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# CHRIST'S ABSOLUTE DETERMINATION TO SAVE: ANDREW FULLER AND PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

JEREMY PITTSLEY

## INTRODUCTION

**A**rguably the pivotal theologian in Particular Baptist history is Andrew Fuller. His theological contribution opened the way for the Particular Baptists to benefit from the extraordinary Evangelical revival in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century. His theology also fueled the inauguration of the modern missions movement as men like William Carey were compelled to use means to reach the unreached. Yet many have understood Fuller's theological developments as compromising betrayals of his own Particular Baptist tradition, and few of his developments have taken more criticism than his doctrine of atonement.

As one might imagine, the doctrine of *particular* redemption was especially important to the *Particular* Baptists of Fuller's day, so any modifications of the commonly held understanding would be viewed with deep suspicion. But did Fuller's theology of atonement amount to a desertion of particular redemption? Did his revolutionary thinking take him beyond his own theological tradition?

To answer these questions, a chronological-theological approach is suggested. The basic contours of the presentation will suggest a chronological scheme: (1) Fuller's historic influences will be considered, (2) his

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theology will be discussed, and then (3) the objections of his detractors will be surveyed and evaluated. At some points, however, the evidence will appear out of strict chronological order. For instance, what Fuller said to answer objections (3) may be helpful for a better understanding of his theology (2). In this way, it is hoped to preserve both clarity and logical continuity and progression.

### HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

A number of distinguishable influences shaped the theology of Andrew Fuller more than any other source outside the Bible. The first influential force in his life was a reaction against the theology of John Gill and his more extreme Particular Baptist counterparts like John Brine. Fuller found a source of relief in the writings of a leader in the Great Awakening on the other side of the Atlantic, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards' profound influence on Fuller continued as he studied Edwards' successors in New England, the New Divinity theologians.

#### *REACTION TO HYPER-CALVINISM*

A primary impetus for Fuller's theological development was his personal sense that something was very wrong with the state of the Particular Baptist churches he knew. An unbiblical approach to God's sovereignty had obviated the need to use means for the progress of the gospel both in church evangelism and personal sanctification. If this was not precisely the approach of the leaders of the denomination, it was at least how Fuller thought the common church member understood their teachings. John Gill remains the best known and prolific representative of the views Fuller sought to renovate, so a brief survey of the pertinent points of his theology is warranted.

In many respects, Fuller's theology came about as a reaction to Gill's. In most recent discussions, John Gill receives a great deal of criticism which would be better directed toward Tobias Crisp and John Brine who in various respects were more extreme than Gill. However, Gill endorsed these men, and though he advocated more moderate form of Calvinism than they, he still adhered to two doctrinal extremes which turned Fuller away to find greener pastures in the writings of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>1</sup> These errors are eternal justification and what Ivimey calls the "non-invitation, non-application scheme."<sup>2</sup>

#### *Eternal Justification*

Gill writes with regard to justification from eternity,

God in his all-perfect and comprehensive mind, had from eternity,

at once, a full view of all his elect; of all their sins and transgressions; of his holy righteous law, as broken by them, and of the complete and perfect righteousness of his Son, who had engaged to be a surety for them; and in this view of things he willed them to be righteous, through the suretyship-righteousness of his Son, and accordingly esteemed, and accounted them so in him.<sup>3</sup>

The argument for eternal justification proceeds thus: Election and justification are correlated as aspects of union with Christ (or the federal headship of Christ over the elect). Because union with Christ entails pretemporal election, union with Christ itself is something that is pretemporal, occurring in eternity past. Justification, then, being an aspect of union with Christ, must also be pretemporal. This means that the elect sinner is, in the courtroom of God, declared righteous before conversion. Gill conceded that the sinner does not enjoy his position in Christ until he is converted, but he has the position nonetheless.

Though many defend Gill's orthodoxy, this error is unmistakable. On the point of eternal justification he is inescapably clear, and, despite his considerable erudition and despite his steadfast defense of other gospel truths, he seems to have ignored or explained away the true force of texts like Romans 1:17, "The righteous shall live by faith."<sup>4</sup> Also the force of Paul's argument in Romans 3:21–31 is that justification is gained for individuals through the instrumentality of faith. While Paul's emphasis is disqualifying works from justification, his thought also makes clear that justification is consequent to conversion in a Biblical *ordo salutis*. Finally the aorist tenses of Romans 8:30 must not be taken to indicate that predestination, calling, justification, and glorification have all occurred in the pretemporal past. If this were true, eternal glorification, not simply eternal justification, would need to be posited. While it is sometimes difficult to understand the relationship between the eternal decree of God and the temporal acts of men, the Biblical chronology is clear: calling and conversion chronologically precede justification.

The scope of implications for the doctrine of eternal justification is beyond the scope of this article, but one implication has been hinted at. Because, in Gill's mind, God has declared the sinner righteous before conversion, conversion cannot entail trusting Christ in order to be justified. Instead conversion entails trusting Christ that one has already been justified from before the foundation of the world. Therefore, the unconverted cannot be exhorted to trust Christ for salvation. Instead, gospel truth is announced, "Christ infallibly saves those who trust in him." And then it is assumed that the elect among the unconverted will turn to

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Christ in faith and believe that they have been justified from the foundation of the world. So at least part of the reason Gill refused to address the unconverted freely is his doctrine of eternal justification.

Obviously Fuller, concerned to preserve the gospel invitation, would be eager to respond. First, he defines justification biblically as a declarative act of God concerning the believing sinner, “not a purpose in the divine mind, [nor] *a manifestation to, an impression on, or a persuasion of the human mind.*”<sup>5</sup> And then he points to the inevitable conclusion that such a declaration “supposes the existence of the [justified] party.”<sup>6</sup> Given a biblical definition of justification, Fuller thinks the concept of “justification from eternity” is simply incoherent. Fuller rightly understands justification as a divine, forensic declaration not as a divine purpose in God’s mind (that would be election), and not as a subjective human experience (that would be assurance).

While Biblical definitions were certainly important, Fuller’s utmost concern, even in the debate on eternal justification, was to preserve the Biblical language of invitation in gospel proclamation. This point was Fuller’s chief dissatisfaction with Gill’s theology.

### *The “Non-Invitation, Non-Application Scheme”*

John Gill is often represented as the quintessential hyper-Calvinist, but some good historical research has shown that he had not fallen into the error of antinomianism as many of his High Calvinist contemporaries had. He believed in the proclamation of the gospel; his objection to the evangelism of his day was very specific. On his view, the language of “offer” as associated with grace and Christ was without Biblical or theological foundation: “that there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay, I deny they are made to any; no, not to God’s elect; grace and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel and applied by the Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

While this is not the same as denying the responsibility to proclaim the gospel and pray for the conversion of the lost,<sup>8</sup> his refusal to offer Christ betrayed, in Fuller’s mind, a serious misunderstanding of the nature of evangelism and an underestimation of the universal significance of Christ’s work. As Peter J. Morden says it, “The gospel could be presented, but indiscriminate ‘exhortations’ to believe were inappropriate.... Sinners could be encouraged to ‘attend the means of grace,’ a traditional High Calvinist stress, but evangelistic preaching where the gospel was ‘offered’ to all was, it was declared, utterly inconsistent with true Calvinist principles.”<sup>9</sup> Those who had never consciously received an

experience of assurance that Christ had indeed died for them were exhorted to pray for mercy, read the Scriptures, and listen to godly sermons, if perchance God would grant them repentance. But they could not be exhorted to trust in Christ for salvation because his death may not have been for them. The effect of this was that some listeners would trust their own “signs of election” rather than Christ, or they would recognize their sinfulness and despair of salvation, or they would recognize their sinfulness and capitulate to the flesh because they were not conscious of any ability to turn to Christ. All of these possibilities gave Fuller impetus to look to the Scriptures afresh for an understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation.

*Fuller's First Response: Duty-Faith*

The first development, and arguably the most revolutionary, was Fuller's advocacy for the doctrine of duty-faith. In essence, the teaching states that unregenerate sinners are morally obligated to believe whatever God has revealed. *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* was a treatise bent on proving that this teaching was Scriptural and essential to a right understanding of evangelism.

From Fuller's perspective, the High Calvinists had made faith depend on a subjective warrant. He saw them as repeatedly indicating that it was necessary that the unbeliever experience some indicator that they were among the elect, even if it would be only a conviction over their sin, before they had a warrant to trust Christ for salvation. After all it is only for the elect that he died.<sup>10</sup> Instead Fuller proposed that the only necessary warrant of faith was that the gospel revealed that Christ died for sinners. Because this warrant had universal reference, everyone without exception is obligated to believe.

