

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Ten Baptists Everyone Should Know: Andrew Fuller

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Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) was born on February 6, 1754 in the village of Wicken in Cambridgeshire, England. He was born into a family of Baptists at a time when the Particular Baptists of England were strongly influenced by what is known as hyper or high Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism is a term used to refer not to those who merely believe in the five points of Calvinism, but for those who additionally affirm the eternal justification of the elect and reject the public and promiscuous proclamation of the gospel. In fact, John Gill's doctrine of eternal justification was used as an excuse to not openly invite all men to believe the gospel. Instead, one should wait upon evidence of election in individuals before telling them to believe in Christ. Although the Evangelical Revivals were taking place in England at the time through the preaching of men such as John Wesley and George Whitefield, most Particular Baptist congregations remained unaffected by this evangelistic movement.

Fuller's own personal testimony was the story of his times in miniature. He was himself raised in a high Calvinistic background. His own pastor rarely addressed unbelievers. These early experiences by Fuller led to his later questions regarding the sinner's duty to believe in Christ. According to the high Calvinists, a "warrant" or evidence of election was necessary before the opportunity to believe the gospel could be set before any sinner. This teaching led Fuller to languish for many years without confidence to approach Christ for mercy. Although Fuller read John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and many

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other works which told of Christ's sufficiency to save, he still lacked confidence that he had the right to believe on Christ.

Eventually, Fuller found what he was seeking for so desperately in the Word of God. Both the divine warnings and promises drove Fuller to faith in Christ. In 1770, Fuller was baptized and became a member of the local Baptist church in Soham. He became that same church's pastor five years later. However, in his early years as pastor, he was still influenced by the high Calvinism of his youth and did not dare to address the unconverted to come to Jesus. But by 1778 all this had changed. Fuller's study of Scripture, his re-reading of Bunyan again and his having fellowship with pastors John Sutcliff of Olney and Robert Hall of Arnesby led him to change his view. Hall, Sr. had introduced Fuller to the writings of the American theologian Jonathan Edwards, specifically recommending his treatise on *The Freedom of the Will*. Edwards' distinction between moral and natural ability/inability was seized on by Fuller as a way of understanding both how sinners have the duty to respond to the preaching of the gospel and why Christians have the responsibility to offer the gospel to all indiscriminately. In 1781, Fuller wrote a book that would be published four years later. This work would become a theological foundation for the modern missionary movement. The title of the book nearly says it all: *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation: or The Obligations of Men Fully to Credit, and Cordially to Approve, Whatever God Makes Known. Wherein is Considered the Nature of Faith in Christ, and the Duty of Those Where the Gospel Comes in That Matter*. It is commonly known simply as *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* and it strongly called for the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel to all peoples. Fuller's commitment to world missions was shown not only in his writings but in his actions. He was instrumental in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 which sent out his friend William Carey "the father of modern missions" to India. This society was formed in order to send and support missionaries to the peoples of the world. Fuller was elected the first secretary of the society and kept that position until his death in 1815.

In addition to Fuller's role in the spread of world missions, he also continued to pastor. He served two churches during the course of his ministry: his home church at Soham from 1775 to 1782 and a congregation at Kettering from 1782 until his death in 1815. Fuller's writings, therefore, were the result of his own preaching and the experience of his congregation. He was not a systematic theologian like John Gill, but rather a pastor-theologian who courageously defended the truth.

Fuller's writings began with the aforementioned *Gospel of Worthy of All Acceptation* in which he argued that it is the responsibility of all sinners to believe the gospel and the responsibility of all believers to proclaim the gospel to sinners. This work made Fuller a

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champion of evangelical Calvinism. So much so that evangelical Calvinism in nineteenth-century Baptist life became known as “Fullerism.”

Fuller also defended the gospel against a group known as the Sandemanians who argued that saving faith is mere intellectual acceptance of the facts of the gospel. This was in opposition to Fuller’s teaching that saving faith also included trust and resulted in a life of continued obedience to Christ. The culmination of Fuller’s response to Sandemanianism was his 1810 work titled *Strictures on Sandemanianism, In Twelve Letters to a Friend*.

Likewise, Fuller’s stance on the exclusivity of Christ for salvation led to more controversy with the universalist, William Vidler. Fuller responded to Vidler’s *God’s Love to His Creatures Asserted and Vindicated* with a series of letters published in the *Evangelical Magazine* and the *Universalist’s Miscellany* that were published together as *Letters to Mr. Vidler, on the Doctrine of Universal Salvation* in 1802.

Andrew Fuller died of tuberculosis on May 7, 1815, but his influence far outlasted his own life span. His legacy was carried forward on both sides of the Atlantic as leading Baptists such as Charles H. Spurgeon and James P. Boyce were adherents of “Fullerism” or evangelical Calvinism instead of being “Gillites.” Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* formed the theological foundation for the modern missionary movement. Perhaps his most lasting legacy is the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest body of Baptists in the world today, which was founded by “Fullerites” and continues his missionary vision with over 5,000 international missionaries supported through the Cooperative Program.

To read more about Fuller, see the recent monograph by Peter Morden titled [The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller \(1754–1815\)](#). For an examination of Andrew Fuller polemics, see [“At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word”: Andrew Fuller As an Apologist](#), edited by Michael A. G. Haykin. Another helpful recent volume on Fuller is Paul Brewster’s [Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian](#). Perhaps the best introduction to Fuller’s life and writings is [The Armies of the Lamb: the Spirituality of Andrew Fuller](#) which contains a biographical introduction by Michael A. G. Haykin and selections from Fuller’s personal correspondence, edited by Haykin.

To read Fuller himself, a couple of options are currently available. The 3-volume [Complete Works](#) is available, as is [a one-volume edition](#) from Banner of Truth. For those unwilling or unable to invest in one of the print editions, there is a ton of Fuller material for free on [Google Books](#). Currently underway is the production of [a critical edition of the works of Andrew Fuller](#), similar in scope and quality to the Yale edition of the Works of Jonathan Edwards. This project is being coordinated by the [Andrew Fuller Center for](#)

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[Baptist Studies](#) at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with Center Director Michael A. G. Haykin serving as the series editor. Three volumes are [currently available](#) with new volumes being released annually. Those interested in learning even more about Fuller and the latest scholarship related to him and his theology should check out the website of the [Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies](#).

This is Part Five of ten of an ongoing series by Steve Weaver.

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Steve Weaver

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