

A REJOINDER TO THE RESPONSES TO “THOMAS GRANTHAM’S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION”



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I appreciate Dr. Steve Lemke for bringing together these three fine scholars to respond to my paper. It is beneficial to have a systematic theologian, biblical scholar, and historian bringing different lenses to bear on Grantham and his doctrine of atonement and justification.

Rejoinder to Rhyne Putnam

Rhyne Putnam demonstrates an uncommon facility with the contours of Grantham’s thought. This is gratifying to see in a rising star among Southern Baptist theologians. He is right when he says that the silence on Grantham in Baptist studies has been deafening. We are grateful that Clint Bass’s outstanding dissertation on Grantham as well as the Mercer University Press Early English Baptist Text Series’ projected publication of *Christianismus Primitivus* will help to bring this silence to an end.

I think there has been one primary reason for this silence: Baptist scholars outside Arminian Baptist circles such as the Free Will Baptist Church have tended to be interested in Particular Baptists when studying seventeenth-century Baptists. Apart from Free Will Baptist historians such as George Stevenson, William Davidson, Michael Pelt, and myself, until recently one heard only fleeting references to Grantham.¹ Now people outside Free Will Baptist circles are taking Grantham seriously. A new *ad fontes* interest in early Baptist faith and practice has no

¹George Stevenson, “Benjamin Laker,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in History* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001); Michael R. Pelt, *A History of Original Free Will Baptists* (Mount Olive, NC: Mount Olive College Press, 1998); J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook: Heritage, Beliefs, and Ministries* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998); J. Matthew Pinson, “Confessional, Baptist, and Arminian: The General-Free Will Baptist Tradition and the Nicene Faith,” in Timothy George, ed., *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Recovering the Apostolic Witness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

doubt stimulated this renewed awareness. Further, many Baptist scholars are exhibiting a desire to probe non-Particular Baptist authors for source material for the contemporary theological task.

As with the contemporary appropriation of any historical author, one will not agree with Grantham on everything. As the Puritan Thomas Brooks illustrated, when one goes to eat an apple with a worm in it, he could simply throw the apple out or eat the apple worm and all. But the best thing to do is to cut the worm out and enjoy the rest of the apple.² That is what we must do with Thomas Grantham. And as we do this, we will find that, though there are a few of his ideas from which we demur, the general trajectory of his theology offers much fruit for contemporary Baptists. Even for those classical Calvinist Baptists who will differ from him soteriologically, there is much rich material to be mined from his ecclesiology, spirituality, and views on religious liberty and church and state. Putnam rightly notes that Grantham's writings on these matters are among the best and most plentiful among seventeenth-century Baptist writers.

What I like most about Putnam's comments is that he understands how Grantham symbolizes the differences between Wesleyan Arminianism and a more Reformation-oriented Arminianism, what Robert Picirilli once called "Reformed Arminianism" (a moniker many of his students picked up and ran with).³ And Putnam is correct to note that Grantham's views on atonement and justification are what makes the difference.

If, as Grantham thought, believers' penalty for sin is satisfied through Christ's cross-work applied to them, and they are clothed in his complete righteousness by virtue of their union and identification with him, then everything changes. That Reformational emphasis on forensic righteousness, on *sola fide*, means that, if a believer can fall from grace, as Grantham and his General/Free Will Baptist kin believed he could, it will be because he is no longer in union with Christ. And, as that union is conditioned on faith, it can be terminated only by unbelief. Furthermore, Putnam is correct in pointing out that Grantham viewed all apostasy as irremediable because of the decisive, once-for-all nature of the covenantal union between Christ and the believer. So this more-Reformed trajectory on atonement and justification does distinguish this sort of Arminianism from Wesleyan Arminianism.

I would like to chase a rabbit here for a moment and encourage Rhyne to help me revive the phraseology of "penal satisfaction," thus rescuing it from its shackles to Anselm. The Episcopalian scholar George Cadwalader Foley was correct when he stated that "the Reformers taught that our Lord's sufferings were *penal*, and Anselm expressly distinguishes between punishment and

²Thomas Brooks, "Heaven on Earth," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: John Greig and Son, 1866), 2:308.

