

# The Passion and Doctrine of Andrew Fuller in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*

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## A BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) lived in the shade of the subject matter of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* for virtually his entire life. He was born at Wicken in Cambridgeshire.

In 1761 the Fullers moved to Soham where Fuller stayed until he removed to Kettering in October 1782. His earliest religious impressions were in the context of the high Calvinism to which he sought to provide a corrective. His pastor, Mr. Eve, has been subjected to a good deal of condescending judgment based on Fuller's brief characterizations. As Fuller recalled his first religious impressions, he was devoid of conviction and did not consider himself at all concerned in the issue of faith for "the preaching I attended was not adapted to awaken my conscience."<sup>1</sup> Fuller

noted, nevertheless, that the light he had received, "I know not how," would not allow him to go into sin with the ease that he observed in other boys his age. The most likely source of his "light" was the preaching of his pastor, Mr. Eve, who, though he had little to say to the unconverted, evidently preached Scripture, which worked as silently and as unobtrusively as the morning dawn in awakening cases of conscience in Fuller. He revealed that he thought on "the doctrines of Christianity," which he must have learned, at least in part, from Eve. He also read books by Bunyan and Ralph Erskine.<sup>2</sup>

For some years he had extreme swings of conviction, depression, reform, impressions of being converted, backsliding, sin, coldness, and deadness.<sup>3</sup> In November 1769, Fuller ventured his soul upon Christ not knowing if he had any warrant so to do, but felt its necessity even if his presumption meant rejection and perishing. This brought to resolution a period of wave after wave of severe conviction in which he knew he deserved to be a permanent citizen of hell and felt himself to be drowning in the whirlpool of

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his sinfulness and guilt.<sup>4</sup> Some of these perceptions of his damnable state surely were received in the instructions of Eve on the doctrine of sin. He was baptized in the Spring of 1770, became actively engaged in the church, loved his pastor Mr. Eve, and made friends with Joseph Driver twenty-four years his senior, but who had been baptized on the same day as Fuller.<sup>5</sup>

A controversy over a case of discipline in the church, in which Fuller had taken an active role, led to a discussion on the nature of human inability, human sinfulness, and human responsibility. This led to Fuller's departure from Eve's opinions and Eve's departure from the church in October 1771.<sup>6</sup> Fuller observed that those disputes turned his thoughts to "most of those subjects on which I have since written."<sup>7</sup> The division and eventual re-formation of the church led to Driver's usefulness as an expositor and Fuller occasionally so between 1771 and 1774. In that year he began to preach regularly at the church in Soham and in May of 1775 was ordained as pastor.<sup>8</sup>

Fuller soon met Robert Hall of Arnesby who came to his ordination, John Sutcliff, and John Ryland, Jr., all of whom had the same theological interests as Fuller. His distance from them, however, prohibited much discussion and correspondence. In an independent manner, therefore, Fuller began his inquiries and "wrote out the substance of what I afterwards published under the title of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*."<sup>9</sup> The initial document, entitled "Some Thoughts on the Power of men to do the Will of God," was done in 1778 and did indeed contain the *substance* of the later work, though it does not have the same organizational structure.<sup>10</sup>

After seven years in Soham, Fuller moved to Kettering in October 1782 to preach, but was not finally settled as pastor until one year later in October 1783. This culminated an inquiry that Kettering had begun in 1779 leading to the exchange of 28 letters. Ryland remarked, "Men who fear not God would risk the welfare

of a nation with fewer searchings of heart, than it cost him to determine whether he should leave a little Dissenting church."<sup>11</sup> During his installation, in which several ministers took part, Fuller presented a confession of faith that demonstrated the maturity he had attained on this issue. It contains several statements that reflected the views that already were in manuscript form in what would become *The Gospel Worthy*. In article VII he wrote, "I believe that men are now born and grow up with a vile propensity to moral evil, and that herein lies their inability to keep God's law, and as such it is a moral and a criminal inability." In article XI he stated, "I believe that such is the excellence of this way of salvation, that every one who hears or has opportunity to hear it proclaimed in the gospel is bound to repent of his sin, believe, approve, and embrace it with all his heart." In article XII, Fuller affirmed, "I believe the pride, ignorance, enmity, and love to sin in men, is such that they will not come unto Christ for life; ... hence I believe arise the necessity of an almighty work of God the Spirit, to new model the whole soul." Article XV collected the implications of these ideas for his duty as a minister of the gospel.

I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; and as I believe the inability of men to spiritual things to be wholly of the moral, and therefore of the criminal kind, and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him for salvation though they do not; I therefore believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them to be not only consistent but directly adapted, as means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.<sup>12</sup>

One year later Fuller was in turmoil about the prospects of publishing his manuscript. The

spiritual gravity of writing so plainly about the duty of love to God consistently challenged his own awareness of sin's subtleties. On November 16 he confided in his diary, "Wrote some thoughts on 1 Cor. xvi. 22. but have great reason for shame and self reflection, While I write on love to Christ, I feel a world of unlawful self-love and self-seeking working in me."<sup>13</sup> He had written ten pages on loving God both for his special gifts of grace and his intrinsic excellencies. The latter are universal and very great. When he mentioned 1 Corinthians 16:22 in this connection he appended a foot note, "This passage (1 Cor. xvi. 22) is a most awful, and yet just description of the final state of those who love not the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> He felt the weight of publishing his views and expected much unhappiness through it as he would expose himself to a great deal of abuse. He did not want the cause of truth to suffer through him, but he was convinced that the cause in which he was engaged was, indeed, the cause of truth and righteousness. As he laid it before God he confessed, "Assuredly he knows my end is to vindicate the excellence of his character, and his worthiness of being loved and credited."<sup>15</sup> On the twenty-second of November, Fuller walked to Northampton, manuscript in hand, to initiate the printing of his "manuscript of the duty of sinners to believe in Christ."<sup>16</sup>

### STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

This first edition gave evidence throughout of this deeply felt and intense personal investment in the material. In the preface, Fuller used first person pronouns. When this preface was edited for the second edition, he called himself "the author" and used third person pronouns all the way through. Removed from the immediacy of his personal struggle through the issues and challenged to a more detached apologetic style by the multiplicity of engagements on other issues, Fuller developed a more formal style with tighter and more condensed thought patterns. His substance remained

intact, his style less emotive, more sophisticated, and, where possible, less elongated. In the first edition, he spoke of faith as "a hearty credit of whatever God hath said, be that what it may" and in the revised preface he said, "a persuasion of the truth of what God has said." He continued with the minimal phrase, "and, of course, to suspect his former views concerning its not being the duty of unconverted sinners"<sup>17</sup> as a precise reduction of the more extended and rich explanation.

From hence by an easy transition, my mind was led farther to suspect my former sentiments concerning faith not being the duty of unconverted sinners. It was natural to argue after this sort—If true faith is nothing more nor less than an hearty or cordial belief of what God says, surely it must be every one's duty where the gospel is published, to do that. Surely no man ought to question or treat with indifference anything which Jehovah hath said!<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, but rarely, in the second edition he increased the intensity of his point instead of aiming at conciseness. For example, "They appeared to me, in their addresses to those poor souls, to have none of the shackles with which I felt myself encumbered," was expanded to "They appeared, to him, in their addresses to those poor, benighted heathens, to have none of those difficulties with which he felt himself encumbered." While expanding in some ways, he shifted the intensity of the word "shackles" to a more sedate "difficulties." A "worthy minister" becomes a "minister whom he greatly respected," and "he suggested that he thought" became "it was thrown out as a matter of inquiry."<sup>19</sup>

For the most part, however, the changes are in the direction of a more streamlined style. While he was careful to maintain the thought, he reduced the passion and existential engagement of the narrative. If Fuller wanted to communicate something of the deeply troubling nature of this massive shift in theological and ministerial conviction, then the original lan-

guage of the first edition seems more alive and troubled in spirit than the more detached version of the preface edited for the second edition. The poignancy of the first compared to the second is never more obvious than in the opening paragraph of “Part First” completely omitted from the second edition.

“What shall I do to be saved?” is certainly a question of vast importance to a fallen creature. All the concerns of this temporary life compared with this, are less than nothing and vanity. The deliverance of our bodies from diseases and dangers frequently attracts our attention, and the salvation of states and kingdoms often fills the world with admiration: these are great, if viewed by themselves; but compared with the worth of a soul, there is less proportion than betwixt the drop of a bucket, and the vast ocean. What is their loss, if lost, to that which is irretrievable, and eternal? And of what importance is the news of their salvation, to that which brings life and immortality to light?<sup>20</sup>

The next paragraph in edition 1 begins, “As God, of his sovereign grace, hath blessed our world with the glorious gospel of salvation by Jesus, so he hath spoken much in his word” etc. The second edition begins with that paragraph but begins the paragraph in this manner, “God having blessed mankind with the glorious gospel of his Son, hath spoken much in his word” etc. Such stylistic alterations extend throughout the work.

