

**A Summary of John Piper’s “Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision:
Andrew Fuller’s Broad­sides Against Sandemanianism,
Hyper-Calvinism, and Global Unbelief”**

By Brian G. Najapfour

Andrew Fuller, born on February 6, 1754 at Wicken, Cambridgeshire, England, was the son of Particular Baptist parents. Raised in his parents’ farm, he did not have a good education nor did he have a formal theological training, and yet became arguably the most influential Calvinistic Baptist pastor-theologian of his time. At the age of seventeen, he was already preaching in a small Particular Baptist congregation in Soham. Then by the time he turned twenty-one, he was called to pastor this church. He remained in this congregation until 1782, when he became minister of another Baptist church in Kettering, Northamptonshire. He had been the shepherd of this flock for the rest of his life. On May 7, 1815 at the age of sixty-one he went to be with the Lord.

Fuller has been dead now for almost two hundred years, but his writings continue to make an impact on history. In fact, John Piper predicts that “Fuller’s impact on history, by the time Jesus returns, will be far greater and different than it is now.” (Piper originally said this in 2007, the same year he wrote “Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision: Andrew Fuller’s Broad­sides Against Sandemanianism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Global Unbelief,” a paper he delivered at the Desiring God Conference for Pastors, 2007.)

Piper goes on to say that Fuller’s “primary impact on history has been the impetus that his life and thought gave to modern missionary movement, specifically through the sending and supporting of William Carey to India in 1793.” In what follows is a summary of Piper’s paper with a special focus on Fuller’s major contribution to world missions. Fuller’s contribution is clearly seen in two areas of his life: his important role in the founding and maintaining of the Baptist Missionary Society and his works against Hyper-Calvinism and Sandemanianism.

The Baptist Missionary Society

In October of 1792, two months after Fuller’s first wife’s death, Fuller along with his likeminded brothers, organized the Baptist Missionary Society. The goal of this Society was to propagate the gospel among the heathen. Fuller’s role in this society was overwhelming. Piper puts it this way: “Fuller served as the main promoter, thinker, fundraiser, and letter-writer of the Society for over twenty-one years.... He also took the lead[ing] role in selecting new missionaries. He wrote regularly to the missionaries on the field and to the people at home.”

Added to this stressful work was his responsibility toward his congregation and family. This strenuous work was also coupled with some challenges. His first wife and eight of their eleven children died. Writing on July 25, 1792, Fullers cries out: “Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me! The afflictions of my family seemed too heavy for me. Oh, Lord, I am oppressed,

undertake for me!” Yet, despite all these trials, Fuller became willing to be involved in the Society.

One of the early missionaries of the Society was William Carey, who along with John Thomas, was sent to Bengal, India in 1793. Carey is known today as “the father of modern missions.” But what many people today are not aware of is that behind this great missionary was Fuller. John Ryland, another member of the Society, wrote an interesting account about Carey. Piper uses this record to illustrate how Fuller served as a vital backbone for Carey’s ministry. The account reads:

Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which had never before been explored, we had no one to guide us; and while we were thus 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 of the rope.”

Piper, commenting on this, says that it was Fuller who “held that rope more firmly and with greater conscientiousness than anyone else [in the Society].” This shows the crucial role that Fuller performed in the life of Carey as a missionary. Then Piper notes that “the sending of William Carey and his team marked the opening of the modern missionary movement.”

Fuller Against Hyper-Calvinism and Sandemanianism

As mentioned earlier, Fuller had become the pastor of a small Particular Baptist congregation in Soham. According to him, the minister whom he replaced in this congregation was a Hyper-Calvinist (or High Calvinist). Fuller said that this minister, John Eve, “had little or nothing to say to the unconverted.” Here is the problem of Hyper-Calvinism: the extreme emphasis it gives to God’s sovereignty slights the duty of every sinner to believe in Christ. Consequently, it also overlooks the biblical mandate to call sinners to come to Jesus. It really destroys evangelism and missions. Later when Fuller assumed the pastorate in Soham, he would recover and preserve the historic biblical Calvinism. This kind of Calvinism advocated the free offer of the gospel to everyone. Fuller’s recovery and preservation of historic Calvinism is what Piper considers Fuller’s “greatest theological achievement.”

Fuller’s extensive refutation of Hyper-Calvinism is found in his well-known work—*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. In this book, writes Piper, “Fuller piles text upon text in which unbelievers are addressed with the duty to believe. These are his final court of appeal against the High Calvinists who use their professed logic to move from biblical premises to unbiblical conclusions.” Fuller’s defense of the biblical teaching to invite sinners to believe in Christ, no doubt became the theological foundation for the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society, which Piper believes to be “the greatest missionary movement in the world.”

Fuller also refuted Sandemanianism, another enemy of evangelism. This erroneous belief originated from Robert Sandeman who taught that saving faith does not involve an active exercise of the mind to believe the gospel truth. For Sandeman, if faith involves any work of the mind, then such a faith becomes a work and it will contradict the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Sandeman's motive to preserve the Protestant doctrine of justification is, on the other hand commendable. But the theological reasoning behind his motive is unscriptural and damaging to missions. Sandemanianism promotes, in Piper's words, "an intellectualistic gathering of passive people who are afraid of their emotions and who lack any passion for worship or missions."

This dangerous doctrine provoked Fuller to write a series of twelve letters against this error. These letters were eventually published in 1810 under the title *Strictures on Sandemanianism*. Here Fuller argued, for instance, that the biblical expressions "to receive Christ" and "to come to Christ" are used synonymous with the phrase "to believe in Christ." And these expressions denote an action of the soul. To understand faith as a duty and as "a holy acting of the will flowing from regeneration" is crucial to our approach to missions. A failure to understand faith this way can diminish our love for the lost souls.

In conclusion, Piper draws some lessons from his study of Fuller's life. One important lesson that is noteworthy here is that a proper knowledge of the gospel is "essential for the power and perseverance and fruitfulness of world missions."