them, acts for them, and on their behalf. What is called a covenant of redemption, is a covenant of grace, arising from the grace of the Father, who proposed to his Son to be the Redeemer, and from the grace of the Son, who agreed to be so; and even the honours proposed to the Son in this covenant, redounded to the advantage of the elect; the sum and substance of the everlasting covenant made with Christ, is the salvation and eternal happiness of
the chosen ones; all the blessings and grants of grace to them, are secured in that eternal compact; for they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and had grace given them in him before the world was; wherefore there can be no foundation for such a distinction between a covenant of redemption in eternity, and a covenant of grace in time.17

Gill argues against any supposed reasons for distinguishing between the covenants of redemption and grace since the singular eternal covenant provides everything needed for both.18 The covenant made with Christ before the foundation of the world provides all the blessings of grace that apply to the elect. He sees no reason, then, to distinguish the two.

Closing his treatment of the “everlasting covenant,” after treating the parties of the covenant, Gill provides seven properties of the covenant of grace.19 The covenant is eternal—which is distinguished from everlasting, meaning its commencement (if we can speak that way) is from eternity; it is freely entered into by each person; and it is unconditional on man’s part, complete, holy, and certain. Finally, it is everlasting, meaning it “will never be antiquated, nor give way to, nor be succeeded by another,” in contrast to the covenant of works and to the way the old covenant administration gave way to the new.20

Parties of the Covenant
Before looking at each person’s work in the covenant in individual chapters, Gill provides six points about the parties in general. First, they are distinct persons which, following Scripture and the tradition, certainly does not mean they are divisible.21 Second, the covenant specifically refers to the distinct personal acts of the unified will.

As they are distinct Persons, so they have distinct acts of will; for though their nature and essence is but one, which is common to them all, and so their will but one; yet there are distinct acts of this will, put forth by and peculiar to each distinct Person ... there is the Father’s distinct act of will notified in the covenant, that it is his will and pleasure his Son should be the Saviour of the chosen ones; and there is the Son’s distinct act of will notified in the same covenant, he presenting himself, and declaring himself willing, and engaging himself to be the Saviour of them; which distinct acts of the divine will thus notified, formally
constituted a covenant between them; and as the holy Spirit dispenses his gifts and grace, the blessings of this covenant, severally as he will, 1 Cor. xii. 11. this is pursuant to an agreement, to a notification of his will in covenant also.22

Third, none of the persons were compelled to covenant, and fourth, each only committed to what he was capable of performing.23 Gill’s fifth point is of particular interest. He says,

As in all covenants, however the persons covenanting may be equal in other respects, yet in covenanting there is an inequality and subordination; especially in covenants, in which there is service and work to be done on one side, and a reward to be given in consideration of it on the other; of which nature is the covenant of grace and redemption; and though the contracting parties in it are equal in nature, perfections, and glory, yet in this covenant-relation they voluntarily entered into, there is by agreement and consent a subordination ... this economy and dispensation of the covenant, thus settled in subordination among themselves by agreement and consent, is done with great propriety, beauty, and decency, suitable to their natural relations they bear to each other, as equal divine Persons.24

In the elided text, Gill looks at the fact that the Father is called the Son’s “Lord and his God,” the Son “is called by the Father his Servant,” and the Spirit is sent by the Father and Son to perform his works. Gill maintains a distinction here between the natural relations and the covenantal relations manifested in the economy, but the comment is noteworthy in light of claims that the arguments for the pactum salutis “veer toward either subordinationism or tritheism.”25 Gill’s final point about the eternal covenant of grace itself is that “God’s end in all things, in nature, providence, and grace, is his own glory, so it is in this covenant, even the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit.”26

With the groundwork laid, Gill presents a seven-chapter explanation of each person’s part in the covenant. He considers the Father’s and Spirit’s roles in a chapter each and places a five-chapter treatment of the Son’s part between them. Much of what he says covers the same ground, so we may consider this large section more briefly.

The Father makes proposals and promises in the covenant. He proposes that the Son redeem the elect, take on a human nature and obey the law, die
for the elect, and feed the flock. If he accomplishes the items proposed, the Father promises some things for the Son and some for the elect in him. First, he promises the Son to equip him with all he needs to accomplish these tasks, glorification and titles (Prophet, Priest, and King), and a promised seed. Second, for the elect he promises deliverance and all those graces connected to the ordo salutis. In short, all those things associated with the salvation of man were proposed and promised from the Father to the Son in the eternal council and concluded in the eternal covenant of grace.

For the Son’s part, Gill opens with a preliminary chapter in which he says the Son agreed to the proposal of the Father. Gill then expounds on the way the eternal covenant of grace includes Christ as Head, Mediator, Surety, and Testator, the third being a subset of the second. As Head, he represents the people before God as a public person, of whom Adam was a type. As Mediator, “Christ is a mediator of reconciliation in a way of satisfaction; reconciliation in this way is Christ’s great work as mediator; this is what was proposed in covenant, and what he therein agreed to do, and therefore is called the mediator of the covenant.” Further, “Reconciliation supposes a former state of friendship, a breach of that friendship, and a renewal of it ... It should be observed, that the elect of God are considered in the covenant of grace as fallen creatures; and that Christ being a mediator of reconciliation and satisfaction for them, suppose them such.” Thus, Gill situates the covenant of grace logically after the fall of man since those who are represented by the Mediator are considered after a breach in their relationship with God. To meet the qualifications of nearness necessary to stand between God and man, this mediator must be both God and man in one Person. As surety, Christ engaged on “their [the elects’] behalf, to do and suffer whatever the law and justice of God required, to make satisfaction for their sins.” To demonstrate that Christ is the testator, Gill begins by showing that the covenant of grace is a testament. As a testament is the freely exercised will of a testator, so the covenant “is founded on the will of God, and is the pure effect of it.” In his will, God disposes what is his, sealed by the blood of Christ and the Spirit, witnessed to by the three divine Persons, and testified to in Scripture. Finally, “the death of Christ is necessary to put this will in force, to give strength unto it, that it may be executed according to the design of the maker of it.”

Though “[t]his covenant is commonly represented as if it was only
between the Father and the Son,” Gill argues the Holy Spirit “was not a mere by-stander, spectator and witness of this solemn transaction, compact and agreement, between the Father and the Son, but was a party concerned in it.”

The Spirit must have assented to the covenant since he works in bringing the covenant into execution in time. Such is the case in particular with the salvation of the elect, the application of the promises—of which he is the foremost, and in the gifts that he gives, such as righteousness, pardon, and adoption. Gill further expands on this with particular examples from the economy of redemption, some with respect to Christ and some with respect to the redeemed. With respect to Christ, the Spirit formed his nature, filled the human nature of Christ with all gifts and graces, and was at work in the crucifixion and Christ’s glorification. With respect to men, he says the Spirit has worked publicly and privately. To those in public office (e.g., prophets, apostles, and ordinary ministers of the word), he endows, confirms, and makes effectual their words. In a private capacity, the Spirit convicts men of sin, righteousness, and judgment, regenerates them, gives them the gift of faith, comforts them, and sanctifies them. These works of the Spirit, says Gill, demonstrate his approbation of the covenant of grace since otherwise he would not have done them.

Though the section on the covenant of grace occupies a large portion of his A Body of Divinity, in it, Gill retraces the entire path of redemption several times, each time showing how a particular Christian truth, whether the distinct relations of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, or the consequent historia salutis flows directly from the will of God through the covenantal lens provided by Scripture. The salvation of the elect has occurred as the immediate result of the Trinity’s decision. Having consulted no creature—neither angel nor man—God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, determined in time to bring fallen man back from the dead. Gill’s recurring reference to the same aspects of the doctrine throughout his treatment of the covenant of grace gives the sense of looking at a singular great object from differing angles in order to afford a greater appreciation of what God has done. And what has he done? God has eternally determined to glorify himself in the salvation of his elect. It is no wonder, then, that Gill refers to the covenant of grace through the rest of his A Body of Divinity and in other works as well.
The Cause of God and Truth

We turn to Gill’s important work, *The Cause of God and Truth*, as an example of how he employed his understanding of the doctrine in theological discourse. According to Gill, this work was as a response to the republication of Daniel Whitby’s (1638–1726) work *Discourse on the Five Points*. The *Cause of God and Truth* consists of four parts that aim at a comprehensive defense of the five points of Calvinism on behalf of his church as well as any who might encounter Gill’s work. Each part of the work deals with the contested doctrines in a unique way. Parts I and II are exegetical. In Part I, Gill handles sixty passages which seem to present difficulties to the adherent of the “Calvinistical” system. In Part II, he presents several verses he interprets as vindicating Calvinistic soteriology, collated according to the doctrines of reprobation, election, particular redemption, efficacious grace, the corruption of human nature and spiritual impotence of the will, and perseverance. In Part III, Gill makes his case by presenting the various doctrines through theological argumentation. Finally, in Part IV, Gill aims to show the antiquity of each doctrine by accumulating evidence from pre-Augustinian authors, again collated according to doctrine. In all, Gill presents a thorough one-man defense of the doctrines of grace in the face of opposition by Daniel Whitby. For our purposes, a brief explanation will be provided of how he integrates the covenant of grace into this work of particular importance.

Throughout the work, Gill mainly encounters the question of the covenant of grace in the context of questions about how an individual enters such covenant. In light of the doctrine of the effectual call, Whitby says, “It is intimated, that such who are in the Calvinistical way of thinking, say, that God promises pardon and life to the non-elect, on condition of their faith and repentance.” Gill responds, “The promise of pardon is a promise of the covenant of grace, and which is made to none but to such who are in that covenant ... though the gospel-declaration of pardon is made in indefinite terms, to every one that believes; the reason is, because to all those who are interested in the covenant of grace, and for those whom Christ died, God does, in his own time, give faith and repentance, and along with them forgiveness of sins.” Here Gill argues that the benefit of pardon occurs within the context of the covenant of grace, so it would be inappropriate to say absolutely that those outside the covenant are blessed with the benefit
of pardon. Rather, pardon is stated indefinitely in gospel declarations since God grants faith and repentance “in his own time.” Later, he argues the command to repent does not contradict “its being a free-grace gift of God; nor its being a blessing in the covenant of grace.” 46 Dealing with the doctrine of individual election in light of the statement in 1 Timothy 2:4, that God wills all men everywhere to be saved, Gill says the salvation Paul means is “a real, certain, and actual salvation, which he has determined they shall have, has provided and secured in the covenant of grace, sent his Son into this world to effect, which is fully effected by him.” 47 The covenant of grace ensures the salvation of those whom God wills to be saved. On the doctrine of the saints’ preservation, he says, “Christ, when he had offered himself, and shed his precious blood, whereby the covenant of grace was ratified and confirmed, was, through the blood of that covenant, brought again from the dead, and declared to be the Son of God with power, and being set down at God’s right-hand, ever lives to make intercession for us; which is the other part of his priestly office he is sanctified by his own blood to accomplish.” 48 It is the covenant of grace, ratified in the blood of the cross, that now finds one of its principle applications in the priestly intercession of Christ.

In Part II, Gill presents texts that favor his own position. Of note are his arguments for the doctrine of election. He states,

God made a covenant with [Christ], as the head of the election of grace; in which he gave his chosen people to him as his seed, his spouse, his sheep, his portion and inheritance, and to be saved by him with an everlasting salvation. This was done before time: otherwise how could these persons be blessed with all spiritual blessings, and have grace given to them in Christ, before the world began; if their persons had not also been given to Christ, and secured in him? 49

In light of the eternal covenant of grace made with Christ in which he receives his people and saves them, and the fact that in the covenant of grace and union with Christ individuals are blessed with spiritual blessings, it must mean that these same individuals were chosen (elect) in eternity. Since they are chosen and given from the Father to the Son from eternity “in eternal election, and in the everlasting covenant of grace,” he says “in time [they] are enabled to believe on him [Christ] for life and salvation, concerning whom the will of God is, that Christ should lose none of them.” 50 Thus, in light of
the eternal covenant of grace, Gill maintains that effectual calling and the perseverance of the saints are guaranteed.

Finally, one particular aspect of the covenant of grace appears in the third part.51 Whitby says,

[the doctrine of a disabled will] is also inconsistent with the New Covenant of Grace, established in the Blood of Jesus, and tendred to all to whom the Gospel is vouchsafed. For they who are excluded from the Benefits of that Covenant, Remission of Sins and Salvation, and by a Decree of Preterition, are left under a Disability to perform the Conditions of that Covenant, Faith, Repentance and Obedience.52

Gill’s contention with Whitby’s argument at this point is that the covenant of grace is not “tendered” to people. He says that even though some do speak of offering Christ and the gospel, “the offer or tender of the new covenant, is what I never met with in other writers.”53 The reason, says Gill, is that the covenant is established in Christ’s blood and the covenant meets all that is necessary, including grace to believe and obey. Earlier, he says, “[God] did, from all eternity, really make a covenant of grace with Christ, on the behalf of the elect; but did not decree to offer to man a new covenant of grace, nor make one promising pardon and salvation to them, upon condition of their faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, but upon condition of the perfect obedience and sufferings of Christ.”54 In Gill’s view, Whitby is mistaken because he thinks the covenant of grace between God and man is purely conditional, and that man must therefore be capable of agreeing to the terms of the covenant—faith, repentance, and obedience.55 Gill, however, argues that the covenant is between God and Christ, and the elect are recipients of the benefits of that covenant—including faith, repentance, and obedience—which is why it is called the covenant of grace.

Commentaries
In light of Gill’s exposition and application of the doctrine outlined above, here we turn to look at some key aspects of the manner in which he integrates the doctrine of the eternal/everlasting covenant into the biblical exposition he provides in his commentaries. Like his A Body of Divinity, Gill so integrates the covenant of grace in his commentaries that a thorough explanation would
require a much longer work.\textsuperscript{56} Instead, I provide a mere sampling here. Gill affirms four main parts to the covenant of grace: eternal engagement, historical promise, historical ratification, and end-time consummation. His comments on Zechariah 1:8, in which a man appears to the prophet riding on a red horse, represent this movement in Gill’s thinking and interpretation. He says,

Christ, who here appears as a man, was ready and forward, in the council and covenant of grace, to agree to become man, and be the surety of his people, and die in their room and stead, in order to save them: his frequent appearances in an human form, before his incarnation, shew how willing and ready he was really to assume the human nature; and as soon as the time appointed for it was up, he tarried not; when the fulness of time was come, God sent him, and he came at once, and immediately; and as soon as possible he went about the business he came upon, took delight and pleasure in it, was constant at it till he had finished it; and even his sufferings and death, which were disagreeable to nature, considered in themselves, were wished and longed for, and cheerfully submitted to by him: and he is quick in all his motions to help his people in all their times of need; nor can any difficulties prevent him giving an early and speedy relief; he comes to them leaping on the mountains, and skipping on the hills; and at the last day he’ll come quickly to put them into the possession of salvation he has wrought out for them; and will be a swift witness for them, and against wicked men that hate them, and oppose them.\textsuperscript{57}

In this passage, the “council and covenant of grace” are the origin of all that subsequently happens in the history of redemption, from the promise and hope of the old covenant to the incarnation and Christ’s work to the final Day of Judgment. A few passages are worthy to be mentioned due to their relationship to the arguments for the \textit{pactum salutis} (or eternal covenant).

\textit{2 Samuel 23:5}

This was the text Keach used for his first publication on the subject, \textit{The Everlasting Covenant}.\textsuperscript{58} Gill does not ignore the immediate historical context of the passage. About the covenant which David mentions, Gill says, “the covenant by which the kingdom was settled on David and his seed was a covenant that would continue for ever, and be kept, observed, and preserved in all the articles of it, and so be sure to his seed, particularly to the Messiah that should spring from him, in whom it was fulfilled, \textit{Luke} i. 32, 33. and the
covenant of grace made with David’s antitype.” According to Gill, David hoped in a covenant that really took the historical development seriously, but the covenant itself was not made in history. The covenant was made “with Christ the head of the church, and the representative of it, and so with all his people in him.” It “is an everlasting one: it was made with Christ from everlasting, as appears from the everlasting love of God, the source and spring of it; the earliness of the divine counsels on which it is formed, ... and from Christ being set up as the Mediator of it from everlasting.” Since David says the covenant is “ordered in all things,” Gill says it is ordered “to promote and advance the glory of the three Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit; to secure the persons of the saints, and to provide every thing needful for them for time and eternity.” David says the covenant is “sure,” and Gill says this secures believers even when there are infirmities and backslidings. In Gill’s explanation here, David’s kingdom is grounded on the everlasting covenant of grace made “from everlasting” with David’s seed, Jesus Christ, and the grounding of the kingdom on that covenant means assurance for David.

Psalm 2:7–8
In Gill’s thought, this locus classicus for discussions about the eternal generation of the Son also includes some important statements about the eternal covenant. First, the statement in v. 7 about the decree—which does not refer to generation, since generation is natural and not dependent “on the decree and arbitrary will of God”—is about the covenant with Christ, “who is the covenant itself.” Importantly, the munus triplicex “is not the foundation of his sonship, but his sonship is the foundation of his office.” Thus, Gill insists that expositors ought not to interpret the eternal relations in any way depending on the decree and works of God in creation and salvation. Second, in this covenant Christ asked many things [in v. 8] of his Father, which were granted; he asked for the persons of all the elect to be his bride and spouse, and his heart’s desire was given him ... he asked for all the blessings of grace for them; for spiritual life here, and eternal life hereafter; and all were given him, and put into his hands for them ... [and] God’s elect among the Gentiles, and who live in distant parts of the world; which are Christ’s other sheep, the Father has given to him as his portion.
To Gill, following the adherents to the *pactum* that preceded him, these verses refer to the eternal council and covenant between the Father and the Son.\(^{61}\)

**Zechariah 6:13**
This passage plays a particular role in defenses of the *pactum*, but at the time of his commentaries Gill interprets the passage in reference to the offices of Christ. Gill says the words “between them both” refer to neither “priestly and kingly offices of Christ; nor the council of peace between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect; for that was past in eternity; but better the gospel of peace, called the whole counsel of God, which in consequence of Christ being a priest on his throne was preached to both *Jews* and *Gentiles*; which brought the glad tidings of peace and salvation by Christ to both, and was the means of making peace between them both.”\(^{62}\) Gill later modifies his interpretation of this passage by the time he publishes his *A Body of Divinity* so that he does eventually interpret it in reference to the eternal covenant. Regardless, it is notable that Gill does in fact affirm the eternal council; his objection is that the council is in the past while the passage seems to reference something future.

**Titus 1:2**
Finally, in this text on the proclamation of the gospel, which was promised before the world began, Gill says it was made “as early as the choice of God’s elect in Christ.” Not only that, it is “as early as the covenant that was made with him, and he was set up as the mediator of it; who was present to receive this promise as their head and representative for them, and to whom it was made as federally considered in him, and in whom it was secured for them.”\(^{63}\) Since Christ was present before the world began, and he was present on behalf of his elect, Christ was the recipient of the promise on our behalf.

**Relationship to Other Baptist Theologians**

At this point, I will simply note various Baptist theologians who also affirmed the doctrine of the eternal covenant. While the previous section demonstrated the way one particular, influential Baptist theologian integrated the eternal covenant into his theological work, here appears a summary sketch of his
successors. In providing such considerable space to the reaffirmation of the same content, I aim to simply demonstrate that the doctrine was not peculiar to one congregation (Horsley-down) nor one place (London). Rather, Baptists affirmed the doctrine of the eternal covenant for a substantial length of the initial history of their movement. To further demonstrate the breadth of the doctrine’s reception, more space is given to Baptists in America. This section includes two main forms of affirmation: assumption and articulation. In the first, reference is made to the eternal covenant in some other doctrinal context. In the second, an author gives lengthy treatment to the doctrine itself.

Assumption of the Eternal Covenant in Baptist Theology

Below are three examples in which the eternal covenant is assumed by Baptists from the 1750s to the end of the nineteenth century. In these we see a representative distribution of the doctrine among the generations following Gill. The authors considered are Isaac Backus, who exercised influence for the Baptist movement in eighteenth-century New England; Andrew Fuller, known for his advocacy of the gospel call; and the Philadelphia Baptist Association, which exercised particular influence within the broader movement of Baptists in America.

Isaac Backus

Among those converted to faith in the Great Awakening of the American Colonies was Isaac Backus (1724–1806). Backus went on to be an important figure in defending religious liberty in the establishment of America, helped to coordinate Baptist efforts, and wrote the first work on Baptist history in America. At the beginning of his time as a Baptist, he preached and published a sermon on Galatians 4:31 which compares the bond and slave women mentioned by Paul. For our purposes, however, he makes an important statement near the beginning of his treatise concerning the eternal covenant. He says,

By this [the free-woman] I understand, first the glorious covenant of grace, made between the Father, and the Son, before the world began. Therefore God says, I have made a covenant with my chosen,—I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. Psal. lxxix. 3, 19. The sum of which covenant (for I cannot be large in describing of it) is, That the Son
of God should assume our nature, and in that nature perfectly obey the law which we have broken, and bear thee punishment due unto us for sin, and so make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in an everlasting righteousness, thro’ which God could be just, and yet justifier of the ungodly: —As the fruit of which, the Father engaged by the influences of the holy Spirit, effectually to draw many of the sons of men to Christ; work faith in their hearts, justify and sanctify their souls, and keep them by his power, thro’ faith unto eternal salvation: Heb. 2.9—17. Psal. 40.6—8. Dan. 9.24. John 16.7—13. Rom. 8.29, 30. I Pet. 1.2—5.

Though Backus did not spend much of his sermon describing the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, he assumes it is the covenantal foundation of the makeup of the new covenant community. Immediately after the quote above, he says the free-woman is “the gospel-church in her pure standing,” and that it includes “All the saints in heaven and earth, [who] make but one catholic church: but it is in the gospel church here below that God appears to publish his grace, and to draw others in.”66 He concludes,

In short, by the free-woman, we may understand the glorious plan of salvation, laid in the eternal mind from everlasting, which in time has been made manifest, first by gradual discoveries thereof in the old testament, and then by Christ’s actually coming in the flesh, and working out salvation, which he began to preach himself, and ‘twas afterwards confirmed unto us, by them that heard him, whereby the gospel church was gathered, and increased.67

Similar to Gill, then, Backus understands the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son as that which is manifested progressively in the promises of the OT and conclusively revealed in the incarnation and ingathering of the church. Though he does not devote a treatise to the eternal aspect of this covenant, he explicitly assumes it.

Andrew Fuller
At one point in Andrew Fuller’s (1754–1815) famous Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, he argues that the gospel “virtually requires” obedience even though it is not technically law.68 To support his point, he compares it to an embassy that requires rebels to lay down their arms and cites biblical texts
that speak of obeying the gospel (e.g., Rom 1:6). Another Baptist, William Button, responded to Fuller’s argument here. He said the gospel is not a declaration that

God can and will, but a publication of a way wherein he has made peace ... The work is done. And this is the sum and glory of the gospel; and to preach the gospel, is to publish and proclaim peace and reconciliation made by the blood of the cross, as the fruit of everlasting love, and the ancient settlements in the council and covenant of peace, and not proposing peace to men on certain conditions to be performed by them, or an “offering through Christ, a reconciliation to the world, and promising them who would believe in him an absolution from their past offences,” as Dr. Whitby expresses it, and as Mr. F[uller’s] words seem to intimate.69

Button, following Gill’s argument against Whitby, says the eternal covenant militates against Fuller’s argument for duty-faith. Rather than denying the eternal covenant, Fuller agreed, but said he disagreed with Button’s conclusion. “I rejoice with him in the doctrines of everlasting love, and the eternal settlements of grace,” says Fuller, “But as the covenant between the Father and the Son before time does not supersede a believer’s actually covenanting with God in time; so neither, as I apprehend, does peace being made by the blood of Christ’s cross, supersede a peace taking place between God and us on our believing.”70 Though he agrees peace was secured in eternity in the covenant between the Father and the Son, Fuller argues such eternal peace does not remove the need for peace between God and man to occur in time. My purpose is not to dive into the debates about Fuller’s theology; rather, we see in this excerpt from the exchange that both sides of the debate saw the eternal covenant as a non-negotiable component of Particular Baptist theology.

*The Philadelphia Baptist Association*
A few decades after Backus incorporated the eternal covenant in his treatise on the makeup of a new covenant church in New England, the Baptists in the mid-Atlantic states did the same in their treatise on the doctrine of justification. William Rogers (1757–1824), writing on behalf of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, says “Faith and repentance are graces bestowed by the Spirit of God, they are blessings flowing from that covenant which is ordered in all things and sure.”71 Thus, the receptive instruments of faith and
repentance are gifts given by the Spirit according to the eternal covenant. The elect are those from the mass of humanity who are unworthy and guilty in themselves, but in the everlasting covenant elected and beloved, have that righteousness whereon their justification is founded, not only exhibited to them by the gospel, but brought nigh by the Holy Ghost, these are the ‘purchased possession,’ this is the ‘bride’ the lamb’s wife; between whom and the Lord Jesus, an union not only now exists but hath existed, ancient as eternity itself, ‘I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee,’ Jer. xxxi. 3.