³Robert E. Picirilli, "General Editor's Preface," in F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans in the Randall House Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), viii.

satisfaction. . . . As a *commutation*, satisfaction was instead of punishment; but they transformed it into satisfaction *by* punishment.”⁴

Many Reformed scholars have used the term *penal satisfaction* to describe this Reformational emphasis. Nineteenth-century thinkers such as Charles Hodge, Augustus Strong, William G. T. Shedd, and Robert L. Dabney used the term, taking it over from earlier Reformed scholastics like Francis Turretin and Stephen Charnock. In the twentieth century the term was employed by writers as diverse as James Orr, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and Cornelius Van Til. Today scholars like J. I. Packer and Timothy George have employed the term. Interestingly, even the Methodist Thomas Oden uses “penal satisfaction,” arguing that Wesley himself believed in it (I wish I had as much confidence in that as Oden does, though Wesley certainly comes closer to it than most later Wesleyans).⁵ My mentor Leroy Forlines and his students use the phrase, and I believe it is worth reviving, because it emphasizes the penal nature of the satisfaction of divine justice Christ provides in his atonement.⁶

Lastly, I think Putnam zeroes in on an important point: Those Arminians who share Grantham’s more Reformed categories on atonement and justification are going to be more critical of N. T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul than perhaps some Arminians would. Grantham’s views on atonement and justification clearly fly in the face of the New Perspective at the most essential points, and modern-day Reformed Arminians are going to agree with Calvinism’s major criticisms of the New Perspective.⁷

Rejoinder to James Leonard

This brings me to James Leonard’s insightful comments in his response. I want to commend Leonard for acknowledging that “Grantham’s soteriological urgencies are not far removed from that of Scripture, even if systematics and biblical theology speak in different tongues.” I have known Jim long enough to know that he gets squeamish about people who press systematic categories at the expense of careful exegetical theology. Indeed we all should share his aversion. But I appreciate his

⁴George Cadwalader Foley, *Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 219.

⁵Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 216. See the discussion between Steve Harper (the Wesleyan Arminian view) and Stephen Ashby (the Reformed Arminian view) in J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁶See F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Randall House, 2011).

⁷The same can be said of Arminius’s views, which are very similar to Grantham’s. See Pinson, “The Nature of Atonement in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius.”

desire (and ability as seen in some other pieces he has written) to bring together biblical exegesis and more-systematic theological categories into a truly biblical theology. He is attempting to deal with the “whole counsel of God” and the intertextual nuances of the best biblical theology. I love the way he does that in his comments on penal satisfaction and union with Christ motifs in the Gospel of Matthew. The work he models, I believe, is just the sort that is needed to get past the dichotomy between Jesus and Paul that has been erected by the New Perspective movement.

Leonard gets to the nub of the difference between Grantham’s kind of Arminianism and later, more-Wesleyan versions of Arminianism when he asks, “How does a true disciple continue in salvation once he has been included in the People of God—to use Matthean language, or once he is united with Christ—to use the language of systematics? Is it through faith that he continues, as indicated by the Baptist Faith and Message, or is our continuance in the grace in which we stand dependent upon our doing good as the opportunity presents itself?” And then he, provocateur that he is, brings in Ben Witherington (who had just spoken in chapel at NOBTS the morning before my lecture) as a foil.

I must admit I am trepidatious about discussing Arminian views of perseverance and apostasy in a Southern Baptist journal. But here goes: Witherington stands in a noble Wesleyan exegetical tradition in describing imputed righteousness as a legal fiction, arguing that “Paul does not talk about Christ being righteous in the place of the believer or about the believer being clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone.” Again, comments like these are the crux of the difference between Wesleyan Arminians and Arminians like Grantham and Arminius. Grantham and contemporary Reformed Arminians insist that Paul *does* talk about Christ being righteous in our place and our being clothed in his righteousness.

This distinction in turn highlights the practical difference between these two Arminianisms when it comes to perseverance in grace. Grantham is careful to argue, with the Reformed, that good works are a necessary evidence of saving faith but they are not the condition of salvation. Faith alone is. And this condition of salvation does not cease to be the condition after the initial act of regeneration. Salvation is, from start to finish, conditioned on faith. The believer’s union with Christ, apprehended by faith, is what saves the believer, and this does not change after initial conversion. One is not saved by faith and kept by works. One apostatizes only by making shipwreck of the faith that saves (1 Tim. 1:19), not by committing acts of sin.

This is why Granthamesque types of Arminians, while insisting that good works are the necessary fruit of saving faith, cringe when they hear Witherington say that “clearly, enough bad works, unethical behavior as listed in 1 Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5, certainly can keep one out of that final eschatological realm.” Like all good Calvinists, Reformed Arminians who lean toward Grantham’s approach believe that unrepentant sin will not be the pattern of a believer’s life. Yet unlike Calvinists, they believe that it is possible for a regenerate person to make irremediable shipwreck of saving faith, which removes the believer from union with Christ.

