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MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF JOHN GILL,
SAMUEL STENNETT, AND ANDREW FULLER

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MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF JOHN GILL,
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PREFACE

It is an honor to have had the opportunity to work on this project. I am grateful for those who supported me along the way, especially my wife, without whom I would have never begun the journey. The Lord has strengthened our family faithfully through these years, and I have no doubt that we will look back on this time with sweet reflection. It has been a privilege to work with Dr. Haykin, Dr. Whitney, and the rest of the fine faculty at Southern Seminary. They are men of great knowledge, but more significantly, genuine piety. I am thankful for their encouragement and example. I pray that this dissertation contributes to the budding field of Biblical Spirituality and challenges any reader who comes across it to be a better spouse and parent. It certainly has accomplished that end in its author.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness . . . And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection.

—Mr. William Collins, proposing to Miss Elizabeth Bennet¹

This memorable scene in Jane Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, provides a window into some of the complicated issues surrounding marriage in early modern England. Mr. Collins, a pompous and perpetually unaware clergyman, proposed to the young Elizabeth Bennet by providing a list of reasons why he wished to marry along with an argument for why she ought to consider their marriage a desirable arrangement. Elizabeth was unimpressed by his practicality and could barely contain her laughter, even though such a marriage would have been financially advantageous. In the end, Mr. Collins moved on swiftly, becoming engaged to Elizabeth’s best friend, Charlotte, within the week. Charlotte was no more attracted to the reverend than her friend but she conceded, “I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only for a comfortable home.”²

Here one can see the diversity of the times regarding marriage. Some, like the opportunistic Charlotte and the bumbling Mr. Collins, viewed marriage as mostly a

¹Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; repr., London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915), 91. Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice* in 1796 and 1797, but it was not published until 1813.

²Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 108.

practical arrangement, primarily aimed at settling property from one generation to the next. Others shared the more idealistic notions of Elizabeth, holding out hope for “a union that [would be] to the advantage of both” husband and wife.³ While notions of authority and structure continued to give shape to domestic relationships, affection between the spouses was a point of significant emphasis, something even Mr. Collins felt obliged to acknowledge. In the midst of it all, legal developments and the growth of society continued to alter the landscape within and around the institution of marriage.

In such a context, one might wonder how the church responded. Surely, there were greater sources of wisdom on the subject than the likes of the Reverend Collins. But what did influential voices in the church say and how did they address the issues of their day? Did theologians consider authority or affection to be the defining characteristic of the marriage relationship? What separated Christian marriages from those of unbelievers? Such questions could be approached from a number of different perspectives, but this study will focus on one denomination, the Particular Baptists, and three specific voices within that tradition: John Gill (1697–1771), Samuel Stennett (1727–1795), and Andrew Fuller (1754–1815). The portrait that emerges will provide a helpful window into the past as well as an instructive example for Baptists today.

John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller were each influential pastor-theologians in their day, especially among their own denomination. Gill pastored the Baptist church at Horselydown in London for over fifty-one years, filling the pulpit where the eminent Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) had previously served and leading the congregation that would one day become the Metropolitan Tabernacle under Charles

³Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 266.

Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892).⁴ Gill was a faithful husband to his wife, Elizabeth (d. 1764), and a committed father to his three children. In addition to his ministry at home and in the church, his influence extended far beyond his congregation. He was the first Particular Baptist to write a comprehensive systematic theology and the first Englishman to complete a verse-by-verse commentary on the whole Bible.⁵ His numerous publications and weekly lecture series earned him, as one biographer put it, “an established character for [scholarship] amongst the learned of all denominations.”⁶ As such an influential voice in his own generation, it is appropriate to consider Gill’s teaching on marriage as a means of understanding how eighteenth-century Baptists

⁴There are numerous biographical resources available for Gill, beginning with a pair of memoirs composed by contemporaries shortly after his death: “A Summary of the Life, Writings, and Character of the Late Reverend and Learned John Gill, D. D.,” in *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), 1:ix–xxxv; John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: John Bennett, 1838). In addition, more recent scholarship has produced several helpful secondary sources including the following: L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, “John Gill,” in *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 83–91; Timothy George, “John Gill,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 77–101; George Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, UK: Go Publications, 1995); Robert W. Oliver, “John Gill: His Life and Ministry,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Press, 1997), 7–50; Robert W. Oliver, “John Gill (1697–1771),” in *British Particular Baptists 1638–1910*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 1:146–65; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 73–107; Thomas J. Nettles, “John Gill (1697–1771),” in *The Baptists* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 1:195–242; and Robert W. Oliver, “The Legacy of John Gill,” in *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771–1892: From John Gill to C.H. Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 3–16.

⁵The first accolade is noted by Stanley K. Fowler in “John Gill’s Doctrine of Believer Baptism,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 69. The second accomplishment is mentioned by Robert W. Oliver in “John Gill,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 38.

⁶“The Late John Gill,” xxix. His key publications include *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated* (1731), *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–1738), *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1767), and *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1770). His reputation outside of the Particular Baptist denomination is illustrated by his longstanding friendship with Anglicans James Hervey (1714–1759) and Augustus Toplady (1740–1778), the latter of whom thought so much of Gill that he requested the privilege of delivering a eulogy at his funeral, an offer his family and friends declined.

understood the subject at the time.⁷ Moreover, his prolific literary output left a legacy that impacted subsequent generations of Baptists, including the two other men discussed in this study.⁸

Samuel Stennett was connected to Gill in numerous ways.⁹ As a fourth-generation minister in the Particular Baptist tradition, Stennett would have been familiar with Gill's ministry from an early age. In fact, Gill preached both an ordination sermon and eventually a funeral sermon for his father, Joseph Stennett II (1692–1758), who pastored the Baptist church at Little Wild Street in Lincoln's Inn Fields for nearly twenty years. When Samuel Stennett succeeded his father in this pulpit in 1758, he no doubt continued a relationship with his fellow London pastor, evidenced by the fact that Stennett would eventually preach a memorial sermon for Gill in 1771.¹⁰ For his own part,

⁷There are currently three published articles related to John Gill's views on this subject: Sharon James, "'The Weaker Vessel': John Gill's Reflections on Marriage, Women, and Divorce," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill*, 211–23; Jonathan Boyd, "John Gill on Resisting Sexual Temptation," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 2014): 254–71; and Matthew Haste, "'A Type of the Marriage of Christ and the Church': John Gill on Marriage," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 2 (July 2014): 289–302.

⁸Gill's contemporaries jokingly referred to him as "Dr. Voluminous," a testimony to his extensive writing ministry.

⁹The biographical sources on Stennett are a bit more scant compared to those on Gill and Fuller; however, the following sources provide a helpful foundation: William Jones, "Some Account of the Life and Writings of the Author," in *The Works of Samuel Stennett* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1824), 1:v–xxxviii; and B. A. Ramsbottom, "The Stennetts," in *British Particular Baptists*, 1:132–44. Several memorial sermons following his death provide additional insight from his contemporaries: Dan Taylor, *A Good Minister of Jesus Christ: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.* (London: W. Button, 1795); Daniel Turner, *The Gracious Presence of God, the Chief Joy of His People Considered: In a Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett* (Oxford: R. Watts, 1795); John Evans, *A Sermon; Preached at Worship-Street, Shoreditch to the Memory of Samuel Stennett* (London: Whittingham, 1795); Joseph Jenkins and Abraham Booth, *The Love of the Brethren, Proceeding from a Perception of God: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.* (London: Bye and Law, 1795).

¹⁰See Samuel Stennett, "The Victorious Christian Receiving the Crown: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. John Gill," in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:148–75. This sermon was published along with Benjamin Wallin's tribute to Gill entitled, "The Address at the Interment of John Gill" (London: Bye and Law, 1771).

Stennett was known for his godly character, sharp mind, and gentlemanly demeanor.¹¹ His impressive gifts caught the attention of the King’s College in Aberdeen, which granted him a Doctor of Divinity in 1763. His written works earned him public acclaim throughout England and a number of his hymns, particularly “Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned” and “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks,” are still sung today.¹² In addition to his public ministry, Stennett enjoyed what seemed to be a happy marriage to his wife, Elizabeth Marsom (1723/24–1795), who was described as “a lady of unaffected piety and good nature” with whom “he lived in close and uninterrupted affection.”¹³ Their marriage laid the foundation for a peaceful home that was such an endearing place for its visitors that one biographer contended “the serene piety, the cheerful benevolence, the improving intercourse, [and] the generous hospitality” of the Stennett home would be missed by many.¹⁴ Stennett set forth his vision for the family in *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (1783), a collection of sermons on marriage and family life that was well-received at the time. Family handbooks had been popular in English literature since the time of the Puritans and yet, Stennett’s biographer believed that *Domestic Duties* should be read in every Christian home on an annual basis, concluding, “We know of no writer who either

¹¹Winters, quoted in Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 1:xxi.

¹²Stennett’s most influential publications include *Sermons on Personal Religion* (1770), *Discourses on the Parable of the Sower* (1787), *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (1783), and *Discourses on Divine Authority and the Various Use of the Holy Scriptures* (1790). Each of these works is available in *The Works of Samuel Stennett*. In addition, Stennett authored nearly forty hymns, many of which appeared in the popular collection known as *Rippon’s Selection*. For a hymn related to the present subject, see “Children Dying in their Infancy in the Arms of Jesus,” in John Rippon, *Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors. An Appendix to Dr. Watt’s Psalms and Hymns* (London: n.p., 1815), 556.

¹³Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” xv.

¹⁴Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” xxii.

before or since has done such ample justice to the subject in all its bearings.”¹⁵ As the most significant work of its kind produced by a Baptist in the eighteenth century, *Domestic Duties* is worthy of detailed analysis in this study.

The final subject, Andrew Fuller, wrote less on marriage than either Gill or Stennett but is included in this study for several reasons. First, he was born in the year that Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act was ratified, a legal step that would transform the institution of marriage in England.¹⁶ In this way, Fuller is helpful because he provides a window a later perspective in the century than the Gill and Stennett. Second, Fuller is generally recognized as the most significant Baptist theologian of the second half of the century, owing both to his prolific writing as well as the impact of his most famous work, *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785).¹⁷ Third, Fuller is worthy of inclusion in this study because his thoughts on marriage are available in his published works, especially his *Expository Discourses on Genesis* (1806), and through his journals and correspondence, which have been faithfully preserved in each of his three major biographies.¹⁸ Finally, Fuller is of interest because his commitment to his family has been

¹⁵Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” xxxii. For a brief introduction to family handbooks beginning in the Puritan period, see Anthony Fletcher, “The Protestant Idea of Marriage in Early Modern England,” in *Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 163–65.

¹⁶For a helpful overview of the cultural context of this legal decision, see Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 15–36.

¹⁷Charles Spurgeon, for example, considered Fuller “the greatest theologian” of his century. Gilbert Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Rope-Holder* (London: Carey Press, 1942), 127.

¹⁸These three biographies are John Ryland, *The Work of Faith: the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, Late Pastor of the Baptist Church at Kettering, and Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society . . . Chiefly Extracted from His Own Papers* (Charlestown, MA: Samuel Etheridge, 1818); J. W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Rufus Babcock (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1830); and Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882). A helpful overview of the source material available on Andrew Fuller can be found in Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World : Andrew Fuller (1754–*

called into question.¹⁹ A letter from his second wife, Anne Coles (1763–1825), written shortly after his death, has led some to assume that Fuller was so devoted to his work that he had little time for his family.²⁰ This single anecdote, however, should not be the only measure of Fuller’s commitment to his family. Although Anne’s comment may reveal a weakness of Fuller in a particular season of life, his biographies reveal a man who, in addition to pastoring the Baptist church at Kettering and leading the Baptist Missionary Society, was also a devoted husband and father. His first wife, Sarah Gardiner (1756–1792), suffered through a tragic illness and eventual death only a few months after the BMS was formally established. Sarah’s suffering and the impact it had on her husband and family produced a number of heartfelt ruminations from Fuller, which will be examined in detail.²¹ In addition, his subsequent marriage to Anne Coles will provide an additional window into his character as a husband and father.²² While Fuller’s theology

1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-century Particular Baptist Life (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 2–4. Nettles also includes a useful overview of the secondary source material in “Andrew Fuller,” in *British Particular Baptists*, 2:140–41. More recent secondary sources on Fuller’s life include the following: Thomas J. Nettles, “Andrew Fuller (1754–1815),” in *The Baptists* 1:243–78; Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 8–35; Phil Roberts, “Andrew Fuller,” in *Baptist Theologians*, 121–39; John Piper, *Andrew Fuller: I Will Go Down, If You Will Hold the Rope* (2012; repr., Louisville: The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies), 1–35; M. A. G. Haykin, “Fuller, Andrew (1754–1815),” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 241–44; Michael Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2001), 23–53; Brian Stanley, “Fuller, Andrew,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 230–31; E. F. Clipsham, “Fuller, Andrew,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 1:414–15.

¹⁹Paul Brewster, for example, considered Fuller’s failure to balance his responsibilities as a husband and father with his public ministry to be one of his key weaknesses as a pastor-theologian. See Brewster, *Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, 162.

²⁰In the letter, Anne lamented, “I am fully persuaded, that my dear husband fell a sacrifice to the concerns of the Mission.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 297.

²¹For example, Fuller composed a poem on the one-year anniversary of Sarah’s death which can be found in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 277.

²²In the same letter previously referenced, Anne went on to conclude, “I must testify [his domestic character] to have been, ever since I had the happiness of being united to him, of the most amiable

of marriage will be considered in this dissertation, his personal life will also receive great attention. As Fuller observed in reference to the biblical story of Abraham's efforts to secure a wife for Isaac, "The characters of men are not so easily ascertained from a few splendid actions as from the ordinary course of life, in which their real dispositions are manifested."²³

Together, these three men aptly represent how Particular Baptists thought about, wrote about, and practiced marriage in the long eighteenth-century.²⁴ As heirs of the Puritans, each of these men was committed to the authority of Scripture and its application to daily life. Thus, John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller provide a helpful window into how eighteenth-century theologians navigated their context and guided their churches toward a biblical vision for marriages and families.²⁵

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the question: how did these three pastors think about and practice marriage? In answering this question, several related questions will be explored as well. First, what were the central elements of their theology of marriage and what was its basis? Second, how did their theology of marriage impact

and endearing kind." Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 297.

²³Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis* in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 3:93.

²⁴This study focuses on Particular Baptists rather than the General Baptists. For a work examining General Baptists on marriage in this era, see John Caffyn, *Sussex Believers: Baptist Marriage in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Worthing, UK: Churchman Publishing, 1988). For more on the decline and growth of the denomination during the eighteenth century, see Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the 18th Century*, vol. 2 of *A History of the English Baptists*, ed. B. R. White (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986).

²⁵For a helpful overview of Baptist marriage in this time period, see Michael A. G. Haykin and Ian Hugh Clary, "Baptist Marriage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Talking, Thinking, and Truth," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2012): 28–40.

the practice of marriage in their own homes? Third, how did the culture around them think about and practice marriage and how did they engage their world on these issues? Finally, how does the spirituality of marriage of Gill, Stennett, and Fuller compare with the Puritans? Among eighteenth-century Particular Baptists, is the subject of marriage a source of continuity or discontinuity with the Puritan tradition?

This dissertation will argue that John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller set forth a biblical understanding of marriage in their generation through their preaching, writing, and faithful leadership as husbands. Their commitment to a biblical spirituality of marriage is evidence of their theological continuity with the Puritan tradition and serves as an helpful example for Christians today.

Status of the Question

Scholars have taken great interest in eighteenth-century England as an historical turning point into the modern world. This fascination has been particularly keen in the area of family studies, where works such as Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* have traced the development of the modern family to this very century.²⁶ As scholars have interacted with Stone's thesis and set forth their own assessments, a significant body of literature has emerged around the eighteenth-century British family.²⁷ One can find various summaries of the social conditions at the time,

²⁶Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Ralph Houlbrooke called Stone's work "the most influential exposition of the view that radical changes occurred during [this] period." Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Family Life, 1576–1716: An Anthology from Diaries* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 9.

²⁷For additional resources on marriage in England in this time period, see the following: Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003); David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, eds., *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500–1789*, vol. 1 of *The History of the European Family* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: A History of the Making and Breaking of*

reprints of private correspondence, and detailed accounts of important legal developments.²⁸ However, few of these studies adequately engage with the significant theological issues of the day and most only address Christian opinions on the periphery. At present, very little published research has addressed how the church responded to the developments around them at this time.²⁹ The present dissertation seeks to fill this gap in part by examining how three influential Baptists approached the subject of marriage.

Such a study must consider not only the historical context of these men but also the theological heritage from which they emerged. In the two previous centuries, the rise of the Puritans radically altered the ecclesiological landscape in England.³⁰ Among the various contributions of the Puritan movement, historians have recently taken

Marriage in England (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); idem, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England 1660–1753* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1560–1680* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1982).

²⁸For additional sources on marriage issues in this period, see the following: Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London 1660–1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: University Press, 1996); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); Sara Heller Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-century England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999); and Rebecca Propert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009).

²⁹One notable exception is John Caffyn’s work on the General Baptists mentioned in footnote 25. However, Caffyn himself concluded, “As far as I have been able to trace, no appraisal has ever been made of Baptist attitudes of marriage—let alone their practices.” Caffyn, *Sussex Believers*, 15. Caffyn’s study provides a helpful contribution to the subject but he focused on only General Baptists in his research.

³⁰There are many helpful introductions to the Puritans. The following sources will provide a foundation for this study: Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality* (London: Epworth Press, 1973); Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Dewey D. Wallace, *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987); J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990); Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004); Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); and Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

particular interest in their views of the home and their understanding of marriage.³¹ While scholars continue to debate precisely who they were and what motivated them, it is without question that the Puritans were influential in their day and for centuries to come.³²

Much has been written in recent years on the question of just how much the Puritans impacted their immediate heirs in Protestantism, the early Evangelicals. In his landmark study, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, British historian David Bebbington traced the beginning of the movement to the Enlightenment period in England.³³ In doing so, he argued that the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s represented “a sharp discontinuity in the Protestant tradition” and a particular break from the Puritanism of previous generations.³⁴ While Bebbington’s “quadrilateral of priorities” for Evangelicalism has

³¹For example, see the following resources on the Puritan family: Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966); Levin L. Schucking, *The Puritan Family: A Society Study from the Literary Sources*, trans. B. Battershaw (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1969); James Turner Johnson, *A Society Ordained by God: English Puritan Marriage Doctrine in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970); Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 73–90; Timothy Beougher, “The Puritan View of Marriage: The Nature of the Husband/Wife Relationship in Puritan England as Taught and Experienced by a Representative Puritan Pastor, Richard Baxter,” *Trinity Journal* 10, n.s. (1989): 131–60; Daniel Doriani, “The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 125–43; Mark Dever, “Christian Hedonists or Religious Prudes? The Puritans on Sex,” in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 245–70; J. I. Packer, “Marriage and Family in Puritan Thought,” in *A Quest for Godliness*, 259–76; and Joel R. Beeke, “The Puritans on Walking Godly in the Home,” in *A Puritan Theology*, 859–76.

³²On the challenge of defining Puritanism, see John Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 255–61.

³³David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989).

³⁴Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 74.

become widely accepted as a functional definition of the movement, some scholars have questioned Bebbington's assumptions about previous generations of Protestants.³⁵

In *The Advent of Evangelicalism*, a group of twenty scholars examined Bebbington's thesis and pointed to a number of key concerns. One central argument of this work was that Bebbington had misread the Puritans, both in terms of their understanding of assurance of salvation and also in regard to their commitment to missions. Michael Haykin, for example, pointed to the development of Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of assurance and missionary efforts as evidence of the continuity that existed between the Puritans and early Evangelicals.³⁶ As Haykin noted, Edwards was a key influence on eighteenth-century Baptists such as John Ryland (1753–1825) and Andrew Fuller as they launched the modern missions movement.³⁷ Similarly, John Coffey argued that the early Evangelicals were “essentially (and self-consciously) derivative” in their theology, combining Reformation doctrine with pietist fervor.³⁸ Coffey concluded that modern Evangelicalism “has roots in both the sixteenth-century Reformation and the eighteenth-century Revival.”³⁹ This conversation is significant for the present dissertation because it helps establish the theological context of Gill, Stennett, and Fuller. Since the Puritans produced such a strong body of works on marriage and because the link between the Puritans and early Evangelicals continues to be debated, a

³⁵Bebbington set forth the following four qualities as the basis of evangelicalism: “conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible, and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.” Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3.

³⁶Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 37–60.

³⁷Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 57–58.

³⁸Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” 272.

³⁹Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” 272.

secondary purpose of this study will be to examine the continuity between these three Baptists and the Puritan tradition on this subject.

Through the lens of their historical and theological contexts, this study will explore the views and practices of three men who were influential in their time and continue to draw attention today. A renewal of interest in Andrew Fuller and other eighteenth-century Baptists has occurred in recent years. According to Nathan Finn, “The rising generation of scholars and pastors interested in the study of Fuller and/or the *ressourcement* of his thought find themselves with a growing body of literature that includes published and unpublished scholarly studies, semi-popular writings, popular summaries, and reprinted primary source material.”⁴⁰ To date, the majority of the scholarly studies on Fuller and the other subjects of this dissertation have focused on their theology.⁴¹ Few have addressed their spirituality and no one has looked extensively at

⁴⁰Nathan Finn, “The Renaissance in Andrew Fuller Studies: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 45.

⁴¹Dissertations examining Fuller’s theology and influence include the following: Pope Alexander Duncan, “Influence of Andrew Fuller on Calvinism” (Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1917); Lynn D. Stairs, “Andrew Fuller: His Life and Mission” (B.D. thesis, Gordon Divinity School, 1956); Arthur H. Kirby, “The Theology of Andrew Fuller and its Relation to Calvinism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1956); John W. Eddins, Jr., “Andrew Fuller’s Theology of Grace” (Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957); Harlice E. Keown, “The Preaching of Andrew Fuller” (Th.M. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957); Edwin A. Reed, “A Historical Study of Three Baptist Doctrines of Atonement as seen in the writings of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Th.M. diss., Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965); Doyle Young, “The Place of Andrew Fuller in the Developing Modern Missions Movement” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981); Thomas K. Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Thomas Jacob South, “The Response of Andrew Fuller to the Sandemanian View of Saving Faith” (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993); Peter J. Morden, “Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of the Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life,” (M.Phil. thesis, Spurgeon’s College, University of Wales, 2000); Christopher R. Kraft, “A Sober Survey of Andrew Fuller’s Soteriology” (Th.M. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); Keith S. Grant, “‘Very Affecting and Evangelical’: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology” (Th.M. thesis, Regent College, 2007); Aaron J. Timmons, “The Cause of Christ and Truth: Arguments for the Deity of Christ in the Anti-Socinian writings of John Gill, Dan Taylor, and Andrew Fuller” (Th.M. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008); Bart D. Box, “The Atonement in the Thought of Andrew Fuller” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological

their marriages. Even in the most recent works on Fuller, for example, his personal life has typically received little attention.⁴² All of the dissertations written on John Gill have targeted his theology and none have addressed his family life significantly.⁴³ To date, no substantial academic study exists on Samuel Stennett or his important work, *Domestic Duties*. Therefore, this dissertation will seek to fill a gap in the literature by considering an important topic from the perspective of these three noteworthy men.⁴⁴

Seminary, 2009); Nigel Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness: Andrew Fuller’s (1754–1815) Pastoral Theology in his Ordination Sermons” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2009); A. Chadwick Mauldin, “Fullerism as Opposed to Calvinism: A Historical and Theological Comparison of the Missiology of Andrew Fuller and John Calvin” (M.A.Th. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); and D. Ian Hughes, “‘No Principle at Second-Hand’: Influences upon the Thought of Andrew Fuller in ‘The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation’” (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2012).

⁴²Although Morden devoted three chapters to Fuller’s life, his family is barely mentioned, with his first wife, Sarah Gardiner, not even listed in the index. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*. Likewise, Paul Brewster provided only brief interaction with Fuller’s family life in his helpful study, *Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, 21–22. In slight contrast, Tom Nettles included nearly ten pages on Fuller’s family in his chapter on Fuller in a survey of the British Particular Baptists (“Andrew Fuller [1754–1815],” in *British Particular Baptists*, 2:128–32, 134–140).

⁴³Significant academic works on Gill include Robert E. Seymour, “John Gill, Baptist Theologian, 1697–1771” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1954); Curt D. Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983); Thomas K. Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Edwin A. Reed, “A Historical Study of Three Baptist Doctrines of Atonement as seen in the writings of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Th.M. diss., Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965); Hong-Gyu Park, “Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill (1697–1771)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001); Jonathan A. White, “A Theological and Historical Examination of John Gill’s Soteriology in Relation to Eighteenth-century Hyper-calvinism” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Aaron J. Timmons, “The Cause of Christ and Truth: Arguments for the Deity of Christ in the Anti-Socinian writings of John Gill, Dan Taylor, and Andrew Fuller” (Th.M. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008); Jerad A. File, “John Gill’s Ecclesiology with Reference to his Work: An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song commonly called Canticles” (Th.M. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Clive R. Jarvis, “Growth in English Baptist Churches: With Special Reference to the Northamptonshire Particular Baptist Association” (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2001). An oft-debated topic concerning Gill is his soteriology and its relationship to Hyper-Calvinism. This question is not a primary issue in this dissertation; however, it will be addressed in chap. 4.

⁴⁴The following dissertations provide additional background information for this study: Olin Robison, “The Particular Baptists in England 1760–1820” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1963); Kenneth R. Manley, “John Rippon, D. D. (1751–1836) and the Particular Baptists” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1967); Margaret A. Hanni, “The Marriage Portrait in Eighteenth-century England” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1996); and Peter Naylor, “English Particular Baptists: From 1688 to the Early

Methodology

As prominent theologians in their day, each of the men in this study produced a number of significant writings. This dissertation will look closely at their published works, especially that which reveals their theology of marriage. Among John Gill's prolific works, his *Body of Practical Divinity* and *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* are most relevant to his views on marriage, while various sermons and other writings will supplement the systematic treatment of the subject in those sources. As previously noted, Samuel Stennett's *Discourses on Domestic Duties* is noteworthy for several reasons. It is a lengthy collection of sermons on marriage and family composed by an eighteenth-century Baptist and both its content and structure demonstrate continuity with the Puritan tradition. In addition to this work, Stennett's other sermons and writings will be explored as they pertain to marriage. While Andrew Fuller never wrote a systematic theology or formal treatise on marriage, his theology on the subject is accessible through his other works. Of particular note is his *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis*, which contains exegesis of several passages related to marriage as well as commentary on various marriages in the Genesis accounts. In addition, Fuller's other published works refer to marriage numerous times, often as a means of illustrating another point. Such references reveal something of Fuller's theology of marriage as well as his understanding of its significance for Christian spirituality. The available correspondence and journals of all three men will also be explored, particularly as these sources shed light on their respective marriages and families.

It is hoped that the variety of sources explored will provide a representative picture of how eighteenth-century Baptists thought about and lived out marriage in their day. In addition to spanning the duration of the long eighteenth-century, each of the men in this study provides a unique perspective rooted in their particular source material. Gill was a gifted systematician, who left a legacy of careful exposition and detailed doctrinal

Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 2000).

analysis. He will be a useful addition to the study because his works will fill in the gaps left by the two other authors, who are less systematic in their approach. Stennett, on the other hand, is of great use because he wrote a popular work dedicated to marriage and the family. As such, he supplies the most fully-developed thought on the subject of any of the three men. Finally, Fuller is a helpful inclusion because his biographers give more details on his own family life than what is available for either Gill or Stennett. His chapter, then, provides a window into an eighteenth-century home and demonstrates how the doctrine of marriage was lived out by one particular family. Thus, each of the three men provides a helpful contribution to the overall study. It is hoped that the end result will yield a useful window in eighteenth-century Baptist spirituality, as well as an encouragement for marriages today.

CHAPTER 2
AUTHORITY AND AFFECTION: FAMILY MATTERS
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

As historian Ralph Houlbrooke has noted, attempts to understand the eighteenth-century British family have produced “lively controversy” in recent decades.¹ Many of the issues under consideration were first raised by Lawrence Stone’s groundbreaking work, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, which traced the development of the modern family to the eighteenth century.² This influential study was, in many ways, the first comprehensive attempt to propose a metanarrative for the development of the English family. Stone organized the history of the English family into three distinct but overlapping eras, each of which possessed unique characteristics.³ According to Stone’s schema, the family developed from a loosely-associated society with little boundaries or privacy to the more modern notion of a privatized nuclear family held together by affection toward one another and autonomy from the outside world.⁴

¹Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450–1700* (New York: Longman, 1984), 2. This work begins with a helpful overview of the source material available to scholars of this subject. See especially Houlbrooke, *English Family*, 2–4.

²Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Ralph Houlbrooke calls Stone’s work “the most influential exposition of the view that radical changes occurred during [this] period.” Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Family Life, 1576–1716: An Anthology from Diaries* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 9. Similarly, Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster concede, “For all the specialist books and articles that have been published on the early modern family in the past three decades none, it is fair to say, has reached as wide an audience, or aroused the same controversy, as Stone’s seminal work.” (Introduction to *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 1).

³For a succinct summary of Stone’s research, see Steven Ozment, *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 18–21.

⁴Stone labeled the three chronological periods as follows: the Open-Lineage Family (1450–1630), the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family (1550–1700), and the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family (1640–1800). His own summary of these categories can be found in Stone, *Family, Sex and*

Stone pinpointed the shift in family life to a transformation of English personality, which he termed “affective individualism.”⁵ He described this concept as “a change in how the individual regarded himself in relation to society (the growth of individualism) and how he behaved towards other human beings, particularly his wife and children on the one hand, and parents and kin on the other (the growth of affect).”⁶ In particular, Stone argued that eighteenth-century England saw the development of the companionate marriage built on romantic love between the spouses and an increase in affection between parents and their children.⁷ Prior to the developments that he set forth in his work, Stone argued that there was little affection and intimacy within the family due to the high mortality rate and the inherent values of society at the time. He noted, “In the sixteenth century, family relationships were characterized by interchangeability, a lack of individual commitment . . . and by conformity to external rules of conduct.”⁸ By the eighteenth century, things had changed. Stone’s description of what he calls the “Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family” summarized the new developments:

It was a family organized around the principle of personal autonomy, and bound together by strong affective ties. Husbands and wives personally selected each other rather than obeying parental wishes, and their prime motives were now long-term personal affection rather than economic or status advantage for the lineage as a whole. More and more time, energy, money, and love of both parents were devoted to the upbringing of the children, whose wills it was no longer thought necessary to crush by force at an early age.⁹

Stone’s description of eighteenth-century English families warrants consideration in any attempt to understand marriage in this time period.

Marriage in England, 4–9.

⁵See Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 221–69.

⁶Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 222.

⁷On companionate marriage, see Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 325–404, and on parent-child relations, see Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 405–82.

⁸Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 117.

⁹Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 7–8.

Since Stone's publication in 1977, however, various scholars have challenged his central thesis. Alan Macfarlane has provided the most systematic critique in concluding that Stone's "description of life in the Early Modern Period bears little resemblance to the society which is revealed to a number of us who have studied the period."¹⁰ By contrast, Macfarlane traces the basic family structure of eighteenth-century England back to at least the fifteenth century and reveals numerous variations from the social norms thought to be constant throughout the period.¹¹ As a result, Macfarlane argues that one should expect that "from the very start of the period there would be some loving parents and some cruel parents, some people bringing their children up in a rigid way, others in a relaxed atmosphere, deep attachments between certain husbands and wives, frail emotional bonds in other cases."¹² While acknowledging that there would be differences attributable to geography and culture, he concludes, "The idea of a massive transformation from a group-based, brutal, and unfeeling society to the highly individualized and loving modern one would not need to be documented."¹³ Thus, Macfarlane and others question Stone's theory on the evolution of the English family.¹⁴

¹⁰Alan Macfarlane, "Review Essays: *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, by Lawrence Stone," *History and Theory* 18, no. 1 (February 1979): 106. Macfarlane further critiques Stone's uses of sources. Being "driven by his largely unexamined general theory to distort the past," Macfarlane argued that Stone "ignores or dismisses contrary evidence, misinterprets ambiguous evidence, fails to use relevant evidence, imports evidence from other countries to fill gaps, and jumbles up the chronology" ("Review Essays," 113).

¹¹Macfarlane set forth this argument in two primary works: Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property, and Social Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); and idem, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Ralph Houlbrooke reaches a similar conclusion in *English Family Life*.

¹²Macfarlane, "Review Essays," 125.

¹³Macfarlane, "Review Essays," 125.

¹⁴For a helpful summary of how scholars have engaged with Stone in the past thirty years, see Berry and Foyster's introduction in *Family in Early Modern England*, 2–17.

Nonetheless, Stone's massive tome remains an important work in the field of family history.¹⁵ Even though Macfarlane set forth his own attempt to reconstruct the development of the English family over several centuries, Berry and Foyster admit that "there is no immediate alternative to Stone's model (its flaws notwithstanding) for thinking about change over time in the history of the English family."¹⁶ The generation of scholars that have succeeded Stone and Macfarlane have tended to focus on particular aspects of British family life rather than attempting to theorize an alternative metanarrative.

By integrating the works of these scholars with one another, it is possible to reconstruct a portrait of the English family within the eighteenth century. Despite his many misgivings with Stone's chronology, Macfarlane's description of the situation in England from the fourteenth century onward is actually similar to Stone's summary of marriage in eighteenth-century England. Macfarlane notes four key elements of this vision for the family: marriage was ultimately the concern of the couple, marriage was viewed as second to celibacy, marriage was to be entered into for the sake of companionship, and marriage was typically rooted in romantic love.¹⁷ Both scholars recognize that affection was central to the marriage union in this period. Similarly,

¹⁵R. B. Outhwaite summarizes the evaluation of many other scholars: "Professor Stone's book is a monument in more senses than one. Extremely fertile in ideas, and a testimony to the author's astonishingly wide reading, yet it has been criticized for papering over very large areas of ignorance and for embodying erroneous conceptions of social and family development" ("Problems and Perspectives in the History of Marriage," in *Marriage and Society. Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R. B. Outhwaite [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981], 7).

¹⁶In their assessment, Berry and Foyster conclude that Stone remains "good to think with" on this subject, even if many of his theories have been disproven. Berry and Foyster, *Family in Early Modern England*, 3, 8. Houlbrooke provides a similar assessment, in noting that "it has acted as a powerful stimulus to discussion and research" (Houlbrooke, *English Family*, 14).

¹⁷Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 330–31.

Joanne Bailey summarizes the way historians now categorize eighteenth-century sources in pointing out the prevalence of “case studies which reveal the affectionate, dynamic nature of specific marriages from several social ranks.”¹⁸ Thus, while many scholars question Stone’s particular arguments regarding the development of affective individualism, the presence of romantic affection within marriage in this time period and its role in shaping the British family is undeniable.

A second important facet of the eighteenth-century British family that has drawn the attention of scholars is how the emphasis on companionship was integrated with patriarchal authority. British society was far from egalitarian in the eighteenth century, but the question of how much patriarchy affected individual families remains an open debate. Popular domestic handbooks, such as some of the works that will be discussed in the following chapters, are at the center of this discussion. Bailey categorizes the opinions of various scholars into two camps whom she calls “the pessimists and optimists.”¹⁹ The pessimistic scholars tend to emphasize the sexual double standard of the day and thus, the poor experience of women.²⁰ On the other hand, the optimists “propose

¹⁸Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 4. Examples include Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1560–1680* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1982), 95–98, 101–4; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 154–72; and Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 102–6. Even Stone’s more recent work is supplemented by two volumes dedicated to case studies. See Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England 1660–1753* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); idem, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660–1857* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁹Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 8.

²⁰Bailey cites the following works as examples of the pessimistic viewpoint: Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998). It should be noted that none of these scholars is exclusively pessimistic. For example, speaking of positive marriage experiences rooted in affection, Mendelson and Crawford note, “While we cannot determine how typical such marriages were, we can at least infer that the subservient role which society imposed on women did not preclude the possibility of

that marriage was more mutual and complementary,” suggesting various ways in which authority and affection could have co-existed.²¹ Anthony Fletcher reaches a similar conclusion in an article on Puritan domestic handbooks, when he determines that the authors genuinely saw no contradiction between patriarchal leadership and relational companionship.²² This same conclusion could be applied to many eighteenth-century writers as well. For his part, Fletcher traces this view to a desire on behalf of the Puritan authors to preserve patriarchy, while speaking in terms that would interest a population becoming infatuated with the notion of romantic love. Thus, he concludes that readers wanted “reassurance . . . that social and gender order was, and would remain with their help, fully intact. But they also wanted to hear about love, affection and partnership.”²³ Fletcher was correct to note the balance between what other scholars have maintained was an irreconcilable dichotomy. However, he stopped short of recognizing the most obvious motivation for the Puritan emphasis on authority and affection in the home: that the authors actually believed this to be the proper way for a family to function.²⁴

The desire to assess eighteenth-century writers according to modern egalitarian standards has often distracted scholars from acknowledging the religious convictions that lay beneath so many works. Historians have rightly noted the influence of social and political issues but have largely bypassed the theological foundations that

passionate love and devotion by wives as well as husbands” (*Women in Early Modern England*, 132).

²¹Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 8. For this perspective, she cites Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, and Wrightson, *English Society*.

²²Anthony Fletcher, “The Protestant Idea of Marriage in Early Modern England,” in *Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 180.

²³Fletcher, “The Protestant Idea of Marriage,” 181.

²⁴This discussion will be further developed in chap. 3.

guided many authors. Regardless of one's assessment of what eighteenth-century thinkers said about marriage, a historian must seek to understand them in their own context and through their own worldview before evaluating their arguments. To obtain an understanding of what particular Christians were saying about marriage at the time, a comprehensive study of sermons, domestic handbooks, correspondence, and private journals is necessary. Most significantly, such a survey calls for the historian to consider these voices in their own context, taking into account both socio-political influences as well as the authors' theological convictions.

This dissertation aims to employ such a methodology to the lives and writings of John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller to explore their theology of marriage. Before reaching any conclusions though, it is paramount to understand the context in which these three men lived. In their case, the two key issues discussed in this section—authority and affection—were the central shaping influences on the family at the time. With these concepts in mind, the remainder of this chapter will seek to reconstruct a picture of the eighteenth-century British family. The subsequent sections will address each of the following topics: demographic trends, legal issues, divorce and separation, gender, sexuality, love and companionship, parent-child relations, and issues related to clergymen and nonconformity at the time.

Demographic Trends

Population growth in eighteenth-century England undoubtedly impacted families. Throughout the seventeenth century and into the first decades of the 1700s, the population hovered around 5 million. However, between the years of 1731 and 1821, the population of England increased rapidly, topping out at nearly 11.5 million people by the

end of the period.²⁵ Scholars have produced various explanations for why this shift occurred, but the most widely-accepted theory belongs to E. A. Wrigley. While the population spike was once attributed to improvements in health care and increased life expectancy, Wrigley tied the demographic growth directly to marriage practices at the time.²⁶ His initial study of twelve parishes revealed that the average age of first marriage dropped significantly during this period.²⁷ In addition, he discovered a steady decline in the number of people who never married at all.²⁸ Wider studies have revealed that these numbers set England apart from other European nations at the time.²⁹ Various historians have sought to document how these changes in nuptiality—centered on the rate and age of first marriage—impacted society as well as their origin.³⁰

²⁵E. A. Wrigley, “Marriage, Fertility and Population Growth in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Marriage and Society*, 137. This article is considered a watershed moment in the study of demographics in British history. Wrigley’s research is built on the discoveries of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure that has been studying British population history since the 1960s. The Cambridge Group revolutionized the field by employing computer-based technologies to the study of family history and demographics. Wrigley’s expanded research on the period can be found in E. A. Wrigley, Roger Schofield, and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁶See, for example, Thomas McKeown, *The Modern Rise of Population* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976).

²⁷Wrigley reports, “Between 1675–99 and 1800–24 mean age at first marriage fell from 27.7 to 25.5 years for men, and from 26.6 to 23.7 years for women; falls of 2.2 and 2.9 years respectively” (“Population Growth,” 147).

²⁸Whereas nearly 20 percent of the adult population never married in the late seventeenth-century, this number dropped to 10 percent by the end of the eighteenth-century and even decreased to nearly 5 percent at mid-century. Wrigley, “Population Growth,” 153.

²⁹For a discussion of British demographics compared with other nations at the time, see Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 26. For an overview of the family in Europe at the time, see David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, eds., *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500–1789*, vol. 1 of *The History of the European Family* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁰Macfarlane, for example, notes that various economic, social, and physical considerations contributed to this phenomenon. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 213–14. Scholars have tended to focus on the question of causation for this trend. Wrigley and Schofield argue that wage improvements were at the root of the shifts, although other scholars have since set forth other theories. For a helpful summary of the discussion on this subject and an argument for the role of cultural development in the trend,

Even as these trends developed, England's relatively late age of first marriage reduced the time in which married women were capable of reproduction, which in turn impacted family size. According to Stone, the typical English wife in the eighteenth century birthed 3 to 5 children over the course of her marriage.³¹ However, between a quarter to a third of English children did not reach their fifteenth birthday.³² Nonetheless, the proliferation of pregnancies still produced what Kirstin Olsen has called "a nation of children." Olsen estimates that due to high rates of mortality, over 45 percent of England's population during the eighteenth century was under twenty years of age, and 25 percent were under the age of ten.³³ Each of these demographic realities would have shaped the experiences of families throughout England.

Legal Issues

Over the course of this century, one of the most significant developments impacting marriage was the 1753 passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act. Prior to this law, there was little legal regulation in England regarding what constituted a marriage. According to Lisa O'Connell, in early modern England, "Marriage was, in essence, a consensual speech act connected to an array of other everyday practices."³⁴

see Emma Griffin, "A Conundrum Resolved? Rethinking Courtship Marriage and Population Growth in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 215 (May 2012): 125–64.

³¹Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 65.

³²Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 68. Stone observes, "Death was at the centre of life, just as the cemetery was at the centre of the village" (*Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, xiii).

³³Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-Century England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 32.

³⁴Lisa O'Connell, "Marriage Acts: Stages in the Transformation of Modern Nuptial Culture," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no.1 (Spring 1999): 68. In fact, O'Connell argues that so much significance was given to the performative power of the early modern marriage vows that such ceremonies were rarely performed in the theatre for fear that the parties involved would inadvertently marry one another by reciting the vows. O'Connell, "Marriage Acts," 85. Whether this was a genuine fear

Prior to the 1753 Marriage Act, marriages were initiated through verbal contracts founded on, in the words of one contemporary, “that FAITH by which the Man and Woman *bind themselves* to each other to live as man and Wife.”³⁵ A man and a woman were legally wed if they exchanged spousals, or vows, with one another in the presence of proper witnesses.³⁶ Spousals could take one of two forms: a promise to marry in the future (*per verba de futuro*) or a commitment to marry at once (*per verba de praesenti*). The contract *per verba de futuro* was only considered binding if followed by consummation. Contract marriages were recognized by the ecclesiastical courts as legitimate unions, however, the common law courts, which oversaw cases where property was involved, did not recognize such arrangements unless the couple also published public notices, known as bans, and participated in a formal wedding ceremony in an Anglican church.³⁷

The private nature of such vows could become a thorny issue when children entered the picture. If a man vowed to marry a woman to convince her to have sexual intercourse with him, it was understood that he would support both her and any children that resulted from their union. However, it was not uncommon for men to flee when their sexual escapades led to unplanned pregnancies. According to Bannet, contemporaries

or not is speculation, but there is no doubt that the words of the bride and groom were central to the marriage ceremony at this time.