Again, the everlasting covenant grounds what the Association calls “declarative” justification. Like Gill, the Association affirms the believer’s eternal security based on the fact that “the righteousness of the Mediator is an everlasting righteousness; this being the sole ground of our confidence, it evidently follows that our abiding is safe: the believer can never lose his interest therein; the act which justifies is in itself unalterable; it is coeval with the eternal covenant; the benefit thereof is ensured and will forever be enjoyed by us.” Though this letter was published as a reaffirmation of justification by grace alone, Rogers and the Association assume their readers are familiar with and affirm the everlasting, or eternal, covenant.

**Articulation of the Eternal Covenant in Baptist Theology**

While the sample above demonstrates that some Baptists at least assumed the doctrine of the eternal covenant in their writings, generally in line with what Gill had provided before them, in what follows I briefly outline briefly two Baptist theologians who gave specific treatment to the eternal covenant after Gill: R. B. C. Howell, second president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and John L. Dagg, sometimes called “The first writing Southern Baptist.”

**R. B. C. Howell**

The second president of the Southern Baptist Convention, R. B. C. Howell (1801–1868), wrote several polemical works in favor of Baptist theology. Among these, Howell wrote a work simply entitled *The Covenants.* Having treated the fall of man in his previous chapter, Howell opens his treatment...
of the covenant of redemption. Of note in light of the preceding Baptist writers, he refers to, “the covenant of redemption, called by most writers the covenant of grace.” He only refers to the covenant of grace by name once—several pages later—when he refers to it as the spiritual covenant as opposed to the national covenant, and the new covenant as opposed to the old covenant which founded the commonwealth of Israel. Howell works through the plan, purposes, parties, and promises of the covenant of redemption. To demonstrate the reality of the covenant, Howell first says the various prophecies concerning a surety for the people show that one was foreordained to come, then he asks, “Did all this occur without any previous consent or agreement?” Like Gill before him, Howell reasons that the occurrence of the unfolding plan of redemption requires the previous agreement, and thus covenant, which he demonstrates to be from eternity. For its purpose, Howell says it is a covenant designed to redeem men—from which it gets its name—to the glory of “all the persons of the adorable Trinity.” Next, Howell outlines the Father’s, Son’s, and Holy Spirit’s roles in the covenant according to their work in the plan of redemption, showing that each freely planned the redemption of man. As for promises, some are made to the Son as Messiah, such as a kingdom and people, while “Others of the promises of the covenant are given to the Messiah for his people” such as the graces immediately associated with salvation, like justification and glorification, but also those typically associated with the fruit of the Spirit. Though much briefer than Gill’s treatment of the doctrine, Howell articulated a doctrine substantially the same a hundred years later and an ocean away.

John L. Dagg

Thomas J. Nettles calls John L. Dagg (1794–1884) “one of the most profound thinkers produced by his denomination.” In his Manual of Theology, published two years after Howell’s in 1857, Dagg treats the covenant of grace in its eternal aspect in his characteristically concise manner. He says the language of “covenant” is accommodated to human speech since in human affairs, a covenant is the agreement concluded between persons in which one party’s proposals are deliberated and accepted by the other party. He says, “In every work of God, the divine persons must either agree or disagree. As they alike possess infinite wisdom, disagreement among them is impossible. The salvation of men is a work of God, in which the divine persons concur. It
is performed according to an eternal purpose; and in this purpose, as well as in the work, the divine persons concur; and this concurrence is their eternal covenant. The purpose of the one God, is the covenant of the Trinity.”86 The covenant must be considered eternal because the parties are eternal and because the Scriptures speak of it occurring in eternity.87 Each party is manifest in the economy of redemption according to this covenant, and though the Son and the Spirit perform particular subordinate roles in the economy, it is in these roles that they also manifest their divinity.88 Finally, Dagg closes by arguing that the covenant of grace is the context of Christian piety and worship, but also that it is different than the new covenant of Hebrews 8 even though “There is, however, a close connection between them.”89 In the new covenant, God deals with man directly, while in the covenant of grace, the promises are made to the Son as representative of his people. Dagg does seem to approach something like the distinction between the covenants of redemption and grace here, but he does not do so explicitly. In relationship to Gill, we may remember that Gill considers the old and new covenants as historical manifestations of the covenant of grace, so Dagg is not necessarily departing from Gill at this point.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the eternal covenant was not missing from the theological discourse of previous Baptist generations. In fact, it is just the contrary. The eternal covenant—though typically considered as the eternal aspect of the covenant of grace—was stated, developed, defended, and integrated into the overall theological system of many of the earliest Baptists until the end of the nineteenth century.90 It influenced the debates with neonomians (the “Baxterians”) and Arminians (Whitby). It was assumed on both sides of the baptism (Backus) and “gospel offer” (Fuller–Button) debates. It was stated by an association (Philadelphia), convention president (e.g. Howell), and systematic theologians (Gill and Dagg). In short, the eternal covenant occupied no small place in theological discourse and underlying assumptions. Only considering Gill, one notes how the doctrine was integrated into all of the theological tasks, including direct exposition and integration of it in the rest of his theology, commentaries, and debate.
1. John Gill, A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures (London: Printed for the Author, 1769). For ease of reference, I provide two different citations for Gill's A Body of Divinity, for which an explanation may be warranted. Gill's work was originally published in three volumes, the first two on "doctrinal divinity" and the third on "practical divinity." All quotations and the initial citation come from those original editions (cited Vol.Book.Chapter.Page). However, the commonly accessible edition, produced in 1839 and published presently by The Baptist Standard Bearer, occurs in a single, unabridged volume. Citations for BSB's work are given after the originals as a simple page number after the semicolon.


3. Quotes of the commentaries are taken from the editions published in his life, but citations are simply "ad loc." to provide for the reader's ease of reference since Gill's commentaries are available online and in printed format. John Gill, An exposition of the Old Testament, in which are Recorded The Original of Mankind, of The Several Nations of the World, and of The Jewish Nation in particular: The Lives of the Patriarchs of Israel; The Journey of that People from Egypt through the Wilderness to the Land of Canaan, and their Settlement in that Land; Their Laws Moral, Ceremonial and Judicial; their Government and State under Judges and Kings; their several Captivities, and their sacred Books of Devotion. In the Exposition of which, It is attempted to give an Account of the several Books, and the Writers of them; a Summary of each Chapter; and the genuine Sense of every Verse: And throughout the Whole, the Original Text, and the Versions of it are inspected and compared; Interpreters of the best Note, both Jewish and Christian, consulted; Difficult Places at large explained; Seeming Contradictions reconciled, And Various Passages illustrated and confirmed by Testimonies of Writers, as well Gentile as Jewish (vols. 2–3; London: printed for the author; and sold by George Keith, at the Bible and Crown in Grace-Church-Street, 1769); An exposition of the Books of the Prophets of the Old Testament. Both larger and lesser (vol. 2; London: printed for the author; and sold by G. Keith, at the Bible and Crown, in Grace-Church-Street; and by J. Robinson, at Dock-Head, Southwark, 1758); An exposition of the New Testament, in three volumes: in which The Sense of the Sacred Text is given; Doctrinal and Practical Truths are set in a plain and easy Light, Difficult Places Explained, Seeming Contradictions Reconciled; Whatever is Material in the Various Readings, and the several Oriental Versions, is observed. The Whole illustrated with Notes taken from the most ancient Jewish Writings (vols. 1 and 3; London: printed for the author; and sold by Aaron Ward, at the King's-Arms in Little-Britain, 1746–1748).

4. Treatment of Gill's doctrine of the eternal covenant in this article is not chronological. This is important, for instance, in his exposition of Zechariah 6:13, since his interpretation of that text changed between his exposition in the commentary and Doctrine of the Trinity and his later A Body of Divinity.

5. Gill begins this section after his treatment of the fall of Adam into sin, saying, "I have considered the covenant of grace in a former part of this work, as it was a compact in eternity, between the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; in which each person agreed to take his part in the economy of man's salvation: and now I shall consider the administration of that covenant in the several periods of time, from the beginning of the world to the end of it. The Covenant of Grace is but one and the same in all ages, of which Christ is the substance; being given for a covenant to the people, of all the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, who is the same in the yesterday of the Old Testament, and in the to-day of the New Testament, and for ever; he is the way, the truth, and the life; the only true way to eternal life; and there never was any other way made known to men since the fall of Adam; no other name under heaven has been given, or will be given, by which men can be saved. The patriarchs before the flood and after, before the law of Moses and under it, before the coming of Christ, and all the saints since, are saved in one and the same way, even by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that is the grace of the covenant, exhibited at different times, and in divers manners. For though the covenant is but one, there are different administrations of it; particularly two, one before the coming of Christ, and the other after it; which law the foundation for the distinction of the first and second, the old and the new covenant, observed by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, chap. viii. 7, 8, 13, and ix. 1, 15. and xii. 24. for by the first and old covenant, is not meant the covenant of works made with Adam, which had been broke and abrogated long ago; since the apostle is speaking of a covenant waxen old, and ready to vanish away in his time: nor was the covenant of works the first and most ancient covenant; the covenant of grace, as an eternal compact was before that; but by it is meant the first and most ancient administration of the covenant of grace which reached from the fall of Adam, when the covenant of works was broke, unto the coming of Christ, when it was superseded and vacated by another administration of the same covenant, called therefore the second and new covenant. The one we commonly call the Old Testament-dispensation, and the other the New Testament-dispensation." John Gill, Body of Divinity, 2.I.I.551–2; 345–46. From such an understanding,

7. Ibid., 1.II.VI.340–41; 209–10. On the last point, he says, “counsel with him is as quick as thought, yea, it is no other than his thought, and therefore they go together.”
8. Ibid., 1.II.VI.341–2; 210. He says, 1) “not things of trifling, but those of importance, are what men consult about and deliberate upon; such is the work of men’s salvation of the greatest moment, not only to men, to their comfort and happiness here and hereafter, but to the glory of God.” 2) “schemes, which are the fruit of consultation and deliberation, are generally the most wisely formed, and best succeed: in the scheme of salvation by Christ, God has abounded in all wisdom and prudence.” 3) “This being the effect of a council between the three divine persons, shews their unanimity in it; as they are one in nature, so they agree in one; and as in every thing, so in this, the salvation of men.”
9. Ibid., 1.II.VI.342–44; 210–12. There are two items to note. First, Gill uses several texts, rather than solely those listed, to make his argument here. Second, he admits that several different interpretations of Zechariah 6:13 are possible, and that he previously (i.e. in his commentary) held to a different interpretation of the text (the reconciliation is between Jews and Gentiles), but by the time of his writing the A Body of the Divinity, he has grown more willing to accept that the verse applies to the eternal council. As one would expect, he also affirms the previous interpretation in his earlier treatment of the Trinity, John Gill, The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of several Discourses on that important subject; Reduc’d into the form of a Treatise (London: Printed and Sold by Aaron Ward, at the King’s-Arms in Little-Britain; and H. Whitridge, at the Royal Exchange, 1731), 65–68.
10. Ibid., 1.II.VL344–45; 212–13.
11. Elsewhere, he says, “[The covenant of grace] springs from the everlasting love of God to his people: that is the source of it. . .The basis and foundation of this covenant are, the purposes, decrees, and counsels of the most High; for he does all things after the counsel of his own will; and it may be depended on as a most sure and certain thing, that an affair, of so much importance as the covenant of grace is, could not be made any otherwise than after the counsel of his will, and depends upon that counsel; and his counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.” “Sermon 11: The Stability of the Covenant of Grace,” in Sermons and Tracts of John Gill: God’s Everlasting Covenant (ed. Michael Allen; New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 132–34.
12. Gill, Body of Divinity, 1.II.VI.346; 213.
13. Ibid., 1.II.VII.347; 214.
15. Ibid., 1.II.VII.350; 216.
16. The name, “covenant of grace,” is proper “since it entirely flows from, and has its foundation in the grace of God: it is owing to the everlasting love and free favour of God the Father, that he proposed a covenant of this kind to his Son; it is owing to the grace of the Son, that he so freely and voluntarily entered into engagements with his Father; the matter, sum and substance of it is grace; it consists of grants and blessings of grace to the elect in Christ; and the ultimate end and design of it is the glory of the grace of God.” A Body of Divinity, 1.II.VII.351–2; 217. Though this statement only includes the Father and Son, he clearly includes the grace from the Spirit throughout his treatment.
17. Gill, Body of Divinity, 1.II.VII.352; 217.
18. Benjamin Keach, The Everlasting Covenant: A Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul, Or, the Excellent Nature of the Covenant of Grace Opened in a Sermon Preached January the 29th, at the Funeral of Mr. Henry Forty, Late Pastor of a Church of Christ, at Abingdon, in the County of Berks, Who Departed this Life Jan. 25th 1692/3 and was Interr’d at Southwark (London: Printed for H. Barnard, 1693); The Display of Glorious Grace, Or, the Covenant of Peace Opened in Fourteen Sermons Lately Preached in which the Errors Of the Present Day about Reconciliation and Justification are Detected (London: Printed by S. Bridge, 1698).
20. Thus, Gill does affirm that, “though these two administrations [old and new covenant] differ in some things, as to some external circumstances and ordinances; yet the matter, sum and substance of them is the same, even Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Body of Divinity, 1.II.XV.401–02; 250.
21. See Gill, Body of Divinity, 1.I.XXXVI.220; 130. “We are not baptized into three names or characters, but in the one name of three persons distinct, though not divided from each other,” John Gill, The Doctrine
22. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VII.353; 218. As other examples of distinct acts of the persons in the unified divine nature, Gill mentions the fact that each person knows and understands and loves the others.

23. Gill and others assume that a covenant is only valid insofar as it is possible for the parties involved are capable of fulfilling the duties required. "If one man enters into a covenant with another, and agrees to do what is not in his power, and which he knows it is not, when he enters into covenant, this is a fraud and an imposition on him, with whom he covenants." Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VII.354; 218. For application of this principle in marriage, for example, see William Perkins’ *Christian Oeconomie*.


27. The elect would be delivered from sin, Satan, and the curses of the law, justified, forgiven, adopted, regenerated, they would know God and the law and the gospel, would be equipped to walk in obedience, persevere, and finally be glorified.


30. Ibid., 1.II.XI.372; 230.

31. Ibid., 1.II.XI.372–73; 230. He later states explicitly, “[God] consulting with Christ his Son, and with him contriving the scheme and method of reconciling to himself the world of his elect, considered as sinful fallen creatures in Adam,” 1.II.XI.380; 235.

32. Gill explains the decree in both supra- and sub-lapsarian terms, the former with regard to the ends and the latter with regard to the means. R. Muller notes, “The eternal council of Father, Son, and Spirit in which the covenant received its form stands contingent (from the point of view of human logic) upon the end of God’s glory and provides the means of saving those who had been determined as elect in the decree. The covenant thus coincides with the sublapsarian decree of the means.” Richard A. Muller, “The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill’s Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*” in *Foundations* 24, no. 1 (1981), 8.

33. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.XI.375–81; 232–36. Importantly, Christ accomplishes these things in time, and so Gill should have connected the reality of justification to time more directly as well rather than placing it in eternity as an immanent act. For a distinction between the way Gill discusses justification in eternity and the way those before him did, see, "Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity," in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 143–48.

34. Ibid., 1.II.XII.383; 237.

35. Ibid., 1.II.XIII.389; 241.

36. Ibid., 1.II.XIII.389–91; 241–42. Gill subsequently argues more specifically that “The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, may be considered as the testator of the covenant of grace, as it is a will or testament,” 1.II.XIII.391; 242–43.

37. Ibid., 1.II.XIII.392–93; 243–44.

38. Ibid., 1.II.XIV.392, 394; 217, 244.

39. Ibid., 1.II.XIV.394–96; 244–45.

40. Ibid., 1.II.XIV.396–98; 245–46.

41. Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, iii–iv. Two editions, both of which are cited by Gill throughout his work, are available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). The second edition available on that website was published in 1735 rather than 1733 or 1734. The full title of the work, shortened for obvious reasons, is Daniel Whitby, *A discourse concerning, I. the true import of the words election and reprobation; and the things signified by them in the Holy Scripture. II. The Extent of Christ’s Redemption. III. The Grace of God; where it is enquired, Whether it be vouchsafed sufficiently to those who improve it not, and irresistibly to those who do improve it; and whether Men be wholly passive in the Work of their Regeneration? IV. The Liberty of the Will in a State of Trial and Probation. V. the perseverance or defectibility of the saints; with some Reflections on the State of Heathens, the Providence and Prescience of God. By Daniel Whitby, D. D. and Chancellor of the Cathedral Church of Sarum (London : printed for John Wyat, at the Rose in St. Paul’s-Church-Yard; printed for Aaron Ward, at the King’s Arms in Little Britain, and Richard Hett, at the Bible and Crown in the Poultry, 1710; 1735). Citations below use Gill’s shortened version. Perhaps the most well-known response to Whitby was Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*, though Edwards addressed others in his work as well, such as Thomas Chubb (1679–1747) and Isaac Watts (1674–1748), whereas Gill exclusively responded to
Whitby. For a brief introduction to Edwards’s response to these three—Chubb, Whitby, and Watts—see Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Freedom of the Will by Jonathan Edwards (ed. by Harry S. Stout and Paul Ramsey, rev. ed., vol. 1. The Works of Jonathan Edwards; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 66–118. D. Rathel’s comfortable minimizing of Keach’s singular-covenant model due to “his opposition to Baxter” should afford Gill a more sympathetic reading as well. Gill lived at a time when the Trinity was denied and Arminianism, rationalism, and the emphasis on human autonomy were all threatening the theology embraced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. David Mark Rathel, “John Gill and the History of Redemption as Mere Shadow,” 397–98, see esp. fn65.

42. For instance, Part II begins with “Chapter I: Of Reprobation,” which has five “sections,” each engaging a particular biblical text.

43. In addition to covering the same doctrines as in the preceding part, here he also engages the notion of man’s free will, God’s prescience and providence, and “the state and case of the heathens.”

44. Gill, Cause of God and Truth, 44; cf. Whitby, Discourse on the Five Points, 243; 237.

45. Ibid., 44–45.

46. Ibid., 73.

47. Ibid., 102.


49. Ibid., 180.

50. Ibid., 276.

51. As Part IV presents pre-Augustinian theologians, it will not be considered here.

52. Whitby, Discourse on the Five Points, 308.

53. Gill, The Cause of God and Truth, 379. Note, Gill is not disagreeing at this point with offering Christ to someone; he disagrees that people speak of offering a covenant to someone. One could wish that Gill stated more positively that we do offer Christ. Still, à Brakel seems to offer a better example, including an exhortation to enter the covenant. Wilhelms à Brakel, The Christian’s Reasonable Service: God, Man, and Christ (vol. 1, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 427–59.

54. Ibid., 334.

55. Others who would generally agree with Gill’s Calvinism, would have responded that faith and repentance were conditio, sine qua non rather than procuring conditions, “that is, a condition apart from which nothing can occur, which however does not pertain to the essence of the matter itself.” À Brakel, The Christian’s Reasonable Service, 1.441. cf. Keach, A Display of Glorious Grace, 185–87; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (vol. 2; New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1877), 365.

56. A simple search of the phrase “covenant of grace” in his work returns more than five-hundred results between his OT and NT commentaries.

57. ad loc. Similarly, on Ps 40:7, he says, “Then said I &c.] As in the council and covenant of peace, when and where he declared his willingness to come into the world, and make satisfaction for the sins of his people; so when the fulness of time was come for his appearance in human nature he repeated the same.”

58. In this instance, Gill did not appeal to a text which “had not been cited in earlier discussions of the pactum salutis” if it is admitted that Keach’s work is among those discussions. J. V. Pesko, The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 114. (Pesko cites it as 2 Sam 22:5, but he clearly means 23:5).

59. ad loc. Italics original.

60. ad loc. In his exposition of v. 9, Gill explains that the destruction of the nations does not refer to the elect Gentiles, “but the stubborn and rebellious ones among the heathen, and in the several parts of the world, who will not have him [Christ] to reign over them.” He says this destruction was fulfilled against unbelieving Jews “in their destruction by the Romans, and will have its accomplishment in the antichristian nations at the latter day.”


62. ad loc.
Here, I admit that a search through the works of several notable and influential Baptists returned several individuals who either (1) do not mention the covenant in their written works, (2) make such a passing statement that it is not worth inclusion, or (3) the reference is too vague to assert that the particular theologian affirmed it. For example, Andrew Fuller compiled a memoir and extracts of the works of Samuel Pearce. In one letter, Pearce says, “All is well, for time and eternity. My soul rejoices in the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.” Based on the works of Keach and Gill, I think we can safely assume Pearce’s reference to 2 Sam 23:5 is based on the assurance found in the everlasting covenant of grace in Christ. This demonstrates both the “passing statement” and “insufficient clarity” problem in sources that might be leaned on. Andrew Fuller and Samuel Pearce, Memoirs of the late Rev. Samuel Pearce, A.M. minister of the gospel in Birmingham; with extracts of some of his most interesting letters. Compiled by Andrew Fuller (London; Bristol; Birmingham; Edinburgh: printed by J. W. Morris, 1800), 204. For an example of another London Baptist, one might consider Keach’s and Gill’s successor, Charles H. Spurgeon, who preached a sermon on October 2, 1859, called, “The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant” in New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 5, sermon 277. This sermon is available through a variety of websites in addition to the collection volumes. In the sermon, Spurgeon walks through many of the same points articulated by his predecessors and contemporaries.


In comparison to Gill, it is interesting to note that Rogers implies election occurs “in the everlasting covenant” while Gill explicitly places election prior to the covenant, in the decree.

At the beginning of the treatise, Rogers distinguishes between eternal and declarative justification, calling the former that which existed in the divine mind eternal while the latter is that which takes place in or on the believer’s conscience. Since my purpose is to demonstrate the assumed affirmation of the eternal covenant, I will not interact with the concept of eternal justification here, which would only detract from the primary aim of this section. William Rogers, Circular Letter on Justification, 15–16.

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Andrew Fuller, The gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptation; or, the obligations of men fully to credit, and cordially to approve, whatever God makes known. Wherein is considered the nature of faith in Christ, and the Duty of those where the Gospel comes in that Matter (Northampton, England: printed by T. Dicey & Co., 1785), 57–58.

William Button, Remarks on a treatise, entitled, The Gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptation; or, the obligations of men fully to credit, and cordially to approve whatever God makes known. By Andrew Fuller (Printed for J. Buckland, Pater-noster Row; W. Ash; J. Dermer; and J. James, Hammersmith, 1785), 49–50.

Andrew Fuller, A defence of a treatise, entitled, The gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptation; containing a reply to Mr. Button’s remarks, and the observations of Philanthropos (Printed by T. Dicey & Co., 1787), 35.

William Rogers, A Circular Letter on the All Important Doctrine of Justification, Addressed by the Philadelphia Baptist Association in North America to the Several Churches in Union (Philadelphia, 1785; London: Reprinted and Sold by William Ash, 1786), 12. This quote again shows a particular reception of Keach and Gill’s interpretation of 2 Sam 23:5.

Rogers does not think faith should be called an instrumental “cause,” but he admits some do so label it and he himself calls it an instrument. William Rogers, Circular Letter on Justification, 15–16.

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Ibid., 31.

Ibid., 117–18. “The promises of the national covenant, were national blessings; the promises of the spiritual covenant (i. e. the covenant of grace) were spiritual blessings, as reconciliation, holiness, and eternal life. The conditions of the one covenant [the old] were circumcision, and obedience to the law; the conditions of the other were, and ever have been, faith in the Messiah, as ‘the seed of the woman,’ the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. There cannot be a greater mistake than to confound the national covenant with the covenant of grace, [that is, the old covenant with the new] and the commonwealth founded on the one, with the church founded on the other. When Christ came, the commonwealth was abolished,
and there was nothing put in its place. The church [now made visible] remained.” (Brackets original).

80. Ibid., 32.
81. Howell looks to such passages as 1 Pet 1:18, 1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:9, and Eph 1:3–6 to demonstrate the eternality of the covenant. Ibid., 32–33.
82. Ibid., 34–35.
83. Ibid., 40–41.
85. John L. Dagg, Manual of Theology (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 253. Though the edition used here was published recently, the pagination is the same as previous editions.
86. Ibid., 254.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 255–56. More explicitly, Dagg says, “In this order of operation, inferiority of nature is not implied, in the subordination of office to which the Son and the Spirit voluntarily consent. The fulness of the Godhead dwells in each of the divine persons, and refers the fulfilment of the covenant infallibly sure, in all its stipulations. The Holy Spirit, in the execution of his office, dwells in believers; but he brings with him the fulness of the Godhead, so that God is in them, and they are the temple of God, and filled with the fulness of God. The Son or Word, in the execution of his office, becomes the man Jesus Christ; but the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him; so that, in his deepest humiliation he is God manifest in the flesh, God over all, blessed for ever.”
89. Ibid., 257.
90. Again, the reader may also look to Arthur W. Pink as an advocate in the twentieth century.
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“Conjugal Union”: John Gill on Christian Marriage

IAN HUGH CLARY

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“The Greatest and Best of Men”: A Summary Life

John Gill (1697–1771) was a Particular Baptist pastor and theologian who stood in the crosscurrent of the evangelical revivals and the Enlightenment. He was born in Kettering on November 23, 1697, to Edward and Elizabeth (née Walker); his father was a wool merchant and deacon in a local Baptist church. The young Gill attended a grammar school in Kettering, but left at the age of eleven due to his parents’ refusal to let him attend Anglican prayer. They could not afford the cost of a Dissenting Academy, so his education concluded and he went to work with his father in the wool trade. It is striking that in 1716, at around nineteen years of age, Gill began a preaching career that led to him becoming a key Baptist leader and theologian and a noted expert in biblical languages, particularly Semitics. For one with an
incomplete education, his scholarly accomplishments are a testimony to his intellectual appetite and abilities; and justification for the conferring of a doctor of divinity by the University of Aberdeen in 1747.

