

Robert Hall's Contributions to Evangelical Renewal in the Northamptonshire Baptist Association

Nathan Finn

*Instructor of Church History
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, NC 27588*

Abstract

This essay argues that Robert Hall, Sr. played a crucial role in promoting evangelical sentiments within the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in the late eighteenth century. Hall's influence upon the association is evidenced by his public preaching, published works, and personal encouragement of his younger colleagues. The evangelicalism of the Northamptonshire churches became increasingly pronounced in the closing years of the eighteenth century, resulting in a widespread prayer movement, the publication of several evangelical treatises, and most significantly, the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792.

Introduction

Historians of eighteenth-century English Protestantism often speak of a declension of evangelical religion among the British Particular Baptists. The source of this spiritual lethargy is often attributed to High Calvinism, or more popularly, hyper-Calvinism.¹² High Calvinists claim that the non-elect are unable to exercise saving faith because the latter are under no obligation to believe in Christ. Hence, High Calvinists rejected the "free offer of the gospel," or the explicit demand that non-Christians believe in Christ.¹³ Though the extent of hyper-Calvinism's influence is

¹² For two recent textbooks that adopt this understanding of eighteenth-century Particular Baptists, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 178–83; Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson, 2003), 98–103.

¹³ For a scholarly definition of High Calvinism, see Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, vol. 8 (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 12; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*

presently undergoing a scholarly reassessment, historians agree that the last quarter of the eighteenth century marked the commencement of a new era for the British Particular Baptists.¹⁴ An evangelical revival commenced within the Northamptonshire Baptist Association, eventually spreading throughout Particular Baptist life.¹⁵ This renewal is typically described as centering on the work of two young Northamptonshire ministers, Kettering pastor and theologian Andrew Fuller, and the famous pastor/cobbler and pioneer missionary William Carey.¹⁶ As significant as their respective ministries were, Fuller and Carey were not alone even in the Northamptonshire Association in advocating an evangelical Calvinism that reconciled God's sovereign election with the biblical command to press the claims of Christ upon all men.

Several men played a role in the evangelical awakening in the Northamptonshire Association, including other young pastors like John Sutcliff, John Ryland, Jr., Samuel Pearce, and Robert Hall, Jr. The latter's father, Robert Hall, Sr., was in many ways a spiritual father and elder mentor to these young evangelicals.¹⁷ Robert Hall was a strong advocate of evangelical Calvinism, particularly of the type associated

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986; reprint, Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 385–91. G. F. Nuttall notes that the term "High Calvinism" is more useful than "hyper-Calvinism" because it was the phrase used during the period in question, and because it is "less prejudiced and question-begging" than hyper-Calvinism. See G. F. Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question: A Turning Point in Eighteenth Century Dissent*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 16, no. 1 (April 1965): 101.

¹⁴ Many historians now argue that High Calvinism was not universal among Particular Baptists prior to the 1770s, but that at least some Particular Baptists were evangelical in their convictions. See Roger Hayden, "Evangelical Calvinism among Eighteenth-Century British Baptists: with Particular Reference to Bernard Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans and the Bristol Baptist Academy, 1690–1791" (Ph.D. diss., University of Keele, 1991), iv–v; Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the 18th Century, A History of the English Baptists*, vol. 2 (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 115.

¹⁵ The results of this revival were significant; according to John Ryland, Jr. the Northamptonshire Association alone grew from eight churches in 1767 to thirty-one churches in 1815. See John Ryland, Jr., *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, from its Commencement, in 1792* (Charlestown, UK: Printed by Samuel Etheridge, 1818), 3. By 1835, forty eight different churches had been included in the association's membership at one time or another. See T. S. H. Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1964), 27–28.

¹⁶ For the best scholarly introduction to Fuller, see Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*. For a thoroughly-researched popular introduction to Carey, see Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991).

¹⁷ For the purpose of this essay, Hall, Sr. will be denoted simply as "Hall," whereas Hall, Jr. will be specifically designated as such.

with New England pastor and theologian/advocate of revival, Jonathan Edwards. By virtue of his status as an elder statesman among a group of like-minded evangelicals, Hall was in a position to exercise considerable influence upon the ministers in his region. Though never as famous as Fuller or Carey, this essay argues that Robert Hall, Sr. played a crucial role in promoting evangelical sentiments within the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in the late eighteenth century. Hall's influence upon the association is evidenced by his public preaching, published works, and personal encouragement of his younger colleagues. The evangelicalism of the Northamptonshire churches became increasingly pronounced in the closing years of the eighteenth century, resulting in a widespread prayer movement, the publication of several evangelical treatises, and most significantly, the formation of the BMS in 1792.¹⁸ Most Particular Baptists embraced evangelical Calvinism within a generation.

