

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Ten Baptists Everyone Should Know: William Kiffin

STEVE WEAVER, PHD

1



William Kiffin (c. 1616-1701) is widely regarded as one of the founding fathers of English Particular Baptists. His remarkable life nearly spanned almost the entirety of the formative seventeenth century and he was the only man to sign both the *First London Confession of Faith* of 1644 and the *Second London Confession of Faith* of 1689.

Orphaned as a child of only 9 years, Kiffin was apprenticed as a glover by the age of 13. When he was 17, Kiffin became converted through hearing the preaching of Puritan pastors John Davenport and John Goodwin. Remarkably, from these humble beginnings Kiffin would become one of the wealthiest men of his time, an adviser to kings, and a leader among the fledgling Particular Baptist movement.

One somewhat humorous incident from Kiffin's life serves to demonstrate both his vast wealth and connections with the English monarch. On one particular occasion, Charles II asked Kiffin for a loan of £40,000. Instead, as Kiffin would later recount, he decided to make a gift of £10,000. This, he estimated, had saved him £30,000! More significantly, Kiffin would use his influence with the king to plead for and obtain religious toleration for his fellow dissenters.

Kiffin was one of the key players in the development of the Particular Baptist strand of English Baptists. Though his exact role is a disputed element in Baptist historiography, he was definitely a part of the mix. The interpretation of the so-called "[Kiffin Manuscript](#)" (hosted by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's [Baptist Studies](#)

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

© 2022, LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

[Online website](#)) is central to the debate regarding the origins of English Particular Baptists. For a discussion of Kiffin's role, see this article titled "[How Did William Kiffin Join the Baptists?](#)" (*Baptist Quarterly* 23, January 1970, 201-207) by B.R. White, the *doyen* of seventeenth-century English Baptist studies.

In the 1680s, Kiffin was involved in a debate with John Bunyan on the issue of open or closed membership. His side of the debate was set forth in [A Sober Discourse of Right to Church-Communion](#) published in 1681 (available [here in PDF format](#)). In this work, Kiffin sets forth the case for the majority view among Baptists historically that baptism (immersion of the believer) is a prerequisite to church membership and the Lord's Supper.

If you are interested in reading more about William Kiffin, then here are some excellent resources to begin with. For a great short biography of William Kiffin, see [Stranger than Fiction: The Life of William Kiffin](#) by B. A. Ramsbottom. For Kiffin's own autobiographical reflections on his life see [Remarkable Passages In The Life Of William Kiffin](#) edited by William Orme (also available for [free from Google Books](#)). Another perhaps more accessible work is Michael A. G. Haykin's [Kiffin, Knollys and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage](#).

Currently, Dr. Larry Kreitzer of Regent's Park College at Oxford University has published a project to make the primary sources regarding William Kiffin available to the scholarly community. This project consists of three volumes, [William Kiffin and His World \(Part 1\)](#), [William Kiffin and His World \(part 2\)](#), and [William Kiffin and His World \(part 3\)](#). The series is currently planned to have at least eight volumes in total. It is hoped that the accessibility of the primary source documents which Kreitzer has uncovered will be the foundation for more in-depth biographical studies than have hitherto been available.

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



Steve Weaver

Steve Weaver (@steveweaver) has been the pastor of Farmdale Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky., since 2008. He also serves as a Fellow for The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he is an adjunct professor of church history. Steve is the author of [Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins \(1647-1702\) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England](#) and has co-edited of a modern edition of [An Orthodox Catechism](#) (a 1680 Baptist revision of the Heidelberg Catechism). Steve and his

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

wife Gretta have been married for twenty-four years and have been blessed with six children. You can follow him on Twitter at [@steveweaver](https://twitter.com/steveweaver).

© *Credo Magazine*, September 27, 2019. Retrieved July 22, 2022.

<https://credomag.com/2019/09/ten-baptists-everyone-should-know-william-kiffin-2/>