Gill was baptized on November 1, 1716, just before his first foray into preaching. In 1718 he served a church in Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, where he met his wife Elizabeth Negus (d. 1764). A year later the young couple moved to London where Gill took the pastorate at Goat Yard Chapel in Horselydown, Southwark (later Carter Lane Baptist Church), a church notable for a previous pastor, the early Baptist and Puritan Benjamin Keach (1640-1704). This congregation—though it would experience multiple name changes—continued in influence after Gill’s death with subsequent pastors like the hymnologist John Rippon (1751–1836), and Victorian preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892). It was at the church in Southwark that Gill was ordained to gospel ministry on March 22, 1720.

Gill was a controversial theologian in two senses. He engaged various theological debates in his day, and he is a man over whom theologians and historians continue to disagree. Gill’s writing career began early with the publication of *Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song* (1728), based on the 122 sermons he preached on the OT book between 1724 and 1727. It was around this time he also wrote two short tracts on baptism, and a work critiquing Deism called *The Prophecies of the Old Testament respecting the Messiah* (1728). Continuing his sortie against Enlightenment challenges to orthodoxy, Gill enjoined the Trinitarian dispute among Dissenters with *A Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1731). This anti-Sabellian work was based on some of his early Great Eastcheap Lectures, a series that began in 1729 and continued for about 27 years, and challenged the growing Unitarianism in nonconformist churches. His defense of the Trinity marks Gill as a major theologian of Late Orthodoxy. Richard A. Muller says that Gill “stands in the trajectory of the older Reformed orthodoxy … [and] remains one of the most significant representatives of so-called precritical exegesis in eighteenth-century Britain.”

Gill’s scholarly oeuvre also includes a four-volume study of the doctrines of grace called *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–1738). This work has been a source for dispute between later scholars over the question of whether Gill tended to hyper-Calvinism. Gill became a household name amongst Baptists with the publication of his extensive *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.
that began to appear serially in 1745, concluding in 1766. Gill’s knowledge of rabbinic literature is on full display in this work that makes him the first person to complete a verse-by-verse commentary on the whole of Scripture in English. After the commentary, Gill’s next most important book is his Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity (1770), a systematic theology that was published in two halves just before his death in 1771. It serves as a compendium to his overall thought. After his death, Gill’s sermons and tracts were published in two volumes in 1773 that include ordination and funeral sermons. His successor John Rippon says that if Gill’s works were all put into folio volumes, they would add up to over “ten thousand folio pages of divinity.” It is no wonder he was sometimes called “Dr. Voluminous.”

While Gill’s concerns were often polemical, the breadth of subjects dealt with in his commentaries and systematic theology means that his thoughts on a broad range of theological topics are of ready service to the church—Rippon says, “The Doctor considered not any subject superficially, or by halves. As deeply as human sagacity, enlightened by grace, could penetrate, he went to the bottom of everything he engaged in.” A study of Gill on almost any theme will bear fruit. In the following we will explore his teaching on Christian marriage, following the structure of his A Body of Divinity, comparing it with relevant selections from his commentaries, and examples from his own married life.

“Love and Reverence”: John Gill’s Systematic Treatment of Marriage

As the title indicates, Gill’s systematic theology is divided into two major parts: doctrinal and practical divinity. Of the two, Gill spends most of his energy on doctrinal issues, organizing theological loci under the doctrine of God. Thus, in Book One he treats subjects like the person of God, his attributes, triunity, and the deity of each person of the Godhead. In Book Two Gill turns to the acts of God, ad intra, and explains them through the lens of covenant, concluding with the work of Christ and the Spirit. Correspondingly, Book Three concerns the ad extra works, including creation, providence, the covenant of works, and the fall of man. In Book Four he explores salvation in treatments on the covenant of grace and the relationship between law and gospel. Book Five is a major study in orthodox Christology, looking at the
The person and work of Christ, with special attention given to his mediatorial offices. From this the discussion flows into Book Six and salvation, dealing with the atonement and the application of redemption. The final part of the doctrinal section not surprisingly ends with eschatology, including subjects like the soul, the resurrection, the millennium and final judgment.15

The second part, on practical divinity, is divided into four books which are all categorized under the worship of God. Book One is on the worship of God proper, with discussions of God as the object of worship, the fear of God, joy, spiritual mindedness, and communion with God. Book Two has to do with the practical forms of worship in the church, including the duties of members and officers, with the classic nonconformist delineation between pastors (elders) and deacons. Book Three is on the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, preaching, public prayer, and singing. Book Four has to do with private worship and other matters. It is in this section that household issues like marriage, childrearing, and master/servant relations are dealt with. As well, he touches on the duties of civil magistrates, good works, and the Ten Commandments.

Marriage, the “Conjugal Union”

Gill’s discussion of marriage is relatively short when compared to other parts of A Body of Divinity; this does not mean that it is treated lightly.16 It falls under the section on private worship, “by which I mean, not merely the private teachings and instructions of a master of a family … But what I mean by private worship, and intend to treat of, are the personal, relative, domestic, and civil duties, incumbent on particular persons, in their different relations to one another.” These are done with a “respect to God, under his authority, according to his will and command, and in obedience to it, and with a view to his glory.”17 He says that the respective duties of husbands and wives to one another are “summed up in these two general comprehensive ones: love on the one part, and reverence on the other, Eph. v. 33.”18 This is based on the “conjugal union” and “marriage relation” between the husband and wife. This union is between “male and female,” “one man” and “one woman,” based on the original creation of Genesis 1:27.

Gill then makes an incidental and curious statement about God’s providence respecting the male population. He argues that throughout history God has maintained an equal number of males and females on the earth;
the ratio typically being thirteen to twelve, or fourteen to thirteen with the “surplus on the side of the males” for the supply of war and for the seas.\(^\text{19}\)

While this appears to be a strained suggestion, recent sex ratio studies have shown demonstrable growths in the births of sons during war time. Based on a study of birth ratios during World War I and II, for instance, Marianne E. Berstein says, “In wartime, when opportunity for fertilization is decreased in a large segment of the population because husbands are away in the armed forces except for short leaves, proportionally more children will be born to the ‘more quickly fertile parents and, since ‘more quickly fertile’ parents apparently have more than the average number of sons in the overall sex ratio will be raised.”\(^\text{20}\) So, interestingly, Gill’s statement seems to conform to contemporary population studies.

The conjugal union makes the husband and wife “one flesh,” according to Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6; of the latter Gill says, “They were two before marriage, but now no more so.”\(^\text{21}\) The union is “indissoluble” except by death or by infidelity on the part of either party, whether by adultery or fornication (Romans 7:2; Matthew 5:32). In his comment on Romans 7:2 he includes desertion, based on 1 Corinthians 7:15, in what is permissible for divorce; both adultery and desertion are “equal to death.”\(^\text{22}\) Commenting on the Matthew text, Gill argues that “fornication” includes adultery, incest, or “any unlawful copulation.” He also says that Jesus’ permissibility clause for divorce is directly contrary to the Pharisaic understanding, based on Rabbi Hillel’s teaching, that “admitted of divorce, upon the most foolish and frivolous pretences whatever.”\(^\text{23}\)

Marriage is to be entered into not by compulsion, but “mutual consent” and with the consent of the parents or guardians of the couple: “[N]one are to be forced into it against their wills; no, not by their superiors; it must be their own voluntary act and deed.”\(^\text{24}\) Citing Hebrews 13:4, Gill says that marriage is an honorable state, and is so because God instituted it at creation. The marriage between Adam and Eve was constructed by God who “made the woman for an help-meet, and brought her to the man, proposed her to him … and she became his wife … it was the Lord’s act and deed.”\(^\text{25}\) Likewise, in his comment on Genesis 1:28 he says that marriage is an ordinance instituted in paradise, and is thus honorable.\(^\text{26}\) It is also honorable because “Christ honoured it by his presence, and at such a solemnity wrought his first miracle, and manifested forth the glory of his Deity” at the wedding.
feast of Cana in John 2:1, 2, 11.

Gill further discusses the relationship between marriage and Christ by arguing that the marriage in Eden typifies “the conjugal union of Christ and the church, Eph. v. 32.” Adam is a type of Christ while Eve is a type of the church: “Adam was first formed, and then Eve; Christ was before the church and, indeed before all things; Eve was formed from Adam . . . the church has her original from Christ, and her subsistence by him.” As the Lord brought Eve to Adam, so the church is brought to Christ “and given to him by his Father, to be his spouse and bride, who he liked, accepted of, and betrothed to himself; and her consent is obtained by the drawings and influences of his Father’s grace.” This prelapsarian prefiguring of Christ’s relationship with the church—argued in a fashion not surprising for Gill—is an illustration of what he calls “the supralapsarian scheme”: Christ had an interest in his church before she fell in Adam. Gill admits, however, that “this is no direct proof” of supralapsarianism, but only serves to illustrate it. Gill cites Ephesians 5:23 as a proof-text for his allegorical interpretation of Eve as a type of the church, though in a literal reading of this verse, Paul is not making a typological connection, but rather is discussing the metaphorical relation between wives and the church. Surprisingly, Gill does not refer to 1 Timothy 2:15, nor does he make this connection in his commentary on this passage nor on Genesis 2:22-24. It is worth noting that Gill’s interpretation of Eve as a type of the church was common in church history. For instance, Jerome (ca. 342–420) argued, based on this Paul’s words to the Ephesians, that, “Even all that is said of Adam and Eve is to be interpreted with reference to Christ and the church.” John Flood shows that this view was held by patristic and medieval theologians like Tertullian, Augustine, Bonaventure, or Nicholas of Lyra—Flood says “it is the spirit of Tertullian, which, to one degree or another, presides over the history of subsequent Genesis exegesis.”

Gill is on sure exegetical ground when he roots the original intent of marriage in creation. The command to “increase and multiply” remains in effect, but since the Fall marriage also serves to protect against sexual sin: it is “to prevent incontinence, and to avoid fornication.” In his discussion of Eve’s creation from Adam’s side in Genesis 2:22 Gill links the purpose of marriage to companionship and love—and also affirms the ontological equality of man and woman: “It is commonly observed, and pertinently enough, that the woman was not made from the superior part of man, that
she might not be thought to be above him, and have power over him; nor from any inferior part, as being below him, and to be trampled on by him; but out of his side, and from one of his ribs, that she might appear to be equal to him; and from a part near his heart, and under his arms, to show that she should be affectionately loved by him, and be always under his care and protection.”

“Glued Together”: The Duties of Husbands to their Wives

Continuing with Ephesians 5:23 in A Body of Divinity, Gill explains the duties of husbands and wives. Beginning with husbands, Paul tells them that they are to love their wives. Gill divides husbandly love into three parts: the nature of love; the manner of loving; and the reasons for love. A husband’s love for his wife, first of all, is superior to love he may have for “any other creature.” Thus, his love for her supersedes love for neighbour, parent, or child because “a man’s wife is himself, and loving her is loving himself, the other part of himself.” Elsewhere he says, “[T]hey are, as it were, glued together, and make but one.” A husband’s love should be rooted in delight; he should take pleasure in his wife’s “person, company, and conversation.” This is so because Christ’s delight is the church, “his Hephzibah,” a reference to the wife of King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 21:1, her name meaning “my delight is her.” His love is to be chaste and singular, which bars against polygamy: “a man should not have more wives than one, whereby his love would be divided or alienated, and hate the one and love the other, as is commonly the case.”

Gill reaffirms the stance of the Second London Confession of Faith (1689) against polygamy and distances the Baptist community from continental Anabaptists, the more extreme of who practiced it.

In a tender section, Gill writes that the husband is to express his love not only in words, but also “in deed and in truth” because facts “speak louder than words.” This is done by providing for her material comforts including food and clothing. He is also to protect her from harm and is to be a “covering to her, as Abraham was to Sarah.” His protection of her is to extend so that he would “risk his life in her defense and for her rescue.” The husband should do “every thing that may contribute to her pleasure, peace, comfort, and happiness,” he is to show deep care for “how he may please his wife.” Finally, he is to seek her spiritual welfare, especially her conversion if she is not a Christian, and her “spiritual peace, comfort, and edification.” When
it comes to a husband’s demeanor towards his wife Gill says, “be not bitter against them; not giving bitter language, threatening words, sour looks, and especially bitter blows; which is cruel, churlish, barbarous, and brutish, unbecoming the man and the christian [sic].”

Gill modeled this tenderness with his own wife. Early in his ministry, Elizabeth had experienced a miscarriage, and Gill devoted much time and energy to see that she was comforted. This became a cause for trouble in the church, as a number of the women believed that he was spoiling her. He maintained this care for Elizabeth throughout their marriage, especially as she suffered chronic ill-health. A story about Gill’s devotion to his wife is recounted in a letter to the editor of The Baptist Magazine. Written by Thomas Quinn, a friend of Gill’s niece, Jane Smith, it details aspects of the Gills’ home life. Smith, who was elderly at the time of Quinn’s writing, told of what her time living with the Gills in her younger years had been like. Smith had been brought into the Gill home to help care for her sick aunt. The Gills lived in an attached house next to their daughter and her husband, Gill’s publisher, George Keith (d. 1782). The shared walls of the two houses had been knocked down on the top floor so that the Gills’ daughter moved between them to help care for her mother. Smith described Gill has being “unwearied in his assiduity to alleviate [Elizabeth’s] distress.” He labored so diligently to help his wife that “injury was done to his health.” Quinn, summarizing Smith, described the Gill home as one of “harmony and mutual goodwill,” and described the Gill marriage as one of “domestic felicity.” In her final years, Elizabeth was an invalid, and Gill spent much of his time caring for her. She died on October 10, 1764, and on the following October 21 Gill preached her funeral sermon on Hebrews 11:16. At the end he was to give a short account of her life, “but it seems he was so very much overpowered at the end of the sermon, where the account might have been given, that he was not able to deliver it.”

In his comment on Ephesians 5:25 Gill says, “Many are the reasons why husbands should love their wives” and proceeds to list them; for instance, they are companions, covenant partners, and their own bodies. Likewise, in A Body of Divinity he lists the first reason as the “nearness” between spouses because they are one flesh; the wife is “himself” and she is to “be loved as his own body.” In turn, she is his “help-meet” and companion “in prosperity and adversity” and shares the joys and sorrows of life, which is the second
reason. The third is that she is the glory and honor of her husband who makes him respectable among his peers. The fourth reason Gill says is “[t]he strongest and most forcible argument of all.” This is the “love of Christ to his church; which is the pattern and exemplar of a man’s love to his wife, and most strongly enforces it.”

“Not Servile”: The Duties of Wives to their Husbands

Following still with Paul in Ephesians, Gill turns to the seven duties wives have toward their husbands, namely, reverence; submission; obedience; assistance; curtailed authority; and steadfastness. Reverence is to be both internal and external, meaning that though she may outwardly show her husband respect, a wife should also revere her husband in her heart because he is given to her by God. She should think highly of him and not despise him. Gill’s statements on submission and obedience, which are so controversial today, are surprisingly balanced and warm. He takes Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:33 about wives submitting in “everything” to mean “relating to family affairs” only; the husband does not have absolute control over his wife. More than this, a wife is not to go along with her husband if he does anything “contrary to the laws of God and Christ,” because God is to be obeyed over men. Subjection of the wife to her husband is “not a servile one”—she is not to be treated like a servant, and even less like a slave. Rather, the picture of the body following the head is a better analogy; the head governs, but it is to govern wisely, with tenderness and a “gentle manner” as Abraham did with Sarah. In his comment on Ephesians 5:22 Gill says that a wife is subject to her husband only, “not to any other man, nor to her children, nor to her servants, or any brought into her house.” Because of this, the wife should render her subjection more easily, willfully, and cheerfully.

The main marital function of a wife is to help her husband in the affairs of the family; the “original end of her creation.” She has rule over the home, including the servants (if there are any), and citing 1 Timothy 2:14, she manages “all domestic business with wisdom and prudence.” At this point it might have been useful for Gill to cite Proverbs 31 and the industrious wife who serves her family in business ventures. As Sharon James rightly observes, Gill’s treatment of wives omits any discussion of Proverbs 31. When he does interpret it, he falls to allegory: “[T]he whole chapter is seen only as a picture of the Church; and thus he loses sight of the reality of the ideal
presented: a powerful woman indeed!” Because the woman is to have no authority over her husband in family affairs, she is to “do nothing without his will and consent, and never contrary to it.” Rather, she is to go “with him wherever God in his providence, and his business in life call him,” just as Sarah did with Abraham in Egypt and Ruth did with Naomi.

In their marriage, Elizabeth Gill took similar charge of her home so that her husband could devote his time to ministry and writing. In the introductory biography to *Sermons and Tracts*, probably written by Rippon, Gill’s sentiments to Elizabeth are described: “The Doctor was always of opinion, that his marriage with this excellent person, was the principal thing for which God in his providence sent him to that place [the church where Gill met her]: and he ever considered his marriage to her, as one of the capital blessings of his life. For she proved affectionate, discreet, and careful: and, by her unremitting prudence, took off from his hands all domestic avocations, so that he could, with more leisure, and greater ease of mind, pursue his studies, and devote himself to his ministerial service.”

These duties to wives are then followed by six reasons—though Gill says these are only “some”—why she is to perform them. The first is the role given to women at creation. Following Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13, Gill argues that because Adam was formed first, and because Eve was made from Adam, she has a subordinate role, though in his comment on the creation of Eve in Genesis 1, she is fully his equal before God. Secondly, Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Fall and drew her husband into it, and so earned part of the curse for herself. Thirdly, the wife is subject to her husband because he is her head. James observes that for Gill, male headship “is not to be exercised for the good of the husband, but for the good of the wife; just as Christ, the head of the Church, sacrificed himself for her good.”

The value of male headship for the wife is seen in his comment on Ephesians 5:24: “[B]eing wholly dependent upon him, and entirely resigned to him, and receiving all from him; who is alone all her expectation of provision, protection, comfort, and happiness, wherefore she has respect to all his commands, and esteems all his precepts concerning all things to be right.” Thus she “yields a chearful [sic], voluntary, sincere, and hearty obedience to them; arising from a principle of love to him, and joined with honour, fear, and reverence of him.” In this connection, fourthly, women are the weaker vessel and are in need of protection, which is provided by their head.
Fifthly, womanly honor demands that she act in a creditable way. Decency is an ornament to women, “and the best ornament they can deck themselves with.” Gill’s sixth and final reason for the wife’s duty to her husband is “the chief argument of all”: it is the subjection of the church to Christ. In Ephesians 5:22–24, Paul lays out a typological relationship between husbands and wives, and Christ and the church. Because the wife typifies the church in her marriage, she is to model godly submission to her husband, who typifies Christ.

Gill sums up all that he has said about the mutual duties of husbands and wives to one another saying, “In short, both parties should consult each other’s pleasure, peace, comfort, and happiness, and especially the glory of God; that his word, ways, and worship, may not be reproached and evil spoken of, through any conduct of theirs.”

CONCLUSION

In all that John Gill says about marriage, it is clear from his concluding reasons for the duties of each the husband and the wife that the gospel is the bedrock of Christian marriage. Because marriage typifies Christ’s relationship with the church, Christians are to strive toward love, companionship, humility, and balance in their marriages. George M. Ella observes that Gill’s “doctrines of the atonement and redemption show clearly a suffering Husband dying vicariously for the Bride he loved, loves and always will love. Few have depicted this truth better than Gill.” The witness of the gospel is at stake. From his own marriage to Elizabeth, we see that Gill strove to picture this, for the good of his family and for the glory of God.

2. Rippon indicates that Gill did not pursue post-secondary education because of his Dissenting beliefs, England’s universities required conformity to the Church of England: “Dr. Gill was conscientiously a Dissenter, though he might in his youth have been sent to one of the universities, had he and his parents approved of it,” Rippon, Memoir, 135–136.


11. Rippon, Memoir, 111.


13. Rippon, Memoir, 137.

14. While there are a number of recent reprints, this essay quotes from the third volume and fourth book of John Gill, A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures New Edition (London: W. Winterbotham, 1796).


16. In terms of sources for the section on marriage, Gill only refers to Scripture, the only non-biblical reference is a footnote where he quotes the Stoic philosopher Seneca.


18. Ibid., 3:400.

19. Ibid.


22. Ibid., 3:461.

23. Ibid., p.62. David Instone-Brewer also argues that Jesus agreed more generally with the school of Shammai on appropriate grounds for divorce, against the school of Hillel. David Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

25. Ibid.
28. In his comment on Gen 2:21 Gill notes Adam’s surprise at awakening to meet Eve for the first time: Adam was put to sleep so “that he might be the more surprised at the sight of her, just awaking out of sleep, to see so lovely an object, so much like himself, and made out of himself, and in so short a time, as whilst he was taking a comfortable nap.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1:19.
30. Ibid., 3:401.
38. Ibid.
39. John Witte remarks that the Anabaptists at Münster “thought polygamy was a spiritual duty for all members of the community to channel their natural passions toward the production of more saints in emulation of the Old Testament patriarchs and in anticipation of the return of the Lord.” John Witte Jr., *The Western Case for Monogamy Over Polygamy*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 239
41. Ibid., 3:402.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 3:403.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
John Gill and Islam: A Baptist Perspective from the Long Eighteenth Century

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John Gill’s peers regarded him as an eminent theologian. Gill was a long-tenured Particular Baptist pastor, prolific author, able defender, and insightful observer of religion. As the articles in this journal suggest, Gill’s writings still pique scholarly curiosity. Michael Haykin’s introductory article presents the important contours to Gill’s life and helps explain his influence.

This present article began as a question, “How did John Gill interpret Islam?” This question prompted others: how did Gill treat Islam in his many writings? What were the sources that influenced his thought on Islam? How did Gill’s perspective compare with other Baptist perspectives? Answering these questions in full would surely require a monograph, but they each have a role to play in this analysis.

This article examines Gill’s various writings to elucidate his perspective

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on Islam for a contemporary audience. Gill considered Qur’ānic allusions to biblical texts alongside rabbinic interpretations, though with a skeptical eye. Islam occupied an especially important place in Gill’s eschatology: he interpreted Islam as the embodiment of one strand of biblical prophecy, naming it the “eastern antichrist” or “Gog and Magog” that opposed the kingdom of Christ on earth, obstructed the mass conversion of the Jewish people, and awaited God’s decisive judgment. Christian rulers were destined to destroy Muslim kingdoms. Understanding the place of Islam in Gill’s thought addresses a lacuna in the literature and opens doors for continuing reflection in Reformed orthodox studies. ¹

Protestant Perspectives on Islam

Protestant theologians reflected on Islam from the sixteenth century forward. Christian engagement with Islam started in the seventh century and European engagement with Islamic thought began in the eleventh century and developed subsequently through mission and crusade.² By the late fourteenth century, the powerful Ottoman Empire included the Balkans and by the mid-fifteenth century Muslim armies had captured Constantinople and even attempted to take Rome. As the Protestant Reformation shook the Western church in the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, Christians in central Europe were shaken by losses in Hungary and conflict with Islam seemed ever-present.³ Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) established a Protestant theological trajectory against Islam through sermons, tracts, and pamphlets, linking Turks with Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 and the “little horn” of Daniel 7.⁴

More directly in line with the theology Gill would espouse, Ulrich Zwingli (d. 1531) and his successor, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), were the first generation of Zurich reformers. Bullinger wrote Derr Türg against Islam in 1567. OT Professor and humanist Theodor Bibliander (1504–1564) translated a Latin edition of the Qur’ān in 1543, supported by Bullinger and Luther, with an apologetic purpose to expose what he believed to be its moral and theological faults.⁵ Genevan Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) believed Muslims to be idolaters and Antichrist, though for different reasons than Luther.⁶

Protestants continued to address Islamic theology during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Representatively, Lutherans, Johann Dannhauer
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(1602–1666) interpreted biblical passages with regard to Islam and Friedrich Calixt (1622–1701) wrote *De Religione Muhammedana*. Reformed Orthodox theologians in the generations after Calvin also reflected on the challenge of Islam. Johann Hottinger’s (1620–1667) nine-volume *Historiae Ecclesiastica* included consideration of the emergence and spread of Islam. Christoph Wittich (1625–1687) and Petrus Van Mastricht (1630–1706) penned theologies defending Christian doctrines of Scripture and the nature of Christ from heterodoxy, including Islamic thought. Both Mastricht and Wittich cited the earlier work of Johannes Hornbeeck on Islamic teaching. Gill read Hottinger, Wittich, Mastricht, Hornbeeck, and others avidly. Protestant engagement with Islam during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries was decidedly polemical and it is within this context that John Gill’s reflections on Islam stand.