The Particular Baptists and the Status of Evangelical Religion, 1725–1779

As noted above, historians often paint a picture of eighteenth-century Particular Baptists as hopelessly captive to the deadening influence of High Calvinism. Much of the blame for this High Calvinism is laid at the feet of the influential London pastor/theologian John Gill, whom H. Leon McBeth calls the “Leading Hyper-Calvinist” of this period.¹⁹ While historians differ as to the extent of Gill's adherence to hyper-Calvinism, there is little doubt that Gill was associated with notable High Calvinists, commended their works to other Particular Baptists, and was at least reluctant to press Christ upon non-Christians.²⁰ In eighteenth century

¹⁸ For a thorough treatment of the founding and early years of the BMS, see Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 1–35. The year 1792 is often marked as the beginning of the so-called “modern missions movement,” but not all historians agree that the Particular Baptists were original in their missionary efforts. See Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 129; William H. Brackney, “The Baptist Missionary Society in Proper Context: Some Reflections on the Larger Voluntary Religious Tradition,” *Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 8 (October 1992): 364. William Carey himself was keenly aware that he was in continuity with a movement that had already commenced, even entitling the second chapter of his *Enquiry* “a short Review of former Undertakings for the Conversion of the Heathen.” See William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, ed. John L. Prestlove (Leicester, UK: Anne Ireland, 1792; reprint, Dallas: Criswell Publications, 1988), 9–24.

¹⁹ McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 176. McBeth is echoing the assessment of Robert Torbet, who referred to Gill as the “ablest exponent” of hyper-Calvinism. See Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3d ed. (Valley Forge: Judson, 2000), 68.

²⁰ For a collection of essays illustrating the scholarly debate over Gill's alleged hyper-Calvinism, see Michael A. G. Haykin, ed. *The Life and Thought of John Gill*

English religion, the “modern question” among dissenting Protestants was whether or not the non-elect were bound by duty to repent of their sins, something they were considered incapable of doing due to their reprobate status.²¹ Those influenced by Gill and more explicit High Calvinists answered the modern question with a resounding “no.” Early nineteenth-century Baptist Historian Joseph Ivimey refers to this approach as the “*non-invitation, non-application*” scheme of preaching.²² Opposition to the free offer of the gospel was especially widespread among the Particular Baptist churches in the greater London area.

More recent studies have argued that while the theological climate among eighteenth-century Particular Baptists was indeed marked by High Calvinism, this is only part of the story. Roger Hayden has shown there was widespread commitment to the evangelical Calvinism of the Second London Confession (1677/89), particularly among those ministers associated with Bristol Baptist Academy who lived mostly in the West country of England.²³ William Brackney agrees that “against the backdrop in the mid-eighteenth century of lifeless, doctrinaire Calvinism, Unitarianism, Arianism, and anti-trinitarian thought, coupled with dry intellectual communication, the leaders at Bristol stressed an evangelical form of Calvinism.”²⁴ This was a full fifty years before the BMS was established. It seems clear a theology amenable to revival was already simmering in some places at least a generation before Hall and others promoted evangelicalism in the Northamptonshire Association.

One of the major reasons the Bristol Academy Calvinists avoided the error of High Calvinism is because of the college leadership’s affinity for Jonathan Edwards, arguably the leading contemporary theologian of evangelical awakening. While pastoring the Congregational church in Northampton, MA, Edwards and his church periodically experienced awakening during the 1730s and 1740s.²⁵ Out of this first-hand

(1697–1771): *A Tercentennial Appreciation*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 77 (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997). Gerald Priest, who argues Gill was a hyper-Calvinist, gives a helpful summary of the various scholars and their positions. See Gerald L. Priest, “Andrew Fuller’s Response to the ‘Modern Question’—A Reappraisal of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 2001): 49, n. 13.

²¹ For a description of how different Particular Baptists answered the Modern Question, see Nuttall, “Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question*,” 101–23.

²² Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the Baptists*, vol. III (London: Printed for B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 267.

²³ Hayden, “Evangelical Calvinism,” iv–v.

²⁴ William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 168–69.

²⁵ For a brief description of Edwards’s view of the relationship between pastoral ministry and revival, see Helen P. Westra, “Divinity’s Design: Edwards and the History of the Work of Revival,” in *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of*

experience, Edwards wrote many treatises related to evangelical revival, most of which were widely circulated in the British Isles. According to George Marsden, “Edwards viewed himself as part of an international Reformed evangelical movement that saw awakenings as God’s greatest works in the current age.”²⁶ By the 1740s Edwards’s writings were popular with the students and faculty at Bristol.²⁷

The influence of Edwardsean Calvinism helped pave the way for the evangelical awakening among the Particular Baptists, gradually toppling High Calvinism from its place of privilege. This began in earnest when several ministers in the Northamptonshire Association became burdened for evangelism and eventually foreign mission, in no small part because they appropriated Edwardsean theology. One of the earliest Northamptonshire pastors to apply Edwards’s theology to the Particular Baptist context was Robert Hall, Sr.

