

Baptists Reflecting on Adam & Eve in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century

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THE SO-CALLED “long” eighteenth century stretches from 1688, which marks the accession of William III and Mary II to the English throne and the end of overt persecution of English Dissent, to 1837, which is the beginning of the

Victorian era, a time of great public power for evangelical dissent. This era between persecution and power is a period of remarkable fruitfulness when it comes to the varied realms of English Baptist thought, piety, and activity. Yet, it is an era of Baptist history that still needs much study. For example, one area of Baptist thinking in this period of time that is still relatively *terra incognita* (unknown land) is that of biblical exegesis. What we need are studies that reflect on the Baptist history of Scripture reception in this era. What follows is a very small contribution to this end.

It is a collection of texts, across a range of literary genres, that reflect on the biblical accounts of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1–3. Despite some differences on what exactly constitutes the image of God, what I find striking is the overall harmony of these witnesses.¹

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ANDREW FULLER: “GOD CREATED MAN IN THE IMAGE OF HIS OWN GLORIOUS MORAL CHARACTER”²

This text is from Andrew Fuller’s commentary on Genesis 1:26–27 and 2:7, 18–25: *Expository Discourses on The Book of Genesis, interspersed with Practical Reflections* (London: J. Burditt, 1806), 13–14, 18–19. From 1790 or so onwards Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), the most important Baptist theologian of the latter decades of the “long” eighteenth century, was in the habit of preaching through books of the Bible, as many of his Puritan forebears had done. His commentary on Genesis was derived from 58 sermons on this first book of the Bible. C. H. Spurgeon once remarked that he

regarded this commentary as “weighty, judicious, and full of Gospel truth.”

We are now come to the sixth and last day’s work of creation, which is of greater account to us than any which have gone before, as the subject of it is man. We may observe:

1. That the creation of man is introduced differently from that of all other beings. It is described as though it were the result of a special counsel, and as though there were a peculiar importance attached to it: “God said, Let us make man.”³ Man was to be the lord of this lower world, under the great Supreme. On him would depend its future well-being. Man was to be a distinguished link in the chain of being; uniting the animal with the spiritual world, the frailty of the dust of the ground with the breath of the Almighty; and possessing that consciousness of right and wrong which should render him a proper subject of moral government.

2. Man was honored in being made after his Creator’s image. This is repeated with emphasis: “God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.”⁴ The image of God is partly natural, and partly moral; and man was made after both. The former consisted in reason, by which he was fitted for dominion over the creatures;⁵ the latter in righteousness and true holiness, by which he was fitted for communion with his Creator. The figure of his body, by which he was distinguished from all other creatures, was an emblem of his mind: “God made man upright.”⁶ I remember once, on seeing certain animals which approached near to the human form, feeling a kind of jealousy, shall I call it, for the honor of my species. What a condescension then, thought I, must it be for the eternal God to stamp his image upon man!

“God made man upright.” He knew and loved his Creator, living in fellowship with him and the holy angels. Oh how fallen! How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!

... His body was formed “of the dust of the ground.”⁷ His soul proceeded from the inspiration

of the Almighty. What a wonderful compound is man! There seems to be something in the additional phrase, “And man became a living soul.”⁸ God is said to breathe the breath of life into all animals; and we sometimes read of the soul of every living thing: but they are never said to be living souls, as men are. God hath stamped rationality and immortality upon men’s souls, so as to render them capable of a separate state of being, even when their bodies are dead. Hence the soul of a beast, when it dies, is said to go downwards; but the soul of man upwards.⁹

... [Genesis 2,] ver. 18–25. The subject closes with a more particular account of the creation of woman. We had a general one before¹⁰: but now we are led to see the reasons of it. Observe:

1. It was not only for the propagation of the human race, but a most distinguished provision for human happiness. The woman was made “for the man”¹¹; not merely for the gratification of his appetites, but of his rational and social nature. It was not good that man should be alone; and therefore a helper that should be “meet,” or suitable, was given him. The place assigned to the woman in heathen and Mahometan [i.e. Muslim] countries has been highly degrading; and the place assigned her by modern infidels is not much better. Christianity is the only religion that conforms to the original design, that confines men to one wife, and that teaches them to treat her with propriety. Go you among the enemies of the gospel, and you shall see the woman either reduced to abject slavery, or basely flattered for the vilest of purposes; but in Christian families you may see her treated with honor and respect; treated as a friend, as naturally an equal, a soother of man’s cares, a softener of his griefs, and a partner of his joys.