In the same manner he changed a phrase on Sandemanianism from “a cold assent to the doctrines of the gospel in general,” to “a general assent to the doctrines of revelation.” On this same point he asserted in the revision “He had no doubt but that such a notion of the subject ought to be rejected; and if this be the notion of Mr. Sandeman ... he has no scruple in saying, it is far from any thing which he intends to advance”<sup>21</sup> as a replacement and a significant

reduction for a much more passionate narrative.

I had no doubt but that such a notion of the subject ought to be rejected. So far from thinking such a *cold assent* to be saving faith, it appeared to me, in some views, to be criminal. The assent, so far as it goes, is right; but the *coldness* of it is criminal, and even *detestable*. If Mr. Sandeman meant to call such a cold assent saving faith, or if the faith which he calls saving, be unaccompanied with a *dependence on Christ for salvation* ... I utterly disclaim his principles.<sup>22</sup>

Both quotes carry the same theological concern, but one clearly has an emotional edge that has been subdued in the other. Such cold belief of the fact of the gospel is not biblical faith, for the gospel comes with an assumption of its excellency and that any belief of it must necessarily include an adoration of its beauty and its intrinsic excellency. So both editions affirm. Originally Fuller had made the point, “Yet, I found the scriptures as fully revealed *what* they are, namely their *real excellency*, as *that they are at all*, I concluded they that did not believe the one as well as the other, disbelieved a great part of the *report* of the gospel; yea the very essentials of it” and concluded, “Whatever faith a wicked man may have in it as a piece of news, he hath none in the goodness of it; he is therefore an unbeliever in the very essence of the gospel, or in that without which it would not be the gospel.”<sup>23</sup> More elegantly and less effusive, Fuller made the same point sixteen years later, “being blind to the glory of God, as it is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ, their belief of the gospel must be very superficial, extending only to a few facts, without any sense of their real, intrinsic excellency; which strictly speaking, is not faith.”<sup>24</sup>

Two paragraphs appear in the first edition, omitted from the revised “Preface to the first Edition” of the second edition, that give insight into the soul struggle of Fuller as he wrote his ideas and was confronted with the possible obligation to publish them. The native feelings

of Fuller and the immediacy of the personal stake he had in this is obvious. We learn also of the importance of the “judicious friends” that would encourage him in the publication and that shared his theology as well as the practical implications arising from it.

At length I wrote my thoughts out, with a view to inform myself by endeavouring to place them in as explicit a light as I could, and to give myself an opportunity of conviction by lending the MS to a few judicious friends, who, if they saw me wrong, would, I hoped, point out my mistakes. Accordingly I lent it to several ministers, and other persons, who were of different opinions relative to the subject. It is at the request of the greater part of these that it now appears in print. They apprehended the subject to be of importance, as it is not a mere speculative point, but involves in it a great deal of practical religion; and, I suppose, might think the present performance calculated at least to excite a spirit of impartial enquiry.

I have often had discouraging thoughts concerning publishing. Though I verily believe the cause in which I engage is, in the main, the cause of God and truth; yet I am not wholly insensible of my own insufficiency to plead it. From a consciousness also of the prejudices of my own mind, and an observation of the same in others, where received opinions are called in question, I have been often ready to indulge despair, and to resign all hope of the principles here offered to consideration meeting with an impartial trial. I have likewise been ready sometimes to weep, from an expectation of hard thoughts, and perhaps hard words from several of those with whom I could rejoice to spend my days in cordial friendship. Indeed, every consideration, but that of a firm persuasion that the cause in which I engage is the cause of truth and righteousness, would induce me to desist.<sup>25</sup>

From a viewpoint of sixteen years later, the immediate concerns expressed in those paragraphs did not seem quite as relevant, so they were omitted. From the situation described, however, in the first edition, one can discern the spiritual and mental energy invested in the first appearing of this work. Fuller did not want to make the mistake of many controversialists and assume excessive significance in his peculiar concerns, but he seriously thought that “the subject treated of in the following pages is of no small importance.”<sup>26</sup> The gravity of it is seen in that it gets to the root of the error of both Arminians and the false-Calvinist antinomians, and, as a sidelight, also sweeps away the error of the Sandemanians. God’s controversy with each of these can be summarized in the following proposal: “maintaining that *to him belongs all the glory*, and to them *shame and confusion of face*. Here lies the spirit of true religion, heartily to yield this point to God; and here lies the turn of a great part of the present controversy.”<sup>27</sup> Arminians contended that since they shouldered the blame, they must retain some element of the glory, that is, the right improvement of remaining, or restored, moral power; the antinomians wanted none of the glory, but excused their unbelief on the basis of the absence of moral ability; the Sandemanians eliminated the necessity of any moral power by making gospel belief the bare mental acceptance of gospel propositions, disconnected from a heart that approves holiness.

The Sandemanians responded so sharply to this and to other works of Fuller, that in his second edition he included a large appendix entitled, “On the Question, Whether the Existence of a Holy disposition of Heart be Necessary to Believing.”<sup>28</sup> Here he gave an extensive, highly nuanced, carefully constructed polemical argument for the necessity of regeneration as a moral, and thus logical, precedent to repentance and faith. “To me,” he proposed, “it appears, that the scriptures trace a change of heart to an

origin beyond either belief or perception, even to that divine influence which is the *cause* of both.” Stated another way, Fuller contended that the Spirit of God “imparts a holy susceptibility and relish for the truth, in consequence of which we discern its glory, and embrace it.”<sup>29</sup> Apart from the new birth, one cannot see the kingdom of God.

### REMOVING DISTRACTIONS AND KEEPING FOCUS

In order to minimize the effect of arguments from red herrings, Fuller pointed to six doctrinal commonplaces that were not at stake in the discussion. First he made clear that election and the “discriminating doctrines of grace” were not an issue but were fully affirmed by “both sides,” meaning himself and the hyper-Calvinists. None will believe but those that are “chosen of God from eternity.” Nor is there any dispute about those that are “the proper objects of encouragement.” Only to those that are penitent does the gospel hold out “its golden sceptre.” A third issue is whether, in believing the gospel, men are bound to do any more than the Law requires. Central to the hyper-Calvinist argument, and implied in the Arminian concept of common prevenient grace, was the conviction that belief in the gospel demanded more ability than that which man in the unfallen condition was required to manifest in his obedience to the Law. Fuller deals more with the complementarity between obeying the Law and believing the gospel throughout the work as that idea is central to his repudiation of the antinomians.<sup>30</sup>

Fourth, Fuller was careful to argue that in believing the gospel, men are not required “to believe *any more than the report of the gospel, or anything that is not true.*”<sup>31</sup> This issue was raised because some described faith, both antinomians and Arminians, as including the conviction of one’s personal inclusion in the substitutionary death of Christ. That is, if I am

to have faith, must I not believe that Christ has died for me in particular? That would require one to believe more than is revealed in Scripture, Fuller contended, and goes beyond the gospel report. They must believe the gospel report of Christ’s death for sinners and his willingness to receive all that come to God by him; This will be saving faith if “they believe that report with all their hearts.”<sup>32</sup>

Fifth, Fuller did not contest the received doctrine of the Calvinists concerning the inability of “fallen men to do things that are spiritually good.” His argument concerned the kind of inability this was and whether it was a sinful, criminal, inexcusable inability. He concluded, “Tis easy, one should think, to see that this inability is so far from excusing men, that it is the most criminal thing in the world; and therefore their obligations to the contrary ought to be particularly pointed out, if it might be to convict them of their sin.” Here, again, Fuller’s first edition has a more energetic and animated discussion than the more terse, streamlined summarized paragraph in the revised preface of the second edition. The second edition summary of about four lines states that the question does not doubt the inability of men to embrace the gospel, “but what kind of inability they lie under with respect to these exercises? Whether it consists in the want of natural powers and advantages, or merely in the want of a heart to make a right use of them? If the former, obligation, it is granted, would be set aside; but if the latter, it remains in full force.”<sup>33</sup> That summary replaced the following section:

We have a far worse opinion of human nature, in its present state, than to suppose them capable of any thing on this sort. To what purpose then, it has been asked, is the dispute? Of what use is it to talk of what men *ought* to do, when you allow they *cannot* do it? We answer, very great. Men are unable, in their present state, to keep God’s law; but it does not thence follow that it is of no use to

vindicate its authority, and ascertain its extent. It is by this, God's prerogative is maintained, the sinner convinced of his sin, and the grace of the gospel appears in its forgiveness.