Robert Hall, Sr. and the Northamptonshire Association, 1753–1776

Robert Hall, Sr. was born in 1728 to an Anglican father and Presbyterian mother.²⁸ Perhaps because of his religious upbringing, Hall struggled with his own sinfulness from at least the age of twelve. He wrestled for years with his salvation, thinking on many occasions that he was too great a sinner to be saved. At one point, Hall even contemplated taking his own life. While reading Galatians 4:4–5, Hall realized that Christ had both kept the law and died for those who transgressed the law. Christ’s mission was to save sinners, and Hall knew he was a sinner. This understanding of the gospel occurred in 1748 and resulted in Hall’s conversion; he was about age twenty at the time. Hall initially followed his mother’s religious sentiments by joining a Presbyterian church, but by 1752 Hall was involved in a religious dispute with whom he termed the “Anabaptists” over the doctrine of immersion. Much to Hall’s chagrin, his brother Christopher had recently become a Baptist, and in his efforts to refute Baptist beliefs Hall himself embraced Baptist convictions. In 1752, he was immersed and joined a Baptist church in Hexham, Durham. Soon Hall felt called to vocational ministry and in

American Religion, eds. Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 136–40.

²⁶ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 201.

²⁷ Hayden, “Evangelical Calvinism,” 341.

²⁸ The biographical information in this paragraph is taken from John Rippon, “The Rev. Mr. Robert Hall,” in *The Baptist Annual Register for 1790, 1791, 1792, and part of 1793* (London: Sold by Mr. Rippon, 1793): 226–40; Michael A. G. Haykin, “Robert Hall, Sr. (1728–1791),” *The British Particular Baptists, 1638–1910*, vol. 1 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 203–10.

1753 he became the pastor of the Baptist church in Arnsby, Leicestershire, where he spent his entire pastoral ministry.

The Arnsby church was small, and funds were often insufficient for Hall's family of sixteen.²⁹ Though impoverished, the Halls frequently received monetary gifts at the most opportune times. When the noted Anglican evangelical John Newton sent Hall £10, the latter responded, "This is the Lord's doing and marvellous in my eyes. Oh to be found worthy of favours."³⁰ Despite its meager financial resources, the Arnsby congregation was nevertheless influential. According to Michael Haykin, "Arnsby had been one of the founding churches of the Northamptonshire Association and Hall had been active in its affairs right from the initial meeting which had been held in 1764."³¹ Rippon adds that Hall himself was "instrumental" in the forming of the association.³² In his history of the Northamptonshire Association, T. S. H. Elwyn refers to Hall as "the outstanding personality" among the founding ministers.³³

As a leader in the Northamptonshire Association, Hall was noted for his theological acumen. He drafted five circular letters for the association. In 1768 Hall wrote a circular letter against "conditional salvation," in which he opposed a form of works salvation, which he defined as those "dispositions or acts required of the creature, as conditions *entitling* to salvation."³⁴ Hall's most notable circular letter was a 1776 defense of the doctrine of the Trinity against the Unitarian minister Joseph Priestly. Hall presented a clear articulation of Trinitarian doctrine, clearly written from a heart of pastoral concern. He closed the letter with an admonition to reverence both Christ and the Holy Spirit as God.

It is the bounden duty of every saint to honour the Son, even as he honors the Father. Consider your obligations to Christ as his purchase. Ye are

²⁹ Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends, and His Times* (Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 1994), 125.

³⁰ Robert Hall Warren, *The Hall Family* (Bristol, UK: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1910), 17; cited in *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Rippon, "The Rev. Mr. Robert Hall," 233. At its founding, the Northamptonshire Association was more than a county-wide network, including churches from Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, and Buckinghamshire. The primary reason for associating was apparently fraternal relations between like-minded ministers. T. S. H. Elwyn indicates that the founders of the association envisioned little more than "annual meeting for mutual encouragement, and spiritual uplift." See Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*, 11.

³³ Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*, 29.

³⁴ Robert Hall, Sr., "Conditional Salvation," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, ed. J. W. Morris (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1828), 293. Emphasis is in the original.

not your own, but bought with a price . . . Your obligations to the Lord the Spirit are great. Look to him to create in you a clear heart, and renew a right spirit within you.³⁵

The popularity of Hall's letter is evidenced by the need for a second edition to be printed later in 1776.³⁶ At the request of John Ryland, Jr., the second edition included an appendix entitled, "Some Thoughts on the Causes of Salvation and Damnation," written in answer to the teachings of one Mr. Fletcher of Madely.³⁷

Hall was not only an able theologian, but also a noted preacher. Before Andrew Fuller was called as pastor of the Kettering church, Hall occasionally filled the pulpit there. J. W. Morris claims Hall's "preaching, conversation and advice, [*sic*] excited no ordinary degree of interest."³⁸ Hall's fellow pastors also appreciated his pulpit gifts; he was invited to preach a sermon before the Northamptonshire Association in 1779. That sermon, later widely circulated in print form, was the most tangible contribution Hall made to the evangelical renewal movement in the Northamptonshire Association.