2. She was made after the other creatures were named; and consequently, after Adam, having seen and observed all the animals, had found none of them a fit companion for himself, and thus felt the want of one. The blessings both of nature and of grace are greatly endeared to us by our being suffered to feel the want of them before we have them.

3. She was made “out of man,” which should lead men to consider their wives as a part of themselves, and to love them as their own flesh. The woman was not taken, it is true, from the head; neither was she taken from the feet; but from somewhere near the heart!

SAMUEL STENNETT: “LESSONS FROM THE MARRIAGE OF ADAM AND EVE”

The following text is taken from Samuel Stennett’s *Discourses on Domestick Duties* (London, 1783), 142–145, 174–175, 177–178. Stennett (1727–95), who came from a long line of Seventh-day Baptist ministers, is arguing against polygamy and seeking to demonstrate the affirmation that “the conjugal relation can lawfully subsist between one man and one woman only.” Central to his argument is the biblical conviction that the main purpose of the married state is the mutual companionship and intimate friendship of the parties involved.

God created man male and female, that is, one woman to a man. The conjugal relation, therefore, in the primitive and perfect state of human nature, did, and could only subsist between two persons.... The ends of marriage ... can only, in their full extent, be answered by its being confined to one man and one woman. These ends are two, the conservation and increase of the human species, and the mutual comfort and assistance of the parties united in this relation. As to the first, it would in all probability be better attained by an honorable and permanent connection between two persons, agreeable to the original dictate of nature, than by a multiplication of wives. But as to the latter, it is evident to a demonstration, that a departure from the primitive institution, in that idea of it for which we are contending, hath in innumerable instances totally defeated it.

Nothing can be more degrading to the female part of mankind, than to consider them as created merely for the purpose first mentioned. He that can admit the idea dishonors himself as well as

them. The powers with which nature hath liberally endowed them, render them capable both of enjoying and contributing very largely to the refined pleasures of friendship and society. Agreeably to this idea, if we may be allowed to advert to Scripture when we are reasoning from the law of nature, we hear the blessed God saying, when he had created our first progenitor, “It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make an helpmeet for him.”¹² As if he had said, “It is fit that man whom I have made for society, should have one for his companion, with whom he may intimately converse, and who may assist him in the duties and be a sharer with him in the joys of life.” Nothing therefore can be clearer than that the woman was created, and given to man in marriage, not merely for the propagating the species, but for that of promoting his and her own felicity.

... [I]ndeed how is it possible that a man should conceive a pleasing idea, not only of the external accomplishments of a woman, but of her understanding, disposition, and piety—so conceive of them as to persuade her, on the grounds of correspondent affections, to join hands with him in this most intimate relation, and not love her? And we may be sure a passion thus kindled in his breast will not languish and die away: it will rise into a steady, unextinguishable flame—a flame which the endearing intercourses of virtuous friendship will daily fan, and the most tempestuous storms of worldly adversity will not be able to put out. Her character he will esteem and honor, her interests civil and religious will lie near his heart, and to her person he will feel a firm and unalterable attachment. Partiality in her favor will ever induce him to place her in such a light as shall secure to her, and of consequence to himself, respect from all his acquaintance and connections: for “the woman is the glory of the man.”¹³