Abraham Booth, who occupied a theological position somewhere between the High Calvinists and Andrew Fuller, agreed with Fuller as far as the objective warrant of faith was concerned. That Christ died for sinners was the only necessary warrant. But Fuller takes him to task for not taking the next logical step: “Mr. Booth has (to all appearance, designedly) avoided the question, Whether faith in Christ be the *duty* of the ungodly? The leading principle of the former part of his work [which called for faith on the basis of the objective warrant in the gospel], however, cannot stand upon any other ground.”<sup>11</sup> If no one need wait for a subjective warrant of faith, everyone is obligated to believe whatever God has revealed.

Another implication here is that if people are morally obligated to

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believe then faith is a holy act. “Faith was a ‘grace of the Holy Spirit,’ ranked in the scriptures together with hope and love. Therefore biblical faith must be ‘holy.’”<sup>12</sup> In the views of the High Calvinists, faith could never be commanded because if it was a command Law and Gospel could not be distinguished.<sup>13</sup> Fuller believed that, though faith was holy, it was not on the basis of its holiness that believers are imputed to be righteous. It is Christ’s righteousness alone that is imputed to be their righteousness in Fuller’s theology. Yet the act of faith, being obedience to the command to believe, is still holy.

The extremes of High Calvinism within the Particular Baptist tradition had launched Fuller on a trajectory which would take him further than duty-faith. Duty-faith may have been Andrew Fuller’s most important benefaction to the theological community, yet he found it in itself an insufficient ground for the gospel offer. As we will see his dialog with Dan Taylor would bring out another important doctrinal recovery—the universal sufficiency of the atonement.

### *INFLUENCE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS*

Having dislodged himself from his High Calvinist upbringing, Fuller found a theological mentor in Jonathan Edwards. No one outside the Biblical authors themselves had a more profound effect on Fuller’s theology than Jonathan Edwards, and his affection for Edwards is evident throughout his works. It was so evident in fact that some of his contemporaries remarked that, if Fuller and his friends had preached more of Christ and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more effective. Fuller came directly to his hero’s defense, “If those who talk thus preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.”<sup>14</sup> As the works of Edwards furnished Fuller with a grand vista of Christian theology, Fuller gained an unparalleled affinity for the Christian minister. The influence of Edwards is most evident in two theological venues: the locus of human inability, and the infinite merit of Christ’s sacrifice.

### *Edwards and Total Inability*

In *Freedom of the Will* Jonathan Edwards proposed a theological distinction in order to defend the Calvinistic doctrine of total inability against the objections of Arminians and Unitarians. The objection was that inability removes responsibility; God could not justly hold humans responsible for flying by flapping their wings—they do not have wings to flap! In the same way, humans must not be considered totally unable to come to God because such inability would necessarily undermine the

clear calls of the Scriptures of humans to come to God. Edwards answer was that there was a kind of inability which was culpable. He called it “moral inability” because it belonged to the moral as opposed to the natural realm (In our example, the inability to fly by flapping would belong to the natural realm). Edwards answered that the objection to inability would stand if it referred to inability in the natural realm, but the inability is restricted to the moral realm. “Anyone who did not respond was, therefore, criminally culpable. All had the natural powers to respond, but they refused to do so.”<sup>15</sup>

That Fuller adopted this distinction is not a topic of debate; his works clearly reflect the language of Edwards on this point. For instance, he writes in reply to Mr. Button that a distinction between moral and natural ability does not necessarily negate total inability: “But an inability *in one respect* may be so great in degree as to become total. It is thus in things which relate merely to a natural inability. A man may have books, and learning, and leisure, and so may not, *in every respect*, be unable to read; and yet, being utterly blind, he is totally unable notwithstanding.”<sup>16</sup>

So Fuller represents the Edwardsian Calvinist tradition that accepts the distinction between moral and natural inability. Many orthodox Calvinists reject this distinction; others receive it warmly. It is something of an intramural debate among Calvinists as they seek to explain what they mean when they teach that humans are totally unable to approach God without the previous and effective life-giving influence of the Spirit. The Edwardsian view is that the kind of inability which pervades the entire human nature (including human reason and emotion as well as the will) is a culpable, criminal inability, not a natural or constitutional inability. The objection to the distinction between kinds of inability is that it seems to limit human depravity to the human will. While Edwards explicitly denounces this kind of limitation (again he held to pervasive depravity), many of his followers, Fuller included, sometimes came to express inability in terms of human volition—something like what Morden says in his summary, “such a person could not come because they would not come.”<sup>17</sup> To downplay the noetic effects of sin and pervasive depravity in this way is to work against the grain of Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor 2:14). However, it does not appear that Fuller took the next logical step on this line of thought. That is, he never adopted the idea that “such a person could come if he but would.”<sup>18</sup> Despite Ella’s accusations on this point,<sup>19</sup> Fuller always held to the total inability of humans to approach God without the previous and effective life-giving influence of the Spirit.



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### *Edwards and Infinite Merit*

Another point of contact between Edwards and Fuller is the idea that Christ's death had infinite merit due to the infinite excellence of the one who was offering his life. In Edwards this concept is related directly to the doctrine of eternal punishment. If eternal punishment is the just desert of the one who has sinned against God, then a substitute of infinite merit must be forwarded for his justification. In Edwards' words, "Hence, the love, honor, and obedience of Christ towards God have infinite value because of the excellence and dignity of the person in whom these qualifications were inherent. And the reason why we needed a person of infinite dignity to obey for us was because of our infinite meanness who had disobeyed, where by our disobedience was infinitely aggravated."<sup>20</sup>

Fuller's understanding of the infinite quality of the atonement may have come directly from Edwards, because it is Edwards' argumentation (not John Owen's, for example) which is represented in his appeal for universal sufficiency in the atonement to which will be examined below. But it should be acknowledged that the concept has different functions in the two theologians. The infinite merit of Christ's sacrifice relates to the eternity of punishment in Edwards and to universal sufficiency in Fuller. Fuller's understanding of universal sufficiency is something of a convergence between Edwards' teachings on inability and on the infinite merit of the atonement.

### *The Atonement: A Convergence of Edwards' Influence*

Edwards' understanding on moral vis-à-vis natural inability and his understanding of the infinite value of the atonement would ultimately unite in Fuller's view of the universal sufficiency of the atonement. As Fuller would say, "If there were not a sufficiency in the atonement for the salvation of sinners, and yet they were invited to be reconciled to God, they must be invited to what is *naturally impossible*. The message of the gospel would in this case be as if the servants who went forth to bid the guests had said, 'Come,' though, in fact, nothing was ready if many of them had come."<sup>21</sup> Fuller deals with the atonement in a way that is somewhat similar to the way he (and Edwards before him) dealt with human ability. To call a man to trust Christ when Christ's death was not sufficient for him would be tantamount to condemning him for not flying by flapping his wings. Fuller reasoned theologically that the call to faith necessarily implies the universal sufficiency of Christ's death.<sup>22</sup>

As with Fuller's reaction to the Hyper-Calvinists, we have seen in Fuller's use of Edwards a concern for providing solid Biblical and theo-

logical bases for evangelism. A thoroughly evangelistic mindset and a thoroughly Biblical Calvinism, in Fuller's mind, are in splendid agreement with each other.

### *INFLUENCE OF THE NEW DIVINITY*

One of the most unfortunate aspects of Fuller's theological journey is the influence of the New Divinity on his theology. The New Divinity is the name given to the school of theologians who succeeded Jonathan Edwards at the head of New England's theological scene. These men claimed to be his rightful successors, and they had his endorsement in many cases before his untimely death in 1758. However, even in those early works, a departure from Edwards' understanding of the gospel was underway in subtle forms. For instance, Joseph Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* began the introduction of the moral government theory of the atonement into Edwards' Calvinistic schema as early as 1753.<sup>23</sup>

#### *The New Divinity and Governmental Atonement*

This change was a reversion to the governmental theory of atonement of Arminian Hugo Grotius<sup>24</sup> who was among the original Dutch Remonstrants. It provides a replacement for the idea of penal substitution which is more amenable to Arminian theology and does not have the implications toward particular redemption which penal substitution has.

