

Jason D. Edwards

The Anchor of a Believer's Hope

John Flavel's (ca. 1627-1691) Theology of Death, Dying, and Eternal Destiny



Reformed Historical Theology

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For Andrea, my beloved wife—partners in life and ministry.

Thank you for reminding me daily how
“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.”

John 3:29 (KJV)

We pray that you, Elijah, Ezra, Elissa, and Faith
will learn to trust more and more and more
in the Only Anchor of our hope, both in life and death.

Contents

Acknowledgements	11
1. Introduction	13
1.1 Reason for this Research	13
1.2 History of This Research	18
1.2.1 Flavel Scholarship	20
1.2.2 Current Demand	23
1.3 Delimitations, Methodology, and Primary Source Materials	25
1.3.1 Delimitations	25
1.3.2 Research Methodology	25
1.3.3 Summary of Primary Source Materials	27
1.4 Thesis	28
1.5 Summary of Contents	28
1.5.1 Concluding Synthesis	29
2. Flavel's Historical and Theological Context	31
2.1 Biographical Aspects	31
2.1.1 Upbringing and Training	31
2.1.2 Flavel's Overlap with John Owen	37
2.1.3 Ministry Setting	39
2.1.4 Personal Losses	40
2.2 The Political Climate in England Circa 1662–1692	41
2.3 Late Seventeenth-Century English Puritans	43
2.3.1 The Theological Heritage of Late Seventeenth-Century English Puritans	45
2.4 Concluding Synthesis	48
3. Flavel's Anthropology	49
3.1 Flavel's Doctrine of Man	49
3.1.1 Creation and Depravity	49
3.1.2 Flavel's Doctrine of Sin	52
3.1.3 Sin and Death	54
3.1.4 The Unregenerate State	54
3.2 The Inner and Outer Man	55
3.2.1 Flavel's View of Body and Soul	57

3.2.2	Situating Flavel's View of the Affections	60
3.3	Concluding Synthesis	64
4.	Flavel's Theological Concepts of Life and Death	65
4.1	The Doctrine of Death	65
4.1.1	Death Defined	65
4.1.2	Postmortem	73
4.1.3	The Doctrines of Heaven and Hell	75
4.2	Concluding Synthesis	85
5.	Insights From Flavel's Christology	87
5.1	The Doctrine of Christ	87
5.1.1	Christ's Nature	88
5.1.2	Christ's Merits	92
5.1.3	The Cross	93
5.1.4	Christ's Victory Over Death	97
5.1.5	Christ's Transformation of the Grave	99
5.1.6	Christ's Union with His People	101
5.1.7	Christ's Graces	103
5.2	Concluding Synthesis	105
6.	Theological Grounds for Hope at Eath	107
6.1	What Is Covenant Theology?	107
6.1.1	Did Flavel Have a Covenant Theology?	108
6.2	Flavel's Biblical-Exegetical Foundation of Covenant Theology Relating to Death	110
6.2.1	Flavel's Biblical-Exegetical Foundation	110
6.3	The Covenant of Redemption	112
6.3.1	The Covenant of Redemption and Hope	116
6.3.2	Implications of the Covenant of Redemption for the Soul	117
6.3.3	Implications of the Covenant of Redemption for the Body	119
6.4	The Covenant of Works	119
6.4.1	The Curse of Adam's Broken Covenant	120
6.4.2	The Work of Christ to Merit Life for His Beloved	122
6.4.3	The Implications of Christ's Earned Blessings	123
6.4.4	<i>Implications of the Covenant of Works for Death and Dying</i>	124