... [W]e must not pass on without remarking the very strong terms, by which the text marks the ardency of that affection it requires of the husband towards the wife. “Let every one of you so love his wife even as himself.” And again, “Men ought

to love their wives, as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh: but nourisheth and cherisheth it.”¹⁴ Language this, which, if that latitude were admitted in the conjugal relation which some men have contended for, would lose all, or at least a great deal, of its propriety and force. The relation is very intimate. A man is to leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they twain are to be one flesh. It is not, therefore, general good-will, or friendly respect only, which this the most endearing of all connections demands. No. Considering her as part of himself—as one with himself, his heart, his soul, his affections ought to be indissolubly knit to her. So and so only will the salutary ends which divine benevolence has proposed by the marriage institution, be happily and effectually answered.

JOHN BRINE: “ADAM & EVE IN THE DELIGHTFUL GARDEN OF EDEN”

Extended reflections on the innocent state of Adam and Eve prior to the fall appear to have been rare among Baptist preachers and authors of the “long” eighteenth century. One of these few reflections follows. It is from the London preacher John Brine, a close friend of the voluminous John Gill (see below) and a prolific author in his own right. This extract was from a text originally entitled “On the Original Purity of Human Nature” and is contained in his *A Treatise on Various Subjects* (2nd ed.; London: George Keith, 1766), 16–22.

[We believe] that man in his original state was the happy subject of moral perfection; not only free from all vitiosity and disorder in his reasonable nature, but possessed of positive holiness, the object of the approbation of God who made him, and made him good, in a moral sense; for otherwise, he had not been a fit object of divine approbation. That his knowledge was complete, or that he was perfectly acquainted with all the momentous truths contained in that law or covenant,

under which he then was. That he had a disposition to good, or a liking to truth, righteousness, and holiness. That he was capable of holding fellowship with his Maker, and actually enjoyed a sense of his favor. That, therefore, pleasures pure and holy sprang up in his mind, from an apprehension of an interest in the good will, care, and bountiful kindness of his Creator. For he not only was entertained with a sight of the pleasing wonders that surrounded him above, and on the earth beneath, especially in that fertile spot of it whereon he was placed; but also with an apprehension of the glory of the Author of the universe....

Adam, therefore, was not only free from pain, uneasy consciousness and misery, but possessed happiness in a positive sense, full satisfaction, joy and delight pure and holy, and such as God designs to a pure and perfect mind. Hence it is apparent that no vain thoughts naturally sprang up in the mind of man, no unlawful desires arose in his soul from an evil bias in his will, nor were any natural tendencies then found in his affections towards objects trifling, vain, and hurtful, through impurity seated in them. His unclouded and perfect reason, which clearly discerned what was the matter of his duty, and dictated him to the practice of it, met with no opposition from disorder in his affections for they were as pure as his mind was discerning.

Reason in a state of innocence ... had no rebellious inclination to subdue and conquer, in order to acting that part it knew to be becoming and fit. God did not place man in such a difficult and disadvantageous situation. He certainly had all the advantages which were necessary to facilitate the practice of what his Maker required him to do. This cannot be scrupled without a reflection both on the wisdom and goodness of his Creator. For infinite wisdom and goodness must needs direct to the formation of the creature free from all such corrupt inclinations as would render his duty a task difficult for him to perform. If man had found himself to be the subject of any such dispositions from the first moment of his existence as were

repugnant to his reason, he would never upon his apostasy have been silent on that head; but would certainly have pleaded it as some extenuation of his crime. For it is evident that he had an inclination to have done this on some pretence or other, if it had been possible. And this would have been a much more plausible plea, than the shameful one he used with his Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."¹⁵ He discovered an inclination to impute his crime to the Author of his being, or to prove that he was the occasion of it. And such is the impious and daring conduct of his wretched descendants in too many instances. Because men find themselves to be the subjects of such desires, or tendencies of mind, as they know to be unfit and repugnant to reason, they easily excuse themselves for errors in practice, and with frontless assurance insist upon it, that it will be cruelty in their Maker to call them to an account for those defects and blemishes in their behavior, which are unavoidable in their present circumstances. We, therefore, may conclude with the greatest certainty that infinite wisdom would take care to prevent all occasion of such like cavilling in the formation of man, that he might not have it to say that his duty was difficult to be performed by reason of an unsuitable turn in his will and tendency in his affections as he was created of God.