Help to Zion's Travellers and the Spread of Evangelical Calvinism, 1779–1791

The last quarter of the eighteenth century marks a turning point in British Baptist history. Joseph Ivimey describes 1779 as "the commencement of a new era in the history of the denomination."³⁹ Modern historian L. G. Champion agrees, noting that "a renewed theology led to a rediscovery of mission and the creation of organisations for the fulfillment of mission."⁴⁰ As with the Bristol faculty and alumni, the source of this renewed theology was the writings of Jonathan Edwards, which Michael Watts notes "led to religious revival among the Particular Baptists in Northamptonshire, England and set in train the dispersion of the

³⁵ Robert Hall, Sr., "Doctrine of the Trinity Stated: in a circular letter from the Baptist ministers and messengers, assembled at Olney, Bucks, May 28, 29, 1776," 2d ed., in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, ed. J. W. Morris (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1828), 345–46.

³⁶ Haykin, "Robert Hall, Sr. (1728–1791)," 206.

³⁷ Rippon, "The Rev. Mr. Robert Hall," 233.

³⁸ J. W. Morris, *Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: George Whightman, 1833), 29.

³⁹ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the Baptists*, vol. IV (London: Printed for B. J. Holdsworth, 1830), 41.

⁴⁰ L. G. Champion, "Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life," *Baptist Quarterly* 28, no. 5 (January 1980): 197.

principles of English Dissent to the four corners of the world.”⁴¹ This awakening changed the face of English Particular Baptists. Haykin claims that, “During the final three decades of the century, the Baptists became a dynamic force in England and Wales, outward-looking and seeking to recruit new members for their congregations . . . a religious force to be reckoned with in the affairs of the nation.”⁴² Most of the scholarly discussion of this period has understandably focused on Andrew Fuller and William Carey. But these were only the two most notable of a larger group of men who helped lead the Northamptonshire Association—and eventually most Particular Baptists—into a period of evangelical renewal and missionary zeal.

It is notable that Ivimey dates the beginning of the revival to 1779 rather than 1785 or 1792, when Fuller and Carey wrote their respective treatises.⁴³ The seeds for renewal were actually planted before 1779. The Edwardsean theology popular at Bristol Baptist Academy has already been discussed at length. In 1868, Abraham Booth, a London pastor who had recently left the General Baptists to become a Particular Baptist, wrote *The Reign of Grace*, wherein he advocated evangelical Calvinism.⁴⁴ Among other things, Booth argued against the High Calvinist belief that sinners needed a pre-assurance of their election—or warrant—to have any hope of salvation, claiming that such a belief actually denigrated God’s free grace.⁴⁵ O. C. Robison argues *The Reign of Grace* “was probably the first book of its nature to enjoy a wide circulation among Baptists in all parts of the country.”⁴⁶ There were even evangelical sentiments present within the Northamptonshire Association. In 1770, John Martin penned a circular letter devoted to the doctrine of election. Martin concluded the letter with an evangelical application of the doctrine.

Every soul that comes to Christ, to be saved from hell and sin by him, is to be encouraged; and it is our duty to show them that election is no bar

⁴¹ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 461. See also Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 2d ed. (Didcot, Oxfordshire, UK: Baptist Union, 2005), 119–24.

⁴² Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 33.

⁴³ Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (Northampton: T. Dicey, 1785); Carey, *Enquiry*. A photo reproduction of the former is in the author’s possession.

⁴⁴ Some scholars debate the extent of Booth’s evangelicalism. William Brackney indicates that, although Booth advocated evangelical Calvinism, his version was of a stricter variety than Hall and other evangelicals. See Brackney, *Genetic History*, 119.

⁴⁵ Abraham Booth, *The Reign of Grace from its Rise to its Consummation* (Leeds, UK: Printed by Griffith Wright, 1768; reprint, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1839), 106.

⁴⁶ Olin C. Robison, “The Particular Baptists in England, 1760–1820,” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1963), 52.

in their way . . . The coming soul need not fear that he is not elected, for none but such will be willing to come, submit to Christ: he need not fear being cast out, for his coming is in consequence of God's drawing love, though at present he may not observe it.⁴⁷

It is clear that many Particular Baptists were not only embracing evangelical Calvinism, but some were even advocating it in print.