6.5	The Covenant of Grace	125
6.5.1	That from Which the Covenant of Grace Saves Believers . .	126
6.5.2	That unto Which the Covenant of Grace Saves Believers . .	127
6.6	Concluding Synthesis	129
7.	Application of Covenant Theology to Death	131
7.1	Flavel's Pneumatology Relating to Death and Eternal Hope	131
7.1.1	The Holy Spirit's Work of Regeneration	131
7.1.2	The Holy Spirit's Work of Sanctification	133
7.1.3	The Holy Spirit's Gift of Assurance	134
7.2	Dying and Repentance	135
7.2.1	The Relationship between Repentance and Hope	136
7.2.2	Repentance as Reformation Dogma	138
7.2.3	Warnings to Those Outside of the Covenant of Grace	141
7.2.4	Christ's Promises to Those in His Covenant of Grace	142
7.2.5	How the Covenant of Grace Changes the Outlook of Believers	145
7.3	Sanctification before Death	147
7.3.1	How Covenant Theology Strengthens Believers	147
7.4	Assurance of Salvation unto Death and Beyond	150
7.4.1	God's Covenant Faithfulness	150
7.4.2	The One Who Preserves the Saved Soul	152
7.4.3	The Cause of Perseverance	153
7.5	Concluding Synthesis	155
8.	Treatment of Emotions Associated with Dying	157
8.1	Fear	159
8.1.1	Biblical Teaching on the Fear of Death	160
8.1.2	The Root of Fear Is Sin	161
8.1.3	Fear Conquered by Christ	163
8.2	Conviction	165
8.2.1	Conviction to Repent	165
8.2.2	Conviction to Believe God's Word	166
8.2.3	Conviction to Run the Race	167
8.3	Peace	169
8.3.1	The Believer's Peace Is Achieved by Christ	170
8.3.2	Peace Because a Believer's Sin Is Paid For	172
8.3.3	A Believer's Soul Is at Peace When Resting in God's Love	174

8.3.4	A Believer's Soul Can Be at Peace with Whatever God Appoints	176
8.4	Grief	178
8.4.1	The Grief of Losing a Loved One	179
8.4.2	The Grief of One's Soul Parting from One's Body	181
8.4.3	The Grieved Conscience	183
8.5	Joy	184
8.5.1	Why Joy in Death Is Rare	185
8.5.2	The Source of Joy in Death	186
8.5.3	The Instrument of Joy in Death	187
8.5.4	Flavel's Descriptions of the Joy of Heaven in Death	189
8.5.5	Applications for Joy in Death	191
8.6	Concluding Synthesis	192
9.	Conclusion	195
9.1	Overview	195
9.2	Situating Flavel's Theological View of Death	196
9.2.1	Insights Related to Flavel's Historical and Theological Context	196
9.2.2	Flavel's Anthropology Situated	196
9.2.3	Grounds For Hope At Death Situated	197
9.2.4	Situating Flavel's Pastoral Application of His Theology of Death	198
9.3	Gaps in Flavel's Theology or the Application Thereof to Death	198
9.4	Significance of This Dissertation to This Field of Scholarship	199
9.5	Areas of Further Research	200
9.6	Flavel's Final Word on Dying	201
	Bibliography	205
	Index	211

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The body of secondary Flavelian literature has grown so significantly, as Chapter 1 will show, that I dare not list all previous Flavel scholars here. Yet I must state my indebtedness to each one for their intriguing research questions, careful analyses, and clear contributions. This project sought to build upon and complement their significant labors.

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1 Charlotte Mason, *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education: A Liberal Education For All* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 27–28.

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If any reader experiences truth, beauty, or hope from the ideas presented in these chapters, may none commit idolatry by attributing it to Flavel or one of his researchers! May the Lord, the Creator and Sustainer of everyone and everything, receive all the glory due to His name. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen."

1. Introduction

*Faith can do many sweet offices for your souls upon a death-bed, when the light of this world is gone, and all joy ceases on earth: it can give us sights of things invisible in the other world, and those sights will breathe life into your souls, amidst the very pangs of death.*¹

1.1 Reason for this Research

“The Reformation’s assault on the afterlife,” according to Peter Marshall, “had profound intellectual and cultural consequences.”² In his recent book subtitled *Death, Religion and the Supernatural in England*, Marshall claims that the undermining of purgatory, “the defining doctrine of late Medieval Catholicism,” by English Protestants led to a “reverential agnosticism” about the world to come and concluded that “the disruptions of the Reformation provided scope” through Calvinist preaching for ordinary people to practice a “kind of vernacular theology” that reoriented the thinking of the English populace on “fundamental matters of life, death, and belief.”³ Such preaching, according to Marshall, “sowed the seeds of a later harvest of skepticism.”⁴ This dissertation evaluates the extent to which such claims are substantiated through an in-depth analysis of the teaching of one seventeenth-century English Puritan preacher.

