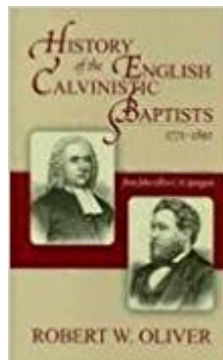




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# History Of The English Calvinistic Baptists 1771-1892: From John Gill To C.H. Spurgeon



## Synopsis

The aim of this book is to trace the story of the English Calvinistic Baptists from the death of John Gill in 1771 to that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon in 1892. It deals not only with the well-known figures in this community's history- theological giants like John Gill, Andrew Fuller, William Gadsby, and Charles Spurgeon- but also with lesser-known lights-men like the hymn writer Benjamin Beddome, the eccentric John Collett Ryland, Abraham Booth, and John Stevens. Wide and deep reading in the writings of these men has given Dr. Robert Oliver an excellent grasp of their various theological perspectives. No Christian community is without its controversies and the Calvinistic Baptists in the period covered by this book are no exception. Even-handedly and with one eye always on the Calvinistic Baptist roots in the seventeenth century- well summed up by The Second London Confession of Faith- the author details the controversies that at times wracked this community. Who may take the Lord's Supper? What is the role of the law in the Christian life? Is there biblical warrant for making free offers of the gospel to all and sundry? None of these issues are minor matters and should not be ignored by Christians today. The thinking of these Baptist worthies is therefore still of great value. Unlike some contemporary historians, Robert Oliver is rightly convinced that the development of the Strict and Particular strand of this community in the nineteenth century is not a stagnant backwater that is best forgotten. Even though the churches of this persuasion were not as balanced as their seventeenth and eighteenth-century forebears, there was a spiritual vitality to this group that needs remembering and Oliver has given us a rich overview of the thought and activities of these English Calvinistic Baptists.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'A...masterful book.' --Dr. Michael Haykin'...A fine piece of work, which I greatly enjoyed reading.'

--David P. Kingdon

Robert W. Oliver was born into a Christian home in Bethersden Kent, England in 1936. From infancy he was brought up to attend the local Particular Baptist Chapel with which his mother's family had been associated since the early nineteenth century. Converted through family and church teaching in childhood he was baptized in 1954 at the Bethersden Church. National service in the Royal Air Force from 1954 to 1956 took him away from his home district for the first time. This was followed by studies at University College, London where he graduated with BA Honours in History in 1959. This was followed by a year's study in the University of Nottingham leading to a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. He then began a teaching career in secondary education in Gloucestershire. He was by this time conscious of a call to the Christian ministry and entered upon a part time pastorate in Cheltenham 1964-1967. His thinking had been profoundly influenced by the teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones while a student in London and thus had moved from the original Hyper-Calvinism in which he had been reared. In 1971 he commenced a pastorate at the Old Baptist Chapel, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire. This continued until retirement in 2006. During this pastorate he completed a research course leading to a PhD through the London Bible College. On completion he was asked to be lecturer in Church History and Historical Theology at the London Theological Seminary, a post he continues to hold.

Title: History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771-1892  
Author: Robert W. Oliver  
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General Subject Matter: Historical narrative delineating differences and principle spokesmen between closed and open communion among Particular and General Baptists during the period of 1771-1892  
Price: \$27.00  
ISBN: 0-85151-920-0  
The purpose of this book is to trace the story of the English Calvinistic Baptists from the death of John Gill in 1771 to that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon in 1892. So states the author in the dust jacket notes and in his introduction. Oliver asserts that no Christian community exists without some type of controversy. Oliver details the controversies that developed at this time. The theme of this book is the development of Strict and Particular doctrines and practices. The thesis of this book is that even though the emergence of two distinct Baptist