³⁵Henry Stebbing, *An Inquiry into the Force and Operation of the annulling Clauses of a late Act for the better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages* (London: n.p., 1754), 5.

³⁶The witnesses were not technically a necessity in order to gain recognition by the ecclesiastical courts, but it was difficult to establish contracts without them.

³⁷Eve Tavor Bannet claims that this ceremony was a mere formality “viewed as a public *repetition* and solemnization of that primary promissory and contractual act.” Eve Tavor Bannet, “The Marriage Act of 1753: ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 234. This statement may have been true in terms of public consciousness, but it is inaccurate regarding the legal requirements of the common law courts.

reported that “desertions were frequent, polygamy and bastardy rampant, and ‘licentiousness’ the rule rather than the exception.”³⁸

Although couples were required to publish banns declaring their intentions three weeks prior to the ceremony, unscrupulous clergy compounded the situation by offering to perform clandestine weddings for anyone at any time for the proper fee.³⁹ The Fleet district in London, in particular, became widely known as a place where two people could get married with very few impediments. Streamlined weddings were performed in the courtyard of the Fleet prison by clergy who were typically already incarcerated and thus immune to further fines. Stone estimates that as many as 6,600 marriages per year occurred within the Fleet prison and that “15 to 20 percent of all marriages in England in the middle of the eighteenth century were conducted in these clandestine ways.”⁴⁰ As one can imagine, the presence of such practices greatly impacted the state of marriage. Stone summarizes, “Before the Act of 1753, therefore, there is no simple answer to the problem of defining what was, and what was not, a marriage.”⁴¹ Such lack of clarity resulted in various social problems and widespread legal confusion. As Attorney General Dudley Ryder (1691–1756) put it at the time, “At present, a man may have privately a wife in every corner of this city, or in every town he has been in, without it being possible for

³⁸Bannet, “A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,” 236–37.

³⁹For a brief summary of clandestine marriages in early modern England, see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 96–120. Rebecca Probert’s overview of the distinctions between a clandestine marriage and a contract marriage is also helpful for understanding the context. See Rebecca Probert, “The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753: Was it Really ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex?’,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 249–54. For a more extensive treatment, see R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500–1850* (Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press, 1995).

⁴⁰Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 115.

⁴¹Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 34.

them to know of one another, or for the next woman to whom he makes his addresses, to discover his being a married man.”⁴²

In addition to the social instability caused by the lack of regulation, others saw another problem of even greater consequence: the potential loss of money. As Gillis summarizes, many men considered clandestine marriages to be “crimes against both property and patriarchy.”⁴³ Whenever a son or daughter married, the family’s wealth traveled with them. Thus, some viewed the irregularity of marriage practices (and the lack of parental control in particular) to be a threat to financial stability. The frustration with this situation is captured in the words of the popular eighteenth-century author Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), who pointed out, “A Gentleman might have the satisfaction of hanging a Thief that stole an old Horse from him, but could have no justice against a rogue for stealing his Daughter.”⁴⁴ Some scholars have argued that the supporters of the Marriage Act were primarily motivated by such financial concerns and were thus willing to pursue legislation that protected their property regardless of its impact on others.⁴⁵ However, given the complexity of the situation, it is best to acknowledge that various motives lay behind the actions of the government at the time.

⁴²William Cobbett, *Parliamentary History of Great Britain, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London: Hansard, 1813), 15:8.

⁴³John Gillis, *For Better, For Worse. British Marriages, 1600 to Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 140.

⁴⁴This statement is cited as a favorite saying of Defoe in Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, 140.

⁴⁵David Lemmings, for example, claims, “The evidence suggests that the authors and supporters of the bill were clearly prepared to sacrifice the interests of poor women in order to avoid any possibility of wasting their sons’ assets in the marriage market.” David Lemmings, “Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753,” *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 2 (1996): 352.

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, officially known as "a bill for the better preventing of Clandestine Marriages," sought to address these various issues.⁴⁶ Beginning on March 25, 1754, only weddings in the Anglican Church were considered legally binding and then, only if the marriage was entered in the parish register and signed for by both husband and wife. The only religious minorities exempted from this law were the Jews and the Quakers, which meant that Dissenters such as the Baptists discussed in this study had no recourse for establishing their own marriage rites.⁴⁷ In addition, any person under the age of twenty-one was prohibited from marrying without the consent of their parents; furthermore, all illegal marriages that occurred in violation of previous laws were declared invalid. Finally, the secular authorities, rather than the ecclesiastical courts, were put in charge of enforcement. Thus, England redefined its definition of marriage and made it more difficult for individuals to reject the system.

Opinions on the Act were sharply divided at the time. According to David Lemmings, "Its passage through parliament was bitterly opposed."⁴⁸ Members of parliament feared that it "threatened the balance of the constitution; offended against the law of God; would weaken the English race in biology and numbers; promote fornication among the poor; and render innocent young women defenseless against treacherous seducers."⁴⁹ One official, for example, decried the Act in strong terms: "I must look upon this Bill as one of the most cruel enterprises against the fair sex that ever entered into the

⁴⁶Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 15:1.

⁴⁷For more on the marriage patterns of Dissenters, see the discussion below. Also, see Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters. From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 329–33.

⁴⁸Lemmings, "Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753," 340.

⁴⁹Lemmings, "Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753," 340.

heart of man, and if I were concerned in promoting it, I should expect to have my eyes torn out by the young women of the first country town I passed through.”⁵⁰

Supporters, on the other hand, recognized its value for stabilizing social forces. The protection of family investments was certainly part of the discussion. Lord Barrington (1717–1793), for example, remarked, “It is not only the interest but the duty of every parent to take care, that his child shall not contract a scandalous or infamous marriage, and if he cannot do this by his paternal authority, the laws ought to assist him as far as possible.”⁵¹ His contemporary William Murray (1705–1793) agreed, concluding, “I cannot suppose that any gentleman who has ever known what it is to be a father, will be against it.”⁵² Others pointed to the restraining power of a public ceremony to keep men from abandoning their families. Otherwise, as one supporter pointed out, “Whenever the Disgust of satiated Appetite, or the Prospect of Advantage should prompt him, he might disclaim the Contract with little Risk of being disproved; and thus innocent women would be daily deluded and abandoned to Infamy and Want.”⁵³

The debate over the Act’s legitimacy and intent has continued among modern scholars. O’Connell summarizes the discussion of its admirers and critics, who have variously characterized the Marriage Act as

a modernizing force through which marriage and family entered the enlightened civil sphere; a regressive measure whereby the state reinforced the parental power and patriarchal familial structures of the propertied elite; a regularization of

⁵⁰Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 15:60.

⁵¹Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 15:24.

⁵²Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, 15:75.

⁵³*A Letter to the Public: Containing the Substance of what hath been Offered in the Late Debates upon the Subject of the Act of Parliament for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages* (London: Charles Marsh, 1753), cited in Probert, “Was it Really ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex?’” 258.

matrimonial law that served to protect women and children from uncertain unions; and an intensification of the anomalies through which they could be exploited.⁵⁴

On one extreme, scholars such as Lemmings, who called it “a complex and draconian measure,” and Bannet, who claimed the Act “made women and their children into whores and bastards,” have voiced strong critiques of the bill. Other scholars have provided a more balanced perspective.⁵⁵

Rebecca Probert’s assessment seems most helpful. She has cautioned that “the novelties of the formalities stipulated by the Marriage Act should not be exaggerated.”⁵⁶ Banns had been required since the thirteenth century and special licenses had been around since the Ecclesiastical Licenses Act of 1533. Furthermore, Probert believes that scholars such as Bannet have overstated the Act’s impact on women. By contrast, Probert contends, “Unless one assumes that a woman would never yield her person to a man other than on a promise of marriage, there was always some sexual activity that took place outside marriage.”⁵⁷ Anyone who was sexually active was inevitably vulnerable to the potential consequences. Probert’s tempered assessment of the changes brought about by the 1753 Marriage Act produce the following conclusion: “Overall, it seems unlikely that the Marriage Act resulted in a significant change in the way people thought about marriage. Most couples had married in church before the Act and more married in the church after it was passed.”⁵⁸ However, it is important to note that Probert does not argue,

⁵⁴O’Connell, “Marriage Acts,” 69.

⁵⁵Lemmings, “Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753,” 346; Bannet, “A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,” 241.

⁵⁶Probert, “Was it Really ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex?’,” 248.

⁵⁷Probert, “Was it Really ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex?’,” 250.

⁵⁸Probert, “Was it Really ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex?’,” 256.

as some have, that the Act was unsuccessful.⁵⁹ Instead, she demonstrates that the Act should be understood as a continuation of developing laws and customs rather than a sharp legal shift in a new direction. In her monograph on the subject, Probert concludes, “The 1753 Act did not constitute such a radical break with the past as has been claimed, was almost universally observed, and was not subject to harsh interpretation by the courts.”⁶⁰ Thus, Probert rejects both the overreaction to the Act’s measures from scholars such as Bannet and Lemmings as well as the under appreciation of the Act’s effectiveness by scholars such as Stone.⁶¹ However one assesses its particular impact, the 1753 Marriage Act is unavoidable in attempting to characterize marriage in eighteenth-century England. While it was at times on the center stage of public debate, the issues involved were always lingering in the background. Even though the three men in this study did not comment directly on this bill, it clearly shaped the context in which they ministered.

Divorce and Separation

The seriousness with which eighteenth-century thinkers considered the making of marriage was due in no small part to the great difficulties involved in ending the relationship. English marriages at this time were expected to be monogamous and permanent. Divorce was quite rare, owing in some part to the relative lack of options for ending a marriage. English law permitted judicial separations but did not grant freedom

⁵⁹Stone, for example, argues that the Act did not fully regulate the marriage system as hoped. Because couples could still discreetly obtain a marriage license by simply crossing the border to Scotland or through evading the law in various ways, he concludes that “a condition of moral and legal confusion” regarding marriage persisted throughout the eighteenth century in England. Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 128–32, 137. This seems to be an instance where Stone is guilty of overstating his case. Outhwaite points out other hyperbolic statements that “cry out for further research” (*Marriage and Society*, 8).

⁶⁰Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long 18th Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

⁶¹Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long 18th Century*, 340–41.

to remarry, unless the couple pursued a divorce through Parliament, which was so expensive that few even tried.⁶² While this led some to simply evade marriage altogether through clandestine unions, others sought a way out of existing marriages through a controversial practice known as “wife-selling.” At a wife sale, a woman was led before a crowd, sometimes with a halter around her neck, and sold to the highest bidder, who thereby became her husband. This practice was somewhat rare and lacked legal sanction but it apparently carried weight as a folk-custom, particularly among the poor.⁶³ Stone observes, “In the popular mind, this elaborate ritual freed the husband of all future responsibility for his wife, and allowed both parties to marry again.”⁶⁴ For those unable to afford a Parliamentary divorce or unwilling to succumb to the public shame of a wife sale, no option remained for legally dissolving a marriage.

In this context, unhappy couples began to exchange private deeds of separation, which contracted out financial matters between the two spouses and granted them semi-freedom from one another.⁶⁵ In most cases, the husband agreed to financially support the wife in some way, but they did not live together or function as a married couple. Stone points out that this practice enabled “a form of quasi-legal collusive self-divorce.”⁶⁶ These practices opened the way for bigamy.

⁶²Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 225.

⁶³Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 225. For a more extensive treatment of the practice of wife-selling, see Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

⁶⁴Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 40.

⁶⁵For a full description of this practice and its evolution in England, see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 149–82.

⁶⁶Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 182. This practice was most common among the middle class and somewhat paralleled the practice of “wife-selling” among the poor.

Bigamy was not officially permitted in England but practices such as private deeds of separation and wife-selling enabled husbands to feel justified in taking a second wife, even if they were still legally wed. In addition, the lack of judicial oversight prior to Hardwicke's Marriage Act enabled a man to desert his family and take another wife without his second family ever knowing about the first.⁶⁷ Eighteenth-century moralists certainly saw bigamy as a problem, as evidenced by how frequently the topic appeared in discourses on marriage, including several that will be examined in later chapters.

It is important to note that the standard of monogamy and permanence within English marriages at the time tended to be one-sided. As many scholars have pointed out, perceptions of adultery were mitigated by a sexual double standard.⁶⁸ According to Stone, adultery on the part of the wife was viewed as “an unpardonable breach of the law of property and the idea of hereditary descent” as well as “an invasion of a husband's property rights to his wife's body.”⁶⁹ However, adultery by the husband was considered “a regrettable but understandable foible” that was “best ignored by a prudent wife.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Mendelson and Crawford describe the somewhat ambivalent attitude of women toward their husband's infidelity: “While women might tolerate a certain level of

⁶⁷Stone concludes that bigamy was “both easy and common” (*Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 40). However, Outhwaite references this particular comment as an example of Stone's tendency toward hyperbolic statements (*Marriage and Society*, 8). For more on the legal challenges of this context, see Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: University Press, 1996), 162–63.

⁶⁸The classic work on this issue is Keith Thomas, “The Double Standard,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 195–216.

⁶⁹Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 7.

⁷⁰Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 7.

sexual infidelity, they did not expect a husband to be flagrantly unfaithful, to maintain a mistress at the expense of his own family, or to infect his wife with venereal diseases.”⁷¹

While many spoke out against adultery, Macfarlane determines, “Analysis of ecclesiastical courts and local records suggests that, on the whole, the offence was regarded quite lightly.”⁷² The known cases suggest “widespread and tolerated adultery,” particularly among husbands.⁷³ Prostitution increased substantially during this period as an outlet for unfaithful men seeking sexual fulfillment.⁷⁴ Macfarlane concludes, “High prostitution and adultery rates may have been the price the English paid from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries for the rigid marriage code.”⁷⁵ Thus, marriage was considered to be a permanent, monogamous commitment, although the double standard of the day applied these expectations differently to men and women.⁷⁶

Gender Issues

The double standard in regard to adultery was part of a larger system of thought that led British society at the time to generally favor men and to assume male leadership in most spheres. Black sums up the situation as follows: “An economic system that bore down hard on most of the population, was linked to a social system in which the position of women, whether relatively fortunate or unfortunate, was generally worse than

⁷¹Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 141.

⁷²Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 240.

⁷³Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 241.

⁷⁴See, for example, Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain 1688–1783* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 88.

⁷⁵Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 244.

⁷⁶While in continuity with their culture on the issue of monogamy, the men in this study were willing to speak out against adultery by either party.

that of men.”⁷⁷ While many women worked out of economic necessity, they were often relegated to servant tasks and had little opportunity for advancement. Furthermore, women tended to be excluded from public life and thus, were confined to the domestic sphere. As Olsen summarizes, “Women were not able to vote, hold property while married, go to a university, earn equal wages for equal work, enter the professions, or be protected by the law from marital beatings and rape.”⁷⁸

This larger cultural setting inevitably impacted marriage relations.

Houlbrooke explains, “Marriage in this period was expected to be an unequal partnership in which the husband’s superior position was justified by his greater strength and wisdom.”⁷⁹ William Blackstone (1723–1780), an eighteenth-century expert on British law, provided a frank assessment that recapitulated the opinion of many, “By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law; that is the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.”⁸⁰ Throughout the century, numerous literary works were set against the backdrop of an underprivileged woman and the difficulties of her situation.⁸¹

Contemporary advice literature further illustrated the challenges for eighteenth-century women. In his popular *Advice to Young Men*, for example, William Cobbett (1763–1835) warned his readers about what a woman agreed to in marriage:

⁷⁷Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 88.

⁷⁸Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-Century England*, 34.

⁷⁹Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 52.

⁸⁰William Sprague, ed., *Blackstone’s Commentaries Abridged*, 9th ed. (Chicago: Callaghan and Company, 1915), 82. Blackstone (1723–1780) first began publishing his lectures on the law in 1754.

⁸¹See, for example, Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798).

[She] makes a surrender, an absolute surrender, of her liberty, for the joint lives of the parties: she gives the husband the absolute right of causing her to live in what place, and in what manner and in what society, he pleases; she gives him the power to take from her, and to use, for his own purposes all goods, unless reserved by some legal instrument; and above all, she surrenders to him her *person*.⁸²

Similarly, Lord Halifax's (1633–1695) *Advice to a Daughter*, which was reprinted throughout the eighteenth century, documented the matter-of-fact approach to gender inequality of the time:

It is one of the disadvantages belonging to your sex, that young women are seldom permitted to make their own choice . . . You must first lay it down for a foundation in general, that there is inequality in the sexes, and that for the better economy of the world, the men, who were to be the law-givers, had the larger share of reason bestowed upon them, by which means your sex is the better prepared for the compliance that is necessary for the better performance of those duties which seem to be most properly assigned to it.⁸³

Regrettably, female perspectives in print from the time period are scarce, particularly from the lower classes.⁸⁴ However, works such as Lady Chudleigh's (1656–1710) popular poem, "To the Ladies," provide a sense of how women may have assessed their plight:

Wife and servant are the same,
But only differ in the name:
For when that fatal Knot is ty'd,
Which nothing, nothing can divide:
When the word obey has said,
And Man by Law supreme has made,
Then all that's kind is laid aside,
And nothing left but State and Pride.⁸⁵

⁸²William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men* (London: n.p., 1829), 139.

⁸³George Savile, *The Lady's New Year Gift, or Advice to a Daughter* (London: n.p., 1688), 25. Savile was the Marquess of Halifax at the time of publication. According to Stone, this work was republished seventeen times before 1791.

⁸⁴A number of female authors from the eighteenth-century did reach a respectable degree of prominence, including Elizabeth Montagu (1720–1800), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), and Hannah More (1745–1833). For more on these women and their contemporaries, see Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, eds., *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁸⁵Mary Chudleigh, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: W. B., 1703), 40.

Some women understood marriage to be an inevitable part of a female's life and seemed to accept it as, at the very least, preferable to the alternative. As Anne Donnellan (1700–1762), for example, wrote to Elizabeth Montagu (1720–1800) in 1742, marriage is “the settlement in the world we should aim at, and the only way we females have of making ourselves of use to Society and raising ourselves in this world.”⁸⁶ Other women, such as the author of *The Female Mentor*, for example, saw great potential in marriage:

I am sure that there is no situation in life so happy as the married state, where both parties consult each other's peace of mind. It heightens every joy; lessens every anxiety; it contracts our wants and our desires; we find every comfort at home, and enjoy calmly those blessings, which others are pursuing, but never reach.⁸⁷

Mendelson and Crawford provide a helpful summary of the prospects of marriage from a feminine point of view:

Women's experiences were so various, influenced by so many different factors, that generalization is impossible. Some women found in marriage their greatest happiness; others, the most abject misery. For some it could be the best chance for social and economic survival; for others, the single life seemed more free of care.⁸⁸

Indeed, while the cultural assumptions of the day impacted marriage relationships, it would be inaccurate to conclude that all eighteenth-century wives were miserable and mistreated. By contrast, Rosemary O'Day contends that historians are often “misled by late-twentieth-century preoccupations with the position of women and the whole issue of equality.”⁸⁹ Bailey agrees in concluding that a wife's work within the home in this time period was of such significance that she developed a “functional

⁸⁶This letter is cited in Bridget Hill, “The Course of the Marriage of Elizabeth Montagu: An Ambitious and Talented Woman without Means,” *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 1 (2001): 6.

⁸⁷“Conversation XXVIII: On Marriage,” in *The Female Mentor, or Select Conversations* (1793; repr., Philadelphia: John Hoff, 1802), 2:141.

⁸⁸Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 147.

⁸⁹Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500–1900: England, France, and the United States of America* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1994), 40, 161.

authority” within the household alongside her husband.⁹⁰ Furthermore, in many homes, patriarchal authority was kept in balance by the contemporary emphasis on affection. In researching the three Baptist leaders who are the subject of this study, efforts have been made to recover the experiences of their respective wives as well. However, the fact remains that for these women, as with most women who lived in eighteenth-century England, there is little historical evidence available to report.

Sexuality

Similar to the individual experiences of women, sexuality is a difficult concept to define in retrospect. Attempting to reconstruct public notions about an inherently private issue is a risky enterprise where one must avoid oversimplifying with vague generalities as well as overstating the evidence provided by particular cases. On the subject of sexuality in eighteenth-century England, scholars have tended to focus on a number of developments that took place over the course of the period. First, there appears to have been a general shift in how the sexualities of men and especially women were perceived at the time. Whereas in previous centuries, women were considered sexual threats to social stability owing to their animal-like drive to find in men what they were naturally lacking, by the middle of the eighteenth century perceptions had shifted.⁹¹ Joanne Bailey encapsulates this development: “Women were recast as the ‘gentler sex’; inherently weak, naturally virtuous and sexually passive, even passionless. Men were

⁹⁰Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 196. Samuel Stennett alluded to such authority in his discourse on the duties of husbands and wives, when he pointed out that over time, a wife’s submissive and genteel spirit could win her esteem in the eyes of her husband. Stennett remarked, “His temper she will assiduously consult, and by yielding to his will, in instances where conscience is not concerned, she will gain an ascendancy over him, which she will securely enjoy without seeming to possess it.” Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (1783; repr., Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1800), 140.

⁹¹Gowing summarizes the appraisal of the dangers of female sexuality in Post-Reformation England: “Prescriptive literature, dramatic plots, popular pamphlets and ballads all communicated a vision of morality in which women, not men, bore the load of guilt for illicit sex, and in which women’s virtue was premised entirely on sexual chastity” (*Domestic Dangers*, 2).

redefined as sexual predators.”⁹² Bailey and others point to the tendency to blame male lovers for sexual promiscuity rather than adulterous wives themselves as evidence of this phenomenon.⁹³ This tendency to portray women as helpless victims of male seducers can be seen in much of the rhetoric surrounding the debate over Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act.⁹⁴ Aside from these particular developments, Anthony Fletcher concludes in his extensive study on sex and gender in early modern England that the positive reference point for men over the span of several centuries was generally constant. He explains, “The essence of prescriptive English masculinity, despite revisions and elaborations, remained throughout these three hundred years some kind of mastery or self-discipline, based upon reason, which conveyed male superiority in control of the emotions.”⁹⁵ By contrast, Fletcher observes (in agreement with Bailey) that an “overwhelmingly negative construction of womanhood” was replaced by “something less demonized and more positive.” In addition to being “desexualized,” as Bailey noted, the “moral, intellectual and spiritual qualities” of women “received much more open and evident validation and acknowledgement.”⁹⁶

A second development regarding sexuality in this period was the increasing openness to the subject in public discourse. Eighteenth-century Englishmen were far from bashful about the realities of sexuality. The various customs surrounding the couple’s consummation of their vows, the popularity of sex manuals as wedding presents, and the

⁹²Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 112.

⁹³Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 165. See also Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 322–46; 376–400.

⁹⁴Bannet references the appeals of certain eighteenth-century feminists who argued that “a woman was not to be punished or ostracized because she had yielded upon her lover’s promise; she was a victim of injustices done to women by men and by society, as well as a victim of her own too loving heart” (“A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,” 242).

⁹⁵Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 411.

⁹⁶Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 412.

overtly sexual themes in many novels and plays all illustrate what Kirstin Olsen identifies as a “great deal of frankness about sexual desire.”⁹⁷ Stone notes this feature as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the century. He argues that “the collapse of the Puritan ascetic morality” along with the “concurrent changes in the way marriages were arranged” led to “a more open admission of sexual passion into the marital relationship.”⁹⁸ While Stone’s assessment of the Puritans is admittedly negative, his larger point regarding the eighteenth century as “a period of extraordinary sexual tolerance” is supported by the historical record.⁹⁹ According to Tim Hitchcock, evidence suggests that “discourses around sex in general became, over the course of the eighteenth century, more widely distributed, more explicit, and more modern.”¹⁰⁰

A third development in this century that is more clearly visible in the records is the increase in illegitimate children and pre-nuptial pregnancies. According to Stone, while the level of recorded pre-nuptial pregnancies was relatively low in previous centuries, the number “shot up” in the eighteenth century, reaching as high as forty percent of all recorded births in some areas.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Wrigley demonstrates that the illegitimacy ratio more than tripled over the course of the century and the commonality of pregnant brides increased substantially as well.¹⁰² Stone attributes this development to a

⁹⁷Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-Century England*, 47. For more on the typical wedding night rituals, see Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, 62–70. For the popularity of sexual handbooks such as *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (published in 1684 but reprinted at least forty times before 1800), see Hitchcock, “Reformulation of Sexual Knowledge,” 828. There are various works on the views of sexuality in eighteenth-century fiction and theatre. For one brief overview, see O’Connell, “Marriage Acts,” 78–85.

⁹⁸Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 543.

⁹⁹Puritan views of sexuality will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁰Tim Hitchcock, “The Reformulation of Sexual Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Signs* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 824. See also idem, *English Sexualities 1700–1800* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997); and Paul-Gabriel Boucé, ed., *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: University Press, 1982).

¹⁰¹Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 609.

¹⁰²Wrigley, “Population Growth,” 156.

cultural shift in attitudes related to sexual permissiveness, brought about in part by a reaction to the end of Puritanism and also by various economic advances.¹⁰³

Amid these developments, it should be noted that eighteenth-century England remained a predominantly heterosexual nation. Although a homosexual subculture existed in London and perhaps among certain segments of the social elite, open homosexual relationships remained rare.¹⁰⁴ Citing various strands of evidence, Stone notes that there was “a distinct rise in public consciousness about homosexuality,” but that homosexual practice remained relatively uncommon.¹⁰⁵ The increased awareness of homosexuality is evident in various moral writings of the day, including several which will be examined in later chapters.

Love and Companionship

The various social problems mentioned to this point—such as increased illegitimacy, rampant adultery, unregulated bigamy, and gender inequality—can obscure the fact that for many eighteenth-century couples, marriage was a source of great personal happiness. In fact, married life was esteemed by many, particularly where hopes of true companionship existed.¹⁰⁶ What the Frenchman Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) observed in the nineteenth-century would have been accurate in the previous century as

¹⁰³For Stone’s full discussion of the potential causes of this change, see Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 622–48.

¹⁰⁴For more on homosexuality in eighteenth-century England, see Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly Home: The Gay Subculture in England 1700–1830* (London: Chalford Press, 1992, 2006).

¹⁰⁵Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 542.

¹⁰⁶On the other hand, as Macfarlane points out, there was also an “extensive literature warning people of the dangers and disadvantages to marriage.” See Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 169–73. Despite such works, the prospect of love remained the “one force which turned all the equations to nothing.” Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 173.

well: “Every Englishman has a bit of romance in his heart with regard to marriage.”¹⁰⁷

Even for someone who seemed aware of the risks involved, Dudley Ryder, for example, could not escape the draw of marriage. He confided to a friend,

I had often upon consideration thought that the miseries and inconveniences that attended that state were much greater than the advantages of it and a man runs a vast hazard in entering upon it, yet at the same time I could not suppose myself capable of being completely happy here without it. I cannot but be uneasy to think that my life shall terminate with myself.¹⁰⁸

Central to the contemporary vision for an ideal marriage was the notion of romantic love between husband and wife. While historians have debated when this emotional impulse became a social norm, as previously noted, it undeniably prevalent in this period. Randolph Trumbach, for example, estimates that by 1780, “three marriages in four were made for love” as opposed to property arrangements.¹⁰⁹ The popular Anglican work, *The New Whole Duty of Man*, illustrates the general attitudes of society in arguing that marriage “cannot be enterprised with any hopes of felicity, without a real affection on the one side, and a good assurance of it on the other.”¹¹⁰ The author represented the opinion of many in calling for companionship: “Men should maintain their wives as become partners; they are friends and companions to their husbands, not

¹⁰⁷Taine continued, “He pictures a home with the wife of his choice, domestic talk, children; there his little universe is enclosed, all his own.” Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans. W. F. Rae (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1885), 96.

¹⁰⁸Dudley Ryder, “Dudley Ryder’s Thoughts About the Prospect of Marriage, 1715–16,” in Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 47.

¹⁰⁹Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 97.

¹¹⁰[Richard Allestree?], *The New Whole Duty of Man* (1658; repr., Trenton, NJ: James Oram, 1809), 242. Although published anonymously, most scholars attribute this work to Richard Allestree (1619–1681). This popular devotional was reprinted numerous times throughout the eighteenth century.

slaves, nor mental servants; and are to be partners in their fortunes: for, as they partake of their troubles and affliction, it is just that they should share their fortunes.”¹¹¹

Macfarlane uncovered the presence of romantic love in a vast array of sources, including moralistic literature, novels, dramas, poetry, letters between spouses, diaries, and reflections on the death of a spouse.¹¹² Such evidence supports Houlbrooke’s conclusion that “the experience of romantic love was widespread during this period.”¹¹³

Stone argues that one reason for the emphasis on love and companionship was the newfound freedom that individuals possessed to choose their own spouses, rather than having their marriages arranged by their parents and kin.¹¹⁴ While in previous generations, marriages were often arranged by parents as a matter of protecting property, by the early eighteenth century, this practice was less common.¹¹⁵ Although the Marriage Act of 1753 required minors under the age of twenty-one to have their parents’ permission before marrying, parents were generally viewed as counsel in the process rather than the parties who controlled marriage formation, especially among the middle and lower classes. At the very least, young people (and young men in particular) were expected to have the right to veto their parents’ recommendation for an arranged

¹¹¹*The New Whole Duty of Man*, 270. In quoting this passage, Macfarlane remarks, “It would be difficult to find a more succinct statement of the ideal of companionate marriage, constantly reasserted throughout the century” (*Marriage and Love in England*, 176).

¹¹²Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 175–207.

¹¹³Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 16.

¹¹⁴Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 274.

¹¹⁵Due to this shift, Stone suggests that the term “paternalism” is a better descriptor of the parent-child relationship in eighteenth-century England than “patriarchy.” Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 58.

marriage if it did not suit their tastes.¹¹⁶ Among the poorer classes, where there was no property to be distributed, the decision to marry tended to be solely up to the couple themselves. Thus, with more freedom to choose their own spouse, individuals began to prioritize affection as a prerequisite to marriage.¹¹⁷

Parent-Child Relations

While this study will focus primarily on marriage, the inevitable impact of parenthood on marriage makes a brief section about parent-child relations appropriate. Stone argues that the high mortality rates of children at the time led to a low degree of intimacy between parent and child, particularly during infancy. He claims, “Even when children were genuinely wanted and not regarded as economically crippling nuisances, it was very rash for parents to get too emotionally concerned about creatures whose expectation of life was so very low.”¹¹⁸ Many scholars have taken issue with Stone’s assumptions, pointing out that it is impossible to assess sentiment from mere demography.¹¹⁹ Speaking of European family studies in general, Steven Ozment remarks,

¹¹⁶For an interesting look at the precarious position of women who desired to reject an arranged marriage at the time, see Laura Thomason’s article on Hester Chapone’s (1727–1801) careful correspondence with Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) on the subject. Laura Thomason, “Hester Chapone as a Living Clarissa in *Letters on Filial Obedience and A Matrimonial Creed*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 323–43.

¹¹⁷It is important to note that the emphasis on affection did not completely preclude the role of money and property in marriage formation, particularly for the social elite. As Alan Macfarlane summarizes, “Marriage was both a psychological and an economic enterprise” (*Marriage and Love in England*, 165).

¹¹⁸Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 70.

¹¹⁹For example, in his lengthy review of Stone, Macfarlane gives four reasons why Stone’s assumptions on this point were faulty: anthropological literature has demonstrated that many third-world families with low life-expectancy are still profoundly attached to one another, Stone cited no research to back up his claims, the historical record provides many examples of loving parents, and no direct correlation between mortality rates and sentiment existed. Macfarlane, review of *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, 107.

“The scholarly perception of stifled children, particularly in Protestant homes, parallels that of stifled wives In neither case, however, is the evidence watertight.”¹²⁰ On the contrary, Houlbrooke notes that in English diaries of the time, “the anguish of loss” over losing a newborn child “was poignantly expressed by many.”¹²¹ Likewise, he concludes that diaries from the period “show that the bond between parents and children, in an age sometimes portrayed as one of distance and deference, was often close.”¹²² Thus, it seems that in the eighteenth century, as in any era, many parents were generally affectionate with their children, regardless of their life expectancy.¹²³

This affection between parents and children did not run contrary to the presence of authority. As noted above, parents were generally viewed as governors within the home, responsible for ruling over their children and servants where applicable. While mothers were involved in this process, the ultimate power resided in the father. The parents’ authority over and responsibility for their children lasted into adulthood. Advice to parents at the time revealed that while parents no longer controlled who their children married, they were still very much involved in the process. Thus, from the beginning of life through the early stages of adulthood, parents exercised authority over their children, typically rooted in affection and care for their well-being.¹²⁴

¹²⁰Ozment, *Ancestors*, 55.

¹²¹Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 104.

¹²²Houlbrooke, *English Family Life*, 136.

¹²³This was certainly true of Andrew Fuller as will be demonstrated in chap. 6.

¹²⁴For more on the expectations of fathers at the time, see Joanne Bailey, “‘A Very Sensible Man’: Imagining Fatherhood in England c. 1750–1830,” *The Journal of the Historical Association* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 267–92. Bailey concludes, “The ideal father in the period 1750 to 1830 was tenderly affectionate, sensitized and moved by babies; he provided hugs, material support and a protective guiding hand The genesis of this imagined fatherhood lay in fundamental eighteenth-century concerns

Although in most cases parents no longer possessed absolute control over the formation of their children's marriages, they still exercised considerable influence, especially among the elite. As will be discussed in chapter 5, Samuel Stennett recommended that young people rely on the wisdom of their parents when making such important choices. Gillis summarizes the situation as follows: "While young people were told they must marry for love and were given a certain latitude in the choice of mates, the courtship process was carefully constructed to prevent misalliances."¹²⁵ Thus, the authority of parents continued to cast a shadow over their children well into adulthood.

Marriage and Clergy

Two final issues need to be addressed in order to provide a sufficient understanding of the British family in eighteenth-century England. The first matter involves the relatively new phenomenon of married clergy in the country. As Kathleen Davies has recognized, "Whatever changes there may have been in English marriage and family life in the early modern period, there can be no doubt that at least one new kind of family developed—the legitimate family of the clergyman."¹²⁶ Prior to the Reformation, Catholic priests were expected to remain celibate, a regulation that lay at the heart of various Protestant polemics against Rome during the early sixteenth-century. Protestants made light of unscrupulous clergy who failed to keep their vows and exploited a common belief that the efficacy of the sacraments were impacted by the purity of the priest who administered them.¹²⁷ After the 1534 Act of Separation, the issue of clerical marriage

about social, class, gender and familial relationships, and national strength" ("A Very Sensible Man," 267).

¹²⁵Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, 135.

¹²⁶Kathleen M. Davies, "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage," in *Marriage and Society*, 58.

¹²⁷For more on the role that clerical celibacy played in the polemical battles of the Reformation, see Helen Parish, "'It Was Never Good World Sense Ministers Must Have Wyves': Clerical Celibacy, Clerical Marriage, and Anticlericalism in Reformation England," *Journal of Religious History*

quickly became a central part of the discussion of how to regulate leadership in the newly-formed Anglican Church. As Helen Parish explains, the English reformers concluded, “If marriage was a remedy for fornication, clerical marriage was a necessary remedy for the ills of the church, and for the reputation of a Christian ministry blackened by accusations of feigned and counterfeit chastity.”¹²⁸ Anglican priests were therefore given permission to marry by the Act of 1549 and by the early seventeenth century, it appears that most clergymen had a wife and family.¹²⁹ This development certainly impacted the way that Englishmen viewed the institution of marriage. Whereas centuries past had been plagued by inconsistent theology regarding marriage and unchaste clergy, the church now possessed a new advocate for the great potential of marriage: the minister and his family.¹³⁰ The reception of married clergy was a slow and, at times, unpredictable process. However, by the eighteenth century, the pastor’s wife was a social norm throughout England, a significant development for the present study.¹³¹

Marriage and Dissent

A final background issue that should be noted in order to understand marriage in eighteenth-century England is the relationship of religious Dissent to the Established Church. Total Baptists (General and Particular Baptists combined) comprised just over 1 percent of the population at the turn of the century. In the second decade of the eighteenth century, there were around 19,000 hearers in 120 General Baptist congregations and over

36, no. 1 (March 2012): 52–69.

¹²⁸Parish, “Celibacy, Marriage, and Anticlericalism,” 54.

¹²⁹The 1549 Act was actually overturned in 1553 after Mary Tudor ascended to the throne but was then restored five years later during the subsequent reign of Elizabeth I.

¹³⁰According to Gillis, the “promiscuous parson” was a favorite target of satire in previous eras (*For Better, For Worse*, 116). The issue of theological reflection on marriage throughout church history will be addressed in the following chapter.

¹³¹For more on this transition, see C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schutte, eds., *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

40,000 in the 206 Particular Baptist churches.¹³² For this portion of the nation's population, the decision to marry introduced a dilemma over where and how to enter into wedlock that persisted throughout the century. Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act only excepted Jews and Quakers from the law's stipulations, which included a ceremony in an Anglican church officiated by an Anglican priest. In fact, Dissenters would not have legal permission to conduct their own marriage rites until 1836, when a new Marriage Act formally provided this option to non-Anglicans. So how did the Dissenters, and Baptists in particular, respond?

According to Rebecca Probert, the overwhelming majority of Dissenters in the eighteenth century simply conformed to the established customs and laws.¹³³ In an extensive study of the practices of Dissenters both before and after the 1753 Act, Probert found little evidence to suggest that non-Anglicans, other than Jews and Quakers, developed their own marriage rites.¹³⁴ The fact that only Jews and Quakers were granted exception to the bill provides further evidence of this conformity. John Caffyn's study of marriage among General Baptists in this time period produced similar evidence. Among the General Baptists in Sussex whom Caffyn studied, at least 70 percent married in the Church of England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with nearly 80 percent of Baptist leaders doing so.¹³⁵ This means, in part, that unless evidence is

¹³²These numbers come from the data compiled by John Evans between 1715 and 1718. Michael Watts provides an overview of Evans' list in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 490–508. A table with Watt's estimates of Dissenting numbers in early eighteenth-century England is available at Watts, *The Dissenters*, 509.

¹³³Probert concludes, "It would have been unsurprising if most Protestant Dissenters, other than Quakers, had chosen to marry in their parish church. That they did so is attested both by the absence of evidence of non-Anglican ceremonies and the positive evidence of compliance." Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, 165.

¹³⁴When the government commissioned congregations in 1838 for their records from the previous century, only eight of the 505 Presbyterian, Baptist, and Independent congregations that had existed prior to 1754 produced a marriage registry. Within those eight registries, very few marriages are actually reported as having taken place within the chapel. Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, 146.

¹³⁵John Caffyn, *Sussex Believers. Baptist Marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Worthing:

discovered to the contrary, John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller were likely all married in Anglican wedding ceremonies under the authority of an Anglican priest.¹³⁶

Conclusion

This overview has intentionally bypassed the key theological issues of the day, as these concerns will be the subject of the following chapter. Before moving on to look at how the church thought about marriage at the time, it is prudent to summarize the picture of the eighteenth-century English family described thus far. As demonstrated, the British family at this time was defined by the key issues of authority and affection. Although scholars continue to debate when the emphasis on affection became normative, there is universal agreement on its importance in shaping the eighteenth-century family. The strong presence of patriarchal authority has raised many questions about how these two issues were integrated with one another at the time.

It seems that ultimate authority resided in the husband and father, although wives exercised leadership over the children alongside their husbands. Children were expected to obey their parents, whose influence over them lasted well into adulthood and included helping them get established in life. Although the society at the time was heavily favored in the interests of men over women, romantic love was thought to balance the scales. The extent to which this hope was realized would have differed from home to home, but the interplay between authority and affection would have been key factors for all.

Although Stone's theory of a massive emotional shift in this period has long

Churchman Publishing, 1988), 101. These numbers are all the more remarkable when one considers that 9 out of 10 General Baptists in the eighteenth-century married someone from within their own communion. As a rule, the General Baptists did not approve of "mixed marriages" with members of other Christian denominations. For more on this position, see Caffyn, *Sussex Believers*, 23–27, and Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 of *A History of English Baptists*, ed. B. R. White (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 14–15, 19–20.

¹³⁶Another consequence of this practice was that no wedding sermons have survived from any of these three men, a resource that surely would have been helpful in this study.

been debunked, it does not follow that the family in eighteenth-century England was a static reality. The nation itself was in the midst of a great period of transition. Rapid population growth and drastic changes in nuptiality altered the demographics. Legal developments such as Hardwicke's Marriage Act reshaped how marriage was formed and ultimately, how it was defined. Marriage formation was a significant issue because marriages themselves were nearly impossible to dissolve. The relative lack of options for getting out of an unsatisfying union led many into adultery, prostitution, and bigamy. These issues as well as the sexual double standards of the day threatened the stability of families and negatively colored the experiences of individuals, especially women. Other significant matters for the present study include the relative novelty of pastoral families after centuries of clerical celibacy as well as the unique challenges that Baptists faced as outsiders to the established church. While it appears that most Baptists simply participated in the Anglican wedding ceremonies required by law, this dynamic undoubtedly impacted (and perhaps limited) Baptist thought on the subject of marriage in general.

A final consideration of note in examining the views of Gill, Stennett, and Fuller in particular, is the way their lives overlapped to span the entire century. The society in which John Gill lived, for example—some of which included the decades prior to the 1753 Marriage Act and still largely impacted by the Puritanism of previous generations—was markedly different from the culture surrounding Andrew Fuller, with its improved perception of women and increased emphasis on romantic love. These differences, and the impact they had on each man and his family, will be noted in the chapters that follow.

In the midst of discussing these unique developments throughout the century, a picture has emerged of family life in eighteenth-century England. The portrait drawn from the preceding outline will serve as the backdrop for the remainder of the study.

Having established the immediate historical context, the following chapter will now address the theological framework that lay beneath Baptist thought on marriage, which traced back to the early Reformers.

CHAPTER 3
THE PURITAN-REFORMED TRADITION
ON MARRIAGE

Reformation Recoveries

Among the many advances of the Protestant Reformation, the retrieval of a biblical view of marriage was undoubtedly one of the most significant achievements. While doctrinal emphases such as *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* are rightly considered the foundations of the Reformers' theology, the transformation of the institution of marriage should be numbered among their most lasting accomplishments. Indeed, the ideas that Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) introduced in the sixteenth century represented a seismic shift away from the formulations of previous generations and provided the foundation for their theological heirs. This chapter will consider the theological context of eighteenth-century Baptist thought about marriage by examining the interpretative tradition that shaped their own views. The following sections, then, will address the Reformers, the Puritans and finally, the early British Baptists on marriage.

Prior to the Reformation, medieval Catholicism was marked by a confusing and, for many, unsatisfying set of contradictory opinions on marriage.¹ On the one hand, theologians insisted that marriage was a sacrament, capable of conferring grace on its participants as an embodiment of Christ's heavenly union with his Church. Furthermore,

¹For what follows on marriage in medieval Catholicism, see Jean LeClerq, *Monks on Marriage. A Twelfth-Century View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982); Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector, eds., *The Olde Dance: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); Glenn W. Olsen, ed., *Christian Marriage. A Historical Study* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001); Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions* (Collegeville, MN: Order of St. Benedict, 2002); Conor McCarthy, ed., *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages. A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Peter Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage*, ed. Michael Langford (London: SCM Press, 2004).

marriage was instituted by God to accomplish particular purposes, namely, the lawful begetting of children and the conquering of lust. These three purposes for marriage—procreation, protection, and sacramental unity—were set forth by Augustine in the fifth century and formed the basis for the church’s doctrine of marriage for a full millennium.² Yet, these positive aspects of the church’s understanding of marriage were tempered by the ecclesiastical requirement of clerical celibacy. Beginning in the twelfth century, the Roman Catholic Church mandated that priests, monks, and nuns renounce marriage and commit themselves to a life of chastity as a requirement to serve in holy orders.³ This injunction was also rooted in the works of Augustine, as well as other Patristic theologians, who considered virginity a higher calling than marriage itself.⁴ To compound the situation, medieval clergy were notorious for failing to live out their vows—many of them were celibate, but not chaste.⁵ This bundle of apparent contradictions—the sacramental status of marriage versus the call for clerical celibacy—became a focal point of the Reformers’ polemical attacks on the sixteenth-century

²For Augustine, see especially *On the Good of Marriage* (c. 401) and *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (415). For a helpful collection of Augustine’s source material on marriage, see Elizabeth A. Clark, ed., *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

³This injunction became canon law at the First Lateran Council of 1123.