The genre of this research is the Art of Dying, or *Ars Moriendi*, its Latin inscription since the Middle Ages. More specifically, this project explores John Flavel’s (ca. 1627–1691) theology of death, dying, and eternal destiny. Does the theology and ministry of a Pre-Enlightenment English Puritan pastor have anything to teach present-day readers about death, dying, and eternal hope?

Death is a salient and emotionally charged topic, loaded with philosophical and spiritual meaning for every living generation. The study of death and dying involves two predominant theological subcategories: anthropology and spirituality. Arguably, no other genre reveals the essence of faith and tests it to its very core more than that of death.

1 John Flavel, *The Whole Works of John Flavel: Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon*, vol. 1 (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 453.

2 Peter Marshall, *Invisible Worlds: Death, Religion and the Supernatural in England, 1500–1700* (SPCK Publishing, 2017), 8.

3 Marshall, *Invisible Worlds*, 8.

4 Marshall, *Invisible Worlds*, 8.

Since the modernization of medicine, Western civilization has tried to hide from death: it “is staged and pre-packaged, sanitized and deodorized, and most of the mess and ugliness of death is hidden from plain sight, delegated to health-care professionals, or is screened as entertainment.”⁵ Could it be that the Christian church has become conformed to the pattern of the world in trying to hide from death? A prominent English Puritan’s theology of death and dying is not a dusty, speculative abstraction of interest only to a bygone era.

My aim in investigating Flavel’s theology of death and ministry in the face of dying is two-pronged. The first aim is broad, and the second is narrower. More broadly, this research intends to contribute to the scholarly literature regarding how those within the Reformed tradition have applied their theology to death and dying as one significant aspect of the human experience. “[U]nderstanding how societies and cultures deal with death provides an important gateway into understanding these societies and cultures in themselves. Death is the ultimate problem they must address, manage, and process. Death is thus a social/cultural problem and a human problem—something to be solved only by the living.”⁶ The Reformed doctrines of man and covenant theology relate directly to questions of grief, dying, destiny, and hope. Yet, scholarly treatments of how the Reformed tradition has handled these themes have been limited and unbalanced.

Oxford University Press recently published the work of Susan Karant-Nunn, who investigated sixteenth-century sermons on death and dying. In her chapter on emotions in Early Modern Catholicism, Karant-Nunn asserted, “Affective piety as an ideal was widely accepted and characteristic of late Medieval and Early Modern Catholicism.”⁷ After “examining three categories of evidence: the adornment of sacred spaces, the central meanings of ritual life, and the sermons,”⁸ she concludes that the “emotional goals” of the Reformed were “astonishingly distinct”⁹ from the emotional goals of Medieval Roman Catholicism. To Karant-Nunn, church icons, rituals, and sermons were more sensitive to human emotions associated with death and dying before the Reformation. In her assessment, the Reformed tradition emphasized a ministry of the word to the neglect of affective piety. Her assertion is representative of an oft-held notion that Reformed ministers from the sixteenth century onward forsook the

5 From Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Anders Petersen, “The Return of Death in Times of Uncertainty—A Sketchy Diagnosis of Death in the Contemporary ‘Corona Crisis,’” *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (2020): 9, 131.

6 Jacobsen and Petersen, “The Return of Death,” 3, 131.

7 Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

8 Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 13.

9 Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 12.



Figure 1: The Calvinist Deathbed.¹⁰
 Source: <https://www.mediastorehouse.com/p/690/john-calvin-death-bed-woodcut-b-w-photo-12801969.jpg.webp>

treatment of human emotions. Did the Reformed theology of English Puritans lead to despair in the face of death and dying? Were Post-Reformation Calvinists like Flavel cold and fatalistic as the illustration in Figure 1 caricatures?

Recent scholars have asserted that “a double task” is universally required of all cultures in dealing with the reality of death: these cultures “must accept that death is the ultimate destiny for all their members, but, on the other hand, they must also deny that death reigns sovereign over life and that nothing can be

¹⁰ In this picture a man lies on his deathbed holding an hourglass. In the dying man’s final moments of life, John Calvin is depicted as telling the hopeless man that Christ is not for all. This German cartoon’s jab at the doctrines of definite atonement and predestination illustrate oft-held misperceptions of Calvinistic ministry. World History Archive, October 18, 1904, retrieved July 28, 2023, from <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-illustration-of-John-calvin-1509-1564-an-influential-french-theologian-122926833.html>.

done about it.”¹¹ In light of this universal challenge, Flavel’s aspect of “consolation” is included within the scope of this current research, highlighting the pastoral and practical significance of Flavel’s contributions. Therefore, this research project aims to shed more light on the history and peculiarities of Reformed views and pastoral application of doctrines of death, dying, and eternal destiny.

