

John Skepp

{1675-1721}

John Skepp {born in 1675} whose name has been brought into notice chiefly on account of his so-called adherence to those views referred to as Hyper Calvinism; or in other words, his faithfulness to Christ in his uncompromising {Christ enthroned} testimony to the sovereignty of God in salvation, and his refusal to give credence to the rank Arminianism that had infiltrated the churches of Christ in his day, was originally a member of the Independent Church at Cambridge, under the care of Mr. Joseph Hussey. By the account of Mr. Hussey it appears that Mr. Skepp pressed himself into the ministry not only without, but against the consent both of his pastor, and of the church to which he belonged. In the Diary of Joseph Hussey we read this interesting entry regarding Skepp: "John Skepp, of Little Wilburn, Miller, rent himself off at last from the Church {in Cambridge} and turned Anabaptist preacher, yet as a lad was converted thoroughly to Christ under my Preaching, spake on soul-work clearly and was admitted into the Church with much Satisfaction; and after all this has repented of his sin and is returned, and Liberty given him to Preach as a gifted Brother at Wittelsea. And last of all is dismissed to be the Pastor of an Anabaptist Church in London." After preaching at various places in the country, but without any settlement, he removed to London, and was chosen to succeed Mr. Crossley as pastor of the Particular Baptist Church at Curriers Hall, London. {This is the same congregation that John Brine would eventually pastor sometime around 1730.} It must have been some time prior to this that he embraced the distinguishing tenet of the Baptists. Though Mr. Skepp had not the advantage of a liberal education, yet, after he took to the ministry, by dint of great diligence and industry, he acquired a large share of knowledge in the languages in which the Sacred Scriptures were originally written, particularly the Hebrew, in which he took uncommon pains under the direction of a Jewish teacher; and he dipped pretty deeply into Rabbinical learning. This taste gave a peculiar cast to his character and method of preaching. Mr. Skepp was a very high 'Calvinist,' and carried those truths to the fullest extent of the Supralapsarian scheme. Some of his high-grace sentiments are published in a book, entitled, "The Divine Energy; or the Efficacious Operations of the Spirit of God in the soul of man, in his Effectual Calling and Conversion; stated, proved, and vindicated. Wherein the real weakness and insufficiency of moral suasion, without the super-addition of the exceeding greatness of God's Power for Faith and Conversion to God, are fully evinced; being an antidote against the Pelagian Plague; by John Skepp, 1722." This treatise was originally composed in the form of sermons, and delivered from the pulpit; but

altered and new-modeled by the author for the press. It was not published, however, until after his death. In a dedication to his church, he gives the following account of their origin and establishment: "Your foundation, as to gospel order, was skillfully and successfully laid, in the very beginning of the troublesome times, by the indefatigable pains and care of that eminent servant and sufferer for Christ, Mr. Hanserd Knollys; and your walls were not only reared, but beautified, by the labors and success of that evangelic son of consolation, Mr. Robert Steed. These two were the chief master-builders, by whose blessed ministry you were built, and continued, upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." Anne Dutton, {Letters on Spiritual Subjects, 1748} who left the church in Northampton to join that under Mr. Skepp, says in her Memoirs, regarding the ministry of Mr. Skepp. "Upon my fixation at London under the ministry of the late Mr. Skepp, I soon found the truth of this declaration of grace; for the waters of the sanctuary were indeed risen waters; which filled my soul with wonder and joy. I found the same doctrines of the Gospel, maintained and vindicated in the ministry of Mr. Skepp; but with an abundance of glory, life and power. His ministry was greatly blessed for my edification in the knowledge of Christ. Mr. Skepp was also a man of deep judgment, and added to this, he had quickness of thought, aptness of expression, suitable affection, and a most agreeable delivery, every way suited to engage the attention of an auditory; and the essence of all was that wonderful Power which attended his ministry, both for the quickening of the saints, and the conversion of sinners. He had a peculiar gift of opening the Scriptures, one text by another; which cast a great light upon the Sacred Oracles. He also delighted to set forth heavenly things by earthly, for his ministry abounded with similes; which, when aptly applied, do much illustrate the Truth, and help our dark minds to take it in. Under his ministry, I was as it were put to school, to learn again those truths in a greater light and glory, which I had some blessed knowledge of before; and the special blessing I received under it, was, the more abundant Life and Power of the Truths known. I found the Gospel, under his preaching, to be indeed, the ministration of the Spirit and Life; and the Word of God to be as a fire, melting my soul down. Oh the light and glory I saw, the life and heat I felt in the doctrines of the Gospel under the irradiating, enkindling influences of the Holy Ghost in his ministry. Prior to my removal to London, I had transient communion with the Church of Christ under his pastoral care; but after I had walked with them thus for some time, it was thought proper, my abode being fixed, that my communion should be so too, whereupon I requested my dismissal from the Church of Christ at Northampton, to which I then related, to that with which I then walked; which being granted, I was received into full communion with this Church of Christ at London. My fellowship herewith was sweet; for the Lord dwelt in this Zion, for me, abundantly blessed her provision, and my poor soul was satisfied with gospel bread. He clothed also her minister with salvation; and, with her saints, my soul also did rejoice. O the glory of God that I