And surely it is reasonable to conclude that Adam performed devotional acts with holy reverence and sacred delight. He could not but give tributes of praise to God his Maker for his superabundant beneficence and favor towards him, whereby he was furnished with everything not only needful to his sustentation in those happy circumstances wherein he was placed; but with whatever he could desire for the entertainment and delight of his innocent and heavenly mind, and constituted ruler and lord over the numerous ranks of creatures the world contains. Above all, his grateful soul was doubtless possessed of adoring thoughts of the wisdom, goodness, and power of his great Creator and of the interest he had in

his approbation, protection, and kindness. And his principles, natural to him, directed him to implore the continuance of the care, aid, and guidance of his Almighty Former, wherein his guiltless soul could not be attended with any dread of his terrors nor with the least suspicion of a want of a favorable regard to him in the mind of that infinitely good Being who made him. And, therefore, what serenity, what satisfaction, what pleasures must fill the breast of man in his primitive state, who had a free access to his Maker, a sense of his favor, and was absolutely free from all fear of his displeasure! O what a happy state must this have been!

Besides his pure and holy mind was not reluctant and indisposed to religious services, nor wandering and sluggish in the performance of them, for man was then not the subject of any aversion to holiness and communion with God. And, therefore, divine worship must be a branch of duty, wherein man took a peculiar pleasure in his original state. Perfect love to the infinitely glorious Object of his worship, sweetly engaged all the powers of his soul unto acts of adoration, thanksgiving, and praise. As his understanding discerned the infinite excellencies of his Creator, and his will was free from all evil bias, it adhered to him, and his affections being untainted, embraced and delighted in God his Maker. As has been observed, whatever the law requires of all men now, that was in man originally; the law commands us to worship our Maker in a pure, holy, and reverential manner without reluctance, wandering, and mixture of vanity in our thoughts, desires, and affections; and consequently innocent man performed service of that noble and heavenly kind. If he had not, he never could have claimed a title to God's approbation and favor; but, on the contrary, must have fallen under his displeasure and censure, for if God receives not that glory from the creature, which is due unto his holy and great name, he cannot but resent it. And since the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, in acts of love to him and in acts of obedience to his righteous will, certain it is that Adam, in a manner perfectly devout and holy, worshipped his great Creator.

Hereby we may be induced to enter upon a pleasing contemplation of the happiness of the lovely pair in the delightful garden of Eden. Two pure minds were perfectly united in love, between which no strife or contention could arise to the disturbance and vexation of either. Adam, on his part, to whom we may allow a superiority over the innocent and beautiful Fair, [i.e. Eve,] he certainly was all affection and kindness to her, nothing of a stern and angry disposition appeared in his air, language, or in any of his actions towards her. His commands, when he gave her any, were no other than such as proceeded from perfect reason, sweetness of temper, and the truest affection. And the woman, on her part, was all submission to her gentle ruler and loving companion, for whom she was formed, and to whom she was given by her Maker, to attend him and unite with him in all acts of adoration and praise to the Former of them both. Perfect harmony, unmixed delight, and untainted piety reigned in the breast of each. And the man, we may suppose, pronounced orations on the wisdom, power, and beneficence of the great Creator, in her hearing; and that she, not less capable of discerning the bright display of these divine perfections in the wonderful works of creation, discovered an approbation of all he expressed, as what perfectly corresponded with her own ideas on those important subjects, and unto both transporting!