Rather than a satisfaction of God's wrath by placing punishment on a substitute, the governmental view of the atonement explains Christ's death with reference to God's role as governor of the universe. It posits that God could not maintain the moral order of the universe for the benefit of his creatures and allow sin to go without notice. Christ's death, then, is an expression of God's displeasure with sin (not the satisfaction of his wrath against sinners). By demonstrating that he is not lax but quite serious about the consequences of sin, it allows him to pardon those who meet the condition of repentance and faith he has set.

The Calvinist's objection is not that God did not seek to demonstrate his moral justice in the atonement (Rom 3:21–26), or that the maintenance of God's justice is essential to the well-being of his creatures. Rather the objection is that by making the atonement center on the well-being of his creatures, instead of his own holy character,<sup>25</sup> the governmentalists have made Christ's death an arbitrary medium of reconciliation. God could very well have settled the sin matter without sacrificing his Son.<sup>26</sup>

Bellamy's departure from Calvinistic theology was not immediately

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clear, it seems, for Edwards wrote the preface to *True Religion Delineated*, but it became more conspicuous as time went on. By the time Jonathan Edwards Jr. was preaching sermons on the atonement, he and the rest of the New Divinity were full-fledged governmentalists.<sup>27</sup>

### *Andrew Fuller and Governmental Atonement*

Another conspicuous point is the influence these men had on Andrew Fuller. In 1805, he wrote to Timothy Dwight, a premier member of the New Divinity school, "The writings of your grandfather, President Edwards, and of your uncle, the late Dr. Edwards, have been food to me and many others. Our brethren Carey, Marshman, Ward, and Chamberlain, in the East Indies, all greatly approve of them [especially the elder Edwards' work on justification].... Some pieces which I have met with of yours have afforded me much pleasure."<sup>28</sup>

A number of items are evident from the correspondence between Fuller and New Divinity man, Timothy Dwight. First, and most obviously, he did have some contact with the New Divinity men. Second, he did not have access to as much of their literature as he had of Edwards', which is evidenced by the phrase "some pieces." Third, he did not necessarily realize the extent of the departure of these men from the theology of Jonathan Edwards. His letter puts Edwards and his successors together of a piece. This fact is not entirely surprising, for these theologians understood themselves to belong thoroughly to Edwards' tradition. Fourth, he appreciated the theological work these men were doing, albeit for Edwards' sake, and we may expect it to have influenced his own theological efforts.

Moral government terminology figures into Fuller's statement of faith relatively early.<sup>29</sup> However, it is not used as a mode of explaining the atonement at all. It is used to show how it is that God's purpose "in our favour" (i.e. election) is not a contradiction the Scriptures description of Christians as "children of wrath, even as the rest," before their conversion. Fuller's mode of explaining the atonement generally found reference not to the divine government but to the divine perfections, "My meaning was rather this, that Christ having obeyed the law and endured the curse, and so fulfilled the *terms* of his eternal engagement, God can in a way honourable to all his perfections pardon and receive the most guilty sinner that shall return to him in Christ's name."<sup>30</sup>

Eventually, however, Fuller began to employ the governmental terminology with reference to the atonement. Statements like the following became characteristic: "Redemption by Jesus Christ was accomplished, not by a satisfaction that should preclude the exercise of grace in forgive-

ness, but in which the displeasure of God against sin being manifested, mercy to the sinner might be exercised without any suspicion of his having relinquished his regards for righteousness.”<sup>31</sup> There is little question that this kind of vocabulary was the result of Fuller’s encounter with the Edwards’ successors.<sup>32</sup>

This last quote provides a clue as to Andrew Fuller’s motivation for adopting governmental language. He was concerned that a view of satisfaction be promoted which would obviate the necessity of grace. He feared that the language of penal substitution would be understood in such a tit-for-tat commercialistic fashion that it would display only justice and not mercy. Indeed he felt that governmental language was an excellent way to explain how God was both merciful and just in the atonement. In private commercial transactions, a person may forgive or demand a debt and demonstrate mercy or justice respectively. Only in public criminal affairs, according to Fuller, was a demonstration of both possible.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, because Fuller’s High Calvinist forebears and contemporaries used commercial language to advocate both a “sufficient only for the elect” view of the atonement and an understanding of the atonement compatible with eternal justification, Fuller doubtless found the governmental language a welcome alternative to commercial vocabulary. The governmental theory was contrived to emphasize a universal atonement, and the governmentalists of New England were using it for precisely that purpose.<sup>34</sup> It seems likely that the adoption of governmental terminology would have a universalizing effect on Fuller’s theology of atonement as well.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas Nettles, in his evaluation of the influence of the New Divinity on Andrew Fuller concludes, “Fuller’s use of governmental language did not involve him in the mistakes of the governmentalists; the atonement never became merely symbolic of justice, but maintained its character as an act of actual justice.”<sup>36</sup> Fuller understood an equivalent (though not necessarily quantitatively equal) satisfaction to be necessary to a Biblical understanding of the atonement. If the satisfaction need not be equivalent, then there need be no satisfaction—and a denial of satisfaction was tantamount to Socinianism.<sup>37</sup> In a way, it seems Fuller’s debates with the Socinians preserved him from embracing “the mistakes of the governmentalists.”

So again it was Fuller’s concern for a Biblical foundation for gospel proclamation that drove him to embrace or reject his contemporary theologians. This concern was involved in his rejection of the Hyper-Calvinist scheme, in his embrace of Edwards’ understanding of human

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ability, and in his embrace of governmental over commercial vocabulary of atonement. His concern for defending the gospel also kept him from finally rejecting penal substitution. As these influences converged upon Fuller's interpretation of Scripture, a comprehensive view of the atonement emerged.

### FULLER'S POSITION ON THE ATONEMENT

In addition to the influence whether positive or negative of the Hyper-Calvinists, Jonathan Edwards, and the New Divinity school, Fuller's view of the atonement shows the pervasive and foundational influence on the teachings of the Scriptures. The concern to meet the demands of the Biblical text is evident throughout.

Fuller's view of the atonement may be summarized: The atonement, as to its nature, is infinite and sufficient for all; the atonement, as to its intent, is definite and efficacious for the elect. To use Fuller's words:

In like manner concerning the death of Christ. If I speak of it irrespective of the purpose of the Father and the Son, as to its objects who should be saved by it, merely referring to what it is in itself sufficient for, and declared in the gospel to be adapted to, I should think that I answered the question in a Scriptural way by saying, It was for *sinners as sinners*; but if I have respect to the *purpose* in giving his Son to die, and to the *design* of Christ in laying down his life, I should answer, *It was for the elect only*.<sup>38</sup>

Each of these two points of theology will be considered in turn. For purposes of organization, we will survey and evaluate Fuller's theology on each of these two points, after each point a discussion of Fuller's exegetical support for the point will follow.

#### *INFINITE AND SUFFICIENT IN NATURE*

In his debate with Dan Taylor, the leader of the revived General Baptist denomination, Fuller was quick to agree that Christ's death did open a way of forgiveness for everyone, as the general atonement advocates insisted. "It is allowed that the death of Christ has opened a way whereby God can consistently with his justice forgive any sinner whatever who returns to him by Jesus Christ. If we were to suppose, for argument's sake, that all the inhabitants of the globe should thus return, it is supposed not one soul need be sent away for want of a sufficiency in Christ's death."<sup>39</sup>

Statements like these place Andrew Fuller one of "two streams," as

Nettles calls them concerning the atonement.<sup>40</sup> Abraham Booth in early Britain and Nettles himself in modern America are representatives of one stream which understands the atonement to be intrinsically definite. While acknowledging the infinite merit of Christ's death, they note that the atonement is efficacious in its very essence; therefore, it is meaningless to discuss the atonement as sufficient for all. Andrew Fuller and most five-point Calvinists have, on the basis of the infinite merit of Christ's death, affirmed the universal sufficiency of the atonement for everyone without exception. On this view, God's design or intent to save through the atonement is the root of its efficacy and particularity.

Fuller defended this understanding on a number of planes. First, the universal sufficiency of the atonement is a necessary basis for the free offer of the gospel.<sup>41</sup> As noted above, if Christ's death were not sufficient for everyone, then calling everyone to come cannot be a just command. It would be "naturally impossible"<sup>42</sup> to use Fuller's Edwardsian vocabulary, for everyone to come if Christ's death were not sufficient for them. One of the central advantages to the sufficiency view is that it provides a just ground for the command to obey the gospel.