John Gill was a Particular Baptist and theologian in the Reformed orthodox or Reformed scholastic tradition, a pathway of thought that began in the mid-sixteenth century and flourished until the late eighteenth century. Often associated particularly with Calvin, the tradition is broader, encompassing multiple generations of theologians from across the Continent. The adjective “scholastic” refers to the rigorous academic method of investigation common to differing extents between these theologians and earlier in the universities of the middle ages. A common three-fold periodization divides the tradition into “early” (ca. 1560–1620), “high” (1620–1700), and “late” (ca. 1700–1790). Willem Van Asselt reckons John Gill’s significance in late scholasticism, describing him as “one of the most important representatives of Reformed scholasticism in the eighteenth century.” Remembering that Gill was an autodidact reinforces the place of books in his theological formation. Gill read widely in the orthodox Reformed tradition, particularly in authors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and his reading helped shape his views on Islam.

**Islam in Gill’s Reading**

Though not limited to sources he cited, Gill’s numerous footnotes indicate specific influences. One source was Scottish exile John Forbes’ (d. 1648) *Instructiones Historico Theologicae*. Forbes’ well-regarded work includes a lengthy polemical chapter covering various “impietatis [doctrinae]”
Muhammedané,” including teachings on various doctrines along with a survey of the spread of Islam after Mohammed.¹⁴ Heinrich Alting’s (1583–1644) Theologica Historica also addressed Islamic arguments against the Trinity.¹⁵ In Italian refugee and OT Professor Hieronymus (Jerome) Zanchi (1516–1590), Gill found the hypothetical situation that a Turk, converted to Christianity by reading the NT, might baptize subsequent believers if no church existed nearby.¹⁶ Gill also read compendia of Islamic theology and history written by Orientalists such as Oxford Professor Edward Pococke (1604–1691)¹⁷ and Dutch polymath Adrian Reland (1676–1718) on Islamic theology of resurrection.¹⁸

John Gill personally owned a copy of an Arabic Qur’ān printed by Abraham Hinckelmann.¹⁹ During Gill’s lifetime, George Sale (d. 1736) translated the first English Qur’ān, and Gill also used this edition.²⁰ Gill cited the Qur’ān directly very few times, though, leaving little evidence of how widely he had read its text. These sources, though not exhaustive, show the place of orthodox writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on Gill’s perspectives on Islam, perspectives that his own works display.

Islam in Gill’s Writings

References to Islam or Islamic thought occur infrequently in Gill’s writings and always as examples of theological error or eschatological judgment. In keeping with his day, Gill almost always used the designations “Mahometans,” “Turks,” and “Saracens” when referring to Muslims. Occasionally he wrote of “Arabs,” usually when referring to speakers of the Arabic language. He described “Mahomet” (Mohammed) as a “vile imposter,” challenging Mohammed’s self-description as a prophet in the line of Moses and Jesus.²¹ Gill’s terminology had been common among Protestants for two centuries and emphasizes a view of Muslim-as-other, outsiders bent on conquest; terms common in Europe and among Protestants and medieval Christians for centuries.

Broadly speaking, Gill’s writings fall into the categories of (1) biblical commentaries, (2) divinity, which may be subdivided into (a) doctrinal, (b) polemical, (c) creedal, and (d) practical, (3) sermons, and (4) linguistics. Others have examined his considerable literary output.²² The following analysis of Islam in Gill’s writings follow this general categorization.

John Gill’s massive, multi-volume Exposition of both the OT and NT
(1746–48) contains very few references to Islam, but those that do appear seem to reveal a limited engagement with the Qur’ān. Gill referenced Hincklemann’s Arabic edition only occasionally in his Exposition of the Old Testament, for comparing the Septuagint Greek term for “sheep” with the Arabic term in Job 1:3 and interpreting the astrological meaning of mazzaroth in Job 38:32. In these instances, Gill only notes the prefatory apparatus and not the Arabic text proper, though Gill enjoyed a clear command of Oriental languages and offered thousands of references to Arabic text of the OT and NT in his Expositions. In Gill’s Exposition of the New Testament, commenting upon Luke 1:20 where Zacharias encounters an angel and is stricken mute until his son is born, Gill compared the Qur’ānic version (Qur’ān 3.41) in which the angel limits Zacharias’ speech for three days. Gill observed that in a subsequent vision (Qur’ān 19.10), the angel proscribes Zacharias’ speech for three nights. Gill considered the Qur’ānic texts to be in error. The Qur’ān describes a partition separating the “blessed and the damned,” a concept Gill suggests came from rabbinic literature, insisting that God’s decree, not a visible partition, is a better description of the “great gulf” of Luke 16:26. Sometimes Gill noted Qur’ānic texts without elaboration, such as his exegesis of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:24), noting “Mahomet has a passage that is somewhat like to this text.” Commenting on James 2:23, Gill simply observed that “Mahomet says himself, ‘God took Abraham for his friend.’” In his Exposition of the New Testament, Gill makes around fifty references to Mohammed, split between exegetical comparisons and simple historical references to Muslim conquest of places mentioned in the Bible. Where Gill cites the Qur’ān, it is from George Sale’s 1734 English translation.

Gill’s Dissertation Concerning the Hebrew Language contains linguistic reflections that reveal Gill’s rejection of Muslim tradition. Considering claims as to the antiquity of various languages, Gill observes:

The Arabs pretend, that their language was spoken by Adam before his fall, and then changed into Syriac, and was restored upon his repentance, but again degenerated, and was in danger of being lost, but was preserved by the elder Jorham, who escaped with Noah in the ark, and propagated it among his posterity.

Gill’s theological writings include a congregational Declaration of Faith and
Practice, practical discourses on topics like prayer, Psalm singing, more detailed polemical writings on matters such as Justification, Perseverance, Grace, and the Trinity, and his expansive and systematic Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity (1769–70). Gill’s systematic and polemical works contain most of his reflections on Islam, particularly in relation to Scripture, Trinity, Christology, and Eschatology.

Gill’s presentation of the doctrine of Scripture comes early in his Body of Doctrinal Divinity, situated between discussion of God’s being and names. Scripture contains “nothing ... unworthy of God” and are properly called “the word of truth.” Gill contrasted the Bible with the Qur’an: “There is nothing impious or impure, absurd or ridiculous in [the Scriptures]; as in the Al-koran of Mahomet; which is stuffed with impurities and impieties, as well as with things foolish and absurd.”

In the eighteenth century, Trinitarian theology faced renewed challenges from secularizing influences of the Enlightenment, put forward by some in the Church of England and by some dissenters. Robert Oliver has aptly described this issue as “the most serious challenge to Dissent in the first half of the eighteenth century.” Argued among Protestants, these doctrinal debates cut to the heart of catholic Christianity and saw the resurgence of theological positions such as Sabellianism and Arianism, positions deemed deficient in the church’s ancient past.

Trinitarian orthodoxy often involved concomitant opposition to classic Christology. One particularly important aspect of Christology and Trinitarianism concerned the eternal generation of the Son, to teaching that Jesus exists eternally as Son in relation to the Father, a key doctrine for showing distinctions within the Persons of the Godhead. In 1768, Gill wrote A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ in which he traced the doctrine from the first century to his own day, listing and summarizing the arguments of those who had defended and opposed the doctrine. Here Gill included “Mahomet and his followers” alongside Sabellians, Arians, and Socinians as groups that opposed the doctrine. According to Gill, Socianism, a sixteen-century European anti-Trinitarian movement, followed an Islamic argument in denying Jesus’ eternal sonship by asking “Who is [God’s] wife?” Conceptually, linking Socianism with Islam and Islam with third and fourth-century heresies helped to designate Islam as linked to heterodox Christianity than a wholly different religion. This context helps
scholars interpret Gill’s statement in his *Exposition of the New Testament* that “the eastern churches were perverted and corrupted by Mahomet, and drawn off to his religion.” Gill was not unique among Reformed scholastic writers in linking Islamic objections to the deity of Christ alongside earlier Christian heresies. Alting took a similar approach, mentioning Sabellians, Samosatenians, Photinians, and Arians along with Muslims as those who “deny that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one God, coessential, and coequal.” Heinrich Bullinger had followed this line of thought in his mid-sixteenth century work an influence that Peter Stephens attributes to John of Damascus (d. 750). The Damascene regarded Islam as Christian heresy.

Elsewhere in this dissertation, Gill named Muhammed “as bitter an enemy to the true, proper and eternal Sonship of Christ, as ever was,” based on the supposition that “God did not need a Son, because if he had a Son, they might not agree, and so the government of the world be disturbed.” Here, Gill cited Alting’s assessment and pointed readers to consult Forbes’ *Historico Theologicae*. Both Alting and Forbes cite variations of this argument.

John Gill’s eschatology contains the clearest expression of his views on Islam. Within Gill’s reading of John’s Apocalypse, the rise of Islam occurs under the fifth trumpet and its subsequent spread under the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:1, 13). For Gill, the trumpet judgments of Revelation were located historically in the Christian Roman Empire, post-Constantine. As Crawford Gribben has shown, Gill’s eschatology was complex, innovative, and decidedly millennialist. For Gill, Jesus reigned over the created world through providential government and he ruled spiritually as the unique mediator of the New Covenant, but Gill also anticipated a future manifestation of Jesus’ rule: “Christ will have a special, peculiar, glorious, and visible kingdom, in which he will reign personally on earth.” This was the millennial reign of Christ, and as the millennium began, Jesus would conquer all enemies: paganism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam.

During the millennium, Satan would be bound and unable to harass God’s people. For Gill, looking back on the church’s history, it was foolish to think that the Ancient Church experienced the fruit of such a binding, marked as the first five centuries were by persecution, even after the reign of Constantine in the fourth century. The rise of Islam several hundred years later in the also argued against the inauguration of Christ’s millennial reign:
Also much about the same time, that vile impostor Mahomet, under the instigation of the devil arose; when the bottomless pit was opened, and then Satan surely could not lie bound in it; out of which came the smoke of the absurd Alkoran, which darkened the sun and moon, the light of [a] great part of the world; and from whence came his locusts, the Saracens, which, for some centuries, greatly afflicted the Christian empire, whose king was called Abaddon and Apollyon, Rev. 9:11; as did the Turks after them, whose empire was set up in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and continued to distress Europe till the latter end of the last. And now, so long as Mahometanism prevails over so large a part of the world as it does, the thousand years reign, and the binding of Satan, cannot be expected.48

Several aspects of Gill’s reading of Revelation 9 bear elaboration. Gill attributed Mohammed’s teaching to satanic influence rather than prophetic inspiration. Explaining the apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation 9, Gill linked the sun-blotting smoke of the great pit (9:2) with the Qur’ān, implying that its teaching functioned to blind a great part of the world to the true light of Scripture and the theological clarity of the gospel. He associated the locusts of 9:3 with the “Saracens,” the popular designation from the ninth century on for Muslims, regardless of ethnicity.49 Though written in 1769, Gill had held this view since at least the early 1750s.

Preaching in 1750 from Isaiah 21:11–12, Gill anticipated a still-future mass conversion of Jews to Christianity. He believed that the time of Constantine in the fourth century was the “meridian” of gospel light among gentiles but that “darkness prevailed” through Mohammed “who having the key of the bottomless pit (Rev 9:1), opened it, and let out the smoke of his false doctrine, contained in his Alkoran, by which the sun and the air were darkened; and also his locusts the Saracens, which ran over the East, and spread his doctrine and worship everywhere.”50 Gill restated this position in his commentary upon Revelation 9:2.51

Gill’s sermons are a good reminder that his primary ministry was that of preacher. John Gill enjoyed a long-tenured pastoral ministry in London (1719–1771), the mid-week Great Eastcheap lectures (1729–1756), not to mention many occasional preaching opportunities that ordinations and funerals for other pastors offered, afforded him thousands of preaching occasions over decades. Gill’s published sermons amount to several dozen and
can hardly represent the volume of his ministry. Islam appears in several of Gill’s published sermons. He preached these sermons during his Wednesday evening expositions, interestingly, both in late December in the early 1750s. His sermon on Isaiah 21 has been described above.

With regard to the destruction of antichrist through divine judgment, Gill saw the seven vials of God’s wrath as the execution of this judgement. Gill took the Western antichrist to be the Roman Catholic Church, or the Pope and the Eastern antichrist to be the Turk or Muslims (57). Another sermon, preached from Acts 26:8 on the resurrection, dismissed the Muslim notion of resurrection including angels and animals: “First, I shall enquire who they are which shall be raised from the dead. I shall not take notice of the Mahometan notion, that angels and brutes shall rise, since the former die not, and therefore cannot be said to be raised from the dead; and the spirit of the latter goeth downward to the earth, never to return more.”

**Conclusion**

This article sought to open up an eighteenth century Baptist perspective on Islam and has introduced the ways in which the Particular Baptist theologian John Gill pursued this engagement. Gill interpreted Islam as a Christian heresy akin to Arianism or Sabbelianism because of its denial of core Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the exclusivity of Christ as mediator, and the idea that the Qur’an contained genuine revelation on par with the Bible. His perspective on Islam-as-heresy was part of a Reformation and medieval tradition. He placed Islam alongside Roman Catholic teaching as the two most powerful enemies of the true church on earth, enemies to be destroyed at the end of the age. In this identification, he was consistent with Bullinger and with Luther, though their immediate influence on Gill’s though is less evident than later Continental writers. Gill’s understanding of Islam was generally mediated through the theological writings of earlier generations of Reformed orthodox scholarship and, to a lesser extent, the result of his own study of the Islamic texts that he had available to him. His engagement directly with the Qur’an, primarily via George Sale’s English translation, focused on texts with biblical parallels and does not seem to be an attempt to understand the text on its own terms. Gill’s purpose was to defend Christianity from its enemies and he was certain that Islam was a significant opponent, one that awaited military defeat by godly rulers of the
earth. Gill never seems to suggest that Christians might engage Muslims by preaching the gospel of Christ crucified, buried, resurrected, ascended, and returning. It will be up to other readers to reach their own conclusions on whether Gill’s silence on this matter was simply in keeping with his views on election and predestination and thus part of his general reticence toward the free-offer of the gospel, an idea whose time had not yet come, cultural or religious bigotry, or something else.\footnote{Gill does represent a turning point in Particular Baptist engagement with Islam. English Baptists in the generation that followed Gill took a different approach to Islam. Through the Baptist Missionary Society, William Carey (1761–1834), William Ward (1769–1823), and to a lesser extent Joshua Marshman (1768–1837), ministered directly to Bengali Muslims in Serampore, India.\footnote{English Particular Baptist pastors and theologians like Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), and Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) exhibited eagerness to preach the gospel to the “heathen,” including Muslims.}}

1. I wish to thank Jay Collier and Jonathan Swan for their help in locating some of the sources used in this article.
10. Johannes Hornbeeck, Summa Controversiarum Religionis (Utrecht: 1658). Hornbeeck was Professor of Theology and Utrecht (1644–54) and Leiden (1654–1666). Book 3 of the Contrroversiarum deals extensively with Islam.
11. Willem J. Van Asselt, Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism (trans. Albert Gootjes; Grand Rapids, MI:

13. Ioannis Forbesii, *Instructiones Historico Theologicæ* (Amsterdam: 1645). John Forbes was Professor of Divinity at King's College, University of Aberdeen from 1620–39 before becoming a religious exile in Amsterdam in the 1640s.


26. Ibid., ch. 19, pg. 249.


28. Ibid., 1:664. Here Gill cites *Koran*, trans. Sale, Ch. 7, pg. 120.


30. Ibid., 3:508. Gill cites "Koran c. 4," which is a reference to Ch. 4, pg. 76 of Sale's edition.

31. For these place references, see, for example, ibid., 3:36, 3:255, and 3:258.


34. Ibid., 1:19–20.


37. Ibid., 2:561. Though Gill does not quote Forbes at this place, Forbes did express a similar argument. See the second point of note 44 below.

39. Alting, *Theologia Historica*, 235, noted that these groups all “negat Patrem, Filium, & Spiritum Sanctum esse unum Deum, coessentiale, coæqualen.”


44. Forbes, *Historico Theologicæ*, 189–90 actually represents four arguments: first, “Non est nisi unus Deus, qui socium & participem non habet Deum alium;” Second, “Deus non est puellarum amator, non habet mulieres; ergo non genuit filium;” Third, “Si Deus haberet filium, periculum esset dissidii inter eos, ne alter in alterum insurgeret;” and Fourth “Quartum argumentum adfert Muhammaed a confictis quibusdam revelationibus, quasi divinis; fingit enim postquam in caelum Christus ascendisset, Deus hoc Christo objecesse, quod seipsum Deum esse & ut Deum adorandum esse persuasisset hominibus: & Christum Deo respondeisse, hoc se nequaquam docuisse.”


54. On Gill and the free-offer, see Oliver, “John Gill,” in *Life and Thought*, 17.

John Gill

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Introduction

The reality of death, especially for a loved one, demands the intersection of theology and pastoral care in the life of the church. John Gill (1697-1771), the renowned English Baptist, was no stranger to preaching funeral sermons or to their pastoral significance. This was especially true of Gill’s funeral sermon, given on June 4, 1738, for his teenage daughter, Elizabeth (March 14, 1725/26–May 30, 1738), which was understandably of much personal import: “You must permit me, this afternoon, to preach rather to myself and family than to you.”1 His sermon was on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus,
will God bring with him.” From this passage, Gill shared with believers the hope that Christian union with Christ was a union that was uninterrupted by even death. He sought to establish this thesis by presenting a biblical understanding of death regarding the human body and soul, a Christocentric hope for all true disciples, and how these theological truths should shape human sorrow and grief when loved ones die.

**To be Asleep in Christ**

“The representation the Apostle gives of the state and condition of the pious dead, that they are asleep; and asleep in Jesus.” Gill focuses on the metaphor of sleep as a vehicle for conveying a biblical understanding of human death in the passage. He notes its use in a variety of cultural contexts (among the “Hebrews, Chaldeans, and Syrians”) and, more importantly, its regular use throughout the Scriptures. Therefore, Paul’s use is not an innovation in a geographical or biblical sense. Yet, the seeming ubiquity of the metaphor does not detract from the significance of how it is used in the Scriptures and what the Scriptures have to say about death as it relates to the human body and soul. Gill’s description of how this metaphor is used in Scripture includes a discussion of how the human body relates to the soul upon death, what sleep implies and does not imply about death, which aspect of human nature sleep describes upon human death, and death as a temporary state.

Gill finds sleep to be an apt metaphor of death for multiple reasons. First, sleep and death both similarly render the person senseless. Second, just as all people require sleep, the expectation of death is universally shared. Death as the curse of original sin for all humanity is in mind here. Yet, while Gill recognizes that death applies to all of humanity, both believers and unbelievers, his interpretation of how sleep is analogous to death is different for believers and unbelievers. He cites Daniel 12:2 (“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”), which describes death for both “good and bad” as sleep and distinguishes what each party will awaken to. The sleep that Christians experience is different, more fitting to the metaphor, the greater focus in Scripture.

Third, how Christians sleep differently from unbelievers begins with an emphasis on how sleep is rest. Just as the sleeping person is resting, “the grave is also a resting place for the saints.” What are the Christian dead resting
from? They find rest from the effects of sin in the world and within themselves. Examples of the former could be injustice, oppression, violence, and offences, whereas the latter might include personal ailments and struggles (e.g., physical, emotional). Who are the Christian dead are resting in? “The pious dead are not only asleep, but asleep in Jesus.”

Gill also addresses how Christian sleep defies the seeming finality of death, examining the immortality of the soul, the state of the human body and soul in the intermediate state, and how Christian death is only temporary. He defends ongoing human existence after death: “We may be assured that they are, that they are in being, that they do exist; for, though they are gone from us, they are somewhere else. We are not to consider them as non-entities, as annihilated, as reduced to nothing, because they are departed from us.” This is what Scripture means when it describes the dead as not being in passages such as Jeremiah 31:15 (they were not) and Genesis 5:24 (he was not). Rather than suggesting a type of annihilation, the biblical text is merely describing their absence on earth. The physical body dies, is buried, and breaks down, but “there’s a wide difference between returning to the dust and being reduced to nothing.”

Gill’s main rationale for disregarding an annihilation of the physical body is resurrection of the body at Jesus Christ’s second coming. The resurrected body is not created from nothing but truly resurrects the old body, even from dust, into “a better frame” that is an “everlasting habitation.” Therefore, in a sense, even the physical body continues to exist beyond death.

Unlike the body, the human soul, which is separated from the body at death, does not die but continues in active existence. Unlike the body, which remains in the earth, the soul of the believer is “lodged in the embraces of Christ, and continue with him in the heavenly paradise, till the last trumpet sounds, and the dead arise.” Therefore, the body experiences sleep, as it is temporarily senseless in the ground, while the Christian’s soul resides with Christ. Regarding the soul’s state after death, Gill takes issue with any notion of “soul sleep,” or that the soul does not have continued active existence when parted from the body. First, the immaterial soul neither dies nor sleeps. Gill holds that actual sleep only characterizes material bodies. Even in life, one is given glimpses of the soul’s continual consciousness in dreams while the person sleeps. Not only is the soul not senseless in the intermediate state, but it becomes “more active in spiritual services” when separated from
the body, which is “often an hindrance to it in the present state of things.”

Rather than implying a gnostic diminishing of the material body’s worth, Gill is taking into account the corruption of original sin in “the present state” of living Christians. He also likens the intermediate state of the Christian’s soul to angels who give worship to the Lord without ceasing. The most compelling evidence is argued directly from Scripture, namely in the tension between the apostle Paul’s desire to live in fruitful labor for Christ and to be in Christ’s presence upon death: “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil 1:23). To be “with Christ” is not a joining into a senseless state. Gill also contends that a transition from active labor for Christ in this present life into a senseless state of soul sleep would not be “far better,” as Paul declares in the biblical text. In this case, the use of sleep to signify death requires qualification, because sleep can only describe the state of the believer’s body and not his or her soul.

A final way that sleep is analogous to death is that both are temporary, the basis for this being the resurrection of the body at Jesus Christ’s second coming. “[S]uch as are asleep, they don’t sleep always, they awake again out of sleep: So they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Particularly those that sleep in Jesus, when he shall call unto them, they shall hear his voice, ... they shall then rise immediately with the utmost pleasure, in perfect conformity to the image of Christ.” Gill’s treatment of the resurrection does not attempt to be comprehensive, but he disagrees with a particular translation of 1 Thessalonians 3:14 (“them also which sleep through Jesus”) chosen by some, such as Henry Hammond (1605–1650), indicating that this passage only included those who had been martyred on behalf of the Gospel instead of all Christians. If this is the case, only Christians who have been martyred would join in this “first resurrection” from 1 Thessalonians 4:16, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” In contrast, Gill argues for the expression in 3:14 to be “them also which sleep in Jesus,” which would include all who have died in Christ, including Christian martyrs and Christians who died peacefully.

The theological significance for Gill is made evident: to be asleep in Christ or to live in Christ means no less than to be united with Christ, and it is this union with Christ that is the basis for the Christocentric hope that all true disciples have, even in death.
**Christocentric Hope for all True Disciples**

Immortality of the soul or mere resurrection of the body are not the sufficient to instill the kind of hope that Christians should have when faced with the inevitability of death. It is union with Christ that Christian hope is built upon. Gill’s treatment of this begins with addressing union as God’s work done in love. He distinguishes between a secret union with Christ and an open union with Christ, secret union being eternal election (“chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,” Eph. 1:4) and open union referring to conversion or the manifestation of one’s secret union.\(^{20}\) The former is accomplished outside of time, while the latter appears within time, and both are accomplished by God. Gill writes, “Those whom Christ betroths to himself, takes into a near conjugal union and relation to himself, he betroths forever.”\(^{21}\) People live in time and experience birth, conversion, and death at certain points in time, but the elect are united with Christ outside of time, because of God’s love for them: “Love is the bond of this union.”\(^{22}\)

Union with Christ as a loving work of God is especially significant in establishing the permanence of a union that cannot be defeated by death, which is the occasion of this sermon. Appealing to the binding power of God’s love for his people described in Romans 8:35–39, Gill argues that God’s love prevails even against death. “Now this union is not dissolved by death; such as are once in Christ, are always so; they that are in him while living, are in him when they die; and will be found in him in the resurrection morn, and day of judgment.”\(^{23}\) The body is separated from the body when one dies, with the body in a senseless state and the soul consciously in Christ’s presence. While the union between body and soul are broken at death, death cannot break the union between the Christian, both body and soul, and Christ.