By the late 1770s, Robert Hall, Sr. had also come to evangelical convictions. It was during this period that John Ryland, Jr. lent Hall two sermons by the American John Smalley, which elaborated on Edwards's doctrine of the will. Ryland claimed that the sermons provided irrefutable evidence that Calvinism is consistent with the free offer of the gospel.⁴⁸ Though Hall was initially a committed High Calvinist, by 1779 he had definitively embraced evangelical Calvinism.⁴⁹ That year he preached a sermon at a meeting of the Northamptonshire Association on the various stumbling blocks in the life of a Christian. His text was taken from Isaiah 57:14, "And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people" (KJV). At the urging of Fuller, John Sutcliff, and John Ryland, Jr., Hall expanded the sermon and published it in 1781 under the title *Help to Zion's Travellers*.⁵⁰ Raymond Brown notes, "Hall's book secured a unique place in the gradually-evolving history of the late eighteenth-century missionary movement."⁵¹ Hall's publishing of the sermon, at the request of the younger Northamptonshire pastors, showed that evangelical Calvinism was taking hold in the association. Significantly, O. C. Robison notes, "The first edition of the book listed four hundred and sixty eight subscribers, many of whom were not Baptist"⁵² Within fifteen years the association was in the midst of a full-fledged awakening, one result of which was a concerted effort to engage in foreign mission.

Michael Haykin describes *Help to Zion's Travellers* as "a vigorous attack on High Calvinism."⁵³ Ivimey agrees, claiming "the principles of

⁴⁷ "Northamptonshire Association Circular Letter from Kettering, 1770," 7; cited in Robison, "The Particular Baptists," 57. Robison observes that Martin later moved to London and opposed Andrew Fuller's evangelicalism. See Ibid.

⁴⁸ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 459.

⁴⁹ If the timeline provided by Tom Nettles is accurate, then Hall embraced evangelicalism sometime between 1776, when John Ryland, Jr. introduced Hall to Edwards and other evangelicals, and 1779, when the Isaiah 57:14 sermon was preached. See Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity: Volume One, Beginnings in Britain* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 264.

⁵⁰ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 148.

⁵¹ Brown, *English Baptists*, 116.

⁵² Robison, "The Particular Baptists," 58.

⁵³ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 147.

this admirable little work were those of modern Calvinism in opposition to the system of high or hyper-Calvinism which had so generally prevailed in our churches.”⁵⁴ It is important to note that for Ivimey, himself influenced by the subsequent evangelical awakening, “modern” Calvinism is synonymous with evangelical Calvinism. Raymond Brown argues that “Hall knew that the high Calvinist preoccupation with election, reprobation and predestination had created deep uncertainties in the minds of sensitive people as to their ability to respond to the gospel of Christ.”⁵⁵ Hall’s particular enunciation of evangelical Calvinism was influenced by Jonathan Edwards, especially his work *Freedom of the Will*, which made a distinction between a person’s moral ability and natural ability to respond to faith in Christ.⁵⁶ According to John Ryland, Jr., “[Hall] called no man upon earth master, in respect to his religious sentiments, but he took a peculiar delight in the writings of President Edwards.”⁵⁷ Hall was so fond of *Freedom of the Will* he is responsible for first introducing Andrew Fuller to the work.⁵⁸ Significantly, Edwardsean theology also figured prominently in Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*.⁵⁹

Hall’s reason for expanding his Isaiah 57:14 sermon into book form was to remove various stumbling blocks to Christian growth. *Help to Zion’s Travellers* was divided into three parts, “Doctrinal Difficulties,” “Experimental Difficulties,” and “Practical Difficulties.” In the first section, Hall defended the orthodox view of the deity of Christ. He also argued for a Calvinistic understanding of human sinfulness, divine election, regeneration, union with Christ, adoption in Christ, and particular redemption. Hall’s theology was decidedly Calvinistic, and it is clear his purpose was not to undermine those doctrines associated with Reformed theology.⁶⁰ In fact, to this point at least, most High Calvinists

⁵⁴ Ivimey, *History of the Baptists*, vol. IV, 41.

⁵⁵ Brown, *English Baptists*, 116.

⁵⁶ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 45.

⁵⁷ This quote is taken from Ryland’s preface to the second edition of *Help to Zion’s Travellers*. See Robert Hall, Sr., *Help to Zion’s Travellers: Being an Attempt to Remove Various Stumbling Blocks out of the Way, Relating to Doctrinal, Experimental and Practical Religion* (Bristol, UK: Printed by William Pine, 1781; reprint, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 8.

⁵⁸ Ernest F. Clipsham, “Andrew Fuller and Fullerism (I),” *Baptist Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (July 1963): 109; Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 43.