⁴The large catechism of Cardinal Bellarmine provides an example of the kind of logic that was common by the end of the medieval era: “He who joyneth in himself in Marriage doth well, but he that doth not joyne himself, but keepeth virginitie doth better. And the reason is, because Marriage is a thing humane, Virginitie is Angelical. Marriage is according to nature, Virginitie is above nature . . . [thus,] the holie Doctors have declared, that the thirtie fold fruite is of Matrimonie, the threescore fold of widowhood, the hundredth fold of virginities.” Robert Bellarmine, *An Ample Declaration of the Christian Doctrine*, trans. Richard Haddock (Roan, Norway: n.p., 1604), 239. In modern terms, Witte has provided a helpful summary of the medieval church’s opinion of marriage: “Marriage was a remedy for sin, not a recipe for righteousness. Marriage was considered subordinate to celibacy, propagation less virtuous than contemplation, marital love less wholesome than spiritual love.” John Witte, Jr., “The Mother of All Earthly Laws: The Lutheran Reformation of Marriage,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 30.

⁵For a discussion of the anticlerical reactions to priestly scandals in pre-Reformation Europe, see R. N. Swanson, “Before the Protestant Clergy: The Construction and Deconstruction of Medieval Priesthood,” in *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schutte (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 39–60.

Catholic Church.

Although Luther and Calvin were theological heirs to Augustine in many ways, they decisively rejected his thinking on marriage.⁶ In developing a uniquely Protestant doctrine of marriage, the Reformers focused on several key points that set their theology apart from the Catholic dogma of previous centuries. First, Luther and Calvin rejected the classification of marriage as a sacrament. In Luther's words, "Nowhere [in Scripture] do we read that the man who marries a wife receives any grace of God."⁷ Both Reformers argued that the very idea of marriage as a sacrament was based on a mistranslation in the Latin Vulgate.⁸ Rather than ascribing a sacerdotal function to marriage, the Reformers asserted its inherent goodness in non-sacramental terms.⁹ Luther

⁶There are many helpful summaries of the developments in the doctrine of marriage during the Protestant Reformation. In addition to various primary sources written by Luther and Calvin, the following key secondary sources were consulted for this section: William H. Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960); Michael Parsons, *Reformation Marriage: The Husband and Wife Relationship in the Theology of Luther and Calvin* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988); John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Covenant. Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); John Witte, Jr., and Robert M. Kingdom, *Sex, Marriage and Family in John Calvin's Geneva, vol. 1: Courtship, Engagement and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); James Turner Johnson, "Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought: Its Development and Implications," in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Eliza Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 124–52; Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2011).

⁷Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520," trans. A. T. W. Steinhauser, rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 36:92.

⁸The exegetical case for calling marriage a sacrament rested on the Latin translation of Eph 5:32: "This is a great mystery (*mysterion*) and I am applying it to Christ and the church." Whereas Jerome rendered the Greek *mysterion* with the Latin term *sacramentum* in the Vulgate, both Calvin and Luther pointed out that the Greek word simply means "mystery." See Luther, "Babylonian Captivity," in *Luther's Works* 36:93, and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.19.34–36, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), 2:631. Quotations from this work will be indicated by volume, chapter, and section after which the volume and page number of this particular printing will be cited.

⁹Michael Haykin summarizes this emphasis as follows: "According to the Reformers and those who followed in their stead—such as the Puritans of the seventeenth century and the Evangelicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—marriage has an innate excellence, is vital for the development of Christian affection and friendship, and is one of God's major means for developing Christian character and spiritual maturity." Michael A. G. Haykin, "Christian Marriage in the 21st Century: Listening to Calvin on the Purpose of Marriage," in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 214.

noted that God “has blessed this state above all other states, and has made everything on earth subservient to and attendant upon it, so that it might be well and abundantly provided for.”¹⁰ Commenting on Ephesians 5:28, Calvin observed, “Marriage was appointed by God on the condition that the two should be *one flesh*; and that this unity may be the more sacred, he again recommends it to our notice by the consideration of Christ and his church.”¹¹

Second, the Reformers placed a greater emphasis on the value of companionship in marriage than their Roman Catholic predecessors. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 7, Luther contended, “The state of matrimony is constituted in the law of love so that no one rules over his own body but must serve his partner.”¹² Luther set the loving service of mutual companionship in contrast to the selfishness inherent in fornication and adultery. Likewise, Calvin noted in regard to Genesis 2:18 that the “woman is given as a companion and an associate to the man, to assist him to live well.”¹³ This notion of holy companionship replaced the Augustinian emphasis on sacramental union in the Reformers’ rendering of the primary goods of marriage.

Third, the Reformers rejected the Catholic insistence on clerical celibacy, a notion they considered both unbiblical and unnatural.¹⁴ Calvin represented the opinion of

¹⁰Martin Luther, *The Greater Catechism in Luther’s Primary Works*, ed. Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), 69–70.

¹¹John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle in *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 21:322.

¹²Martin Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald in *Luther’s Works*, 28:13.

¹³John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. John King, in *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 1:129.

¹⁴Calvin considered the prohibition of marriage for priests to be completely irrational: “For after having dignified matrimony with the title of sacrament, what brainless versatility is it for them to stigmatize it with the characters of impurity, pollution, and carnal defilement! What an absurdity it is to exclude priests from a sacrament!” Calvin, *Institutes* IV.19.36, 2:631. In Luther’s words, “Just as eating, drinking, waking, and sleeping are appointed by God to be natural, so God also wills that it be natural for a man and woman to live together in matrimony.” Martin Luther, “To Three Nuns. 6 August 1524,” in

many of his Protestant contemporaries when he cited the failures of this rule as evidence of greater problems within the Catholic Church:

This prohibition clearly shows how pestilent are all their traditions; since it has not only deprived the Church of upright and able pastors, but has formed a horrible gulf of enormities, and precipitated many souls into the abyss of despair. The interdiction of marriage to priests was certainly an act of impious tyranny, not only contrary to the word of God, but at variance with every principle of justice.¹⁵

For both Luther and Calvin, this aspect of reformation began in their own homes, where each took a respective wife and set an example for other ministers.¹⁶ These foundational shifts reshaped the church's doctrine of marriage and formed the foundation for future generations of Protestant theologians.

The Puritans

The English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the fruit of the Protestant Reformation spreading to England.¹⁷ Although the Church of England formally broke from Rome in 1534, many leaders recognized that the newly-formed Anglican Church was in need of greater purification. The Puritans were marked by their desire to see further reform in the Church of England as well as a particular emphasis on

Letters of Spiritual Counsel, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 271. In another sermon, Luther made his point even more clear: "It is useless and futile, yes, a very foolish and evil thing, that the attempt is now being made to despise matrimony and to lure people away from it to celibacy." Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7* in *Luther's Works*, 28:27.

¹⁵Calvin, *Institutes* IV.12.23, 2:429.

¹⁶After the death of his wife, Idelette (d. 1549), Calvin told a friend "I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordered, would not only have been the wiling sharer of my indigence, but even of my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry. From her I never experienced the slightest hindrance." John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (1858; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 5:216.

¹⁷The issue of defining Puritanism has received much attention from scholars. For a helpful summary, see the previously noted work of John Coffey, "Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 255–61.

Christian piety rooted in biblicism.¹⁸ This emphasis on practical piety based on the Scriptures naturally led to a focus on the responsibilities of married life.¹⁹ Thus, the Puritans were responsible for extending the Reformer's initial shifts on the subject by crafting a mature doctrine of marriage in their own day.²⁰ In the Puritan mind, marriage had a divine purpose. Therefore, marriages should conform to the biblical teaching on the subject, which centered on the spiritual marriage of Christ to his church. This section will explore the Puritan perspective on marriage through examining their thoughts on the following key issues: celibacy, the ends of marriage, affection and intimacy, moderation, spirituality, and hierarchy in the home.

¹⁸Many scholars have noted this emphasis in Puritan piety. For a brief overview, see Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 21–24.

¹⁹For years, the Puritans were subject to a negative reputation for their religious scruples. Recent scholarship, however, has helped balance this perception, particularly on the subject of marriage. The following secondary sources provide helpful overviews of the Puritan doctrine of marriage: William Haller and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5 (1941–42): 235–72; Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966); James T. Johnson, "English Puritan Thought on the Ends of Marriage," *Church History* 38, no. 4 (December 1969): 429–36; James T. Johnson, "The Covenant Idea and the Puritan View of Marriage," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 1 (January–March 1971): 107–18; Edmund Leites, "The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage," *Journal of Social History* 15 (1981/82): 383–408; Tim Beougher, "The Puritan View of Marriage: The Nature of the Husband/Wife Relationship in Puritan England as Taught and Experienced By a Representative Puritan Pastor, Richard Baxter," *Trinity Journal* 10, n.s. (1989): 131–60; Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 39–55, 72–89; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision for the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 259–73; Diana Feige and Franz Feige, "Love, Marriage, and Family in Puritan Society," *Dialogue & Alliance* 9, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995): 96–114; Belden C. Lane, "Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (June 2000): 372–402; Judith S. Graham, *Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (Boston: Northeastern University, 2000); Mark Dever, "Christian Hedonists or Religious Prudes? The Puritans on Sex," in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 245–70; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 859–76; Michael A. G. Haykin, "Hope is Kindled": *The Reformers and Puritans as Spiritual Mentors* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 143–61.

²⁰For a helpful article on the continuity between the Reformers and the Puritans on these subjects, see Kathleen M. Davies, "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage," in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R. B. Outhwaite (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 58–80.

Celibacy

Following the Reformers, the Puritans rejected the medieval veneration of celibacy. They celebrated marriage as a creation of God and a good gift to mankind. With extensive writings on the subject, they sought to define the marriage relationship in biblical terms, aimed at maintaining a proper picture of Christ's relationship with his church, and pointed to the spiritual lessons one could learn in marriage.

While many Puritans could be quoted on the subject, William Gouge (1575–1653), who penned the most famous Puritan work on the subject entitled *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), serves as a helpful illustration.²¹ Gouge, an eloquent minister who served the Blackfriars parish in London, wrote, “Let the admirers and praisers of a single estate bring forth all their reasons, and put them . . . against marriage . . . we shall find single life too light to be compared with honest marriage.”²² In contrast to the veneration of virginity that had marked the church for centuries, Gouge and his Puritan contemporaries celebrated marriage and its God-given purposes. Their appreciation of marriage, however, did not lead them into the Roman Catholic error of sacramentalism. Gouge, for example, voiced the opinion of many Puritans on this issue when he called the notion of marriage as a sacrament “a rotten building erected on a sandy foundation.”²³

Freed to appreciate marriage without overstating its purpose, the Puritans developed a robust vision for the family, which they framed as a microcosm of the commonwealth and the foundation for all of society.²⁴ In the preface to the definitive Puritan statement of faith, the *Westminster Confession* (1646), the family was called “the

²¹For more on Gouge, see Brett Usher, “Gouge, William 1575–1653,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 21:36–39.

²²William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 211.

²³Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 128. For his full discussion of this error, see Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 126–28.

²⁴Indeed, J. I. Packer has argued that the Puritans “gave [the vision for marriage] such strength, substance, and solidarity as to warrant the verdict that . . . they were creators of the English Christian marriage” (*Quest for Godliness*, 260).

seminary of the church and state.” As such, parents were warned “if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth.”²⁵ Gouge laid out the Puritan vision for family life in similar terms:

Besides, a family is a little Church, and a little commonwealth, at least a lively representation thereof, whereby trial may be made of such as are fit for any place of authority, or of subjection in Church or commonwealth. Or rather it is as a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or commonwealth.²⁶

Despite their typically high view of marriage, some Puritans, such as the Kidderminster divine Richard Baxter (1615–1691), continued to advocate the advantages of singleness, particularly for those in ministry.²⁷ Baxter argued that the single life was “usually the most advantageous state of life” for ministers, but he ultimately counseled others to “choose that state of life, that in it you may be most serviceable to [God].”²⁸ Baxter, who eventually did get married himself, numbered at least twenty difficulties that husbands would encounter in marriage and warned ministers in particular to count the cost before embarking on matrimony.²⁹ However, in contrast to the medieval Catholic theologians, he did not forbid clergy from marriage. Instead, he counseled ministers and

²⁵Thomas Manton, “Mr. Thomas Manton’s Epistle to the Reader,” in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), 9.

²⁶Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 18.

²⁷For more on Richard Baxter’s life and ministry, see N. H. Keeble, “Baxter, Richard (1615–1691),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4:418–33.

²⁸Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 1:395, 404. In regard to ministers, Baxter lists four specific considerations that men should consider before taking a wife (*Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:400–1).

²⁹Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:398–400. Baxter was not trying to discourage his readers from marrying but rather from marrying without discernment. He concluded, “All these are the ordinary concomitants and consequents of marriage; easily and quickly spoken, but long and hard to be endured! No fictions but realities, and less than most have reason to expect. And should such a life be rashly ventured on in a pang of lust? Or such a burden be undertaken without forethought?” (*Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:400). For more on Baxter’s marriage to Margaret Charlton (1636–1681), see Haykin, *Hope is Kindled*, 147–59, and Beougher, “Puritan View of Marriage,” 145–53.

all other Christians to “take notice of the helps and comforts of that condition, as well as of the hindrances and troubles.”³⁰ Thus, the Puritans rejected the medieval veneration of celibacy in favor of a more balanced perspective on marriage.

The Ends of Marriage

A second major contribution of the Puritans was their intentional reordering of the ends of marriage. The Augustinian order of procreation, fidelity, and sacramental unity was retained in the sixteenth-century Anglican liturgical guide, *The Book of Common Prayer*, although its author Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) replaced unity with mutual help.³¹ In the subsequent decades, the Puritans would reorder these purposes in order to place further emphasis on the role of companionship in marriage.³²

Others in church history had noted the companionate purpose of marriage, but the Puritans gave it greater prominence than ever before. Thomas Gataker (1574–1654) reasoned, “If children be a blessing, then the root [from] whence they spring ought much more to be so esteemed . . . Children are the gift of God, but the Wife is a more special gift of God.”³³ For Gataker and many other Puritans, the companionship of husband and

³⁰Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:403. For Baxter’s list of the mercies of marriage, see *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:404.

³¹The description of the causes for which God ordained marriage read as follows: “One was, the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and the praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body. Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.” John E. Booty, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer 1559* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 290–91.

³²According to James T. Johnson, “During the seventeenth century no small portion of Puritan writings on marriage is devoted to qualifying and rearranging the ends of marriage as stated above so as to assert the primacy of mutual help in marriage over procreation” (“Ends of Marriage,” 429). Johnson traces this development back to William Perkins’ 1609 work, *Christian Oeconomie*.

³³Thomas Gataker, *A Good Wife God’s Gift* (London: John Haviland, 1623), 11. As Johnson points out, Gataker’s understanding of the blessings of companionship is so strong that in a later sermon, he lists three separate goods of marriage related to that which is listed third in the prayer book (“Ends of Marriage,” 432). For more on Gataker, see Brett Usher, “Gataker, Thomas (1574–1654),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 21:625–27.

wife replaced procreation as the primary end of marriage. Even when a Puritan retained the traditional order, such as Gouge, they tended to place great emphasis on companionship. Gouge's description of the "mutual help" spouses offer one another displays the all-encompassing ideal of mutual companionship:

Man and wife [should] be a mutual help one to another. An help as for bringing forth, so for bringing up children; and as for erecting, so for well governing their family. An help also for well ordering prosperity, and well bearing adversity. An help in health and sickness. An help while both live together, and when one is by death taken from the other. In this respect it is said (Proverbs 18:22) *who so findeth a wife, findeth a good thing*, which by the rule of relation is true also, of an husband. No such help can man have from any other creature as from a wife; or a woman as from an husband.³⁴

Baxter provided liturgical structure to this line of thinking in his *Reformed Liturgy* (1661), which was presented at the Savoy Conference in 1660 as a replacement for the Anglican prayer book. In his wedding service, the minister's prayer for the couple addressed God with the following words:

Most merciful Father, who has ordained marriage for mutual help, and for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with a holy seed, and for the prevention of uncleanness; bless thy own ordinance to these persons, that entering this state of marriage in thy fear, they may there entirely devote themselves unto thee, and be faithful in all conjugal affections and duties unto each other.³⁵

Baxter began with companionship as the primary purpose of marriage, with the notions of producing offspring and preventing fornication as derivatives of this purpose. His specific wording for the ends of marriage was taken directly from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), although Baxter was the first divine to incorporate such language into an actual wedding service.³⁶

This development was more than a matter of rhetoric for the Puritans. Their

³⁴Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 210.

³⁵Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Liturgy in Works of Richard Baxter*, 15:495.

³⁶The text of the confession on this point was as follows: "Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness." *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.2, 103. This language was not used in the wedding service contained within the *Westminster Directory*.

reordering of the purposes of marriage carried with it the responsibility of husbands and wives to carry out their duties to one another with utmost sincerity, in hopes of blessing one another as God had ordained.³⁷ Speaking of the one-flesh union of husband and wife described in Genesis 2:24, Gouge commented, “This near conjunction between man and wife is a great motive to stir them both up, cheerfully to perform all the duties which God requireth of either of them.”³⁸

With these ideas in mind, the Puritans celebrated companionship in marriage, as illustrated by the following quote from Baxter:

It is a mercy to have a faithful friend, that loveth you entirely, and is as true to you as yourself, to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs, and who would be ready to strengthen you, and divide the cares of your affairs and family with you, and help you to bear your burdens, and comfort you in your sorrows, and be the daily companion of your lives, and partaker of your joys and sorrows. And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul; to join with you in prayer and other holy exercises; to watch over you and tell you of your sins and dangers, and to stir up in you the grace of God, and remember to you of the life to come, and cheerfully accompany you in the ways of holiness.³⁹

The emphasis on companionship also impacted Puritan perspectives on other issues such as divorce.⁴⁰ Whereas Luther was prepared to allow divorce on the grounds of impotency, Gouge disagreed, declaring that although procreation is one end of marriage, it should not be considered the only end.⁴¹ The Puritan poet John Milton (1608–1674)

³⁷In addition to the language of church and state, the Puritans also favored the analogy of friendship when discussing the marriage relationship. For a discussion of this point, see Johnson, “The Covenant Idea,” 110.

³⁸Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 116.

³⁹Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:430.

⁴⁰The following point from Mark Dever provides a helpful summary to the way that different groups distinguished between each end of marriage: “If the Roman Catholics tended to emphasize Gen 1:28 (‘Be fruitful and multiply’) and the Lutherans emphasized 1 Cor 7:9 (‘It is better marry than to be aflame with passion’), the Puritans tended to go to Gen 2:18—‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’ In other words, the Roman church emphasized procreation, the Lutherans pointed to protection, and the Puritans, while agreeing with both of these, stressed companionship in life and partnership in the service of God.” Dever, “Puritans on Sex,” 259.

⁴¹See Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 183.

went so far in his emphasis on companionship that he argued divorce was justifiable in the absence of love.⁴² Although his thoroughly modern perspective would be welcomed centuries later, his views were scandalous in their day. Most of the Puritans, while agreeing with his emphasis on companionship, did not follow his logic on the topic of divorce. Regardless, the Puritan insistence on companionship as a primary end of marriage greatly shaped their overall doctrine of marriage.

Affection and Intimacy

The reordering of the ends of marriage led naturally to recognizing the importance of affection, and specifically sexual intimacy, in marriage. While the church had long struggled to articulate the role of sexuality in the marriage relationship, the Puritans were forthright regarding its value.

William Whateley (1583–1639), the vicar of Banbury in Oxfordshire and author of an influential handbook on marriage, reminded his readers of the necessity of love in marriage: “Love is the life and soul of marriage, without which it differs as much from itself, as a rotten apple from a sound [one], and as a carcass from a living body.”⁴³ Baxter employed a similar physical metaphor to describe the centrality of this emotional attachment: “If love be removed but for an hour between husband and wife, they are so

⁴²For more on Milton’s views, see R. V. Young, “The Reformations of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), 291–96.

⁴³William Whateley, *A Bride Bush, or A Direction for Married Persons* (London: Bernard Alsop, 1623), 31. For more on Whateley, see Jacqueline Eales, “Whateley, William (1583–1639),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 58:401–2. For a helpful article on Whateley’s work in its context, see Jacqueline Eales, “Gender Construction in Early Modern England and the Conduct Books of William Whateley (1583–1639),” in *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 Summer Meeting and the 1997 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge, UK: Ecclesiastical Historical Society, 1998): 163–74. Whateley’s *A Bride Bush* was widely-disseminated in the eighteenth century thanks in part to its endorsement by the well-known evangelical leader, John Wesley (1703–1791). Wesley said of this work, “I am persuaded, it is not possible for me to write anything so full, so strong, and so clear on this subject, as has been written near an hundred and fifty years ago, by a person of equal sense and piety.” Quoted in Bufford W. Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1996), 99. For more on Wesley’s appropriation of the Puritans, see Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley. His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 185–92.

long as a bone out of joint; there is no ease, no order, no work well done, till they are restored and set in joint again.”⁴⁴

The celebration of marital love provided a context for recognizing the validity of sexual relations within marriage. Although the Puritans have long been categorized as prudish killjoys, their discussions of sexuality tended to be frank and, in their own way, positive. Gouge summarized the Puritan perspective:

One of the best remedies [against adultery] that can be prescribed to married persons (next to an awful fear of God, and a continual setting of him before them, wherever they are) is that husband and wife mutually delight each in the other, and maintain a pure and fervent love betwixt themselves, yielding that ‘due benevolence’ one to another which is warranted and sanctified by God’s word, and ordained of God for this particular end. This ‘due benevolence’ (as the Apostle stileth [sic] it), is one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage: and necessary for the main and principal ends thereof: as for preservation of chastity in such as have not the gift of continency, for increasing the world with a legitimate brood, and for linking the affections of the married couple more firmly together. These ends of marriage, at least the two former, are made void without [sic] this duty be performed. As it is called ‘benevolence’ because it must be performed with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully; so it is said to be ‘due’ because it is a debt which the wife owes to her husband, and he to her.⁴⁵

It is significant to note how Gouge connected sexuality to each of God’s purposes for marriage. Whereas previous generations of Christians had viewed sex as merely permissive for the purpose of procreation and the satisfaction of lust, the Puritans argued that the “due benevolence” of sexual relations within marriage was a key means of cultivating companionship.⁴⁶ In a similar way, Whateley recognized the power of sex for both sustaining godliness—“It is a principal means of living purely in this estate to enjoy [sexual relations within marriage] moderately and holily”—and also nurturing

⁴⁴Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:431. Baxter gave twelve sub-directions for maintaining conjugal love, including the following: “Overcome them with love; and then whatever they are in themselves, they will be loving to you, and consequently lovely” (*Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:431).

⁴⁵Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 221–22.

⁴⁶The phrase “due benevolence” is taken from 1 Cor 7:3, which reads as follows in the Authorized Version: “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto her husband.”

affection: “The willingness of their familiarity, doth serve to nourish, and continue their natural affection of love; and by helping them to attain by each other’s means, the true and proper ends, and just content of matrimony, doth make them dearer and dear to each other’s souls.”⁴⁷

This acknowledgement of a function for sex within marriage that centered on pleasure and companionship freed the Puritans to celebrate sexuality as a good gift of God. Their favorite passages for supporting this perspective included Proverbs 5:15–19 and Genesis 26:8. Gataker, for example, connected the two in noting that Proverbs 5:15 (“Rejoice in the wife of thy youth”) suggested “as if the Holy Ghost did allow some such private dalliance and behavior to married persons between themselves as to others might seem dotage: such as maybe was Isaac’s sporting with Rebekah.”⁴⁸ The Puritans considered such physical displays of affection an obligation in marriage rather than a mere allowance. Edmund Leites has provided a helpful summary for their thinking on affection and intimacy: “The life of duty is a life of discipline, yet they make the spontaneous (and erotic) delight in one’s spouse a *duty* of married life. Mutual delight in one another is not simply desirable, it is required: husband and wife together must make this a reality.”⁴⁹

Moderation

While recognizing the value of sexual intimacy within marriage, the Puritans also sought to define its limits. They warned against focusing on the love of one’s spouse to the detriment of loving God. In the Puritan view, marriage could train a person to love God more fully as they learned to love their mate. However, such love could become

⁴⁷Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 13, 25.

⁴⁸Thomas Gataker, *Certain Sermons* (London: J. Haviland, 1635), 2:206. In the Authorized Version, Gen 26:8 reads, “And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.”

⁴⁹Leites, “Duty to Desire,” 396.

lustful if it became a spiritual distraction. John Robinson (1575–1625), for example, warned, “As a man may surfeit at his own table or be drunken with his own drink; so may he play the adulterer with his own wife, both by inordinate affection and action.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Puritans promoted moderation in the affections as a means of subordinating love for one’s spouse beneath love and devotion to God.

The first step toward moderation in this area was to avoid founding a marriage on physical attraction alone. Baxter and others warned against the dangers of allowing one’s lust to be the primary motivation for getting married: “The marriage that is made by lust or fancy will never tend to solid content or true felicity; but either it will feed till death on the fuel that kindled it, and then go out in everlasting shame; or else more ordinarily it proveth but a blaze, and turneth into loathing and weariness of each other.”⁵¹

Second, many Puritans counseled married couples to aim at moderation in their sexual relations, even as they recognized their God-given function for promoting companionship. Whateley, for example, declared, “The married must not provoke desires for pleasure’s sake, but allay desires, when they provoke themselves.”⁵² Like many of his Puritan contemporaries, he feared that “excessiveness [would] inflameth lust, and disposeth the persons so offending to adultery.”⁵³ To guard against excessiveness, Baxter counseled that the mind of each spouse should “be brought to a moderate, chaste, and sober frame” so that “the remedy [may] not be turned into an increase of the disease, but used to extinguish it.”⁵⁴

A third way in which the Puritans sought to encourage moderation in sexuality

⁵⁰John Robinson, “Of Marriage,” in *The Works of Robinson, the Pilgrim Father* (London: John Snow, 1851), 1:242.

⁵¹Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:402.

⁵²Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 19.

⁵³Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 19.

⁵⁴Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:431.

was through the various regulations they placed on the act itself, even for married couples. Daniel Doriani has noted the way some Puritans sought to control sexual relations between spouses by requiring prayer before sexual intercourse.⁵⁵ Whateley, for example, warned, “Know that thou hast not interest to touch thine own wife, or thine own husband, till thou have done thine homage to God in prayer.”⁵⁶ His conclusion on the subject illustrates the perspective of certain Puritans toward temperate enjoyment of sexuality within marriage: “In a word, marriage must be used as seldom and sparingly, as may stand with the need of the persons married.”⁵⁷ Daniel Doriani sees in this tendency an unbiblical obsession with moderation that tainted the Puritan perspective on sexuality. His concerns are summarized as follows: “The Puritans’ vague discomfort with passion and pleasure descends from the Greek and Catholic dualism with its denigration of and antipathy toward the body. The godly brethren found it very difficult to make a complete break with that tradition, even over several generations.”⁵⁸ It should be noted that not all Puritans prescribed moderation in this way. Gouge, by contrast, declared, “An husband’s affection to his wife cannot be too great if it [be] kept within the bounds of honesty, sobriety, and comeliness.”⁵⁹

The Puritans were keenly aware of the power of the flesh, and thus, they refused to let their desires rule over them in any way. Baxter provided a helpful summary of how Puritan divines frequently encouraged their parishioners toward the proper use of

⁵⁵Daniel Doriani, “The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 134–35. Doriani cites various warnings from authors such as Robert Bolton (1572–1631), William Whateley, and Robert Cleaver (d. 1613) to demonstrate the Puritans’ great concern in this matter (“Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” 134–36). For more, see Daniel M. Doriani, “The Godly Household in Puritan Theology, 1560–1640” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1986).

⁵⁶Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 18.

⁵⁷Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 19.

⁵⁸Doriani, “Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” 142.

⁵⁹Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 361.

desires:

Turn all your passions into the right channel, and make them all Holy, using them for God upon the greatest things. This is the true cure. The bare restraint of them is but a palliate cure; like the easing of pain by a dose of opium. Cure the fear of man, by the fear of God, and the Love of the creature, by the Love of God, and the cares for the body, by caring for the soul, and earthly fleshly desires and delights, by spiritual desires and delights, and worldly sorrow, by profitable godly sorrow.⁶⁰

This balanced perspective on the subject of sexual intimacy illustrates Edmund Morgan's statement that "Puritan love was no romantic passion but a rational love, in which the affections were commanded by the will under the guidance of the reason."⁶¹

Spirituality

Another important facet of the Puritan vision for marriage was the relationship's role as a vehicle of sanctification. Contrary to the Roman Catholic distrust of marriage as a hindrance to spirituality, the Puritans considered the close proximity of husband and wife to provide ample opportunities to encourage one another in the Lord. Baxter even incorporated this notion into one of the pastoral prayers of his wedding service: "Let them not hinder, but provoke one another to love and to good works."⁶²

After discussing the pros and cons of marriage, Baxter concluded, "It is nothing but making God our guide and end that can sanctify your state of life."⁶³ Like the other Puritans, he did not consider the single life to be inherently more spiritual than marriage. In fact, although he did counsel ministers to consider the challenges they would face in seeking to care for both a family and a church, he also admitted that "in a godly

⁶⁰Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:275.

⁶¹Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 52.

⁶²Baxter, *Reformed Liturgy* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 15:495. A similar point was made in the Solemnization of Matrimony service contained in the *Westminster Directory*, where the couple was exhorted to "pray much with and for one another, watching over and provoking each other to love and good works, and to live together as the heirs of the grace of life." *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, in *Westminster Confession*, 388.

⁶³Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:404.

family there are continual provocations to a holy life, to faith, and love, and heavenly-mindedness.”⁶⁴ For Baxter, these potential spiritual benefits were especially channeled into the lives of the family members through regular times of family worship. On this point, Baxter counseled families to read the Scriptures, pray, and sing songs of praise together twice per day, in the morning and evening. He considered the family’s daily worship of God to be a fulfillment of divine commands, a proposition he supported by twenty specific arguments.⁶⁵

Similarly, Gouge encouraged spouses to pray together as a means of cultivating their own relationship and fulfilling their duties to God. To spur couples on in this endeavor, he listed five items in particular that they could pray for together, including their marital unity, their purity, their children, their needed provisions, and their own spiritual development.⁶⁶ He considered the husband to be “as a Priest unto his wife,” yet he considered each spouse to play a role in encouraging the other:

Great need there is, that husbands and wives should endeavor to help forward the growth of grace in each other, because we are all so prone to fall away and wax cold, even as water if the fire go out, and more fuel be not put under. And of all other, husbands and wives may be most helpful herein, because they can soonest espy the beginning of decay by reason of their near and continual familiarity together.⁶⁷

That last point—that the nearness of the husband-wife relationship provided them with an advantage in edifying one another—was of particular significance to the Puritans. They considered it to be one of the unique blessings of marriage, rooted in God’s purpose of mutual companionship. Thus, they did not confine the spirituality of the home to scheduled times of family worship and prayer. Rather, the Puritan divines challenged the married within their congregations to seek out opportunities to maximize

⁶⁴Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:425.

⁶⁵For full discussion, see Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:409–22.

⁶⁶Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 236–37.

⁶⁷Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 235, 243.

their relationship for the glory of God. This was a mutual duty that each spouse rendered to the other, illustrating one way in which the relational hierarchy was softened by the emphasis on companionship. Baxter's appreciation for his wife, Margaret, provides a window into what this relationship could have looked like in a Puritan marriage:

[She] was very desirous that we should all have lived in a constancy of Devotion, and a blameless Innocency: And in this respect she was the meetest helper that I could have had in the world (that ever I was acquainted with). For I was apt to be over-careless in my Speech, and too backward to my Duty; And [at her death] she was still endeavoring to bring me to greater wariness and strictness in both. If I spoke rashly or sharply, it offended her. If I carried it (as I was apt) with too much neglect of Ceremony, or humble Complement to any, she would modestly tell me of it.⁶⁸

Thus, the Puritan emphasis on mutual companionship strengthened the couple's relationship with one another as well their individual relationships with God. The following quote from William Whateley demonstrates how the Puritans encouraged spouses to be of spiritual help to each other and provides a fitting conclusion to this section:

They must be ready with special diligence, as they have special opportunity to consider one another, and to provoke unto love, and to good works. If the wife perceive the husband slack in matters of religion, or mercy, or the like, she must ever be commending those things unto him, and putting him in mind of the excellency of these virtues, and the great reward that God will give to them that practice them; and so sweetly drawing him to a more frequent practice of them, always remembering to be mild and gentle in her speeches this way, as one that would allure, and not enforce. The husband likewise must with the most familiar and kind speeches that may be, stir up his wife's dullness, if he perceive her dull; and mind her of those motives that may encourage, and quicken her in all well-doing. O how sweet a society would this of man and wife be, if they could in this manner be watchful of all opportunities, to further each other's proceeding in godliness!⁶⁹

Hierarchy at Home

While much could be said about the Puritan understanding of marriage, the

⁶⁸Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, the Daughter of Francis Charlton, of Apply in Shropshire, Esq.; And Wife of Richard Baxter* (London: B. Simmons, 1681), 70.

⁶⁹Whateley, *A Bride Bush*, 63.

final area of emphasis to note was their insistence on leadership in the home. For the Puritans, this responsibility fell on the shoulders of husbands and fathers. Men were expected to lead the family in daily worship together, set an example of private devotion, and guard the purity of the home. In the Puritan mind, these duties were a function of the family's covenant with God.

The great significance of a husband's leadership in the home is illustrated by the way Whateley railed against husbands who forsook these duties:

That house is a misshapen house, and (if we may use that term) a crump-shouldered, or hunchback house, where the husband has made himself an underling to his wife, and given away his power and regiment to his inferior: without question it is a sin for a man to come lower than God has set him. It is not humility, but baseness, to be ruled by her, whom he should rule.⁷⁰

A man's responsibility to lead his household encompassed both the actions and the manner in which he led. For example, Baxter commanded, "Be a good husband to your wife, and a good father to your children, and a good master to your servants, and let love have dominion in all your government, that your inferiors may easily find, that it is their interest to obey you."⁷¹ Indeed, the command to love one another was at the center of all household expectations. Husbands and fathers were expected to lead the way in this endeavor.⁷²

⁷⁰Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 98. Whateley took an extreme position in regard to a husband's responsibility in governing his wife, even to the point of allowing husbands to physically discipline their wives when necessary. He recommended such actions as a last resort and likened it to a man lancing a wound for the sake of healing. While he admitted that a husband may be forced to reluctantly physically discipline his wife at times, he passionately condemned striking her in rage. For the full discussion, see Whateley, *Bride Bush*, 105–11, 167–73. Whateley's position on the physical discipline of a wife seems to be a minority opinion among the Puritans. For a counter-argument, see Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 389–93. Given that Gouge published his work after Whateley's first edition came out, it is possible that he is specifically responding to Whateley in this section.

⁷¹Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:423.

⁷²"Let spiritual love to your family be predominant, and let your care be greatest for the saving of their souls, and your compassion greatest in their spiritual miseries." Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:424. Baxter gave a total of fifteen directions to husbands for the wise governing of their homes and an additional ten motives to inspire them (*Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:422–26).

Furthermore, as Gouge noted, the unique relationship between man and wife called for loving leadership: “Though the man be as the head, yet is the woman as the heart, which is the most excellent part of the body next to the head, far more excellent than any other member under the head, and almost equal to the head in many respects, and as necessary as the head.”⁷³ As such, Gouge called for the centrality of love in all of the husband’s actions toward his wife, even those rooted in his authority:

No duty on the husband’s part can be rightly performed except it be seasoned with love His look, his speech, his carriage, and all his actions, wherein he hath to do with his wife, must be seasoned with love: love must show itself in his commandments, in his reproofs, in his instructions, in his admonitions, in his authority, in his familiarity, when they are alone together, when they are in company, before others, in civil affairs, in religious matters, at all times, in all things: as salt must be first and last upon the table, and eaten with every bit of meat, so must love be first in an husband’s heart, and last out of it, and mixed with everything he hath to do with his wife.⁷⁴

The emphasis on love was intended to both honor God and make the marriage relationship agreeable to all parties. With this in mind, Gouge concluded, “If an husband carry himself to his wife as God requireth, she will find her yoke to be easy, and her subjection a great benefit even unto herself.”⁷⁵

In addition to stressing the importance of love, the Puritans also placed various limits on the husband’s authority. For one, and perhaps most significantly, they emphasized the limitations placed on the man by God himself. The wife was only responsible to obey her husband in so far as she could do so in obedience to God.⁷⁶ As the Puritans frequently pointed out, the Apostle commanded wives to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22) but not exhaustively in all circumstances.

⁷³Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 271.

⁷⁴Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 351–52.

⁷⁵Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 340.

⁷⁶See, for example, Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 326–28.

Second, the Puritans encouraged husbands to wield their authority sparingly, so as not to lord it over those entrusted to their care. It was the authority of God they sought to establish in their home, not their own. Gouge provided a helpful image for understanding the Puritan vision for authority in the home:

Authority is like a sword, which with over much using will be blunted, and so fail to do that service which otherwise it might when there is most need. A wise, grave, peaceable man, may always have his sword in readiness, and that also very bright, keen, and sharp; but he will not be very ready to pluck it out of his scabbard; he rather keepeth it for a time of need, when it should stand him in most steed. Such husbands therefore as are too frequent in their commands, show themselves not grave, nor wise, nor lovers of peace.⁷⁷

Finally, as a means of balancing authority in the home, Puritan wives were entrusted with various leadership responsibilities as well. On the one hand, they were viewed as co-authorities alongside of their husbands in relation to the children and servants (if applicable). Again, Gouge is helpful for understanding what this partnership could look like in the Puritan home:

Let therefore husbands and wives herein assist one another for so they may be very helpful one to another, and bring, by their mutual help in governing, much good to the family. The husband by his help aiding his wife, addeth much authority unto her, and so causeth that she is not despised, nor lightly esteemed. The wife by her help causeth many things to be espied, and so redressed, which otherwise might never have been found out: for two eyes see more than one, especially when one of those is more at hand, and in presence, as the wife is in the house.⁷⁸

Furthermore, various Puritan husbands were willing to concede certain household responsibilities to their wives, especially where the women proved to be more gifted. Baxter, for example, considered his wife “better at resolving a case of conscience than most divines” and was unashamed to have been “much ruled by her prudent love in many things.”⁷⁹

Thus, the Puritan perspective on marriage is much more positive than some

⁷⁷Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 378.

⁷⁸Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 259.

⁷⁹Baxter, *Breviate*, 75.

might assume. As Edmund Morgan concluded in his study of the Puritan family, “The Puritans were neither prudes nor ascetics. They knew how to laugh and they knew how to love.”⁸⁰ Following their Protestant forefathers, they rejected the veneration of virginity and sought to re-establish the goodness of marriage in the mind of the church. They did so by stressing the role of mutual companionship as a God-given purpose for marriage, a key motivation for affection and intimacy, and even as a foundation for mutual edification. The emphasis on companionship also nuanced their perspective on male headship, providing important caveats for the husband’s authority over his wife and home.

J. I. Packer has summarized well the ultimate root of the Puritan focus on marriage and family life: “Their passion to please God expressed itself in an ardor for order; their vision of the good and godly life was of a planned, well-thought-out flow of activities in which all obligations were recognized and met, and time was found for everything that mattered.”⁸¹ Surely, the responsibilities and commitments of married life were among the things that mattered most to the Puritans themselves and among their greatest legacies to subsequent generations. The following section will now introduce the immediate successors to the Puritans and the forerunners of our primary subjects in this thesis: the early British Baptists.

The Early Baptists

The first Baptists in England emerged from the matrix of the Puritan and Separatist communities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸² Although the earliest British Baptists held to a general view of redemption that contradicted the position of

⁸⁰Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 64.

⁸¹Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 273.

⁸²The issue of Baptist origins has been a subject of great debate in recent scholarship. For a helpful overview of the discussion, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds, UK: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 15–32.

most Puritans, the following brief survey of seventeenth-century Baptist writings will demonstrate they tended to follow the Puritans on the subject of marriage.

Thomas Grantham

One of the most influential Baptist theologians of the seventeenth-century was Thomas Grantham (1634–1692), the oft-persecuted pastor of the General Baptist congregation at Lincolnshire.⁸³ Grantham published a number of significant works in his lifetime, but his *magnum opus* was *Christianismus Primitivus* (1678), a treatise of systematic theology that addressed a vast number of topics including marriage.⁸⁴ In discussing its lawfulness, he pointed out that marriage “is a solemn and honourable ordinance of God [that was] instituted by God himself in the time of Man’s Innocency for the modest and orderly propagation of Mankind.”⁸⁵ As the author of marriage, God also dictated its limits, which included the forbidding of polygamy, consanguineous unions, and marriages between a believer and unbeliever.⁸⁶ General Baptists such as Grantham typically defined an “unbeliever” as anyone who was outside of the denominational community, including other evangelical Christians.⁸⁷ Although Grantham considered

⁸³For more on Grantham, see Samuel Edward Hester, “Advancing Christianity to Its Primitive Excellency: The Quest of Thomas Grantham, Early English General Baptist (1634–1692)” (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977); John Inscore Essick, *Thomas Grantham: God’s Messenger from Lincolnshire* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013); Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 1:71–94.

⁸⁴Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus. Or the Ancient Christian Religion* (London: Frances Smith, 1678).

⁸⁵Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.6.1, 37. Quotations from this work will be indicated by volume, chapter, and section after which the page number of this printing will be cited.

⁸⁶Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.6.1–2, 38–40. As will be discussed below, these same limitations are recognized in the *Second London Confession*.

⁸⁷The first declaration of this position in the minutes of the General Assembly occurred in 1656, where the messengers determined, “It is by this Assembly agreed that Mixt Marriage is unLawfull.” By 1668, a more extensive statement was produced, which would govern General Baptist practice for centuries. John Caffyn has demonstrated a consensus within the denomination regarding the unlawfulness of marrying outside of the community amid confusion over what to do when someone did, particularly if they married another evangelical Christian. At first, it appears that some congregations excommunicated

each of these actions to be an aberration of God’s purposes for marriage, he did not recommend dissolving such unions.⁸⁸ Rather, he argued that “nothing but the pollution of the Marriage Bed can justify a Divorce” and cautioned men against putting away their wives for lesser reasons.⁸⁹

When Grantham turned to the duties of husbands and wives several chapters later, he echoed the Puritan concern for the home’s impact on the greater commonwealth: “either the Power of Government must be kept in its proper Subject, or else not only Families, but Kingdoms are laid open to ruin and all perturbations.”⁹⁰ He grounded the responsibilities of a husband in the familiar commands of Ephesians 5, noting that the principle duties involved in his government were to “love, defend, and provide for his wife.”⁹¹ Sounding very much like a Puritan, he bemoaned the audacity of those who failed to love their wives:

He that putteth his Wife out of his Affection, dealeth no better than he that divorceth her. This want of love between a Husband and Wife, is a grievous Iniquity, a treasonable Impiety, hateful in the sight of God; and yet it is that which Satan prevails to ensnare Men with, to the provoking of the Majesty of Heaven against them, to the evil example of their Families, and to the perdition of their own Souls.⁹²

Casting a vision for loving companionship, Grantham counseled husbands in providing emotional support to their wives: “When thou sees thy Wife sinking under any pressure

individuals who married out; however, by mid-eighteenth century, this position had softened considerably. For more on this discussion and a record of the Assembly’s pronouncements on the issue, see John Caffyn, *Sussex Believers. Baptist Marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Worthing, UK: Churchman Publishing, 1988), 23–27, 52–55.