By way of evaluation, one objection to this view is that universal sufficiency entails universal efficacy, that is, universal sufficiency is tantamount to universalism. Fuller answered this objection by three analogies: the omnipotent creative power of God, the infinite wisdom of God's plan of salvation, and the omnipotent regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. According to Fuller, saying that universal sufficiency necessitates universal efficacy is like saying that God's infinite creative power necessitates that "there must have been an infinite number of worlds in existence."<sup>43</sup> Also, equating universal sufficiency to universal efficacy would be like saying that because infinite wisdom devised the salvation of some humans that also "all the world, and the fallen angels too, would be interested in that salvation."<sup>44</sup> Or, in another place he says, "I know but that there is the same objective fullness and sufficiency in the obedience and sufferings of Christ for the salvation of sinners as there is in the power of the Holy Spirit for their renovation; both are infinite; yet both are applied under the direction of infinite wisdom and uncontrollable sovereignty."<sup>45</sup> That the Holy Spirit, in his infinite and omnipotent nature, could regenerate everyone does not necessitate that he will regenerate everyone. Fuller argued that an atonement of infinite worth need not necessitate universal salvation. Fuller is talking about what would be morally or legally possible for God to do. The atonement is such that God has no legal obstacle for declaring any ungodly person righteous. This fact does not necessarily imply that God must declare

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every ungodly person righteous. Such declarations, being wholly gracious on God's part, are left in his sovereign wisdom and decree.

As we continue to evaluate Fuller's claim, it is helpful to examine the debate somewhat beyond Fuller's immediate context. Thomas Nettles, who holds a view of the atonement similar to that of Abraham Booth, furnishes another argument in response to the sufficiency position on the atonement as A. A. Hodge stated it: "Because of this truth Hodge's statement that 'what would save one would save another' is only partially true. Yes in its eternal nature; no, in its intensity of punishment. To accept Hodge as accurate at this point would be to say that Bethsaida and Chorazin need not suffer any more Sodom and Gomorrah."<sup>46</sup> Nettles wants to preserve Edwards' argument that infinite merit is necessary to free believers from the sentence of eternal punishment. He is correct to preserve this point. However, this argument against Hodge's (and Fuller's) view misses the point that is being made about the infinite nature of Christ's death. All appeals to quantity in this view are obviated by the fact that Christ's death is infinite. There may be a real difference in the quantity of suffering deserved for the finite human, but the theanthropic obedience of Christ makes these distinctions inconsequential as far as atonement is concerned. Otherwise, Christ would be said to have died more for Paul, a blasphemer, than for John the Baptist because Paul's needed more individual sins forgiven. This understanding is difficult to substantiate from the Scriptures. Any sin merits an eternal punishment and demands infinite satisfaction. Infinite satisfaction suffices as well for one sin as for many—though various sins may deserve worse punishment in eternity than others.

Nettles offers a third objection to Fuller's understanding of the atonement: "One might well ask, 'If every legal obstacle to a man's salvation is removed, what hinders his being saved?' Logically, he can no longer be justly condemned for his sins but only for his unbelief. But think further. Is not unbelief a sin for which Christ has suffered the legal penalties? Certainly, for even the elect have been unbelievers for a season."<sup>47</sup> Fuller believed that it is possible now for God righteously to declare righteous any ungodly person who believes. The obstacle of unbelief is not a legal one for God; it is an experiential one for the unbeliever. God is not viewing unbelief as the final sin which remains to be absolved, and this sin is absolved only through repentance and faith. Any sin, including unbelief, may now be forgiven because of Christ's work. But Christ's work was intended to secure the forgiveness of those he represented and for whom he also secured repentance and faith. Nettles blurs the categories "what hinders his being saved" and "legal obstacle to a man's salvation." The

“legal obstacle” is that, without the atonement, God could call no ungodly person just. Because of the atonement, he may justly call any ungodly person just—Christ’s death is sufficient to cover their sins too.

The final objection Nettles offers is to question the legitimacy of the connection between the infinite nature of Christ’s person and the universal sufficiency of his death.

The Virgin Mary doubtless suckled the baby Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Does this act of tender affection upon Jesus suffice for the whole world because He was divine...? Obviously not, since Jesus took only the amount given Him by his mother. Likewise, in His propitiatory death, Christ absorbs only as much wrath as the Father inflicts upon Him. His deity does not increase the stringency of the punishment but rather gives eternal quality to it and strengthen Him to bear its force.

Yet the force of Hodge’s and Fuller’s argument is that the very “eternal quality” of the punishment Christ bore is inseparable from an infinite sufficiency. By definition one cannot separate the infinite merit of Christ’s sacrifice from the universal ability of Christ to save. The analogy between Mary’s milk and God’s wrath simply does not hold.

In order to preserve the free offer of the gospel and to undergird it with sound Biblical support, Fuller propounded an atonement of universal sufficiency. It seems to stand up to theological argumentation; does it hold exegetically?

One of the main texts Fuller would point to show the universal sufficiency of Christ’s death is Romans 3:21–26. Specifically the phrase “whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (KJV).<sup>48</sup> “There would be no propriety in saying of Christ that he is set forth to be an expiatory sacrifice *through faith in his blood*, because he was a sacrifice for sin prior to the consideration of our believing in him. The text does not express what Christ *was* as laying down his life, but what he *is* in consequence of it.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, Fuller would say that this text is talking about *Christ as the way of salvation* rather than as procuring salvation. That the concepts of *Christ as the only way of salvation for anyone* and *Christ as the procurer of salvation for the elect* are not incompatible with each other is the thrust of Fuller’s theology and the understanding of atonement in mainstream Calvinism. While this is certainly a possible interpretation of Romans 3, undoubtedly some would protest that *propitiation* on this view loses the efficacy the term would usually connote. Perhaps 1 John 2:2 could have been used to



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support Fuller's interpretation as well.<sup>50</sup>

So Fuller showed the theological necessity of the sufficiency of the atonement and demonstrated that it was compatible with the apostolic proclamation of Christ as "propitiation through faith in his blood." But he did not stop with an atonement which was sufficient for all with respect to its nature; Fuller also strove to show that the atonement is efficacious for God's elect.

### *Definite and Efficacious in Intent*

When Fuller was debating with General Baptist Dan Taylor (under the name Philanthropos), his Particular Baptist principles shown through the most clearly. Though he admits to having studied the topic little previously, Fuller's keen intellect and heartfelt faith produced an exposition and defense of particular redemption worthy to become a standard for future generations.

Some have sought to explain Fuller's view as a provision-application scheme of the atonement. That is, the particularity of the atonement is solely in its application; the provision is strictly universal.<sup>51</sup> There appear to be clear indications in this direction. Fuller does say, "the peculiarity which attends it consist[s] not in its insufficiency to save more than are saved, but in the *sovereignty of its application*."<sup>52</sup> However, what must not be underestimated is that Fuller connected the application of the atonement to the atonement's intent. The word "sovereignty" in this construction refers not merely to the sovereign work of the Spirit in regeneration, but the sovereign design of the Father in election. Fuller himself clarifies what he meant when he said "the sovereignty of its application," and it is completely inconsistent with the unlimited atonement configuration:

That for which I then contended [when he wrote "Reply to Philanthropos] was, that Christ had an absolute and determinate design in his death to save some of the human race, and not others; and were I engaged in a controversy with Philanthropos now, I should contend for the same thing. I then placed the peculiarity of redemption wholly in the *appointment or design* of the Father and the Son, which, if I understand my own words, is the same thing as placing it in the "sovereignty of its application."<sup>53</sup>

This point should have been clear from clear from *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* where he says, "And as the application of redemption is solely directed by sovereign wisdom, so, like every other event, it is the result of *previous design*. That which is actually done was *intended* to be

done.”<sup>54</sup> An advocate of the universal atonement position is slow to connect the doctrines of election and atonement, but Fuller shows no such timidity. On Fuller’s view, if the application of the atonement is limited, then it must also be definite in design.

One of the clearest indications that Fuller aligned himself with the Reformation tradition on the point of the extent of the atonement is that he was willing to use the phrase “procuring cause” to describe the relationship between Christ’s work and salvation. The atonement as the “procuring cause” of salvation is by default designed only for those who actually receive salvation. As Fuller says, “By the death of Christ sin is said to be ‘purged,’ or expiated; and sinners to be ‘redeemed,’ ‘reconciled,’ and ‘cleansed from all sin;’ and by his obedience many are said to be ‘made righteous.’ This obedience unto death was more than the means of salvation; it was the procuring cause of it.”<sup>55</sup>

Fuller’s theological defense of an efficacious atonement proceeded along three inter-related lines: (1) consistency of purpose within the Trinity, (2) the impossibility that Christ’s death should result in failure, (3) and the impossibility of faith without Christ’s death.