When describing the body’s continued union with Christ, Gill points to how the Christian’s body, as well as the soul, are purchased by Christ’s blood, are incorporated as members of Christ’s body (the Church), and are “the temples of the Holy Ghost.”\(^{24}\) These redemptive realities exist for the living and the dead, for both the body and the soul. Union with Christ is not dependent upon the activity of the person’s body, but upon Christ’s “care, and guardianship” over it.\(^{25}\) As such, “Christ won’t lose his purchase nor any part of his fulness; nor will the Spirit of God lose his dwelling place.”\(^{26}\) This assurance of being kept by God is why the Christian dead are truly at
rest. This clearly opposes any inclination toward a gnostic view of human nature in which the material body is diminished in worth. Gill also maintains a holistic sense of humanity as the *imago dei*, with both the body and soul having worth and being redeemed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Though the state of the person changes from life to death to resurrection, there is constancy in one’s union with Christ. This is the reassurance Gill seeks to give to both himself and others. If one is in Christ, “nothing is more certain than this, that to whom God gives grace he also gives glory.”

Having already noted Gill’s rejection of soul sleep, and his conviction of the Christian soul’s increase in “spiritual services” in the intermediate state, the soul’s position is bound to one’s union with Christ. Their “souls are in a state of happiness,” for they are with the souls of other believers, are surrounded by angels, and most importantly, “they are in the presence of, and enjoy uninterrupted communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Just as the resting body of the believer is assured continued union with Christ, the Christian’s soul is also assured to be in the presence of the triune God. Again, if one is in Christ, “nothing is more certain than this, that to whom God gives grace he also gives glory.” Therefore, there is no such thing as salvation in Christ that will only be partially fulfilled, which leads to Gill’s treatment of the resurrection.

The certainty of the resurrection is based upon Jesus Christ’s resurrection and the believer’s union with Christ. Working from Romans 11:15–16, Gill emphasizes the effect Christ has on those who are united with him. Jesus is the “first fruits” and “root” who is holy and who makes whoever is part of him holy, because they are united with Christ. Gill puts the accomplishing of this transforming work completely upon Christ, who “represents, sanctifies, and endures” those who are united with him. Thus, because Christ resurrected from the dead, those who are in Christ will also resurrect from the dead. Pointing to Revelation 20:6, union with Christ even shapes when one is resurrected when Christ returns. It is true that both believers and unbelievers will be resurrected, but Gill’s premillennial views surface in seeing the resurrection of the just preceding the resurrection of the unjust by one thousand years. Union with Christ also determines what the dead are resurrected to. For example, Gill cites Psalm 49:14 with clear references to 1 Corinthians 6:2 and Revelation 2:26: “the righteous one, who are found in
Christ, and his righteousness, shall have the dominion over the morning,” \(^{34}\) God’s salvific work is assured to be completed in Christ’s second coming and the resurrection of the body. This assurance naturally leads Gill to conclude that all Christians, the living and the dead, will be joined together at Christ’s return.

**Grieving with Hope**

In seeking to convey a biblical understanding of death regarding the human body and soul and a Christocentric hope for all true disciples throughout his funeral sermon, Gill naturally emphasized how these theological truths should shape the sorrow and grief he and others were experiencing at the loss of his daughter. More specifically, he wanted to show how these theological truths could and should comfort believers in the midst of mourning the dead. First, Gill bases hope on our union with Christ. Second, he explains how Christians can possibly find assurance in the dead’s standing before God. Third, it is human to grieve. Finally, Christian grief must not conform to worldly grief.

“[Death] is the wages of sin,” and, therefore, death is a universally shared reality, “yet to them that die in the Lord it is a blessing; the curse is removed from their death, the sting is taken out of it by Christ; so he gives his beloved sheep in a different manner from the rest of men.” \(^{35}\) In Christ, Christians experience death differently, just as they experience life, beforehand, and resurrection, afterward, differently. Though death seems final, Christians should be hopeful because their union with Christ is not threatened by anything including death. Another reason union with Christ gives Christians a basis for hope even in death is because the dead are not suffering but are at rest. “Such a view of the state of the dead serves to render death very easy and familiar to us, and to take off the horror, and those frightful apprehensions which are often entertained concerning it.” \(^{36}\) Their sleep is rest, and their souls are in “the embraces of Christ, and continue with him in the heavenly paradise,” in undiminished communion with the Lord. \(^{37}\) Finally, union with Christ leads to certainty in the resurrection of the body just as Jesus Christ was resurrected. The knowledge that death is temporary and that there is a reunion to look forward to should bring extra comfort for those who miss the dead. “Our friends are gone but a little before us; we are hastening after
them as fast as the wings of time can carry us.”

While one might have assurance in one’s own union with Christ, how can one have any confidence in another’s union with Christ? How can one know if a loved one now sleeps in Christ? Gill response is, “Did they live in Christ?” The answer to this question is pivotal in the kind of comfort that can be afforded of those the dead had left behind. Paul’s words in Romans 14:7–8 are instructive, according to Gill, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” The life lived in Christ has continuity from life to death. As such, conversion (i.e. open election) and its fruit bring a sense of assurance in a person’s union with Christ to fellow believers. This life lived for Christ also bring assurance when death comes, because the Christian life has continuity from life to death through union with Christ. It was common to share details of the dead’s life to assuage the fears and sorrows of grieving loved ones. One example of the pastoral significance of this effort is found in Gill’s funeral sermon for Benjamin Seward in 1753. Even though Gill was merely acquainted with him, he strived to highlight reasons to hope for his union with Christ: “I am not so well qualified to give him his true portrait, as a gentleman and a Christian; however, what from my own observation, and the information of others, I’ll give you the best account of him I can.” While Gill’s grief kept him from including details of Elizabeth’s life, an account of her life was added to the published sermon.

Alongside the previous points establishing hope and assurance, Gill reassures that grief and sorrow are not only naturally human responses to losing loved ones, but that there is also biblical warrant for such grief. He warns against any notion that would deny human grief, “establish a stoical apathy, a stupid indolence, and brutal insensitivity” as unbiblical. He proceeds to pull examples of grief from Scripture that appear to stand as models of grief. Such examples include when Abraham’s mourning and weeping after Sarah died, when Joseph mourning for seven days after Jacob died, when Israel wept for Moses for thirty days, when David mourned for Saul and Jonathan who died during the battle against the Philistines, and also when he mourned for Abner whom Joab murdered. The NT also gives us examples of this when Christians buried the martyred Stephen, and Paul’s expectation of intense sorrow should Epaphroditus have died from illness. The most
significant and likely most reassuring model is when Jesus Christ wept for Lazarus. While even a righteous person is not guaranteed to be a model of righteousness, Jesus was without sin. These proof texts of grieving serve mainly to guard against a misunderstanding of Scripture to demand a type of stoicism when faced with grief.

On one hand, Gill defended Christian freedom to grieve when loved ones died. On the other hand, he also warns Christians against mourning “even as others which have no hope,” the others being unbelievers. The Scriptures set the standard for appropriate ways to mourn, as seen above, and for inappropriate ways to mourn. The OT includes the following restriction, “Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.” Gill also notes common transcultural mourning practices, such as “mourning women” as mentioned in Jeremiah 9:17, as an example of excessive mourning. Other characteristics of excessive mourning that Christians should avoid would be “covering themselves with mud, dirt, and filth, smiting their heads, breasts, and thighs,” that even some unbelievers would reject. The underlying cause for this type of mourning is that their mourning is without the knowledge and hope of the resurrection. This is why Christians should avoid excessive mourning, for it seems to contradict the knowledge and hope they have in the resurrection. Therefore, they “should not sorrow as they did, and mourn over our friends as though they were lost, and never to be enjoyed more; this is to act contrary to our character as Christians, to the doctrine of Christianity, to the Gospel of Christ, in which life and immortality are brought to light, and set in the clearest view before us.” Gill’s warning is not simply against excessive emotionality but against behavior that at least appears to deny one’s union with Christ. In fact, Gill’s own emotions kept him from continuing his sermon as planned: “My affections will not permit me to give you an account of the ground and reason of this hope, this faith, this confidence [in Elizabeth’s life].”

Conclusion

Gill explores Paul’s use of sleep as a metaphor for death, building upon the conviction that the elect are united with Christ holistically, both body and soul. It is this union with Christ that gives true Christians hope in light of
the apparent finality of death: “that in a little time we shall meet together again, and never part.”

The pastoral thrust of the sermon fully surfaces at this point. It is because Christians, both living and asleep, share the same hope in Christ, that the grief of the living can and must be shaped by the knowledge that the dead are in an “uninterrupted union” with the triune God and will return with Christ.

1. John Gill, A Sermon occasioned by the death of Elizabeth Gill, who departed this life May 30, 1738, having entered the 13th year of her age. Preached June 4th. To which is added, an account of some of her choice experiences, London: Aaron Ward (1738), 3.
2. Ibid., 5.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid., 8.
5. Ibid., 10–11. Gill cites Job 30:23 (“For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living”) and Rom 6:23 (“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”).
6. Ibid., 6.
7. Ibid., 9.
8. Ibid., 11.
10. Ibid. “Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not” (Jer 31:15, emphasis added). “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Gen 5:24).
11. Ibid., 17.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid. See Rev 4:8, “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”
17. Ibid., 9–10.
18. Ibid., 11. Hammond writes, “that the men here peculiarly spoken of are those that die in the cause, or for the faith of Christ … those that sleep through Jesus, that is, by occasion of him, or for Christianity sake.” Henry Hammond, A paraphrase and annotations upon all the books of the New Testament briefly explaining all the difficult places thereof, London: Printed by J. Flesher for Richard Davis (1659): 671–72.
“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches” (Rom 11:15–16).

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev 20:6).

"Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling” (Ps 49:14); “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (1 Cor 6:2); “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations” (Rev 2:26).

John Gill, A Sermon occasioned by the death of Benjamin Seward, Esq; who departed this life March 30th, having enter'd the forty-ninth year of his age. Preached, April 8th, 1753, London: G. Keith (1753): 32–33.

Gill, Death of Elizabeth Gill, 24.
The Divine Word in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)

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John Gill’s theology of the divine Word had ramifications for his understanding of the immanent and economic Trinity. Basing the origin of this divine name on the apostle John’s interpretation of the Old Testament (OT), Gill applied the significance of the Son’s identification as the divine Word to his understanding of the Son’s divine nature and works. Gill’s understanding of the Son as the divine Word incorporated the analogy of the mind, inherited from church tradition and bolstered by Greek Philosophy. This analogy was further understood by Gill’s incorporation of other Scriptural images, and was further apprehended by the Son’s identification as Wisdom. These analogies, names, and images were mutually defining for understanding the nature of the divine Word, the Son of God. The central theological implications of this divine name, which include the Word’s deity, eternality, and distinct personality, were all based on Gill’s reading of Scripture, most notably in the Gospel of John. The economic implications of this name include the Son’s role in the eternal council and covenant of grace and his co-efficient work in speaking creation into existence. As the Word, the Son was not only spoken of in the OT, but as the interpreter of the Father’s mind, he knows God’s mind and has revealed it throughout all ages, most definitively in the
incarnation. As the divine Word, the Son is the Mediator who intercedes on behalf of the elect. Thus, understanding the identity of the divine Word provided Gill with a way of understanding central elements of his Trinitarianism and soteriology.

**The Identity of the Word**

Seventeenth and eighteenth-century England saw a rise in antitrinitarian theology that required constant attention. John Gill, a Baptist pastor in London, first published on the Trinity in his 1731 *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated*. The spread of Sabellianism among Baptists formed the immediate context for its composition and publication. This work, however, provided a robust biblical and theological defense of the Trinity against both Sabellianism and Socinianism, which were common in the eighteenth century. In doing so, Gill concentrated much of his efforts on the doctrine of the Son. Out of nine chapters in this work, he devoted four to the second Person. In his first of these four chapters Gill introduced the identification of the second Person as the Word, referring to this designation as a “name, appellation, or character.” Gill generally treated this identifier as a name that revealed particular characteristics of the second person (to be described below). He believed the identification of the divine Person to whom this name belongs was easily determined in Scripture. In the writings of the apostle John, Gill noted that this is a frequent name given to the Son, which speaks to his deity, eternality, co-existence with the Father, and distinct personhood. Gill believed that the “Word” in John 1:14 was a clear reference to the Son. He highlighted the use of this name in John’s other writings, including his first epistle (1 John 1:1; 5:7) and Revelation (1:2; 14:13). It is the second Person, the Son of God, who is also the Word of God.

It was crucial to establish the meaning of this divine name since at least one highly influential author, Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), had incorporated it into his subordinationist view of the Son. Gill, in his chapter on the Word or *Logos*, as well as in the relevant areas of his other writings, consistently incorporated the meaning of this divine name into his Trinitarianism. In doing so he articulated and defended the doctrine of the Trinity against both Sabellianism and Socinianism.
The Divine Word

Gill’s theology of the divine Word, or *Logos*, constituted an important aspect of his understanding of God the Son. According to Gill, this divine name spoke to the Son’s distinct mode of subsistence and further defined his work in the economy of salvation. The rest of this essay will be devoted to articulating Gill’s understanding of the Son’s divine name as Word with respect to its immanent and economic implications.

The Analogy of the Mind

Gill understood that the name, Word, indicated something of the eternal nature of the Son. And like other theologians before him, he found the analogy of the mind helpful for achieving further understanding of the Son. For Gill, the Son is the *Logos* as the mental word, or thought of the mind. Like a thought is generated in the mind, so is Christ begotten of the Father. This analogy demonstrates not only that he was eternally with the Father, but that he is distinct from him. Deity, eternity, as well as distinct personality are all included in this name. In what may be his fullest expression of the analogy, Gill wrote,

> He may be so called, because As the mental word, or the conception of the mind, which is Λόγος ἐνδιάθετο, is the birth of the mind, begotten of it intellectually, and immaterially, without passion or motion; and is the very image and representation of the mind, and of the same nature with it, yet something distinct from it: So Christ is the begotten of the Father, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person; of the same nature with him, though a Person distinct from him.7

There are four elements that come out of Gill’s reflection of the Son as *Logos*: generation, image and representation, consubstantiality, and distinct personhood. From these elements, one can see how the analogy of the mind may prove fruitful in understanding eternal generation. The analogy of the mind and thought provided another angle at which to behold this divine mystery. With respect to generation, the picture points away from physical, to spiritual generation, an understanding of generation which is more fitting to the nature of God as a divine Being.8 The Son is described in other Scriptures
as the “image” or “brightness” of the Father, providing additional ways of apprehending the Son’s eternal nature (Col 1:15, Heb 1:3).⁹

**Historical Use of the Analogy**

Gill’s use of the intellectual analogy for understanding this divine name was not unique to him, or to other reformed theologians. According to Herman Bavinck, the analogy was used by Justin Martyr, Tatian, Tertullian, Lacantius, and others. Bavinck wrote, “Athanasius and the Cappadocians regularly pictured generation as God’s recognition of himself in his image, as the eternal utterance of a Word. The Father and the Son are related, they said, as mind (νοῦς) is to word (λόγος).” Bavinck continued to explain Augustine’s attempt to find “clear imprints on the Trinity in human consciousness and reason.”¹⁰ Richard Muller characterizes William Perkins’ use of the analogy for eternal generation as being a “medieval and specifically Thomist interpretation of the Son’s procession as intellectual.”¹¹ The importance of both Augustine and Aquinas with respect to the development of this doctrine is acknowledged by Gilles Emery: “Amongst the Fathers, it was St Augustine who particularly worked on pinpointing the nature of the ‘word’ within a theory of relation. Thomas’ project can be seen as a personal development of this legacy. He puts forward his own viewpoint ‘as following on from what Augustine has shown.’”¹² Aquinas’ theology is of particular interest for understanding Gill, as Gill follows Aquinas’ trajectory by using the analogy as a way of apprehending the eternal generation of the Son.¹³

Protestants in the Reformation and Post-Reformation period were also not opposed to this analogy. Calvin, while seeming to give preference to the idea that name *Logos* refers to the Son as the Wisdom of God, he nevertheless employed the analogy to explain this divine name in his commentary of John 1:1.¹⁴ In addition to Calvin, Gill cited Antonius Walaeus (1573-1639), and Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) in support of this position.¹⁵ Among English-speaking theologians whom Gill referenced in his writings, Edward Leigh (1602-1671) and Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) made use of the analogy. Describing eternal generation, Leigh wrote,

In respect of this generation, the Sonne is called *The Word of the Father*, John 1.1.
not a vanishing, but an essential word, because he is begotten of the Father, as the word from the mind. He is called *The Word of God*, both internal and conceived
(that is, the Divine Understanding reflected upon itself from eternity, or God’s knowledge of himself) so also he is the inward wisdom of God, Prov. 8. Because God knows himself as the first and most worthy object of contemplation, and external or uttered, which hath revealed the counsels of God to men, especially the elect; that we may know the Father by the Son as it were by an Image, John 1.18. so also he is the externall wisdome instructing us concerning the Will and Wisdome of the Father to Salvation.16

Similarly, Waterland stated the following in a sermon on John 1:1: “But I must observe, that the Greek Λόγος, which we render WORD, may signify either inward Thought, or outward Speech. And it has with good reason been supposed by the Catholick Writers, that the design of this Name was to intimate that the Relation of Father and Son, bears some Resemblance and Analogy to that of Thought, or of Speech to the Mind.”17 Thus, when Gill conceived of the Son as the Word in this manner, he did so following the precedent of the reformed and broader Christian tradition.

The Begotten Word
Gill explicitly connected the Logos with eternal generation in his explanation of the intellectual analogy provided in his Doctrine of the Trinity.18 The Son is the “mental word, or the conception of the mind,” which is “the birth of the mind.”19 This birth, or generation is to be thought of in a particular way in keeping with the nature of the subject.20 Thus, as the “mental word … is the birth of the mind, begotten of it intellectually, and immaterially, without passion or motion … So Christ is the begotten of the Father.”21 This connection reveals that the name, Word, is closely tied to the name, Son, since it is the Son’s generation that is intended by the use of the name, Word. This name, as Gill understood it, helped explain the nature of the Son’s eternal generation. Thus, this divine name finds importance as it explains a fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion. In Gill’s mind, the doctrine of eternal generation was indispensable, as it provided the foundation not only for the Son’s deity, but was the means of explaining the distinction of Persons within the divine essence.22

The importance of this name appeared in Gill’s Body of Divinity, where he gave his most detailed exposition and defense of eternal generation.23 In these pages, Gill defended eternal generation against Socinian objections.
He approached the discussion from various angles, but explained that divine generation must be understood in a way that is reflective of God's divine, spiritual nature: “When Scriptures ascribe generation to the Divine Being, it must be understood in a manner suitable to it, and not of carnal and corporal generation; no man in his senses can ever think that God generates as man does; nor believe that ever any man held such a notion of generation in God.” Gill thus removed misguided notions of the Father’s relation to the Son through generation, and made way for a proper understanding of the Son’s eternal generation from the Father. After producing a citation of Socinus in which he accused “Evangelics” of holding to a view in which God generates “one like himself...as animals do,” Gill demonstrated his own approach: “But generation must be understood of such generation as agrees with the nature of a spirit, and of an infinite uncreated spirit, as God is.” It is at this point that Gill began to rely upon the analogy of the mind, drawn from the meaning of the Son’s identification as Logos. Additionally, it is at this point where Gill’s theology of the Word can be thought of similarly to that of Thomas Aquinas. Gilles Emery explains Aquinas’ theology of the Word in this way:

The Word is a person who subsists in himself, distinct from the Father from whom he proceeds; being equal to, and of the same nature as, the Father, he is the perfect expression and presentation of the Father. The notion of Word also enables one to grasp what it means for God to be Son, using an analogy which is adapted to the spiritual nature of God. To put it another way, it is the notion of the Word which, according to St Thomas, gives one an understanding of begetting the Son which is best fitted to God.

Consonant with Emery’s assessment of Aquinas, it may be said of Gill that he considered the name, Word, and the analogy that is signaled by it, to be a helpful means of understanding eternal generation in a way that rightly accords with the Son’s divine nature. Gill produced an additional example to further the analogy entailed in this name when he wrote, “that spirits generate we know from the souls or spirits we have about us and in us; our minds, which are spirits, generate thought; thought is the conception, and birth of the mind; and so we speak of it in common and ordinary speech, I conceive, or such a man conceives so and so.” This illustration of the relation between a thought
to the mind corresponds with the coexistence, distinction of persons in the Godhead, and of the relation of Father and Son in generation: “now as soon as the mind is, thought is, they commence together and they co-exist, and always will; and this the mind begets within itself; without any mutation or alterations in itself.” The internal and immaterial nature of generation is thus given shape by the analogy of the mind, to which this divine name points. As Gill penned it, “the mind to God who is Νους, the eternal mind, to Christ, the eternal Λόγος, word and wisdom of God; who is in some sort represented by λόγος ευδιαθετος, the internal mental word.” Gill provided further explanation of these analogies, quoting both Plato and Aristotle before concluding the discussion. The Son, who is the Word of God, is begotten from eternity. This biblical affirmation, however, does not mean that there was ever a time the Son was not. Nor does it mean that the Son is a created being—he is of the very same essence as God. All of this, Gill asserted, can be proved by this analogy, indicated by the Son’s identification as the Word:

Now if our finite created spirits, or minds, are capable of generating thought, the internal word or speech, and that without any motion, change or alteration, without any diminution and corruption, without division of their nature or multiplication of their essence; then in an infinitely more perfect manner can God, an infinite uncreated spirit, beget his Son, the eternal Word, wisdom, reason, and understanding, in his eternal mind, which he never was without, nor was he before it.27

These analogies are given, Gill instructed, to relieve minds and help Christians understand the mystery of eternal generation.28 Gill quoted Amandus Polanus (1561–1610) at length to further demonstrate how the analogy connects to eternal generation:

Mental or metaphysical generation … is a similitude and adumbration of divine generation; as the mind begets by nature, not by power, so likewise God; as the mind begets a birth simple and perfect, so God; as the mind begets immutably (or without mutation) so God; as the mind begets of itself in itself, so God; as the mind does not beget out of matter without itself, so neither God, as the mind always begets and cannot but beget, so God the Father; as metaphysical generation abides, so the divine.29
In Gill’s theology, the identity of the Son as the eternal *Logos* helped explain the nature of eternal generation against rival theologies. Contrary to Socinianism, the analogy of the mind provided Gill a means of understanding the Son’s eternal generation that upheld the Son’s eternal co-existence with the Father, his consubstantiality, and, contrary to Sabellianism, personal distinction between the Persons of the Trinity.30

**The Image of God**

As the Son is the Word, he is also the image of the Father and the brightness of his glory. Gill tied this language from Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 to the analogy of the mind explicitly as mutually defining aspects of the Word. Gill’s interpretation of these texts further illumine his theology of the Word, particularly as it related to the analogy of the mind.