More narrowly, this project analyzes how the theology of Flavel shaped his preaching, writing, and pastoral ministry regarding death, dying, and the promise of eternal life in Christ. The question remains, however, relating to the reason for this research: Is Flavel’s theology worth researching? The ___ reasons below justify why this study has chosen to focus on Flavel.

The first reason Flavel is selected for study is because he has been neglected. Flavel has been relatively neglected by academia until recently. Brian Cosby argues convincingly that Flavel can be considered “The Lost Puritan.”¹² Yet careful historians have established Flavel as a leading and representative Reformed and confessional theologian.

2. A second reason why Flavel was selected is for his lasting influence. Anthony à Wood¹³ (1632–1695) asserted that Flavel’s following during his life surpassed that of John Owen and Richard Baxter.¹⁴ Iain Murray has said, “[S]ome Puritans might be more learned than [Flavel] and some more quaint, but for all-around usefulness, none was his equal.”¹⁵ Cosby has convincingly described

11 In context, the assertion reads thus: Because death in itself is such an unshakable fact of life, all cultures must necessarily at one and the same time perform a double task. On the one hand, they must accept that death is the ultimate destiny for all their members, but, on the other hand, they must also deny that death reigns sovereign over life and that nothing can be done about it. From Richard G. Dumont and Dennis C. Foss, *The American View of Death* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1972). “This double task keeps all cultures and societies going, admitting death its rightful place whilst simultaneously trying to push it aside. It is this jostle between living with death and doing everything to avoid it that has formed—and continues to form—the very foundation for historical changes in our death attitudes.” From Jacobsen and Petersen, “The Return of Death,” 4, 131.

12 Brian H. Cosby, *John Flavel: Puritan Life and Thought in Stuart England* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

13 Wood was a contemporary of John Flavel and a Royalist historian at Oxford University. He is the most likely author of Flavel’s first biography. In the original (1st edition), this quote is found written in the side margin.

14 Anthony à Wood, *An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in the Most Ancient and Famous University of Oxford, from the Fifteenth Year of King Henry the Seventh, AD 1500, to the Author’s Death in November 1695: Representing the Birth, Fortune, Preferment and Death of All Those Authors and Prelates, the Great Accidents of Their Lives and the Fate and Character of Their Writings. To Which Are Added, the Fasti, Or Annals, of the Said University* (London: R. Knaplock, D. Widwinter, and J. Tonson, 1721), 323.

15 Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971).

the remarkable lasting impact of Flavel's writings following his death during the subsequent century.¹⁶

A third reason Flavel was selected is because his application of theology is outstanding. Cosby's assertion is congruent with Charles Bridges's (1794–1869) assessment. Bridges concluded that perhaps none surpassed Flavel and his earnestness and application of preaching.¹⁷ Flavel's influence is further documented by Michael Haykin, who observed how “a good number of the leaders and believers in the evangelical revivals that swept British society on both sides of the Atlantic were deeply impacted by Flavel.”¹⁸

A fourth reason Flavel was selected is because the benefit of his writings has stood the test of time. Flavel's influence multiplied in the nineteenth century through Scottish evangelical leaders such as Robert Murray M'Cheyne and Andrew Bonar. Flavel's style, as devotionally warm as that of John Bunyan and Matthew Henry, made his published *Works* (vol. 6) appeal to rising generations of Reformed pastors and theologians. Archibald Alexander, the first professor at Princeton Seminary, read Flavel's sermons and treatises while still in his youth, leading the doctrinally clear and pastorally warm Alexander to con-