Besides, the *nature* of this inability renders a just statement of men's obligations peculiarly necessary. We maintain with the apostle, that *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them*; but then, we as well maintain, that his inability is no other than that of a man under the dominion of carelessness and prejudice, who, while he continues such, is unable to discern and embrace the truth. We grant that carnal men are unable, totally unable to do any thing acceptable to God; but then we maintain as well, that they are no otherwise unable than a man that is under the dominion of enmity to another is unable to love and please him.<sup>34</sup>

The sixth non-issue for Fuller was whether preaching was done with the intent of provoking the carnally-minded to perform something spiritually good that would serve as the ground of their justification. Fuller believed that refusal, and this moral inability, to obey the Law arose from the same perversity of heart as refusal to believe the gospel. He had no delusion, therefore, that his attempt to persuade would render the unbeliever more pliable and likely to believe; like the Law, left without the operation of the Spirit of God such preaching would only increase resistance and reveal the fundamental hatred of the sinner toward God. "We hope," Fuller pled, "to be believed when we say the design of all our preaching and writing is not to persuade sinners that they can believe in Christ of their own accord." He knew they were too wicked for that. Rather, his purpose was "to convince them of their inability and utter depravity; and this we believe cannot be done but by dwelling upon their great obligations." Paul, indeed, became con-

vinced of his inability and depravity by a view of the spirituality of the Law. Fuller continued:

The only way that we know of to convince any man of sin, is to shew him *what he ought to be*, and compare that to *what he is*. We reckon faith in Christ one of those things required by the law of God of those where the gospel is preached, and we preach the obligations of men to it for the same ends with which others preach other branches of the law; namely, not with any hope that our carnal hearers, while such, will obey it; but with a view, if it please God to bless our endeavours, by shewing them what they ought to be, to convince them of what they are, and so to bring them to pray in the spirit of *Ephraim, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*.<sup>35</sup>

In the revised preface, Fuller made this issue more precisely to the point as to whether faith justified as a virtuous ground of acceptance with God. Such could never be the case, for faith was but a mean to declare one's submission to the righteousness of Jesus. Though justification is only by Christ's righteousness imputed, the Jews fell through lack of faith and "our judgments must be strangely warped by system, if we did not conclude it [their lack of faith] to be their sin, and that by which they fell and perished."<sup>36</sup>

Fuller added a seventh caveat in the revised edition stating, "The question is not, whether unconverted sinners be the subjects of exhortation; but, whether they ought to be exhorted to perform spiritual duties?" He, of course, believing faith in Christ to be a duty, contended that the exhortation of every gospel minister in his preaching was only to spiritual duties. No other kind of duty to God exists except that which is spiritual, the performance of which arises from love to God; no duty that God requires may be performed by "a carnal heart destitute of love to God." Whether it be Law or gospel, "God requires the heart, the whole heart, and nothing but the heart."<sup>37</sup>

He assured the reader that nothing personal

entered into his discussion of the various writings but only an attempt to get at the issues involved. The writings of the dead were mostly involved for that is “the likeliest way to have the subject considered in a dispassionate manner.” We examine the works of the dead for the benefit of the living, for “most people can bear to have their principles examined in the person of another better than in their own persons.”<sup>38</sup> He welcomed anyone to point out his mistakes but “let him not merely *call* them mistakes, but *prove* them so, by solid scriptural evidence.” In such a manner of engagement one would do no harm to Fuller but would be fully entitled “to every mark of honour and christian [sic] respect.”<sup>39</sup>

### THE THESIS AND THE PLAN

The basic thesis of Fuller is this: *Belief of the gospel is the greatest of all moral duties and the refusal to do so, for those that hear, is the most severe of crimes against the honor, righteousness, justice, and holiness of God. Following from this, the chief task of the gospel minister is to persuade and exhort his hearers to believe the gospel with the assurance that hearty compliance brings justification to eternal life and refusal brings an aggravated condemnation.*

Fuller developed this thesis in three parts of the book with amazing concentration on that central idea. Part one stated the subject and defined faith. Part two discussed six propositions proving that faith in Christ was the duty of all men “who hear the sound of the gospel.”<sup>40</sup> The revised edition stated “all Men who hear, or have Opportunity to hear, the Gospel.”<sup>41</sup> The gospel itself, unlike the Law, is not originally written in the heart, and belief of it is not, therefore, by nature an obligation. Such belief in the absence of hearing it would be a natural and physical impossibility. Keeping the Law, however, is by nature an obligation, and, unkept, brings under condemnation all, whether or not they hear the gospel. Fuller’s driving concept in this book is to show how the gospel, though a manifestation of sovereign grace, nevertheless, speaks to the

same issues as the Law and calls for the same cordial compliance of mind; it carries, therefore, the same weight of obligation as the Law.

Though he had scattered a discussion of some objections to his doctrine throughout parts one and two, he reserved for part three an engagement with the most direct and substantial objections to his basic premise. Fuller opened this section with a lengthy discussion of the moral nature and capacities of Adam in the unfallen state. Since this idea constituted the keystone to the Hyper-Calvinist theological argument, we will unfold carefully its layers. He dealt also with objections arising from a belief in the sovereignty of God expressed in his decrees and the distinguishing doctrines of sovereign grace, belief in particular redemption (as a separate discussion), the nature of the covenant of works in focusing on perfect righteousness from personal obedience, the present necessity of an efficacious work of the Spirit, and the necessity of an internal spiritual principle as fundamental to a believing heart. Fuller believed in each of these but did not see any of them as rendering belief in the gospel as anything less than a moral duty.

### A DEFINITION OF FAITH

Fuller set forth a relatively simple definition of faith. He then filled each part of the definition with all the content required by faithful biblical exposition. An examination of all the ways in which the word faith appeared in the biblical text yielded a summary idea, “But in all these, faith is the credit of some testimony.” Saving faith, Fuller, contended is no less so. Nothing is given the name of faith but “what is founded on substantial evidence.” Seeking, therefore, from Scripture, some pungent declaration of the word related to the enjoyment of the fullness of gospel salvation, Fuller settled on 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “The belief of the truth.”<sup>42</sup> All other spheres in which truth may be asserted pale in comparison to this truth and, for sure, exist only to support this truth. In that phrase, “belief of the truth,” is



contained all that Scripture testifies about the gospel including the consonance of mind and heart in the grand presentation of the glory and beauty and intrinsic excellence of the Redeemer. Fuller expounded.

That was it that represented God in his *true* character, and men in *theirs*—that told them the *truth* without falsehood or flattery, concerning the evil of sin, and its just demerit—that gave them a *true* account of their miseries, and necessities, and as well exhibited the glorious *realities* of life and immortality to views. That was it which formed the subject matter of the apostles embassy, and in the reception of which he knew men’s everlasting interests were concerned. That was it of which the Son of God himself came down to *bear witness*. To acquiesce therein is to view things in measure as God views them, and as Christ viewed them when he offered himself a sacrifice for sin. Never was such *witness borne* to the excellence of God’s law and character, to the evil and demerit of sin, and to the worth of the everlasting enjoyment of God as he then bore! To view things then as he viewed them, is to view them as *they are*, and that is the same thing as the apostle calls *the belief of the truth*. It deserves also to be particularly noticed that what is here called the belief of the truth, is peculiar to the *elect*, accompanies *sanctification of the spirit*, and terminates in *salvation*.<sup>43</sup>

In the second edition, Fuller’s concentration was not so tied to 2 Thessalonians but emerged as a summary of thirteen New Testament passages that he quoted in brief. “That the belief of the truth which God hath revealed in the scriptures concerning Christ, is saving faith,” Fuller reaffirmed, “is evident from the following passages.” The final of these thirteen brief quotations was 2 Thessalonians 2:13, from which catena he concluded, “It cannot be doubted, that, by the *belief of the truth*, is here meant, faith in Christ; and its being connected with sanctification of the Spirit and eternal salvation, proves it to be saving.”<sup>44</sup>

Fuller had dismissed several common misperceptions of biblical faith prior to proposing his definition. Each of these erroneous conceptions inserted something of personal interest into the nature of faith: such as, faith involves necessarily the convictions that Christ’s graces already extend to me in particular, or an unshaken persuasion of my being is a state of salvation. Neither of these is an element revealed in Scripture or contained in the preaching of the Apostles. “The Scriptures always represent faith as terminating on something *without us*; namely on Christ, and the truths concerning him.”<sup>45</sup> Gratitude for the particular blessings of grace and confidence in our status as sons of God are desirable and should be sought, but only upon believing the gospel. Promises are not made of any personal connection with gospel blessings apart from general promises and conditions. Faith gains all advantages resident within the gospel, but those advantages are consequent upon believing and thus are not any part of what must be believed. “The grand object of that is, *what Christ is*, and not *the happy condition that I am in, as interested in him*.”<sup>46</sup> Faith, belief of the truth of all that is reported about Christ in his person and his redemptive work, concentrates on his sufficiency, his excellency, and his authoritative prerogative. In the most precise construction of the order of saving graces, Fuller set believing these things prior to the coming to him, the trusting in him, and the act of union with him; he is seen, at the first dawn of faith, as great and worthy irrespective of benefits that he may or may not sovereignly bestow.<sup>47</sup> The great examples of faith to which Jesus pointed were the woman of Canaan and the centurion. Both believed in Jesus’ intrinsic excellence, his authority, his absolute prerogative prior to any firm knowledge that he included them in any special advantages of his grace.<sup>48</sup>