Being both the image and the brightness of the Father says much of the same with respect of the Word—that he is coessential (consubstantial) with the Father but is a distinct person from him. With respect to the analogy of the mind, the Word that proceeds by birth from the mind is the brightness of it. Specifically, the Son is the brightness of the Father. By this Gill believed the Scriptures pointed to the consubstantial nature of both the Father and the Son. It is all the glorious perfections of the Father that the Son shines forth. Being the brightness of the Father’s glory with respect to the divine essence, “he has the same glorious nature and perfection, and the same glorious names, as Jehovah, the Lord of glory, &c. and the same glory, homage, and worship is given him.” Seeking to further tease out the significance of the imagery of the sun—which points to the Father and Son’s consubstantiality and personal distinction—he wrote, “the allusion is to the sun, and its beam or ray: so some render it the ray of his glory; and may lead us to observe, that the Father and the Son are of the same nature, as the sun and its ray; and that the one is not before the other, and yet distinct from each other, and cannot be divided or separated one from another.” The concurrence with the mind analogy can hardly be missed. Although adding to the analogy with the imagery of the Son shining forth the Father’s glory like a ray of sunlight from the sun, the import of this imagery leads to the same conclusions—that the Father and Son both exist together from eternity, share the same essence, and yet are personally distinct.31

The revelation of the Word as the brightness of the Father’s glory provided another analogy, or imagery, for understanding eternal generation.
Immediately following Gill’s discussion in the Body of Divinity regarding the analogy of the mind as a means of understanding eternal generation, Gill enlisted the imagery of the sun, taken from Hebrews 1:3, to help illumine the doctrine of eternal generation. His conclusions are the same with this analogy as they are with that of the mind:

To this may be added another similitude, which may help us in this matter, and serve to illustrate it; and that is the sun, to which God is sometimes compared; the sun generates its own ray of light, without any change, corruption, division, and diminution; it never was without its ray of light, as it must have been had it been prior to it; they commenced together and co-exist, and will as long as the sun endures; and to this there seems to be an allusion, when Christ is called the brightness, ἀπανγασμα, the effulgence, the beaming forth of his Father’s glory, Heb. i.3.32

Commenting on the author of Hebrews’ reference to the Son as God’s image, Gill stated that the Scriptures’ revelation of Christ as the image of the Father means also that he has “equality and sameness of nature, and distinction of persons.” Gill quickly explained how: “for if the Father is God, Christ must be so too; and if he is a person, his Son must be so likewise, or he can’t be the express image and character of him.” Having again connected this analogy to the doctrines of consubstantiality and personal distinction, Gill referred the reader to his note on Colossians 1:15, where this imagery is explained further, and where it is also connected to the Son’s identification as Word.33 In his interpretation of this text Gill explained that the Son is the image of the Father—not deity. And he is so as the Son of God. This led Gill to conclude that rather than existing as a different substance that provides a “shadow” of the Father, it points to their equality, consubstantiality, and distinction within the divine nature:34

[he] is the natural, essential, and eternal image of his father, an increated one, perfect and complete, and in which he takes infinite complacency and delight: this designs more than a shadow and representation, or than bare similitude and likeness; it includes sameness of nature and perfections; ascertains the personality of the son, his distinction from the father, whose image he is; and yet implies no inferiority, as the following verses clearly shew, since all that the gather hath are his.35
This description, Gill remarked, was consonant with Philo’s writings about the Logos, whom he says is the image of God.36

The discussion of these texts is warranted by Gill’s own mention of Hebrews 1:3 in his description of what the Son’s identity as Word means. An examination of these critical texts reveal how Gill understood the meaning of the Son’s identification as the Logos by way of the mind analogy, but also how he explained that analogy by pointing to other imagery that speak to the Son’s eternal nature. Gill understood that the Scripture’s images and analogies all come together to help Christians understand who the Son is in his divine nature. It should be noted that in the case of both the analogy of the mind and that of the sun, Gill used them to aid the Christian’s knowledge of the Son’s eternal generation, which is the Son’s defining and “distinctive relative property” in the Godhead.37

**The Wisdom of God**

Tied to the Son as the Word of God, is the consideration of him as the Wisdom of God.38 Often in Gill’s writings, the two names are mentioned together.39 Considering the metaphor of the mind, it would make sense that the thought or conception of the mind would also be considered its wisdom. Gill understood references to God’s wisdom in two ways—personally and essentially. Personally, it applies to the second Person. Essentially, it applies to the divine essence as an essential attribute shared by all divine Persons. In his *Body of Divinity*, Gill considered wisdom as an essential attribute of the divine nature.40 In other places, such as his exposition of Proverbs 1 and 8, he considered it with respect to the Son personally.41 The connection between God’s wisdom, the divine Word, and the analogy of the mind, was made explicit in Gill’s *Body of Divinity* when he tied both “word and wisdom of God” to the “internal mental word” represented by the Logos.42

The identification of the Son as Wisdom was made explicit in Gill’s exegesis of Proverbs. He wrote that Wisdom is best thought of in Proverbs as referring to the Son. This designation speaks “of the consummate and perfect wisdom that is in him.” Gill applied this to the Son in various respects, such as his mediatorial office and his incarnation. Identifying “wisdom” in Proverbs 1:20 with the Son, he referred to wisdom as “a divine Person,” immediately invoking the name “Logos,” or “Word.”43 In Proverbs 8:22, Gill further clarified that the Wisdom of God was possessed by God “in right of paternity.” This
verse, used by Arius (according to Gill) to prove the Son was created, was interpreted by Gill as a reference to eternal generation. According to Gill, the Wisdom of God has eternally existing with God as the Father’s Wisdom and is the Creator of the universe. He commented that this verse “denotes the Lord’s having, possessing, and enjoying his word and wisdom as his own proper son; which possession of him is expressed by his being with him and in him, and in his bosom, and as one brought forth and brought up by him … when he went forth in his wisdom and power, and created all things; then he did possess his son, and made us of him; for by him he made the worlds.”

Gill teased out the implications of Proverbs 8:22: “This shews the real and actual existence of Christ from eternity, his relation to Jehovah his Father, his nearness to him, equality with him, and distinctions from him.” This name, given in Scripture to the Son, provided yet another way of understanding the relation of the Father and Son in eternal generation and divine action: the Word is the Wisdom of the Father begotten from all eternity.

**Gill’s Initial Objection to the Analogy**

While in much of Gill’s *Exposition*, and especially in his *Body of Divinity*, he made use of the analogy of the mind when considering the divine Word, it appears that he was not always so comfortable with it. In his sermon, *Paul’s Farwel Address at Ephesus*, he provided a near-identical description of the analogy which appeared in the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, but then argued that this understanding of the name may be too speculative to be useful:

But this [the analogy of the mind] may be thought too curious, and as falling short (as all things else in nature do) of expressing that adorable mystery of godliness. And, indeed, oftentimes, when we indulge our own curiosity, and give a loose to our thoughts this way, we run into confusion, and every evil work. For though Christ is certainly and really God, as well as man; yet I am afraid that our abstracted ideas of him, as God, of his Generation and Sonship, distinct from him, as Mediator, often lead us into labyrinths, and draw off our minds from the principle things we have in view. God having set bounds around his inscrutable and incomprehensible Deity, as he ordered to be set about mount Sinai, when he descended on it; that we may not too curiously gaze upon it, and perish. It seems to be his will, that our saving knowledge of him, and converse with him, should be all in and through Christ the glorious Mediator. With this we should
be contented. It is enough for us, that this Divine Person, who is called λόγος, the Word, is God; for John expresses it in so many words. 47

Having made this argument, Gill followed by stating that he believed the Son is called Word because of his work in the economy of salvation. 48

For reasons not given by Gill in later writings, Gill was not comfortable with the analogy for the mind as an explanation of this appellation. But, by the time this sermon was incorporated into the Doctrine of the Trinity, Gill elided the qualifying statement and put the analogy forth as a reason for the divine name. In fact, it is the first reason he gives. While there is no explicit reason given for this change of heart, Gill’s use of the analogy as an explanation for eternal generation, which he reaffirmed later in his Body of Divinity, may provide a clue. It is likely, considering the enormous pressure of antitrinitarianism in England, that Gill was pressed to see the fruitfulness of this analogy for understanding, explaining, and defending the nature of the eternal Son.

Exegetical Underpinnings from John 1

While the analogy of the mind, derived from the divine Word, is laden with significance, it arose in Gill’s theology as a product of exegetical and theological reflection. Gill’s understanding of the divine Word drew heavily from the Prologue of John’s Gospel, where the divine Logos prominently appears. 49 Gill stated at the opening of his chapter on the divine Word that John 1:1-2 proves his deity, eternality, co-existence with the Father, and distinct personhood—all realities included in the analogy of the mind. These realities are given shape and significance as they are further revealed in the Prologue of John.

Gill took the opportunity when interpreting the very first phrase of John 1:1 to explain how it refers to the Son, the essential word, and for what reasons. He is the essential Word, Gill reasoned, on account of his being the eternal Son, begotten from eternity as a thought is in the mind. He is also called Word on account of his actions and by his being “the interpreter of his father’s mind.” 50 Gill asserted that by “beginning” (1:1), the apostle John speaks of eternity. As he was in the beginning, he was with God. Here Gill highlighted the personal distinction, but also the consubstantial nature of the Father and Son: “but this phrase denotes the existence of the word
with the father, his relation and nearness to him, his equality with him, and particularly the distinction of his person from him, as well as his eternal being with him; for he was always with him, and is, and ever will be.” The full deity of Christ was then expounded as Gill continued, commenting on John’s statement that “the word was God” (Gill’s translation, italics original):

not made a God, as he is said hereafter to be made flesh; nor constituted or appointed a God, or a God by office; but truly and properly God, in the highest sense of the word, as appears from the names by which he is called; as Jehovah, God, our, your, their, and my God, God with us, the mighty God, God over all, the great God, the living God, the true God, and eternal life; and from his perfections, and the whole fulness of the Godhead that dwells in him, as independence, eternity, immutability, omniscience, and omnipotence.

Adding to these comments the Son’s works and the worship given to him, Gill argued for the divinity of the Word from John 1:1. The deity of Christ is also substantiated, according to Gill, by the Apostle’s statement in John 1:4, that in him was life (Gill’s translation, italics original). Gill argued that “life” points to two things. First, the “divine life” that the Son has in himself (autotheos), and also the life that he communicates to others. In a likely reference to Job 19:25, Gill correlated this text with Job’s understanding of the Word “as his living redeemer.” This, Gill continued, “regards him as the word and living God, and distinguishes him from the written Word, and shews that he is not a mere idea in the divine mind, but a truly divine Person.”

The divine Word who has life is also the light and the giver of light. It is the divine life of the second Person through which men receive their capacity to perceive as rational beings. Gill identified the creating power of the living Word when he wrote, “for when Christ, the word, breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul, he filled him with rational light and knowledge.” For Gill, this proved the divinity of the Word. He went on to argue that all “spiritual and supernatural light,” by which people are saved, sanctified, and glorified, is from Christ. Gill connected the light of men to the light spoken of in John 1:7, whom he identified as Christ: “by which is meant, not the light of nature, or reason; nor the light of the Gospel: but Christ himself, the author of light, natural, spiritual, and eternal.” This identification is further supported, in Gill’s estimation, by appeals to both
the OT and Philo, who connected this name to the *Logos*.\(^{55}\)

While the above only samples Gill’s exposition of John’s Prologue, these few passages highlight Gill’s understanding of the essential characteristics of the divine Word, namely, his deity, eternality, co-existence with the Father, and distinct personality.

### The Word in the Economic Trinity

Gill’s theology of the divine Word pertains not only to the immanent Trinity, but also the economic Trinity. There are works of the Son both *ad intra* and *ad extra* that provide a basis for his divine name. These works include the Son’s role in the eternal council and covenant of grace, his work as Creator, his revelation of the Father’s will throughout all ages, and his work as Mediator.\(^{56}\)

**The Word in the Covenant of Grace**

Important to Gill’s system of theology is his conception of the covenant of grace.\(^{57}\) In his view, the covenant of grace is “the foundation of all the grace and glory, comfort and happiness, of the saints in time and to eternity.”\(^{58}\) Gill connected the work of the Son as it related to his identity as the *Logos* in this way: “He spake in the ancient council, when the methods of man’s salvation were consider’d, consulted and agreed on; and declared, that he would be a surety for all the elect. He spoke for every blessing, and every promise in the covenant of grace. He assented to every article in the covenant between them.”\(^{59}\) In his *Body of Divinity*, Gill distinguished between the eternal council and eternal covenant of grace in this way: “these are generally blended together by divines; and indeed it is difficult to consider them distinctly with exactness and precision; but I think they are to be distinguished, and the one [eternal council] to be considered as leading on, and as preparatory and introductory to the other [covenant of grace], though both of an eternal date.”\(^{60}\) In this eternal council, all three persons of the Godhead were included. When Gill mentioned the role of the second Person in the council, he referred to him as Wisdom, who “was on all accounts fit” to take part in the council. One of the ways Gill identified the Son’s fitness for this council was the fact that he shares “the same wisdom, counsel and understanding” with the Father.\(^{61}\) The Son’s fitness corresponds with Gill’s understanding of the mind analogy. As the Word, the Son knows the thoughts of the Father.
because he is “the very image and representation of the mind.” In this way, the Son’s participation in the council agreed with his identity as the divine Word and Wisdom of the Father:

Jehovah the Son, has the same wisdom, counsel and understanding his Father has; for all that he hath are his; nor does Christ think it any robbery to be equal with him; he is wisdom itself, or *wisdoms*, he is possessed of the most consummate wisdom; in him, even as Mediator, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and he himself says, *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom*, Prov. i.20 and viii. 14. See Col. ii. 3. yea, he is called the *Wonderful, Counsellor*, Isa. ix. 6. Which not only respects his capacity and ability to give the best counsel and advice to men, as he does, but to assist in the council of God himself; and so the *Septuagint* interpreters understood that passage, rendering it, *the Angel of the great council;* whereby it seems as if those Jews then had a notion of this great transaction, and of the concern of the Messiah in it; to whom the whole verse belongs: to which may be added, that Christ the Son of God, was as one brought up with his divine Father, lay in his bosom, was privy to his designs, and must be in his council, and was on all accounts fit for it.

As the Son took part in the eternal council, the divine Word also took part in the covenant of grace, to which it pertained. Gill defined the relation between the eternal council and the covenant of grace as follows: “The council before treated of, is the basis and foundation of the covenant of grace, and both relate to the same thing, and in which the same persons are concerned. In the former, things were contrived, planned, and advised; in the latter, fixed and settled.” What was considered and then settled was the salvation of God’s elect. For Gill stated, “the covenant of grace is a compact or agreement made from all eternity between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect.” As a covenanted party, Gill understood the divine Word to be the one who took on the work given him by the Father for the salvation of his people. Gill expounded Psalm 40:6–8 to outline the Son’s involvement in the covenant, which further illustrates the meaning of the Son’s identification as the divine Word in Gill’s theology. In sum, the Son’s participation in the covenant involved his “assent to his Father’s proposals, his acceptance of them, and open declaration of his readiness and willingness to act according to them, which formally constitute the covenant and compact between them.”
The Creator Word

The divine Word may not only be considered Savior, but must also be considered Creator. Gill wrote, “He spoke all things out of nothing in the first creation.” Gill understood that all three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, act together in creation as “co-efficient” causes. Yet, he affirmed that “by him, the eternal Logos, the essential Word of God, the worlds are said to be framed.” Gill considered it important to point out that the Word’s action in creation not be understood instrumentally with respect to causation. Rather, the Word is an efficient cause along with the Father and the Spirit. Gill buttressed these claims in his comments on John 1:3 by appealing to the Jewish Targums and Philo, which spoke of the Word as the Creator of the world. In his comments on Genesis 1:3, Gill stated that “Perhaps the divine Person speaking here is the Logos or Word of God, which was in the beginning with God, and was God, and who himself is the light that lightens every creature.” The one who spoke creation into being, then, was the divine Word of God.

The Interpreter of the Mind

As the Word is the thought, or mental word of the mind, he is also the interpreter of it. As the interpreter, the Word is the one who knows the mind and will of God and reveals it to others. Thus, this characteristic of the divine Word has both immanent and economic implications. The eternal nature of the Word, as interpreter of the mind, is demonstrated by Gill from John 1:14, “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten, which is in the bosom of the Father; he hath declar’d him.” From this text, Gill found proof for eternal generation, but, more than that, he postulated that the Son’s being in the Father’s bosom “denotes unity of nature, and essence, in the father and son; their distinct personality; strong love, and affection between them; the son’s acquaintance with his father’s secrets.” The Word is the interpreter because, as one who partakes of the same nature as the Father, he knows his mind as a distinct divine person.

Sharing in the same essence, yet being distinct as a person, the divine Word knows the Father’s mind. The economic implications of this are that “he was capable of declaring his mind and will to his people; which he has done in all generations.” According to Gill, The Word’s divine act of declaring the Father’s will is evident in Scripture from the very beginning.
In Genesis 3, Gill attributes God’s voice in the Garden to the Word: “It was he, the Word of the Lord God, whose voice Adam heard in the garden; and who said unto him, Adam where art thou? And it was the same Word of the Lord who continued his discourse with him, and his wife, and the serpent; and made the first discovery of grace to fallen man.” In addition to this, Gill believed that it was the Word who appeared to OT saints as God’s will became progressively known. Moreover, Gill’s comments on John 1:10 reveal that he believed the Word came in human form before the incarnation: “and he was frequently visible in the world, in an human form, before his incarnation, as in Eden’s garden to our first parents, to Abraham, Jacob, Manoah, and his wife, and others.” Again, bearing out the meaning of John 1:10, Gill wrote,

Now Christ, the word, came to the Jews before his incarnation, not only in types, personal and real, and in promises and prophecies, and in the word and ordinances, but in person; as to Moses in the bush, and gave orders to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt: he came and redeemed them himself with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm; in his love and pity he led them through the Red Sea as on dry ground; and through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night; and he appeared to them at Mount Sinai, who have unto them the lively oracles of God.

Gill then connected the rejection of the Word in the OT to the rejection of the incarnate Christ, “And so they treated this same Logos, or word of God, when he was made flesh, and dwelt among them.” Gill held to the idea that revelation progressed throughout OT leading to the coming of the incarnate Christ. He expressed this revelatory progression by contrasting the revelation of God’s incarnate Son with previous eras of revelation:

And there is a difference between these two revelations in the manner in which they were made; the former was at sundry times, and in diverse manners, the latter was made at once, and in one way; that was delivered out in parts, and by piece-meal, this the whole together; the whole mind and will of God, all his counsel, all that Christ heard of the father; it is the faith that was once, and at once, delivered to the saints; and it has been given out in one way, by the preaching of the word: to which may be added, that formerly God spoke by many persons, by the prophets, but now by one only, by his son; who is so not by creation, nor
by adoption, nor by office, but by nature; being his own son, his proper son, begotten of him, of the same nature with him, and equal to him; and so infinitely preferable to the prophets: he is son, and not a servant, in whom the father is, and he in the father, and in whom the spirit is without measure; and God is said to speak by him, or in him, because he was now incarnate.81

While the divine Word was revealed in the OT, and while God made his mind known through various ways and by various means—the definitive revelation of his mind has come in the incarnate Word. In his comments on John 1:18, Gill stated that the divine Word, who has “acquaintance with his father’s secrets,” has made him known finally and definitively: “[The Son] has clearly and fully declared his [Father’s] nature, perfections, purposes, promises, counsels, covenant, word, and works; his thoughts and schemes of grace; his love and favour to the sons of men; his mind and will concerning the salvation of his people; he has made, and delivered a fuller revelation of these things, than ever was yet; and to which no other revelation in the present state of things will be added”82 The divine Word not only knows the mind of the Father, but he has set about to reveal it. Thus, the appearance of the incarnate Word constitutes the full and final revelation of the Father’s mind in this era of redemptive history.

Gill also believed that the Son is called the Word because he was spoken of in the OT. Gill stated, “He is the Word that was spoken of to all the Old Testament-saints, and prophesied of by all the prophets, which have been since the world began; this is the sum and substance of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament.”83 This idea of the divine Word, who is spoken of in the OT and is the summation of all God’s promises, must be connected with Gill’s covenant theology. The Word is the “sum and substance of all the promises” as he is the “sum and substance” of the covenant of grace:

he is the Alpha and the Omega, as of the scriptures, so of the covenant of grace; he is the first and the last in it, the sum and substance of it; he is every thing, ALL in ALL in it; all the blessings of it are the sure mercies of him, who is David, and David’s Son; he is prevented with all the blessings of goodness, and the covenant-people are blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, as their covenant-head; all the promises are made to him, and are all year and amen in him.84
All the promises spoken of in the OT pertain to the Word, who is the sum and substance, the centerpiece and faithful one who brings all the promises of the covenant to their completion.

**Mediator and Intercessor**
The Son’s role as Mediator of the covenant of grace constitutes the final aspect of his work for which he is termed the divine Word: “Besides, he, as the Word speaks for the elect in the court of heaven, where he appears in the presence of God for them; acts the part of a Mediator on their account; calls for, and demands the blessings of grace for them, as the fruit of his death; pleads their cause, and answers all charges and accusations exhibited against them.” As the head of the covenant of grace, the Word acts as mediator, and, as mediator, he acts as priest. The works that Gill has described are all acts that Christ performs as mediator and priest of the covenant of grace, which, as we have shown, are all acts that the Word assented to do in the covenant of grace. These priestly works of Christ provide yet another way of apprehending the significance of the Son’s identity as divine Word. Gill believed that the Word who is himself God, who possesses the power to create, also has the power to effect his work as priest. In this way, the Word’s divine action is descriptive of his work from the foundation of the covenant in eternity to its completion.

**Conclusion**

John Gill’s theology of the divine Word had implications for his understanding of both the Son’s divine nature and his divine works. The analogy of the mind drawn from this divine name provided Gill with a way of understanding the Son’s eternal generation in accordance with his spiritual nature. Gill’s doctrine of eternal generation is further understood by the mutually defining metaphors of brightness and image, which Gill tied closely to the analogy of the mind. Additionally, Gill understood that there is a close connection between the identification of the Son as Wisdom and Word. Crucial to Gill’s understanding of this divine name is his exegesis of John’s Prologue, which supported his understanding of the analogy of the mind by proving that the Word is divine, eternal, co-existent with the Father, and yet a distinct Person from him. The meaning of this divine name underscores his role in
the economic Trinity. The Son is identified as the Word who spoke at the eternal council and covenant of redemption, who created the world, and who interprets and reveals the Father's mind. Being the sum of all God's covenant promises, he is the Word spoken of in the OT and is the final revelation of the Father's mind, who, as Mediator and priest, intercedes and provides the blessings of salvation promised in the covenant of grace.

1. Gill republished a second edition in 1752, from which I will cite for the remainder of this essay. John Gill, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Stated and Vindicated. Being the Substance of Several Discourses on That Important Subject; Reduc'd into the Form of a Treatise.* (Little-Britain: Aaron Ward, 1731).
5. I mention Clarke as an example of one whose theology challenged classical Trinitarianism in the eighteenth century. Gill did not cite him on this point in any of the works I have examined, although it is not unlikely that Gill had his, or similar views, in mind when speaking to these issues. It may also explain the reason he devoted an entire chapter to this divine name. Clarke rejected a Trinitarian understanding of the "Word" in John 1:1 as polytheism: "That the Word was Another Self-existent, Underived, Independent Person, co-ordinate to Him with whom he was: And This is the Impiety of Polytheism; subverting That First and Great Foundation of All Religion both Natural and Revealed, the Unity of GOD." Clarke instead argued that the Son is a person whose being was derived from the Father and who received "divine" attributes in a way unexplainable by human wisdom. He cited both Origen and Eusebius as authorities in his favor: "that the Word is a Perfon, deriving from the Father (with whom he existed before the World was,) both his Being it felf, and incomprehensible Power and Knowledge, and other divine Attributes and Authority, in a Manner not revealed, and which humane Wifdome ought not to perfume to be able to explain: And This is the Interpretation of the Learnedeft and moft Antient Writers in the Primitive Church." Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity: In Three Parts: Wherein All the Texts in the New Testament Relating to That Doctrine, and the Principle Passages in the Liturgy of the Church of England, Are Collected, Compared, and Explained* (London: James Knapton, 1712), 86, emphasis original.
6. My assessment of Gill on this point has been illumined by Gilles Emery's work on Thomas Aquinas. See more below, specifically endnote 44.
8. This is a major part of Gill's argument and use of this analogy. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 145; Emery's chapter, "The Person of the Son" (176–218), has been invaluable for understanding the significance of Gill's thought, especially on the use of the analogy as a way of understanding eternal generation. Much like Aquinas, Gill's theology of the Word helped him understand the nature of eternal generation. Gilles. Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.
9. I am indebted to Dr. Tyler Wittman for helping to point towards Thomas Aquinas and Gilles Emery as I sought to investigate Gill's use of the analogy of the mind. My conversations with Dr. Wittman have proved invaluable for understanding eternal generation and other related areas of inquiry. Aquinas' condensed thoughts in this area can be found below. I am thankful also to Layne Hancock who originally pointed me to this book that has helped me better understand these issues. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology* (trans. Richard J. Regan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35–39.


13. It is of note that while it is Aquinas who is credited with developing this theory, his work is rarely cited in the reformed documents that were accessed for my research. Additionally, I have yet to see a citation of Aquinas in my readings of Gill. However, I do not believe this is because Gill did not read him. Gill appears to have owned a folio edition of Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*. A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Reverend and Learned John Gill, D.D. Deceased. Comprehending a Fine Collection of Biblical and Oriental Literature; (Cambridge: Unpublished manuscript, 1772), 9.

14. “As to the Evangelist calling the Son of God the Speech, the simple reason appears to me to be, first, because he is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and, secondly, because he is the lively image of His purpose; for, as Speech is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God, and to say that He reveals himself to us by his Speech.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 17:26; Gill himself cites Calvin as holding to this view. Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 4:167, footnote q.


18. For support of this doctrine, Gill cites Ignatius, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Tatian. Gill, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 101; Godet has reference to modern editions of these authors’ works Gill cites. Steven Tshombe Godet, “The Trinitarian Theology of John Gill (1697–1771): Context, Sources, and Controversy” (PhD diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 175.


23. See ibid., 143–159.

24. Ibid., 145.

25. Ibid.

26. With respect to this name, Emery’s entire chapter is illuminating (176–218). According to him, Aquinas’ “doctrine of the Word is incontestably the heart of Thomas’ Trinitarian theology” (179). Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 189, emphasis original.


28. Ibid.


30. The way in which Aquinas’ theology of the Word functions to hem out both Arianism and Sabellianism, which at root is the same as Gill on this point, is summarized here: Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 188.