16 “The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of the evangelical leaders Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, who led what became known as the First Great Awakening (1730s and 40s). Both of these men were heirs of the Puritan tradition in general and of John Flavel in particular. ‘Holy Mr. Flavel,’ as Edwards calls him, is quoted more than any other person in Edwards’ *Religious Affections* (1746) except for Stoddard and Shepherd. Moreover, Edwards’ writing format and style—namely, that he states a particular doctrine and then gives an explanation—is identical to that of Flavel. James I. Packer, picking up on this, calls Edwards the ‘spiritual heir’ of Flavel. George Whitefield was also influenced by Flavel. When making plans for his ministry in Georgia, he included Flavel’s writings in his luggage to take along with him on his journey from London. At another point, in a letter to John Wesley (1703–1791), Whitefield defended the doctrine of election using Flavel’s orthodoxy. Not long before his death, Whitefield not only commended the books of Flavel, but also noted that his works are often ‘inquired after and bought up, more and more every day.’” Brian H. Cosby, “The Theology of Suffering and Sovereignty as Seen in the Writings and Ministry of John Flavel, c. 1630–1691” (PhD diss., Australian College of Theology, 2012).

17 Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry; with an Inquiry into the Causes of Its Inefficiency; with an Especial Reference to the Ministry of the Establishment* (London: Seeley, Burnside & Seeley, 1844).

18 In the foreword to Yuille’s book, Haykin explains how “George Whitfield ranked his works alongside those of John Bunyan (1628–1688) and Matthew Henry (1662–1714) for spiritual usefulness. Many of those converted under the ministry of the Virginia presbyterian Samuel Davies (1723–1761) were ardent readers of, among other Puritan works, the books of Flavel. And the Yorkshire Baptist leader John Faucet (1740–1817), who played a significant role in the revival of the Baptist cause in northern England was deeply attached to Flavel’s works.” From Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), x.

clude, later in his life: "To John Flavel, I certainly owe more than to any uninspired author."¹⁹

A fifth and final reason Flavel was selected for this study is because he represents his time period. Stephen Yuille²⁰ points to Flavel's exposition of the assembly's catechism²¹ as evidence of Flavel's commitment to Reformed confessionalism. As heir of the Westminster divines, Flavel applied Reformed biblical doctrine with pastoral zeal. In this way, Flavel's treatment of this subject not only applies the substance of Reformed theology but is also representative, at least to a limited extent, of the orthodox Christian tradition up to the end of the seventeenth century.²²

1.2 History of This Research

While numerous aspects of the human experience have been explored, an opportunity exists to further investigate the mentality of the Reformers and the Puritans as expressed by their views of death and dying. Philippe Ariès's landmark book in the mid-twentieth century surveyed Western attitudes toward death since the Middle Ages.²³ His work stands as evidence that the topic of death and dying yields meaningful insights into a religion's values. He defines mentality as how "people perceive the nature of things, in ideas, perhaps never consciously articulated, that were simply lived naively as self-evident."²⁴ Ariès analyzed changes in attitudes over the centuries regarding death as expressed in cultural symbolics like art, architecture, drama, and literature. He has a section on Early Modern Puritans, though it is brief.

19 James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D. D, LL. D., First Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1870).

20 Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum*, 2–3.

21 John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel*, vol. 6 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 138–317.

22 "The Westminster confession of faith and its accompanying catechisms offer, among other things, a unique and highly significant window into the relationship between biblical interpretation and theological formulation into the continuities and discontinuities in religious thought that belong to the development of the reformed tradition in the eras of the reformation end of protestant orthodoxy as that tradition moved from its beginnings into its era of confessionalization or institutionalization." From Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (P&R Publishing, 2007), 4.

23 Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, vol. 3 (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1975).

24 Philippe Ariès, "Mentality as History." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 5, no. 1 (1981): 102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40256047>.

This study is not in the domain of mentality. However, the theology popularized by Flavel and other Puritan ministers certainly contributed to the mentality of his readers. A thorough treatment of the belief system or theology of the Puritans was beyond the scope of his project. Thus, the topic of death and dying from a theological perspective remains largely unexplored. Given the absence of in-depth research on Puritan and Reformed theology of death and dying, this project serves as a first mover upon which future comparative analyses may expand.