Even in the opening of the spiritual eyes to see the glory of Christ, “there is no new revelation made to the soul *of things not contained in the scripture*.” All the excellence, glory, and preciousness of Christ pressed on the mind and

inflamed in the heart, or to be discerned later by Christians, “is already reported in the sacred scriptures.” Since this is so, faith, the belief that culminates in union with Christ, inextricably connected with salvation, is belief of the truth. Such belief is the duty of all that hear the gospel. “If it is denied to be men’s duty to believe these *intrinsic excellencies* of religion, let it be proved that these are not a part of the *record which God hath given of his Son*.”<sup>49</sup>

### **A DEFENSE OF THE ASSERTION THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL MEN TO HAVE SUCH FAITH**

Following the definition of faith, Fuller invoked six propositions to show that this faith was the duty of all men “who hear, or have opportunity to hear, the Gospel.” Though he already had given sufficient reason to state that as a truth, he did not want readers to think that he had exhausted the biblical network of ideas that supported his thesis. These six propositions, therefore, Fuller discussed with an abundance of biblical interpretation and doctrinal reasoning. First, the call to faith comes to unconverted sinners. Fuller shows with amplitude that the calls of the gospel with the command to believe were given to men while in their unconverted state. Both testaments demonstrate this to be so. Among the many passages employed, the command of Psalm 2, “Kiss the Son,” with its implications of love and recognition of worthiness carries weight for an Old Testament text. John 5:23, “men should honor the Son,” elicits this comment from Fuller, “This then cannot amount to less than a holy hearty love to him, and adoration of him, in all the manifestation by which he hath made himself known; and this evidently includes faith in him.”<sup>50</sup>

Second every man must cordially receive and heartily approve whatever God reveals. This seems self-evident since God is a God of truth, holiness, and love. To assert otherwise

would be grotesque, “horrid and unworthy of a refutation!” If all men should love God because of the perfections revealed in creation, how much more should all men love God for the gospel and obey its required conditions for its enjoyment. As a revelation, the gospel is infused with all the glories of the Law and is a manifestation of the same excellencies, but in more powerful personal demonstrations. If all are obliged to obey the revelation of God’s Law, how much greater impetus rests upon the conscience to conform to all that is commanded and every act of worship that is implied in the revelation of the gospel.

Third, though the gospel is not strictly speaking a law, but a message of pure grace, nevertheless it requires such engagement with it as virtually requires obedience which includes saving faith. Passages that use the word “obey” in reference to the gospel and threaten punishment on those that do not obey (1 Thess 1:8, 9 and 1 Pet 4:17) certainly imply that the gospel’s connection with the Law is such as to require obedience. Fuller gave a lengthy paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:19 showing that the gospel preacher is under commission to command a belief of the gospel.<sup>51</sup>

Fourth, in Scripture the refusal of sinners to believe is ascribed to their depravity as arising from an evil heart, a heart captive to the devil, and is a manifestation of every work of the flesh which also is hostile to the Law of God. Fuller employed a long quote from John Gill in confirmation of his view. Also one of the operations of the Spirit in convicting the world of sin, perhaps the sin that is the sum of all others, specifically concerns their not believing on the Son.<sup>52</sup>

Fifth, God has “threatened and inflicted the most awful punishments on men for their not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>53</sup> Among other passages, Fuller appealed to John 3:18 as securing the idea that unbelief is a procuring cause of damnation. To the same end he interpreted 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. In both cases, the persons under question, unbelievers, were

presented with Christ as the sum and substance of the gospel, and, in both cases, they refused to come to the light or refused the love of the truth, and were thus given up to damnation. "How this can be accounted for," Fuller queried, "but by allowing that they *ought* to have received the love of the truth, is difficult to say; and yet if this is allowed, it is the same thing as allowing saving faith to have been their duty."<sup>54</sup>

In the sixth proposition, Fuller gathered together all the other spiritual exercises incumbent on men in general, and showed that they have an inextricable connection with the gospel of Christ. That which bound all of these various elements together was the obligation of all men to conduct themselves before God with true spiritual holiness. That the Law is spiritual and implies this founded Fuller on the argument from which he extrapolated a number of qualities endemic to gospel repentance and characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit. This continuity between the spirituality of the Law and the effects of the gospel again proved Fuller's contention that it is the duty of all men to believe the gospel. "If God's law be spiritual, and remain in full force as a standard of obligation; if men, while unconverted, have no real conformity to it; if regeneration be the writing of it upon the heart, or the renewal of the mind to a right spirit; all these things are clear and consistent."<sup>55</sup> In the original edition, Fuller included a lengthy exposition of the excellence of God as he is in Himself, and the excellence of Christ in his person and redemptive work. He included it in a pertinent but much diminished way in the second edition. He concluded this section in the second edition with the summary analytical statement, based on his observations of the Spirit's work. "But if that which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit be something different in its nature from that which is required in the divine precepts, I see not what is to be made of the scriptures, nor how it is, that *righteousness, goodness* or anything else which is

required of me, should be accompanied, as it is, with the promise of eternal life."<sup>56</sup>

The first edition closed this section with a richer display of passion but with just as much confirmation of its thesis.

Scripture did I say? Surely it never ought to have been questioned, even though God had never told it us, whether loveliness ought to be loved, beauty admired, purity imitated, just authority feared and obeyed, sin lameted [sic], truth embraced, and a vile sinner lie humble before God!

O ye cold-hearted, frozen formalists!  
On such a theme, 'tis impious to be calm;  
Passion is reason, transport temper here!<sup>57</sup>

## DEALING WITH THE OBJECTIONS

### *Are the Powers of Adam under a Covenant of Works Consistent with a Call to Faith under a Covenant of Grace?*

The core of what Fuller perceived to be the determinative error of hyper-Calvinism, or anti-nomianism, he exposed most thoroughly in part three in his discussion of objections to his principle of "duty-faith." These objections all concerned "the inability of innocent Adam to believe in Christ as a saviour, or from the supposed inconsistency of this principle ["duty-faith"] with that of the divine decrees."<sup>58</sup> The first objection dealing with "the nature of that divine principle which Adam possessed"<sup>59</sup> gave the substance of the argument that lay behind all the objections and formed the most characteristic element of hyper-Calvinism. As a preliminary caveat to his discussion, Fuller pointed out that "if by reason of our darkness we could not ascertain with precision the nature and extent of our first parents principles and abilities, is that to be wondered at?" The moral powers constituting a condition of innocence so foreign to our disordered souls would be extremely difficult to discern. The preceptive part of Scripture would, however, in Fuller's viewpoint, create a trajectory of thought only consistent with the

duty of all men to consent to all that God reveals and commands—even the command to repent of sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, the appearance of inconsistency between divine decrees and human responsibility should offer no barrier to belief if both can be demonstrated to be clearly taught in Scripture; divinely revealed truth might certainly challenge the narrow limits of human rationality. Should it be demonstrated, however, by the “false-Calvinist” that the principle of moral action incumbent upon Adam in the unfallen state differed in some *essential* way from the exhibition of faith called for by the gospel, then the difficulty of claiming that believing the gospel is the moral duty of all fallen persons, elect and non-elect, increases.

The idea central to the objection is this: Adam possessed no need of turning from sin and placing trust, or belief, in a redeemer when in the innocent state, and had, therefore, no power for such actions of soul. That for which he had no necessity and thus no power in the innocent state cannot now become his duty until God, by special grace, bestows such power. The supernaturally induced state of faith comes only by an additional manifestation of divine energy unnecessary for and unavailable to the innocent man and, therefore, constituted no part of the obligation or power of the fallen man.

Fuller responded by dividing the concept of incapacity into two states; essential and circumstantial. Adam’s incapacity for the duty of repentance was merely circumstantial, not essential. Other possibilities not present in an innocent world might nevertheless become duties in the condition of a fallen world. Fuller illustrated:

So Adam while innocent though possessed of love to God and man in an high degreee [sic], was yet incapable of discovering that love by sighing for the abominations of the land, or pitying and relieving the miserable. The reason was, there were no abominations in the land to sigh for, nor miserable beings for him to pity.