34. Ibid., 9:171–72.
35. Gill also states that this could refer to his office as Mediator, “in whom, as such is a most glorious display of the love, grace, and mercy of God, of his holiness and righteousness, of his truth and faithfulness, and of his power and wisdom.” Ibid., 9:172.
36. Ibid.
37. Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 143–44; Similarly, Emery notes that it is the “relation of origin” that is “uncovered in the divine Word.” Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 188.
38. Recall also the quotations from Calvin and Leigh above.
44. Ibid., 4:382.
45. Ibid., 4:383.
46. See Gill’s comments on Proverbs 8:22–24, ibid., 4:382-3.
48. Ibid., 4:168-171. Gill cited a Targum of Hosea 1:7 as proof that the Son is called Word in this sense. He then outlined four ways in which the Son acts as Word in the economy of salvation. First, he spoke in the eternal council and covenant; second, he spoke creation into existence; third, he knows and speaks the mind of the Father; fourth, he speaks as an advocate for his people in heaven’s court. See more on these four points below.
49. With respect to teasing out the meaning of the mind analogy, Gill’s commentary does far less than Aquinas’ commentary on the same book. Nevertheless, Gill’s exegesis supports the primary doctrinal assertions that he attributes to the analogy. Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas*, 178, 183–185.
51. Ibid., 7:738.
52. Ibid., 7:738-39.
53. Ibid., 7:740.
54. Ibid., 7:740-41.
55. Ibid., 7:741.
56. Gill distinguished between both “external” and “internal” works of God, as well as “personal” and “essential” acts of God: “The external acts and works of God, are such as are done in time, visible to us, or known by us; as creation, providence, redemption, &c. His internal acts and works, which will be first considered, and are what were done in eternity, are commonly distinguished into personal and essential. Personal acts are such as are peculiar to each person, and distinguished the one from the other; and which have been taken notice of already, in treating of the doctrine of the Trinity. Essential acts are such as are common to them all; for as they have the same nature and essence, they have the same understanding, will, and affections; and the same acts appropriate to these belong unto them, both with respect to themselves and the creatures they meant to make; that is to say, they mutually know one another, love each other, and will each other’s happiness and glory; and have the same knowledge of, will concerning, and affection for creatures to be brought into being be them.” John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (1839 ed.; repr.; Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 172, emphasis original.
57. For more on Gill and the covenant of redemption, or covenant of grace, see Muller, who argues that Gill provides development of this doctrine by locating all three divine Persons in it. Richard A. Muller, “The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill’s Critique of the Pactum Salutis,” Foundations 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 4–14.
61. Ibid., 212.
64. Ibid., 214.
69. Additionally, in his *Body of Divinity*, Gill argued that the Father, Son, and Spirit all act as efficient causes, and that there can be no other principle or instrumental causes. Gill, 260.
71. Ibid., 7:739.
77. Ibid., 102-03, emphasis original.
79. Ibid., 7:742.
80. Ibid., emphasis original.
81. Ibid., 9:374, emphasis original.
82. Ibid., 7:746.
Book Reviews


Nijay Gupta, in his new book, *Paul and the Language of Faith,* makes an important contribution to the conversation surrounding faith language in Paul. Gupta serves as a professor of NT at Northern Seminary and is the author of numerous books, most recently, *A Beginner’s Guide to New Testament Studies* and *Reading Philippians.* In *Paul and the Language of Faith,* Gupta adds to the rapidly growing discussion around πίστις language in Paul. He is not fully satisfied with recent discussion of faith language (both academic and popular) and seeks to go back to the Pauline sources to discover afresh what Paul meant by the term πίστις.

Gupta laments that often the popular definition of faith falls short of the essence of the NT word πίστις from which it is translated. Several popular connotations for faith include faith as mere opinion not grounded in any reasons; or faith is equated with doctrine, “like faith statements and faith traditions” (3). Faith is also often seen as mere passive reception of God’s grace. Moreover, English translations almost solely translate πίστις as faith, although the word carries a greater range of meaning than the English word faith. Gupta asserts that when we look at πίστις in its ancient context, one can see that the term carries a spectrum of meanings. Therefore, we should not see πίστις as a term that requires a single English rendering, but rather as a term that has a range of meanings and each use must be understood in light of its context: “Instead of thinking about the semantics of πίστις in zone terms, we must consider that his (Paul’s) meaning may modulate, moving across this spectrum according to his meaning” (12).

To that end, Gupta provides three categories which define πίστις. First, believing faith: “When πίστις is used in this way, the emphasis falls on the proper method of perception, which is at odds with worldly knowledge and mere human ways of seeing reality” (10). Despite the downplay of other scholars on this understanding of πίστις, Gupta sees a cognitive aspect to the term. In this way, faith means “*seeing-with-something-other-than-eyes*”
The strange wisdom of salvation through the cross of Christ can only be grasped by faith. Second, πίστις can mean obeying faith. Here, it carries the sense of faithfulness. Gupta believes that there is a “more active nature of πίστις at least in some instances” (11). When Israel in the OT entered a covenant relationship, there was the expectation of “love, goodwill, mutuality, and loyalty from both sides” (10). The same goes for NT believers. Although not commonly translated as faithfulness or loyalty, πίστις carries this sense in much of Greco-Roman literature. Gupta asserts that, at times, the NT, in keeping with its Greco-Roman context, has πίστις mean the same. These first two definitions of πίστις can be seen as setting the two ends of the spectrum for the range of meaning of the term. In the middle is Gupta’s final definition: trusting faith. This last term is the one by which Paul may modulate between the first two. As Gupta explains: “There may be times ... where we must recognize a meaning of πίστις in Paul that tries to encapsulate both of these polarized values” (12). Trusting faith modulates between faith as mere cognition to faith as faithfulness or loyalty. This meaning of πίστις for Gupta comes out in Romans 1:16–17: “The point is not works or faith, nor is it faith versus faithfulness. For Paul the gospel does not summon believers either to beliefs or to obedient actions per se. Rather, it is a call for trust” (166).

Gupta’s research on πίστις also touches on many contemporary Pauline debates. Although he intentionally decides to avoid the πίστις χριστοῦ debate, he cannot ignore it entirely. Gupta sympathizes with what he calls a “third view” being proposed by Benjamin Schliesser and others. In this view, the emphasis is not on human faith nor Christ’s faithfulness, but rather “it points to ‘the event of salvation, God’s redemptive eschatological act’” (174). Πίστις is seen as associated with the gospel and participation in Christ. It “refers to the fact and experience of the Christ-relation” (174). The relational emphasis of this third view fits well with Gupta’s emphasis on the Christ-relation in πίστις.

Gupta’s work also touches on other contemporary issues in Paul. In the area of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), Gupta seeks to correct some of the current consensus. Starting with E. P. Sanders’s insistence that the Judaism of Paul’s day functioned under “covenantal nomism,” where one is accepted into the covenant by grace but remains in it by works, many scholars see Paul functioning under the same framework. Gupta would like to correct this consensus by affirming that Paul did not function under covenantal nomism,
but covenantal pistism: “The radical step that Paul took was not to emphasize πίστις but to separate if from Torah works. Jews would naturally have believed that their covenantal relationship with God was based on trust and fidelity (πίστις), but all of this was mediated by and through Torah ... Paul argues that the mediation of Torah works conflicts with the relational agency of Christ, what I call the Christ-relation” (154). What is central now to the covenant relationship is not the works of the law but the Christ-relation. Furthermore, on issues of divine and human agency, Gupta wants to see both functioning. The covenant relationship requires participation from both sides.

Paul and the Language of Faith makes an important contribution to the conversation on faith language in Paul. This work has several strong points. First, Gupta is right to see modulation in the term πίστις. A small survey of the NT would show that there is not a unilateral meaning for the term. Matthew’s meaning of πίστις in 23:23 (“you ... have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” [ESV]) is not quite the same as Paul’s in Philippians 3:9 (“not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ”). Moreover, Jude 3 sheds another nuance on πίστις by referring to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” The English word faith does not capture this spectrum of meanings. Πίστις can range from faith to faithfulness. Gupta is right to call for translators to take each use of πίστις on its own terms and let context define what aspect of the term is being emphasized.

Second, Gupta’s covenantal pistism provides a helpful pushback to the NPP’s emphasis on covenantal nomism. Gupta rightly sees Paul moving away from the Torah as the center of the covenantal relation to God, but now centering on the Christ-relation. Christ is the mediator, not the law. Finally, Gupta’s work provides a via media for faith language in Paul. On the one hand, he rightly points out that πίστις does not mean mere passive reception. Often people think of faith as merely the passive reception of God’s grace. He rightly shows that, in its Greco-Roman context, πίστις often meant faithfulness or loyalty. Πίστις leads to action. On the other hand, Gupta still holds on to cognitive aspects of faith and rightly critiques works such as Teresa Morgan’s, Roman Faith and Christian Faith, for its softening of the cognitive aspects of faith in the NT.

One weakness of this book is its downplay of the faith/works dichotomy in Paul. Gupta asserts: “What is the problem with works? For Paul, the problem
with works is not that they are bad or too self-active, but simply that they do not constitute the core; the core is the Christ-relation” (185). He does not see faith and works as diametrically opposed in Paul, but rather, with the coming of Christ, works should not be the center of attention but Christ. The problem is a matter of focus, not the doing of the works themselves. It seems, however, that Paul has a bigger problem with the works of the law. He goes at length to show that no has ever been justified by works (Gal 2:16, Rom 4:1–12). The law was a temporary measure never meant to deliver righteousness (Gal 3:24). Many Jews in Paul’s day were seeking to be right before God by their adherence to the works of the law. Paul himself attempted to do this in his former religious life (Phil 3:4–6). Yet, he considered all his works of the law as “rubbish.” (Phil 3:8). It would be difficult to conclude after reading such passages that Paul merely thought the problem with works of the law was a matter of focus. Rather, his former life as one committed to works of the law is diametrically opposed to his one now by faith in Christ.

Nijay Gupta provides a stimulating work in *Paul and the Language of Faith*. He rightly shows that πίστις is not a one-size-fits-all term, but rather has a range of meanings from faith to faithfulness. We must understand each use of πίστις in its own context. It can range from a more cognitive aspect (faith) to something more like loyalty (faithfulness). Any person wanting to further understand how Paul uses faith language would be helped by this book, particularly those who are not satisfied with the polarized sides of the debate (faith vs. faithfulness). This book gives an insightful and fresh look at faith language in Paul.

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One’s food practices—what, how, and with whom someone eats—are some of the more ubiquitous and consequential realities of physical life. But even in a culture with some concerning food issues (think of the prevalence of
obesity, the rise of eating disorders, and the continuous fad diet craze), food habits are not a common subject of Christian teaching. This is what makes Dana Robinson’s published dissertation, *Food, Virtue, and the Shaping of Early Christianity* a fascinating and helpful study: it demonstrates early Christian teachers intentionally appropriating, engaging with, and seeking to influence the established food culture in which their people lived.

Dana Robinson received her PhD at Catholic University of America. *Food, Virtue, and the Shaping of Early Christianity* explores the role that Greco-Roman food culture and practices played in the efforts of Christian preachers to create common sense pictures of piety for the “ordinary” Christian (6). Arguing that food practices are “constitutive of an entire social and religious world,” she approaches sermons and writings by John Chrysostom, Shenoute, and Paulinus through two lenses: the use of food metaphors in their teachings and their complex articulations of the ways Christians should behave in food spaces (225).

One of the central tools Robinson uses to analyze the food discourse of these figures is cognitive metaphor theory, which asserts that metaphors enable people to understand abstract ideas by associating them with concrete realities (10). Robinson demonstrates that Chrysostom, Shenoute and Paulinus intuitively understood the power of metaphor to take difficult concepts about piety and bring them to a level readily available to lay people. Chrysostom articulates a lay piety of moderation—a complex concept from Aristotelian ethics that involves living in the mean between two vices—by describing it as “true fasting” (23-25, 31, 42). Shenoute describes the features of spiritual growth, including the age-old Christian tension between God’s sovereign acting in a believer and a believer’s intentional acting for God, through the accessible images of fruit and farming (119-122, 126-132). Paulinus, in a surprising appropriation of the pagan practice of votive food sacrifices, gives moral instruction on the sacrificial lives believers should live (186-187, 189-196).

These figures also demonstrate a deep and complex concern with the physical spaces where Christians eat. Robinson’s analysis of the way these figures spoke about eating spaces is dependent on theories of cultural geography that examine space and place as “socially constructed entities” (12). Chrysostom seeks to have his wealthy listeners turn their dining rooms (often places for the rigid social distinctions and pride evident in Greco-Roman culture) into little churches—places distinguished by their piety and
equality (105-106). Shenoute makes complex and sometimes contradictory arguments about what a truly Christian meal is, where Christians are allowed to partake of the Eucharist, and the economic factors in Christian eating (151, 165-167, 172). Paulinus communicates the sacrifice and joy of Christian worship by both mapping architectural space and human bodies onto each other and conflating the consumption of a sacrificial meal with worshipful speech to God (218-219).

From the analysis and interactions with these three figures, Robinson concludes that food metaphors and food practices are “fundamental building blocks for these influential models of Christian piety” (21). The “common sense wisdom” that food provides makes it an ideal tool for religious leaders and lay people to “negotiate the lived experience of religion in all of its complexity” (222).

As may already be evident, readers should be aware that Food, Virtue and the Shaping of Early Christianity is narrow in its focus, complex in its methodology, and technical in its analysis. Patristic scholars will appreciate Robinson’s thorough knowledge of fourth century food culture, her nuanced picture of fourth century Christianity’s relationship with food, space, and piety, and her treatment of the less well-known Shenoute. Non-specialists, on the other hand, will need to read carefully and thoroughly to grasp much of her argumentation.

One small criticism: Robinson does not significantly engage with these figures’ interpretation of the food metaphors in Scripture. Though she does mention Chrysostom’s image of “true fasting” in relationship to “the fast that [The Lord] chooses” in Isaiah 58:6, Robinson doesn’t address Chrysostom’s preaching or interpretation of any biblical food metaphors like John 6:35, “I am the bread of life.” Establishing a relationship between Chrysostom’s use of food metaphor with his interpretation of biblical food metaphors would have rounded out her argument and given readers more insight into the way he understood metaphor and food as communication tools.

Those things being said, this volume can be appreciated by a variety of audiences. Anyone interested in patristic engagement with Greco-Roman culture, the patristic use of metaphor and imagery, or patristic spirituality (particularly the tension between the ascetic ideal and what was expected of “ordinary” Christians) should consider reading this book. Additionally, pastors who want to improve their ability to communicate spiritual truths
in understandable ways to their audiences will benefit from exposure to these three figures’ use of metaphor, particularly Shenoute’s expansive use of farming and fruit to communicate fundamental realities of the spiritual life.

Finally, though it is a volume focused on the fourth century, *Food, Virtue, and the Shaping of Early Christianity* also has implications for the present and growing evangelical concern about bodily practice for Christian spirituality. Popular books such as *The Common Rule* by Justin Whitmel Early and more scholarly books like *Desiring the Kingdom* by James K. Smith have emphasized the powerful influence our bodily practices have on our spiritual lives. If food is anywhere near as consequential for Christian piety as Robinson appears to demonstrate, this book suggests a pressing need for Christian leaders to start articulating twenty-first century Christian piety both in terms of food and in relationship to our actual food practices.

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Jeannine Brown is professor of NT at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. As the interest in literary approaches to the NT continues to expand in biblical studies, Brown, in her new book *The Gospels as Stories*, seeks to consolidate and present a summary of the field—along with some of her own advances—of narrative criticism as applied to the four Gospels. There are six parts to the book, the middle four of which explain and explore a specific element of stories, namely the following: “plot and plotting” (part 2), “character and characterization” (part 3), “intertextuality” (part 4), and “narrative theology” (part 5). In each of these parts, there is a chapter of theoretical discussion, followed by a second chapter, which serves to illustrate the point with an extended example.

In the introductory first chapter (part 1), Brown locates narrative criticism in the broader landscape of approaches to the Gospels. She organizes such approaches into three main categories: scholars tend to “amalgamate” (such
as in gospel harmonies), “atomize” (extracting bits from the narrative), or “allegorize” (à la Augustine or many modern-day preachers). Brown’s alternative approach is narrative criticism, which has the distinct advantage of holding intact a gospel as an integrated whole. Narrative criticism, “in broadest terms … attends to the literary and storied qualities of a biblical narrative” (11). Brown continues with a discussion of concepts important to narrative criticism. There is a distinction between “story”—the simple collection of characters, settings, and plot points—and “discourse”—the way in which the author uses these elements to “communicate key messages” in the narrative (such as pacing, sequencing, and characterization; 12). Brown then explains what the “implied author” and “implied reader” are. She concludes this chapter by noting that narrative criticism as a discipline in biblical studies has come to include social-historical features of a narrative’s historical context. Also, readers can use narrative criticism in cooperation with other approaches, including feminist criticism and theological interpretation.

In part 2 (chaps. 2-3), “Plot and Plotting,” Brown defines a plot as a sequence of events that includes an element of causality and is composed of an exposition, rising action, climax, and a resolution. She discusses sequencing (how an author orders the episodes) and lists the following of its devices: the “primacy effect” (the first in narrative having emphasis), chiasm, intercalation, inclusio, prolepsis (“flash-forward”), and analepsis (“flashback”). In addition to sequencing, the Gospels each have an individual style (e.g., Mark’s “habit of narrating lengthy episodes with colorful details” [38]) and pacing to the shape of their narrative. Also, the simple selection of material—what an author includes/excludes in a Gospel—informs us of the writer’s storytelling and theological interests. The second chapter of part 2 (chapter 3) illustrates this framework in an examination of Luke’s gospel. For instance, Brown includes a full page-sized chart that matches themes to episodes, suggesting that Luke groups events by theme. Also, Luke seems to pair stories of men with stories of women in Jesus’ Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50); for example, after Jesus heals a demon-possessed man in 4:31-37, he heals Peter’s mother-in-law in vv. 38-39.

In part 3 (chaps. 4-5), “Characters and Characterization,” Brown begins by surveying some of the standard fare for treatments on character (e.g., Forster’s distinction between “flat” and “round” characters). However, unlike many takes on characterization, Brown organizes character traits around
relationships, rather than, say, types or topics. She examines characters in relation to: the narrator (an analysis which includes, among other things, a character’s reliability from the perspective of the narrator), other characters, readers, setting, plot, and theme. For all these, Brown uses the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 as an example. Chapter 4 of the book, “Matthew’s Characterization of the Disciples,” applies characterization to an analysis of the twelve disciples in Matthew. Brown’s doctoral work is on the subject (xi), and indeed this may be her strongest chapter. The disciples, she argues, are, for the most part, taken as a group (88), and they are presented as Jesus’ closest followers. On the other hand, they have a mixed performance in terms of (mis)understanding who Jesus is and what he teaches. Following her relationship-oriented taxonomy, Brown continues by comparing the disciples to other characters (the disciples have “little faith”) as well as the narrative’s setting, plot, and themes.

Part 4 (chaps. 6-7) treats intertextuality, a word “most often used to describe the varied ways the evangelists engage the Old Testament as well as the study of these connections” (107). The Gospels can have shared settings and events with OT stories, thus invoking them with textual resonances of one kind or another. For instance, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) evokes “similar scenes from Genesis of a man and a woman meeting at a well” (114). These resonances can be through citations, allusions, or echoes (following Hays’ well-known classifications). This creates continuity with the OT—a “theological analogy” (“typology” [123])—and helps throw light on the characters. Intertextuality can influence the reader by reinforcing a teaching or warning and can add a measure of authority to the gospels. The illustrative next chapter, “Intertextuality in John,” looks at John’s use of allusions and echoes. Through intertextuality John presents Jesus as the Passover lamb and highlights the theme of the renewal of all things, namely through Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Part 5 (chaps. 8-9), “Narrative Theology,” asks how we interpreters can make the move from story to theology. Story does indeed “theologize,” and Brown explores how. First, a narrative can maintain propositional tension between what seem to be competing ideas. For instance, Matthew holds in both hands “divine revelation” and “human reception” (150)—that is, divine and human will. Matthew does not engage in the project of subsuming one to the other. Second, narrative pulls us beyond abstract proposition (a tricky point to
illustrate in prose, a genre that presents ideas in abstract propositions). Brown continues by offering some diagnostic questions by which we may quarry theology from narrative. These include: “How does an evangelist’s plotting of his story contribute to his theology?” and “How does an evangelist develop his characters across the story, and how does this development contribute to his theology?” (136). Brown concludes the chapter with an example from John’s gospel: John weaves together settings such as the Jewish festivals to communicate who Jesus is. The subsequent illustration chapter, “The God of Mark’s Gospel,” examines Markan theology proper (what does Mark say about God the Father?). To summarize, Mark characterizes God as affirming and supporting the ministry of Jesus and the good news he brings.

In part 6—the final chapter—Brown concludes the book with a summary of how she understands the relationship between story, history, and theology. Story, she argues, is “the first point of entry” (184). Then, once also being informed by history, our knowledge can ascend to theological understanding.

Brown’s work here is as concise as it is helpful. As a handbook or introduction to narrative criticism of the gospels, Brown’s book delivers. Students will find it accessible, and scholars will find it a useful, at the very least as a reference to core concepts in the subject. Also, her unique contributions (such as in Matthew’s characterization of the disciples) are worthy of consideration for anyone interested in the field.

I have two broad criticisms. First, I would prefer that the material major more on what is particular to stories and storytelling. The parts on plot and character mostly accomplish this. However, the parts on intertextuality and “theologizing” can slide into discussions that do not tell us much about stories per se. Intertextuality illustrates this point: it is important but not exclusive to narrative; therefore, it seems questionable to me to make a whole part of the book center on it. Even if a part on intertextuality is necessary, I would expect it to focus on aspects of intertextuality that are exclusive to story. Unfortunately, I was unable to find much that could not also be said about the NT epistles or Revelation. To put the general point differently, what, exactly, are the advantages of placing this information in narrative form rather than prose? This is the question I would have loved to have seen answered more throughout the book.

Second, and in line with the previous point, one of the most notable features of narrative is its ability to shape the reader/listener in ways that prose
cannot. Brown devotes scarce attention to this (but see 103-104). A good hermeneutic of scripture, in my view, involves not merely interpretation but also transformation. How does a narrative transform us? I wonder if she could have devoted a whole part to this question (perhaps instead of intertextuality).

Despite these qualms, I am thankful for Brown’s hard work, and I will likely recommend it to those who need a relatively short introduction on the subject in clear, unintimidating prose.

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What if the cure for fear was actually … fear? As surprising as it sounds, that is precisely the answer Scripture gives. In his book Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord, Dr. Michael Reeves works like a caring physician of the soul to help his patients understand that the answer to alleviating their sinful fears is to grow in the fear of the Lord. Such fear, he argues, does not mean being afraid of God. Rather, as Reeves so elegantly shows, the gospel of Jesus Christ “frees us from our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful, happy, and wonderful fear (16).”

Reeves serves as the president and professor of theology at Union School of Theology in Bridgend and Oxford, United Kingdom. Rejoice and Tremble is the larger version of the companion book What Does it Mean to Fear the Lord? This new book series produced by Union seeks to equip ministry leaders with sound theological resources, while also providing believers access to the same tools in a more concise format.

Reeves makes several moves to establish his argument. He begins by showing how both the church and culture have misunderstood the fear of God. On the one hand, most Christians think of the fear of God as “the gloomy equivalent of eating your greens: something the theological health nuts binge on while everyone else enjoys tastier fare (16).” On the other hand, in its attempt to alleviate the problem of fear, Western culture has actually created a more conducive environment for fear’s growth. Though
atheistic authors and scientists claim that mankind’s knowledge has advanced far beyond the need for faith in a deity, the problem of fear has actually worsened over time (24).

Reeves makes his next move by lifting the lid off of the buried treasure of Reformed and Puritan piety, holding up the faith-filled lives of these saints in the light of Scripture to show that the fear of God is the pinnacle of true delight in God. Referencing men like Luther, Calvin, Flavel, SWIN Knock, Gurnall, and Bunyan, Reeves clarifies what godly fear is not and then paints a picture of right, godly fear. As he notes, sinful fear is the product of misunderstanding God’s nature and character (33). If left unattended, it becomes “a festering sore that spews out an ooze of other toxic fears (37).”

True or godly fear, however, is a blessing of the new covenant (45). In fact, true fear of God is equal to love for God. It is the “intensity of the saints’ love for and enjoyment of all that God is (52).” To love God with such intensity is to follow the example of the Messi sh himself, whose delight is in the fear of the Lord (Isa 11:3). To be sure, the fear of God includes the experience of trembling and awe at the majesty and holiness of God. However, seen through the lens of Christ, the sinner comes to embrace this glorious God with, as Charles Spurgeon says, “a sacred delight (59).”

Fortunately for the reader, Reeves has a knack for distilling the thoughts of theologians such Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, and John Calvin. Using Calvin’s approach in his Institutes, Reeves shows that the fear of God begins with the knowledge of God the Creator (69). However, trembling at the Creator transitions to rejoicing with the knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ (75). Apart from drawing near to God in Christ, the sinner is left with the sort of fear Reeves describes from the theology of Rudolf Otto, who focused almost exclusively on the fear of God the Creator (86). This, as theologian John Murray points out, results in the dread of coming judgment (89). As the church father Athanasius taught, it is by looking to the Son that people come to see the person of God the Father, not only the work of God the Creator (92). This same point was echoed by the Reformers, whose cry of sola Scriptura led to an emphasis on the grace of God the Redeemer, who has revealed himself through his Son (92).