The first line of reasoning appears in a circular letter Fuller produced on the “Practical Uses of Christian Baptism.” There he says, “We have also professed by our baptism to embrace that great salvation which is accomplished by the united influence, of the Sacred Three.”<sup>56</sup> These three were united in the plan of redemption, which Fuller calls, “‘the everlasting covenant’ in which the Sacred Three (speaking after the manner of men) stipulated with each other the bring about their vast and glorious design.”<sup>57</sup> Election by the Father, redemption by the Son, and regeneration by the Spirit are viewed as a piece in theology of Andrew Fuller—each are definite, concerning only a subset of humanity.<sup>58</sup>

A second theological argument for particular redemption is that it does not seem to comport with what the Scriptures teach about Christ’s mission that the possibility of ultimate failure would have been allowed. “On the contrary, [the Arminian scheme] supposed that God, in sending his Son into the world, and the gospel of salvation by him, never *absolutely* determined the salvation of one soul; that, notwithstanding any provision which *he* had made to the contrary, the whole world, after all, might have eternally perished.”<sup>59</sup> Fuller faults the Arminian view for allowing that Christ’s death could have been completely useless, having no absolute determination to save.

A third argument, a theme that is repeated throughout Fuller’s works, shows the theological necessity of an efficacious atonement. “It is necessary to our salvation that a *way* and a *highway* to God should be opened:

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Christ is such a way, and is as free for any sinner to walk in as any highway whatever from one place to another: but considering the depravity of human nature, it is equally necessary that some effectual provision should be made for our *walking* in that way.<sup>60</sup> God's gracious mitigation of the noetic effects of sin in regeneration has as its procuring cause Christ's cross work. Faith itself must be seen as something that Christ secured at the cross. Robert P. Lightner, in his defense of unlimited atonement, seems to miss this when he says in his conclusion, "Salvation is impossible without the cross, and so is it impossible without faith."<sup>61</sup> Fuller would certainly agree that this statement is true, but it is woefully incomplete because faith is impossible without the cross.<sup>62</sup> When Christ died he intended to secure salvation for the elect in addition to making salvation available to all. When we consider not only its infinite nature, but also its definite intent, we see that Christ made "some effectual provision... for our *walking* in that way."

Fuller advanced four types of passages which he thought taught particular redemption. He understood from the Scriptures that (1) God had promised a people to his Son, (2) and, therefore, God's Son came on a mission to save. (3) Consequently, Christ is the surety or guarantor of their salvation, and this explains why (4) the reason that no charge may be laid against God's elect is that Christ has died for them.

The promise of God the Father to Christ is one of the central reasons that Fuller held to Particular redemption.<sup>63</sup> He found no better reason to reject the Arminian hypothesis as it "appears to us utterly inconsistent with all those scriptures where God the Father is represented as *promising* his Son a reward for his sufferings in the salvation of poor sinners."<sup>64</sup> Among the Scriptures to which Fuller alluded would be passages like Isaiah 53:11–12a, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great," and John 10:28–29, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

The promise of God to the Son necessarily limits the purpose of Christ's coming. According to Fuller, 1 Timothy 1:15 explicates the design of Christ to save. Christ's death was "voluntary" or purposeful; he came with a purpose to accomplish the salvation of sinners. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." This language supposes that, in coming into the world, our Lord was *voluntary*, or that it

was with *design*, which supposes his preexistence; and that this design was to save sinners, the chief of sinners.”<sup>65</sup>

The promise of God and Christ’s purpose in his death are related throughout Fuller’s works. After taking heated criticism for changing his views on the atonement, Fuller affirmed that he still believed in particular redemption affirming, “Christ did not lay down his life but by *covenant*—as the elect were given to him, to be as the *travail of his soul, the purchase of his blood*—he had respect in all that he did and suffered to this recompense of reward. It was for the covering of *their* transgressions that he became obedient unto death.”<sup>66</sup> In defense of his orthodoxy, Fuller explained that he understood the atonement as being motivated by or founded upon a covenant<sup>67</sup> in which the Father had promised the elect to the Son as reward for his suffering. The Son came then to suffer so as to attain the reward. “The love which Christ is said to have borne to the church was discriminating, and effectual to its salvation. The church is supposed to have been given him of the Father, to be unto him as a bride to a husband, and ultimately the reward of his undertaking.”<sup>68</sup>

It is because Jesus came to save the elect that he is called the “surety” of the New Covenant blessings to them (Hebrews 7:22, κϱν). Repeatedly, Fuller appealed to the language of this passage which affirms Jesus is the “guarantor of a better covenant” (ESV) to show that in as much as Christ’s work effected final salvation, it terminated upon God’s elect alone. “Ought we not, therefore, to suppose that, after the example of the high priest under the law, Christ was a surety *for the people to God?* and if so, we cannot extend the objects for whom he was a surety beyond those who are finally saved, without supposing him to fail in what he has undertaken.”<sup>69</sup>

The idea of “surety of salvation” necessitated for Fuller the final salvation of those for whom Christ performed this office.<sup>70</sup> Fuller is not far from the mark on this point. One of the key distinctions between the old and new covenants is the guarantee of regeneration to its participants and beneficiaries. Christ, in his official capacity as anointed priest of God, is the guarantor of regeneration (as a new covenant blessing) to the new covenant peoples. According to the author of Hebrews, securing the blessings of the new covenant, which includes the promise of regeneration, is one of the purposes of Christ’s death. In his death, he acted as the theanthropic guarantor of regeneration promises. It is nearly tautological to say that he guaranteed those promises of new life only to those who had been chosen to new life.

Christ, then, is the guarantor of regeneration and final salvation of those who are chosen to life, and this fact explains why it is that Paul

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says, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom 8:33–34). According to Fuller, these verses teach that the reason condemnation cannot be brought against God’s elect is attached to Christ’s death, “but if it extends equally to those who are condemned as to those who are justified, how does it become a security against such a charge?”<sup>71</sup>

There are a number of objections to this view which Fuller addresses in his works. Among the first objections Fuller deals with is Dan Taylor’s objection that “it is nowhere *expressly said* that Christ died only for a part of mankind.”<sup>72</sup> Fuller does not let Taylor get away with an easy jab. The Scriptures do assign a purpose to Christ’s death which, if actually accomplished, necessarily implies that Christ’s ultimate saving purpose only involved a subset of the human race. It is not merely a matter of saying that Christ “died for me” (Gal 2:20), and reasoning up to Christ died “for the world.” For the intent of Christ’s death is different for a definite subset of humanity. “It is expressly said that he gave himself that he might purify unto himself *a peculiar people*” (see Tit 2:14).<sup>73</sup> Passages like these may apply only to those who actually become “eager to do what is good.”

Another objection raised by Fuller’s Arminian opponents was based on 2 Corinthians 5:15, “which he observes that the phrase *they who live is distributive*, and must, therefore, include only a part of the *all* for whom Christ died.”<sup>74</sup> Fuller reminds Taylor that “it does not appear to be the design of the apostle to affirm that Christ died for all that were dead, but that all were dead for whom Christ died.... This proves both that the condition of those for whom Christ died was the subject of the apostle’s main discourse, and that the extent of the term *all*, in the latter part of this verse, is to be determined by the former.”<sup>75</sup>

While Fuller escapes the force of Taylor’s objection, it is not immediately clear that he has taken the correct view of the text. It appears that “one died for all, and therefore all died” is a superior translation of the text than the one Fuller and Taylor were working with, “if one died for all, then were all dead” (KJV). The text is making a direct connection between Christ’s death and the believer’s death “to our old life” (NLT). The believer’s death to his old self is a direct effect of Christ’s death for them. Nevertheless, Fuller is correct about the extent of the term “all,” it is limited by the context.

Hebrews 2:9 was also advanced against Fuller’s understanding of particular redemption, Jesus, “by the grace of God should taste death for

every man” (κτν). Fuller replies that Philanthropos “is not unacquainted with the scope of the author of the Epistle of the Hebrews, nor of the word man not being in the text.”<sup>76</sup> Fuller’s point here is to say that “all” may just as readily refer to the “many sons” whom he is “bringing...to glory.” The fact that the word “man” is not in the text is not necessarily determinative, of course, but it does make the text more ambiguous than might otherwise be recognized by the reader of the Authorized Version.