⁵⁹ For the influence of *Freedom of the Will* on Andrew Fuller, see Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 45–51;

⁶⁰ Hall’s commitment to Calvinism was reiterated in his 1788 circular letter, in which he advocated the traditional understanding on definite atonement. See Robert Hall, Sr., “Divinity of Christ and the Efficacy of His Atonement,” in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, ed. J. W. Morris (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1828), 413–20.

would have agreed with Hall's book. Robert Hall, Jr., in his preface to later editions of *Help to Zion's Travellers*, reinforced this interpretation of his father's work, pointing readers to where the true "innovations" in the work lie.

The sentiments of my honored father were decidedly Calvinistic. His object, however, in the following treatise, was not so much to recommend that system in general, as to disengage it from certain excrescences, which he considered as weakening its evidence and impairing its beauty.⁶¹

According to Hall, Jr. his father's work was not about redefining Calvinism, but rather rescuing the system from those whom he believed had perverted it.

Hall broke with High Calvinism in the second section of his work. In a chapter entitled, "The sinner's warrant to apply to Christ," Hall agreed with Abraham Booth that, at least humanly speaking, there is nothing that prevents the grossest sinner from receiving Christ except his own sinful refusal to believe. A sinner does not need to believe that God has elected him to salvation before he can believe. On the contrary, by believing in Christ the sinner proves to be among the elect. Though only the elect will choose to believe, the call to repent is issued to "whosoever will."⁶² Hall was rejecting High Calvinist arguments against offering the gospel to all people. High Calvinists claimed the non-elect are under no obligation to do the very thing which they are unable to do—repent of their sins and trust in Christ for their salvation. Hall argued that the human call to repent is universal, even if the divine call to believe is given only to the elect.

In the third section, Hall further challenged High Calvinist reticence toward evangelism by providing a theological justification for the universal preaching of the gospel. Specifically, Hall followed Jonathan Edwards by making a distinction between man's natural ability versus his moral ability to believe in Christ. Hall's position can be summarized as thus: the reason it is not inconsistent for God to decree that salvation is only for the elect and simultaneously command that the gospel be preached to all men is because every man has the natural ability to believe the gospel. It is not natural ability that prevents the non-elect from believing, but rather man's moral ability. To the non-elect, the gospel is morally repugnant, and hence rejected. But to the elect, the gospel is the very words of life, and thus embraced. All men are called upon to believe, because in one sense, all are able, but only the elect will

⁶¹ Hall Sr., *Help to Zion's Travellers*, 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 124–25.

believe, because in another sense, they are the only ones who can.⁶³ The Christian's duty is to present the truth to all people, trusting God to save whom he will. Hall also argued strongly against Antinomianism, often a byproduct of hyper-Calvinism.

Antinomianism teaches a believer neither to fear God nor to regard man; for, according to it, he cannot be guilty of offending the one nor of injuring the other, for as there is no law, cruelty is not prohibited, nor kindness required; but truth and treachery, profanity and piety, love and hatred, are equally agreeable in believers.⁶⁴

According to Hall, Antinomianism destroys any meaningful basis for Christian ethics and should be rejected.

What made *Help to Zion's Travellers* such an important book was not its defense of Calvinist doctrine, but rather its criticism of High Calvinist theology and practice. In Hall's mind, election and evangelism, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, were not mutually exclusive concepts. God has chosen, and all are commanded to believe. A Christian's responsibility is not to prognosticate about who is chosen, but to share the gospel with all men so that the elect might believe. As Michael Haykin notes, "Hall clearly intends that the preaching of the gospel should not be restricted in any way, but that every man everywhere and in every condition be exhorted to repent and believe on Christ for salvation."⁶⁵ Brackney claims "The elder Robert Hall was a major catalyst for softening the deterministic outlook of English Baptists in the eighteenth century."⁶⁶ Though eclipsed by the later works of Fuller and Carey, *Help to Zion's Travellers* was the first book written by a Northamptonshire Association pastor that advocated evangelical Calvinism, and was a major indication that evangelicalism was taking hold in the association.

Hall's Influence on the Emerging Generation

Though Robert Hall, Sr. died before the BMS was established in 1792, he played a crucial role in its founding through the influence he had upon many of the younger ministers in the Northamptonshire Association. O. C. Robison argues Hall's "great contribution was as much in his personality as in his writings, for he was held in high esteem by the rising generation of young men who were to spread from the Midlands

⁶³ Ibid., 219–30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 200.

⁶⁵ Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Elder Robert Hall and His *Help to Zion's Travellers*: 1," *The Banner of Truth* 343 (April 1992): 19.

