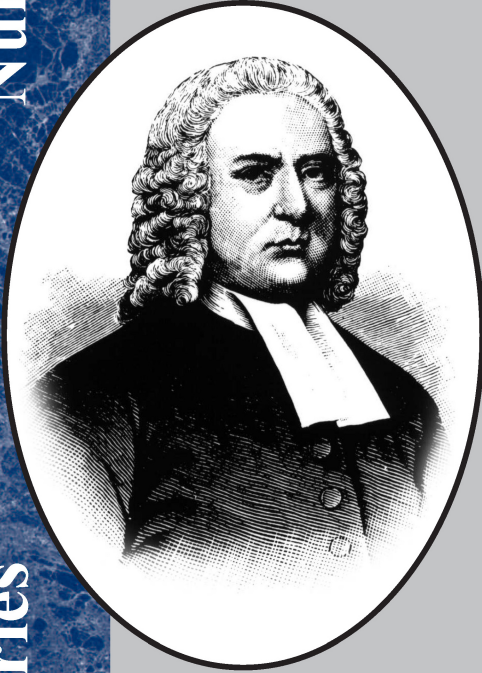


**The Baptist Faith Series**

**Number 3**



# **The Cause of God and Truth**

**John Gill, D.D.**

**THE  
CAUSE OF  
GOD AND TRUTH**



**JOHN GILL, D.D.**  
1697-1771

THE  
CAUSE OF  
GOD AND TRUTH

IN FOUR PARTS.

WITH A  
VINDICATION OF PART IV.

FROM THE CAVILS, CALUMNIES, AND DEFAMATIONS, OF MR. HENRY HEYWOOD.

BY JOHN GILL, D.D.

A NEW EDITION

W.H. COLLINRIDGE, 1, LONG LANE, LONDON.

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1855



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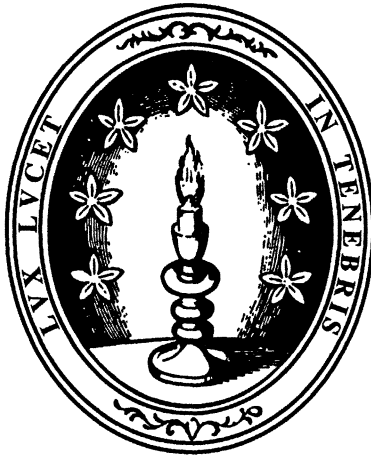
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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth.  
— *Psalm 60:4*

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**THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM**

*lux lucet in tenebris*

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN #1-57978-886-6

## P R E F A C E .

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It should be known by the reader, that the following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time *Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points* was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistical Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

The Second Part was published in the year 1736, in which the several passages of Scripture in favour of special and distinguishing grace, and the arguments from them, are vindicated from the exceptions of the Arminians, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but *to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This *new edition*, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

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## INTRODUCTION

### John Gill: The Mantle and the Chair

When, in the tumultuous days of the beginning of the Downgrade Controversy, Charles Spurgeon faced the possibility of the loss of friends and finances, he recalled in a letter to his church a moment of poignancy in the ministry of John Gill.

"My eminent predecessor, Dr. Gill, was told, by a certain member of his congregation who ought to have known better, that if he published his book, The Cause of God and Truth, he would lose some of his best friends, and that his income would fall off. The doctor said, 'I can afford to be poor, but I cannot afford to injure my conscience;' and he has left his mantle as well as his chair in our vestry." [C.H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973) 2:477].

This Spurgeonic remark carries within it the legacy of John Gill to evangelical Christianity, in general, and Baptists, in particular. It is especially appropriate that the remark was made concerning the book now being reprinted by the Baptist Standard Bearer. Alternately applauded and derided, celebrated and lamented, appreciated and opprobriated, Gill remains a significant testimony to the faithfulness of God in giving spiritual gifts for His peoples' benefit. In fact, it is in the unrelenting stewardship of his singular graces that Gill has been most criticized.

**His mantle** - The reference is to the mantle of Elijah. In 1 Kings 19:19 it is used to call Elisha from plowman to prophet. In 2 Kings 2:8, 13, 14, it indicates the presence of God's power in performance of miracles and in speaking God's truth though idolatry and disobedience are dominant in the culture. To this both Elijah and Elisha were called and to this, excepting the power of miracles, Gill and his eventual successor, Spurgeon, were called. Spurgeon speaks well for both when he says, "Controversy is never a very happy element for the child of God: he would far rather be in communion with his Lord than be engaged in defending the faith, or in attacking error." Delightful repose is hardly ever the lot of the elect in this world and they sometimes must arise from "the bed of rest" in order to "stand covered with the sweat and dust of battle." Gill stood thus attired quite often; his gifts, the times, and his God required it of him.