It seems possible that this text could be referring to the sufficiency of Christ’s death “for everyone.” The universal implications of his obedience are made clear throughout the passage, God is “putting everything under” (v. 8) Jesus, and Jesus is “now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death” (v. 9). The success of Christ’s mission afforded him “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:19; see also Phil 2:9, Rom 1:2–5). On this basis, everyone without exception is morally bound in this season of mercy to acknowledge his lordship, to become his disciple and to seek grace and forgiveness in him. Because Christ’s rights to obedience are absolutely universal, and because those rights are directly related to his obedient work, there is a sense that his work relates to absolutely everyone universally. Of course, as we have seen above, Fuller would whole-heartedly agree with these sentiments in theology, even if he did not see universal implications in this text.

Fuller’s treatment of 2 Peter 2:1 (“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.”) is similar to that of Hebrews 2:9, “Nor need he be told that the apostle Peter, in the context of the Saviour’s blood; that the name there given to the purchaser is never applied to Christ; and that if it is applied to him in this instance, it is common to speak of things, not as they actually are, but as they are professed to be: thus apostates are said to be *twice dead*, as if they had been spiritually alive.”<sup>77</sup>

Fuller advances two possible interpretations of the text which do not necessitate that Christ actually bought the false teachers. The first is that Christ is not the “sovereign Lord who bought them.” Yet it seems best to conclude that this word does refer to Christ. Two factors support this interpretation. First, from the context, the action of “buying” seems particularly suited for his person. He is the person within the Trinity who set down the payment.<sup>78</sup> Second, the parallel in Jude 4 also supports this conclusion; there the allusion to Christ is clearer, “[they] deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign [δεσπότης] and Lord.”<sup>79</sup> So when the heretics mentioned in 2 Peter taught and acted out their libertine tendencies they

treated Christ as though he did not have a right to their obedience.

The second possible interpretation that Fuller offers is that Peter is referring to these heretics according to their appearances. That is, they denied the Lord whom he appeared to have bought. This is the same view most ably defended in modern commentaries by Thomas Schreiner who says that Peter is referring to what the false teachers professed. The false prophets did not leave the Christian community; they were still professing believers. Schreiner summarizes his position: “Peter said that they were bought by Jesus Christ, in the sense that they gave every indication initially of genuine faith.”<sup>80</sup> This view does have an advantage in that it understands ἀγοράζω to have soteriological ramifications. However for two reasons it seems inadequate. First, in short, there is no indication that this is a statement the false prophets made.<sup>81</sup> If they claimed to be redeemed, but in fact were not, it seems reasonable to expect Peter to insert some indication that the statement of their redemption was false. Because there is no such caveat in the text, those who take this view actually end up with an interpretation which directly contradicts the words of the text: “Their denial of Christ showed that they were not redeemed”<sup>82</sup>—but the text says they *were* redeemed. Second, Peter’s emphasis in this phrase is not on what the false teachers did or professed subjectively but on what Christ accomplished for them objectively. He is saying Christ paid the redemption price to gain the right to their obedience; he is not saying that they professed obedience to him. In other contexts Peter mentions that the false teachers had cleaned up their lives (2:21–22, they knew “the way of righteousness,” but they “turned back”), but that is not his emphasis here. Submitting to Christ’s lordship, or professing to do so, is not the same thing as being under Christ’s all-encompassing authority. Though the former is certainly part of Peter’s overall message, he discussed the latter in this text. So ἀγοράζω does not mean professed spiritual redemption.

A better interpretation of this text mirrors the above interpretation of Hebrews 2:9. This view understands Peter to refer to a benefit of Christ’s cross work that pertains to every person without exception: the availability of salvation,<sup>83</sup> or the duty to believe. Because Peter casts this concept in the slave-master framework, and because the flow of Peter’s argument indicates that the false teachers had an obligation to obey, the universal availability of salvation must be expressed in imperatival terms. Christ has made salvation available to all men, and, therefore, all men are obliged to obey his call.<sup>84</sup> As we have seen, this is essentially Fuller’s concept of duty-faith. However, some object to this interpretation on lexical grounds: “*Agorazō* is never used in Scripture in a hypothetical

sense unless II Peter 2:1 be the exception.”<sup>85</sup> Both Chang<sup>86</sup> and Kenard,<sup>87</sup> however, refer to an occurrence of ἀγοράζω which does not denote an actual purchase. Luke’s gospel records the parable of the marriage feast in which invitees make excuses for not coming (14:16–24). One of the invitees says, “I have bought (ἀγοράζω) a field, and I must go out and see it” (14:18).<sup>88</sup> Marshall explains, “It may seem strange that a visit to the field should follow rather than precede the purchase, but the purchase may well have been arranged on condition of a later inspection and approval.”<sup>89</sup> Though the analogy is not perfect, we seem to have an example here of the use of ἀγοράζω to indicate a transaction which does not entail ownership in the fullest sense.

In addition this interpretation of ἀγοράζω is in close agreement with BDAG’s presentation of the lexical data. BDAG’s second definition for ἀγοράζω reads, “To secure the rights to someone by paying a price.”<sup>90</sup> This definition appears to perfectly fit Peter’s flow of thought: Christ paid the price by his own death to secure the rights to the obedience of all humans without exception. The false teachers have denied the Master who bought them, and thereby forfeited deliverance from destruction.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, Long’s lexical argument against universality in this text fails. In light of these conclusions, it seems best to understand ἀγοράζω to refer to Christ’s purchasing the rights to the obedience of every human. Again, the above material indicates that Fuller would have agreed with this point theologically, even if he chose a different interpretation of the text.

In conclusion it seems that Fuller’s theology was sometimes better than his exegesis. In preserving his Particular Baptist credentials he too readily accepted traditional interpretations of problem texts without letting their context and flow of thought permeate his understanding. Particular redemptionists who believe in the sufficiency of the atonement like Fuller have sometimes sold their theology short by reverting to unlikely interpretations of key texts. Historic Calvinism is a robust Biblical system which can stand close exegetical scrutiny and comparison with the Biblical text. A modern Calvinist Wayne Grudem has taken some steps to avoid this all too easy trap:

The sentence, ‘Christ died for all people,’ is true if it means ‘Christ died to make salvation available to all people’ or if it means, ‘Christ died to bring the free offer of the gospel to all people.’ In fact, this is the kind of language the Scripture itself uses in passages like John 6:51, 1 Timothy 2:6, and 1 John 2:2. It really seems to be only nit-picking that creates controversies and useless disputes when Reformed people insist on being such purists in their speech



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that they object anytime someone says that ‘Christ died for all people.’<sup>92</sup>

A thorough interaction with these texts and other others may drive a Calvinist to acknowledge the universal sufficiency of the atonement, but this was evidently not Fuller’s experience. His concern for the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning work was driven, not by individual problem texts,<sup>93</sup> but by his concern to preserve the Biblical understanding of gospel proclamation. He does not seem overly concerned about finding the sufficiency of Christ represented in specific Bible verses. His biblical support is largely found in the offer of the gospel, which, on his view, assumes a sufficient atonement. Yet a quick look at some of the verses used against particular redemption has shown that the verses fit quite readily into Fuller’s evangelical Calvinism.

### HISTORICAL RESPONSE TO ANDREW FULLER

Fuller’s emphasis on the universal sufficiency of the atonement was as well-received by the old guard as was duty faith. At one point, Booth accused him of holding an Arminian view.<sup>94</sup> Later Booth was content to call him “Baxterian,” after Richard Baxter, who in the previous generation had sought a middle ground between Calvinism and Arminianism on the point of the atonement.<sup>95</sup> On at least one point, Booth had the exegetical and theological advantage in this debate. He called Fuller out for adopting governmental language,<sup>96</sup> and Fuller deserved the rebuke.