⁸⁸Over the course of the seventeenth century, this became the standard General Baptist position as well. Caffyn argues that most churches would initially withdraw from a member who had married an unbeliever, but, upon observing repentance from them, would welcome them and their spouse back into the community of faith. General Baptist leaders did not appear to encourage such individuals to divorce their new spouses, even when they disapproved of their unions. See Caffyn, *Sussex Believers*, 26–31.

⁸⁹Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.6.3, 41. In this context, Grantham did not mention how believers should handle cases of abandonment.

⁹⁰Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.1, 62.

⁹¹Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.1, 62.

⁹²Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.1, 63.

of Mind or Body, thou art to bear thy burden; and with thy courage and prudence to strengthen her, and divert her fears and sorrows.” This injunction is rooted in the mutuality of the marriage relationship, “for under God she hath none to flee to like thee.”⁹³ Like the Puritans, Grantham also understood the potential of marriage for the spiritual good of each spouse. In fact, he prioritized this aspect of companionship: “The Christian Man’s greatest care, should be to live with his Wife, as a Joint-Heir of the Grace of Life, and therein to help her, lest Satan beguile her of that Inheritance.”⁹⁴

Turning to wives, Grantham pointed out that their principal duty was to revere their husbands and submit to them as leaders.⁹⁵ Interestingly, he reminded women that this subjection was instituted by God as a punishment for Eve’s “deceiving of her Husband, and so exposing him and herself to mortality and misery.”⁹⁶ The Puritans, by contrast, tended to ground the domestic roles in creation rather than the fall, although Grantham’s interpretation would become more common in the eighteenth century.⁹⁷ He summarized the duties of a wife under three primary headings: to offer consistent affection, to readily obey her husband’s just commands, and to avoid contention.⁹⁸ To encourage women who were married to difficult men, he commended the example of Augustine’s mother, Monica (331–387), as a model of wise submission and godly

⁹³Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.1, 63.

⁹⁴Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.1, 63.

⁹⁵Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.2, 64.

⁹⁶Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.2, 64.

⁹⁷The Anglican evangelical Henry Venn (1725–1797), for example, would argue that God made Eve’s “desire for pre-eminence the reason of her subjection.” Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man* (London: n.p., 1763), 278. The Puritan William Gouge, by contrast, observed five reasons for recognizing the husband’s superiority over his wife, none of which mentioned Eve’s transgression. See Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 269–70.

⁹⁸Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.2, 64–65.

perseverance.⁹⁹

A final section pertaining to the home addressed the practice of family worship. While Grantham sided with the Puritans in acknowledging the importance of regular times of family devotion, he admitted, “I find no positive direction that it ought to be the Exercise of a Family every day.”¹⁰⁰ Instead of focusing on specific prescriptions for how and when to perform family worship, Grantham instead commended families to “devote themselves to God by solemn Prayer, with as much frequency as they can” and “to talk of the Sacred Scriptures at all convenient times.”¹⁰¹ Like the Puritans before him, Grantham recognized the potential for marriage to contribute to a believer’s sanctification.

A decade later, Grantham dealt with marriage once again in a postscript to a treatise that opposed infant baptism.¹⁰² In this work, published in 1689, he defended the rights of Baptists to conduct marriage ceremonies independent of the prescriptions found in the Anglican Prayer Book. Specifically, Grantham opposed the requirement of exchanging rings and kneeling before the altar, two issues that the Puritans themselves rejected in previous generations.¹⁰³ He wrote in defense of Baptists who were being maligned for not conforming to the Anglican order of service in order to “humbly offer our Reasons why we dissent from their ceremonies; and why also our Marriages are good in the Eyes of the Law.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.2, 65–66.

¹⁰⁰Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.3, 66.

¹⁰¹Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* III.12.3, 67–68.

¹⁰²Thomas Grantham, *Truth and Peace. Or, the Last and Most Friendly Debate Concerning Infant Baptism* (London: n.p., 1689).

¹⁰³The wedding service contained in the *Westminster Directory*, for example, instructed the minister to pronounce the couple man and wife immediately after they exchange vows “without any further ceremony” (*Westminster Confession*, 388).

¹⁰⁴Grantham, *Truth and Peace*, 74. As discussed in the previous chapter, prior to the Marriage

He began by pointing out that Baptists were not opposed to the public solemnization of marriage and even included a transcript of a typical Baptist wedding service.¹⁰⁵ In affirming public ceremonies, Grantham was likely aiming to distance his argument from the long-standing clandestine marriage controversy discussed in the previous chapter. By providing a detailed overview of a Baptist covenant, he could demonstrate that the Baptists practiced “all that is essential to Marriage,” even if they neglected certain aspects of the Anglican ceremony which they deemed to be unbiblical.¹⁰⁶ Nothing in the Baptist service directly contradicted the laws of England. Furthermore, he pointed out the Church of England did not oppose Catholic marriage ceremonies at the time, even though the theological differences between the Anglicans and the Papists were far greater than with the Baptists on this particular issue.¹⁰⁷

Having provided a foundation for his argument, Grantham then took up the two principal issues of his treatise, the lawfulness of kneeling before an Anglican priest at the altar and the giving of rings. Grantham’s primary issue with each of these practices was that neither were prescribed in Scripture, an indication that he likely held to the Puritan understanding of the regulative principle of worship. Moreover, the prevalence of unholy bishops in the Anglican Church and the superstitious rituals surrounding the exchanging of the rings made it impossible for Baptists to conform in good conscience.¹⁰⁸

Act of 1754, British law did not expressly forbid Dissenters from marrying outside of the Church of England. However, Rebecca Probert has demonstrated that such marriages were not looked upon with favor. Although she did not mention Grantham’s work in her discussion of non-Anglican marriage practices, his description of the circumstances aligns with her thesis. See Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long 18th Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–35.

¹⁰⁵Probert made no mention of Grantham in her research, but Caffyn did include this same transcript in his work. See Caffyn, *Sussex Believers*, 61–62.

¹⁰⁶Grantham, *Truth and Peace*, 75.

¹⁰⁷Grantham, *Truth and Peace*, 82.

¹⁰⁸In regard to “the Popish use of the ring,” Grantham was especially concerned with the priest’s supposed role in sanctifying the ring as well as the requirement to exchange the rings in the name of the Trinity, a practice which Grantham feared would lead others to conclude that marriage was as much a sacrament as baptism (*Truth and Peace*, 89).

Grantham concluded his work by heartily affirming the right of the magistrate to oversee marriage—“this universal ordinance of God”—rather than the Anglican Church.¹⁰⁹ In this point as well as his main argument, he showed himself to be once again in line with the interpretative tradition of the Puritan movement, which viewed marriage as a civil ordinance under God.¹¹⁰ Although the early Baptists were capable of novel contributions to the subject, the writings of Thomas Grantham illustrate the continuity that existed between the early Baptists and the Puritan tradition on the subject of marriage.

Benjamin Keach

Another significant voice among the early English Baptists was Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), the pastor of the Horsley-Down congregation where John Gill would eventually serve as pastor. Although he is primarily known today for his passionate defenses of believer’s baptism and his role in fostering the singing of congregational hymns, Keach wrote on a variety of theological topics.¹¹¹ He was one of the most significant Particular Baptist theologians in his day, even though he began his ministry in a General Baptist church.¹¹² As Thomas Nettles has noted, the Southwark pastor “bumped and bristled his way through life leaving everything around him much different from what it was when he discovered it.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Grantham, *Truth and Peace*, 91.

¹¹⁰The argument that marriage is a creation ordinance and thus, under the ultimate jurisdiction of the state, traces back to Luther. For a helpful recent study on the impact of Luther’s theology of marriage on subsequent generations, see A. G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013).

¹¹¹For more on Keach, see Nettles, “Benjamin Keach (1640–1704),” in *The Baptists*, 1:163–94; Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*, 83–93; David A. Copeland, *Benjamin Keach and the Development of Baptist Traditions in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2001); and Austin R. Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2004).

¹¹²The circumstances of Keach’s theological transformation are a historical mystery but Haykin infers that Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691) and especially William Kiffin (1616–1701) may have been instrumental influences. See Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*, 84.

¹¹³Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:163.

One legacy of his passion for theological clarity was the confession of faith that he produced for his church in 1697.¹¹⁴ The brevity of the statement makes it possible to quote the article that addressed marriage in full:

We believe Marriage is God's holy Ordinance, that is to say between one Man and one Woman: and that no Man ought to have more than one Wife at once: and that Believers that marry, should marry in the Lord, or such that are Believers, or Godly Persons; and that those who do otherwise, sin greatly, in violating God's holy Precept; and that Ministers as well as others may marry; for *Marriage is honourable in all.*¹¹⁵

Several comments can be made in regard to this statement. First, Keach held to a historically orthodox position in rejecting homosexuality, polygamy, and intermarriage with unbelievers. Second, he followed the Puritan-Reformed tradition in denying both a sacramental view of marriage as well as clerical celibacy. Finally, Keach commended marriage as a holy ordinance grounded in the word of God. He upheld the goodness of the institution and sought to teach his people to conform their marriages to God's standards.

It is interesting to note what is not said in this statement. For example, he did not delineate the purposes of marriage, discuss the roles and responsibilities of each spouse, or even take a position on divorce.¹¹⁶ At least two reasons may explain these omissions. For one, Keach did not intend this work to be exhaustive. As expressed in his epistolary introduction, he set out "to state an account of the most concerning Articles of [the church's] Faith."¹¹⁷ In addition, the pastor would not have relied on this document alone as a guide to the church's theology. For additional support, Keach would have no doubt turned to the *Second London Confession*, the subject of the following section.

¹¹⁴Benjamin Keach, *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation Meeting at Horsley-Down* (London: n.p., 1697).

¹¹⁵Keach, *Articles of the Faith at Horsley-Down*, Article 35.

¹¹⁶Keach did not include any questions related to marriage in his catechism. See Benjamin Keach, *The Baptist Catechism* (London: n.p., 1693).

¹¹⁷Keach, the Epistle Dedicatory of *Articles of the Faith at Horsley-Down*.

Second London Confession

The *Second London Confession* (1677) was the most significant doctrinal declaration of the Particular Baptists in the seventeenth century. Composed in part to demonstrate solidarity with the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, who were persecuted alongside the Baptists in the 1660s and 1670s, the text of the document was based on the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646). British Baptists had previously developed a confession of faith in 1644, however, the onslaught of persecution and the need for further theological clarity called for a revised statement. The *Second London Confession* agreed with the original work in principle but expanded it considerably, adding a number of new articles, including one on marriage.¹¹⁸

Chapter 25 of the new confession addressed marriage in four brief statements. The first section defined the nature of marriage as a heterosexual, monogamous union.¹¹⁹ This strong statement against polygamy is a replica of the parallel text in the *Westminster Confession*. As Michael Haykin and Ian Clary have noted, the framers of the Baptist confession were likely eager to express their position on this issue in order “to emphasize a further area of likeness with their fellow English Protestants and [to] distance [themselves] from the continental Anabaptist radicals,” who practiced polygamy.¹²⁰ Although no alterations were made to the parallel statement in the *Westminster Confession*, the Baptist leaders did add several proof texts.¹²¹ In addition to citing Genesis 2:24 with the Presbyterians, they also added Matthew 19:5 (a New Testament

¹¹⁸For more on the *Second London Confession*, see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1959), 235–40.

¹¹⁹“Marriage is to be between one *Man and one Woman*; neither is it lawful for any man to have more then [sic] one *Wife*, nor for any *Woman* to have more then one *Husband* at the same time.” *Second London Confession* XXV.1 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 284).

¹²⁰Michael A. G. Haykin and Ian Hugh Clary, “Baptist Marriage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Talking, Thinking, and Truth,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2012): 29.

¹²¹*Westminster Confession of Faith* XXIV.1, 103.

quotation of Gen 2:24), as well as Matthew 19:6 and Malachi 2:15, texts typically cited to condemn divorce. Interestingly, the Baptist confession omitted the two articles on divorce found in the *Westminster Confession*. Haykin and Clary surmise that the framers of the Baptist confession may have considered these two biblical references to have been sufficient for stating their position on divorce.¹²² However, after noting that Benjamin Keach also left divorce out of the aforementioned confession of his church, Haykin and Clary conclude that more research is needed to determine how the early Baptists defined this issue. One voice that provides further clarity on the subject is that of Thomas Grantham, who, as previously noted, explicitly stated that divorce was permissible when adultery had occurred.

The second section of the chapter on marriage addressed the purposes of marriage with priority given to mutual companionship: “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of *Husband* and *Wife*, for the increase of Man-kind, with a legitimate issue, and for preventing of uncleanness.”¹²³ This section again replicated the parallel *Westminster* passage, with the only omission being the phrase “and of the Church with an holy seed.” The framers of the Baptist confession likely left this phrase out because they had already referenced Malachi 2:15, the biblical passage from which the phrase in the previous statement originates. This minor alteration notwithstanding, the early Baptists were clearly in step with their Puritan predecessors in emphasizing companionship as the first purpose of marriage.

The next section concerned the lawfulness of marriage and specific prohibitions for believers. In this article, marriage was affirmed as “lawful for all sorts of people” who are able “with judgment to give their consent.”¹²⁴ However, Christians are

¹²²Haykin and Clary, “Baptist Marriage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 29.

¹²³*Second London Confession XXV.2* (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 284).

¹²⁴*Second London Confession XXV.3* (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 284–85).

exhorted “to marry in the Lord” rather than with “infidels, or idolaters” or “such as are wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies.”¹²⁵ This entire paragraph aligns with the parallel statement from the *Westminster Confession* with only one noteworthy exception. The Westminster divines included “papists” among the list of infidels and idolaters whom true Christians should not marry, yet the Baptists did not. It is unclear why the Baptists would remove this group of people from their own list thirty years later. One explanation is that they simply assumed Catholics within the aforementioned categories and felt less pressure to explicitly mention them in their day. In addition, the Particular Baptists may have sidestepped specificity on this point to avoid sounding like their General Baptist contemporaries who notoriously forbade intermarriage with any believers outside of their own denomination.¹²⁶

The final section of the chapter on marriage dealt with the forbidding of marriage within “the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the word.”¹²⁷ This paragraph was again lifted directly from the *Westminster Confession*, although the Baptist framers omitted the final sentence of the parallel paragraph that provided further explanation of the particular kinds of consanguinity forbidden in Scripture.¹²⁸ The Puritans were explicit about such prohibitions in their day. As Baxter explained, even though the law of Moses was no longer binding on the Christian community, its directives on this point were grounded in the law of nature. Thus, “Prudence telleth

¹²⁵*Second London Confession* XXV.3 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 285).

¹²⁶As noted above, this stance created much controversy within the General Baptist community. Furthermore, Raymond Brown has argued convincingly that it also contributed to the denomination’s decline. For this assessment, see Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 of *A History of English Baptists*, ed. B. R. White (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 14–15, 19–20.

¹²⁷*Second London Confession* XXV.4 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 285).

¹²⁸The *Westminster Confession* included the following statement in this paragraph: “The man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred, nearer in blood then [sic] he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband’s kindred, nearer in blood than of her own” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* XXIV.4, 104).

everyone that it is their sin, without flat necessity, to marry in a doubtful degree; and therefore it is thus safest, to avoid all degrees that seem equal to those named in Leviticus 18.”¹²⁹ The Baptist framers of the *Second London Confession* followed the Puritans on this point, as they did on many others.

David Crosley

A final figure of note from this era of early Baptists is David Crosley (1669/70–1744), who helped start several Calvinistic Baptist churches in Lancashire and Yorkshire and pastored the congregation at Bacup.¹³⁰ Crosley was a friend of John Bunyan (1628–1688) and a correspondent of George Whitefield (1714–1770), yet he is most remembered for an incident that got him excommunicated from the church he briefly pastored in London, which had been founded by Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691).¹³¹ According to the minute books of the Cripplegate church, Crosley was dismissed for “drunkenness,” “immodest behavior towards women, bordering on the breach of the seventh commandment,” and “lying.”¹³² Despite this inauspicious departure, he was

¹²⁹Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:404–5.

¹³⁰For more on David Crosley, see Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Bartlett and Hinton, 1823), 3:361–63; James Hargreaves, *The Life and Memoir of the late Rev. John Hirst, Forty Two Years Pastor of the Baptist Church at Bacup. Also an Appendix containing a Sketch of the Rise of that Church . . . and a Short Account of Several Ministers* (Rochdale, England: Joseph Littlewood, 1816), 302–38; B. A. Ramsbottom, *The Puritan Samson: The Life of David Crosley 1669–1744* (Harpenden, England: Gospel Standard Trust, 1991); Anne Dunan-Page, “The Writings of David Crosley and Baptist Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 45, no. 5 (January 2014): 260–83.

¹³¹Crosley was close enough to Bunyan that he stayed in the house in which he had died and preached in his former congregation in Bedford a few months later (Hargeaves, *An Appendix*, 322–23). For more on Crosley’s relationship with Bunyan, see Ramsbottom, *Puritan Samson*, 3. Although he never met Whitefield, they exchanged several letters, and the latter was comfortable proclaiming, “Our sentiments as to the essential doctrines of the gospel, exactly harmonize, and our souls, I trust, have drank into the same spirit. Only with this difference: he is a man, and I am only a babe in Christ.” George Whitefield, preface to *Samson a Type of Christ*, by David Crosley, 2nd ed. (London: n.p., 1744), iii.

¹³²“Cripplegate (Curriers Hall) Church Book, 1689–1723,” quoted in Anne Dunan-Page, “Letters and Records of the Dissenting Congregations: David Crosley, Cripplegate and Baptist Church Life,” in *Debating the Faith: Religion and Letter Writing in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page and Clotilde Prunier, International Archives of the History of Ideas (Dordrecht, UK: Springer, 2013), 76. For a full summary of the episode at Cripplegate, see Dunan-Page, “Letters and Records,” 69–87, or

eventually restored to ministry and finished his years as the pastor of the Baptist congregation at Bacup.¹³³ Crosley is of note for the present thesis because of his tract, *The Christian Marriage Explained*, which was published in 1744 along with a prefatory recommendation from Whitefield himself.¹³⁴ A brief summary of Crosley's exposition of Ephesians 5:22–33, which Whitefield considered “sound, plain, and practical,” will conclude this survey of early Baptists on marriage.¹³⁵

According to his own introductory note, Crosley composed *The Christian Marriage Explained* to “set forth the beauty and utility, the honour and significancy of marriage, first betwixt Christ and his church; second, betwixt a Christian man and his wife” in order that “that husbands and wives may everywhere live and walk together in peace, love, and faithfulness, with a steady and constant regard to the analogy they bear, or ought to bear (in their marriage-relation) to Christ and his spouse.”¹³⁶

Crosley considered the husband and wife relationship to be the “perfect Icon, and exact Picture” of the mystical union between Christ and his church.¹³⁷ Yet, he took pains to make clear which relationship was primary and which was derivative:

Marriage betwixt Man and Woman, tho' honourable, and of singular Antiquity, being instituted in Paradise, and first celebrated before the Fall, in the Presence of the Almighty, yet in itself is no such Mystery [referring to Ephesians 5:32]; for that lies in, and arises from the Nature, Degree and Consequence of the federal and mystical Relation that is betwixt Christ and his Church; and Marriage betwixt Man and Wife is so much the more honourable and comfortable, as it bears the more lively Representation of, and is influenced the more eminently by the blessed and

Ramsbottom, *Puritan Samson*, 4–5.

¹³³Along with this incident, historians have also found interest in Crosley as a representative of Antinomianism, although a recent article from Dunan-Page has called this assumption into question. See Dunan-Page, “The Writings of David Crosley,” 273–80.

¹³⁴Crosley originally drew up the work in 1726 for a friend who had requested his thoughts on Eph 5:22–33. It was first published in 1744 as an appendix to his sermon on Samson and was later reprinted with the Samson sermon in 1796.

¹³⁵Whitefield, preface to *Samson a Type of Christ*, iii.

¹³⁶Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, vi.

¹³⁷Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, 38.

super-excellent Relation that is betwixt Christ and his Church.¹³⁸

Thus, Crosley called husbands and wives to mind this model as they sought to live out their own matrimonial responsibilities. Following the outline of his text, Crosley first discussed the submission of wives to their husbands, noting that a wife's subjection is to be rendered to solely her own husband and then, only in the Lord so that "in obeying one she obeys both."¹³⁹ Next, he exhorted the husband to loving leadership mirrored after Christ. His discussion of love bears the mark of one influenced by Puritan sentiments: "A Man's Love to his Wife, should be like Aaron's Rod, always in the Bud, continually progressive, and productive of an endless Train of pure Affections."¹⁴⁰ Thus, Crosley, like his Baptist brethren in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, held orthodox positions on marriage, rooted in biblical faithfulness and informed by the Puritan-Reformed tradition.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a theological background for understanding the eighteenth-century Baptist perspective on marriage. It has been demonstrated that the earliest Baptists considered themselves heirs of the Puritan movement and, ultimately, the Protestant Reformation. Thus, a proper understanding of the Puritan-Reformed perspective on marriage is necessary for examining the views of later Baptists.

As noted, John Calvin and Martin Luther led the Protestant rediscovery of the biblical purposes for marriage by rejecting the sacramental status of marriage as well as the call for clerical celibacy. In its place, they argued for the divine plan of marriage as a creation of God, intended to provide a means for companionship, procreation, and,

¹³⁸Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, 47. Crosley followed the Puritans in rejecting marriage as a sacrament, claiming that the Papists "ascribe too much to Marriage, and too much lower the Nature of a Sacrament."

¹³⁹Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, 40.

¹⁴⁰Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, 44.

especially, protection from sin.

The Puritans expanded the Reformation understanding of marriage by further emphasizing its companionate purpose and through articulating various ways in which God had intended for mutuality between the spouses to serve as a strong foundation for individual marriages. They followed the Reformers in allowing ministers to marry and upheld the goodness of sexual intimacy within marriage, while also prescribing limitations that would protect couples from overindulgence. In addition, the Puritans emphasized the potential of marriage as a means of cultivating godliness, particularly when husbands led their wives in the pursuit of true spirituality.

The early Baptists developed their own doctrine of marriage from within this particular theological stream. Although they were capable of expressing their own viewpoints, they largely reaffirmed the statements of previous generations on the subject, particularly in their central statements of faith.

As we move into the eighteenth century, these various theological themes provide the background for exploring the views of John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller. As these men sought to articulate a doctrine of marriage in their own historical context described in the previous chapter, how much impact did their theological heritage have on them? Did they continue to affirm the emphases of the Puritan-Reformed perspective described here or did they chart a new course of their own? To answer these questions, we must turn to the men themselves and examine marriage in each man's life and theology.

CHAPTER 4
MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY
OF JOHN GILL

Perhaps the best endorsement for the writings of John Gill can be found in the scribbled notes of a nineteenth-century copy of his commentary on the Minor Prophets. The volume belonged to Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the renowned Baptist preacher who occupied the same London pulpit that Gill had manned for half a century, and the handwritten recommendation read as follows: “Many sneer at Gill, but he is not to be dispensed with. In some respects, he has no superior. He is always well-worth consulting.”¹ Although appreciation for Gill’s work has waxed and waned in the centuries since his death, most who have studied Gill would agree with Spurgeon that the eighteenth-century Baptist is, at minimum, well-worth consulting.² His voluminous and comprehensive body of work makes him an ideal resource for considering how Particular Baptists approached specific topics such as marriage. In addition to being chronologically earlier than the other subjects of this study, his theology is also foundational for future

¹This comment is reported in numerous places. For one example, see George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Durham, UK: Go Publications, 1995), 187.

²As will be demonstrated in the following section, Gill was well-regarded in his day for his theological acumen and erudite thinking. However, his legacy has often been obscured by charges of Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism. There is an extensive body of literature on questions surrounding Gill’s soteriology and its impact on the Particular Baptist denomination; however, none of these issues are central to the present study. For more, see the following: Curt D. Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983); Thomas Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Ella, *John Gill*, 151–83; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 73–107; and Jonathan A. White, “A Theological and Historical Examination of John Gill’s Soteriology in Relation to Eighteenth-century Hyper-Calvinism” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010). For a brief but helpful introduction, see Michael A. G. Haykin, Introduction to *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Press, 1997), 2–6.

generations. This chapter will outline his understanding of marriage, first by looking at his life and then by delving into his various writings on the subject. This study will demonstrate Gill's faithfulness to Scripture and general continuity with the Puritan tradition discussed in the previous chapter.

The Life of John Gill

John Gill was born to be a Dissenter.³ His parents, Edward and Elizabeth, were founding members of the Baptist church at Kettering which Andrew Fuller would later pastor.⁴ Gill's first biographer described his parents as "religious and pious persons" and noted that his father had "strong impressions" his son would be of "eminent service in the Baptist interest."⁵ Born in Kettering on November 23, 1697, the young Gill demonstrated a strong interest in learning. However, his formal education ended at age 11 when his parents pulled him from school to avoid mandatory attendance at the daily prayer services of the local Anglican parish.⁶ Gill was converted at age 12 under the preaching

³The biographical sketch that follows is based on the following sources: "A Summary of the Life, Writings, and Character of the Late Reverend and Learned John Gill, D. D.," in *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), 1:ix-xxxv; John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (London: John Bennett, 1838); and Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Bartlett and Hinton, 1823), 3:430-61. There have been several helpful studies on Gill in recent years: Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 77-101; Robert W. Oliver, "John Gill: His Life and Ministry," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 7-50; Robert W. Oliver, "John Gill (1697-1771)," in *British Particular Baptists 1638-1910*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 1:146-65; Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 73-107; and Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2005), 1:195-242. As Ella has noted, the biographical material on Gill is scarce compared to other significant theologians of his day. Ella has provided a helpful overview of the available resources in *John Gill*, 20-22.

⁴The church was founded by William Wallis (d. 1715) several members of the local Independent congregation in 1696. For more, see Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:526-27.

⁵"The Late John Gill," in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:x.

⁶Though his formal education was cut short, he continually applied himself to Greek and Latin and also taught himself Hebrew. Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 5. John Rippon (1750-1836), who succeeded Gill as the pastor of the congregation at Carter's Lane, provided the most detailed biography on Gill although he drew heavily from the anonymous memoirs previously mentioned. For more on Rippon, see Ken R. Manley, "Rippon, John (1751-1836)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. G. C. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 47:2-3.

of William Wallis, whom he considered “his spiritual father.”⁷ He chose to postpone his baptism until he was 19, by which time his spiritual vitality became evident to those around him.⁸ Immediately, the congregation at Kettering began to recognize his ministerial gifts and sought opportunities for him to be trained. His first ministerial assignment at Higham-Ferrers was brief, but he was there long enough to meet a “young gentlewoman of great piety and good sense” named Elizabeth Negus (d. 1764).⁹ The two married in 1718 and would remain so until Elizabeth’s death. They had multiple children, but only three survived infancy. One of those three, a young girl named after her mother, died at the age of 13 in 1738, an occasion which prompted a heartfelt memorial sermon from Gill.¹⁰ Their two surviving children, Mary and John II (d. 1804), eventually lived in adjoining houses on Gracechurch Street in London, where their parents also spent time in their final years.¹¹ Mary wed George Keith (d. 1782), a London bookseller who published a number of Gill’s works.¹² John II was a goldsmith who lived in London for most of his life before retiring to nearby Walworth. He and Keith were the executors of John Gill’s estate after his death and helped get his works distributed in America.¹³ According to

⁷Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 6.

⁸Gill composed a hymn that the congregation sang on the night of his baptism. This hymn can be found in “The Late John Gill,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:xiii.

⁹“The Late John Gill,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:xiv.

¹⁰For this sermon, which also contains commentary on young Elizabeth’s piety, see John Gill, “Occasioned by the Death of Elizabeth Gill,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:391–408. From Gill’s comments, we learn that he supplied his children with spiritually-edifying books such as John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and regularly talked with them of eternal things. See, especially, Gill, “The Death of Elizabeth Gill,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:403–8.

¹¹“The Late John Gill,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:xxviii.

¹²In addition to publishing many of Gill’s works, Keith also trained Joseph Johnson (1738–1809), who would become the most well-known London publisher of the latter half of the eighteenth-century. Among his notable works, Johnson published the writings of Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), and the poetry of William Cowper (1731–1800), including his satire of Martin Madan’s defense of polygamy that will be discussed in chap. 6.

¹³John II corresponded with James Manning (1738–1791), President of Rhode Island College (now Brown University), and donated a collection of Gill’s published works along with fifty-two folio

Rippon, “Both these children were a great happiness to their parents, and the family had always reason to be thankful to God for their domestic comfort, peace, and harmony.”¹⁴ Despite his many literary projects and the various responsibilities associated with pastoring his church, Gill stayed involved in the life of his family, thanks in part to a rigorous daily schedule.¹⁵

Gill’s comments on marriage should be understood through the lens of his own experience, which appeared to be quite pleasant. He always considered meeting Elizabeth “the principal thing for which God in his providence sent him to” Higham.¹⁶ Despite numerous physical ailments throughout her life, Mrs. Gill was an affectionate wife, who discreetly guarded what her husband entrusted to her. She was also credited with being a great help to her husband as she “by her unremitting prudence, delivered him from all domestic avocations, so that he could, with more leisure, and greater ease of mind, pursue his studies, and devote himself to his ministerial work.”¹⁷ Gill seemed to possess a deep appreciation for her; to the point that some members of his congregation once feared that he was spoiling her with extravagant care after a miscarriage.¹⁸

volumes of the Church Fathers from Gill’s library. At the time, Manning noted that it was “by far the greatest donation our little Library has yet had.” Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Early History of Brown University including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of James Manning 1756–1791* (Providence, RI: Snow & Farnham, 1897), 192. See also Guild, *Early History of Brown University*, 419–23 for John II’s correspondence with Manning.

¹⁴Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 11. According to Ella, Mary was received into the membership at Horsleydown in April 1744 and John II in March 1751 (*John Gill*, 236).

¹⁵Rippon reported that he rose at daybreak most days and breakfasted in his study, “always on chocolate,” but always joined his family for dinner and, “even to the last affliction, carved for them” (*Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 116–117). Rippon also relayed an interesting note from his family regarding his habit of talking to himself, which kept him, in a sense, “always in his studies” (Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 120).

¹⁶Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 9.

¹⁷Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 9–10.

¹⁸Ella, *John Gill*, 56–59. For more on this incident and its greater context, see B. R. White, “John Gill in London, 1719–1729: A Biographical Fragment,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (April 1967): 82–85.

Further evidence of his affection for her can be seen in the memorial sermon he preached two weeks after her death.¹⁹ In the sermon, the bereaved husband stayed close to his text (Heb 11:16), noting that this passage “may serve to wean us from this world” and “point out to us the happiness of those that are gone before us.”²⁰ He then concluded abruptly, “But I forbear saying any more,” perhaps in order to conceal his emotions.²¹ His notes, however, revealed that he had intended to pay tribute to his wife and give evidence of her piety, her love for the Lord, and her perseverance in faith during her final days.²² Gill reported that Elizabeth was converted early in life and endured “scoffs and jeers” from her friends for her piety.²³ She grew to be a humble woman, who loved the Lord’s Day and possessed a tender conscience before God. Although she experienced frequent physical ailments and a long, painful demise, her husband reported she faced her trials with patience and perseverance. In her final days, she was supported by the truths of Scripture and her meditations on the suffering of Christ. On October 10, 1764, her sufferings concluded in a moment of apparent joy when she lifted her arms and cried, “Lord, Lord!” as she took in her final breath. Elizabeth proved to be a faithful companion to her husband throughout her life and a steadfast believer to the very end.

¹⁹John Gill, “The Saints Desire after Heaven and a Future State of Happiness,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:566–78. In the Authorized Version, Heb 11:16 reads, “But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.”

²⁰Gill, “The Saints Desire after Heaven,” in Gill, *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:578. The subtext of this sermon title read, “Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Elizabeth Gill. Preached Oct. 21, 1764.”

²¹Gill, “The Saints Desire after Heaven,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:578. Rippon concurred on this supposition, “It seems he was so very much overpowered at the end of the sermon, where the account might have been given, that he was not able to deliver it” (*A Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 10). In addition, it should be noted that Gill was especially adverse to what he called “long encomiums” and typically kept the biographical portion of his funeral sermons very brief. See, for example, John Gill, “Christ, the Ransom Found,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:529.

²²Gill’s notes are appended to the transcript of this sermon in Gill, “The Saints Desire after Heaven,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:578–79. The details in the following sentences are taken from these notes.

²³Gill, “The Saints Desire after Heaven,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:578.

The two had only been married for two years when Gill was elected as pastor of the Particular Baptist church at Horselydown in London, where Benjamin Keach had previously served.²⁴ Gill would pastor this congregation for fifty-one years until his death in 1771, although he saw little increase in its numbers over that span.²⁵ He was said to have presided over the flock “with dignity and affection,” to which his congregation returned a genuine “reverence” for their pastor.²⁶ It was Gill’s habit to prepare a general outline of his sermon and then preach extemporaneously off his notes.²⁷ He preached twice per Lord’s Day each week and gave a weekly public lecture at Eastcheap for over two decades.²⁸ The congregation produced various future ministers in Gill’s day including John Brine (1703–1765), William Anderson (d. 1767), and James Fall (d. 1763).²⁹

Gill’s pastoral ministry was the overflow of a vibrant spirituality rooted in the

²⁴Gill updated the church covenant Keach had written upon his arrival, removing a number of articles including the section on marriage. See *A Declaration of the Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ in Carter-Lane, Southwark, Under the Pastoral Care of Dr. John Gill; Read and Assented to at the Affirmation of Members in Sermons and Tracts*, 3:616–31. Gill’s updates are recorded in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 14. For more on Gill’s possible motivation for making this change, see White, “John Gill in London,” 85–88.

²⁵Walter Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, quoted in Ivimey, *History of English Baptists*, 3:450.

²⁶Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 123. Rippon noted that Gill was not known to make frequent visits to his church members, although he was more than capable of showing empathy to them and celebrating with them when appropriate. For more on Gill’s conduct as a minister, see Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 123–30.

²⁷Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 122. Gill’s general pattern was to exposit one book in the morning, one in the evening, and a third on Lord’s Supper days. Rippon noted that this practice helped him quickly accumulate a body of work (Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 116).

²⁸For more on his weekly lecture series at Eastcheap, see Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 27–28.

²⁹For more on Brine, see S. L. Copson, “Brine, John (1703–1765),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 7:661–62. Both Anderson and Fall preceded Gill in death and the latter preached a funeral sermon for each man. See John Gill, “The Faithful Minister Crowned,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:592–608, and John Gill, “The Superior Happiness of the Righteous Dead, to that of Living Saints,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:551–65 respectively.

gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁰ In his final years, Gill wrote to a relative expressing the sole grounds of his hope for eternal life:

I depend wholly and alone upon the free, sovereign, eternal, unchangeable, love of God, the firm and everlasting covenant of grace, and my interest in the Persons of the Trinity, for my whole salvation; and not upon any righteousness of my own; nor on anything in me, or done by me under the influences of the Holy Spirit.³¹

Gill labored among the people at Horsleydown until his death on October 14, 1771.³²

Although devoted to his church, Gill's influence extended far beyond his congregation in Southwark and his impact on future generations has been significant. Several aspects of Gill's legacy are worth noting before moving on to examine his doctrine of marriage. First, his literary output was nothing short of voluminous. His Anglican friend Augustus Toplady (1740–1778) quipped after his death, "It would, perhaps, try the constitutions of half the *literati* in England, only to read, with care and attention, the whole of what he wrote."³³ Indeed, were all his works to be printed together, Rippon reckoned that the sum total would have been over "TEN THOUSAND folio pages of Divinity."³⁴ So, there are few doctrinal topics that Gill failed to address in some way. Second, his corpus was systematic and comprehensive. He was the first Particular Baptist to write a comprehensive systematic theology and the first English-speaking theologian to complete a verse-by-verse commentary on the whole Bible.³⁵

³⁰For more on the piety of Gill, see Gregory A. Wills, "A Fire that Burns Within: The Spirituality of John Gill," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 191–210.

³¹This comment is taken from a letter to his nephew, Mr. John Gill (d. 1809) of St. Albans, recorded in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 133.

³²Samuel Stennett wrote an inscription in Latin for Gill's tombstone. An English translation is available in Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 3:453.

³³Quoted in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 137.

³⁴Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 111.

³⁵The first accolade is noted by Stanley K. Fowler in "John Gill's Doctrine of Believer Baptism," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 69. The second accomplishment is mentioned by Robert W. Oliver in "John Gill," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 38. Rippon reflected on the significance of his verse-by-verse exposition and how it stands above similar works in *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 76.

These resources make his thoughts on a particular subject readily accessible. Finally, he enjoyed a favorable reputation outside of Baptist circles as a representative of his denomination. Gill's numerous publications and weekly lecture series at Eastcheap earned him "an established character for [scholarship] amongst the learned of all denominations."³⁶ He was the principal expositor for the Particular Baptists of his generation, frequently called upon to answer the publications of others.³⁷

With such influence and reputation, it is appropriate to consider what John Gill taught concerning marriage.³⁸ He provides a helpful window into how eighteenth-century theologians navigated their context by guiding their congregants toward a biblical vision for the home. Gill's vast corpus and detailed commentaries yield exegetical insight on various passages in the Bible dealing with the subject. The following section, therefore, will examine his teachings on the nature of marriage and the relationship between husbands and wives.

³⁶"The Late John Gill," in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:xxix. His key publications include *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated and Vindicated* (1731), *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–1738), *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1769), and *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1770). His reputation outside of the Particular Baptist denomination is illustrated by his longstanding friendship with Anglicans James Hervey (1714–1759) and Augustus Toplady, the latter of whom thought so much of Gill that he requested the privilege of delivering a eulogy at his funeral, an offer his family and friends declined due to Gill's untiring commitment to Dissent. See Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 135–36. Rippon recounted several stories that stemmed from his weekly meetings with ministers of the "Three Denominations," in *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 117–118.

³⁷Rippon recorded numerous times in which Baptists on either side of the Atlantic sent a recent publication to Gill requesting that he draw up a rebuttal, which he often did. See Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 21, 26, 52, and 61. Gill was, of course, no stranger to doctrinal controversy. When once approached by friends who warned him that arguing against a particular person might lead to a loss of reputation or book sales, Gill remarked, "Don't tell me of losing. I value nothing, in comparison of Gospel truths. I am not afraid to be poor." Quoted in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 37. In a similar vein, John Wesley, to whom Gill addressed a work on predestination, once commented to Toplady of Gill: "He is a positive man, and fights for his own opinions through thick and thin." Quoted in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 65. Toplady reflected on his various polemical efforts: "So far as the distinguishing Doctrines of the Gospel are concerned, [he] never besieged an error, which he did not force from its strong holds; nor ever encountered an adversary, whom he did not baffle and subdue." Quoted in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 138.

³⁸Toplady figured, "While true Religion, and sound Learning have a single friend remaining in the British Empire, the works and name of Gill will be precious and revered." Quoted in Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 140.

The Nature of Marriage

Since Gill produced both a verse-by-verse commentary and a systematic theology in his lifetime, his theology of marriage is discernible through his treatments of the subject.³⁹ As Sharon James has pointed out, one must be careful not to judge an eighteenth-century theologian on twenty-first century standards.⁴⁰ John Gill was a man of his time, addressing the concerns of his day and seeking to exegete the Scriptures for his own pastoral ends. It would be unfair to expect him to answer every question of the modern theologian. Nonetheless, given the comprehensive nature of his literary output, his theology of marriage provides an instructive window into the way Baptists thought about the subject in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The first aspect of Gill's thinking on marriage to note is its foundation in biblical exegesis. This was, in many ways, true of all his efforts at articulating Christian doctrine. In the introduction to his *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, he warned, "When men leave the sure word, the only rule of faith and practice, and follow their own fancies, and the dictates of their carnal minds, they must needs go wrong."⁴¹ Thus, Gill stayed close to his text in his sermons and especially his commentaries. He was committed to treating verses within their original context rather than focusing on contemporary application, even when interaction with current issues might have proven fruitful.⁴² This practice

³⁹There have been at least three recent studies related to Gill's doctrine of marriage: Sharon James, "'The Weaker Vessel': John Gill's Reflections on Marriage, Women, and Divorce," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 211–23; Jonathan Boyd, "John Gill on Resisting Sexual Temptation," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 2014): 254–71; and Matthew Haste, "'A Type of the Marriage of Christ': John Gill on Marriage," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 2 (July 2014): 289–302.

⁴⁰James, "John Gill's Reflections on Marriage, Women, and Divorce," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 211. Ironically, James seemed to violate her own advice in this regard, as will be demonstrated below.

⁴¹John Gill, Introduction to *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity; or A System of Evangelical Truths* (1839; repr., Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), lii. Rippon explained that Gill's *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* contained the substance of Gill's pulpit ministry from the previous five years. In Rippon's estimation, "There are but few, if any, theological publications, in the English language, of more deserved repute than" this work (*Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 96).

⁴²One example relevant to the present subject will suffice to illustrate this point. In his

stemmed from his desire to preserve the meaning of the text rather than a lack of appreciation for its usefulness. On the subject of marriage and countless others, Gill called for constant attention to the Scriptures as a guide for Christian spirituality: “Let us have constant recourse to [the Bible], as the standard of faith and practice; and try every doctrine and practice by it, and believe and act as that directs us, and fetch everything from it that may be for our good, and the glory of God.”⁴³

Thus, he derived his understanding of marriage from the biblical record. In his *A Body of Practical Divinity*, Gill defined marriage as “a union of male and female, of one man and one woman in lawful wedlock, agreeable to the original creation of man.”⁴⁴ Further explanation of each phrase of this definition will illuminate his thinking on the subject, making it a helpful outline for considering Gill’s theology of marriage.

Union of Male and Female

Marriage is, first of all, a union in which “male and female become one, even one flesh.”⁴⁵ This one-flesh union was at the heart of God’s original design for the relationship when he instituted it in the Garden of Eden. The creation of marriage, which Gill argued took place on the sixth day, established principles that shaped the institution for future generations. One such notion was the one-flesh union brought about by the marriage bond. Commenting on Genesis 2:24, Gill noted, “The union between [man and wife] is so close, as if they were but one person, one soul, [and] one body.”⁴⁶ When a

discussion of Lev 21:7 regarding the prohibitions against a priest marrying a defiled woman, Gill spoke only of Old Testament laws and Jewish customs, even though issues such as clerical celibacy or even the foolishness of unequal unions might have been addressed.

⁴³Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 25.

⁴⁴John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity; or A System of Practical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (1770; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), 974. See also John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1809–1810, repr., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 9:104, 484.

⁴⁵Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 974. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:484.

⁴⁶Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 21.

man leaves his father and mother to unite with his wife, he does so “with a cordial affection, taking care of her, nourishing and cherishing her, providing all things comfortable for her, continuing to live with her, and not departing from her as long as they live.”⁴⁷ As will be discussed at length below, Gill believed that this bond was so strong that it was indissoluble but by death, adultery, or desertion.