⁶⁶ Brackney, *Genetic History*, 119.

throughout the country as Baptist leaders.”⁶⁷ One of these younger ministers was Andrew Fuller. Raymond Brown observes that “the links between the two men were close and strong.”⁶⁸ When Andrew Fuller was ordained in 1775, Hall was one of the ministers who participated in the service.⁶⁹ As mentioned above, it was also Hall who first introduced Fuller to Jonathan Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* when the younger pastor was struggling with his own High Calvinism and moving toward the evangelical position. Though there is no evidence that *Help to Zion’s Travellers* itself was particularly instrumental in shaping Fuller’s own evangelical Calvinism, Morden notes that Fuller does refer to the book in the first edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*.⁷⁰ Though Hall’s writings may not have greatly influenced Fuller, his advice did; Hall strongly encouraged Fuller to publish *Gospel Worthy*.⁷¹

A second younger minister whom Hall mentored was John Sutcliff. The latter was already predisposed to evangelical Calvinism before he met Hall, having studied at Bristol Baptist Academy in the 1770s. Obviously influenced by Edwardsean theology, Sutcliffe preached a sermon for the Northamptonshire Association in 1784 in which he encouraged the ministers present to hold prayer meetings in their churches in the hopes of fostering revival. That same year Sutcliff also published an English edition of Edwards’s *An Humble Attempt to Promote the Agreement and Union of God’s People Throughout the World in Extraordinary Prayer for a Revival of Religion*.⁷² The result was a widespread evangelical prayer movement among the churches of the Northamptonshire Association. Hall encouraged Sutcliff in his efforts and thought highly enough of the younger minister that he once claimed that “Brother Sutcliff is a safe man; you never need fear that he will say or do an improper thing.”⁷³

A third younger minister influenced by Hall, not surprisingly, was his son, Robert Hall, Jr. The younger Robert Hall became a leader among the Particular Baptists, especially in the early years of the nineteenth century. He came by his evangelicalism naturally, having sat under his

⁶⁷ Robison, “Particular Baptists,” 59.

⁶⁸ Brown, *English Baptists*, 116.

⁶⁹ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 138.

⁷⁰ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 45. Some scholars argue for a more direct link between Hall’s book and *Gospel Worthy*. Tom Nettles argues that Hall’s “organization of Edwards’s thought appears to have had an impact on Fuller’s treatment.” See Nettles, *The Baptists*, 262.

⁷¹ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 147.

⁷² Hayden, “Evangelical Calvinism,” 343.

⁷³ Andrew Fuller, “Principle and Prospects of a Servant of Christ,” in *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Belcher (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle), 353.

father's teaching. He was also a remarkably intelligent child, having already read Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* and *Religious Affections* by the time he was nine years old.⁷⁴ Hall, Jr. served as longtime pastor of the Harvey Lane church in Leicester, a church once pastored by William Carey, with whom Hall shared an enthusiastic zeal for mission.⁷⁵ The younger Hall was also a notable preacher in his own right. Thomas McKibbens notes that when Hall, Jr. was pastoring in Cambridge, so many students were attending his services that the university's officials considered passing a rule to prevent students from worshipping at Hall's church.⁷⁶ Hall, Jr. is probably best remembered for his opposition to the slave trade and his theological controversy with Joseph Kinghorn over the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁷⁷ The son recognized the mental acumen of his famous father, remembering that "He appeared to the greatest advantage upon subjects where the faculties of most men fail them; for the natural element of his mind was greatness."⁷⁸ Hall, Jr. also spoke fondly of his father's piety, noting in his preface to the second edition of *Help to Zion's Travellers*, "I shall ever esteem it one of the greatest favors an indulgent Providence has conferred upon me, to have possessed such a father, whom in all the essential features of character it will be my humble ambition to imitate, though conscious it must ever be—Haid passibus aequis."⁷⁹

Perhaps most significantly, at least so far as the Particular Baptist missionary movement is concerned, Robert Hall, Sr. was influential in the ministry of William Carey. When he was struggling to arrive at his own evangelical convictions, Carey, like his friend Andrew Fuller, found a mentor in Hall. Clearly drawn to Hall's preaching, Carey would often

⁷⁴ Michael A. G. Haykin, "Hearing the Word: Robert Hall's Reflections on How Best to Profit Spiritually from Preaching," *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 137.

⁷⁵ George J. Griffin, "Robert Hall's Contribution to Early Baptist Missions," *Baptist History and Heritage* 3, no. 1 (January 1968): 5.

⁷⁶ Thomas McKibbens, "Disseminating Biblical Doctrine through Preaching," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19, no. 3 (July 1984): 47.

⁷⁷ For Hall's position on the slave trade, see Timothy Whelan, "Robert Hall and the Bristol Slave-Trade Debate of 1787–1788," *Baptist Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (January 2000): 212–24. In the ordinances debate, Hall advocated open communion whereas Kinghorn endorsed strict communion. See Robert Hall, Jr., *On Terms of Communion: with a Particular View to the Case of the Baptists and Paedobaptists* (Manlius, NY: Kellogg & Clark, 1817); Joseph Kinghorn, *Baptism, A Term of Communion at the Lord's Supper; A Defense of "Baptism a Term of Communion," in Answer to the Rev. Robert Hall's Reply* (Norwich, UK: Bacon, Kinnerbrook; Wilkin and Youngman, 1820).