But no one imagines that because Adam was not capable of sighing for the abominations of the land, therefore his descendents ought not: or that because he could not pity the miserable, therefore, they are not bound to do so. Adam could have done all this had he been *in circumstances which required it*. Why then should that *circumstantial* incapacity of Adam to repentance and faith, be brought as an argument against the present duty of his descendants?<sup>60</sup>

Fuller argued, therefore, that the essence of those moral qualities that were necessary for repentance and faith resided within the originally created innocent man as constituent elements of the law written on the heart (“love to God and man in an high degreee” [sic]). The natural and moral perfections of God as perceived by Adam in innocence might be different, and in the context of creation and providence only appear less glorious, than those enjoyed by fallen men in contemplating the redemptive love of God in “sovereign saving grace,” but these differences “lie not in the *nature* of the principle, but are merely *circumstantial*, and so do not circumscribe present duty.”<sup>61</sup> Fuller followed with three biblical reasons to consider “that the principle of Adam in innocence, and that in believers, notwithstanding these differences are *essentially*, or *for substance* the same.” First, Fuller proposed that “they are both formed after the same rule, and that rule is the holy law of God.” He showed this continuity by pointing out that the expectation upon Adam was that of “an entire conformity to the moral law of God.” That same expectation also described the mission of Christ in the salvation of sinners, “an entire conformity to the same moral law.” In addition, the restoration of the divine image in saved persons as they “are formed after the image of Christ, must be the same.” Thus, from creation in innocence to restoration in eternity “it is not any new law, but the same divine law

that is *written on their hearts* in regeneration, as was written on Adam's heart in his state of innocence."<sup>62</sup> This argues that the difference in the duties of unfallen and fallen men relate solely to their circumstances and not to any essential principle of their moral nature.

Fuller's second reason points to the language of salvation employing such words as "returning," "washing," and "renewing." These words cannot refer to the natural faculties of the mind or heart, for then the fall would have been an entire destruction of human nature; instead this means the renewal of a right disposition, a washing from the pollution that has marred the original state, a return to those affections that guided the heart prior to its departure. Certain aspects of the circumstances of such restoration are different from the original circumstances, but the operating principle in the heart of man is the same. Fuller illustrated the point.

That the life we enjoy through Christ is *in many respects* different from that which was promised in the covenant of works, may for aught appears to the contrary, be allowed, without supposing our principles essentially different. 'Tis certain, we shall contemplate and enjoy God in a different character, and as exercising his attributes in a different way than what could have been, had man continued in innocency. And no doubt the bliss will be far more glorious than that which was lost in Adam. Christ came not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly. But this circumstantial difference in the object enjoyed makes nothing in proving his and our *principles* to be different in their *nature*. The joy of angels is greatly increased by man's redemption, but it does not thence follow that their *principles* are different from what they were prior to the revelation of that event. A life of joy in heaven is far more glorious than a life of communion with God on earth; yet the principles of saints on earth and saints in heaven are not therefore of a different *nature*.<sup>63</sup>

A principle of heart certainly will operate in different ways and toward different objects given different circumstances, whether angels in heaven, innocent men on earth, fallen and unrestored men on earth, fallen and restored men on earth, fallen and unrestored men in hell, or fallen and restored men in heaven. The abiding principle is that the human heart had an original love of holiness as seen in the perfection of his creator and thus engaged in a pursuit of righteousness that he might reflect the loving actions and presence of his creator. The fall introduced a state of unrighteousness to which condemnation is the just response of God, and of corruption of heart which brings about the increasingly severe misery of a hatred of holiness. Salvation, in all of its dimensions and in all of the eternal glories connected with it, introduces no new principle in the moral nature of man nor any state of righteousness that was not originally anticipated as a result of unbroken obedience.

It is perfectly consistent, therefore, with the grace of God in the gospel to say that belief of the gospel is the duty of all men. This does not imply a present ability, however, for our indisposition toward God has made the conditions of repentance and faith so antagonistic to our present desires that we cannot conform to them. "And hence," Fuller concluded, "rises the necessity of the work of the Spirit. We need not only the gospel to be held forth to us, ... but an almighty power to accompany it, that our rebellious spirits may be so brought into subjection, as to embrace it."<sup>64</sup>

This same principle of argumentation is suffused throughout Fuller's discussion of other objections. For example, on an objection from the covenant of works—faith in Christ is not included in the covenant of works and cannot therefore be the duty of those who are not under the covenant of grace—Fuller noted, "And though the law of God, as given to Adam, did not *formally* require faith in Christ, yet it

required *such a disposition of mind, as, if its subject were in a fallen state, and a mediator were revealed, would cordially embrace him.* Of this, it is hoped, proof sufficient has been given, in answer to the *first* objection.<sup>65</sup>

In addition he reasoned, “The law [under which Adam operated] required a disposition, which, if under fallen circumstances, and the revelation of a saviour, would operate the same way that evangelical graces now operate.”<sup>66</sup> Also in discussing the necessity of the work of the Spirit of God, that is the special grace of effectual calling, Fuller argued that we “need the Spirit of God to enable us to do our duty.” To those that believed this diminished the power and grace involved in regeneration, Fuller explained that grace finds its peculiar beauty in that it is given in spite of *demerit*. But if no obligation exists peculiar to the gospel, the bestowal of its blessings may magnify sovereignty but have little of what we normally recognize as grace. And further, if the bestowal of the gifts of the gospel comes in a way that overcomes a virtually invincible moral opposition to what is bestowed, then the power of that grace is highlighted more than if the bestowal had nothing to do with an opposition peculiar to those gospel blessings. So again, “The idea of a prior obligation to those things which are wrought in us in regeneration, appears plainly therefore to strengthen the evidence for the necessity of the Spirit’s work, rather than weaken it.”<sup>67</sup>

### ***The Decrees of God and the Will of Man***

Fuller did not argue that any person is obligated *to be the recipient* of the sovereign acts of God. The decrees of God, in other words, do not nullify the moral precepts of God and the consequent culpability of men for their sinfulness in these determined events. The doctrine of decrees, election in particular, is designed to “teach those that are saved what cause to attribute their salvation to, and those that are yet

carnal what source salvation must arise from if ever they obtain it.”<sup>68</sup> If divine decrees are ever put to the use of excusing men in their sin, diminishing their obligations, or weakening the intensity of their necessary attention to the matters of salvation, they are put to ill use. He illustrated this with a large number of biblical events in which the divine determination of the outcome did not nullify or weaken the moral obligation of all the persons involved in the event. Pilate was wicked in releasing Jesus to the will of hostile men though God determined that it should be so. Pharaoh was wicked in refusing to release the Israelites from slavery though God had determined his refusal and would show the greatness of his power and his wrath in the demise of Pharaoh. Joseph’s brothers did wickedly in selling Joseph into slavery but God had determined the entire event for his own good purposes.

Fuller argued throughout for an intimate compatibilism between God’s sovereign decrees and unabated human responsibility. Though men have no responsibility in determining the content of the eternal decrees of God, yet their nature is such, and God’s decrees are such, that men as moral agents are responsible for every action and the character of every relation in which they are involved in all of these events. So has God wed together his decrees and our responsibility with absolute compatibility.

In one summary statement Fuller stated, “Election, redemption, and faith, are all blessings, but are not all dispositions, herein they differ; the former are God’s acts without us, but the latter is our act as by him enabled.”<sup>69</sup> Human response, therefore, even when divinely enabled, is in a different category from, though embedded within, the divinely ordained outcome of events. The consistency of Fuller’s perception of this is seen in the way he structures his statement of human responsibility where God has determined not to grant regeneration to an individual. Again he included an argument

from the continuity of moral duties between the innocent and the fallen state.

This, and whatever else is spiritually good, appears to us to have been his duty before God wrought this change in him, as well as at the time, and that his want of a disposedness to these things was a criminal defect.—But the term *regeneration* is not used to express any thing we *are* or *do*, but *what God does for us*. It is not used to express our *being of a right spirit*; if it were, we should say it was every man's duty; but God's sovereign and almighty work of *making us so*. It is not mens [sic] sin that *God does not* create in them a right spirit, and yet surely they ought *to be of a right spirit*. To make this matter still more plain and evident, if possible, let it be considered that God's not giving that holiness to fallen men which his law requires, and which they have lost, be that what it may, is not their sin; but yet all must allow it is their sin that they *have it not*: otherwise the want of holiness is not a criminal defect, and it is abusing mankind to call them *sinners*. We do not say it is the duty of men *to give themselves special grace*; all we affirm is, that it is their duty *to be* that which nothing but special grace can make them; and he that will deny this, must deny that a bad man ought to be a good one.<sup>70</sup>

Does, however, the *oughtness* of holiness as independent of the grace of regeneration imply the *oughtness* of a state of forgiveness in relation to the nature and/or intent of the death of Christ? Fuller sought to be sensitive to the character of this objection.