One aspect of the one-flesh union Gill highlighted was the lawful enjoyment of sexual relations, an emphasis he inherited from his Puritan predecessors. He defined the New Testament phrase “due benevolence,” a favorite focus of the Puritans, as “an act of love and affection, a sign of mutual benevolence, so of justice; it is a due debt from divine ordination, and the matrimonial contract.”⁴⁸ Thus, Gill followed the Puritan-Reformed tradition in recognizing that sexuality and spirituality were not at odds when physical desires were properly channeled through the one-flesh union of husband and wife.

In order for sexual expressions to be lawful, relationships must conform to biblical standards. Gill understood marriage as a union of male and female, and thus, heterosexual. Although homosexuality was not common in England in the first half of the eighteenth century, Gill did not hesitate to condemn the “unlawful and shocking copulation of man with man” as an “unnatural sin,” which he considered an even greater evil than fornication.⁴⁹ In his discussion of Leviticus 20, Gill called homosexual relations an “abominable wickedness . . . contrary to nature and more than brutish.”⁵⁰ Thus, the

⁴⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:21.

⁴⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:642.

⁴⁹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:133. These comments are made in regard to the lewd behavior of the Sodomites detailed in Gen 19. According to Stone, there was a “distinct rise in public consciousness about homosexuality” during this time period, even if there may not have been an increase in practice. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 542.

⁵⁰Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:654.

first significant point of Gill's doctrine of marriage was that matrimony consisted of a heterosexual union that formed a permanent bond and the proper outlet for sexual enjoyment between man and wife.

One Man and One Woman

Turning to the second phrase in Gill's definition of marriage, this heterosexual union was to be a monogamous commitment, that of "*one* man and *one* woman." In commenting on Genesis 1:27, Gill noted, "Only one man and one woman were created, to shew that hereafter a man was to have at a time no more wives than one."⁵¹ When Lamech took a second wife, Gill protested that his actions were "contrary to the first institution of marriage."⁵² Departing from God's plan for marriage defied the Lord and introduced various problems into the relationship. Of Elkanah and his two wives, Gill remarked, "When a man had more wives, two or more, they were usually at enmity to one another, as the two wives of Socrates were, being always jealous lest one should have more love and respect than the other from the husband."⁵³

Gill argued that monogamy was among the qualifications for pastors and deacons in the local church. He contended that 1 Timothy 3:2 did not oblige a pastor to be married, nor restrain him from a second marriage after the death of his wife, but rather "he should have but one wife at a time," a stipulation intended to address polygamous practices rampant in first-century Roman culture.⁵⁴

⁵¹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:11.

⁵²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:37. For additional comments on the unlawfulness of polygamy and the problems it caused, see Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:411.

⁵³Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:412.

⁵⁴Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 865. He followed this same line of interpretation for the office of deacons. See Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 884. Commenting on the call for temperance in the wife of a deacon, Gill noted that those who practiced otherwise "may do a great deal of mischief in the church, through their influence on their husbands" (*Body of Practical Divinity*, 884). See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:288, 302.

In Gill's own day, polygamy was a complex challenge. As noted in chapter 2, loose legal restrictions and the absence of faithful record-keeping made it nearly impossible to police the practice prior to Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753. By the time Gill published his *Expositions on the Old and New Testament* and *A Body of Practical Divinity*, Hardwicke's Act had been in place for nearly two decades, but similar problems continued to persist in England.⁵⁵ As noted in chapter 3, the situation was compounded for a Baptist theologian by the radical views of some earlier Anabaptists who had called for the legalization of polygamy on biblical grounds. Gill would have certainly been eager to distance himself from such heterodox views and was also mindful of present controversies surrounding the subject.⁵⁶

In addition, Gill argued that the standard of monogamy also condemned divorce, which he frequently mentioned alongside of polygamy as an aberration of marriage.⁵⁷ The marital bond was "made by God himself," he argued, making it "so sacred and inviolable, as that it ought not to be dissolved by any man."⁵⁸ Gill recognized that divorce was somewhat common in Old Testament Israel, however, he argued that the provisions in the Law regarding divorce were intended as permissions rather than mandates. Moses required men to issue a certificate of divorce so as to avoid dismissing their wives in a heat of passion due to their hardness of heart. This stipulation, according

⁵⁵For a discussion of the failures of the Marriage Act from the perspective of a modern critic, see Eve Tavor Bannet, "The Marriage Act of 1753: 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 233–54.

⁵⁶For this argument, see Michael A. G. Haykin and Ian Hugh Clary, "Baptist Marriage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Talking, Thinking, and Truth," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no.1 (2012): 29.

⁵⁷For example, on Matt 19:4, Gill noted that God "made the first parents of mankind, male and female; not males and females, but one male, and one female, who, upon her creation, was brought and married to him; so that in this original constitution, no provision was made for divorce, or polygamy." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:212.

⁵⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:212. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:655.

to Gill, was intended “not so much as a privilege and liberty to the men, as in favour of the women,” for it protected them from being cast aside without cause.⁵⁹ He considered the Deuteronomy 24 prohibition against remarrying a divorced wife after she had married another man an additional effort to dissuade Jewish men from hastily putting away their wives.⁶⁰ Regardless of these concessions, Gill considered marriage to be a life-long commitment in the eyes of God.

He did, however, take the traditional Reformed position on divorce, considering it lawful only in cases of adultery and abandonment.⁶¹ Given that the *Second London Confession* and other early Baptists were mostly silent on this issue, Gill’s comments on divorce provide somewhat of an unprecedented window into early Particular Baptist thought on the subject. According to Gill, adultery is capable of dissolving a marriage because it defiles the marriage bed and, in his words, “destroys being one flesh.”⁶² Thus, he gave stern warnings against the temptation to pursue sexual satisfaction outside of one’s marital commitments as detailed in the following section. When abandonment occurred, Gill said of the deserted party, “They are not to be held, but let go; and the deserted person may sit down contented, being not to be blamed, the

⁵⁹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:213.

⁶⁰Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:103–4.

⁶¹Commenting on 1 Cor 7:27, for example, he noted, “Marriage is such a bond as cannot be dissolved, but by the death of one of the parties (Rom 7:2); unless in case of adultery, or of willful desertion; and it is a bond which mutually obliges.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:652. For a helpful study of Gill’s reception of Reformation theology, see Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 51–68. Muller observes, “John Gill stands as powerful proof, if any were needed, that the thought of English nonconformity and, within that category, English Baptist theology, is in large part an intellectual and spiritual descendant of the thought of those Reformers, Protestant orthodox writers, and Puritans who belonged to the Reformed confessional tradition” (“John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 51).

⁶²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:213. See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:48, 211–14.

fault entirely lying upon the deserter.”⁶³ In such cases, Gill allowed the innocent party to remarry “after all proper methods have been tried for a reconciliation.”⁶⁴ In the same way, victims of marital unfaithfulness were also permitted to remarry, according to the following logic:

A woman that is married to a man, *is bound by the law to her husband*; to live with him, in subjection and obedience to him, *so long as he liveth*; except in the cases of adultery (Matt 19:9) and desertion (1 Cor 7:15), by which the bond of marriage is loosed, and for which a divorce or separation may be made, which are equal to death; *but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband*; the bond of marriage is dissolved, the law of it is abolished, and she is at entire liberty to marry whom she will (1 Cor 7:39).⁶⁵

Thus, Gill held the union of one man and one woman in high esteem. He understood God’s standard to condemn polygamy and divorce, but he recognized exceptions in cases of adultery and abandonment. Such instances made divorce permissible and left the innocent party free to remarry.⁶⁶ His main consideration was the sanctity of the marriage bond, which he contended was “not merely a civil, but a sacred affair, in which God is concerned.”⁶⁷

Lawful Wedlock

As a heterosexual, monogamous relationship, marriage was designed to conform to a particular standard of commitment and conduct. In Gill’s definition, the man and the woman were united in “lawful wedlock,” referring to the covenant made under God at the commencement of their marriage. While the covenant commitments were made by each spouse in their vows to one another, God himself was responsible for

⁶³Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:647.

⁶⁴Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:647.

⁶⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:467.

⁶⁶Gill’s doctrine of divorce mirrors the articles in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* that were left out of the *Second London Confession*.

⁶⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:212.

enacting this new relationship. Thus, under God and in his presence, the marriage covenant was lawful and binding, creating a transformed relationship between man and wife.⁶⁸ This new relationship was not sacramental, but rather involved a commitment of two people under God.⁶⁹ In discussing the nature of the marriage covenant mentioned in Malachi 2, Gill noted, “The wife is a part of a man’s self, is one flesh with him; partaker of what he has, a partner with him in prosperity and adversity; a companion in life, civil and religious, and ought to remain so till death part them; for, whom God has put together, let no man put asunder.”⁷⁰ The final five words were, of course, a quotation of Jesus from Matthew 19:6. Gill could use a New Testament phrase to interpret an Old Testament text because he believed in the continuity of the whole Bible and its relevance for faith and practice.

Gill understood God as not only the creator of the institution of marriage, but also as the author of each newly-established marriage covenant. Of Proverbs 2:17, he noted, “God is the author and institutor of marriage, and has directed and enjoined persons to enter into such a contract with one another.” As such, “He is present at it, and is a witness of such an engagement, and is appealed unto in it; which, as it adds to the solemnity of it, makes the violation of it the more criminal.”⁷¹ As Gill explained, God’s

⁶⁸Discussing Mal 2:14, Gill explained God’s role in the forming of the marriage covenant: “When espoused together in their youthful days, the Lord was present at that solemn contract, and saw the obligations they were laid under to each other, and he was called upon by both parties to be a witness of the same” (*Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 6:762).

⁶⁹Like the Reformers before him, Gill strongly opposed a sacramental understanding of marriage and any ceremonies that might suggest this view. See, for example, John Gill, *The Dissenters’ Reasons for Separating from the Church of England in Sermons and Tracts*, 2:380.

⁷⁰He continued, “Wherefore either to divorce her, or marry another, was a breach of covenant; for by covenant is not meant the covenant of God made with the people of Israel, in which they both were; but the covenant of marriage made between them, and which was broken by such practices.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 6:763.

⁷¹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:341. Interestingly, Gill compares the wayward woman in this passage to the Church of Rome who had forsaken Christ and become a harlot. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:372–73.

presence in the marriage covenant calls individuals to particular standards of conduct. Adultery is abhorrent because it destroys the covenant bond created by God himself. Following the Puritans, Gill argued that sexual intercourse itself is “a natural action” that “may be performed without sin” within the context of marriage. However, any sexual activity outside of the marriage bond is imprudent and shameful, something even pagans could recognize.⁷²

Since adultery destroys the marriage covenant and defiles the name of God, Gill went to great lengths to warn of its dangers. His commentary on Proverbs 5 and 7 focused on the perils of the adulterous woman and demonstrated pastoral sensitivity in attempting to steer young men away from her. One danger in adulterous relationships is that they are difficult to get out of once commenced. “Generally speaking,” he explained, “such as are ensnared by an adulterous woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are as bands, are held so fast by her that they seldom get out again, though some few may escape.”⁷³ Once a man turns to a harlot, “they follow them in a view of pleasure, but it ends in ruin; if not in the loss of bodily life, by the revengeful husband or civil magistrate; yet in the destruction of their immortal souls.”⁷⁴ As Gill explained in his discussion of Leviticus 18:20, the actions of an adulterous man have far-reaching consequences: “The adulterer defiles himself; all sin is of a defiling nature, but especially this, which defiles a man both in soul and body, and brings a blot and stain upon his character, which shall not be wiped off.”⁷⁵

⁷²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:143. Gill pointed out that even the pagan Abimelech was able to recognize that he ought not to lay with Sarai once he learned she was Abram’s wife.

⁷³Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:341.

⁷⁴Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:375. See also, Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:392–93, 481, 489.

⁷⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:640. Similarly, he noted with reference to Prov 2:18, “Committing sin with an harlot hurts both soul and body” (*Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:359).

King David demonstrated the dangers of adultery when he sinfully took Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, for himself. David's actions were evil in the sight of God and provided a warning for others, both male and female. Much of Gill's discussion of adultery focused on men being led astray by wayward women because that was the context in view in passages such as Proverbs 5 and 7. However, Gill did not follow the tendency in his day to ascribe blame for sexual wantonness to one sex or the other in particular; he understood lust to be motivated by sin and selfishness and considered both men and women capable (and culpable) of sexual sin.⁷⁶ In the story of David and Bathsheba, for example, he noted the sin of both parties and concluded with a general warning to all who are married:

[The story of David and Bathsheba] is recorded to show what the best of men are, when left to themselves; how strong and prevalent corrupt nature is in regenerate persons, when grace is not in exercise; what need the saints stand in of fresh supplies of grace, to keep them from falling; what caution is necessary to everyone that stands, lest he fall; and that it becomes us to abstain from all appearance of sin, and whatever lends unto it, and to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation.⁷⁷

So how can one resist the temptations of adultery? First, Gill argued that individuals should pursue true spirituality rooted in the Gospel of Christ: "Nothing has a greater tendency than Christ and his Gospel, and an intimate acquaintance with them, and a retention of them, to keep from all sin, from all fleshly lusts, from the sin of uncleanness."⁷⁸ Second, Gill encouraged couples to take full advantage of the privileges of matrimony. He considered the marriage bed "the proper antidote against [adultery]" and counseled men to drink deeply from its blessings:

Take a wife and cleave to her, and enjoy all the pleasures and comforts of a marriage-state. As every man formerly had his own cistern for the reception of water for his own use (2 Kgs 18:31), so every man should have his own wife, and

⁷⁶See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:536. For the context for this comparison, see the discussion above in chap. 2.

⁷⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:606.

⁷⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:371.

but one; and as drinking water quenches thirst, and allays heat; so the lawful enjoyments of the marriage-bed quench the thirst of the appetite, and allay the heat of lust.⁷⁹

Regarding this metaphor taken from Proverbs 5, Gill continued, “The pure, chaste, and innocent pleasures of the marriage-state, are as different from the embraces of an harlot, who is compared to a deep ditch and a narrow pit (Prov 23:27), as clear running waters of a well or fountain from the dirty waters of a filthy puddle (Prov 9:17).”⁸⁰ Thus, Gill understood lawful wedlock itself to provide inherent help for fulfilling the commitments called for in the marriage covenant.

Gill’s definition of the nature of marriage was principally derived from Genesis 2:24, which he called “the law of marriage.”⁸¹ In summary, this design called for an inseparable union between one man and one woman in lawful marriage, which in its very nature prohibited “polygamy, unlawful divorces, and all uncleanness, fornication, and adultery.”⁸² The final aspect of Gill’s definition to be noted is its consistency with God’s purposes for marriage.

Agreeable to the Original Creation

Gill argued that marriage is a “very honourable estate” because it was instituted by God and confirmed by Christ.⁸³ Gill noted the significance of God having created marriage in paradise before sin entered the world and the fact that Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding ceremony.⁸⁴ In addition, he pointed out the honorable purposes of marriage in the plan of God, following the general categories

⁷⁹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:362.

⁸⁰Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:362.

⁸¹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:106.

⁸²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:21.

⁸³Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 974. See also *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 311.

⁸⁴See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:758.

established in the Puritan-Reformed tradition: to portray the relationship of Christ and his church, to provide companionship between the spouses, to preserve chastity by avoiding temptation, and to produce godly offspring.⁸⁵

Beginning with the latter, Gill considered procreation “a natural action, [that] might have been, and may be performed without sin.”⁸⁶ He viewed Genesis 1:28 not as a command to marry and have children, but pointed out that it “seems to be more than a bare permission.”⁸⁷ Consistent with his theological forerunners, Gill strongly rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of clerical celibacy.⁸⁸ In discussing Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:1, he argued, “The apostle’s meaning is not that it is unlawful to marry, or that it is sinful to lie with a woman in lawful wedlock; but that it is much better, and more expedient on several accounts to abstain from the use of women, when persons have the gift of continency.”⁸⁹ However, he considered this gift to be rare and insisted celibacy was not inherently holier than the married life. Those who choose to remain single for the sake of the kingdom, do so “not in order, by their chaste and single life, to merit and obtain the kingdom of glory.” Rather, by avoiding the encumbrances of matrimony, they can more freely “attend the worship and service of God, the ordinances of the Gospel church-state, to minister in, and preach the Gospel of Christ, and be a means of spreading

⁸⁵Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 974. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:484, where Gill only lists procreation and prevention of fornication among the ends of marriage.

⁸⁶Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:11.

⁸⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:11.

⁸⁸In Prov 7:14, for example, he suggests that the wayward woman’s reference to having paid her vows can be likened to “the vows of virginity and celibacy, through a show of which the most shocking iniquities are committed by members of the church of Rome.” Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:373. Throughout Gill’s exposition of Prov 5 and 7, he compares the Roman Catholic Church to the harlot. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:485.

⁸⁹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:642.

it in the world, and of enlarging his kingdom and interest.”⁹⁰ This is an honorable ambition but Gill felt strongly that no one should be forced into it. On the contrary, the typical pattern for most people would be to marry and have children. This course was not only permissible under God but also fulfilled the design of creation:

When persons not only find in them some lustful motions and desires, and a glowing heat of concupiscence; but are as it were all on fire with the lusts of the flesh, and in great danger of being drawn into the commission of fornication, adultery, or other pollutions, and even unnatural lusts; it is much better to enter into a marriage-state, though it may have its cares, inconveniences, and difficulties, than to be under temptations and inclinations to such defilements.⁹¹

In this way, Gill recognized that marriage could protect individuals from the temptation of fornication. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:2, Gill summarized the Apostle Paul’s message as follows: “Let every man that has a wife enjoy her, and make use of her, and let every woman that has an husband, receive him into her embraces.” Such instructions, rooted in the Scriptures, “teach us that marriage, and the use of it, are proper remedies against fornication; and that carnal copulation of a man with a woman ought only to be of husband and wife.”⁹²

In fact, once a couple is married, Gill would have them to understand the duty they bear to one another to provide sexual satisfaction. Were a wife to refrain from supplying what the Scripture termed “due benevolence” to her husband, it would be an abomination, for the husband “has sole power over it, and may require when he pleases the use of it.”⁹³ Gill considered this duty to one another to be mutual so that the wife possessed the same authority over her husband’s body. To give up marital relations

⁹⁰Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 7:214. For a similar perspective from the Puritan tradition, see Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 1:400–401.

⁹¹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:645.

⁹²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:642.

⁹³Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:643. For a similar perspective from the Puritan era, see William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 221–22.

entirely, like some Roman Catholics who sought to be celibate within marriage, “would be contrary to the will of God, the institution and end of marriage, and of dangerous consequence to either party.”⁹⁴ Gill feared that if couples did not make use of the due benevolence owed to one another in marriage, they would expose themselves to the temptations of Satan.

Although he recognized the spiritual purposes of marital sexuality, Gill followed the Puritans in calling for temperance, arguing that the Apostle Paul “suggests a moderate use of [the marriage-bed].” The Apostle, in Gill’s words, “would not have them give up themselves to lasciviousness and carnal lusts and pleasures, even with their own wives, and spend their time altogether in their company and embraces.” Rather, “Since the time of life was short, and that full of troubles, they should spend it in the service and worship of God, private and public, as much as possible; and not in the indulging and satisfying of the flesh.”⁹⁵ Gill saw no contradiction between these two perspectives. Couples ought to grant one another the due benevolence necessary to avoid temptation, but they should not focus so much on their sexual freedom that they are distracted from service to God.

A third purpose for marriage was mutual companionship. Gill acknowledged that God had created the woman in part to fulfill this need in man. The Creator had recognized that it was not good for man to be alone, “not pleasant and comfortable to himself, nor agreeable to his nature, being a social creature; nor useful to his species, not being able to propagate it; nor useful to his species, not being able to propagate it; nor so much for the glory of his Creator.”⁹⁶ So God created Eve to be Adam’s helper and companion. Gill described the intended responsibilities of the wife as follows:

⁹⁴Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:643.

⁹⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:653.

⁹⁶Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:11.

One to help him in all the affairs of life, not only for the propagation of his species, but to provide things useful and comfortable for him; to dress his food, and take care of the affairs of the family; one like himself in nature, temper, and disposition, in form and shape . . . that would be pleasing to his sight, and with whom he might delightfully converse, and be in all respects agreeable to him, and entirely answerable to his case and circumstances, his wants and wishes.⁹⁷

Gill's description of the woman acknowledged that her function was agreeable in various ways with God's purposes for the institution. Eve supplied practical assistance to Adam, pleasing company for his enjoyment, and was, of course, essential to the procreative purpose. Although Gill called for wives to be agreeable to their husbands in all respects, he did not consider the woman inferior to the man. Rather, he subtly argued for equality by picking up on a favorite Puritan image, the notion that Eve was created from Adam's side, not from his head lest she rule over him nor from his feet lest she be trampled upon.⁹⁸ In addition, Gill pointed out the great care which God exercised in crafting her. Eve was *built* (not created or formed) to signify that "she is the foundation of the house or family, and the means of building it up."⁹⁹ At the heart of the marriage

⁹⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:20.

⁹⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:20–21. This phrase is typically attributed to Matthew Henry (1662–1714), who observed in regard to Gen 2:22, "That the woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved." Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 10. While Henry is often cited as the originator of this quote, it goes back much further. Henry may have picked it up from the earlier Puritan Matthew Poole (1624–1679), who noted, "The woman was taken out of this part, not out of the higher or lower parts, to show that she is neither to be her husband's mistress, to usurp authority over him, nor yet to be his slave, to be abused, despised or trampled under his feet; but to be kindly treated, and used like a companion, with moderation, respect, and affection." Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1683; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 7. This insight traces back to the twelfth-century theologian Peter Lombard (1100–1160), who commented, "In the beginning . . . if [the woman] had been made from the highest part, as from the head, she might seem created for domination; but if from the lowest part, as from the feet, she might seem to be created for subjection to slavery. But because she is taken as neither mistress, nor as slave-girl, she is made from the middle, that is, from the side, because she is taken for conjugal partnership." Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007), 172.

⁹⁹Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:21. In addition, Gill pointed out how God presenting Eve to Adam, confirmed several significant aspects of marriage: that a bride should have the consent of her parents, that parents should assist their children in finding a good partner, and that marriage should be held in honor.

relationship, then, was the companionship of husband and wife.¹⁰⁰ His vision for mutual companionship was consistent with that of his Puritan predecessors:

She is his companion in prosperity and adversity; shares with him in his cares and troubles, in his joys and sorrows; sympathizes with him in all conditions, weeps when he weeps, and rejoices when he rejoices; she is a partner with him in the blessings of grace now, and will be a partner with him in eternal glory.¹⁰¹

Thus, Gill defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman, joined in covenant by God for his holy purposes. Central to his understanding of marriage was an emphasis on God's action in the creation and design of the institution, as well as his role in enacting each individual marriage. Since he tied the relationship so closely to God himself, Gill believed that God's reputation was in, one sense, wrapped up in every marriage, a fact that should compel couples toward conforming to his standards. Gill summarized this point as follows: "In short, both parties should consult each other's pleasure, peace, comfort, and happiness, and especially the glory of God; that his word, ways, and worship, may not be reproached and evil spoken of, through any conduct of theirs (Titus 2:5)."¹⁰²

Christ and the Church

While John Gill acknowledged the purposes of procreation, protection, and companionship, he did not consider any of them to be the ultimate end of marriage. The most significant purpose of marriage, according to Gill, was the way in which the union between husband and wife served as an emblem of Christ's relationship with his church. On this point, which is threaded throughout his many discussions of marriage, Sharon James calls Gill "eloquent," for "he never loses sight of the fact that [marriage] is a

¹⁰⁰Gill found a positive example of this kind of mutuality in Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac, he pointed out, loved her, "as a man ought to love his wife, even as his own body; and she was a person to be beloved, being very fair, and of a goodly countenance." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:171.

¹⁰¹Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

¹⁰²Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976.

picture of the love of Christ for the church.”¹⁰³ A quick scan of Gill’s commentaries proves James’ assertion. He considered the first marriage between Adam and Eve “a type of the marriage of Christ, the second Adam, between him and his church.”¹⁰⁴ The marriage of Christ has been revealed progressively over the span of redemption history, as he explained in his notes on the fifth verse of Isaiah 54:

That is, Christ, the Husband of the church, and of every true believer; who secretly betrothed them to himself in eternity, having asked him of his father; and, being given to him, openly espouses them in conversion, one by one, as a chaste virgin; which he will do more publicly in a body at the last day, when the marriage of the Lamb will come, when he will appear as the bridegroom of his people; and to which character he acts up, by loving them with a love of complacency and delight, most affectionately and constantly; by sympathizing with them in all their troubles; by nourishing and cherishing them as his own flesh, and interesting them in all he is and has.¹⁰⁵

When commenting on Paul’s quotation of Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:32, Gill expounded in great detail how the marriage of Adam and Eve was a “figure and emblem of the mysterious union between Christ and his people:”

For the leaving of father and mother prefigured Christ’s coming in this world in human nature, and his disregard to his earthly parents, in comparison with his people, and his service for them; the man cleaving to the wife very aptly expresses the strong affection of Christ to his church, and the near communion there is between them; and indeed, the marriage of Adam and Eve was a type of Christ and his church; for in this the first Adam was a figure of him that was to come, as well as in being a federal head to his posterity: Adam was before Eve, so Christ was before his church; God thought it not proper that man should be alone, so neither Christ, but that he should have some fellows and companions with him: the formation of Eve from Adam was typical of the church’s production from Christ; she was made of him while he was asleep, which sleep was from the Lord, and it was not an ordinary one; which may resemble the sufferings and death of Christ, which were from the Lord, and were not common; and which are the redemption of

¹⁰³James, “Reflections on Women, Marriage, and Divorce,” *John Gill*, 216. Similarly, George Ella has remarked, “[Gill’s] doctrines of the atonement and redemption show clearly a suffering Husband dying vicariously for the Bride he loved, loves and always will love. Few have depicted this truth better than Gill.” Ella, *John Gill*, 24.

¹⁰⁴Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:21. He went on to say the church “sprung from him, from his side; and is of the same nature with him, and was presented by his divine Father to him, who gave her to him; and he received her to himself as his spouse and bride.”

¹⁰⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 5:318. For more on Gill’s eschatology, see Crawford Gribben, “John Gill and Puritan Eschatology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (October 2001): 311–26.

his church and people; and which secure their comfort and happiness, and well-being: she was taken out of his side, and built up a woman of one of his ribs; both the justification and sanctification of the church are from Christ, from the water and the blood which issued out of him; and to the same Adam was she brought of whose rib she was made, and that not against her will: so it is God that draws souls to Christ, and espouses them to him, even the same that he has chosen in him, and Christ has redeemed by his blood; and to the same are they brought, who was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their sins; and they are made willing in the day of his power upon them, to come and give themselves to him. Adam's consent and acknowledgement of Eve to be his wife shadow forth Christ's hearty reception and acknowledgement of the saints, as being of him, and his, when they are brought unto him under the influences of his grace and spirit.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the relationship of Christ and his church consistently shaped Gill's thought on marriage and, in many cases, was explicitly mentioned in discussions of the subject.¹⁰⁷ This emphasis led him at times to even find the concept in passages that seemed to teach otherwise. For example, he interpreted Proverbs 31 as an extended meditation on the church in loving submission to Christ and made no practical comments about its usefulness for guiding women in everyday life.¹⁰⁸ This interpretation was a departure from the Puritan tradition, but is traceable back to the Patristic Era.¹⁰⁹ It was also consistent with his reading of other Old Testament passages, particularly the Song of Solomon. Gill, like most of the Puritans, read the Song of Solomon as an allegory of the spiritual marriage between Christ and the church.¹¹⁰ This relationship, not the individual unions of human husbands and wives, was primary for Gill's understanding of marriage.

¹⁰⁶Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:106. For a discussion of this quotation as an illustration of Gill's larger theological system, see Haykin and Clary, "Baptist Marriage," 32–33.

¹⁰⁷For more examples, see Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 5:364–65, 403, 6:74, 6:387–88, 9:859, and 9:871–72.

¹⁰⁸See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:543–49.

¹⁰⁹Both Henry and Poole interpret Proverbs 31 as the description of the virtuous woman. For an example of a Patristic theologian who provided an allegorical reading of the passage, see Caesarius of Arles, "Sermon 139.1," in *Sermons, Volume 2 (81–186)*, trans. Mary Magdeleine Mueller, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 47:26.

¹¹⁰See also Jerad A. File, "John Gill's Ecclesiology with Reference to his Work: An Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song commonly called Canticles," Th.M. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010. For more on the Puritan interpretation of Song of Songs, see Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

Thus, the spiritual marriage of Christ and his church lay at the heart of Gill's thought on matrimony and was significant to understanding God's purposes for the institution.

The Relationship of Husband and Wife

Gill believed that God's purposes for marriage were ultimately realized when each spouse exercised the specific duties of their individual roles. These roles were grounded in the pages of Scripture rather than the persuasions of his day. Gill summarized these respective responsibilities of the husband and wife as follows: "love on the one part, and reverence on the other."¹¹¹

The Duties of Husbands

Gill called for a husband's love to be "hearty and sincere, and not feigned and selfish; it should be shown in private, as well as in public: it should be chaste and single, constant and perpetual."¹¹² Like the Puritan William Gouge, he encouraged men to express their love lavishly. A husband should be "greatly delighted with . . . loving [his wife] and being loved by her." If he should commit an error, Gill contended, "Let it be on the side of love, in loving her too much; better err in loving her than in loving a strange woman."¹¹³ Such sentiments would have likely been well-received in Gill's day, as many of his contemporaries similarly encouraged the expression of affections.¹¹⁴ What Gill called the husband to, however, was more than the romanticism of his day; it was a

¹¹¹Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 973–74. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:104, 204.

¹¹²Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:104.

¹¹³Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:362. Similarly, Gouge instructed the husband "so highly to esteem, so ardently to affect, so tenderly to respect her, as others may think him even to dote on her. A husband's affection to his wife cannot be too great if it is kept within the bonds of honesty, sobriety and comeliness." Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 361.

¹¹⁴For a discussion of the concept of romantic love in England at this time, see Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 174–208.

committed and sacrificial love rooted in the person and work of Christ.

The love of husbands for their wives, following the example of Christ, should consist in,

A strong and cordial affection for them; in a real delight and pleasure in them; in shewing respect, and doing honour to them; in seeking their contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure; in a quiet, constant, and comfortable dwelling with them; in providing all things necessary for them; in protecting them from all injuries and abuses; in concealing their faults, and covering their infirmities; in entertaining the best opinion of their persons and actions; and in endeavoring to promote their spiritual good and welfare.¹¹⁵

He defined the nature of this love according to the following qualities: a husband's love should be unique ("superior to any shown to any other creature"); it should be rooted in affection ("a love of complacency and delight"); it must be singular ("a man should not have more wives than one"); and it ought to be mutual ("the wife is to love the husband, as the husband the wife").¹¹⁶ Such love ought to result in loving actions, not merely verbal expressions. For Gill, these actions included provision for the wife's temporal good, physical protection, care for her peace and comfort, and finally, spiritual encouragement.¹¹⁷ Although Gill took the biblical language of the woman being "the weaker vessel" quite literally, he did not use this notion as a basis for asserting male dominance.¹¹⁸ Rather, this truth was an encouragement for the husband to exercise prudent leadership in his family.¹¹⁹ Gill considered these responsibilities to be ordered by

¹¹⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* 9:104. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 2:402, 2:404, and 9:557.

¹¹⁶Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

¹¹⁷Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975. See also his comments on Proverbs 5:18: "Thy wife, make her happy by keeping to her and from others; by behaving in a loving, affable, and respectful manner to her; by living comfortably with her, and providing well for her and her children." Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:362.

¹¹⁸See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:557. Whereas Gill considered women to be weaker "as to strength of body, and endowments of the mind," he argued that such a reality ought to compel the man to lead "gently and tenderly" rather than to treat her "with neglect and contempt, or with inhumanity and severity."

¹¹⁹Gill noted Adam's lack of leadership in the Garden and pointed out that Satan attacked Eve

a wise Creator who had crafted men to fulfill these specific roles in the home.

In her summary of Gill on this subject, James critiqued his failure to cast a vision of the husband's responsibility to lead his wife toward spiritual maturity by using her spiritual gifts in ministry.¹²⁰ While Gill perhaps could have said more on this subject, James did not mention his point noted above regarding the way a husband should express love for his wife by promoting her spiritual welfare. Going against her own admonition not to judge Gill by contemporary standards, James quoted modern theologians John Piper and Wayne Grudem to say, "Any kind of leadership that . . . tends to foster in a wife personal immaturity . . . has missed the point of the analogy in Ephesians 5."¹²¹ While James employed this quotation to correct Gill, this seems to be a notion with which he would have agreed. In explaining the love of a husband in *A Body of Practical Divinity*, he argued that a husband should seek his wife's "conversion, if [she is] unconverted, and her spiritual peace, comfort, and edification, she being an heir with him of the grace of life."¹²² Gill would have the husband pursue his wife's spiritual growth "by joining her in all religious exercises; in family worship, in reading, in prayer, in praise, in Christian conference and conversation; by instructing her in everything relating to doctrine, duty, and church-discipline."¹²³ Thus, contra the suggestion of James, Gill's vision for the husband's love included both physical and spiritual care.

when she was alone "and her husband not with her, to aid and assist, counsel and protect her" (*Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 320).

¹²⁰Although not cited, James may also have in mind Gill's comments about women teaching in reference to 2 Tim 2:12. However, it should be noted that while Gill argued that women were prohibited from teaching with authority over a man, he affirmed the teaching ministry that women can rightly have with children and other women. See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 3:285–86.

¹²¹James, "Reflections on Women, Marriage, and Divorce," 218. James is quoting from John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 64.

¹²²Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

¹²³Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

Gill also emphasized the reasons enforcing this duty for husbands, noting “the nearness between them . . . the help, advantage, and profit he receives by her . . . [and] the glory and honour she is unto him.”¹²⁴ The most significant grounds for a husband’s love, however, is the love of Christ to his church, “which is the pattern and exemplar of a man’s love to his wife.”¹²⁵ Thus, every action of the husband toward his wife should be informed by the union of Christ and his people.

The Duties of Wives

Gill followed a similar pattern when discussing the duties of the faithful wife. He believed that her disposition toward her husband should chiefly include reverence, submission, and obedience.¹²⁶ A wife ought to revere her husband, speaking of him and to him respectfully, rather than despising him in her heart. In this way, Gill entreated women to follow the example of Abraham’s wife Sarah (1 Pet 3:6) instead of Michal, the wife of David (2 Sam 6:16).¹²⁷ He noted that godly women adorn themselves with “meekness and humility, and in a quiet deportment,” whereas, “lewd women are generally very talkative.”¹²⁸

While Gill clearly taught that a woman was to obey her husband, he was quick to underscore the biblical limits of the husband’s leadership. A wife is to submit to her own husband only and “not in any thing that is contrary to the laws of God and Christ.”¹²⁹

¹²⁴Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

¹²⁵Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975–76.

¹²⁶Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 6:381.

¹²⁷Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:556.

¹²⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:556, 4:374.

¹²⁹Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:104.

Furthermore, her submission “is not a servile one” but rather “as the body, and members of it, are subject to the head, by which they are governed, guided, and directed to what is for their good . . . in a wise, tender, and gentle manner.”¹³⁰ The one-flesh union of man and wife should shape their relationship with one another. As the husband is motivated toward loving leadership because of his wife’s nearness to him, so also the wife is encouraged in her submission by the reality of this bond.

In addition to respect and obedience, a wife should provide “assistance and help in family affairs,” agreeable to the original purpose of her creation. Under a wife’s assistance to her husband, Gill included “guiding the house with discretion, keeping her children and servants in good order and decorum, abiding at home, and managing all domestic business with wisdom and prudence.”¹³¹ This list of duties is somewhat parallel to Rippon’s description of Elizabeth Gill.¹³² Finally, a wife should assume no authority over her husband and should continue with him “in every state and circumstance of life.”¹³³ When wives fulfill their biblical duties to their husbands, they not only improve their own reputation but also that of their husband.¹³⁴ In his commentary on Ephesians 5:22, Gill summarized the role of godly wives as follows:

They should think well of their husbands, speak becomingly to them, and respectfully of them; the wife should take care of the family, and family affairs, according to the husband’s will; should imitate him in what is good, and bear with that which is not so agreeable; she should not curiously inquire into his business, but leave the management of it to him; she should help and assist in caring and providing for the family; and should abide with him in prosperity and adversity, and do nothing without his will and consent.¹³⁵

¹³⁰Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976.

¹³¹Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976. See also Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 8:654, 9:103–4, 204, and 354.

¹³²See Rippon, *Brief Memoir of the Late John Gill*, 9–10.

¹³³Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976.

¹³⁴Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 975.

¹³⁵Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:103–4. For the impact that such wives

In his commentary on Genesis, Gill further illustrated his concept of the ideal wife, in describing the kind of woman that Abraham's servant sought for Isaac. The servant sought the woman who offered him a drink of water because "hereby he would know that she was a careful and industrious person, willing to set her hand to business when necessary; that she was humane and courteous to strangers; humble and condescending, and willing to do the meanest offices for the good of others."¹³⁶

While these descriptions may concern twenty-first century readers, one must remember Gill's context and the general acceptance of inequality in the home at the time. In addition, his various admonitions to husbands regarding loving leadership should be noted. Gill envisioned a Christian home where a wife could joyfully submit to her husband, trusting his leadership and acknowledging his God-given authority in the family. Furthermore, Gill asserted that wives should recognize that God has ordained this structure in the family. A wife should keep in mind the following reasons for her unique role in the family as she performs her duties: "the time, matter, and end of the woman's creation, she was made after him, out of him, and for him; and from her fall, and being first in the transgression; and from her being the weaker and inferior sex; and from the profitableness and comeliness of it."¹³⁷ Although Gill argued that gender distinctions were a part of the original created order, he did acknowledge that the curse had disrupted gender relationships. "It looks as if before the transgression [of Eve] there was a greater equality between the man and the woman, or man did not exercise the authority over the woman he afterwards did, or the subjection of her to him was more pleasant and agreeable than now it would be."¹³⁸ Through the Gospel, however, equality of value was

could have on their unbelieving husbands, see Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:555.

¹³⁶Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:165.

¹³⁷Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* 9:104. See also Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 976.

¹³⁸Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 1:28.

restored, even as the unique roles within the home remained.¹³⁹ As with the husband, Gill pointed the wife to the example of Christ and his church for her ultimate motivation¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

A few summative thoughts will conclude this study of marriage in the life and theology of John Gill. As has been demonstrated, Gill was a man of his times, calling for the husband's authority in the home and noting the necessity of affection between the spouses. Yet, he transcended his context by considering the marriage relationship through the lens of Scripture. He grounded his teaching in the relationship of Christ and his church so that marriages would provide a faithful picture of the Lord's union with his people. His understanding of the purposes of marriage and overall spirituality of marriage was in strong continuity with the Puritan tradition. As such, his legacy is not so much by way of innovation but in the fact that he faithfully articulated the duties and definitions of this honorable estate to his own generation.

While some may read his descriptions of the role of husbands and wives as an affirmation of strong patriarchy, it is best to remember Gill's context when assessing his views. Rather than blaming him for living in a time that undervalued women, he should be credited with preserving a pure vision of marriage that was ultimately grounded in the gospel of Christ.¹⁴¹ This vision provided a firm foundation for future generations, including the subject of the following chapter, Samuel Stennett.

¹³⁹See Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:557–58.

¹⁴⁰Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9:104.

¹⁴¹This statement is a deliberate echo of Thomas Nettles' concluding assessment of Gill's soteriological views. In an attempt to correct modern caricatures and misrepresentations of Gill, Nettles wrote, "Perhaps, rather than imputing blame upon Gill for the leanness of the times, he should be credited with preserving gospel purity, which eventuated in the efforts to use means for the conversion of the heathen" (*By His Grace and for His Glory*, 107).

CHAPTER 5
MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY
OF SAMUEL STENNETT

On a cold February day in 1758, John Gill preached the funeral sermon for the Reverend Joseph Stennett II (1692–1758), the late pastor of the Particular Baptist church that met at Little Wild Street in London. As Gill neared the end of his message at the elaborately decorated chapel in Charter House Square, he paused to address the pastor’s grieving family. “What shall I say? The stroke upon you is heavy; the providence is very afflicting. The loss of such an indulgent husband, tender father, kind brother, amiable relation, and loving friend is a great one indeed!”¹ This family was well-known throughout London, possessing considerable wealth and many prominent social connections. However, the most significant legacy of the Stennett family was its faith, evidenced by the number of Dissenting ministers that came from its ranks in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. Among the black-clad mourners that day who would continue in this godly heritage was one of Joseph’s sons, Samuel, who assumed his father’s pastorate and eventually published the most significant work on marriage and family by a Baptist in the eighteenth century. This chapter will examine the role that these subjects played in Stennett’s life and theology through a survey of his life and an examination of his most influential work on the subject, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*.

¹John Gill, “The Mutual Gain of Christ and Christians in their Life and Death,” in *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), 1:550. Various details about this funeral and its expenses are available in L. G. Champion, “The Social Status of Some 18th-century Baptist Ministers,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (January 1973): 10–14.

The Life of Samuel Stennett

Samuel Stennett was a fourth-generation pastor in the Particular Baptist denomination.² His great-grandfather, Edward Stennett (d. 1691), was a wealthy physician who pastored a congregation that met in his own castle.³ The epitaph for Edward and his wife, Mary Quelch (d. 1705) suggests that, among other things, the eldest Stennett passed on a legacy of godly marriage.⁴ The son of this “holy and happy pair,” Joseph Stennett I (1663–1713), pastored the Baptist Church at Pinners’ Hall and wrote a number of influential hymns.⁵ His son, Joseph II, was the pastor of the Baptist congregation at Little Wild Street in Lincoln’s Inn Fields for nearly twenty years, earning a reputation as both an eloquent preacher and an ardent patriot.⁶ Thus, Samuel Stennett was blessed with a godly heritage of faithful ministers, who had impacted the British

²The biographical sketch that follows is drawn from the following sources: William Jones, “Some Account of the Life and Writings of the Author,” in *The Works of Samuel Stennett* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1824), 1:v–xxxviii; Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton, 1830), 4:351–64; B. A. Ramsbottom, “The Stennetts,” in *British Particular Baptists 1638–1910*, ed. by Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 1:132–44; J. H. Y. Briggs, “Samuel Stennett,” in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 2:1047; S. L. Copson, “Stennett, Samuel (1728–1795),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. G. C. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52:403; and B. A. Ramsbottom, *Sing Aloud in Jesus’ Name: Some Lesser Known Hymnwriters* (Stotfold, UK: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 2005), 35–38.

³For more on Edward Stennett, see R. L. Greaves, “Stennett (or Stennet), Edwards (d. 1705),” in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton, UK: The Harvester Press, 1984), 3:204–5.

⁴The epitaph, written by their son, Joseph I, read, “Here lies an holy and happy pair; As once in grace, they now in glory share. They dared to suffer, but they feared to sin, And meekly bore the cross the crown to win; So lived, as not to be afraid to die; So died, as heirs of immortality.” Steven Bedney, ed., *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America* (1910; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1980), 1:96.

⁵The great hymnist Isaac Watts unapologetically drew certain phrases from Stennett’s work. Ramsbottom, “The Stennetts,” 137. For more on the hymns of Joseph Stennett I, see Michael A. G. Haykin, “‘At Thy Table . . . Thy Loveliness I View’: The Person of Jesus Christ in the Hymns of Joseph Stennett I,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (April 2013): 69–86. For more on hymn-singing in this time period, see Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson, “Particular Baptist Debates about Communion and Hymn-Singing,” in *‘Drawn into Controversie’: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 284–308.