**The chair** - In the opinion of some critics this is a concretion of his lack of social graces and his unwarranted absence from the activism of the age. In reality, this chair was the armory for Gill's peculiar contribution to the maintenance of gospel purity. Dr. Gill's chair participated in a proverb in his age, for if one wanted to express utmost confidence in an assertion he would say that it was "as sure as Dr. Gill is in his study." Gill lived in accordance with the allotment of grace given him by God and did not think of himself more highly than he ought (Romans 12:3). He exercised faithfulness to the "measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:7) by seeing himself plainly and simply as a pastor/teacher and doing all he could do not to "neglect the gift" that was in him. Study and writing are hard work, a weariness to the flesh, and, contrary to some sneering misrepresentations, they hardly ever insulate their practitioners from insult and injury. While the apostle Paul experienced wearisome and violent opposition in person, some of his most tumultuous and emotional conflicts came as a result of what he wrote --- or even that he wrote (2 Cor. 2:1-11; 10:1-11). Gill's hours in his study did not serve a cowardly, dispassionate spirit, but were times of intense concentration and painful striving for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). His was the task of preparing the saints for the great fights of sanctification and confrontation. In speaking of the people to whom the preacher ministers, Gill says, "They should not always remain ignorant, imprudent, or be always fed with milk, and not able to digest meat; nor be unable to go unless led, and be tender and incapable of bearing hardships for Christ and His Gospel, and of defending it and His cause and interest; but should play the man, and quit themselves as such and be strong, which the Gospel ministry is a means of, and encourages to." [Commentary, Eph. 4:14]. Gill's chair stood on the front-line of battle and its seat was no place for a coward.

### **The Spheres of Battle**

Art and wisdom must combine to help one distinguish between things that differ and isolate the similarities in things of a kind. Gill demonstrated both in the battles that he chose and in his demarcation of the specific sphere of conflict. Some battles were fought for orthodox Christianity; some for the evangelical doctrines of Calvinism; and others for the distinguishing marks of Baptist ecclesiology.

**Orthodoxy** - In 1728 Gill responded to the requests of his friends to answer the writings of a deist, Anthony Collins, on the scheme of

Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. An observer of the controversy stirred by Collins sniped that "No calvinist could write in this controversy to any advantage." With the challenge urged upon him, Gill preached sermons in his church on the Old Testament prophecies related specifically to the history of the life of Jesus. From these sermons was extracted the text for The Prophecies of the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, considered and proved to be literally fulfilled in Jesus. This effort met with joyous approval in the Christian community, including the provocateur who was skeptical of a Calvinist's ability in this controversy.

The success of Dr. Gill in this venture, combined with his Exposition of the Song of Solomon earlier in the same year, drew the attention of Christians of all denominations to the learned Gill. Several benefactors from different denominations agreed to subscribe a Wednesday evening lectureship and to invite Dr. Gill to fill it. He began in 1729 and filled it faithfully, missing only rarely, until 1756. From this discipline came his work on the The Trinity, The Cause of God and Truth, Justification, and several of the commentaries in his Exposition of the Old and New Testaments. In 1730, he joined with eight other ministers, chiefly of Independent persuasion, in preaching a series of messages on the "most important doctrines" of Christianity. Each preached two messages. The messages were then combined into a book, Gill's subject being the "Resurrection of the Dead." He produced Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity in 1731, prompted by the appearance of Sabellianism in dissenting, especially Baptist, churches. Without in any sense diminishing in importance the ecclesiology of the Baptists or the "evangelical truths ... commonly called Calvinistical," Gill recognized the centrality of the "grand fundamentals, and principal articles of faith, concerning the mystery of the Trinity, the Deity of the Son of God, and of the Holy Spirit, the person and office of the Messiah" [Body of Divinity, 1: xxiv].

**Baptist Ecclesiology** --- His commitment to the cause of Christian orthodoxy was carried on alongside a tenacious advocacy of church purity. An unflinching Baptist, Gill began his ministry of polemics (1726, 1727) in two pieces defending the cause of believer's baptism. In a double exchange with Matthias Maurice in Northamptonshire, Gill produced The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion and subsequently A Defense of the Ancient Mode. A flurry of works explaining and defending Baptist principles appeared from 1749 to 1752. In both England and New England, infant baptism found "unanswerable" expositors to which John Gill responded with

point-by-point explanations and refutations. In 1746, Jonathan Dickinson, pastor of a Presbyterian church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and acknowledged leader of the revivalist New Light Presbyterians, published A Brief Illustration and Confirmation of the Divine Right of Infant-baptism. Dickinson, alarmed at the growth and spread of Baptists during the First Great Awakening, served as first president of the College of New Jersey before it moved to Princeton. Gill's answer, entitled The Divine Right of Infant Baptism Examined and Disproved, stimulated rejoinders, including one by Peter Clark, pastor at Salem, to which Gill wrote re-rejoinders. Another title to which Gill gave answer was The Baptism of Infants a Reasonable Service, founded upon Scripture, and undoubted apostolic Tradition. All of these writings called for broad understanding and careful treatment in exegetical, historical, and theological disciplines.