### ***The Particularity of the death of Christ and The Universality of the call to Believe***

One of the most discussed areas of Fuller's defense of divine determination focuses on his discussion of "Particular Redemption." While the burden of Fuller's theological discussion, and his personal investment of study, had always been the relation of human depravity to moral and natural ability and inability, the

connection of these issues to the atonement had not been far behind. In his discussion of the atonement in the first edition, subheaded as "Concerning Particular Redemption," Fuller pointed to an objection based on the supposed absurdity that "God can have made it the duty of any man to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, or that he can have promised salvation to him on his so believing, when all the while his salvation was not the end for which he died."<sup>71</sup> The Table of Contents described his argument in these words: "If faith were a believing Chirst [sic] died for *me* in particular, this objection would be unanswerable." The second statement of the summary asserted, "No necessity for the party *knowing* his particular interest in Christ's death in order to believe in him, or for his *having* any such interest to render it his duty." Fuller's basic argument in the first edition is that, at the time of "his first coming to Christ," a person "knows of no particular interest" he has in the death of Christ, "or that he should have such an interest at all, in order to make it his duty."<sup>72</sup>

None can conclude their interest in Christ while they remain an unbeliever; thus, belief does not include the persuasion that Christ has died with the intent of saving such a sinner in particular. When Fuller argued, "It appears equally evident, that there is no necessity, in the nature of the thing, for the party *to have* any interest in Christ's death, in order to make trusting in him his duty,"<sup>73</sup> he emphasized that the duty to believe the gospel is not dependent on a special provision of grace made for such and such a sinner in particular. The hypothetical situation posits as a condition of consideration that there are some, the non-elect, for whom the death of Christ includes nothing from which they could find forgiveness should they come to him for such; for them he was neither substitute, sacrifice, nor propitiation and provides nothing, therefore, for them to draw upon to any advantage. Given such a case, even

if a supplicating sinner could view the content of forgiveness procured by the death of Christ and upon such a view found that no investment for the forgiveness of his sins was made, still the only proper and dutiful posture for him is the supplication of mercy, for receiving mercy is the only path to a restoration of dutiful submission to the governing prerogative of God.

This particular part of his argument he abandoned upon being challenged by Dan Taylor. The supposition of *no-interest*, deemed in later writings as the “commercial” view, behind this argument was hypothetical for Fuller. His main contention was that *knowledge* of peculiar inclusion in the saving intent of God did not logically precede one’s duty to believe the gospel, or to fall at the feet of God as a suppliant for mercy. Though he does not explicitly argue the case, Fuller assumed a *quid pro quo* pattern for Christ’s substitutionary death for at least part of his argument that the sinner, nevertheless, had the duty to believe. His defense of duty allowed for this way of envisioning the particularity of Christ’s redemptive work. It is not at all certain that Fuller actually believed, at the time of the publication of the *Gospel Worthy*, what he later called the “commercial” view of the atonement, but it is clear that he did not reject it as inconsistent with the free offer of the gospel. In order to enforce the intrinsic morality of the commands of the gospel, he proposed that such a view, that is, the non-inclusion of some sinners in the objective procurement of forgiveness by Christ’s substitutionary death, was not inconsistent with the duty of sinners to apply to God for mercy through the gospel.

Fuller, in the second edition of *GWAA* written in 1801, no longer defended that particular hypothetical consideration, but said that the *commercial* view “might for all I know, be inconsistent with indefinite invitations.”<sup>74</sup> In the first edition, he earnestly contended that neither *knowing* one’s inclusion nor *having* inclusion in Christ’s death altered the pre-existing duty to believe, or

trust, in the Christ of the gospel. This language indicates two distinct options in the understanding of God’s purpose in limiting the efficacious results of Christ’s death.

Very quickly after the appearance of *Gospel Worthy*, Fuller was forced to limit his defense to only one of these implied options, and more clearly adopt that viewpoint as his personal theology. An immediate challenge from Dan Taylor, a General Baptist, to Fuller’s attempt at demonstrating the consistency of Calvinism with the duty to believe the gospel, brought Fuller’s response in a book entitled *Reply to Philanthropos*<sup>75</sup> published in 1787. Fuller, in 1803, recounted the impact that Taylor’s argument had on him. “I freely own that my views of particular redemption were altered by my engaging in that controversy.”<sup>76</sup> He sought to answer Taylor “without considering the sufficiency of the atonement in itself considered” as a sufficient ground for universal gospel invitations, but could not justify it. He found Taylor’s reasoning and Scripture itself blocking his way for that specific defense, and therefore adopted a view that omitted any justification of the “no interest” or “commercial” view as a ground for general exhortations to apply to Christ for forgiveness of sins.

His *Reply to Philanthropos* [1787] described his understanding of the Calvinist view of atonement, now focused only on one-half of the view he intended to defend in the first edition of *Gospel Worthy*.

I suppose P. [Philanthropos, aka Dan Taylor] is not ignorant that Calvinists in *general* have considered the particularity of redemption as consisting not in the *degree* of Christ’s sufferings, (as though he must have suffered more if more had been finally saved,) or in any *insufficiency* that attended them, but in the sovereign purpose and design of the Father and the Son, whereby they were constituted or appointed the price of redemption, the objects of that redemption ascertained, and the ends to be answered by the whole transaction determined. They suppose the



sufferings of Christ, in themselves considered, are of *infinite* value, sufficient to have saved all the world, and a thousand worlds, if it had pleased God to have so constituted them the price of their redemption, and to have made them effectual to that end. Further, whatever difficulties there may appear in these subjects, they in general suppose that there is in the death of Christ a sufficient ground for indefinite calls and universal invitations, and that there is no mockery or insincerity in the Holy One in any one of these things.<sup>77</sup>

Given that, Fuller discussed a multiplicity of scripture passages and images under seven headings that demonstrated that “there was a certain, absolute, and consequently limited design in the death of Christ, securing the salvation of all those, and only those who are finally saved.”<sup>78</sup> He also pointed to Witsius, Du Moulin and Owen as supportive of this view point. Nevertheless, he interpreted such passages as 1 John 2:2 and 1 Timothy 2:6 (“propitiation for the whole world”, “ransom for all” and other passages that included such universal language) to be indefinite terms (that is, not indicative of an absolute inclusion of every individual persons in the world) designed to show that Christ ransomed Gentiles no less than Jews as well as all classes of men politically and socially. In detail, however, he maintained that the language “expressed what is true only of those who are finally saved,” that is, specifically efficient for those that God predestined for salvation.<sup>79</sup>

In his next response to Taylor, *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace*,<sup>80</sup> Fuller revisited this particular point. In letter IX, Fuller explained his view that Christ’s death, while sufficient by nature for the forgiveness of the sins of all persons in the world, was, at the same, specifically designated as an effectual remedy for the elect only. Such discrimination is entirely the prerogative of God and he cannot be accused of a lack of love in doing what he does out of pure grace, as long as his treatment of others is not inconsistent with holy justice. Fuller claimed that his

discussion was designed only to demonstrate “the consistency of a limitation of design in the death of Christ with the indefinite call of the gospel.”<sup>81</sup> Should the whole world consent to return to God by submission to the gospel conditions, none need fear that any insufficiency in Christ’s death would render it unjust to receive him. “All the limitation I maintain in the death of Christ,” Fuller reminded Taylor, “arises from pure *sovereignty*; it is a limitation of *design*,”<sup>82</sup> while any person bidden to come, will find, if he comes, a full and abundant provision for his reception.

The design, however, in the covenantal determination of those for whom Christ would actually die with the intent to save was limited to a certain people. “All I suppose,” Fuller continued to maintain, “is that provision was not made effectually to persuade every one to embrace it; and that, without such effectual persuasion, no one ever did, or will, embrace God’s way of salvation.”<sup>83</sup> Letter XII of the same work gives further insight on Fuller’s method of argument. He wrote, “Now admitting that I am mistaken in my supposition ... nothing follows from it but that I have misunderstood certain passages of Scripture, by considering them as conveying an indefinite, but not a universal idea.” That merely establishes what was already admitted “that a way is opened, by the death of Christ, for the salvation of sinners, without distinction; and that any man may be saved, if he is willing to come to Christ.” Other parts of Taylor’s argument Fuller flatly denied and again insisted, “All I contend for is that Christ, in his death, absolutely designed the salvation of all those who are finally saved; and that, besides the objects of such absolute design, such is the universal depravity of human nature, not one soul will ever believe and be saved.”<sup>84</sup> He then reaffirmed his original interpretation of the passages in question with their particular application to those that God determined to save and for whom he made “an effectual provision of grace.”<sup>85</sup>

In every instance, Fuller reiterated an exegetical principle and specific interpretations that Taylor “has not sufficiently answered.”<sup>86</sup> For one

to point to this passage as showing that Fuller altered his understanding of the atonement so as to agree with Taylor, misses the nature of Fuller's argument and ignores his reaffirmation of the original position. Fuller's method of argument involved a hypothetical concession to show that nothing would be gained by the opposition in making the concession. "Letter XII" shows no further change in Fuller's view but a reaffirmation of it and a clarification of the purpose of his argument.