⁶Ramsbottom related a story of Stennett’s influence for patriotic causes and also noted that “he was very friendly with various of the most eminent persons in England in his day” (“The Stennetts,” 139).

Particular Baptists for over a century.⁷

However, as his biographer was quick to point out, Samuel Stennett's prominence "was not a borrowed lustre, reflected from the virtues of his progenitors."⁸ Rather, his character "beamed forth its native goodness" to all who knew him.⁹ A survey of the descriptions given to him at his various memorial sermons further illustrates his reputation.¹⁰ Daniel Turner (1710–1798), the aged pastor of the Baptist congregation at Abingdon, considered Stennett "a very dear and highly esteemed friend" who was "distinguished among the Protestant Dissenting Ministers for his useful learning, cultivated taste, [and] extensive knowledge" and marked by "a spirit of genuine piety and virtue."¹¹ Dan Taylor (1738–1816) called him "one of the best men, and one of the best

⁷For additional resources on the Stennett family, see *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, 1:93–102; *The Works of the late Reverend and Learned Mr. Joseph Stennett* (London: n.p., 1732); S. L. Copson, "Stennett, Joseph (1663–1713)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 52:403; B. A. Ramsbottom, *Through Cloud and Sunshine: Four generations of faithful witness—the story of the Stennett family* (Oxford: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 1982).

⁸This statement is attributed to Dr. Winters, who penned a brief sketch of Stennett's character for the Protestant Dissenter's Magazine following his death. This piece is quoted in Jones, *Life and Writings of the Author* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxi–xxvii. According to Ivimey, Winters was a Paedobaptist (*History of the English Baptists*, 4:363). Stennett's biographer William Jones (1762–1846) was a London bookseller and Scotch Baptist who wrote a number of histories and memoirs from this time period. For more on Jones, see Derek B. Murray, "Jones, William (1762–1846)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 30:675.

⁹Dr. Winters, quoted in Jones, "Life and Writings of the Author," in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxi.

¹⁰Joseph Jenkins (1743–1819), whom Stennett baptized and trained in ministry, preached his funeral sermon while Abraham Booth (1734–1806) addressed the crowd at his interment. These two addresses were published together as Joseph Jenkins, *The Love of the Brethren, proceeding from a Perception of the Love of God: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D. . . . Together with the Address at the Interment by Abraham Booth* (London: Bye and Law, 1795). Several other friends and colleagues preached memorial sermons in Stennett's honor and later published them as follows: John Evans, *A Sermon Preached at Worship-Street, Shoreditch, October 18, 1795; Being a Sincere Tribute of Respect to the Memory of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D., the Rev. Andrew Kippis, D. D., and the Rev. Rice Harris, D. D.* (London: C. Whittingham, 1795); Daniel Turner, *The Gracious Presence of God, the Chief Joy of His People, Considered in a Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.* (Oxford: R. Watts, 1795); Dan Taylor, *A Good Minister of Jesus Christ. A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.* (London: n.p., 1795).

¹¹Turner, *Gracious Presence of God*, 2, 22.

ministers.”¹² Given Taylor’s role as an influential General Baptist leader, his assessment of Stennett’s wider influence is particularly noteworthy:

The good Minister now called from us, the late Rev. Dr. Stennett, was singularly qualified to benefit Society at large. The esteem in which he was held by men of all parties, his extensive connections, his acquaintance with those in superior stations, his benevolent and truly liberal disposition, his great prudence, his polite behavior, his various learning and knowledge, and his genuine piety, singularly qualified him for extensive public usefulness.¹³

The circumstances of Stennett’s conversion are unknown but he seems to have come to Christ at an early age and was baptized by his father. His hymn, “Praise for Conversion,” based on Psalm 66:16, is thought to contain allusions to his own experience.¹⁴ He trained for ministry under the Rev. John Hubbard (1692–1743), a pastor and theological tutor in Stepney, and Dr. John Walker, a prominent London linguist. After serving as an assistant pastor under his father for a decade, he was ordained on June 1, 1758 as the pastor of the Particular Baptist Church at Little Wild Street with the aforementioned John Gill and the celebrated hymnist Benjamin Wallin (1711–1782) presiding over the service.¹⁵

Stennett was known for his sharp mind, genuine piety, and gentlemanly demeanor.¹⁶ Jenkins explained that he was both naturally-gifted—possessing “strength of his natural faculties, vigor of imagination, and acuteness of judgment”—and devoted to

¹²Taylor, *A Good Minister*, 3.

¹³Taylor, *A Good Minister*, 31. In closing his sermon, Taylor reminded his audience, “I make these observations on the death of this great man of God, partly as a tribute of respect to his memory; more especially as a tribute of gratitude to the God of all grace, who in love to us, and to our fellow creatures, made him so eminent in purity and in usefulness” (*A Good Minister*, 35).

¹⁴Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:viii.

¹⁵Stennett would eventually preach funeral sermons for each of these men. See Samuel Stennett, “The Victorious Christian Receiving the Crown. A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. John Gill,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:147–75 and Samuel Stennett, *The Faithful Minister Rewarded: A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Benjamin Wallin* (London: G. Keith, 1782).

¹⁶“He set the Lord always before him—had habitual recourse to prayer—and walked with God—was ever ready to forgive injuries, and disposed to put the best construction upon the actions of other people.” Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xiv.

study. According to Jenkins, Stennett “had added, from his earliest years, so close an attention to reflection and study, that there was scarcely a topic in science or literature, in religion, or even politics, but he seemed to have investigated.”¹⁷ His impressive gifts caught the attention of the King’s College in Aberdeen, which granted him a Doctor of Divinity in 1763.¹⁸ His written works earned him public acclaim throughout England and a number of his hymns, particularly “Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned” and “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks,” are still popular today.¹⁹

In his day, he was a man of many social connections, some of them quite prominent.²⁰ It was said that King George III was an intimate friend who visited Stennett’s home at Muswell Hill frequently.²¹ Stennett corresponded with James Manning, President of Rhode Island College (now Brown University), and encouraged the efforts of the college through his relationship with Morgan Edwards (1722–1795),

¹⁷Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 29.

¹⁸The Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey reported that this honor was unsolicited from Stennett: “Having devoted his life to the service of God, he sought not the honor which cometh from men, nor did the possession of it tend in any degree to lessen his exemplary humility.” Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:353.

¹⁹Stennett’s most influential publications include: *Sermons on Personal Religion* (1770), *Discourses on the Parable of the Sower* (1787), *Discourses on Divine Authority and the Various Use of the Holy Scriptures* (1790), and *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (1783), which will be discussed in detail below. Each of these volumes are available in Stennett’s collected works. In addition, Stennett authored nearly forty hymns, many of which appeared in the popular collection known as *Rippon’s Selection*. For a hymn related to the present subject, see “Children Dying in their Infancy in the Arms of Jesus,” in John Rippon, *Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors. An Appendix to Dr. Watt’s Psalms and Hymns* (London: n.p., 1815), 556.

²⁰Several of his eulogizers marveled at Stennett’s social connections and ability to relate to different segments of society. For example, Jenkins recalled, “In many a wretched apartment in this city have I been with him, when he has wept over the sick and dying...and yet, if called upon, he was so perfectly at ease in the higher circles of life, that respectable personages, in honourable stations and of noble rank, have sought and thought themselves honoured by his friendship.” Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 31.

²¹This information is recorded in various places. For example, see Reuben Aldridge Guild, *The Life, Times, and Correspondence of James Manning and the Early History of Brown University* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), 120. Stennett preached a sermon after the death of George II, who was said to be a friend of his father, Joseph II. For the sermon, see Samuel Stennett, “A Sermon on the Death of King George II,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:177–98. Joseph’s friendship with George II is mentioned in Champion, “Social Status of Some 18th-century Baptist Ministers,” 12.

whom he trained in theology before Edwards moved to America.²² The famous philanthropist and prison reformer, John Howard (1726–1790), regularly attended his sermons and expressed sincere appreciation for his ministry.²³ When Samuel Davies (1723–1761), a Presbyterian pastor in Virginia who would eventually become the president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), and Gilbert Tennent (1703–1764), the well-known New Jersey preacher who helped spark the colonial Great Awakening, visited England in the 1750s to raise money for the college, Stennett met with them multiple times.²⁴ His father, Joseph II, contributed to their efforts and introduced them to various distinguished members of London society.²⁵ It is from Davies’ journal that we learn of Stennett’s regular Monday evening meetings with Thomas Llewellyn (1720–1783), the pastor of Prescott Street Baptist Church and well-respected tutor, and Thomas Gibbons (1720–1785), an Independent minister and hymn-writer who was a close friend of Isaac Watts (1674–1748).²⁶

Stennett was thoroughly committed to Baptist principles, but his influence extended into the larger Dissenting community. John Newton (1725–1807) was clearly

²²For a sample of Manning’s correspondence with Stennett, see Guild, *Life of James Manning*, 120–25. Of Stennett’s work *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, Manning wrote, “I highly esteem them. I wish every family were possessed of the book.” Guild, *Life of James Manning*, 355.

²³Howard wrote to Stennett in 1786 to express his gratitude for “the many, many pleasant hours” he had spent reviewing his notes from Stennett’s sermons, which he called “the songs in the house of my pilgrimage.” For this letter, see “Letter from Mr. Howard to Dr. Stennett,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:459–60. In addition, Stennett preached a memorial sermon in Howard’s honor, taking Acts 5:38 as his text—“who went about doing good.” See Samuel Stennett, “A Sermon on the Death of John Howard, Esq.,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:279–300.

²⁴See George William Pilcher, *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad. The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753–1755* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 51, 59, 76, 81, and 120.

²⁵Davies remarked of Joseph II: “He is a judicious, prudent and candid Gent, and has more Influence in Court, than any Dissenting Minister in London” (Pilcher, *Davies Abroad*, 51). For an episode highlighting some of the elder Stennett’s social connections, see Pilcher, *Davies Abroad*, 70.

²⁶This practice is mentioned in Pilcher, *Davies Abroad*, 58–59. For more on Llewellyn, see Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:583–85. For more on Thomas Gibbons, see John Handby Thompson, “Gibbons, Thomas (1720–1785),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 22:38–39.

familiar with his ministry and it appears that John Wesley (1703–1791) knew of him as well.²⁷ One biographer noted that Stennett’s gifts and notoriety could have resulted in a more comfortable station in the Established Church, but “he chose rather to maintain a good conscience in the sight of God; for he was a Dissenter from *principle*.”²⁸

Stennett was also committed to his local congregation.²⁹ The Particular Baptist congregation at Little Wild Street was founded by John Piggott (d. 1713) near the end of the seventeenth century.³⁰ Under Stennett’s ministry, it was considered “the principal Baptist church in the metropolis.”³¹ According to Ivimey, the church had around sixty members at mid-century but by 1788, it had grown to the point that the chapel was enlarged to seat five hundred.³² In serving the church in one capacity or another for nearly fifty years, Stennett faithfully shepherded those entrusted to his care. Jones marveled at his ministry, in which he was known for “exhorting, warning, comforting, and directing [them . . . administering the ordinances with striking solemnity, expounding

²⁷For Newton’s mention of Stennett, see Grant Gordon, ed., *Wise Counsel: John Newton’s Letters to John Ryland, Jr.* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 246. Stennett is referenced briefly by John Wesley and although Wesley did not appear to know him personally, the reference is unique enough to warrant mentioning. On May 23, 1768, Wesley mentioned in a letter to a friend that a rumor had started accusing him of recommending that a man on death row use a crucifix. Wesley wrote, “I traced this up to its author, Dr. Stennett, an Anabaptist Teacher.” According to Wesley, Stennett visited the man himself and assumed that Wesley had given the crucifix to him during one of his frequent visits. Wesley concluded the matter with obvious frustration: “Dr. Stennett himself I never yet saw; nor did I ever see such a picture in the cell; and I believe the whole tale is pure invention.” For the full letter, see “CCX—To the Rev. Mr. Plenderlieth,” in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (1872; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 12:245.

²⁸Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:vii.

²⁹Of this commitment, Taylor remarked, “Perhaps few ministers have understood and practiced the duties of their function, or have maintained a fraternal regard to those over whom they presided, better than the late reverend Dr. Stennett” (*A Good Minister*, 9).

³⁰For more on Piggott, see Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 2:451–62. See also *Brief History of the Baptist Church in Little Wild Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, from 1691 to 1858, with Biographical Notices of the Pastors* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1858).

³¹Herbert S. Skeats, *A History of the Free Churches of England: from A.D. 1688–A.D. 1851* (London: A. Miall, 1869), 261.

³²Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 3:278, 4:363.

the word of God in a pleasing and familiar manner . . . and maintaining order in all their assemblies.”³³ The church’s influence stretched beyond London through various members who became ministers and missionaries.³⁴ Most noteworthy among these men was John Thomas (1757–1801), the medical missionary who accompanied William Carey (1761–1834) on his first journey to India in 1793.³⁵ In addition to his service to the church at Little Wild Street, Stennett also regularly preached at the Seventh-Day Baptist meeting in Currier’s Hall, Cripplegate for over twenty years.³⁶

In his home, he followed the godly example of his faithful forefathers.³⁷ His wife, Elizabeth Marsom, was described as “a lady of unaffected piety and good nature”

³³Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xiii.

³⁴Among the men set apart for ministry by the church during Stennett’s tenure were the following: William Clarke (d. 1795), who pastored Baptist congregations at Unicorn-Yard and Exeter; Joseph Jenkins, who preached Stennett’s funeral sermon and pastored several churches in London; and Samuel’s son, Joseph Stennett III, who became the pastor of the Baptist church at Faringdon. For more on Jenkins, see J. H. Y. Briggs, “Jenkins, Joseph (1743–1819),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 29:957–58.

³⁵Stennett himself had encouraged caution regarding the Indian mission, although his relationship with Carey was amicable and the latter held him in high regard. For more, see George Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1887), 47–48; and Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D. D.* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1836), 57. It should be noted that Stennett’s reservations had to do with the nature of this particular mission at this time, not the pursuit of missions in general. In fact, a warm, evangelical spirit permeates Stennett’s writings. For one such example related to the present study, see his comments regarding the father’s duty to promote religion in his home: “Every effort, therefore, should be used by those who fear God, both ministers and people, to diffuse the knowledge and savour of religion among their friends, neighbors, and acquaintance . . . Let us, by our instructions, influence, and example, preach the gospel of our divine Master to all around us, intreat and beseech men to become his disciples, and pour out our fervent cries at the throne of grace for an effectual blessing on our endeavors.” Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:43.

³⁶Although Stennett shared the Sabbatarian views of his family, he never pastored a Seventh-Day Baptist Church. He filled the pulpit at Currier’s Hall on an almost weekly basis for two decades, but declined the opportunity to become the congregation’s full-time pastor. It should be mentioned that some later Seventh-Day Baptists have blamed Stennett and other ministers who pastored both a Sabbath-keeping and first-day congregation for the decline of the denomination in this century. For a balanced discussion of this point, see Don A. Sanford, *A Choosing People: The History of the Seventh Day Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 70–71.

³⁷According to Jones, “As a husband, a father, and the master of his family, his deportment was alike upright and exemplary” (“Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xv).

with whom “he lived in close and uninterrupted affection.”³⁸ Jenkins considered him “upright and exemplary” as a husband and father.³⁹ According to Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Stennett’s “regard to the comfort, but especially to the spiritual welfare, of the domestics of their family, was productive of the happiest effect.”⁴⁰ Dr. Winters contended that “the serene piety, the cheerful benevolence, the improving intercourse, [and] the generous hospitality” of the Stennett home would be missed by many.⁴¹

One man who undoubtedly would have possessed fond memories of the Stennett home was a certain John Hancock, whom the family took in at the request of his elderly aunt. At the time of his arrival, Hancock was a “profane and vicious youth” with an unrefined past.⁴² Yet, he was converted through attending their regular practice of family worship and afterward, became a faithful member of the church at Little Wild Street.

The Stennett home also produced two children in whom their father took “inexpressible satisfaction.”⁴³ Taylor noted in particular Stennett’s love for his son, Joseph III, who followed his father into pastoral ministry: “The tenderness with which his Father loved him [and] the solicitude with which his Father consulted his best interests,

³⁸Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xv. Elizabeth was the daughter of Samuel Marsom, a Baptist minister in Luton, Bedfordshire. Her grandfather, Thomas Marsom, started the Baptist church in Luton in 1726 and her brother, Samuel II, eventually succeeded his father as pastor of the same church. For more on Samuel Marsom I, see Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4:418–20.

³⁹Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 37.

⁴⁰Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xv.

⁴¹Winters, quoted in Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxii.

⁴²Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 38. Jenkins also mentioned that the young man was “tutored on a bowling-green,” apparently an indication of an uncivilized upbringing.

⁴³Joseph Jenkins, “Brief Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.,” in *The Baptist Annual Register, for 1794, 1795, 1796–1797*, ed. John Rippon (London: Dilly, Button and Thomas, 1797), 389.

are well-known to all who had any intimacy with the family.”⁴⁴ In his funeral address, Jenkins challenged Joseph, as a fellow pastor’s son, to follow in the faithful footsteps of his mother and father:

We are descended from those worthies who were famous for their firm attachment to the gospel, who labored and who suffered more abundantly, who in effect laid down their lives in the cause of Jesus, who, valiant for the truth, fought the good fight, who finished their course, and who, endure what they might, kept the faith. May we follow them even as they followed Christ, and be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.⁴⁵

Elizabeth Stennett’s death in 1795 was considered the greatest trial of her husband’s life. Though her illness lasted only a week, it was a difficult time for her family as her condition rendered her delirious and unstable.⁴⁶ Winters reported that Elizabeth’s death was an event her husband “felt as a man of tender affections, but which he supported with all the dignity of a Christian.”⁴⁷ Her departure also led Stennett to sense that his own end was near, causing him to redouble his efforts in his congregation and to meditate on the Scriptures with greater zeal than ever before.⁴⁸ As his health declined, he shared several tender moments with his children and dearest companions in his final days. He asked a friend to tell his church “that he loved them all in the Lord, and that the truths he had preached, were his alone consolation in the hour of death.”⁴⁹ After

⁴⁴Taylor, *A Good Minister*, 33.

⁴⁵Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 45.

⁴⁶Jenkins provided the fullest account of her final days in his brief memoirs of Samuel Stennett, largely based on his funeral sermon. This work was included in *Rippon’s Register 13* (August 1796) and has been reprinted as Joseph Jenkins, “Brief Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D.,” in Samuel Stennett, *An Exposition of the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13*, Newport Commentary Series (1786; repr., Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2012), 1–18.

⁴⁷Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxii.

⁴⁸One of his final sermons was focused on Jesus as a High Priest who was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). According to Jenkins, this sermon was the fruit of “his meditations during a sleepless night the previous week” that Stennett reported was “a night so comfortable as, he confessed, he had never before enjoyed in his life” (*Love of the Brethren*, 40).

⁴⁹Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 41.

taking vinegar for his throat reminded him of that which Christ drank on the cross, he confessed, “O! When I reflect upon the sufferings of Christ, I am ready to say, ‘What have I been thinking of all my life?’ They are now my only support.”⁵⁰ To his son, Joseph, he declared, “My son, God hath done great things for us. He is very gracious to us, I can leave myself and my family with him.”⁵¹ Samuel Stennett fell asleep in the Lord on August 24, 1795, leaving behind a beloved son and daughter, a grieving church, and a legacy of great faithfulness. The following lines are taken from a poem Stennett composed in his final years reflecting on the death of a believer:

How safe, how easy ’tis to die,
With Christ my guardian-angel by!
He’s my defense from pain and sin,
From foes without and fears within.
O death, where is thy sting? O grace, thy victory?⁵²

Discourses on Domestic Duties

For a man so devoted to his family, it is appropriate that one of his most influential works would focus on domestic matters. *Discourses on Domestic Duties* was published in 1783 and earned Stennett high esteem as an author and practical theologian.⁵³ Family handbooks had been popular in English literature since the time of the Puritans and yet, his biographer was able to conclude, “We know of no writer who either before or since has done such ample justice to the subject in all its bearings.”⁵⁴ In

⁵⁰Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 41. In the same vein, he wondered aloud how those of the Socinian persuasion, such as Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), could comfort themselves in their hour of death, exclaiming, “What should I do now, if I had only such opinions to support me?” Jenkins, *Love of the Brethren*, 42.

⁵¹Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xix.

⁵²Samuel Stennett, “The Bird of Paradise,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:529.

⁵³Winters considered Stennett’s chief contribution to be his practical works, which he figured “have been of unspeakable service in the world and especially to the rising generation.” Quoted in Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxvi.

⁵⁴Jones, “Life and Writings of the Author,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:xxxii. For a brief introduction to family handbooks beginning in the Puritan period, Anthony Fletcher, “The Protestant Idea

fact, Jones thought so highly of Stennett's work that he recommended that this collection of sermons be read in every Christian home annually.

Stennett's influences are not immediately obvious to the undiscerning reader. He rarely quoted others and almost never cited any parallel works of a similar nature. He was just as likely to quote from Plato or Cicero as from Luther or Calvin. However, there are several indications that he was strongly influenced by the Puritan-Reformed tradition. First, Stennett considered himself an heir of the Puritans, as he made clear in his work, *A Trip to Holyhead* (1793). This work, published a decade after *Domestic Duties*, recalled a fictional dialogue between a Dissenter and an Anglican on various political topics of the day. Buried in the discourse is a brief but significant reference in which Stennett mentioned "the good old Puritans, whose descendants the Dissenters are."⁵⁵ Second, Stennett readily recommended the Puritans to others. Evidence of his high regard for Puritan writings can be found in a letter from Robert Burnside (1759–1826), a young member of the Currier's Hall congregation training for ministry, which referenced Stennett's recommendation to focus his studies on only two books alongside the Bible: *The Family Expositor* by Philip Doddridge (1702–1751) and Matthew Poole's *English Annotations on the Holy Bible*.⁵⁶ Both works are considered classic Puritan treatises.⁵⁷ In his funeral sermon for Stennett, Dan Taylor also mentioned his appreciation for Samuel

of Marriage in Early Modern England," in *Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 163–65.

⁵⁵Samuel Stennett, *A Trip to Holyhead* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:478.

⁵⁶Robert Burnside would eventually become the pastor of the Seventh-Day congregation at Currier's Hall in 1785. For more on Burnside, see Ivimey, *History of English Baptists*, 4:326–27. The letter was reproduced in "A Letter from Robert Burnside to Dr. Samuel Stennett. Aberdeen, December 23, 1779," *The Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 7 (July 1939): 424–26.

⁵⁷For more on Doddridge, see Geoffrey F. Nutall, "Doddridge's Life and Times," in *Philip Doddridge 1702–1751: His Contribution to English Religion*, ed. Geoffrey F. Nutall (London: London Press, 1951), 13–31. For more on Poole, see Nicholas Keene, "Poole, Matthew (1624?–1679)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 44:841–842.

Shaw's (1635–1696) *Immanuel*.⁵⁸ Finally, as will be demonstrated, the structure and content of Stennett's work bore the marks of one thoroughly steeped in Puritan thinking. This final point will be supported in the discussion that follows.

Stennett's *Discourses* considered the family from multiple angles. His first three discourses were of a general nature, addressing the duties of benevolence, family religion in general, and family worship. From there, he moved on to household duties rooted in particular relationships. His outline followed the basic structure of Ephesians 5:22–6:9 as he spoke first of the duties of husbands and wives, then of parents and children, and finally, of masters and servants. The final four discourses addressed specific topics related to the family, including domestic friendship, hospitality, the role of celebration in family life, and the idea of the family as a preview of heaven. Space prohibits outlining each discourse in this work. Instead, Stennett's key themes will be highlighted under the following headings: the importance of family religion, the meaning of marriage, the responsibilities of husbands and wives, the duties of parents and children, and, finally, the family as a preview of heaven.

The Importance of Family Religion

Like the Puritans before him, Samuel Stennett held a high view of the family and its potential to shape society. In his first three discourses in particular, he contended that the private happenings of domestic life impacted public welfare. He argued, "As man was made for society, it is the duty and interest of everyone to contribute what lies in his power to the general good."⁵⁹ His concern for the family was, in part, rooted in his concern for the commonwealth. Various social issues such as adultery, prostitution, and bigamy threatened the stability of British families at the time and Stennett believed that

⁵⁸For more on Shaw, see Jim Benedict, "Shaw, Samuel (1634/5–1696)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 50:122–23.

⁵⁹Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:1.

national reform could begin in the home. Echoing a concept made popular by the Puritans, he noted that the family is “a little society,” and therefore, foundational to the future of society as a whole.⁶⁰

In agreement with the sentiments of his day, Stennett understood the burden of this responsibility to rest primarily on the father. According to Stennett, a father’s responsibilities can be considered under five general headings: to look after the morals of their families, to instruct their families in the principles of religion, to lead in the consistent practice of family worship, to oblige family members to faithfully attend public worship, and to set a holy and pious example.⁶¹ Stennett’s list of responsibilities is similar to lists set forth by Puritan authors such as Richard Baxter.⁶²

Stennett was adamant about the spiritual influence of fathers and the disastrous consequences that ensued when fathers did not make religion a priority in the home. “We see the true reason why there is so little family religion in the world,” he bemoaned, “It is because masters of families do, in general, pay so little attention to religion themselves.”⁶³ On the contrary, when men lead their homes in a godly way, they can expect the Lord to bless their efforts. Thus, he concluded regarding the faithful fulfillment of these responsibilities: “If such were our tempers and conduct in the families over which we preside, there would be light in all our dwellings, and joy in every heart there; our houses would be schools of virtue, temples of devotion, and nurseries of heaven.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:30. This language was common among the Puritans. See, for example, William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 18.

⁶¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:32–33.

⁶²See, for example, Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 1:422–24.

⁶³Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:43.

⁶⁴Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:42.

Of particular importance to Stennett was the maintenance of regular family worship, a subject to which he devoted an entire discourse.⁶⁵ After addressing several reasons why families should offer daily prayer and praise to God, he set forth a guide for doing so. Again, his advice bears a strong resemblance to that of Baxter.⁶⁶ Stennett first urged families to consider the proper time for worship in their home, accounting for professional responsibilities, health, and other circumstances that would impact consistency. He avoided prescribing a particular length of time for family worship, but advised families to avoid rushing through the exercise on the one hand or tediously belaboring it on the other. In general, Stennett suggested that fifteen to twenty minutes in both the morning and the evening would be sufficient for most families. As for the service itself, he recommended three main elements: the reading of Scripture, the offering of praise, and prayer for specific needs in the family. Within these general categories, Stennett placed less emphasis on what should be done in family worship than on the manner in which it should be carried out. He urged fathers in particular, “When you go down on your knees, remember that you are in the presence of Almighty God, that you are the representative as it were of your whole family, and that the proper or improper discharge of this duty will be likely to have an important effect on their temper and conduct.”⁶⁷ What is more, faithfulness to this exercise may even lead to the conversion of family members or servants.⁶⁸ He also noted the duty of all members of the family to be

⁶⁵See Samuel Stennett, “Discourse III: Family Worship,” in *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:45–69.

⁶⁶Baxter listed twenty arguments in favor of the practice of family worship and dealt with many of the same objections mentioned by Stennett. See Baxter, *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:410–20.

⁶⁷Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:60.

⁶⁸Stennett continued, “And O how transporting the reflection in such a case to a master who fears God, and conscientiously discharges his duty—*This and that man was born in my house!*” (*Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:56). Perhaps Stennett had in mind his own joy in seeing young John Hancock come to Christ years before.

present and attentive at family worship, unless they were providentially hindered.

Finally, Stennett answered three typical objections to family worship: that it is uncommon, inconvenient, and that a father may feel unqualified to lead it.⁶⁹ Here, the pastor returned to his previous arguments for the practice of family worship as a duty before God and encouraged men to start with the simple practice of giving thanks before meals. Stennett clearly considered family worship to be of great importance, evidenced by the amount of instruction he provided for it as well as the pastoral urgency with which he addressed fathers on the matter. He understood that consistent family worship did not guarantee the piety of the household, but he also knew its power in the hands of God. Thus, he concluded, “Where the heads of families do, upon principle, maintain regularly the worship of God in their houses, we may be bold to affirm vice will not reign triumphant there.”⁷⁰ Turning from his emphasis on family religion, the following section will consider Stennett’s vision for the marriage relationship on which the family is founded.

The Meaning of Marriage

Stennett considered “the conjugal relation” to be “the most important of all social connections.”⁷¹ In his discourse on the duties of husbands and wives, he defined marriage according to the standards of Scripture. It was God who created marriage and therefore, only he who has the authority to define it. Thus, Stennett described the conjugal union as “the result of a solemn contract between one man and one woman to live together as husband and wife till death shall part them,” as God had instituted in the

⁶⁹Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:64–68. Baxter dealt with the same objection regarding a father’s fitness to pray as well as other objections at *Christian Directory in Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:422–23.

⁷⁰Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:55.

⁷¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:70.

beginning.⁷² He considered marriage to have two primary purposes: “the conservation and increase of the human species, and the mutual comfort and assistance of the parties united in this relation.”⁷³ Interestingly, Stennett did not explicitly mention the third traditional end of marriage in this context—protection against fornication. However, later in this same discourse, he encouraged marriage at a young age in order to avoid the temptations of a single life, indicating his acknowledgement of this function of marriage.⁷⁴

Within this understanding of marriage, Stennett elaborated on four points: marriage is monogamous, the parties must be competent for the commitment being made, the contract should be duly attested, and only death and adultery can dissolve the union.⁷⁵ Each of these four criteria for marriage were the subject of contemporary disputes in eighteenth-century England, but Stennett invested the most space in proving the mandate for monogamy. His attack on polygamy was likely motivated in part by the recent controversy surrounding Martin Madan’s *Thelyphthora, or A Treatise on Female Ruin* (1780), which sought to legitimize polygamy on biblical grounds.⁷⁶ Madan (1725–1790), a lawyer who became a Calvinistic Methodist itinerant after he had been converted under the ministry of John Wesley, argued that polygamy could provide a solution to

⁷²Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:70.

⁷³Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:71. It is unclear why Stennett did not follow the order of the *Second London Confession* on the purposes of marriage. Although he placed procreation first, it is clear that companionship was central to his vision for marriage.

⁷⁴See below for Stennett’s understanding of young age.

⁷⁵Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:70–71.

⁷⁶Martin Madan, *Thelyphthora, or A Treatise on Female Ruin* (London: J. Dodsley, 1780). Madan seems to have been influenced by certain continental theologians who had advocated a similar argument in the early part of the eighteenth-century. For more on this controversy among the Lutheran Pietists, see A. G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 70–96.

rampant societal plagues such as prostitution and illegitimate children.⁷⁷ His provocative proposal set off a firestorm of rebuttals, including one from his own first cousin, William Cowper (1731–1800).⁷⁸ While Stennett did not mention Madan by name, his emphasis on monogamy and his proximity to the controversy suggests it was on his mind.⁷⁹ Some of the harshest words in his entire treatise were reserved for polygamy, which he called a deviation from both the law of nature and the law of Christ.⁸⁰ He argued that polygamy was contrary to nature because it failed to live up to the primary purposes of marriage previously mentioned and because it was particularly degrading to women. In direct contrast to Madan, he argued that polygamy was an affront to both a woman’s dignity and happiness rather than a solution to her plight.⁸¹ Turning to the biblical evidence, Stennett concluded, “It is enough for us, that our Lord Jesus Christ has absolutely forbidden it, and grounded the prohibition upon the purity and perfection of the marriage state, as at first instituted in paradise.”⁸² Thus, Stennett rejected this then-contemporary line of argumentation and rested his case on the biblical evidence.

⁷⁷According to Madan, “That our brothels are filled with harlots, our streets with prostitutes, and our land with impurity, is too dreadfully true” (*Thelyphthora*, 6). Madan felt that legitimizing polygamy was the reasonable and biblical solution. Of the biblical case for polygamy, he declared, “So far from being prohibited or condemned by the law, we find it allowed, owned, and even blessed of God; and in no instance, amongst the many recorded in Scripture, so much as disapproved” (*Thelyphthora*, 75). For more on Madan, see Arthur Pollard, “Madan, Martin (1725–1790),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 36:58–60.

⁷⁸Cowper’s response, entitled *Anti-Thelyphthora, a Tale in Verse* (1781), was among nineteen attacks on Madan’s treatise recorded in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. See Falconer Madan, “Martin, Madan (1726–1790),” in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 35:290. Although Stennett published *Domestic Duties* in 1783, he likely preached these messages when the controversy was going on in London.

⁷⁹Madan preached in multiple London churches and served as the chaplain of Lock Hospital located near Hyde Park.

⁸⁰Stennett defined “the law of nature,” to which he frequently referred throughout this work, as “that code or compendium of duties arising from our relation to God and to one another, which is discoverable by the dictates of reason and conscience” (*Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:76).

⁸¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:70.

⁸²Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:79.

Stennett addressed the other three criteria for marriage briefly. The competency of the parties involved and the necessity of witnesses were both issues tied to the mid-century Marriage Act, which Stennett clearly affirmed. Consistent with other Baptists discussed in this study, Stennett permitted divorce on grounds of adultery, which dissolved the marriage bond by breaking the one-flesh union.⁸³

Before turning to the specific duties of husbands and wives, Stennett proposed a guide for “the forming [of] this important connection” owing to the significance of possessing “a correspondence of character, affections and circumstances between man and wife.”⁸⁴ This section richly displays what characteristics the eighteenth-century Baptist considered significant for the prospect of marriage.

First, Stennett recommended that individuals pursue marriage at a young age in order to maximize their interest in one another and lessen the temptations of single life. It is interesting to consider this piece of advice in light of eighteenth-century British marriage patterns. As noted previously, individuals tended to marry in their late twenties, yet Stennett recommended marriage by the age of *sui juris*. By this notion, he likely meant age twenty-one, given that Hardwicke’s Marriage Act required parental permission for marriage of children under that age.⁸⁵ He considered early marriage a “barrier . . . against the many very dangerous temptations to which single life is exposed.”⁸⁶

Next, Stennett advised young people to consider the “concurrence of parents and friends.”⁸⁷ While he did not approve of arranged unions, he still encouraged

⁸³There is no discussion on the issue of desertion and divorce in Stennett’s works.

⁸⁴Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:70.

⁸⁵The issue of parental consent for marriage stretched back several centuries. For example, see Baxter’s discussion of whether or not the lack of parental consent nullified a contracted marriage (*Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:397).

⁸⁶Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:81. This point alludes to the third traditional purpose of marriage, namely, protection from fornication.

⁸⁷Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:81.

individuals to consult the wisdom of their parents in making such an important decision, reflecting his correspondence with contemporary views on parents and children.

Having discussed these preliminary considerations, Stennett emphasized that the most significant factor in assessing a potential mate is “the subsistence of a sincere friendship and cordial affection.”⁸⁸ Here Stennett echoed that central Puritan theme of companionship. While Stennett clearly called for order in the home and authority within relational structures, he did not consider authority opposed to affection. This was a consistent theme throughout his treatment of the marriage relationship and, of course, in his discourse on domestic friendship.⁸⁹

With that in mind, Stennett set forth five matters of prudence for an individual to consider in assessing a potential spouse. The first and foremost was religion, with regard to which he encouraged young people to focus on their own piety before evaluating the spirituality of others. He considered this period of life to be particularly advantageous for spiritual growth and bemoaned, “How sad a sight [it is] to see a young person launching out on the ocean of life without compass or rudder to steer by!”⁹⁰ In regard to choosing a spouse, Stennett challenged young people to not only marry a Christian but also to seek “a uniformity of sentiment and practice in the mode of professing it” in order to avoid “even the least occasion of misapprehension and coolness” in the relationship.⁹¹ Finally, as they sought a spouse possessing genuine piety, Stennett encouraged young people “to implore the direction and blessing of divine

⁸⁸Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:81.

⁸⁹For example, Stennett contended, “The union between *man and wife* is, or however ought to be, the result of previous esteem and affection; and it is so very intimate, so mutually beneficial, and so permanent, that one would think it could not subsist without the most endearing and improving friendship” (*Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:227–28).

⁹⁰Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:82.

⁹¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:83. Note that Stennett did not follow the General Baptists of his day in prohibiting marriage outside of one’s denomination.

Providence in this momentous concern.”⁹²

Next, Stennett encouraged young people to seek out someone with an agreeable natural temper because such a disposition “fastens the knot love has tied, and confirms the union friendship created.”⁹³ The third characteristic young people should look for is good sense, which will fuel enjoyable conversations and “mutual participation of intellectual pleasures.”⁹⁴ In addition, he offered guidance for finding a good match in worldly circumstances and external accomplishments, although he considered these final two traits of lesser consequence than those previously mentioned.⁹⁵ Having established this understanding for the meaning of marriage, Stennett then turned to address the particular responsibilities of each party.

The Duties of Husbands and Wives

Stennett summarized the “reciprocal duties of husbands and wives” in the same language as Gill: “love on the part of the husband” and “reverence on the part of the wife.”⁹⁶ In the following pages, Stennett fleshed out the responsibilities that couples render to one another in obedience to the commands of God.

Stennett was careful to define the husband’s love in biblical terms. Love is not simply “general goodwill, or friendly respect only,” he argued; it is far more intimate. Citing Ephesians 5:28–29, he contended that a husband must recognize his wife is “part of himself” in such a way that “his heart, his soul, [and] his affections ought to be

⁹²Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:83.

⁹³Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:84.

⁹⁴Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:85.

⁹⁵Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:85–86. Stennett’s advice in this section mirrors Baxter’s directions for one considering a potential spouse. Similarly, Baxter advised that individuals look for “a holy fear of God,” a suitable “nature or temperament,” and an agreeable “person, education, and estate.” For the full discussion, see Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:401–4.

⁹⁶Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:87.

indissolubly knit to her.”⁹⁷ Such love should rise in the heart like a “steady, inextinguishable flame” which “the endearing intercourses of virtuous friendship will daily fan, and the most tempestuous storms of worldly adversity will not be able to put out.”⁹⁸ Stennett’s description of a husband’s love can be summarized under the two headings of service to his wife and satisfaction in her company. A husband’s servant leadership should include practical, emotional, and spiritual support as follows:

Her health, ease and happiness he will assiduously consult . . . The anxieties and cares attendant upon her maternal and domestic character, he will in every possible way soothe; and endeavoring by a thousand endearing expressions to allay the fears incidental to female tenderness. When she is happy he will be happy and when she is afflicted he will be afflicted with her.⁹⁹

In addition, the husband’s affection for his wife should lead him toward satisfaction in her as a gift from the Lord. Stennett explained,

Her character he will esteem and honour, her interests civil and religious will lie near his heart, and to her person he will feel a firm and unalterable attachment. Partiality in her favour will ever induce him to place her in such a light as shall secure to her, and of consequence to himself, respect from all his acquaintance and connections . . . Her presence, surrounded with her offspring, the dear pledges of their mutual love, will render his own mansion, however plain, far more cheerful and agreeable to him than any other house he may occasionally visit.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Stennett called husbands to an ardent love of their wives rooted in the unique relationship formed by the unbreakable bond of marriage.

As for the wife, Stennett would have her to respect her husband and support him faithfully. Unlike some of his eighteenth-century contemporaries, he grounded this relational hierarchy in creation itself. Both Henry Venn and John Wesley considered the woman’s role in marriage to be a consequence of the fall.¹⁰¹ Stennett, on the other hand,

⁹⁷Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:88–89.

⁹⁸Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:87.

⁹⁹Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:87–88.

¹⁰⁰Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:87. Stennett’s description of the husbands love is reminiscent of the parallel section in Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 350–52, 359–63.

¹⁰¹See Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man* (London: n.p., 1763), 277–78; John Wesley, 144

maintaining his allegiance to the Puritan-Reformed tradition, considered the wife's call to submission to rest on "the rank her husband holds in creation."¹⁰² Husbands ought not to demand such reverence, but rather the wife should joyfully highlight his qualities, cover his faults, and "yield to his will, where conscience is not concerned."¹⁰³ Although he was well-aware of the general atmosphere of gender hierarchy, he counseled that a wife's respect ought not to be "exactd on [the husband's] part, but cheerfully rendered on hers."¹⁰⁴ In this way, "Esteem and affection will be so blended in her breast that her sweet and respectful demeanor towards him . . . will strike every observer as the soft impulse of nature, rather than the result of studied prudence."¹⁰⁵ Such reverence—"founded in reason and affection"—will become natural as it comes "flowing from love."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the wife's proper discharge of these duties will "contribute greatly to their mutual welfare and happiness" and "will not fail to secure to her in return the tribute of admiration and esteem, as well as affection and delight." Thus, Stennett grounded the reciprocal duties of the husband and his wife in their mutual love for one another. In addition, he argued that obedience to the dictates of Scripture would not only please God but also increase affection between the spouses. The presence of hierarchy in the relationship did not hinder affection in Stennett's view, but rather, enhanced it.

Stennett also knew that love alone was insufficient to motivate spouses toward fulfilling their roles in the home. Therefore, he closed this particular discourse by appealing to the example of Christ and the church, which was so prominent in his text. Stennett challenged husbands to consider the love of Christ—"so free, generous, ardent,

Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament (Bristol: William Pine, 1765), 1:116.

¹⁰²Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:89.

¹⁰³Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:89.

¹⁰⁴Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:90.

¹⁰⁵Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:90.

¹⁰⁶Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:91.

and constant”—and strive to imitate his example.¹⁰⁷ He exhorted the wife to conduct herself in a manner akin to the church, “remembering that she holds the same relation to her husband which the church stands in to Christ.”¹⁰⁸

Stennett considered love a given within marriage, though he did not explain how to cultivate affection. For him, love could both fuse two people together and keep their marriage intact against all challenges. In doing so, he showed himself to be very much a man of his times, although in a different way than Gill, who placed a greater emphasis on authority. Like Gill, however, Stennett called husbands to an ardent love of their wives, which he rooted in both the indissoluble bond created by marriage and the example of Christ and the church.

One of Stennett’s unique contributions in this work was his emphasis on domestic friendship, a subject which received the attention of a full discourse. Like his Puritan predecessors, he considered companionship central to God’s purposes for marriage. Stennett pointed out that God instituted marriage, “not only for the increase of the species, but for the purpose of promoting their mutual happiness, and that of their offspring.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, within the family one should expect that “friendship should prevail here in the highest degree it is capable of being enjoyed in the present state.”¹¹⁰ He then went on to describe various expressions of domestic friendship as well as suggestions for improving relationships within the home.¹¹¹ Noteworthy in Stennett’s treatment of this subject was that he expected all members of the household to be involved in genuine friendships with one another. This is an important caveat for his prior statements

¹⁰⁷Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:92.

¹⁰⁸Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:93.

¹⁰⁹Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:221.

¹¹⁰Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:221.

¹¹¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:234–53.

regarding order and authority. For Stennett, the presence of authority and specific roles in the home did not preclude the opportunity for affectionate relationships to exist between husband and wife and even parent and child.

The Duties of Parents and Children

In keeping with the central thesis of examining marriage among eighteenth-century Baptists in this time period, the relationship of parents and children will only be addressed in brief. Stennett's description of the duties of parents and children mirrored Gill's discussion of the same subjects, suggesting that Stennett perhaps developed this section alongside of Gill's *A Practical Divinity*.¹¹² However, he departed from Gill on the issue of catechizing. Whereas Gill questioned the legitimacy of training children to memorize Scripture and prayers before their conversion, Stennett called for it and even answered some of Gill's objections to the practice.¹¹³ The discussion illustrates some of the diversity that existed among Particular Baptists of the eighteenth century on issues of family life.