In short, I believe Grantham would agree with Leonard's comments that "Witherington claims that a person gets into the People of God by faith but is kept therein by doing good deeds and avoiding bad deeds. However, while Matthew's Gospel says much about the holy behavior of Jesus' followers, Reformation Arminians would argue that such behavior is descriptive of those who are united with Christ but not the basis for union."

Rejoinder to Clint Bass

I appreciate the opportunity to dialogue with a careful historian like Clint Bass. Although I have minor differences with some of Bass's understanding of Grantham's soteriology, I think his work on Grantham is generally brilliant. In his response he seems to be arguing that Grantham's theology of grace is somewhere between Reformed orthodoxy and the moralistic Arminianism of seventeenth-century Anglican divines such as Thorndike, Taylor, Hammond, and Bull. I also think that he would say that these Anglican Arminians agreed more with Grotius and Goodwin on atonement and justification, thus diverging from Grantham's Reformed account.

My perspective concurs with his in large measure. Grantham's sort of Arminianism differed strongly from the Reformed orthodox on how one *comes to be* in a state of grace. He radically eschewed the particularism of their predestinarian schema. In this way he *agreed* with Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians. However, when it came to the question of *what it means* to be in a state of grace, for Christ's redemptive work to be applied to the believing sinner, Grantham shared the Reformed view: In his righteous, law-fulfilling life and death, Christ satisfied the just demands of a holy God. He paid the penalty for human sin. Justification consists in those who are in union with Christ by faith being imputed with Christ's active and passive obedience. In this way he *disagreed* with Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians.

It is important to note that I am by no means arguing that Grantham was essentially Reformed in his soteriology.⁸ His doctrines of predestination and general atonement are anything but those of the Reformed orthodox of his period. But in his views of atonement and justification he is very Reformed, going further in his views of the imputation of both the active and passive obedience of Christ than even some of those at the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Assembly.⁹ I believe Bass and I agree on these matters.

⁸The whole meaning of the word *Reformed* is tricky. Early Baptists would not conceive of Reformed as a synonym for five-point Calvinism, as we often do today. Rather they would see it as a distinction with the Church of Rome, as in "reformed according to the Scripture."

⁹See, e.g., Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009).

As far as the historical identification of the General Baptists, I think Bass is onto something. I am using the terms *General Baptist* and *Particular Baptist* more in the ways they are commonly understood. Bass is thus correct that I am using the term *General Baptist* to mean those in the General Assembly, the General Baptist “denomination” that was formed in 1654. I am not using it to describe all those Baptists who believed in a general atonement.¹⁰ He is also correct to note that the national assembly, like many Baptists today, did not bring people into strict conformity on all points. There were some, like Monck and the Orthodox Creed for example, who seem to have toyed with eternal security.

Yet I am speaking of the mainstream of the General Baptists. Bass uses Samuel Loveday as an example of a General Baptist who demurred from Grantham’s approach to atonement and justification. Yet Loveday cannot be seen as Goodwinian in his doctrine of atonement and justification. Again, Grantham and all General Baptists in the General Assembly would have agreed with what Goodwin and other Arminians said about things like predestination, reprobation, and Romans 9. These were the kinds of things Loveday was using in *Personal Reprobation Reprobated*, which is a treatment of reprobation in Romans 9. Loveday’s doctrine of atonement and justification cannot be extrapolated from one off-hand comment written in the context of a treatise on divine reprobation. Loveday never expounded a doctrine of the nature of atonement and justification as far as I can tell.

Bass says that it is “unlikely” that all General Baptists believed as Grantham did on atonement and justification. I am fairly confident that is an accurate statement, just as I am sure that it is unlikely that all Southern Baptists believe in eternal security. But that doesn’t affect my thesis, that the mainstream General Baptist view on atonement and justification, like that of their foremost spokesman and theologian Thomas Grantham, was more Reformed in character. So, like Bass, I wouldn’t be surprised to find ministers in the General Assembly who might have articulated a careful doctrine of atonement and justification more like that of Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians. That certainly wasn’t the mainstream, however, and I cannot find any one of them who does it. Yet they all agreed with those authors against Calvinist views on predestination and reprobation.

¹⁰The expression “General Baptist” was in flux during the English Civil War and Interregnum, the period between the unseating of Charles I as king of England and the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660. For example, general-atonement Baptists such as Henry Denne and Thomas Lambe were antinomian and more predestinarian and did not accept the laying on of hands after baptism, as affirmed by the General Assembly and the *Standard Confession* of 1660. However, after the restoration, “General Baptists” would refer more to the General Assembly of General Baptists.