Though Reeves devotes significant time and attention to unpacking biblical and historical theology in establishing his argument, in his final move, he gives great care to practical theology as well. He does so, first of all, by
showing that true delight in God leads to holiness, not licentiousness. As Spurgeon states, godly fear “leads us to dread anything which might cause our Father's displeasure (102).” Thus, a right knowledge of God leads to a right fear of God, which becomes the driving force of our relationship with God and the pursuit of holiness (110).

Second, Reeves calls Christians in general and pastors in particular to assess their lives and teaching (125). As the church walks in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31), proclaiming the gospel with bold and joyful hearts, it testifies to the one thing that “can liberate us from the anxieties now flooding our increasingly post-Christian Western culture (150).” In the end, cultivating a heart that fears the Lord is about becoming who God created his people to be. For it is in the fear of the Lord that believers will worship and enjoy their God forever (163).

*Rejoice and Tremble* provides a much needed and user-friendly introduction to the often overlooked and misrepresented concept of the fear of the Lord. For those working in the field of Biblical Spirituality, Reeves’ concise but meaty work would serve as a delightful introduction to the heart of gospel-centered piety. Pastors and other ministry leaders would benefit immensely from reflecting on this work and taking inventory of the content and tone of their preaching and teaching. For believers in general, *Rejoice and Tremble* is an invitation to draw near to God through faith in Jesus Christ and to know the intense joy found in fearing the Lord.

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Protestantism has contended with the contributions of Thomas Aquinas for some 500 years. More recent books such as Norman Geisler’s *Thomas Aquinas* (Baker, 1991; reissued Wipf and Stock, 2003) and Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen’s *Aquinas Among the Protestants* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017) demonstrate a renewed desire among Protestants to utilize Thomas. However, others, while recognizing his positive contributions, still caution
against the uncritical acceptance of Thomas’s theology, pointing to philosophical problems undergirding it.

One such figure is K. Scott Oliphint in *Thomas Aquinas*, whose academic background equips him well for addressing this project. He teaches apologetics and systematics at Westminster Theological Seminary. He has authored numerous books on apologetics and philosophy, including *Reasons for Faith* (P&R, 2006) and *Covenantal Apologetics* (Crossway, 2013), as well as contributing to *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy* (Zondervan Academic, 2016).

*Thomas Aquinas* stretches across approximately 150 pages, examining questions concerning Thomas’s views of knowledge and existence. Oliphint structures each of these subjects similarly, summarizing and then analyzing Thomas’s positions. His treatment of Thomas’s epistemology comprises an assessment of reason and revelation, including the light of natural reason; the problem of self-evidence; the epistemology-metaphysics relationship, including consideration of foundationalism; and the *praematura fidei*. Oliphint’s treatment of Thomas’s ontology covers proofs for God’s existence (the so-called *quinque viæ*) and who God is, including discussion of divine simplicity and possible worlds.

While each of these topics merit analysis, the issue of greatest intrigue regards Thomas’s structure of knowledge. Thomas held to a “twofold truth of divine things” by which man may know some divine truths “by the light of natural reason” (philosophy) but requires divine revelation for other divine truths that “wholly surpass the capability of human reason” (theology). Oliphint explains that “significant and often strident debate [exists] among Thomists as to the proper structure of this distinction,” which significantly implicates questions about man’s epistemic capabilities and, thus, broader questions about apologetics (12).

Oliphint interprets the structure of Thomas’s distinction such that natural reason forms the “foundational structure” or the “substructure” of man’s epistemic capacity and revelation forms its “superstructure” (13, 78). This interpretation would mean that Thomas believed that the human intellect, by the light of natural reason, could ascertain some divine truths, like God’s existence (11–17), through the *quinque viæ* (55–74), which may function as *praematura fidei* (25–31). Also, this divine knowledge does not occur by intrinsic self-evidence but rather by empirical means that are independent of revelation (17–21).

Oliphint offers two important critiques of Thomas’s account of natural
reason, which address the natures of revelation and sin. First, he challenges Thomas’s distinction between knowledge by reason and knowledge by revelation, observing that they do not exist in the “same category” (31): Reason is a tool, and revelation content. Consequently, man does not know some things by reason and others by revelation. In contrast to Thomas, “the Reformers, following Calvin, understood that reality is exhaustively revelational,” Oliphint explains. “There is no such thing as the ‘purely natural.’ Since the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1), since God speaks through all that he has made (Rom 1:19–20), that which is ‘natural’ is, at the same time, the very ‘supernatural’ communication of God to his creatures” (79–80).

Additionally, Oliphint argues that Thomas “neglected to incorporate” the “radical effect that sin has on the mind of fallen man” into his theology (33). “[N]atural reason,” states Oliphint, “is wholly unable to come to proper conclusions with respect to God and his existence” (34). He also affirms belief in man’s intrinsic knowledge of God, which Thomas functionally denied, but, referencing Romans 1, says, “Our sin causes us to suppress the truth that God gives to us through his creation” (49). In sum reformational theology “rightly rejected” Thomas’s paradigm (78).

Some interpreters have painted those who hold to positions different from their own as misrepresenting (one author even uses the word maligning) Thomas’s views, as if the question is one of ignorance or dishonesty. However, such polemics are irresponsible (even misleading). A more responsible frame acknowledges that the division among Thomas’s interpreters is an honest one, with serious scholars, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, who genuinely disagree about Thomas’s position. Oliphint summarizes the two basic viewpoints as traditional and new (25). The spectrum of positions is more complicated, with some opting for a middle way (120n1), but Oliphint identifies the basic parameters.

Partly at issue is whether Thomas grounds theology in philosophy (traditional) or philosophy in theology (new). Under the former, man may know some divine truths by the light of natural reason and independent of divine revelation. By contrast, under the new view, man knows divine truth because of divine grace and revelation. The new view, says Oliphint, has “no room in the inn for the traditional notion of natural reason in Thomas” (28). Followers of this view include both Roman Catholics, such as Marie-Dominique Chenu, Étienne Gilson, and Henri de Lubac, as well as Protestants like Norman Geisler,
R. C. Sproul, and J. V. Fesko. While Reformed interpreters would undoubtedly appreciate this view’s emphases on grace and revelation, adherents of the older view argue that it does not reflect Thomas’s actual position.

The traditional view generally sees Thomas as holding that natural reason can grasp divine truths independent of divine revelation. Among others, these also include Roman Catholics, for instance Ralph McInerny, Steven Long, Lawrence Feingold, and Bernard Mulcahy, as well as Protestants such as Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, Lesslie Newbigin, and Carl F. H. Henry. So, although some Roman Catholics and Protestants may agree on their interpretation of Thomas, they would disagree about its worth. Whereas Roman Catholics point to a “natural reason’ that can produce true knowledge of the true God,” the Reformed insist that the “best that natural reason can do, since the fall, is to produce an idol, a god of [their] own imaginings” (53). For his part, McInerny reaffirmed “Thomas’s commitment to natural reason” (12). He also criticized the new view for “virtually destroy[ing] any place for philosophy as its own discipline” (28), contended instead for an autonomous philosophy (Praeambula Fidei, Catholic University of America Press, 2006, 35).

By contrast, Oliphint identifies “a number of significant and serious issues at stake for anyone who is concerned to affirm a biblical, Reformed epistemology” (31). Thomas adopted “two ultimately incompatible principia”: the “neutrality of natural reason” with the “truth of God’s revelation” (126). Regrettably, Oliphint loses focus to mount an attack against Arminianism. Specifically, he argues, “these incompatible ideas are [also] adapted in Arminian theology” (121). However, his un nuanced statement is ill-conceived.

The Arminianism reflective of Jacobus Arminius, who ministered in the Dutch Reformed Church, also rejects belief in the neutrality of natural reason. Likewise, it confesses a radical depravity of natural reason that requires divine grace and revelation for rescue. Authors such as F. Leroy Forlines, Classical Arminianism (Randall House, 2011), and J. Matthew Pinson, Arminian and Baptist (Randall House, 2015), have given expression to this position, which points to the broader Reformed consensus existing prior to the Synod of Dort in its articulation of Reformed Arminianism. Thus Oliphint may follow a traditional interpretation of Thomas’s epistemology and, consequently, reject “Reformed Thomism” (3). However, his loading Arminianism with the problems of Thomism lacks warrant,
because Reformed Arminianism rests upon the same epistemological bases as Reformed Calvinism.

Nevertheless, Oliphint’s *Thomas Aquinas* is an overall enjoyable and worthwhile read. It is most appropriate for those people whose interests lie with Reformed and/or Thomistic epistemology. Even if the reader adopts the new perspective on Thomas and disagrees with Oliphint’s traditional interpretation, they should appreciate that he does not simply dismiss out of hand alternative viewpoints but takes seriously the ever-present dispute concerning Thomas among his interpreters.

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*Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul’s Theology and Spirituality.*
By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, 294 pp., $30.00 paper.

Michael Gorman is a leading voice among NT scholars. He is known for his work on Paul’s cruciform spirituality, missional hermeneutics, and participation in Christ. *Participating in Christ* continues along these lines of inquiry by offering readers a set of “interconnected explorations” in the participatory theology and spirituality of Paul (xxvii). Although each chapter can be read as a stand-alone contribution, Gorman’s aim for the book is to offer both the academy and the church a coherent reading of Paul through a participatory lens (xxiii). The author succeeds at demonstrating the necessity in bringing major Pauline themes together with participation in Christ.

Gorman opens the book with a concise orientation to the growing discussion around participation in Christ in Paul (xvii-xxii). Chapter 1 brings readers a general overview of the book by way of thirteen propositions. These function as the main arguments made in the book. As such, the reader is provided his primary conclusions on each topic in the opening chapter. Chapter 2 introduces several neologisms in arguing that the cross is a Christophony as well as a theophany, ecclesiophany, and anthropophany (30). In short, Gorman says the cross is a revelation of not only Christ’s identity, but also the identity of God, the church, and humanity.
In chapter 3 Gorman answers some of his critics regarding his elevation of cruciformity in Paul’s spirituality and theology. Pauline theology and spirituality, argues Gorman, places an emphasis on the cross that grants it a certain priority (55). Based upon exegesis of Philippians 2:5, in chapter 4, Gorman argues that participation and cruciformity better describes the spirituality of Paul in Philippians rather than imitation or mimesis (77).

Beginning with chapter 5, Gorman turns to Galatians. He says Paul’s apocalyptic experience and apocalyptic theology are to be placed in a mutually informing relationship (97). Included alongside this apocalyptic dialectic are Paul’s new covenant perspectives (98-100). This “apocalyptic new covenant” is demonstrated in the world as the church is an apocalypse of the apocalypse. In other words, the church is a living manifestation and exegesis of the new covenant (113).

Chapters 6–8 form a small unit within the book. Looking at Galatians 2:15-21 (ch. 6), 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (ch. 7), and several texts from Romans (ch. 8), Gorman contends that justification in Paul is both participatory and transformative (115). While positioning himself over-against both a forensic view of justification and a covenant membership view, Gorman argues that Paul is a creative thinker and thus rethinks old concepts (i.e., dikaiōō) in new ways (122). Chapter 9 returns to 2 Corinthians reinforcing his view that justification is transformative participation. As such, justification itself entails theosis or deification (209). In this way, Gorman picks up theosis language from the Christian tradition, and argues that it captures Paul’s understanding well (212).

Chapter 10 shifts the book’s focus to contemporary application. In imitation of Martin Luther King Jr., Gorman writes a letter in Paul’s name to the church in North America. In addition to touching on themes from the book, Gorman highlights aspects of the church’s witness and failures. The book ends in chapter 11 on the importance of the resurrection in preaching and contemporary Christian spirituality.

Gorman has a knack for seeing how disparate streams of Paul’s thought come together. For instance, on the apocalyptic new covenant, Gorman weaves together Paul’s theology, ethics, and mission (113).

While grounded in exegesis the author often moves from what is stated in Paul to what is implied (38, 40, 44, 62, 78, 136, 163, 167 n.51, 201, 221). This is demonstrative of Gorman’s ability to think “theologically” with Paul. It also contributes to one of Gorman’s aspirations, that is, to expound Paul
for the contemporary church.

In a far-ranging book like *Participating in Christ*, readers will likely diverge from the author. While Gorman makes a few conciliatory remarks about the forensic view of justification, his position ultimately undermines it without convincing argumentation. Proponents of forensic justification will maintain the relationship between justification and other theological/spiritual realities (as Gorman acknowledges). The key disagreement between a forensic view of justification and the one proposed by Gorman is the exact nature of the relationship between justification and other theological realities. For example, it is not clear why acknowledging that justification is “integral” to new life with the Messiah (i.e., participation) means we must abandon their distinction altogether (see 121). Gorman overstates the nature of the relationship by claiming justification to be identical with participation. Further, it does not seem he offers a convincing way forward by eschewing the different backgrounds of the *dikai-* family word group (Scriptural & Second Temple), and instead, suggests we imagine Paul rethinking everything (122).

For those interested in the contemporary debate around union with Christ, *theosis*, and justification, Gorman offers an informed take by a seasoned scholar. From a pastoral perspective, *Participating in Christ* will invite thoughtful reflection for the confessing church in a contemporary world.

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Scott Swain, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, serves as president and systematic theology professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. He has contributed to many works of theology, such as *Reformed Catholicity* (2015; co-author), *Christian Dogmatics* (2016; co-editor, chapter author), *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (2017; co-editor, chapter author), New Studies in Dogmatics (series co-editor), and *Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* (2020; co-editor). As the second entry in the Short Studies in Systematic Theology series, this book aims to provide
a simple—but not simplistic—introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity that is “attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture” about the subject (11). Swain also cites the 2016 trinitarian controversy (concerning eternal functional subordination [EFS]; a.k.a. eternal relations of authority and submission [ERAS]) among evangelicals as a proximate cause for the writing of this book (13).

Beyond the introduction, Swain executes his task in eight chapters, with chapters 1–2 devoted to scriptural teaching on the Trinity, chapters 3–6 to a biblical-theological treatment of God’s internal nature, and chapters 7–8 to a biblical-theological treatment of God’s external works. The book also features a short but helpful glossary and annotated “further reading” list. In chapter 1, Swain engages Matthew 28:19–20’s depiction of “scriptural trinitarianism” to articulate the “basic grammar” of the Trinity: one God, three persons, distinguished by mutual relations. The author expands upon this grammar in chapter 2 by surveying intra-trinitarian conversation texts, cosmic framework texts, and redemptive mission texts. The chapter concludes with a six-point summary of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. In chapter 3, Swain engages the doctrine of divine simplicity, articulating its meaning and significance for the doctrine of the Trinity. The author devotes chapters 4, 5, and 6 to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively, emphasizing the theme of “biblical naming.” Swain discusses the primacy, uniqueness, and transcendence of God’s fatherhood—characteristics shared by God’s filiation (the Son) and God’s spiration (the Spirit). He also addresses three theological errors concerning the Son: early-church modalism and subordinationism and contemporary EFS/ERAS. Finally, he treats the “double procession” of the Spirit (filioque), outlining several supports for, and benefits of, the position. In chapter 7, Swain covers the “shape” of God’s external operations (viz., indivisible) before discussing two applications thereof: appropriations of God’s inseparable activity to this or that divine person and the divine missions (or “sendings”) of the Son and the Spirit for us and our salvation. Swain concludes his work in chapter 8 by considering the ultimate end of the triune God’s work, the beneficiaries of his work, and how God communicates the benefits of such work to us.

*The Trinity* is a superb introductory text featuring simple, accessible—yet precise, descriptive—language for a wide-ranging readership. Swain limits technical jargon and abstract speculation. Chapter 3 on divine simplicity may
be the most challenging for beginners, but Swain writes as simply as possible given the transcendent and, therefore, challenging nature of the doctrine. The text is thoroughly biblical and doxological throughout, not just in the first two chapters on scriptural trinitarianism. I imagine Swain endeavors, on the one hand, to show the doctrine of the Trinity’s relevance for daily Christian experience and, on the other hand, to respond to mid-twentieth-century critiques concerning the doctrine’s irrelevance for Christian life. He accomplishes this goal well, evoking praise for the triune God at every turn. Further, the book is an excellent articulation and defense of classical (Latin) trinitarianism. Swain not only articulates various theological concepts (e.g., relations of origin, inseparable operations) but also explains why they matter and how they help us rightly understand and worship God’s triune nature and works. Likewise, the author not only addresses various theological errors (e.g., modalism, tritheism) but also shows why they are so damaging and, thus, to be avoided. I specifically commend Swain for critiquing ERAS (84–87). He rightly and helpfully points out the problems with the position, shows its harmful effects upon God’s personal properties and simple being, and criticizes biblicism’s faulty theological method. Familiar readers may find the author overly critical of ERAS-proponent Bruce Ware; however, Swain correctly distinguishes between Ware’s 2017 (better) and 2005 (worse) iterations of ERAS.

I have only quibbles with The Trinity, nothing more. The work evidences a few minor inconsistencies here and there. For example, the term “procession” does not appear until chapter 6, when it should have been introduced alongside “relations of origin” in chapter 1. Similarly, the language of “common” and “proper” predication, introduced in chapter 1, is missing from the discussion of “essential” and “personal” properties in chapter 3. Further, Swain could have better acknowledged his indebtedness to tradition (i.e., early creeds and confessions) in his theological method (18). Likely, however, he is trying to stress that orthodox trinitarian theology is ultimately grounded upon, and normed by, Scripture—“everything else is commentary” (27). I also found it interesting that Swain does not engage Johannine “sending” texts when exploring redemptive mission texts in chapter 2. Perhaps by examining Markan and Galatian texts, the author seeks to demonstrate that a Christology from “above” finds support beyond John’s Gospel—the contrary of which is often the critique of those promoting a Christology from “below.”

Despite these and other trivial matters, The Trinity is an overwhelming
success vis-à-vis the series’ and author’s aims. It’s clear and concise bibli-
cal-theological treatment of classical trinitarian categories, unique emphasis
on the divine names, well handling of theological errors old and new,
prominent Christocentric and doxological features, and more make this
volume a worthy, up-to-date alternative to Michael Reeves’s Delighting
As Swain accurately explains, “This work is designed to serve beginning
students of theology …, pastors seeking to review the main contours of
Trinitarian teaching, and interested laypersons” (20). Though Swain is
solidly Reformed, his work is suitable for the entire range of the evangelical
Christian tradition.

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Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of C. H. Spurgeon. By
Thomas Breimaier. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020, 304
pp., $28.99.

While there are tomes written about the life and preaching of Charles H.
Spurgeon, works reflecting a thorough analysis of his interpretive method-
ology are virtually nonexistent, so Thomas Breimaier aims to “identify and
analyze C. H. Spurgeon’s approach to biblical hermeneutics” (3). Breimaier
serves as tutor in Systematic Theology and History at Spurgeon’s College,
London UK, as well as a book review editor for the Scottish Bulletin of
Evangelical Theology. This seminal work is the culmination of his disser-
tation, The Cross in the Tabernacle: Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Biblical
Hermeneutics (PhD University of Edinburgh).

Spurgeon believed that a preacher that could deliver a sermon without
speaking the name of Christ ought never to preach again (123) and if he
could preach without speaking to sinners, then he really has no clue as how
to preach (37). Breimaier attempts to understand the interpretive process
behind such straightforward views. His purpose is to comprehend to what
degree did the atonement (crucicentrism) and Spurgeon’s passion for the
lost (conversionism) contribute to how he dealt with Scripture. Breimaier
demonstrates this through an examination of “his conversion and early ministry, publications, addresses, sermons, and instruction to students” (19-20).

The book unfolds the development of the Spurgeon hermeneutic in thematic fashion. The Introduction contains a well-spring of Spurgeon scholarship. Chapter One details his youth, his interactions with the Word and theology in an environment of Nonconformity, his familial influences and how those began to form his crucicentric and conversionistic hermeneutic that would prove essential for his ensuing pastoral ministry (47). Chapter Two reveals further interpretive developments during the initial two decades of Spurgeon’s ministry in London. Breimaier examines ministry outside of the pulpit including heated correspondence between Spurgeon and a high Calvinist Baptist pastor, material in The Sword and The Trowel, devotionals, and discourses on the nature of the Bible.

Spurgeon’s interaction with the OT and the NT is the focus of Chapters Three and Four. His interpretive process was consistent no matter the passage or genre—Christ was present in each selected text and so, there was neither struggle nor impropriety in producing and proclaiming crucicentric and conversionistic sermons (121). Chapter Five surveys Spurgeon’s ministry reach outside the pulpit. Among these ministries and events were his publication The Sword and The Trowel, and the Downgrade Controversy; these and other ministries would supply a wide-ranging framework for Spurgeon to advance his crucicentric and conversionistic approach through interaction with current trends and scholarship (19). Chapter Six highlights Spurgeon’s efforts in education (e.g., the Pastor’s College and Lectures to My Students). For him the academic study of the Scriptures was to center on the cross of Christ (specifically the atonement) and the message of salvation (especially its free offer to sinners) (240). In the Conclusion, Breimaier offers an answer for Spurgeon’s immense success—1) his ability to communicate with the blue-collar lower middle class, 2) the fact he was well-read and engaged with works of higher criticism, and 3) his crucicentric and conversionistic focus (244-245).

The strength of this volume is that Breimaier answers his question—“To what degree did the atonement (crucicentrism) and his passion for the lost (conversionism) contribute to how Spurgeon dealt with Scripture?” His answer—to the nth degree! While true in a straightforward sense, Breimaier would insist that the Spurgeon hermeneutic is not as simple as “making a beeline to the cross.” Spurgeon did in fact have a unified approach to
biblical interpretation that followed a consistent two-fold emphasis. One, it was *crucicentric* in nature, Spurgeon felt a holy obligation to always preach Christ faithfully, no matter the text (104). Two, it was *conversionistic* in application, in that his sermon typically contained the free offer of the gospel. This two-fold emphasis often led to a penchant to interpret sermon texts with the sole aim of preaching the cross and calling for conversion (143). This interpretive approach reflected both his sermons and the entire landscape of his ministry.

Another highlight is the inclusion of Spurgeon’s exchange with other pastors, scholars, commentators and commentaries. Breimaier details Spurgeon’s interaction with notables such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, David Strauss, Benjamin Jowett, F. C. Bauer and the schools of Göttingen and Tübingen; as well as Christmas Evans, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Charles Hodge, John Nelson Darby, John Albrecht Bengal, D. L. Moody, and A. T. Pierson. Although Spurgeon was oft critical and the personal bane of liberalism, his academic perspective held that he was “not among those who throw away “the dry bones of criticism”—bones are as needful as meat, though not as nourishing” (135). Breimaier also juxtaposes Spurgeon’s interpretations on selected texts (e.g., Num 21; Job 19:25; Mark 5) with other conservative contemporaries such as Alexander Maclaren, F. B. Meyer, Franz Delitzsch, Octavius Winslow, J. C. Ryle, and Horatius Bonar. Overall, they all held the same *crucicentric* perspective on chosen passages, but Spurgeon often, in the face of obvious exegetical evidence, chose *conversionistic* application regardless of text meaning or the varying interpretations of his conservative contemporaries (107).

Breimaier’s meticulous documentation of Spurgeon’s handling of the sacred text raises a question for further study. How was it that God so blessed Spurgeon, when Spurgeon so often took liberties with the text? It seems for Spurgeon, on occasion, the end (no matter how worthy) justified the means—any practice employed to preach the available nearness of salvation was hermeneutically appropriate (15-16) and Spurgeon insinuated exegetical and homiletical justification in his strained text interpretation because sinners came to Christ (164). Although the purpose of his hermeneutic was consistent (*crucicentric* and *conversionistic*) the means was sometimes subjective—Spurgeon indicated that his primary goal concerning biblical interpretation was the inclusion of express references to Christ and
conversion, even though those subjects were not immediately pertinent to the text of the sermon (79, 91, 122, 248).

Indeed, there are many volumes both by Spurgeon and about Spurgeon and still Thomas Breimaier pens his own edition within the Spurgeon canon that is in every way sui generis. Though many have read what Spurgeon preached, *Tethered to the Cross* breaks new ground, revealing his hermeneutical process. This work will prove beneficial for those interested in biblical interpretation, the history of preaching, and further study of the colossus Spurgeon. For an additional look at Spurgeon, one may read Tom Nettles’ *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Mentor, revised 2013) or his forthcoming volume, *The Child is Father of the Man: C. H. Spurgeon* (Christian Focus, 2021). For fresher sermon offerings from the “Prince of Preachers” try Geoffrey Chang’s *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon Volume V: His Earliest Outlines and Sermons Between 1851 and 1854* (B&H Academic, 2021). The clarity and force of Spurgeon’s hermeneutic should resonate within the heart of every true man of God, “We must have Christ in all our discourses, whatever else is in or not in them. There ought to be enough of the gospel in every sermon to save a soul” (78-79). May we, like Paul and Spurgeon decide “to know nothing among [us] except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

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