denominations out of English Separatism which differed in the proper candidates which could be received as communicants at the Lord's table, the Strict Baptists (Particular Baptists) The author uses a combination of narration and exposition to develop his thesis. The author tells the story of a series of events, developments, and changes that took place after the death of the historic pastor John Gill through the death of another historic pastor, Charles H. Spurgeon in a chronological order. Oliver emphasizes various events to tell his readers about the various developments and what factors precipitated them. Oliver also uses exposition to explain each event and its significance. Oliver also gives excellent analysis of these events. The author attempts to present the facts as clearly as possible. These facts range from the development of doctrinal papers, establishment of various churches, the calling or dismissing of various pastors, and other essential events from both "camps." This book was very interesting. Oliver, although unafraid to admit his bias, was very objective and very thorough in his presentation. Oliver was extremely detailed. This book is very useful to its intended audience as it provides extensive research explaining how various churches developed strict or open communion practices and how they changed during the period of 1771-1892. Oliver seems to not only defend the position of strict or closed communion but he seems to defend and uphold "hyper-Calvinism." He seems to venerate men such as Gill, Gadsby, Philpot, Fuller and Booth who were seemingly hyper-Calvinists. I would agree with Oliver that communion is preceded by believer's baptism. I agree with the author's opinion that the doctrines of grace are biblical doctrines taken straight from the pages of the Scriptures. I agree that only adult candidates who profess and demonstrate conversion should be baptized. Oliver divides his book into three distinct sections. Part One is a detailed history of what Oliver calls "the eighteenth-century heritage." He examines the life, ministry, and contribution (good or bad) of a number of eighteenth century men. Oliver also details controversies such as antinomianism. Part Two details the differences of three prominent men who preached and wrote extensively on the questions and issues of their day; Andrew Fuller, Abraham Booth, William Gadsby, and John Stevens. Part Three begins with the movement toward open communion, the question of the free offer of the gospel, the impact of both John C. Philpot and Charles H. Spurgeon on these issues. Robert W. Oliver pastored the Old Baptist Church in Bradford on Avon in Wilshire for over thirty-five (35) years. He was a frequent lecturer on Church History in the London Theological Seminary. This book is a hardback copy. The layout of this book makes it very reader friendly. The typography is very easy to read. There are a number of black and white renditions and sketches of a number of principle men connected to this period and these controversies. This book is replete with footnotes at the bottom of the page. This book contains three (3) appendices giving further information and summaries. This book contains an

extensive bibliography. There are three (3) indexes at the end of this book, one for names, another for places, and a third for subjects. In summary, Oliver detailed the development of the Strict and Particular brands of the church community in the nineteenth century. He believed it was not a "stagnant backwater that is best forgotten," but needed to be recorded for great benefit today. Oliver contended that there was a "spiritual vitality" to this group (English Calvinistic Baptists) that needed to be remembered. Oliver skillfully provided a very detailed and useful overview of both the thought and activities of this group of believers. I found this book to be very interesting and informative. I find it difficult to do a general summary of this book due to the fact that Oliver made each chapter stand on its own. The chapter titles are as follows: The Legacy of John Gill Blessings in the Cotswolds Three Noteworthy Leaders The Communion Controversy 1772-1781 The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation Antinomianism William Huntington's Controversy with the Particular Baptists Andrew Fuller and Abraham Booth William Gadsby John Stevens Moves Toward Open Communion The Beginnings of the Strict Baptist Magazines Joseph Charles Philpot Organizations Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The main topics of this book are: Who may take the Lord's Supper? "From the seventeenth century onwards, Baptists had debated the question of whether communion should be closed or open, but it was not until the nineteenth century that differences over this issue led to distinct Strict Baptist groupings." (page 58) "The Particular Baptist denomination remained divided on terms of communion but the two sides within the communion was not settled." (page 87) What is the role of the law in the Christian life? John Gill wrote, "[The Law] (sic) is of use to saints and true believers in Christ...to be a rule of life and conversation to them; not a rule to obtain life by; but to live according to; to guide their feet, to direct their steps, and to preserve them from going into bye and crooked paths." (page 112) In 1957 John Murray wrote, "An erroneous conception of the function of the law can be of such a character that it completely vitiates our view of the gospel; and an erroneous conception of the antithesis between law and grace can be of such a character that it demolishes both the substructure and the superstructure of grace." (page 112) Is there a biblical warrant for making free offers of the gospel to all and sundry? Andrew Fuller wrote in 1815, "I have preached and written much against the abuse of the doctrine of grace; but that doctrine is all my salvation and all my desire. I have no other hope than that from salvation by mere, sovereign and efficacious grace, through the atonement of my Lord and Savior. With this hope I can go into eternity with composure." (page 89) Andrew Fuller's publishing of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* in 1785 was a powerful challenge to the prevailing Hyper-Calvinism within the Particular Baptist Churches. William Button and John Martin had been heavily influenced by John Gill. Button was compelled to denounce Fuller's publication, charging Fuller with Arminianism.

Button wrote: There are those, who warmly espousing Mr. F.'s (Fuller) cause, have been pleased to say, they hope his book will cure some their Gillism and Brinism. To such I beg leave to say, I am ashamed of their contemptuous manner of speaking of those great and good men, Gill and Brine, whose characters and works ought to be revered and esteemed by all, who call themselves Christians." (page

100)-----I received a complimentary copy of this book from The Banner of Truth Trust for this review and nothing else. The opinions offered in this review are mine and I was not required to offer a favorable opinion.

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