⁷⁸ Olinthus Gregory, "A Brief Memoir of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.," in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, vol. III, eds. Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Belcher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), 3.

⁷⁹ Hall Sr., *Help to Zion's Travellers*, 23. The Latin phrase at the end of the quote is translated "at a slower pace."

walk twenty miles to listen to Hall preach at Arnsby.⁸⁰ But more than Hall's evangelical sermons, *Help to Zion's Travellers* proved especially instrumental in the development of Carey's own evangelical Calvinism. Peter Morden claims that Hall's book "was probably the most important extra-biblical work that Carey read."⁸¹ In his preface to later editions of *Help to Zion's Travellers*, John Ryland, Jr. said of Carey, "here that excellent man, who is now laboring in India, with such indefatigable zeal for the salvation of the heathen, first found his own system of divinity."⁸² In his later years Carey himself praised Hall's book.

Mr. Skinner one day made me a present of Mr. Hall's *Help to Zion's Travellers*; in which I found all that arranged and illustrated which I had been so long picking up by scraps. I do not remember ever to have read any book with such raptures as I did that. If it was poison, as some then said, it was so sweet to me that I drank it greedily to the bottom of the cup; and I rejoice to say, that those doctrines are the choice of my heart to this day.⁸³

Robert Hall, Sr. may not have lived to see the Particular Baptists enter into foreign mission, but his evangelical influence was clearly visible in the lives of the younger ministers he encouraged, including William Carey himself.

Conclusion

English Particular Baptists found themselves at a theological crossroads in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Many had drunk deeply of the High Calvinism so prevalent in the environs around London. Those who looked to John Gill for their theological convictions embraced Gill's hesitancy to call upon sinners to repent, and in many instances embraced a thoroughgoing hyper-Calvinism. This theology was opposed to mission and evangelism, as evidenced by John Ryland, Sr.'s allegedly labeling of Carey as an "enthusiast" in response to the latter's call for foreign mission work at the 1785 Northamptonshire Association's ministers'

⁸⁰ Brown, *English Baptists*, 116. In commenting on Hall's influence on Carey and Fuller, Peter Naylor observes, "The good that came from [Hall's] country church in Leicestershire is incalculable." See Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Grace, 1992), 212.

⁸¹ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 130.

⁸² Hall, Sr., *Help to Zion's Travellers*, 10.

⁸³ Quoted in Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D.D.* (Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836), 11.

fraternal.⁸⁴ But another group of Particular Baptists, initially those with ties to Bristol Baptist Academy and later those who ministered in the Northamptonshire Association, adopted the evangelical Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards and argued for a Reformed theology that was compatible with foreign mission and intentional evangelism. Though the younger pastors in the Northamptonshire Association, and especially Fuller and Carey, receive most of the credit for igniting the evangelical awakening of Particular Baptist life, these younger leaders were influenced by earlier evangelicals, not the least of whom was Robert Hall, Sr.

Though virtually unknown to modern historians, Robert Hall, Sr. made a significant contribution to the evangelical awakening in the Northamptonshire Association. Through various avenues of influence, Hall encouraged a generation of younger Calvinists to embrace evangelistic fervor and evangelical piety. As this evangelicalism spread through the Northamptonshire Association, the result was spiritual renewal and the advent of a missionary movement among the Particular Baptists. Though Hall did not live to see the culmination of this renewal movement, he played a part in its ultimate fruition. In his preaching ministry, Hall encouraged his colleagues to avoid an extreme view of Calvinism that tended to dampen enthusiasm for evangelism. In his writing ministry, Hall published the first book-length attack on hyper-Calvinism from within the Northamptonshire Association. In his ministry of encouragement, Hall urged Fuller to publish *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation. Help to Zion's Traveller's* so influenced Carey, it could be argued that Carey's own *Enquiry* was simply the application of Hall's evangelical Calvinism to the question of foreign mission. In conclusion, though Robert Hall, Sr. was not the most important figure associated with the revival of the English Particular Baptists, and though he was not the first Particular Baptist to embrace evangelical Calvinism, there is little doubt that Hall was an influential presence within the Northamptonshire Association who tirelessly promoted the evangelical convictions that ultimately spread to most Particular Baptists in the years following 1792.

⁸⁴ George, *Faithful Witness*, 53. According to tradition, Ryland is supposed to have told Carey that "when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me." Whether or not Ryland actually rebuked Carey is debated by scholars. See Nettles, *The Baptists*, 291–92; Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 194.