saw in this House of His! In this garden of God I sat down under the shadow of my Beloved with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste; and the sweetness of Christ's Grace-Fullness, his fruit as the Apple Tree, suited to my present necessity and capacity, and did quicken my appetite, and set my soul a longing for that happy day, when I should feast upon his glory fullness, as the Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God." {Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God, with a Poor, Sinful, Unworthy Creature, in Three Parts, by Anne Dutton 1750} Dr. John Gill, who had a great esteem for the memory of Mr. Skepp, published a Second Edition of this book {Divine Energy} in 1731, and prefixed to it a recommendatory preface; in which he added the following regarding Skepp: "Mr. John Skepp was a man of singular talents and abilities; of very quick, strong, natural parts; of great diligence and industry in acquiring useful knowledge; a warm and lively Preacher of the Gospel; a zealous Defender of the special and peculiar doctrines of it; whose ministry was blessed to many souls, for the conversion of some, and for the edification of others." Gill also divided the work into chapters, at the head of which he placed their contents, for the more easy reading, and better understanding it. Gill's partiality to our author arose out of an intimacy formed with him in an early period of his ministry. {When John Gill was ordained to the pastorate on March 22, 1720, Skepp was one of the participating ministers. Mr. Skepp asked the usual questions to the candidate and also preached a charge to the Congregation from Hebrews 13:17} It was through his acquaintance with Mr. Skepp that he was encouraged to apply himself with diligence to oriental learning, in which he afterwards made so great a proficiency. Mr. Skepp dying within a year or two after Dr. Gill settled in London, he purchased most of his Hebrew and Rabbinical books, which were of great use to him in the prosecution of his own studies. Mr. Skepp's ministry at Curriers Hall was not of many years continuance. He died in the year 1721, when, as it is apprehended, he was not very far advanced in life. *This brief biographical sketch was largely taken from Walter Wilson's {History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches, Vol.2, 1808} and interlaced with a few extracts from other sources. MPJ*

Efficacious Operations of the Spirit of God in Conversion

If there be such an exceeding greatness of power put forth upon the hearts and souls of God's elect in conversion, as the scriptures do abundantly manifest, and as hath been declared; then we infer hence, very justly, that conversion is no such easy thing, nor so common as most persons count it to be. Some persons, yea, many, as I showed under the first head, mistake conversion and faith, and look upon reformation, and external holiness to be conversion; and that faith is no more, than an assent to this or some other doctrinal truth or proposition; whereas conversion work, is an internal change; as hath been shown. It begins in the heart, and ends in the life. There may be a reformation when there is no true, thorough conversion. There may be morality, a just, good, moral conversation between man and man; a religious conversation, a conscience made about performance of

the duties of religion; and yet the heart unchanged. Who more zealous in religion than the Pharisees? Who more strict? Yea, some were in their conversations very exact. Saul for one, while in a state of unregeneracy, yea, as touching the righteousness of the law, as in the common notion of the Pharisee, blameless. He had as much to boast of and trust in, as to attainments in religion, as most men; yea, he ventures to say, I more than they; and yet {saith he} all this was short for he was but like a painted sepulchre. Conversion-work is not so easy and common as the generality of persons imagine; who think they want only to be told of their duties, and if they will attend, they may perform all that is told them; for this corrupt notion has got footing in the hearts of men, that God will require no more than they are able to perform; but I have shown, that the law of God requires more than the creature is able to give; for otherwise righteousness would be by the law, and Christ would have died in vain. The law calls for a clean heart; "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness," Jeremiah 9:14. And by the prophet Ezekiel, the law calls upon the sinner and saith, "turn yourselves and live ye; make you a new spirit and a new heart," Ezekiel 18:31. These scriptures, I have shown, are the voice of God's law, discovering that the law calls for internal purity; and that external sanctity will not satisfy its demands. Now, though these demands are made upon the creature, the creature, being fallen, is unable for the performance of them. Therefore, there is a covenant of free grace made between the Father and the Son on the behalf of the elect; in which God hath promised, that he will give a pure, new, and clean heart; that he will work a special saving change upon the soul; which promises would be useless and insignificant, if the creature could give himself this new heart; whatever thoughts men may have of their own power in a state of nature, they will find other things, if the Spirit of God comes to work effectually upon them. I have often compared the state of man by nature, with respect to his notion or ability, to a person in a fever, who thinks that he is stronger than other people; he tells them that he is well, and as strong as anybody, &c.; but alas; they that sit by him pity him; knowing that it all proceeds from the height of the distemper. Let but that be abated, and the man begins to feel a real weakness; he that was so strong that others could hardly hold him in his bed, cannot now so much as raise himself. When the Spirit of God comes to convince a sinner, he shows the soul its own weakness, and insufficiency. Now it is to be feared, there are but few among professors that have been made, from a felt experience of their own weakness, to cry out, "Turn me, and I shall be turned;" and but few to be found who are constant supplicants at the throne of grace, as David, saying, "create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," Psalm 51:10. Professors are many. Many have the lamp, but few the oil. How few among the heap of professors have known the effectual work of God upon their souls. Conversion is a great work; and among the many professors, it is to be feared, that sound true converts are but few. Secondly, if there be such an exceeding greatness of power, to be put forth upon the hearts of those who shall be converted, in order to turn them effectually; we may, without breach of charity, infer, that those who oppose and deny the power of the gospel are destitute of this work. Such men set themselves against the work of the Spirit; they cast contempt and reproach upon his person and office, and on the work of the Spirit of God upon the heart; being destitute of that Spirit, they blaspheme and reproach him. They who have seen an excellency in the person of Christ, and the need of him, as their alone Saviour, cannot speak slightly of him; and they who have also seen the need of a new heart and a new spirit, and that this is a special work of the Spirit of God in and upon the soul, cannot speak slightly of the Spirit and his operations. No person that