Another series of baptism writings began in 1765 when Peter Clark's Defense of the Divine Right of Infant-Baptism was republished in England. Gill republished his reply to it, other exchanges on the subject followed, including some from America. In the course of events, Gill was called upon either to retract or explain more fully a remark he made in the preface to his reply to Mr. Clark. Gill had written, "The Paedobaptists are ever restless and uneasy, endeavouring to maintain, and support, if possible, their unscriptural practice of infant baptism; though it is no other than a pillar of Popery: that by which Antichrist has spread baneful influences over many nations." Though the position stated so starkly appears radical, it was in perfect conformity to the way Baptists had treated the issue historically. In 1609, John Smyth, an English Separatist, documented his move from infant baptism to believer's baptism by publishing a work entitled The Mark of the Beast, in which he contended that infant baptism was the chief instrument by which antichrist perpetuated an unregenerate church in the world. Gill, now called upon to retract or defend, chose the later and published Infant Baptism, a Part and Pillar of Popery. His last piece on this issue served as an appendix to his Body of Divinity and was entitled A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes. In this work Gill condenses and synthesizes years of detailed work in Jewish literature to determine whether the infants from proselyte families were baptized. Supposedly, from this practice, the early church would have received infant baptism as natural and expected. Its warrant would therefore be clear without the necessity of any direct admonition to infant baptism in the teachings of Christ or the apostles. Gill's evidence, sifted from a

massive amount of literature, concludes that no such possibility existed in the Judaism of the day.

During Gill's first series of works on this subject he received anonymously a poem encouraging him to continue his fight in the tradition of Baptist champions of the past.

"Stennet, at first his furious foe did meet,  
 Cleanly compell'd him to a swift retreat:  
 Next powerful Gale, by might blast made fall  
 The church's Dagon, the gigantic Wall:  
 May you with like success by victor still,  
 And given your rude antagonist his fill,  
 To see that Gale is yet alive in Gill."

**Calvinism** - In his defense of Calvinism, Gill experienced some of his greatest friendship and support and engendered some of his greatest opposition and misrepresentation. One notable friendship within Anglican ranks was with the famous hymnwriter, Augustus Toplady. When Gill died, Toplady desired to officiate at the grave, but the church chose Benjamin Wallin and Samuel Stennet. Toplady, nevertheless, left an admirable written evaluation of Gill's contribution to the cause of the doctrines of grace.

"Perhaps, no man, since the days of St. Austin, has written so largely, in defence of the system of Grace; and certainly, no man has treated that momentous subject, in all its branches, more closely, judiciously, and successfully. What was said of Edward the Black Prince, 'that he never fought a battle, which he did not win;' what has been remarked of the great Duke of Marlborough, 'that he never undertook a siege, which he did not carry;' may be justly accommodated to our great Philosopher and Divine: who, so far as the distinguishing Doctrines of the Gospel are concerned, 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."

Others, however, in his days and since gave vent to an unusual torrent of criticism covering the spectrum from friendly and benign to hostile and malignant toward Gill. He has borne the charges of antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism but patently is not the one and certainly does not fit into the most distinctive patterns of the other. I have treated these accusations extensively in another

context. Though sometimes even Gill's friends find reason to advise caution toward what they perceive as extremes in his system, that does not explain the bulk of the criticism. Much of the exaggerated negativity toward Gill comes from the discomfort he creates by his clear and uncompromising advocacy of the doctrines of free and sovereign, distinguishing grace.

In December, 1737, Gill preached to his Wednesday evening lecture group a sermon entitled "The Doctrine of Grace Cleared from the Charge of Licentiousness." After discussing the tendency that fallen humanity has to pervert all things, even those things that are most holy, Gill displays the beauty and balance of the doctrines of grace by discussing the holy tendencies of ten teachings vitally connected with that system: God's everlasting love for His people; eternal, personal election; unconditionality of the covenant of grace; particular redemption by Christ; substitutionary atonement; justification by imputed righteousness; full and free remission of sins; God's seeing no sin in His people; efficacious grace in conversion; and the saints' final perseverance. Though some may use these doctrines as an encouragement to licentiousness even as they did in the days of Christ and the apostle Paul, there is nothing of that sort in the doctrines themselves. His discussion of particular redemption provides an example of Gill's argument.