The other noteworthy aspect of Stennett's treatment of these roles in the family is that he advocated for partnership in parenting through a creative plan for balancing the responsibilities of a child's education. He suggested that a child's first seven years should be spent primarily with his mother because "nature hath endowed the female sex with such tenderness of disposition and warmth of affection, as admirably qualifies them for all the painful, but to them pleasing duties of nurturing and rearing their young."¹¹⁴ Once that foundation is properly laid, the next seven years should be spent under the primary

¹¹²Compare Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:104 with John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1770; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000), 977. Stennett does not plagiarize Gill's words, but the flow of thought is so similar that Stennett was almost certainly basing this paragraph on Gill or some other common source used by both men.

¹¹³See Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:110–14.

¹¹⁴Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:102.

guidance of the father, whose “authority, knowledge, and experience qualify him for a kind of exertion” which is necessary.¹¹⁵ During the final seven years of childhood (ages 15–21), parents should jointly focus on educating their children and helping prepare them for the responsibilities of independent adulthood. Stennett’s plan for educating children illustrates the mutuality that he envisioned in marriage.¹¹⁶

The Family as a Preview of Heaven

A final aspect of Stennett’s vision for the family to note was the way in which he envisioned the family as a preview of heaven. According to Stennett, because the Scriptures use the language of families to describe the blessings of heaven, families can uniquely prepare individuals for their heavenly dwelling. While earth is not the Christian’s ultimate home, every believer will make a home here. Therefore, Christians should strive to make their homes as “heavenly” as possible. Stennett’s description of the model home, while admittedly idealistic, serves as a helpful summary of his vision for the Christian family:

The father was a wise, affectionate, good man; a sincere disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus, whose doctrine he professed, and whose example he followed The welfare of those entrusted to his care, lay near his heart, and . . . the counsels of divine wisdom . . . were sweetly mingled with the most pleasing expressions of paternal tenderness and love The partner of his life, inexpressibly dear to him, had all the charms which virtue and religion could add to a form that commanded admiration and love. She was modest, prudent, and kind Their children . . . inherited the virtues of their parents . . . and as the powers of reason expanded, the seeds of religion, which had been carefully sown in their breasts, sprung up under a

¹¹⁵Stennett, *Domestic Duties in Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:103.

¹¹⁶Stennett’s plan is likely rooted in thought that was common in eighteenth-century England. In his influential work, *Emile* (1762, published in English in 1763), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) argued for a stage-based program of childhood education that acknowledged the differences inherent in each stage of development. In addition, the educational theories of John Locke (1632–1734) continued to shape eighteenth-century practices. For more on childhood education in this period, see Kingsley Price, *Education and Philosophical Thought*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967); Andrew O’Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children’s Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003). For a history of Christian approaches to childhood education, see Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

divine influence, and promised a fair and joyful harvest.¹¹⁷

As Stennett pointed out, there are numerous blessings to living in a well-ordered home:

Following the simple dictates of nature, [the family] acquired and preserved health; living on good terms with their neighbors, they secured themselves peace; cultivating domestic affections, they enjoyed a flow of innocent and enlivening pleasure; improving their opportunities for contemplation and discourse, they grew in wisdom and virtue; and conversing daily with heaven in the duties of religion, they were gradually prepared for the sublime services and joys of that better world.¹¹⁸

The final sentence is the key to understanding Stennett's vision for the family. He called for a well-ordered home because he believed in the family's ability to gradually prepare its members for a better home to come. This line of thinking is reminiscent of Baxter's sentiment from the previous century, where he noted that "a well-governed family is an excellent help to the saving of all the souls that are in it."¹¹⁹ One can see Baxter's influence on Stennett in the following quote from the Kidderminster divine:

To live where God's law is the principal rule, and where you may be daily taught the mysteries of his kingdom, and have the Scriptures opened to you, and be led as by the hand in the paths of life; where the praises of God are daily celebrated, and his name is called upon, and where all do speak the heavenly language, and where God, and Christ, and heaven are both their daily work and recreation; where it is the greatest honour to be most holy and heavenly, and the greatest contention is, who shall be most humble, and godly, and obedient to God and their superiors, and where there is no reviling scorns at godliness, nor any profane and scurrilous talk; what a sweet and happy life is this! Is it not likest to heaven of anything upon earth?¹²⁰

Stennett followed this line of thinking and incorporated it as a central motif for his understanding of marriage and family. Near the end of this discourse, he proclaimed, "A family, a pious family, is methinks a shadow, of which heaven is the substance. Visit the pleasant mansion wherein the God of grace deigns to dwell, and say whether you are not struck at your very entrance with this prophetic inscription written in fair characters

¹¹⁷Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:306–7.

¹¹⁸Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:298.

¹¹⁹Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:425.

¹²⁰Baxter, *Christian Directory* in *Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:425.

upon it: ‘This is the gate of heaven.’”¹²¹

Conclusion

As Stennett neared the final years of his life (he was in his late fifties when *Domestic Duties* was published), the seasoned pastor reflected on the home he had grown up in and the godly heritage that preceded him. He recognized that he had been graced with a foretaste of heaven in his own family and he longed for others to know that blessing as well. He also knew that a reunion awaited him. He had been reminded of this fact by Gill at his father’s funeral two decades prior and, in what must have been a sweet providence to Stennett, he was able to comfort Gill’s own relatives with this same hope when their beloved passed. Following Gill’s death, Stennett spoke a word of encouragement to Gill’s family that echoed the Doctor’s own sentiments: “Let not your sorrow exceed...[but] while you often call to mind the excellent counsels he hath given you, and are walking in the path he trod, comfort yourselves with the joyful and transporting prospect of meeting him again, ere long, in the realms of light and glory above.”¹²²

This was Samuel Stennett’s vision for the family, a place where spirituality could bloom as one generation passed down faithfulness to the next and exemplified the fruit of religion. Like the Puritans who came before him, Stennett called his readers to

¹²¹Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:322. The “gate of heaven” language is taken from Gen 28:17, where the Authorized Version reads: “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Although the words come from Jacob’s dream at Bethel, the Puritans applied the phrase to families. For example, it was said of the family of Thomas Abney, the lord mayor of London who hosted Isaac Watts in his home for over three decades: “Persons coming into such a family, with a serious tincture of mind, might well cry out, ‘This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven.’” Quoted in Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (1948; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 281.

¹²²Samuel Stennett, “The Victorious Christian,” in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:175. In Gill’s funeral sermon for Joseph Stennett, he had spoken similarly: “Remember what is your loss, is his gain; and that you will see your husband, your father, your brother, your relation, and your friend again, to greater advantage than ever you saw or enjoyed him here.” Gill, “The Mutual Gain of Christ,” in *Sermons and Tracts*, 1:551.

organize their families around the dictates of Scripture, with fathers leading in family worship, husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives revering their husbands with appropriate affection. As individuals fulfilled their biblical duties to one another, the members of a pious family experienced an eschatological foretaste of future blessings. In this way, families possessed the potential to be, as Stennett observed, “nurseries of heaven.” With these words, the London pastor turned the traditional Puritan image of the family as “a little society” heavenward. While acknowledging the family’s impact on the present commonwealth, Stennett encouraged parents to set their sights even higher, realizing their responsibility to provide previews of “a better country” (Heb 11:16). This was a vision that Stennett hoped would be passed on to future generations. In turning to the next generation, the following chapter will examine the life and writings of the most influential Baptist theologian of the late eighteenth-century, Andrew Fuller.

CHAPTER 6
MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY
OF ANDREW FULLER

As Andrew Fuller, William Carey, John Ryland, Jr., and their other friends from the Northamptonshire Baptist Association made plans to send Carey abroad in 1792, they knew their efforts would require a broad base of support.¹ Thus, the group of pastors from the Midlands traveled to London to meet with the city's most influential Baptist ministers, including Samuel Stennett. Although Stennett possessed a warm, evangelical spirit, he sided with the other metropolis ministers in questioning the wisdom of Fuller and Carey's plans. Andrew Fuller later reported, "Good Mr. Stennett advised the London ministers to stand aloof and not commit themselves."² The plan, of course, would come to fruition and mark a turning point in the history of Christian missions.³ For his part, Stennett remained cordial with Fuller and Carey and the two men continued to view him with great respect.⁴ Stennett died when the Baptist Missionary Society was still

¹For more on these men and their friendship that led to the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends and his times* (Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 1995); John Ryland is especially significant for the present study because he is Fuller's most detailed biographer. For more on Ryland, see E. F. Clipsham, "Ryland, John (1753–1825)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. G. C. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48:471–72.

²George Smith, *The Life of William Carey* (London: John Murray, 1887), 47–48. According to Carey's son, Eustace, the London ministers voted in an overwhelming majority in favor of Stennett's proposal. For more on their reasoning for this decision, see Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D. D.* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1836), 57.

³The Baptist Missionary Society was originally called the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen. For more on its founding and subsequent history, see F. A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, from 1792 to 1842*, 2 vols. (London: T. Ward & Co., 1842).

⁴Carey, *Memoir of William Carey*, 57.

in its early years, but had he lived to see its growth, he would have undoubtedly celebrated this great work of God with his younger brothers in the faith.

While Andrew Fuller and Samuel Stennett may have disagreed on the future of the Baptist mission to the world, the following chapter will demonstrate that their views on marriage were quite similar. Like the other men in this study, Fuller was a devoted father and husband whose theology of marriage compelled his commitment to his home. Due to the additional source material available, this chapter will take a deeper look at Fuller as a father and husband than previous chapters did with John Gill and Samuel Stennett. It will be demonstrated that Fuller sought to live out the Puritan-Reformed vision for marriage that Gill and Stennett had articulated in previous generations. Following this biographical study, we will turn to Fuller's theology of marriage, demonstrating its continuity with the other subjects of this study.

The Life of Andrew Fuller

Andrew Fuller was born at Wicken in Cambridgeshire on February 6, 1754.⁵ His father, Robert (1723–1781), was a farmer and his mother, Philippa (1726–1816), a pious

⁵The biographical account below is based on the following sources: John Ryland, *The Work of Faith: the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, Late Pastor of the Baptist Church at Kettering, and Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society . . . Chiefly Extracted from His Own Papers* (Charlestown, MA: Samuel Etheridge, 1818), 4–13; J. W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Rufus Babcock (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1830), 1–17; Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 1–20; Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton, 1830), 4:526–34. For a helpful overview of the source material available on Fuller, see Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 2–4. For an overview of the secondary material, see Thomas Nettles, “Andrew Fuller (1754–1815),” in *The British Particular Baptists, 1638–1910*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 2:140–41. Additional recent studies of Fuller's life include the following: Gilbert S. Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Ropeholder* (London: Carey Press, 1942); Arthur H. Kirby, *Andrew Fuller 1754–1815* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1961); E. F. Clipsham, “Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 20 (1963–1964), 99–114, 146–54, 214–25, 268–76; and Phil Roberts, “Andrew Fuller,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 121–39; and Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

influence throughout his life.⁶ Despite early exposure to what he came to know as “false Calvinism,” Fuller was converted in his teenage years and baptized into the Particular Baptist Church at Soham by the Reverend John Eve (d. 1782).⁷

Soon thereafter, a doctrinal squabble in the church prompted him to study the Scriptures earnestly and consider a future in ministry.⁸ After this incident led to Mr. Eve’s departure from the church, Fuller began preaching alongside a prominent deacon named Joseph Diver. These circumstances provided the young man with considerable opportunities to exercise his gifts and develop his own theological system. In a letter to a friend, he explained, “Being now devoted to the ministry, I took a review of the doctrine I should preach and spent much of my time in reading, and in making up my mind as to various things relative to the gospel.”⁹ In the summer of 1775, he was ordained as the

⁶Of his grandmother, Andrew Gunton Fuller recounted, “She was a woman of excellent Christian character, to whose influence the fact is most largely due that all her children became consistent members of Baptist churches” (*Andrew Fuller*, 12). Andrew Gunton Fuller pastored congregations in Middlesex, Worcestershire, and London over the span of his thirty years of pastoral ministry. For more on him, see J. H. Young, “Fuller, Andrew Gunton,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 1:415.

⁷Information on Fuller’s conversion is available in a letter to Dr. Charles Stuart, which was eventually printed in the *Evangelical Magazine* and is included in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 7. Although outside the bounds of this work, the influence of High Calvinism on Fuller’s experience is significant. In retrospect, he wrote, “I now found rest for my soul, and I reckon, that I should have found it sooner, if I had not entertained the notion of my having no warrant to come to Christ without some previous qualification. This notion was a bar that kept me back for a time; though, through divine drawings, I was enabled to overleap it.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 14. This experience clearly impacted Fuller’s passion in his adult years for battling High Calvinism. This raises the question of his continuity with John Gill, who is often cited as one of the chief proponents of High Calvinism among Particular Baptists in previous generations. While this accusation has been the subject of debate among scholars, it is suffice to say that Fuller was capable of appreciating Gill’s work, despite whatever soteriological differences may have existed between the two men. For more on Gill’s influence on Fuller, see Barry Howson, “Andrew Fuller’s Reading of John Gill,” *Eusebeia* 9 (Spring 2008): 71–95.

⁸This controversy had to do with the question of whether or not a person was capable of obeying God and resisting temptation through his own strength. The various opinions in the church, which notably pitted his mentor Joseph Diver against his pastor John Eve, left a strong impression on young Fuller. Furthermore, the dispute eventually led to Mr. Eve departing the church in October of 1771. The incident is recorded in a letter to Dr. Charles Stuart in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 18–22. Morden comments that the most significant impact of this controversy on Fuller himself was that it left him “increasingly dissatisfied with High Calvinism, particularly its practical effects” (*Offering Christ to the World*, 30).

⁹Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 25.

pastor of the church at Soham, where he remained until 1782. During this season of ministry, Fuller met Sarah Gardiner (1756–1792) and the two were married on December 23, 1776.¹⁰

During his tenure at Soham, Fuller matured as a young minister, refined his theology, and weathered various trials within the small congregation.¹¹ Soon, however, the Baptist church at Kettering began to inquire about his interest in replacing their retired pastor. After nearly four years of correspondence and prayer, the Fullers relocated to Kettering in 1782, where Fuller pastored the remainder of his life.¹²

The majority of Fuller’s most significant accomplishments came during his time of ministry in Kettering. While faithfully serving this congregation for over thirty-three years, Fuller’s impact as a theologian spanned the globe. He became a leading voice in the eighteenth-century evangelical world in defense of the faith against both outside attacks and heresies within.¹³ His greatest work, *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785), lifted Calvinistic soteriology from the mires of High Calvinism and provided a robust theological foundation for the growing efforts to send missionaries into

¹⁰Sarah was the daughter of Stephen and Sarah Gardiner of Burswell, Cambridgeshire, whom Ryland described as “people of respectable character” (*Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 255).

¹¹Ryland commented, “Mr. Fuller continued pastor of the church at Soham for more than seven years, and, considering the size of the congregation, had as much success as could well be expected, but attended with many painful trials, as the case often is, when God is preparing a man for future usefulness” (*Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 35). These trials included a meager income, the loss of several children in infancy, and discouragement from those within the church who were not satisfied with his ministry. For more, see Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:458–59.

¹²Though outside the scope of this study, the manner in which Fuller handled this process revealed much about his character and eagerness to submit to the will of God. Ryland referenced some twenty-eight letters on the subject dated November 1779 to August 1783. He remarked, “Men who fear not God would risk the welfare of a nation with fewer searching of heart than it cost him to determine whether he should leave a little Dissenting church, scarcely containing forty members besides himself and his wife.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 36.

¹³For further resources on this subject, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word: Andrew Fuller as an Apologist* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004); Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*; and Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, especially 144–57.

heathen lands.¹⁴ He wrote effective polemical works against Deism, Socinianism, and Sandemanianism.¹⁵ As previously noted, he helped found the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 alongside of other pastors from the local Northamptonshire Association and proved to be a faithful “rope-holder” the remainder of his life.¹⁶

Amidst it all, the people who knew him best were likely those choice individuals who called him father and husband. In the memoir he wrote about his father, Andrew Gunton Fuller (1799–1884) rightly observed, “There is no division of a man’s life so marked and characteristic as that which is made by the door of his own house, on the two sides of which are witnessed sometimes two distinct men, and always two distinct phases of character which act and react on each other.”¹⁷ While many men do not give the same level of energy and attention to their families as they do to their public pursuits, the younger Fuller argued that this tendency was not true of his father. Though Fuller’s domestic life often proved difficult, he faithfully served those entrusted to his care, an aspect of his legacy that has received surprisingly little attention in recent studies.¹⁸ What follows will demonstrate these qualities of Andrew Fuller by looking at his character as a husband and father as well as each of his successive marriages.¹⁹

¹⁴For a helpful summary of the impact of *The Gospel Worthy*, see Peter Morden, “Baptist and Evangelical: Andrew Fuller and The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” *Bulletin of the Strict Baptist Historical Society*, no. 38 (2011): 1–20.

¹⁵Nettles notes, “Fuller did not ignore the broad issues of the day. He accepted the challenge of Deists and Socinians, thoroughly mastered their writings and fired off replies so perceptive and to the point that his opponents found their arguments clearly emasculated.” Nettles, “Andrew Fuller,” in *British Particular Baptists*, 2:123.

¹⁶This image is taken from a well-known story in which Fuller recalled that the sending of Carey to India was somewhat like a group of men standing at the mouth of an unfamiliar mine. “We had no one to guide us,” Fuller recounted, “and while we were deliberating, Carey, as it were, said, ‘Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope.’ But before he went down, he, as it seemed to me, took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect, that ‘while we lived, we should *never* let go the rope.’” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 144.

¹⁷Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 7.

¹⁸For more, see footnote 43 in chap. 1.

¹⁹Much of the substance of the following overview of Fuller’s family life was previously

Marriage to Sarah Gardiner

In his commentary on Genesis, Fuller contended that a wife ought to be “treated as a friend, as naturally an equal, a soother of man’s cares, a softener of his griefs, and a partner of his joys.”²⁰ During his first pastorate in Soham, Fuller discovered such a friend in a young woman named Sarah Gardiner. When Fuller married Sarah in 1776, she was already a member of the church at Soham. Ryland described her as “a very amiable and excellent woman.”²¹ Little is known about her other than the references in her husband’s diary and her role in the episodes that follow. Sarah gave birth to eleven children over the course of their marriage, eight of whom did not reach adulthood.²²

Sarah and Andrew seemed to have had a strong marriage founded on a mutual love of God. On one particular day, Fuller noted in his journal that he had enjoyed “some interesting conversation with my wife, on little faith, great depravity, a great Saviour, and genuine love to God, from a spiritual discernment of his glory, and delight in the character of the true God.”²³ The breadth of topics covered that particular morning leads one to believe that such conversations were a regular aspect of their life together. In this scene, the Fullers acted out the Puritan-Reformed vision for companionship and mutual encouragement that has been traced in the preceding chapters. One can imagine they would have agreed with Samuel Stennett’s comment that “the endearing intercourses of virtuous friendship will daily fan” the flames of love.²⁴

published in Matthew D. Haste, “Marriage and Family in the Life of Andrew Fuller,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17, no.1 (Spring 2013): 28–34.

²⁰Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis* in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 3:9.

²¹Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 271.

²²Ryland recorded the details of her progeny as follows: “She had eleven children, three of whom were buried at Soham, five at Kettering, one in the sea, and two survive.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 255.

²³Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 71.

²⁴Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties* in *The Works of Samuel Stennett* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1824), 3:87.

Sarah Fuller’s character as a wife and mother is evident in the way she walked with her husband through the difficult trial of losing their daughter, who bore her mother’s name. Young Sarah (1779–1786) became sick in December 1785 with what appeared to be the measles. Fuller recorded several heart-warming spiritual conversations that he and his wife had with their daughter during this painful season.²⁵ From this episode, we learn that it was their regular practice to read Scripture to their children at night, to pray with them before bed, to sing hymns to them, and to supply them edifying materials to read.²⁶ As parents, Andrew and Sarah were grieved to see their daughter suffer physically, but they were most concerned with the condition of her soul. When Fuller first learned of his daughter’s sickness, he wrote of his children, “Oh! I could give up their bodies; but I want to see piety reigning in their souls, before they go hence, and are no more seen.”²⁷ Months later, he declared about young Sarah, “I think I could willingly submit to God in all things, and bear whatever he should lay upon me, though it were the loss of one of the dear parts of myself, provided I could but see Christ formed in her.”²⁸

One particular night, the young girl admitted that she feared her future because she had sinned against God. Fuller replied lovingly, “True my dear, you have sinned against the Lord; but the Lord is more ready to forgive you, if you are grieved for

²⁵The entire episode is recounted through Fuller’s journal and letters in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 256–71. For a poem that Fuller composed when the young girl was only eight months old, see Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 256–57. For the hymn written by Ryland for young Sarah, see Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 259. For the verses Fuller composed after her death, see Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 261–62.

²⁶Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 258–60.

²⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 267.

²⁸Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 267. In his journal, he concluded, “I feel a satisfaction, that my times, and the times of all that pertain to me, are in the Lord’s hands. This also I have felt all along—never to desire the life of the child, unless it be for her present and eternal good. Unless she should live to the Lord, I had rather, if it please God, she might not live at all.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 269.

offending him, than I can be to forgive you, when you are grieved for offending me; and you know how ready I am to do that.”²⁹ He then proceeded to tell his daughter about the Lord’s mercy to the dying thief, which seemed to cheer her soul. It is apparent his wife had similar conversations with their dying daughter as well, illustrating their partnership in parenting. In a letter to Ryland, Fuller noted, “Yesterday, my wife had pretty much talk with her, and seemed much satisfied of her piety, and resigned to her death.”³⁰

Young Sarah died on May 30, 1786. Her poor father was so afflicted with grief over this pending loss that he was confined to his bed during her final days.³¹ After her funeral, he wrote in his diary, “I feel a solid pleasure in reflecting on our own conduct in her education; surely, we endeavored to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and I trust our endeavors were not in vain.”³² Again, Fuller used plural pronouns in this statement, reflecting a united effort from the two parents in caring for their daughter.³³

Sadly, the young girl’s mother was destined to meet an early and tragic end to her life as well.³⁴ On July 10, 1792, Fuller wrote in his diary, “My family afflictions have

²⁹Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 260. Fuller continued, “I then told her of the great grace of God, and the love of Christ to sinners. I told her of his mercy in forgiving a poor wicked thief, who, when he was dying, prayed to him to save his soul. At this she seemed cheered, but said nothing.”

³⁰Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 263. Such maternal instruction was likely similar to what Fuller himself had received as a young boy from his mother.

³¹Fuller wrote in his diary, “As I lay ill in bed, in another room, I heard a whispering. I inquired and all were silent . . . all were silent . . . but all is well! I feel reconciled to God. I called my family round my bed . . . and blessed a taking as well as a giving God.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 270.

³²Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 270.

³³In addition to caring for his daughter’s soul, Fuller was also able to see how the Lord used this trial in his own life. Before her death, he wrote, “I can easily see, it may be best for us to part. I have been long praying, in I know not what manner, that I might be brought *nearer* to God; find some particular *evils* in my heart subdued; and my heart more *weaned* from things below, and *set on things above*. Perhaps, by ‘terrible things in righteousness’ God may answer these petitions.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 270.

³⁴This episode is recounted through Fuller’s correspondence and journal in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 271–77. After her death, Fuller wrote up an account of her final days and sent it to

almost overwhelmed me; and what is before me I know not! For about a month past, the affliction of my dear companion has been extremely heavy.”³⁵ Soon after, he wrote to Ryland, “Through the effect of her hysterical complaints, Mrs. Fuller is, at this time, as destitute of reason as an infant.”³⁶ Although she was pregnant at the time, Fuller did not render an estimate as to the precise nature of her affliction. As the weeks wore on, her mind became increasingly unstable and she feared her own family, even accusing them of holding her hostage from her true family. At other times, she was so desirous of her husband’s company that he could scarcely leave her presence.³⁷ Ryland noted Fuller’s consistent tenderness toward her throughout her sickness.³⁸ Save for a brief interval in her final weeks, she continued in this state for three months (June to August 1792), never fully recovering. The respite in her sickness yielded a touching scene that is worthy of mention. One night when Fuller wept in her presence, she seemed to be restored to her senses for a brief time at the sight of his tears. Instantly, she recognized her husband, kissed him, and began to apologize for her conduct. The two stayed up for the whole night talking and reflecting, as she gave instructions to him about various domestic matters. The following morning, she also recognized her son, Robert (1782–1809), and had a sweet conversation with him. This interlude reveals the kind of wife and mother that Sarah was in full health and is a reminder of the genuine affection that seemed to subsist between her and her husband.

Regrettably, this period of relief lasted less than a full day, and she sunk back

her father, Stephen Gardiner. The details that follow are taken from this account.

³⁵Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 271. Two weeks later, Fuller wrote to Ryland, “My domestic trials are exceedingly great, far, very far, beyond what I ever met with before.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 272.

³⁶Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 272.

³⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 273. Remarkably, the Baptist Missionary Society was founded in October of the same year. One can only imagine the strain upon Fuller at the juxtaposition of these two events.

³⁸Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 271.

into despair by that evening, never to recover her strength again. After giving birth to a daughter on August 23, 1792, Sarah Gardiner Fuller died in her home in the presence of her husband.³⁹ Fuller reflected on her passing with these words, “Poor soul! What she often said is now true. She was *not* at home . . . I am *not* her husband . . . these are *not* her children . . . but she has found her home . . . a home, a husband, and a family better than these.”⁴⁰

Fuller was obviously quite confident in his wife’s salvation, having observed her piety up close for over fifteen years of marriage. After her death, he reported that she was resigned to the will of the Lord during the lucid moments of her affliction and often spoke to friends about how she regretted not having served God better.⁴¹ From the admittedly scarce evidence available, it appears that the marriage of Andrew and Sarah Fuller was consistent with the Puritan vision for the home. Their mutual affection rested not on the shifting sands of outward beauty or pleasant circumstances, but on the sure foundation of a holy commitment to one another and a genuine desire to obey God. They partnered together in raising their children, instructing them in the Lord and praying for their salvation. They encouraged one another toward spiritual growth and strengthened each other through various trials. They remained heavenly-minded, even as the earth seemed to shake beneath their feet. While one must be careful drawing conclusions from limited evidence, it appears that their relationship was healthy and their affection for one another genuine; evidenced in no small part by the impact that Sarah’s death had on her widowed husband.

³⁹In her final hours, she exclaimed to her grieving husband, “Let me die my dear,” words which Fuller took to heart. The daughter, whom they named Bathoni, followed her mother in death about three weeks later. Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 275–76.

⁴⁰Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 275.

⁴¹Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 276. John West, who succeeded Fuller as the pastor at Soham, preached her funeral from 2 Cor 5:1. In the Authorized Version, it reads, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Near the one-year anniversary of her death, Fuller composed some verses in her memory, which further reflected the quality of their marriage and their love for one another. An extract from these words provides a fitting conclusion to this section:

There once did live a heart that cared for me;
I loved, and was again beloved in turn.
Her tender soul would sooth my rising griefs,
And wipe my tears, and mix them with her own.
But she is not! And I forlorn am left,
To weep unheeded, and to serve alone.⁴²

Marriage to Anne Coles

Perhaps one of the strongest indications of the health of Fuller's first marriage was his eagerness to marry again. On July 18, 1794, he wrote in his diary that he was praying through Proverbs 3:5–6 as he considered the possibility. With hopes of once again finding the kind of companionship he enjoyed with Sarah, he wrote, "I have found much of the hand of God guiding me to one in whom I hope to find a helper to my soul."⁴³ This one was Anne Coles, the daughter of Reverend William Coles (1735–1809) of Amphill, the godly and evangelistic pastor of the Baptist church at Maulden.⁴⁴ Three months later, Fuller devoted a day to fasting and praying for his anticipated marriage, noting in his journal the comfort he took from Solomon's prayer of dedication in 1 Kings 8:22–66. Andrew and Anne were married on December 30 of the same year.⁴⁵ In his

⁴²Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 277.

⁴³Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 278.

⁴⁴Ryland spelled her name as "Ann," but her son referred to her as "Anne." For more on William Coles, see Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 278–81. In a letter to a friend, Coles said of Fuller, "I feel an entire confidence in the worthy man who is designed, by Divine Providence, to be the companion of my daughter's life. I love him; and the more I know of him, the more I confide in him, as *a good man, and a favourite of God*. I believe his heart is right with God, and that it will be well with him, in life, in death, and forever." Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 281.

⁴⁵Andrew Gunton Fuller recorded an exchange between Andrew Fuller and his mother about the prospect of his second marriage. After briefly expressing her concerns for his children in having a step-mother, Philippa Fuller concluded, "My dear, I wish you to do that which will render you most happy." Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 74–75. For his part, Andrew Gunton Fuller reported that no difference was ever

journal, Fuller marked the day as follows:

This day, I was married; and this day will, probably, stamp my future life with either increasing happiness or misery. My hopes rise high of the former; but my times, and the times of my dear companion, are in the Lord's hands. I feel a satisfaction that in her I have a godly character, as well as a wife.⁴⁶

The two had six children together, three of whom died in infancy. After the death of the first child, a daughter named after her mother, Fuller wrote a touching poem that included the following lines:

Oh! Our Redeemer and our God—our help
In tribulation—hear our fervent prayer!
To Thee we now resign the sacred trust,
Which thou, erewhile, didst unto us commit.
Soon we must quit our hold, and let her fall;
Thine everlasting arms be then beneath!
In Thee a refuge may she find in death,
And in thy bosom dwell, when torn from ours!
Into thy hands her spirit we commit,
In hope ere long to meet and part no more.⁴⁷

Two sons and one daughter from this marriage survived their father: Sarah (d. 1816), who died shortly after her father's death, having demonstrated a remarkable piety in her final years; William, about whom little is known, and Andrew Gunton, who became a pastor and biographer of his father.⁴⁸ His particular memoir provides the most information about Anne Fuller. Andrew Gunton Fuller called his mother, "one of the

made between the children of Anne and the children of the late Sarah Gardiner.

⁴⁶Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 278. Ryland also included an extract of a letter from Fuller describing the occasion, which aimed at "as little parade as possible" but included an evening of tea and prayer with a dozen close friends.

⁴⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 282. Ryland received this poem from Mrs. Fuller after her husband's death. She shared that the two of them stayed up all night watching their dear child the night before she died, feeling hopeless to help her. The following morning, Fuller penned these lines. The child was twenty months old when she died.

⁴⁸Sarah Fuller lost the use of her limbs in 1811 and remained in pain for the rest of her life. Ryland remembered her as an amiable child, with good character and a tender conscience. During her sickness, she frequently sought opportunities to speak to her friends and family about their own spiritual welfare, even instructing Robert Hall Jr. (1764–1831) to make special appeal to her friends at her pending funeral. Such piety came by the grace of God but can also be attributed in part to the home in which she was raised. Sarah Fuller died on June 11, 1816 at the age of nineteen. An account of her illness and character can be found in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 291–94, as well as in "Sketches of the Lives of three Children of the Rev. Andrew Fuller," 73–87.

noblest and truest mothers, as well as the best of wives, to whom my father, not less myself, owed a large measure of what was worth living for.”⁴⁹ He continued, “She was a true help-meet to her husband, not only as an amanuensis, but a discreet adviser, and tenderly mindful of his health and comfort amidst his multifarious labours.”⁵⁰ The younger Fuller recalled a particular story about his mother that illustrated her piety. One day, as a young boy, he found his mother pacing her bedroom and praying aloud. When the young boy inquired to whom she was talking, she replied, “To God, my child, about you.”⁵¹ She then knelt beside her son and explained, in his words, “such a practical lesson in the spirit of prayer as could never be forgotten.”⁵²

Andrew and Anne Fuller appeared to have had a happy marriage where each supported the other. Their son reported that his father would sometimes confide in Anne his great sorrows over the loss of his first wife. It seems that Anne handled such moments with grace and tenderness as she recognized that “it comforted him to tell her the sad tale.”⁵³ Of Anne, Fuller wrote, “I have found my marriage to contribute greatly to my peace and comfort, and the comfort of my family; for which I record humble and hearty thanks to the God of my life!”⁵⁴ Thus, Fuller was blessed in his second marriage with the same kind of companionship he had enjoyed in his first. Having examined each of Fuller’s marriages, we will now look briefly at his relationship with his children.

A Devoted Father

Andrew Fuller’s friend and biographer John Webster Morris (1763–1836)

⁴⁹Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 75.

⁵⁰Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 76.

⁵¹Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 76.

⁵²Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 76.

⁵³Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 76.

⁵⁴Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 283.

provided an excellent window into the Fuller home:

In domestic life, he was calm and tranquil, reposing in the bosom of his family with great contentment and satisfaction. No man more enjoyed the softened pleasures of 'home, sweet home,' or entered with greater feeling into its interests and concerns; yet he never returned from his numerous fatiguing journeys to indulge himself in ease . . . but solely with a view of renewing and multiplying his efforts in another form.⁵⁵

His memoirs reveal that such efforts sprang from the heart of a devoted father. Fuller was dedicated to training his children in the ways of the Lord through family worship and intentional spiritual conversations. What Richard Baxter and John Gill called for in previous generations, Andrew Fuller lived out. He sang the words of the great Puritan hymn-writer Isaac Watts over his children.⁵⁶ Of his daughter, Sarah, whose story is told above, he recalled, "I used to carry her in my arms into the fields, and there talk with her upon the desirableness of dying and being with Christ."⁵⁷ He seized upon such trials of life as opportunities to drive home the lessons he taught the children in their catechisms: "I felt much impressed tonight, in catechizing the children. [I] thought about my own little girl, and talked to them concerning her."⁵⁸ As his children grew older, he wrote to them to encourage their faith and offer wisdom in their trials.⁵⁹ Throughout his life, Fuller remained committed to the spiritual welfare of his children, exhibiting a love

⁵⁵Morris, *Memoirs of Andrew Fuller*, 308. Reflecting on Fuller's domestic life, Morris remarked, "It is by the facility with which superior minds descend from their elevation, and mingle with us in the ordinary occurrences of life, that under one view we estimate their greatness." Morris, *Memoirs of Andrew Fuller*, 35.

⁵⁶Fuller reminisced about singing the words of Watts' "Cradle Hymn" over his daughter Sarah in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 257. The specific lines that Fuller remembered were as follows: "May'st thou live to know and fear him, Trust and love him all thy days; Then go dwell forever near him, See his face, and sing his praise."

⁵⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 259.

⁵⁸Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 268.

⁵⁹For example, see the two letters addressed to his daughter, Mary, when she was away at Northampton for school. These letters are found in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 301–2.

that his own son called “remarkably intense.”⁶⁰

His wayward son, Robert, put this love to its greatest test.⁶¹ On May 12, 1796, Fuller wrote regarding Robert, “I know not whether he be a real Christian.”⁶² In the following years, Fuller arranged work for Robert on numerous occasions only to see his son desert the opportunities and embarrass his father multiple times.⁶³ After one such incident, Fuller wrote in his diary, “I perceive I have great unhappiness before me, in my son, whose instability is continually appearing.”⁶⁴ Despite the absence of any change in Robert’s attitude, Fuller remained hopeful.⁶⁵

After years of wandering, Robert eventually joined the Marines and set sail for Portugal, an occasion that prompted him to write his father seeking forgiveness. Fuller replied graciously, “You may be assured that I cherish no animosity against you. On the contrary, I do, from my heart, freely forgive you.”⁶⁶ The compassionate father then took

⁶⁰Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 68.

⁶¹The account of Fuller’s efforts to guide Robert can be found in Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 283–90 with additional information supplied by Andrew Gunton Fuller in *Andrew Fuller*, 68–73. This story is also summarized in “Sketches of the Lives of three Children of the Rev. Andrew Fuller,” 7–28, and in Michael Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2001), 283–88.

⁶²Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 284.

⁶³Ryland recorded these various details faithfully. In May 1796, Fuller sent Robert to London to work in a warehouse owned by his close friend William Burls (1763–1837), but his son wasted the opportunity. In 1797, his father found work for him in Kettering but Robert spurned it to join the army. After he was discharged from the army, his father arranged yet another situation for him, but he enlisted with the Marines instead. There were numerous departures and much disappointment for the father, including the time that he received a false report of his son’s death. However, each time Robert returned to his father, he was met with affection. Nonetheless, this grace seemed to have little impact on the young man who possessed, in the words of Ryland, such “a habit of roving” (*Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 285).

⁶⁴Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 284.

⁶⁵In a letter to Ryland, he commented, “Even while I knew not where he was, I felt stayed on the Lord, and some degree of cheerful satisfaction, that things would end well.” Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 285.

⁶⁶Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 288. The portion of this letter that Ryland preserved reveals that although Fuller was full of compassion for his son, he was willing to speak difficult truths to him.

this opportunity to plead once more with his son to come to Christ:

My dear son! I am now fifty-five years old and may soon expect to go the way of all the earth! But before I die, let me teach you the good and the right way . . . You have had a large portion of God's preserving goodness; or you had, ere now, perished in your sins . . . Nevertheless, do not despair! Far as you have gone, and low as you are sunk in sin, yet, if from hence, you return to God by Jesus Christ, you will find mercy.⁶⁷

Regretfully, Robert's response to this letter is unknown. Instead, his father received news a few months later that his son had perished off the coast of Lisbon. The following Sunday, Fuller preached a passionate sermon about God's willingness to justify even the worst sinner through Christ. Thinking of his wayward son, Fuller began to weep in the pulpit as he referenced the Lord hearing Jonah from beneath the waves.⁶⁸ Fuller knew that God could save his dear son, but he feared that Robert had continued to spurn the Lord until it was too late.

Andrew Gunton Fuller, who was privy to information that his father apparently never knew, recorded an encouraging conclusion to the story. Many years later, a man who served alongside Robert in the Marines told him, "We were exceedingly intimate, and opened our minds much to each other. He was a very pleasing, nice youth, and became a true Christian man."⁶⁹ It appears that his father's faithful prayers and passionate pleas toward his son were not in vain. While Fuller was likely unaware of this grace until his own death, the promise of a joyous reunion awaited him nonetheless.⁷⁰

This story provides a profound window into the heart of Andrew Fuller the

⁶⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 289.

⁶⁸Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 290. Ryland recorded the three points of the sermon and the fact that the congregation joined in mourning with him.

⁶⁹Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 73.

⁷⁰Morden points out, "This ending is not as implausible as it first appears, as letters written by Robert to his father and half-sister Sarah (which are now lost), together with a report from the ship's captain, gave Fuller himself some hope that his son had come to repentance and faith at the end of his life." Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 113. Haykin comments fittingly, "Andrew Fuller's many prayers for his wayward son were answered and that verse from Psalm 126 powerfully illustrated: 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy'" (*Armies of the Lamb*, 259).

father. He prayed fervently for his children and counseled them toward Christ through intentional conversations. The same devotion that inspired his late-night talks with his young dying daughter compelled him to pen passionate epistles to his adult children.

Despite the preceding accounts of his family life, some scholars have questioned Fuller's commitment as a husband and father. In his excellent study of Fuller as a pastor-theologian, for example, Paul Brewster has suggested that Fuller was so devoted to the Baptist Missionary Society in his later years that he may have been guilty of neglecting his family.⁷¹ As an illustration of Fuller's lack of balance, Brewster quoted Anne in a letter to Ryland after Fuller's death in which she lamented her husband's workload and its negative impact on his family and health. In her grief, Anne commented, "I am fully persuaded, that my dear husband fell a sacrifice to his unremitting application to the concerns of the Mission."⁷² In at least one instance, Fuller himself reported the impact that his various labors had on his second wife as well. He wrote, "Through such a number of objects as press upon me daily, my own vineyard, my own soul, my own family, and congregation, are neglected."⁷³ In stark terms, Fuller recounted his wife's concerns: "My wife looks at me with a tear ready to drop, and says, 'My dear, you have hardly time to speak to me.'"⁷⁴ How should such stories impact one's

⁷¹Brewster lists "achieving balance" as one of Fuller's key weaknesses. Brewster, *Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, 161–62.

⁷²The context of Anne's comment to Ryland after her husband's death was as follows: "To so great a degree was he absorbed in his work, as scarcely to allow himself any leisure, or relaxation from the severest application; especially, since of late years, his work so accumulated on his hands. I was sometimes used to remark, how much we were occupied; (for, indeed, I had no small share of care devolved upon me, in consequence); his reply usually was, 'Ah, my dear, the way for us to have any joy, is to rejoice in all our labour, and then we shall have plenty of joy.' If I complained, that he allowed himself no time for recreation, he would answer, 'O no, all my recreation is a change of work.' If I expressed an apprehension that he would soon wear himself out, he would reply, 'I cannot be worn out in a better cause.'" Near the end of the letter, Anne remarked, "I am fully persuaded, that my dear husband fell a sacrifice to his unremitting application to the concerns of the Mission; but I dare not murmur. The Lord has done as it pleased him; and I know that whatever he does is right." Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 282–83.

⁷³Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 91.

⁷⁴Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 91.

assessment of Fuller as a husband and father?

Surely no man is without fault in his efforts to balance the responsibilities of multiple roles, but to truly get at the meaning of these statements, one must consider the context. Fuller's reference to Anne's tear-filled pleas for him to slow down was in reply to an editor who had asked him to begin contributing to a new journal.⁷⁵ He was not confessing his failure as a husband so much as he was citing his wife's fears that he was doing too much as a reason for declining the opportunity. The overall point of the letter is actually supportive of the thesis of this chapter: he refused to take on this responsibility because he did not want it to negatively impact his family.

Anne's comment to Ryland about the toll of the BMS work on Fuller's health was probably rooted in reality. Fuller was tirelessly devoted to the efforts of the missionaries and several of his contemporaries expressed similar concerns.⁷⁶ However, his devotion to the BMS should not be framed as a general lack of commitment to his family. Alongside such comments, one must recall Fuller caring for his dying wife in her final days, weeping over the crib of his infant daughter, and his tireless efforts to help his wayward son. Such actions are not consistent with the accusation of family neglect. A single letter from his grieving widow should not provide the sole assessment of his character as a husband and father. The picture that has emerged in this study reveals a man who remained faithful to his family in spite of his various responsibilities. While it is true that Fuller was intensely devoted to the work of the mission, perhaps even to a fault at times, it should be noted that in the same letter, Anne concluded, "I must testify [his

⁷⁵The context for this letter is provided by his son in Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 90. It should also be mentioned that Fuller seemed to possess a tendency toward self-abasement. For example, in his journal, he lamented, "My Sabbaths, I fear, are spent to little purpose; I have so little love to God and the souls of men." Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 268.

⁷⁶For example, Robert Hall, Jr. wrote after Fuller's death of his "unceasing labours and exertions in superintending the Mission to India, to which he most probably fell a victim." Quoted in Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 192.

domestic character] to have been, ever since I had the happiness of being united to him, of the most amiable and endearing kind.”⁷⁷ Had Sarah Gardiner Fuller had the opportunity, one can imagine she would have concurred with this assessment, particularly in light of Fuller’s diligent care for her in her final days.

As Andrew Fuller himself once observed, “The characters of men are not so easily ascertained from a few splendid actions as from the ordinary course of life, in which their real dispositions are manifested.”⁷⁸ This statement provides a helpful perspective on Fuller’s attitude toward his family. The Baptist pastor was a loving father, who sought the spiritual well-being of his children through prayer and instruction. Taking the Puritan call for fatherly leadership seriously, he modeled spirituality to his children and trained them in the ways of the Lord. He was a faithful husband, who cared deeply about each of the women to whom he was successively married. Both Sarah and Anne proved to be helpful companions to Fuller and, in each marriage, he seems to have enjoyed the kind of mutuality that the Puritans and early Baptists sought to pursue. While his numerous public commitments often pulled him away from his family, he still sought to minister to them even as he pastored his church, defended the faith through his written works, and promoted the cause of international missions. Like his Puritan predecessors, Fuller’s commitment to making God known throughout the world seems to have begun in his own home.