ever knew what the new birth was, can ever speak slightly or reproachfully of the Holy Spirit, either with respect to his person, office, or operations; therefore it is an inference very just to say concerning these; they have a form of Godliness, but deny the power; they are destitute of the Spirit of God; they are like those Laodiceans, who conceited they were "rich, and full, and had need of nothing," Revelation 3:17, whereas, indeed, they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The worst was, they knew it not, and neither would they believe it. Thirdly if there be such an exceeding greatness of power put forth upon the hearts and souls of those who believe, then the Spirit of God, in his work and office, ought to be greatly prized and valued by those who have felt anything of his power and operations upon their souls. They ought also to have a high esteem for that ministry, for that gospel, and for that Spirit's work and office, which others speak so slightly and reproachfully of. Those who never saw a beauty in, and need of Christ, may speak slightly of him; but can those who have seen the need of a Saviour, and have had him discovered to them so gloriously, as one full of grace and truth; can they, I say, disesteem him? Surely no! To you who believe, he is precious, while to others he is a stone of stumbling. So those who are ignorant of the Spirit's work, may stigmatize him; but those who have felt his work upon their hearts, can they speak slightly of the Spirit? Can they hear him reproached? No, surely. They love him, and value him above all. Those who have come under the Spirit's work, it is their duty, in point of gratitude, to love and value him; to esteem his person and office, and all his operations and undertakings. But; fourthly, if there is such an exceeding greatness of power put forth upon the souls of those who believe; then we may infer hence, the need of the Spirit of God to accompany the ministry of the word. There is a generation of professors, who tell us in so many words' that God hath made known his mind so plainly and clearly in the holy scriptures, as that any man who will attend to them, may read it, and know it; as there needs no more than a close application on our part; and this they do to decry the teachings of the Spirit; it is done to advance nature, and nature's abilities, and to reproach them who profess to be under the Spirit's teachings. Indeed, if there was no work of God put forth in conversion, then the word without the Spirit might do; but forasmuch as there must be a mighty power put forth upon them who believe, there must be the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the word together make the gospel the power of God to salvation. There is a need of the Spirit, that so the Spirit and the word may go together; that wherever the gospel is received by any, it may be received not in word only; "for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," 1 Thessalonians 1:5. Assurance here I do not take to be that which is personal; though that comes in the gospel and by the Holy Ghost; but that evidence and demonstration of the truths delivered; that they came with such power and authority, being backed by the Holy Spirit, upon the hearts of those who heard them, that they were assured these were the truths of God; that it was not enthusiasm; but that there was a reality in those truths, and they were agreeable to the mind of God. But what I would particularly take notice of is, that they received it not in word only; it is a sad thing to be left to a gospel only of words, though they are never so well put together; it will have no success; it may please the ear, but it will never reach the heart. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe," 1 Thessalonians 2. ver. 13. Here is the internal power which the Spirit of God, with the word, hath upon the soul. The word of man only reaches the ear. The word of man always supposes a power in

the subject to perform what is called for, but the word of God doth not, for the Lord hath said, "Let there be light, and it was so;" but it could not be supposed that the creature could make itself; man cannot make the new creature; man can only use words, and recommend what he hath to say with close argument; but it must drop if a power do not accompany it. But the word of God is made effectual to conversion when the Spirit of God works with it. John Skepp {Divine Energy; or the Efficacious Operations of the Spirit of God upon the Soul of Man, in His Effectual Calling and Conversion, Stated, Proved, and Vindicated. 1722}