"It is indeed a redemption from the bondage, curse, and condemnation of the law; but does not exempt from obedience to it, as it is in the hands of Christ; for saints are still under the law to Christ; nor do any more delight in the law of God after the inward man, or more cheerfully serve it with their mind, than those who are most sensible, that they are become dead unto it, and delivered from it by the body of Christ. Redemption is a deliverance from sin, from all sin, original and actual; and that not only from the guilt of sin, and the punishment due unto it; but in consequence of redeeming grace, the redeemed ones are delivered from the dominion and governing power of sin, and at last from the being of it. Christ saves His people from their sins; He does not indulge them in them.... Strange! that a redemption from a vain conversation should ever be encouragement to one; or that a person's being ransomed out of the hands of Satan, and taken as a prey out of the hands of the mighty, should be an argument with him to give up himself to him and his service; or can be thought to have any tendency to engage him in a state of bondage to him, to be led as a captive by him at his will."

At the close of the message, he encouraged his hearers to "value and esteem the doctrine of grace." And not only so, but to "stand fast in it, abide by it, and earnestly contend for it." This steadfast abiding and contending is that which rankles many of his detractors. Bogue and Bennett, in their four volume History of Dissenters (vol. 4), remark that though the purity of his intentions and the magnitude of his labors could be appreciated, they regretted that Gill's works "had not been prepared with greater delicacy of taste, and revised with more accurate judgment." But "above all" they lamented that his writings had "diffused a taste for extravagant calvinism" (p. 467). Its extravagance is only in the certainty, clarity, and constancy with which it is set forth.

Spurgeon, who calls Gill the "Coryphaeus of hyper-Calvinism," remarked that "If his followers never went beyond their master, they would not go very far astray." And though Spurgeon complains about some stylistic devices of Gill's commentaries he says, "For good, sound, massive, sober sense in commenting, who can excell Gill?" [Commenting and Commentaries, p. 9].

Spurgeon was not so alarmed at the supposed "extravagance" of Gill's Calvinism because he recognized the pernicious tendency of Arminian theology concerning the foundational doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. During the Downgrade Controversy, while congratulating the Methodists on maintaining the great "evangelical doctrine" at the center of that dispute, he recalled the eighteenth century decline of dissenters into Socinianism. One cannot deny the "historical fact that Arminianism has usually been the route by which the older dissenters have travelled down-ward to Socinianism." In complement to that reality was Spurgeon's conviction that "Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to the vital truth." [Sword and Trowel, April, 1887, p. 195]. The connections between these doctrines can be traced several times in the history of Christian thought.

Gill's days saw this same development. In 1719, the dissenters of Devon and Cornwall had experienced an excruciating confrontation with a dissenting pastor at Exeter named James Pierce [Peirce?], a man with decided Arian tendencies. When a committee asked him to give a positive response to a trinitarian creedal affirmation, he refused on the grounds that subscription to a formula set in words other than unchanged biblical words was to submit to human authority over divine authority. He was dismissed from his post but not before his views had infected several others in the area. The



London dissenting ministers sought to give advice on the subject, and, in a debate held at Salter's Hall, divided over the necessity of a minister's subscribing to a definite trinitarian creed or confession. Ostensibly, the issue at hand was not the Trinity but the subscription to a creed. Among the voters were fifteen General Baptists and sixteen particular Baptists. Fourteen of the General Baptists voted against the necessity of subscribing to the confession while fourteen Particular Baptists voted in favor of subscription. In non-subscriber discussions which followed, the issue of the Trinity was bypassed and the controversy was represented as the valiant struggle of liberty of conscience against a repressive and inquisitorial mentality. However, after that time Arianism, and even Socinianism, spread among dissenting congregations devastating the General Baptists, Arminian in theology, and the Presbyterians who had forsaken their distinguishing doctrinal standards.

Gill's ministry in London was contemporary with this lamentable theological decline destroying formerly evangelical churches. Even Particular Baptists eventually were affected. Two London pastors, John and Sayer Rudd, were disciplined by their churches for characterizing the doctrine of the Trinity as consisting of "words and phrases of men's own inventing and which are no where to be met with in Scripture." Other churches disciplined members for not being clear in "ye doctrine of ye Trinity" or for not believing in the "divinity of Christ." Gill's good friend and fellow London Particular Baptist pastor, Samuel Wilson, engaged in a series of lectures to counteract the simultaneous deliveries of the Socinian James Foster.