In the second edition of *GWAA*, when Fuller revisited the doctrine of atonement, he became much more specific in defending one view of the atonement and dropping any defense of the "principle of *pecuniary* satisfaction" as consistent with general invitations to reconciliation. He focused his defense on a position on the atonement that was consistent with the views of the synod of Dort, and that of "all the *old* Calvinists,"<sup>87</sup> only implied in edition one of *GWAA*, but made explicit in *Reply to Philanthropos* and in *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace*.

Though Fuller asserted that Calvinists in general held his view, historically two views of particular redemption have dwelt side by side, as witnessed by his own implied duality in his first edition. One view, defended by John Spilsbury<sup>88</sup> (as far as we can discern the first Particular Baptist pastor), Abraham Booth,<sup>89</sup> and John L. Dagg,<sup>90</sup> contends that the suffering of Christ, as a matter of actual measurable justice set forth by the Father, must be commensurate with the degree of susceptibility to punishment for all those that the Father gave him and for whom he sanctified himself in his obedience to death. He thus is the victim of all that particular wrath that should be measured to them, and he does not suffer as a propitiation for others. They would point to such texts as "the church of God which he bought with his own blood" and "for you are bought with a price," and biblical indicators of discernible degrees of punishment as reflecting commercial analogies to insinuate that moral justice may, indeed must, also be measured.

A second view, represented by the Synod of Dort, Andrew Fuller, and to some degree by J. P. Boyce<sup>91</sup> and John Owen,<sup>92</sup> is that the intrinsic value of Christ's suffering, given the infinite dignity of his person, is sufficient for the sins of all people in the world. The specific work of Christ in the atonement could be no less for only one person, and no more for the whole world. Its particularity comes from the covenantal arrangement between Christ and the Father, that the Father would grant all the gifts and blessings gained by the Son in his suffering to those, and those exclusively, for whom Christ came to suffer.

Thus the articles of the Synod of Dort read, "The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." The document goes on to say, "And whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves." It is in the pre-mundane determination that this price is given peculiarly for the elect that constitutes its particularity. The language of Dort is again instructive: "God willed that Christ, through the blood of the cross, (by which he confirmed the new covenant,) should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, (which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he obtained by his death.)"<sup>93</sup>

That is the view of Fuller.<sup>94</sup> He rejected the so-called "commercial" view with firm resolve; "I conclude, therefore, that an hypothesis which in so many important points is manifestly inconsistent with the Scriptures, cannot be true." He applied this idea much in the way that Dort does: "If it be in itself equal to the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to embrace it; and if the peculiarity which attends it, consist not

in its insufficiency to save more than are saved, but in the sovereignty of its application, no such inconsistency can justly be ascribed to it.”<sup>95</sup> Since his concern was to reconcile the purposes of God with the free agency of man, Fuller felt strongly that the quantitative view of the atonement rendered it “naturally impossible” for some sinners to be saved and, therefore, inconsistent with general invitations. It represents God as “inviting sinners to partake of what has no existence, and which therefore is physically impossible.”<sup>96</sup>

Christ’s death, however, renders the purpose of grace toward the elect both consistent with justice and a matter of sovereign grace. God has the prerogative, settled from eternity, to “apply his sacrifice to the salvation of some men, and not of others.”<sup>97</sup> Many never hear the gospel and the greater part that hear it disregard it. Those that do believe ascribe their salvation solely to the free gift of God. “And, as the application of redemption is solely directed by sovereign wisdom,” Fuller continued, “so, like every other event, it is the result of *previous design*. That which is actually done was *intended* to be done.” Thus it is that Christ’s intent in coming was to save his elect, to give Himself for them, purify them, and make them a peculiar people. In that “consists the peculiarity of redemption.”<sup>98</sup>

On this basis free exhortations to all to comply with the gospel are perfectly consistent with particular redemption, Fuller reasoned. In 1803, He quoted Calvin’s commentary on John 3:16 that the preacher has warrant to call “all men without exception to the faith of Christ.” He also combined this universal warrant with particular intent in continuing his quotation of Calvin’s comment, “for though Christ lieth open to all men, yet God doth only open the eyes of the elect, that they may seek him by faith.”<sup>99</sup> The sufficiency is there, so a compliance with the gospel invitation on anyone’s part would be intrinsically and necessarily vain for none. God’s restricted purpose, though revealed in principle, is not in any case revealed in particular prior to a sinner’s closing with Christ by faith.

No person is called on to believe that Christ has died for them in particular as an element of genuine faith, but, so Fuller continued to argue, “must believe in him as he is revealed in the gospel; and that is as the Saviour of *sinners*.”<sup>100</sup>

Fuller closed the section on particular redemption by quoting Elisha Coles (as he had in the first edition) as saying, “He that would know his own particular redemption, before he will believe, ... begins at the wrong end of his work, and is very unlikely to come that way to the knowledge of it.” No one may conclude himself excluded from redemption, unless he does so himself by his obstinate refusal to come as a sinner utterly dependent on the mercy of a sufficient savior. Again as he did in the first edition, Fuller quoted John Owen: “When God calleth upon men to believe, he doth not, in the first place call upon them to believe that Christ died for them; but that *There is none other name under given among men, whereby we must be saved, but only of Jesus Christ, through whom salvation is preached.*”<sup>101</sup>

Since the death of Christ by its nature, in Fuller’s construction, does not exclude the possibility of salvation for any sinner, the legal impediment from God’s standpoint has been removed leaving the only impediment as human unbelief. Any person invited to trust confronts now, not a body of sin for which he must pay in light of no sufficient provision of forgiveness existing, but a heart that hates even the imposition and assumption that his guilt demanded atonement. That he must repent of hell-deserving sin and look to a substitute for reconciliation with God is a truth for which an ungodly person feels repugnance. Atonement now falls back on the character of the human will for its actualization.

### ***The Inability of Man to Believe***

This condition naturally leads to a discussion of the distinction between moral ability and inability and natural ability and inability. Throughout this treatise, Fuller pointed to this

as germane to an understanding of the relation between Law and gospel. This was a primeval principle for Fuller. In his original musing on the subject when he was 23, he had proposed an answer to a question on human ability. "If the question was put to me whether Man since the Fall has any power to do the Will of God, I would endeavour to answer with 'meekness and Fear.' I think there is a sense in which he has and a sense in which he has not."<sup>102</sup> He then explained the conundrum thus established with this proposal: "I cannot but think the Distinction made by some divines between Natural and Moral Ability sufficient to determine this Difficulty."<sup>103</sup>

In the introduction to the first edition of *Gospel Worthy*, as in "Some Thoughts," Fuller described the impact that reading Jonathan Edwards's *Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will* had on his thinking on this issue. Edwards's discussion "disburdened the Calvinistic system of a number of calumnies with which its enemies have loaded it."<sup>104</sup> This led Fuller to see in the Scripture that the inability ascribed to man in the issue of repentance and faith was not of an excusable kind because of a lack of natural faculties, but was of a blameable kind, arising from a moral, or immoral, aversion of heart to divine holiness. Resistance to the call to faith was criminal and contrary to duty.

Though present in the introduction and implicit throughout, Fuller reserved his most extended discussion of the important theological subject, "some *additional observations* of this subject," for the final eleven pages. In the second edition, Fuller omitted this discussion and substituted some concluding reflections on the warrant to believe, the influence of faith on justification, the alarming situation of unbelievers, and the duty of ministers in dealing with the unconverted.<sup>105</sup> In the first edition, however, Fuller felt that the key to clinching his argument concerning faith being a duty of all that heard the report of the gospel depended on a clear demonstration that

unbelief was sinful and criminal, not merely the pitiable insufficiency of created powers.

In "Some Thoughts" Fuller defined natural ability as "*The enjoyment & exercise of the Faculties of our souls, & the members of our Bodies.*"<sup>106</sup> In the first edition he used the language "The enjoyment of rational faculties, bodily powers, and external advantages."<sup>107</sup> The lack of all of these things, or in certain instances, any one of them constitutes natural inability. Moral ability, originally, he defined as, "*An inclination, or disposition, of mind to exercise these Natural Powers, to good or holy purposes*"<sup>108</sup> condensed in the first edition to "A disposition to use our natural ability to right purpose."<sup>109</sup> At bottom, therefore, it involves a heart to know and love God and devote all the powers of soul and body as instruments of righteousness for him. The lack of these things, having no heart to know God, love God, to serve him, and to devote all natural capacities to him, renders a man unable to perform any truly spiritual good, but this inability is a wicked and perverse type of destitution.