Marriage in the Theology of Andrew Fuller

While Andrew Fuller never wrote a treatise on marriage, his views on the subject are accessible through careful study of his works.⁷⁹ For example, in a sermon on

⁷⁷Ryland, *Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 282–83.

⁷⁸Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:93.

⁷⁹Much of the following material will also appear in Matthew D. Haste, “‘Helped on our Way to Heaven’: Andrew Fuller’s Theology of Marriage,” in *Encountering Andrew Fuller: New Essays on Andrew Fuller as a Theologian*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (n.p.: Alev Books, 2015).

Ephesians 5, he marveled at how “motives to the most ordinary duties are derived from the doctrine of the cross,” and remarked, “Who but an apostle would have thought of enforcing affection in a husband to a wife from the love of Christ to his church?”⁸⁰ Such statements reveal that he thought of marriage through the lens of the gospel and recognized its connection to spirituality. He explained, “I am inclined to think that our personal Christianity is more manifest in this way than in any other.” Character is not proven by actions on special occasions, he reasoned, but “by that which is habitual, and which, without our so much as designing it, will spontaneously appear in our language and behavior.”⁸¹ For Fuller, the doctrine of the cross lay at the heart of marriage; therefore, marriage could be helpful in appreciating the gospel. He frequently used marriage as an illustration for particular gospel truths, revealing his thoughts on matrimony in the process. By examining such references in his writings, it is possible to assemble a basic framework of Andrew Fuller’s theology of marriage.

As with much of his theology, his doctrine of marriage was consistent with the Puritan tradition. Fuller was well-versed in the writings of certain Puritans and bore the marks of their influence in many ways.⁸² According to Morris, although Fuller’s library included but “a scanty collection of the writings of the Puritans . . . he was very partial to Owen and Bunyan.”⁸³ In 1798, Fuller compiled a list of 310 books in his personal

⁸⁰Andrew Fuller, “The Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:243.

⁸¹Fuller, “The Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:244.

⁸²For more on how Puritan theology shaped Fuller, see Jeffrey K. Jue, “Andrew Fuller: Heir of the Reformation,” *Eusebeia* 9 (Spring 2008): 27–52; Thomas J. Nettles, “The Influence of Jonathan Edwards on Andrew Fuller,” *Eusebeia* 9 (Spring 2008): 97–116; and Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Brill: Brill Press, 2012).

⁸³Morris, *Memoirs of Andrew Fuller*, 359. The specific authors mentioned are, of course, John Bunyan (1628–1688), the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and pastor of the Bedford congregation, and John Owen (1616–1683), the renowned theologian and voluminous author. For more on Owen’s influence, see Carl R. Trueman, “John Owen and Andrew Fuller,” *Eusebeia* 9 (Spring 2008): 53–70.

possession, which included fifteen by Puritan authors.⁸⁴ While he may have been unfamiliar with some of the specific works on marriage mentioned thus far in this study, he read deeply enough in the Puritan tradition to have absorbed many of its key components. The following sections will demonstrate his continuity with the Puritans by examining his views on marriage, which were rooted in a biblical understanding of God's plan and purposes for the institution.

God's Plan for Marriage

Fuller's theology of marriage began with the recognition that God had dictated a plan for it in the Scriptures. As such, humans are accountable to their Creator and the "original law of marriage."⁸⁵ Fuller used several terms for this notion but he derived the basic concept from his reading of Genesis 2:18–25.⁸⁶

According to Fuller, the "original design" of marriage set forth in Genesis "confines men to one wife" and "teaches them to treat her with propriety."⁸⁷ As noted in previous chapters, polygamy was a significant issue in eighteenth-century England, but Fuller's positive definition of marriage here prohibited not only polygamy but other forms of fornication such as homosexuality and adultery as well. Although Fuller does not refer to homosexuality in this context, his overall theology of marriage only allows

⁸⁴This information is taken from Michael A. G. Haykin, "A Great Thirst for Reading": Andrew Fuller the Theological Reader," *Eusebeia* 9 (Spring 2008): 16. For the full list of Fuller's library, see "List of Books belonging to Andrew Fuller of Kettering" (Ms. G95B, Bristol Baptist College Library, Bristol, England).

⁸⁵Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:66.

⁸⁶Additional terms include "the law of nature" in Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:10; "the Christian law" in Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:121; and "the original simplicity" of "first principles" in Andrew Fuller, *Strictures on Sandemanianism in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:633. In his discourses on the Sermon on the Mount, Fuller noted that Jesus reinstated "the original law of creation" in regard to marriage and divorce. Andrew Fuller, *Sermon on the Mount in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:571.

⁸⁷Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9. Fuller's basic definition of marriage is in agreement with *The Second London Confession* of 1677. See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1989), 284–85.

for a heterosexual relationship. For example, in reference to Genesis 19, he referred to the acts of the Sodomites as “a species of crime too shocking and detestable to be named.”⁸⁸ Fuller considered adultery a perversion of God’s plan for monogamy and recognized it as grounds for lawful divorce.⁸⁹

In his reflections on Genesis, Fuller pointed out the failures of Lamech, Abraham, and Jacob to uphold the biblical standard of faithful monogamy. Lamech was “the first who violated the law of marriage” by taking a second wife and Abraham followed the foolish advice of his wife into the same “deviation from the original law of marriage.”⁹⁰ In regard to Abraham’s choice to marry Hagar, he concluded, “There is no calculating in how many instances this ill example has been followed, or how great a matter this little fire has kindled.”⁹¹ Additionally, he noted of Jacob, “The domestic discords, envies, and jealousies between Jacob’s wives serve to teach the wisdom and goodness of the Christian law, that every man have his own wife, as well as every woman her own husband.”⁹² He considered any such form of fornication “an evil and bitter thing” because it violated God’s plan for a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman.⁹³

Fuller recognized that God’s plan for marriage also included specific roles and responsibilities for each spouse. Consistent with the Puritan tradition, Fuller believed that

⁸⁸Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:77. In another work, he also referred to homosexuality as “unnatural.” Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel its Own Witness* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:40.

⁸⁹See Fuller, *Sermon on the Mount* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:570–71.

⁹⁰Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:23, 66–67.

⁹¹Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:67.

⁹²He continued, “No reflecting person can read this chapter without being disgusted with polygamy, and thankful for that dispensation which has restored the original law of nature, and with it, true conjugal felicity.” Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:121.

⁹³Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:137.

the husband was to lead his home, protecting his family from both physical and spiritual dangers.⁹⁴ In an ordination sermon preached in 1787, Fuller exhorted a young minister to pay close attention to his responsibilities as a spiritual leader in his home:

Value [good character] at home in your family. If you walk not closely with God there, you will be ill able to work for him elsewhere. You have lately become the head of a family. Whatever charge it shall please God, in the course of your life, to place under your care, I trust it will be your concern to recommend Christ and the gospel to them, walk circumspectly before them, constantly worship God with them, offer up secret prayer for them, and exercise a proper authority over them.⁹⁵

Fuller connected faithfulness in the home to fruitfulness in ministry, arguing that “eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, as noted above, he considered a man’s conduct at home to be a supreme revelation of his true character. In a sermon on false teachers, he remarked, “Men may put on the demure and the devout for mere selfish purposes, but follow them into private and domestic life, and they will ordinarily declare themselves.”⁹⁷ Fuller further pointed out that a man’s leadership in his home was significant because of its impact on those entrusted to his care. In a sermon entitled, “The Importance of Union of Public and Private Interests in the Service of God,” Fuller again pointed out the need for men to pay attention to “the spiritual welfare of [their] families.”⁹⁸ One can detect the seriousness with which Fuller understood this responsibility from the following quote:

Alas! How painful must be the thought, if one, or two, or more of those thus

⁹⁴Fuller chastised both Adam and Abraham for failing to lead their families. Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:11, 66.

⁹⁵Andrew Fuller, “The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:136. Fuller’s list of fatherly responsibilities is reminiscent of Samuel Stennett’s parallel consideration of the same subject. See Stennett, *Domestic Duties* in *Works of Samuel Stennett*, 3:32–33.

⁹⁶Fuller, “Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:143.

⁹⁷Fuller, *Sermon on the Mount* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:589.

⁹⁸Fuller, “Importance of Union of Public and Private Interests in the Service of God,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:472.

committed to our charge, be wrecked and lost! How interesting it must be to a serious mind to be able to say, at the last day, “Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me!” It is true that the parent is not accountable for the conversion of his children. He cannot change their hearts. He only that made the human mind can change it; but the means are his, the blessing is the Lord’s. It is of importance that we carefully walk before our children, setting them a holy example, walking before our families and all our domestics in such a way as that we recommend them to follow us.⁹⁹

Fuller’s language of “walking” before the family as a godly model is likely rooted in the Authorized Version’s rendering of Psalm 101:2, “. . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.” Matthew Henry (1662–1714), the renowned Puritan commentator on the Scriptures, called this passage “The Householder’s Psalm.”¹⁰⁰ Henry called for fathers to follow the example of David, who considered “not only how he would walk when he appeared in public, when he sat in the throne, but how he would *walk within his house*, where he was more out of the eye of the world, but where he still saw himself under the eye of God.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Fuller’s understanding of the man’s role in the home was consistent with the Puritan tradition he inherited.

Fuller also taught that God had given specific responsibilities to wives. In an address prepared for two missionaries and their wives, Fuller elaborated on some of these duties as follows:

My dear sisters, yours is a great work . . . It is for you to strengthen the hands of your companions, by a cheerful demeanor under their various discouragements, by conversing with the native females, by keeping order in the family, by setting an example of modesty and affection, by economy and industry.¹⁰²

As these missionary wives followed the example of other faithful women,

⁹⁹Fuller, “Importance of Union of Public and Private Interests,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:472. As noted above, the pain of seeing one’s own children depart from the Lord was a sorrow Fuller knew well.

¹⁰⁰Henry’s commentary was one of the most popular works of its kind in the eighteenth century. It is almost certain that Fuller would have been familiar with it. For more on Henry, see Allan M. Harman, *Matthew Henry (1661–1774): His Life and Influence* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012).

¹⁰¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 887.

¹⁰²Andrew Fuller, “The Christian Ministry a Great Work,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:515.

Fuller believed that their conduct would be “a powerful recommendation of the gospel.”¹⁰³ When wives failed to fulfill their roles, their conduct not only reflected poorly on the gospel but also had the potential to negatively influence their husbands. Thus, Fuller noted of the patriarch Abraham, “The father of mankind [Adam] sinned by hearkening to his wife, and now the father of the faithful follows his example [in Gen 16]. How necessary for those who stand in the nearest relations, to take heed of being snares, instead of helps to one another!”¹⁰⁴

Fuller contended that each spouse should fulfill their duties to the other out of love rather than obligation. In one sermon, he used marriage as an example of love, contending, “All the labours and journeys of a loving head of a family are directed to their comfort; and all the busy cares of an affectionate wife to the honor and happiness of her husband.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, following his Puritan and Baptist predecessors, he recognized the role of affection as a motivation for fulfilling marital responsibilities.

One aspect of Fuller’s theology of marriage that is especially noteworthy is the way he envisioned how the loving fulfillment of spousal responsibilities pointed to the power of the gospel. He contended that the husband’s leadership is not to be of a tyrannical spirit as was common in pagan countries, for Christianity had restored the “woman to her original state, that of a friend and companion.”¹⁰⁶ In a cultural context where gender inequality was assumed and accepted, Fuller considered the proper treatment of women to be one of the distinguishing marks of a truly Christian home. It

¹⁰³Fuller, “Christian Ministry a Great Work,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:515.

¹⁰⁴Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:66.

¹⁰⁵Andrew Fuller, “The Nature and Importance of Love,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:306.

¹⁰⁶Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:16. Fuller noted that while there is “doubtless a natural subordination in innocency, through sin woman becomes comparatively a slave,” especially “where sin reigns uncontrolled, as in heathen and Mahometan countries.” Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:16. Thus, Fuller was in agreement with his fellow eighteenth-century Baptists in grounding gender roles in the created order, even as he acknowledged how these roles had been distorted by the Fall.

would be inaccurate to cast Fuller as a revolutionary on this issue, but he did challenge men to treat their wives in a way that distinguished them from the surrounding culture. Thus, he proclaimed, “Go among the enemies of the gospel, and you shall see the woman either reduced to abject slavery, or basely flattered for the vilest purposes; but in Christian families you may see her treated with honor and respect.”¹⁰⁷ Fuller contended that the Christian vision for marriage restored dignity to women, calling for the wife to be “treated as a friend, as naturally an equal, a soother of man’s cares, a softener of his griefs, and a partner of his joys.”¹⁰⁸ Fuller’s description of marital companionship is consistent with the Puritan vision, but he expanded it by focusing on the restored dignity of women and the way in which Christian marriages ought to stand out from the culture around them.

Thus, Fuller argued that the gospel empowered Christian marriages to conform to God’s original plan by restoring the ability of husbands and wives to live out their respective roles faithfully. As individual marriages attained this goal, Christian families cast a powerful vision to the watching world. Furthermore, such families provided the foundation for strong churches. Fuller’s reflection on this fruit of godly families provides a helpful conclusion to this discussion and is worth quoting in full:

A Christian family is the first nursery for the church of God. It is there that the seed of truth is ordinarily sown. It is there that the first principles of true religion are often instilled. The prayers, the tears, the cautions, and the example of a godly parent, who walks in the fear of God before his family, will leave effects on the mind. I have seldom known persons converted who were brought up in religious families, but they have dated their first impressions from something which took place in the family. They have dated their early convictions to what has passed in family worship, perhaps, or in the counsel and example of their friends. Thus is the church of God supplied from Christian families—thus are the lively stones furnished, by which the spiritual house is reared. Let this be an encouragement to us.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9. See also *The Gospel its Own Witness in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:42–47.

¹⁰⁸Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:10.

¹⁰⁹Andrew Fuller, “Importance of Union of Public and Private Interests,” in *Works of Andrew*

God's Purposes for Marriage

Since God created marriage with a specific plan in mind, Fuller recognized the value of noting the divine purposes for the institution. Like others in the Puritan-Reformed tradition, Fuller acknowledged three primary purposes for marriage—procreation, protection, and companionship—to which he included a fourth: the display of gospel truths in reflecting the relationship of Christ and the church. This section will examine how Fuller treated each of these purposes as a demonstration of his theological continuity with the Puritan-Reformed tradition. While he did not reorder the customary sequence of purposes when discussing the creation of marriage in his commentary on Genesis, like his Puritan predecessors, he placed far greater emphasis on the role of companionship than the other stated purposes.¹¹⁰ In consolidating Fuller's thoughts on the subject, the following section will survey how Fuller addressed each of these purposes throughout his corpus.

First, he noted that God created marriage “for the propagation of the human race.”¹¹¹ Marriage provided the proper relationship in which to obey the command to multiply and be fruitful. Fuller explained that the command “contains permission, not of promiscuous intercourse, like the brutes, but of honorable marriage.”¹¹² Thus, one purpose for marriage is the multiplication of the human race according to God's original command in Genesis 1:26–27.

A second purpose of marriage is to make “a most distinguished provision for

Fuller, 1:472. Similarly, William Gouge had declared nearly two centuries before: “A family is a little Church, and a little commonwealth, at least a lively representation thereof, whereby trial may be made of such as are fit for any place of authority, or of subjection in Church or commonwealth. Or rather it is as a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned; whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or commonwealth.” William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 18.

¹¹⁰It is noteworthy that Fuller did not follow the order of the *Second London Confession*. Like Samuel Stennett, he placed procreation first in his discussion of the purposes of marriage, although companionship was clearly central to his vision for marriage.

¹¹¹Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9.

¹¹²Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis in Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:39.

human happiness.”¹¹³ Fuller made this comment in relation to God’s creation of Eve, noting, “The woman was made for the man; not merely for the gratification of his appetites, but of his rational and social nature.”¹¹⁴ In his commentary on Genesis 2, he continued, “It was not good that man should be alone; and therefore a helper that should be meet, or suitable was given him.”¹¹⁵ In this same passage, he called Eve “a fit companion” for Adam. One way in which Fuller alluded to the centrality of companionship can be seen in the way he appealed to marriage to substantiate other points throughout his writings. For example, in arguing for the necessity of love in one’s actions toward God, he reasoned, “If a wife were ever so assiduous in attending to her husband, yet if he were certain that her heart was not with him, he would abhor her endeavors to please him, and nothing that she did would be acceptable in his sight.”¹¹⁶ Thus, for Fuller, genuine companionship and mutual affection lay at the heart of God’s purposes for marriage. This position shone clearly through each of his marriages detailed above.

A third purpose Fuller noted for marriage was protection from sin. In his reflections on Genesis 6, he argued, “The great end of marriage, in a good man, should not be to gratify his fancy, nor to indulge his natural inclinations, but to obtain a helper; and the same in a woman.”¹¹⁷ Here he was not speaking of mere physical assistance, but rather moral encouragement. He continued, “We need to be helped on our way to heaven, instead of being hindered and corrupted.”¹¹⁸ Thus, Fuller envisioned companionship to

¹¹³Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9.

¹¹⁴Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9.

¹¹⁵Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:9.

¹¹⁶Andrew Fuller, *Dialogues and Letters between Crispus and Gaius* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:678.

¹¹⁷Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:26.

¹¹⁸Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:26.

involve both romantic affection as well as spiritual support. A century prior, Richard Baxter had acknowledged the potential for mutual encouragement in similar language: “Remember that you are hasting to the everlasting life You are but to help each other in your way, that your journey may be the easier to you, and you may happily meet again in the heavenly Jerusalem.”¹¹⁹

Fuller’s language of being “helped on our way to heaven” may have been influenced by a popular mid-century work on marriage which he possessed in his personal library.¹²⁰ *The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Marriage-State* by John Johnson (1706–1791) was a short allegory reminiscent of John Bunyan’s classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678, 1684).¹²¹ The author recounted a dream in which he witnessed four young men receiving advice from an elderly man about the importance of choosing a good companion for their journey from Babylon to Canaan. The first three men chose to ignore the man’s advice and experienced various troubles as a result, with two of them being led astray to the point of falling off the way altogether. The fourth man, being wiser than the others, chose a fit companion for the journey to Canaan. As the story unfolded, the two proved to be useful help-meets to one another, illustrating the blessings of a one-flesh union founded on faith, in contrast to the plight of being unequally yoked. Johnson’s reflection on this happy couple may have influenced Fuller’s language quoted above: “So I continued observing this united Pair advancing in their Way; for they greatly

¹¹⁹Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 1:404.

¹²⁰This work is included on the recorded list mentioned above.

¹²¹John Johnson, *The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Married-State* (London: George Keith, 1754). Johnson was an interesting character who started his own small sect of Dissenters. For more on John Johnson and the Johnsonian Baptists, see Kenneth Hipper, “The Johnsonian Baptists of Norwich” *The Baptist Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (January 1999): 19–32; Robert Dawbarn, ed., *History of a Forgotten Sect of Baptized Believers Heretofore Known as “Johnsonians”* (London: Balding & Mansell, 1900). This little volume contains a letter of interest to this study in which Johnson explained his rationale for getting married and what he sought in a potential wife. See Dawbarn, *History of a Forgotten Sect*, 19.

contributed to help each other forward, many Difficulties they surmounted, and many rich Blessings they enjoyed as they traveled in the Way.”¹²²

Fuller, of course, found his primary support for this notion in the Scriptures. The Genesis narrative provided several warnings illustrating how spouses could hinder rather than help one another in this regard. Noting how Eve led Adam astray, Fuller commented, “It was the first time, but not the last, in which Satan has made use of the nearest and tendered parts of ourselves, to draw our hearts from God.”¹²³ Fuller recognized that the companionship of a spouse can be a source of great encouragement in sanctification or a devilish snare that leads one toward unrighteousness. Fuller’s warning is reminiscent of the Puritan Thomas Gataker’s straight-forward assessment from the seventeenth century. According to Gataker, marriage “is a business of the greatest consequence, and that whereon on the main comfort or discomfort of a man’s life doth depend; that which may make thine house to be as an heaven or an hell here upon earth.”¹²⁴ In noting such dangers, Fuller pointed out the wisdom of God in prohibiting marriage with unbelievers and warned his congregation of ignoring this command.¹²⁵ The tone of his plea illustrated the high view he held of this particular function of marriage: “I would earnestly entreat serious young people, of both sexes, as they regard God’s honor, their own spiritual welfare, and the welfare of the church of God, to avoid being unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”¹²⁶

In this way, Fuller argued that marriage is for the propagation of the human race, a provision for human happiness, and for protection against sin. A fourth and final

¹²²Johnson, *Advantages and Disadvantages*, 35.

¹²³Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:11.

¹²⁴Thomas Gataker, *A Marriage Praier* (London: John Haviland, 1624), 8.

¹²⁵Andrew Fuller, “The Nature and Importance of Love,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:306.

¹²⁶Fuller, “Nature and Importance of Love,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:306.

function of marriage noted by Fuller is the picture that it provides. Fuller frequently appealed to marriage as an illustration of gospel truths and, in doing so, injected marriage with critical importance. As previously cited, Fuller argued that the ultimate significance of marriage is “derived from the doctrine of the cross.”¹²⁷ In a sermon entitled, “Conformity to the Death of Christ,” Fuller affirmed that “the common duties of domestic life are enforced from” the principles of Christ’s death.¹²⁸ As such, Fuller employed the realities of domestic life as a means of illustrating gospel truths. With each reference to marriage in the context of the gospel, Fuller reaffirmed the necessity of doing marriage according to God’s plan and purposes. Such illustrations fall into three general categories: marriage as a picture of union with Christ, marriage as a preview of eschatological hope, and marriage as a means of understanding the person of Christ.

Fuller frequently used marriage to help demonstrate the blessings of a believer’s union with Christ. For example, when one of his beloved deacons died in 1792, Fuller’s funeral sermon focused on the nature of this blessing for those who die in the Lord.¹²⁹ In order to explain the nature of this union, Fuller cited the biblical comparison to marriage:

The union between Christ and his people is frequently compared to the marriage union; as they who were twain become ‘one flesh, so they who are joined to the Lord are one spirit’ [1 Corinthians 6:16–17]; and as in that case there is not only a mental, but a legal union, each becoming interested in the persons and possessions of the other, so in this we, with all we have, are Christ’s, and Christ, with all he has, is ours.¹³⁰

In another sermon, he noted, “As she that is joined to a husband becomes interested in all that he possesses, so they that are joined to Christ are, by the gracious

¹²⁷Fuller, “Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:243.

¹²⁸Andrew Fuller, “Conformity to the Death of Christ,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:311.

¹²⁹Andrew Fuller, “The Blessedness of the Dead who Die in the Lord,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:152–60.

¹³⁰Fuller, “Blessedness of the Dead who Die in the Lord,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:152.

constitution of the gospel, interested in all that he possesses.”¹³¹ Fuller considered marriage to be particularly helpful for understanding how God justifies sinners by grace through faith. He reasoned that justification is an act of grace because the sinner brings nothing into the relationship and yet, through union with Christ, the sinner becomes the recipient of all his blessings. In the same way, he pointed out that when a wife “becomes one with her husband,” she becomes “legally interested in all that he possesses,” regardless of her former poverty.¹³² As such, Fuller concluded, “The wealth which an indigent female might derive from the opulence of her husband would not be in *reward* of her having received him, so neither is justification the reward of faith.”¹³³ In reflecting on the same illustration in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, he remarked:

Ask [a woman brought into an inheritance through marriage], in the height of her glory, how she became possessed of all this wealth; and, if she retain a proper spirit, she will answer in some such manner as this: It was not mine, but my deliverer’s; his who rescued me from death. It is no reward of any good deeds on my part; it is by marriage; it is ‘of grace’ . . . She now enjoys those possessions by marriage; yet who would think of asserting that her consenting to be his wife was a meritorious act, and that all his possessions were given her as the reward of it?¹³⁴

Such statements demonstrate the importance of marriage in Fuller’s theology as a picture of gospel truths.¹³⁵

In reference to the eschatological reign of Christ, Fuller declared, “The whole gospel dispensation is described as a marriage supper. What an espousal then and what a supper that will be!”¹³⁶ His sermon entitled “The Future Perfection of the Church” further

¹³¹Andrew Fuller, “Reception of Christ the Turning Point of Salvation,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:269.

¹³²Andrew Fuller, “Justification,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:281.

¹³³Fuller, “Justification,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:281.

¹³⁴Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:384.

¹³⁵See also Fuller, *Gospel Worthy* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:402.

¹³⁶Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Apocalypse* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 3:286. Additional references to marriage in his exposition of Revelation include 3:283–86, 295, 305–6.

drew out the implications of this imagery, demonstrating how marriage was used as a metaphor throughout Scripture to, among other things, trace the process of God perfecting his church.¹³⁷ As Fuller pointed out, in presenting the church to himself as described in Ephesians 5:25–27, Christ demonstrated both his sufficiency as a Savior and man’s lowly condition in sin. Whereas the parent typically presented the bride to her groom, the church, described as an abandoned orphan in her sinful condition (cf. Ezekiel 16:1–5), had no one to present her to Christ. “In this case,” Fuller asserted, “the bridegroom must himself be her father, and perform the office of a father throughout, even to the presenting of her to himself. If such be the allusion, it represents in an affecting light our forlorn condition as under the fall.”¹³⁸ In this passage and others, therefore, Fuller sought to explain the marriage metaphor because he considered it a means of helping believers “to heighten our love to Christ,” particularly as they looked ahead to the future consummation of reconciliation to Christ.¹³⁹

Finally, Fuller used marriage imagery as a means of drawing attention to the person and character of Christ as the husband of the church. One such example was in an argument for the extent of the atonement, where he argued, “His death is represented as resulting from his love, which he exercises as a husband.”¹⁴⁰ According to Fuller, Christ’s conduct to the church was “the tender relation of a husband” and therefore, rooted in loving sacrifice.¹⁴¹ These statements carried rhetorical power when understood with his view of the husband’s role in mind. Thus, each time that Fuller appealed to marriage as a

¹³⁷Fuller, “Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:243–53.

¹³⁸Fuller, “Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:252.

¹³⁹Fuller, “Future Perfection of the Church,” in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 1:253. For similar examples, see also Fuller, *The Gospel its Own Witness*, 2:95; Andrew Fuller, *Letters to Mr. Vidler on Universal Salvation* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:56, 219, 310–11, 384.

¹⁴⁰Andrew Fuller, *Reply to Philanthropos* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:491.

¹⁴¹Fuller, *Reply to Philanthropos* in *Works of Andrew Fuller*, 2:499.

picture of biblical truths, the reader learned not only about his understanding of the gospel but also about his theology of marriage.

Conclusion

Andrew Fuller considered marriage a union of one man and one woman faithfully committed to one another. He sought to uphold this vision in his own marriage and proclaimed it in his various theological publications. He argued that God created marriage to propagate the human race, as a provision for happiness, as a means of protection against sin, and as a picture of Christ's love for the church. Although he never focused an entire work on marriage, it is clear that Fuller saw great significance in this ordinary, domestic duty, particularly when viewed through the doctrine of the cross.

Like John Gill and Samuel Stennett before him, he appropriated the Puritan-Reformed vision for marriage in his own day and for his own purposes. Whereas Stennett had turned the Puritan vision heavenward, Fuller turned it to the world and emphasized the power of marriage to proclaim the gospel. Consistent with his missional focus, Fuller considered marriage a means of pointing others to Christ, the faithful Husband of his beloved church.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The preceding study has sought to examine marriage in the life and theology of three eminent eighteenth-century Particular Baptists, John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller. Each man left a lasting legacy through his ministry and written works. This study has demonstrated that among their various responsibilities, each man was also devoted to his wife and family. Their commitment was motivated by their theology of marriage, which was rooted in Scripture and informed by the Puritan tradition of previous generations. In this conclusion, the central questions that were asked at the beginning of this study are revisited and conclusions are set forth, along with a few reflections on the significance of this thesis.

Toward a Theology of Marriage

The first question this study sought to address regarded the substance and sources of their theology of marriage. It has been thoroughly demonstrated that John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller found their doctrine of marriage in the pages of Scripture. As the society around them was shifting in several ways on the subject, they stayed true to a historically orthodox understanding of conjugal union based on biblical revelation.

While there were some variations among them, the three men held to the same essential understanding of marriage, recognizing it as a life-long, heterosexual union of one man and one woman created by God for the sake of producing children, protecting from sexual temptation, and providing mutual companionship. For each man, this notion was rooted in the revelation of God and the relationship of Christ and the church, from

which marriage draws its ultimate significance. This understanding was shaped by the Puritan-Reformed tradition but it was ultimately grounded in Scripture itself.

As the preceding chapters have shown, within this general framework, each man emphasized unique aspects of marriage in the context of his own ministry. Living in the first half of the long eighteenth century, John Gill was most concerned with properly defining the institution of marriage. As a systematic theologian, his detailed analysis of the biblical passages related to marriage and his works on divinity provided a solid foundation for future generations. His most significant contribution to the spirituality of marriage was his emphasis on how marriage protected against sin, evidenced especially in his extended discussions of the dangers of adultery. He envisioned the responsibilities of husband and wife through the lens of authority. This understanding of the husband's duty to govern was rooted not in the spirit of his day but in the Scriptures themselves, where he noted that God had instituted structure in the marriage relationship for his glory and our good.

Living through the middle of the long eighteenth century, the London pastor Samuel Stennett articulated a similar vision for marriage albeit with his own unique emphases. Though he affirmed the same basic understanding of authority as Gill, he placed greater stress on the role of affection in the marriage relationship. He considered romantic love central to the marital union and essential to the couple's happiness. In his *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, Stennett cast a vision for marriage that included the larger household as an integral component. The modern notion of two star-crossed lovers focused on one another and insulated from the outside world would have been foreign to Stennett. He considered the creation of a new family unit one of the central purposes of marriage. As such, a Christian marriage should aim at not just starting a new family, but shaping a household for the glory of God. His language of the family as a prelude to heavenly joys was a means of promoting this vision for family piety.

Andrew Fuller, born in the year that Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act went into effect, provided insight into a third generation of Particular Baptists on the subject of marriage. Fuller largely agreed with Gill and Stennett on the central aspects of marriage and his theology on the subject did not depart from theirs in any significant way. His most unique contribution to thinking on matrimony was his focus on the way Christian marriages commend the gospel of Christ to the world. Fuller noted the distinct commitments of Christian couples and argued that living out these principles distinguished their marriages from those outside the church. Thus, these three eighteenth-century Particular Baptists were largely consistent in their theology of marriage. This continuity across the century was due in part to their shared foundation in the Scriptures and the common influence of the Puritan tradition.

Theology in Practice

The second question explored in this study had to do with how this theological framework for marriage played out in each man's respective home. This study has shown that, in many ways, these three men practiced what they preached. While not without faults, it is clear that Gill, Stennett, and Fuller are admirable not only for their clarity on this subject but also for their convictional practices. As pastors today look for models of healthy marriages, they would do well to consider the examples of these eighteenth-century men.

Of Gill's marriage, little biographical data remains; however, the available material suggests that he provided loving comfort for his oft-sick wife, Elizabeth, and that he considered her one of God's chief blessings. While some might critique Gill's emphasis on the weaknesses of women, it should be noted that his point in making such arguments was never to justify severity but rather to inspire husbands toward gentle leadership. It appears that Gill modeled this concept in his own marriage. A young man might look to John Gill's lavish care for his wife following her first miscarriage and

evaluate how he could support his own wife through her trials and difficulties.

Samuel and Elizabeth Stennett were committed to promoting family piety and sought to model Christian spirituality to their household. The regular practice of family worship and their commitment to hospitality served them in this endeavor. Evidence of their mutual affection for one another comes from the surviving details of their relationship and especially from Samuel's reaction to Elizabeth's death. Though he continued to serve his church faithfully, it was recognized by all that a part of him had died with her. Just a few months later, Stennett's own earthly sojourn ended and he was reunited with his wife, allowing the two to experience the realities that their home had foreshadowed. Stennett's commitment to family worship and the fruit it bore in his home is surely an encouragement for men to remain steadfast in their own spiritual leadership.

Given the additional material available, this study focused on Fuller's practice of marriage far more than the other men. He and his first wife, Sarah, proved to be mutual encouragements to one another in the midst of several trying circumstances including Sarah's fatal illness. His second wife, Anne, was a faithful helper, assisting him in his work with the Baptist Missionary Society and remaining a trusted confidante throughout their time together. As a husband and father, Fuller was as devoted to faithfulness in his private life as he was in his public pursuits. As such, his marriages supply an illustration of how the Puritan tradition conceptualized in the writings of Gill and Stennett can be lived out in the home. Although he was far from perfect in these areas, his example may refresh others who observe his tireless efforts to care for his dying wife and daughter or his relentless pursuit of his wayward son. Since these men pursued a biblical spirituality of marriage in their own lives, there is much to be commended to future generations.

Speaking to Eighteenth-century England

A third consideration of this study was the impact of the surrounding culture on the theology and practice of these three men. As noted in chapter 2, marriages in

eighteenth-century England were shaped by the key issues of authority and affection. The patriarchal structure embedded in society was somewhat softened by the emphasis on romantic affection, but the society as a whole continued to be marked by gender inequality. Various social issues such as polygamy and adultery threatened the stability of marriages, while political battles over the definition of marriage and the future of the institution shaped contemporary practice.

Gill, Stennett, and Fuller were, of course, not immune to these societal concerns, but they were not dominated by them either. Their definition of marriage was minimally impacted by the political discourses and social trends of their day because they grounded their doctrine in Scripture instead. Notwithstanding, they articulated their theology in contemporary language and, when appropriate, addressed social issues as necessary. All three men strongly opposed polygamy, for example, an issue that was far more prevalent in eighteenth-century England than it is today. Just as one could not present a responsible defense of marriage in twenty-first century America without addressing divorce or homosexuality, eighteenth-century theologians could not ignore polygamy in their sermons on marriage. All three of these men brought the Word of God to bear on this subject as they sought to address the issue from a biblical perspective.

In terms of gender issues, none of the three men could be considered revolutionaries, although their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of men and women were shaped more by Scripture than by the surrounding culture. Gill, Stennett, and Fuller supported a hierarchy of responsibilities in the home, but they opposed distinction in value and dignity. Instead, they emphasized that women were heirs of grace alongside their husbands and that the faithful fulfillment of their roles was just as significant as the work of their husbands. Furthermore, in their own way, each theologian argued that the gospel of Christ uniquely shaped how husbands ought to treat their wives regardless of the cultural norms around them.

As demonstrated, the three men considered companionship central to marriage, although their understanding of romantic affection was not equated with the spirit of their day. For them, love was not a sentimental notion so much as a spiritual reality, wrought by disciplined obedience to the Word of God and tireless imitation of the example of Christ. They did not see an ultimate contradiction between authority and affection because they found both in their Bibles.

Continuing the Puritan Tradition

A final question that this study sought to address was the possible continuity between eighteenth-century Baptists and the Puritan tradition on the subject of marriage. It has been demonstrated that these men were highly influenced by “the good old Puritans,” as Stennett described them. Consistent with the Reformed tradition, the Particular Baptists rejected the veneration of virginity and the sacramental understanding of marriage set forth by the Roman Catholic Church. In continuity with the Puritans, they emphasized the companionate purpose of marriage, the ways in which marriage strengthened spirituality, and the responsibility of husbands to provide loving leadership in their homes. While they held much in common with the Puritans, Gill, Stennett, and Fuller were not mirror images of their thought on the subject in every way. Three distinctions between these Baptists and the Puritan tradition are worth noting.

First, while these eighteenth-century Baptists generally agreed with the Puritans on the purposes of marriage, they were less concerned with the specific order. All three men emphasized companionship in concurrence with the Puritans, but none of them grounded this emphasis in the ordering of the purposes. Furthermore, each of them freely rearranged the purposes based on their particular arguments in a given context. Samuel Stennett, for example, did not specifically number protection from sin among the purposes of marriage in his formal discussions, although he clearly affirmed the notion. This lack of specificity suggests that the Puritan conversation regarding which purpose

should be considered primary either did not continue into the eighteenth-century or, at least, was not of central concern to the Baptists.

Similarly, while the subjects of this study generally agreed with the Puritan call for a husband's loving leadership in the home, they were far less prescriptive about what this leadership should look like. Gill, Stennett, and Fuller each argued that husbands were called to lead their homes spiritually, but there are no parallel passages in their works that compare with Baxter's list of ways for a man to govern his home or Whateley's extended discussion on the dangers of losing one's authority. Does this absence reflect a softening of the relational hierarchy among these Baptists? It is more likely that it demonstrates a difference in communication style from that of previous generations and perhaps, openness to allowing husbands to work out their own leadership in their own way. On the whole, these three men were far less prescriptive in their teaching on the family than their Puritan predecessors.

Finally, each of these three Baptist thinkers emphasized unique aspects of marriage in their own writings. Gill, presenting his theology of marriage in a systematic format, addressed the definition of marriage and its aberrations, such as polygamy and adultery, with the most clarity of the three men. In doing so, he delineated the central purposes of marriage and the responsibilities of spouses but did not typically develop the ideas in his printed works. Stennett, on the other hand, who developed his sermons for publication as a domestic handbook, briefly defined marriage but placed more emphasis on questions of spiritual application. He sought to guide his readers in practical matters rarely addressed by Gill, such as choosing a spouse, developing the practice of Christian hospitality, and implementing family worship. Fuller's theology of marriage was in continuity with Gill and Stennett but he placed a greater emphasis on the role of marriage as an illustration of gospel truths than either of his predecessors. These unique emphases demonstrate that although the writings of all three men bore the marks of Puritan

influence, they were capable of making original contributions to the subject as well.

Concluding Reflections

In drawing to a conclusion, it is appropriate to consider the contribution of this study to the fields of Baptist history and eighteenth-century spirituality. Several observations are in order. First, this study has further demonstrated the continuity that existed between eighteenth-century Evangelicalism and the Puritan tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While this study has focused on only one specific issue, there is no denying that on the subject of marriage, the eighteenth-century Baptists looked to the Puritans for direction. This conclusion calls into question the claims of historians such as David Bebbington who have argued otherwise.¹ Bebbington's thesis that early Evangelicalism sprang from Enlightenment thought and represented a sharp discontinuity with the Protestant tradition of previous generations proves to be inaccurate on the issue of marriage as it relates to the eighteenth-century Particular Baptists. One may object that these three Baptists are not representative of the Evangelical tradition as a whole. However, it should be noted that the other eighteenth-century Evangelicals cited in this study, such as John Wesley and Henry Venn, leaned heavily on the Puritans for their understanding of marriage as well. Wesley is especially significant to this argument because Bebbington considers him an outlier to the Reformed Evangelicals frequently cited as evidence of Puritan-Evangelical continuity.² As it relates to the present subject though, Wesley actually provides further evidence of the Puritan influence on eighteenth-century thought, given his vocal appreciation for the writings of William Whateley. Further research is necessary to confirm if this continuity exists with other early

¹See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 20–74.

²See David W. Bebbington, "Response," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 424–25.

Evangelicals on the subject of marriage.

As a second point of conclusion, it is worth noting several questions for further research raised by this study. For one, how did the eighteenth-century Baptists compare to other Evangelicals from the same period? Did John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Howell Harris hold to similar convictions regarding marriage?³ A second and related question is, what role, if any, did the issue of marriage play in the developments surrounding the transatlantic awakenings of this century? Were topics related to marriage commonly addressed by revival preaching? A third question has to do with what is perhaps the most famous incident related to marriage and Baptists from this period: William Carey's deliberation over whether or not to leave his reluctant wife in England when he moved to India as a missionary. This episode raises several questions related to this study. What impact, if any, did the theology of these men (and especially Andrew Fuller) have on Carey's consideration? Was Carey's theology of marriage an anomaly among his peers or did he find support in the same doctrinal convictions as Gill, Stennett, and Fuller?⁴ Did Fuller or any of his other colleagues weigh in on his decision? Such questions must await another study but demonstrate the significance of the present work.

A third reflection on this study is related to the field of spirituality and the significance of marriage as a window into practical piety. As Andrew Fuller observed,

³At present, there is very little published on the subject of early Evangelical thought on marriage. The following studies provide a perspective from particular individuals: Bufford W. Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1996); Doreen Moore, *Good Christians, Good Husbands?: Leaving a Legacy in Marriage & Ministry. Lessons from the Marriages & Ministries of Elizabeth & George Whitefield, Sarah & Jonathan Edwards, Molly & John Wesley* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004); Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford: University Press, 2012); and A. G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013).

⁴One possible explanation for Carey's willingness to leave Dorothy behind may have been Richard Baxter's comments on the subject. Baxter wrote, "If [ministers] can neither do God's work as well at home, nor yet take their wives with them, nor be excused from doing that part of service, by other men's doing it who have no such impediment; they may and must leave their wives to do it. In this case, the interest of the church, and of the souls of many, must overrule the interest of wife and family." (*A Christian Directory in The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* [1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008], 1:443).

“The characters of men are not so easily ascertained from a few splendid actions as from the ordinary course of life, in which their real dispositions are manifested.”⁵ The truth behind this statement calls for more studies like the present thesis. The men and women of former days should not be assessed on the merits of their publications alone. Their personal lives—including their families, their marriages, and of course, their piety—deserve the attention of today’s scholars, both for developing a better understanding of the figures themselves and also for the benefit of the church today.

This brings us to the final contribution of this study, namely, its relevance for today’s church. As Western culture continues to drift further and further away from the core convictions of a Judeo-Christian worldview, numerous assumptions of the past are sailing toward the horizon along with it. Among the most notable transformations of the past decade is certainly the shifting perspective on marriage among the majority of Americans. John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller would have never envisioned a society where homosexual marriage was legalized, divorce was commonplace, and fornication was celebrated. Although they would have been shocked by contemporary American culture, they would have known where to point the church for strength. As in their own day, these men would call the church to turn to the Scriptures for guidance. They would point to Christ and his Bride as the model for marriage, regardless of the cultural developments around them.

As this study began with a scene from the fictional world of Jane Austen, it seems appropriate to permit one of her beloved characters to play a part in the final word. Charlotte Lucas, who was willing to marry the Reverend Collins despite having little interest in men or matrimony, famously quipped, “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” It is certain that John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller would

⁵Andrew Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis* in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 3:93.

have disagreed. Had these eighteenth-century pastors been inserted into the scene, they would have surely sought to convince the young woman otherwise. Perhaps they would have pointed out that God created marriage for both human happiness and his own glory. They might have mentioned that true satisfaction is found in serving one's spouse, not in pursuing your own aspirations. Maybe they would have warned Charlotte that the greatest threat to her happiness was not her husband, but her own heart, where sinful desires could spoil God's plan and purposes for marriage. Regardless of their specific argument, they certainly would have disagreed with the notion that marriage was opposed to pleasure. Instead, they might have revised Charlotte's words as follows and in doing so, encapsulated the bedrock conviction of eighteenth-century Baptists on this subject: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of obedience to the Word of God."

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ABSTRACT

MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF JOHN GILL, SAMUEL STENNETT, AND ANDREW FULLER

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This study examines marriage in the life and writings of three eminent Particular Baptists: John Gill (1697–1771), Samuel Stennett (1727–1795), and Andrew Fuller (1754–1815). Eighteenth-century England was a time of great transition in society, especially related to the institution of marriage. Legal developments, shifting cultural norms, and various social issues contributed to a complex period in which many questions arose regarding marriage. This dissertation demonstrates how Gill, Stennett, and Fuller set forth a biblical understanding of marriage in their generation through their preaching, writing, and faithful leadership as husbands. Their commitment to a biblical spirituality of marriage is evidence of their theological continuity with the Puritan tradition and serves as a helpful example for Christians today.

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