Gill's advocacy of the doctrine of grace inextricably involves a vindication of trinitarian theology, for the two areas are necessarily complementary. A striking, but typical interdigitation of these doctrinal heads comes near the beginning of Gill's sermon on Romans 3:31, "The Law Established by the Gospel."

"The Apostle goes on to shew, that the matter of justification, or that by which a sinner is justified, is the righteousness of God; a righteousness in which Jehovah, Father Son and Spirit, are concerned. God the Father sent His Son to work it out, and bring it in; He has approved and accepted of it, and graciously imputes it to all the elect. The Son of God is the author of it; who is our 'Immanuel,' God with us, God in our nature, God and man in one Person, 'God over all, Blessed for ever.' Hence it has that fullness, sufficiency, and virtue to justify all to whose ac-

count it is placed; which the righteousness of a mere creature could never do. The Holy Spirit of God discovers this righteousness to a poor, sensible sinner, brings it near to him; sets it before him; works faith in him to lay hold upon it, and receive it, and pronounces him justified by it in the court of conscience."

The Cause of God and Truth was written in view of the same reality. Gill undertook the project to refute the arguments of Daniel Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points. This grand defense of Arminianism might just as well have been a defense of popery as far as Gill was concerned, for Arminianism and Pelagianism were "the very life and soul of Popery." Beyond popery, however, the man-centered teaching of Arminianism seemed to be irresistibly drawn historically to even more sinister theological connections. In his earlier writing ministry, Whitby had refuted the Arian and Socinian errors, but, by the end of his life, according to the posthumously published Last Thoughts, he was a convinced Unitarian. Gill identified Arminianism with "other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation."

The arrangement of The Cause of God and Truth is helpful. Part One consists of an exegesis of sixty scriptures reputed to teach doctrines contrary to the Calvinistic system. Part Two provides an exegesis of Scriptures which contain clear assertions of the Calvinistic system. Part Three contains a defense of the theological coherence and internal Biblical logic of the Calvinistic system in opposition to various cavils brought against it by Whitby and others. Part Four consists of an intriguing array of pre-Augustinian patristic texts that lend historical support to the system as consistent with the continued witness of the church in every age. Gill is wisely reserved in his claims at this point. He does not attempt to show that a coherent scheme of the doctrines of grace was taught by the pre-Augustinians. He freely acknowledges that many errors were taught by them and "never were more absurd notions, or more horrid and blasphemous doctrines maintained" on many subjects than in the ante-Nicene period. These were men who, in many ways, should not be called the Fathers of the church, but the children of the church, since their understanding of the entire scheme of redemption was far inferior to that of the Reformers. The early writers were much more skilled at demolishing pagan notions and Jewish misrepresentations than they were in "stating, explaining, and defending the Christian faith." The doctrinal error about which they were most concerned

was the person of Christ. The doctrine of grace had never been disputed and, thus, they were under no necessity of troubling themselves to solve this difficult problem. Had it arisen in the Pelagian form earlier, they would, doubtless, have dealt with it. Foundations for Augustinianism, however, were laid and the Augustinian system was not created ex nihilo. Gill is concerned to demonstrate that the foundation was clear and, though interspersed with ill-stated and sometimes erroneous ideas (sometimes even contradictions which Gill had no intention of seeking to reconcile), it was certain that "the Arminians have no great reason to boast of antiquity on their side."

When death was near, in 1771, Gill expressed to his nephew the personal dimensions of the faith for which he had contended earnestly and sacrificially all his 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 any thing in me, or done by me under the influences of the Holy Spirit;... but upon the free grace of God, and blessings of grace streaming to me through the blood and righteousness of Christ, as the ground of my hope."

This preface is written with the hope and prayer that the republication may provide encouragement and material for many of God's servants to stand for The Cause of God and Truth.

Tom J. Nettles  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
November, 1992

*“Perhaps no man since the days of Augustine himself, has written so largely, in defense of the system of grace; and certainly, no man has treated that momentous subject, in all its branches, more closely, judiciously, and successfully. What was said of Edward the Black Prince, ‘that he never fought a battle, which he did not win;’... may be justly accommodated to our great Philosopher and Divine (Gill)”*

**Augustus Toplady**

quoted in John Rippon’s  
A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings  
of the Late Rev. John Gill, D.D., pgs. 139-140

*“If you read Whitby on the Five Points, read  
Dr. Gill’s reply...It is the fullest answer to Whitby.”*

**Edward Bickersteth**

in The Christian Student, p. 578

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