As in many other places, Fuller revealed his gratitude to Jonathan Edwards for providing pivotal insights when he shows that this is not a new or contrived idea but quite thoroughly discussed in the Reformed literature of the past and present. "It is abundantly improved for this purpose by President Edwards, in his *Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will.*" Fuller further described this effort by Edwards as "a book which has been justly said to go further toward settling the main points in controversy between the Calvinists and Arminians, than any thing that has been wrote: and which the late Mr. Toplady highly recommends to all who wish to see the Arminian sophistry totally unravel'd and defeated."<sup>110</sup>

That men have remaining to them their natural powers, or ability, does not argue at all that they are good or that they may convert themselves apart from the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit. Their moral inability

is such that the impossibility of their so turning is as great as if the obstruction were established on the laws of mechanical physics. The will in such a condition naturally includes the affections, now perverse, and their reign over the understanding so that blindness of mind indicates a severe moral, and voluntary, rebellion against the plain and just claims of God on all his rational creatures. That the natural capacities are of such a nature that, apart from their captivity to moral perversity, they could be employed in the pursuit of God's glory, and, according to divine law, should be. Fuller asserted this oughtness in a remarkably exuberant passage affirming the distinctives between natural and moral abilities. We should be so exhorted.

Does not common sense, as well as common honesty, here require the distinction of natural and moral strength or ability? Do they not unite to determine that heart and strength are here to be understood of the former and not of the latter? If by strength here we understand all the natural powers of our souls, members of our bodies, and opportunities that are put into our hands; then the difficulty is removed, the meaning is plain, and the passage proves natural strength to be the measure of obligation. The purport of it appears to be this; 'You have a soul, consisting of wonderful powers, and a body fearfully and wonderfully made, consisting of many active members, with many opportunities wherein you will have occasion to call them forth to exercise, let them all be devoted to the glory of God. Particularly, you have the powers of perception and understanding; let them be wholly employed in contemplating his character, or in what shall subserve his glory. You have the powers of choice; chuse what he chuses and refuse what he forbids—let your will be lost in his. You are the subject of delight, let it regale itself in his excellence; of desire, let it centre in him as your portion; of joy, let it always be employed in his praise; of sorrow, let it open

its flood-gates for offending him; of zeal, let it burn always in his service; of hatred and revenge, let them spend their shafts against that which is inimical to his honour. Never sacrifice any of your senses or members to iniquitous purposes, but devote them all to God. Squander away none of your precious time, but grasp at every opportunity to promote his glory.<sup>111</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Ryland, D.D., *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Published by Button and Son, 1816), 18. Noted in future references as L&D.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> The handwritten manuscript is in the Archives of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It had been given to the Rochester Theological Seminary, received by Ezekiel G. Robinson, by Fuller's son in gratitude for the seminary's public tribute to Andrew Fuller. It was obtained by the J. P. Boyce Memorial Library with the assistance of Michael Haykin in 2012. This will be referred to as "Some Thoughts."

<sup>11</sup> L&D, 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (Northampton: Printed by T. Dicey & Co., 1785), 108. Quotations will be taken from the original edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. It will be referred to simply as GW.

<sup>15</sup> L&D, 205.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Quotations from the second edition will be from a three volume edition of the works of Andrew Fuller entitled simply *Fuller's Works*. It has neither publisher nor date but was printed by J. G. Fuller in Bristol. It will be referred to simply as FW. *The Gospel Worthy*

is in volume 1 so the notation normally will be FW 1:?. Other works of Fuller quoted in this paper are from *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (ed. Joseph Belcher; 3 Vols.; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845). This will be referred to as CW. This quote is from FW, 9.

<sup>18</sup> GW, 4.

<sup>19</sup> GW, iii; FW, 8.

<sup>20</sup> GW, 1.

<sup>21</sup> FW, 9.

<sup>22</sup> GW, iv.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>24</sup> FW, 10.

<sup>25</sup> GW, vi.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> FW, 1:189-256.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1:239-40.

<sup>30</sup> GW, vii, viii.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> FW, 1:14.

<sup>34</sup> GW, ix.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>36</sup> FW, 1:15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1:16.

<sup>38</sup> GW, xi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>41</sup> FW, 1:5.

<sup>42</sup> GW, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 10, 11.

<sup>44</sup> FW, 1:36. Again the substance of conviction is the same but the style of presentation is condensed and omits some of the emotive immediacy of the first edition. Compare this sentence with the last one of the block quote just above, "It deserves also to be particularly noticed that what is here called the belief of the truth, is peculiar to the *elect*, accompanies *sanctification of the spirit*, and terminates in *salvation*."

<sup>45</sup> GW, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7, 8. For the difference between faith itself, and dependence on Christ, receiving Christ, coming to

Christ and trusting in him for salvation as flowing from faith see FW, 1:40-45. Fuller developed these precise distinctions, only implicit in the first edition, as a response to Abraham Booth's *Warrant and Nature of Faith*, which he published as a response to Fuller's first edition of *Gospel Worthy*. All of these are so intrinsically connected to biblical faith that they naturally flow from it so that Fuller could say, "And, from hence, it will follow, that trusting in Christ, no less than crediting his testimony, is the *duty* of every sinner to whom the revelation is made" (FW, 1:44).

<sup>48</sup> GW, 7, 8; FW, 1:25.

<sup>49</sup> GW, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 61-64.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>55</sup> FW, 1:113.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> GW, 108.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>74</sup> FW, 1:134.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Fuller, *Reply to Philanthropos* in FW, 1:378-528. Also see CW, 2:459-511.

<sup>76</sup> CW, 2:709.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2:488f.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 2:494.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2:496ff.

- <sup>80</sup> Andrew Fuller, *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace* in FW, 1:533-670; Also CW, 2:512-560.
- <sup>81</sup> CW, 2:541.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2:542.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2:550-51.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2:556.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2:555.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 2:710.
- <sup>88</sup> John Spilsbury, *A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme* (London, 1643), 40.
- <sup>89</sup> Abraham Booth, "Divine Justice Essential to the Divine Character," in *The Works of Abraham Booth* (3 Vols.; London: J. Haddon, 1813), 3:60, 61. "Divine Justice" was originally published in 1803 as a response to Fullers' second edition.
- <sup>90</sup> John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 324-331.
- <sup>91</sup> James P. Boyce, *An Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral FL: Founders Press, 2006), 312-314, 337-340.
- <sup>92</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* in *The Works of John Owen* (16 Vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 10:295-96. Fuller himself quoted Owen in support of his position from this very part of Owen's *Death of Death*, CW 2:694. After Owen discussed the atonement's sufficiency on the basis of the dignity of the person making the offering and that he did "undergo the whole curse of the law and wrath of God due to sin," he wrote, "And this sets out the innate, real, true worth and value of the bloodshedding of Jesus Christ. This is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be applied unto any, made a price for the, and become beneficial to the, according to the worth that is in it, is external to it, doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God." [Fuller's quote ends here.]
- Owen continued, "It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to *have been made a price* to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world. That it did formally become a price for any is solely to be ascribed to the purpose of God, intending their purchase and redemption by it."
- <sup>93</sup> Thomas Scott, *The Articles of the Synod of Dort* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1993), 282-285.
- <sup>94</sup> Fuller specifically identified his views as consistent with those of the "Calvinists who met at the Synod of Dort." After he had quoted many of the key phrases of the document on the atonement, Fuller confessed, "I would not wish for words more appropriate than the above to express my sentiments." CW, 2:712.
- <sup>95</sup> FW, 1:135.
- <sup>96</sup> CW, 2:692. See also his discussion of this in his letter to Dr. Ryland CW, 2:708-09. "If there were not a sufficiency in the atonement for the salvation of sinners, and yet they we invited to be reconciled to God, they must be invited to what is *naturally impossible*."
- <sup>97</sup> FW, 1:135.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1:136.
- <sup>99</sup> CW, 2:712. Fuller is quoting from Calvin's comment on John 3:16 in his *New Testament Commentaries*.
- <sup>100</sup> FW, 1:137.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1:137-38.
- <sup>102</sup> "Some Thoughts," 1.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>104</sup> GW, v.
- <sup>105</sup> FW, 1:160-189.
- <sup>106</sup> "Some Thoughts," 2.
- <sup>107</sup> GW, 185.
- <sup>108</sup> "Some Thoughts," 2.
- <sup>109</sup> GW, 186.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid., 192.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid., 189-90.