

# John Gill and the Continuing Baptist Affirmation of the Eternal Covenant

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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*,<sup>1</sup> *The Cause of God and Truth*,<sup>2</sup> and his commentaries.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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."<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup>

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?”<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> Gill argues,

[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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

### *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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

Third, none of the persons were compelled to covenant, and fourth, each only committed to what he was capable of performing.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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."<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup>

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*.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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."<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> To meet the qualifications of nearness necessary to stand between God and man, this mediator must be both God and man in one Person.<sup>33</sup> 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."<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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."<sup>37</sup>

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.”<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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*.<sup>41</sup> *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.<sup>42</sup> In Part III, Gill makes his case by presenting the various doctrines through theological argumentation.<sup>43</sup> 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."<sup>44</sup> 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."<sup>45</sup> 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.”<sup>46</sup> 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.”<sup>47</sup> 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.”<sup>48</sup> 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?<sup>49</sup>

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.”<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> Whitby says,

[the doctrine of a disabled will] is also inconsistent with the *New Covenant of Grace*, established in the Blood of *Jesus*, and tendered 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.<sup>52</sup>

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."<sup>53</sup> 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."<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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 *pactum salutis* (or eternal covenant).

#### 2 Samuel 23:5

This was the text Keach used for his first publication on the subject, *The Everlasting Covenant*.<sup>58</sup> 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, *Luke* i. 32, 33. and the

covenant of grace made with *David's* antitype.”<sup>59</sup> 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 triplex* “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.<sup>60</sup>

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.<sup>61</sup>

*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.”<sup>62</sup> 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.”<sup>63</sup> 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 THEOLOGIAN**

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).<sup>64</sup> 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. lxxxix. 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.*<sup>65</sup>

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.”<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>

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.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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."<sup>70</sup> 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."<sup>71</sup> Thus, the receptive instruments of faith and

repentance are gifts given by the Spirit according to the eternal covenant.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

Again, the everlasting covenant grounds what the Association calls "declarative" justification.<sup>74</sup> 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."<sup>75</sup> 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."<sup>76</sup>

#### *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*.<sup>77</sup> 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.”<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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?”<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.”<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.”<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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.”<sup>86</sup> The covenant must be considered eternal because the parties are eternal and because the Scriptures speak of it occurring in eternity.<sup>87</sup> 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.<sup>88</sup> 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.”<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> 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.
2. John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth. In Four Parts* (4th ed.; London: Printed for G. Keith in Gracechurch Street, 1775).
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,

- especially when one accounts for his commentaries, it is difficult to concur with D. Rathel that Gill falls prey to Webster's warning about making history a "mere shadow." David Mark Rathel, "John Gill and the History of Redemption as Mere Shadow," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 4 (2017), 379–80. John Webster, "It Was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him': Soteriology and the Doctrine of God," in *T&T Clark Reader in John Webster* (ed. Michael Allen; New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 132–34.
6. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VI.340; 209.
  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.VI.344–45; 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* (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999), 14–15.
  12. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VI.346; 213.
  13. *Ibid.*, 1.II.VII.347; 214.
  14. *Ibid.*, 1.II.VII.349; 215.
  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).
  19. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.XV.398–404; 247–50.
  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.XXVI.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*

- of the Trinity, 75.
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*.
  24. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VII.354–55; 218–19.
  25. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (rev. ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019), 319.
  26. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VII.355; 219.
  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.
  28. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1.II.VIII.356–66; 219–26.
  29. *Ibid.*, 1.II.IX.366–68; 227–29.
  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. VII, XIV.352, 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 Tryal 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 Chantor 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.
  48. *Ibid.*, 119–20.
  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. Wilhelmus 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. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 114. (Fesko 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.”
  61. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace the Second Part* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1677), 10–11, 19; David Dickson, *A Brief Explication of the First Fifty Psalms* (London: Printed by T.M. for Ralph Smith, 1655), 10–12. Herman Witsius, *Of the Economy of the Covenants*, 2.2.10. Stephen Charnock, “A Discourse of God’s Being the Author of Reconciliation,” in *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (vol. 3; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 380. Of course, we should remember that Gill insists on including the Spirit in the covenant in his *A Body of Divinity*.
  62. ad loc.

63. ad loc. Gill then refers his readers to 2 Tim 1:1.
64. 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.
65. Isaac Backus, *A Short Description Of the difference between the Bond-woman and the Free; As they are the two Covenants, with the Characters and Conditions of each of their Children: Considered in a Sermon, Delivered in Middleborough* (Boston: Printed by Green & Russell, 1756), 7–8.
66. *Ibid.*, 9.
67. *Ibid.*, 9.
68. Andrew Fuller, *The gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptance: 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.
69. William Button, Remarks on a treatise, entitled, *the Gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptance; 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.
70. Andrew Fuller, *A defence of a treatise, entitled, The gospel of Christ worthy of all acceptance; containing a reply to Mr. Button's remarks, and the observations of Philanthropos* (Printed by T. Dicey & Co., 1787), 35.
71. 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.
72. 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.
73. William Rogers, *Circular Letter on Justification*, 17. 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.
74. 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*, 10.
75. William Rogers, *Circular Letter on Justification*, 21.
76. For a twentieth-century Baptist theologian, one might add Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 13–26.
77. Robt. Boyte C. Howell, *The Covenants* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1855).
78. *Ibid.*, 31.
79. *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 eternity of the covenant. Ibid., 32–33.
  82. Ibid., 34–35.
  83. Ibid., 40–41.
  84. Tom J. Nettles, “Preface to the New Edition of Manual of Theology,” in *Manual of Theology* by John L. Dagg (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009).
  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.