Another point of clarification about the accusation is that Booth was not so theologically naïve as to assert that Christ’s death was not infinitely meritorious.<sup>97</sup> He too may have benefited from Edwards’ discussion of these matters. In any case the specific point of his objection was not the infinite merit but the universal sufficiency of the atonement. Fuller believed that these are logically inseparable;<sup>98</sup> Booth saw things differently.<sup>99</sup>

Fuller followed two strategies to defend himself against the charges of Arminianism and Baxterianism. First, he clarified the timing of his change of opinion. It appears that Booth thought that the change had occurred during the gap between “Reply to Philanthropos” and the second edition of *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*.<sup>100</sup> The reason for this misunderstanding would be readily apparent. “Reply to Philanthropos” gives a reasonably straightforward defense of particular redemption. But the second edition of *Gospel Worthy* removed and restated material pertinent to that issue.<sup>101</sup>

Fuller responds, “I freely own that my views of particular redemption

were altered by my engaging in that controversy [with Dan Taylor=Philanthropos]; but what alteration there was, was *before* I published my Reply.”<sup>102</sup> The significance of this defense should not be missed: most of the defense of particular redemption cited above comes from this Reply. Fuller wanted Booth to see that, if one judged solely from the changes made between the editions of *Gospel Worthy*, he would get the wrong impression of the changes Fuller had made to his view. Fuller’s orthodoxy is much more defensible when one considers “Reply to Philanthropos” as representative of his mature view.<sup>103</sup>

Fuller’s second strategy of defense was to show that his view, far from being Arminian or Baxterian,<sup>104</sup> was actually closer to historic, confessional Calvinism than Booth’s view. The universal language of the Canons of Dort proved especially helpful on this point, “The death of the Son of God is the only and most complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.”<sup>105</sup>

Fuller finds support for his understanding even in Calvin himself, “He appears to have considered the death of Christ as affording an offer of salvation to sinners without distinction; and the peculiar respect which it bore to the elect as consisting in the sovereignty of its application, or in God’s imparting faith and salvation through it, to them, rather than to others, as it was designed to do.”<sup>106</sup> Of course, the words Fuller is using are his own, but he felt that he had recovered historic Calvinism with his emphasis on universal sufficiency, as he said, “What is now called Calvinism is not Calvinism.”<sup>107</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While Fuller’s genius must not be underestimated, his development on the extent of the atonement represents not innovation of a new—teaching, but the recovery of an old teaching. He, like the standard Reformed confessions, taught that the atonement is sufficient for all but efficacious only for the elect. The impetus for his genius is a stout commitment to the Scriptures as the rule of faith. Theology must come from the Scriptures and must not be imposed upon it. We would all do well to heed Fuller’s advice in areas of theological concern like these, “Read the Bible not with a system before your eyes, but as a little child with humility and prayer.”<sup>108</sup> **E**

**Jeremy Pittsley** completed his M.Div. and Th.M. degrees at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He is currently preparing to plant churches and train pastors in Nairobi, Kenya.

ENDNOTES

1 As Peter J. Morden, “The entirely negative view of Gill and his ministry expressed by Whitley undoubtedly needed some revision. But attempts to defend him from the charge of High Calvinism are ultimately unconvincing” (*Offering Christ To The World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) And The Revival Of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005], pp. 14–15).

2 Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), III, 272.

3 *The Moral Nature and Fitness of Things Considered*, quoted in George M. Ella, *John Gill and Justification from Eternity* (Durham, England: Go Publications, 1998), p. 50.

4 Unless otherwise noted all Scripture citations are from the NIV.

5 Andrew Fuller, *The Atonement of Christ: and the Justification of the Sinner* (New York: American Tract Society, 1854), p. 228.

6 Fuller, *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 227.

7 John Gill, “The Doctrine of Predestination,” par. 47 [on-line], accessed 8 August 2007, available from [http://www.pbministries.org/books/gill/Sermons&Tracts/sermon\\_07.htm](http://www.pbministries.org/books/gill/Sermons&Tracts/sermon_07.htm), Internet.

8 “Gill has no objections to encouraging sinners to come to Christ, but considers the phrase ‘offer Christ and Grace’ as strictly without theological foundation. Grace strictly refers to the sovereign bestowment of unmerited salvific blessings and cannot, therefore, be offered, not even to the elect” (Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, Twentieth Anniversary ed. [Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006], p. 48).

9 Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 57.

10 “This effectively made faith into a person’s subjective, conscious feeling that the Holy Spirit was beginning to work savingly in their life, and that the gospel was therefore for them. But this, asserted Fuller, was not biblical faith” (Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 24).

11 “Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” in Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller, with a Memoir of his Life by Rev. Andrew Gunton Fuller*, ed. A.G. Fuller; rev. ed. J. Belcher, 3 vols. (reprint of 1845 ed., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), II, 342.

12 Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 80. This is why Fuller insisted on regeneration preceding faith. If faith is a holy disposition than it is necessary for the life of the new nature precede it.

13 Hence the title of George M. Ella’s work, one of the most thorough modern critiques of Fuller’s theology, *Law and Gospel in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Durham, England: Go Publications, 1996).

14 “To John Ryland,” in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Michael A.G. Haykin (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2001), p. 271.

15 Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 44.

16 Andrew Fuller, “Reply to Mr. Button,” in *Complete Works*, II, 438.

17 Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 44.

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18 Though see Gerald L. Priest, “Andrew Fuller, Hyper-Calvinism, and the ‘Modern Question,’” in *At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word: Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*, ed., Michael A.G. Haykin, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), pp. 67–69.

19 Ella, *Law and Gospel*, p. 72.

20 Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), p. 25.

21 Andrew Fuller, “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” Works 2:709. Also, in response to a letter from a detractor, Fuller writes, “It would seem by your manner of writing as if some sinners, were they ever willing to come to Christ for life, could not be saved, for want of a sufficiency in the death of Christ to save them. But no such particular redemption as this is taught in the Scriptures. On the contrary they assure us that no sinner that cometh to Christ shall be cast out (and the whole of the duty lies in a being willing to come)” (“To Mr. I. Mann and Mr. Robert Aked,” in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, pp. 216–217).

22 Morden also makes the same point, “In terms of natural ability everyone could respond, because not only did they have the natural powers enabling them to do so, but there was, potentially, provision for them in the death of Christ. Their inability to respond was entirely criminal” (*Offering Christ to the World*, p. 72).

23 Boston (Chauncey St.) : Congregational Board of Publication, n.d. Also Robert W. Oliver discusses the the New Divinity movement and its influence on Fuller (“Andrew Fuller and Abraham Booth,” in *At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word*), pp. 210–214.

24 Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 89.

25 This is what Edwin A. Reed called “the incipient danger [in Fuller] of creating a dichotomy between God and his moral government.” “A Historical Study of Three Baptist Doctrines of Atonement as Seen in the Writings of John Smith and Thomas Helwys, John Gill, and Andrew Fuller” (Unpublished Th.M. Thesis, CMGG, 1965), p. 127.

26 One of the chief evidences that Fuller actually adopted the moral government view over against penal substitution is that he makes this precise objection in his explanation of the necessity of the atonement. See n. 36 below.

27 See Michael Haykin, “Particular Redemption in the Writings of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)” in *The Gospel in the World*, Studies in Baptist Life and Thought, ed. David W. Bebbington (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002).

28 “To Timothy Dwight,” in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, pp. 199–200.

29 “I believe that before we believe in Christ, notwithstanding the secret purpose of God in our favour, we are considered by the moral governor of the world as aliens, as children of wrath, even as others; but that, on our believing on his Son, we are considered as no more strangers and foreigners, but are admitted into his family and have power, or privilege, to become the sons of God” (“Confession of Faith,” in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, p. 279).

30 Andrew Fuller, “Reply to Mr. Button,” in *Complete Works*, II, 433. Even as Fuller began to adopt governmental terminology, he retained the idea that satisfac-

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tion had reference to the divine perfections: “The import of this gospel is, that God is in the right, and we are in the wrong; that we have transgressed against him without cause, and are justly exposed to everlasting punishment; that mercy, originating purely in himself, required for the due honor of his government to be exercised through the atonement of his beloved Son; that with this sacrifice God is well pleased, and can, consistently with all his perfections, pardon and accept of any sinner, whatever he hath done, who believeth in him (*The Atonement of Christ: and the Justification of the Sinner*, p. 386).

31 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 94.

32 “In particular, it is almost impossible to believe that Fuller would have started using the language of ‘moral government’ without the New England writers. Edwards’ followers were probably more significant for Fuller here than at any other point in his theology.” (Morden, *Offering Christ To The World*, pp. 91–92.)

33 Fuller, *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 69.

34 Oliver, “Andrew Fuller and Abraham Booth,” p. 217.

35 For example, “The principle of substitution, or of one standing in the place of others, being admitted by the Sovereign of the universe, he endured that which in its effect on the divine government was equivalent to the everlasting punishment of a world, and did that which it was worthy of God to reward with eternal glory, not only on himself, but on all those whose behalf he should intercede (*The Atonement of Christ*, p. 231).