BENJAMIN BEDDOME: “THE FALL OF ADAM AND ITS IMPACT”

Benjamin Beddome (1717–95) is one the great Baptist hymnwriters of the eighteenth century, though he did not write his hymns with the intention of ever getting them published. He was in the habit of preparing a hymn to be sung at the close of the morning worship service, which would pick up the theme of his sermon, a practice that prompted Horton Davies to describe Beddome as an “indefatigable sermon summarizer in verse.”¹⁶ However, he did allow thirteen of his hymns to be published in a hymnal edited by fellow Baptists

John Ash (1724–79) and Caleb Evans (1737–91) in 1769, *A Collection of Hymns Adapted to Public Worship*. It was more than twenty years after his death that Robert Hall, Jr. (1764–1831) supervised the publication of the entire collection of his 822 hymns and 8 doxologies. The following hymn is taken from this collection edited by Hall: *Hymns adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), 262, and is entitled “Effects of the Fall.”

When Adam sinned, through all his race
The dire contagion spread:
Sickness and death, and deep disgrace
Sprang from our fallen head.

Satan in strong and heavy chains,
Binds the deluded soul;
And every furious passion reigns,
Without the least control.

From God and happiness we fly,
To earth and sense confined;
Lost in a maze of misery,
Yet to our misery blind.

Whene’er the man begins his race,
The criminal appears;
And evil habits keep their pace
With our increasing years.

Corruption flows through all our veins,
Our moral beauty’s gone;
The gold is fled, the dross remains,
Oh sin, what hast thou done!

Jesus, reveal thy pardoning grace,
And draw our souls to Thee;
Thou art the only hiding place,
Where ruined souls can flee.

SAMUEL PEARCE: “A DIGEST OF BELIEF ABOUT ADAM AND EVE”

In this small extract from his personal of confes-

sion of faith Samuel Pearce, the close friend and confidant of Andrew Fuller and William Carey (1761–1834), summarizes his beliefs about Adam and Eve. In many ways they are an accurate digest of Baptist belief on this subject in the “long” eighteenth century. These paragraphs are taken from Pearce’s confession of faith that can be found in its entirety in Andrew Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce*, ed. W. H. Pearce (London: G. Wightman, 1831), 8–13. The original is in the Bristol Baptist College Archives.

I believe that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth in six days; and having designed this world for, and suited it to, the condition of a rational creature, he made man in his own image, with a mind formed for loving and obeying its Creator; but at the same time, in perfect consistency with that freedom of the will with which, for the honor and justice of divine government, He endues all his intelligent creatures.

I believe that God wisely appointed a test for the obedience of man, wonderfully suited to his nature and state, promising a continuance of felicity co-equal with a continuance of duty; but threatening death as the consequence of a violation of his law, including not only subjection of the body to mortality, but also a loss of the moral image of God, and liability to everlasting misery, as the just reward of sin.

I believe that man voluntarily and willingly, without any necessity from the purpose of God, did violate this law, and thereby expose himself to all of its penalties; and that, from the connection of the whole human race with Adam, all his posterity are so interested in his conduct as through his fate to become possessors of a corrupt nature, which, being opposed to the righteous will of God, constitutes us objects of his displeasure, and disposes us to that conduct which terminates in eternal death; or, in the language of Scripture, “Sin having entered into the world, death came by sin, so that death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”¹⁷

JOHN GILL: “THE SALVATION OF ADAM”

John Gill (1697–1771), the doyen of English Calvinistic Baptist thought from the 1720s to the 1770s, was a voluminous author, whose writings, in their structure, recalled the theological works of the Puritan era. For many in the Anglo-American Baptist community of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his *Body of Divinity* was a veritable standard of orthodoxy. This passage is taken from a sermon *Jehovah’s Declaration, Behold the Man is Become as One of Us*, considered, found in Gill’s *Sermons and Tracts* (London, 1814), II, 294–296.

Why was Adam, after his fall, prevented from eating of this tree [of life]? Some have thought that there was either a natural or a supernatural virtue abiding in this tree after the fall, so that, could Adam have eaten of it, it would have perpetuated his life, either for many hundred years or else for ever, and that the reason why God prevented access to it was either: 1. *Compassion* for him, that he might not live a long and tedious life, attended with affliction and sorrows, to which he was now subject; Or, 2. By way of *punishment*, that he might not be able to elude the sentence of death, which was passed upon him.

But neither of these seems feasible. Not the *former*, because one would think that if this tree had possessed such a virtue as to prolong his life, it would also have preserved him from all bodily afflictions and distempers. Not the *latter*, because it was impossible that the sentence should be eluded in any such way, which was the just desert of sin; and what God’s veracity was engaged to make good. Besides, had such a powerful virtue continued in this tree after the fall of man, everybody knows that God, who put that virtue in it, could have removed it at pleasure so, that if Adam had eaten up the whole tree, it would have been of no significancy to him, nor would it have answered any such end. This is manifest from the daily food we eat, from which, if God withholds a blessing, or

takes away the natural virtue, it will not yield any nourishment to our bodies. For, “*man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*”¹⁸ (Matt 4:4) So that there was no reason, on this account, for such a guard about this tree, as that of “*cherubims and a flaming sword, which turned every way*”¹⁹ to defend it. The true reason, therefore, of this prevention was:

3. That Adam might have no hope nor expectation of life from that or anything else, but Christ the promised Messiah. Adam might think, as this tree was useful to him in his state of innocence to preserve his life, that it would be so now, and thereby be tempted to forget the promised seed,²⁰ from whom he had reason to expect life and salvation. And now, that he might not lie under this temptation, the Lord God thought it expedient to thrust him out of Paradise and place a guard about the tree. For there is nothing that man is more prone to than to seek life anywhere but in Christ. There seems to be a natural aversion to that. “*Ye will not come to me,*” says Christ, “*that ye might have life.*”²¹ No, they had rather go to Mount Sinai, yea, travel all the globe over, than go to Christ for life, could they but obtain it any other way. But God has resolved upon this as the only way of life and salvation; and that man shall not come at it by his own works of righteousness, be they what they will. And therefore, [he] has so guarded this way that he who seeks for righteousness and life, by his own doings, runs upon the flaming sword of justice; and whilst he is endeavoring to insure his own salvation, he is pulling ruin upon himself. Upon the whole, I do not consider these words as having respect to the event, or what would have been, if Adam had eaten of this tree; but the vain opinion, and the foolish expectation, that he might have entertained, of securing his life by it.

...Observe the grace of God, in providing a Savior for lost man; and how early the discovery of it was made to him. A Savior was provided before that sin was committed, which required one; and was revealed, before the man was driven out of the garden, that he might have no reason to

despair of life.

Let us not, then, lay hold on any vain pretences for life; such as those of our own doings, services, and performances. But let us look to Christ alone, for he “*is a tree of life, to them that lay hold upon*” him; “*and happy is every one that retaineth him.*”²²

ENDNOTES

¹In the texts that follow, punctuation has been altered to reflect modern usage, as well as the updating of the spelling of a few words.

²Andrew Fuller, *Confession of Faith*, article IV in *The Last Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Other Miscellaneous Papers, not included in his Published Works* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1856), 210. This confession was delivered by Fuller on the occasion of his installation as pastor of the Baptist Church in Kettering on October 7, 1783.

³Genesis 1:26.

⁴Genesis 1:27.

⁵James 3:7.

⁶Ecclesiastes 7:29.

⁷Genesis 2:7.

⁸Genesis 2:7.

⁹Fuller references Ecclesiastes 12:7 at this point.

¹⁰Genesis 1:27.

¹¹1 Corinthians 11:9.

¹²Genesis 2:18.

¹³1 Corinthians 11:7.

¹⁴Ephesians 5:28–29.

¹⁵Genesis 3:12.

¹⁶Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 3:136.

¹⁷See Romans 5:12.

¹⁸Matthew 4:4.

¹⁹Genesis 3:24.

²⁰Genesis 3:15.

²¹John 5:40.

²²Proverbs 3:18.