36 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 75.

37 “But this objection [that “the question is not what sin *deserves*, but what God *requires* in order to exalt the dignity of his government...in the forgiveness of sin”] implies that it would be consistent with the Divine perfections to admit, not only what is equivalent to the actual punishment of the sinner, but of what is not equivalent; and, if so, what good reason can be given why God might not have entirely dispensed with a satisfaction, and pardoned sinners without any atonement.” (“On the Deity of Christ,” in *Complete Works*, III, 693). See also, Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 75.

38 Andrew Fuller, “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 707.

39 Andrew Fuller, “Reply to Philanthropos,” in *Complete Works*, II, 489.

40 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 340.

41 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 343.

42 See Andrew Fuller, “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 709 and Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 72.

43 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 60.

44 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 60.

45 “Reply to Philanthropos,” in *Complete Works*, II, 489.

46 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 356.

47 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His*, p. 349.

48 See *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 293.

49 Andrew Fuller, “Reply to Philanthropos,” in *Complete Works*, II, 499.

50 J. Ramsey Michaels, “Atonement in John’s Gospel and Epistles,” *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill, Frank A. J. L. James, Roger R. Nicole (Downers

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Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 117.

51 This appears to be the assessment of Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, p. 70. It is clearly Ella's interpretation of Fuller (*Law and Gospel*, pp. 153, 197).

52 Emphasis is mine. *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, in *Complete Works*, II, 374.

53 Andrew Fuller, "Six Letters To Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 710.

54 Andrew Fuller, "Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation," in *Complete Works*, II, 374. This effectively answers the question of human responsibility as it relates to particular redemption. Given the universal sufficiency of the atonement, the efficacy of the atonement poses no additional problem for human agency on Fuller's view. The atonement is a function of God's purpose and, if the sovereignty of God's purposes is consistent with human responsibility, then so is particular redemption ("Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 501).

55 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 231. See also, p. 235.

56 "On the Practical Uses of Christian Baptism," in *Complete Works*, III, 340.

57 Andrew Fuller, "Confession of Faith," in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, p. 277.

58 "Mr. Fuller, too, by some of his explanations respecting the sufficiency of the atonement as a sacrifice equal in value to have effected the salvation of all mankind, was supposed to have pleaded for universal redemption; nothing, I am persuaded, was farther from his intention, as he considered the Holy Spirit's application of the atonement confined to the objects of the Father's election, and of the Son's redemption" (Ivimey, *English Baptists*, IV, 88). Robert Reymond's recent discussion of the atonement indicates that this agreement remains an important argument in the particular redemptionist's arsenal (*New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998], p. 477).

59 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 465.

60 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 489.

61 Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), p. 146.

62 "If the supposed universal extent of Christ's death had a universal efficacy, it would be worth the while of a lover of all mankind to contend for it; but if it proposes finally to save *not one soul more* than the scheme which it opposes—if it has no real advantage in point of *provision* in one respect, and a manifest disadvantage in another—if it enervates the doctrine of the *atonement*, confessedly leaves the salvation of those who are saved to an *uncertainty*, and, by implication renders it *impossible*—then to what does it all amount?" ("Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 508).

63 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 71.

64 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 490.

65 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 357.

66 Andrew Fuller, "Six Letters to Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 708.

67 The felicity of the term *covenant* may be questioned, but there can be no doubt exegetically that the Father *promised* this inheritance to the Son.

68 *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 146.

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- 69 Andrew Fuller, "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 491.
- 70 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 489.
- 71 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 494.
- 72 Quoting Philanthropos, p. 71, in "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 495.
- 73 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 495.
- 74 Quoting Philanthropos, p. 78, in "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 500. It is interesting that Fuller thought Taylor's arguments from 2 Corinthians 5:15 were his strongest. Many, including myself, consider 2 Corinthians 5 one of the clearest texts *in favor of* Fuller's position on the atonement.
- 75 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 500.
- 76 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 500.
- 77 "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Complete Works*, II, 500.
- 78 Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003), p. 329.
- 79 Fuller's assertion that no other text has Jesus as δεσπότης is due to the fact that Jude 4 is not without its problems. Bauckham concludes based on evidence from the early church that Jude names Jesus the δεσπότης (*Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], p. 39).
- 80 Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 331.
- 81 Andrew E. Chang, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (Jan-Mar 1985): 60.
- 82 Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 283.
- 83 D. Edmond Heibert, *Second Peter and Jude* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1989), p. 90; Chang, "Second Peter 2:1," p. 52.
- 84 Chang, "Second Peter 2:1," p. 54.
- 85 Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement* (n.p., 1977), p. 72.
- 86 "Second Peter 2:1," p. 56.
- 87 Douglas W. Kennard, "Petrine Redemption: Its Meaning and Extent." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 403.
- 88 ESV.
- 89 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 589.
- 90 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "ἀγοράζω," p. 14 [hereafter cited as BDAG]. BDAG mentions 2 Peter 2:1 under this heading. See also I. Howard Marshall, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).
- 91 Heibert, *Second Peter and Jude*, p. 90.
- 92 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 601–2. John 3:17, Hebrews 2:9 and 2 Pet 2:1 should also be included in this group of clear texts whose universality need not be denied.

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93 At one point he does say that not only Dan Taylor but the Scriptures were “standing in the way” of his previous non-sufficiency view, but he does not care to list the specific Scriptures which influenced his decision (“Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 710).

94 Fuller is not mentioned by name but quoted by Booth in the Appendix to the published sermon “Divine Justice Essential to the Divine Character,” in *The Select Works of Abraham Booth*. 3 vols. (Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.), III, 78, 83–84.

95 “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 714.

96 The title of the sermon cited above is a reference to the fact that Fuller had run close to the danger of bifurcating God’s character and his government of the universe. See above.

97 After all, in his most famous work he may be found saying, “[Christ’s death] must be wholly sufficient to take away the sins of the most guilty sinner and powerful enough to save the very worst of transgressors. If Christ’s person is infinite in glory then his obedience is boundless in merit.... As the infinite glory of his divine person cannot be separated from his humanity, so infinite merit must be connected with his obedience and sufferings. In all that he did, and in all that he suffered, he was the Son of God” (*The Reign of Grace*, prepared by Richard Inns [Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2003], p. 210).

98 “The grounds on which I have attempted to vindicate the atonement... operate, I admit, against that notion of particular redemption which places it not in the *design* of the Father in giving his Son, nor the Son in laying down his life, but in the number of sins and sinners for which his sufferings sufficed as an atonement; but this in my account is no part of evangelical truth; and by the acknowledgement of Mr. B(ooth), that *the same sacrifice is necessary for the salvation of one sinner as of many*, it would seem to be none in his” (Andrew Fuller, “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 711).

99 Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, p. 340.

100 This is taken as the reason that Fuller is so keen to note that his mature views did not differ substantially from the views represented in “Reply to Philanthropos” (Andrew Fuller, “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 709).

101 In fact, Fuller explains, “As my views of particular redemption were somewhat changed between my writing the first edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, and my *Reply to Philanthropos*, it was right when publishing a second edition of the former work to render it consistent with the latter, as well as with my then present sentiments (“Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 710).

102 “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland,” in *Complete Works*, II, 709.

103 While “Reply to Philanthropos” is particularistic, Fuller does evidence in it that he had indeed reconsidered the atonement as it concerns its sufficiency, “I suppose P. 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)” (*Complete Works*, II, 488).

104 Fuller explicitly rejects the idea of “universal redemption” taught by Richard



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Baxter, which appears to be simply four-point Calvinism similar, though not identical to that of Moises Amyraut. Baxter had other problems, as Fuller is quick to point out, but he also makes sure to single out Baxter's view of the atonement and reject it. "Mr. Baxter pleases for 'universal redemption;' I only contend for the *sufficiency* of the atonement, in itself considered, for the redemption and salvation of the whole world; and this affords a ground for a universal invitation to sinners to believe; which was maintained by Calvin, and all the old Calvinists. I consider redemption as inseparably connected with eternal life, and therefore as applicable to none but the elect, who are redeemed from *among* men" ("Six Letters to Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 714).

105 "Six Letters to Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 712.

106 "Six Letters to Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 712.

107 "Six Letters to Dr. Ryland," in *Complete Works*, II, 712.

108 "To Mr. I. Mann and Mr. Robert Aked," in *Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller*, p. 217.