An initial comparative work of the genre of dying manuals by English Puritans was conducted by Jenny Mayhew.²⁵ Nonetheless, the focus of her research was primarily literary rather than theological, and the time period included in the scope of her project preceded Flavel's life. David Sceats²⁶ also contributed to the analysis of this genre, focusing on the pastoral practices of Puritans. Still, his work was shorter and focused on North America in the time period that followed that of Flavel. Such limitations up to this point led Herman Selderhuis to conclude that "literature on this topic is so far rather scarce."²⁷

Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda edited a book called *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*.²⁸ This work similarly responded to the stereotype of Puritans as gloomy or emotionless. While theological views were considered in relation to Puritan understandings and experiences of joy, happiness, assurance, and affliction, the primary objective of their work was to show that emotions were important to Puritans. By contrast, this dissertation is not inquiring into Early Modern emotions, but rather is focused specifically on exploring Flavel's view of death and dying in the context of his theology and pastoral work.

A current series of publications by the Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht publishing house has helped to fill the literature gap with scholarly analysis of various Puritan and Reformed theologians. In 2022, Britt Stokes analyzed Isaac Watts's (1674–1748) views of death and dying.²⁹ Though Watts represents the genera-

25 Jenny Mayhew, "English Godly Art of Dying Manuals, c. 1590–1625" (PhD diss., Oxford Brookes University, 2007).

26 David Sceats, "Precious in the Sight of the Lord ...": The Theme of Death in Puritan Pastoral Theology," *Churchman* 95, no. 4 (1981): 326–339.

27 Herman Selderhuis, "... And Yet Be Loth to Die?" Death and Dying in the Theologies of John Owen and Richard Baxter," *Hapshin Theological Review* 7 (2018): 171.

28 Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda (eds.), *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

29 W. Britt Stokes, *A Soul Prepared for Heaven: The Theological Foundation of Isaac Watts' Spirituality* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), online at <https://content.e-bookshelf.de/media/reading/L-18491974-d42b161cd0.pdf>.

tion following Flavel, subsequent investigations of continuity and variety among the Reformed Orthodox as it developed over time would interest future academic inquiry.

1.2.1 Flavel Scholarship

Regarding the theology of Flavel, many works exist that add context and color to the research questions given in this project. Still, none have directly addressed how his theology applies to death and dying. Other investigations into the mentality and theology of Dutch theologians are currently being pursued by theologians such as Gerard Bosker.³⁰

The first significant treatment of Flavel's life and theology can be attributed to John Quick (1636–1706),³¹ whose writing highlights the lives and deaths of imminent Puritans, published in 1691,³² but Flavel's view of death and dying was beyond the scope of Quick's work. The publication by W. Baynes and Son in 1820, entitled *The Whole Works of John Flavel: Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon*, in six volumes,³³ preserved Flavel's writing for future readership. Nonetheless, it was not until 1911 that Edward Windeatt³⁴ explored Flavel's theological contributions. Windeatt's work highlights the historical context of Flavel's theology but does not directly consider the topic of death and dying as found in Flavel's writings. Kwai Sing Chang's dissertation through the University of Edinburgh in 1952³⁵ offers a thorough bio-

30 Gerard Bosker, "De troost van een heerlijke toekomst: Een dogmenhistorisch onderzoek naar de ontwikkelingen in de eschatologie van de Nadere Reformatie aan de hand van de catechismusverklaringen van Z. Ursinus, W. Teelinck, P. van der Hagen en T. van der Groe" (MTh diss., Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2018).

31 Nathan Parker's research yielded the conclusion that "We know that Flavel kept a diary as John Quick quoted from it at length in *Icones Sacrae Anglicanae*, pages 923–4. A selection of this was reprinted in the standard biography of his life which appeared in the 1701 and 1820 editions of his writings. That an 800-word portion of Flavel's diary has been preserved has not been noted by Flavel researchers." From Nathan Parker, "Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World—The Theology of John Flavel" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2013), 46.

32 John Quick, *Icones Sacrae Anglicanae or The Lives and Deaths of Severall Eminent English Divines, Ministers of the Gospel, Pastors of Churches and Professors of Divinity in Our Owne and Foreigne Universitys*, 2 vols. Located in Dr. Williams Library, London, c. 1691.

33 John Flavel, *The Whole Works of John Flavel: Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon*, vol. 1 (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820).

34 Edward Windeatt, *John Flavell: A Notable Dartmouth Puritan and His Bibliography* (William Brendon and Son, 1950), 6.

35 Kwai Sing Chang, "John Flavel of Dartmouth, 1630–1691" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1952).

graphical sketch of Flavel's life and work. While Chang explored Flavel more broadly, a narrow focus on Flavel's theology of death and dying remains unexplored.

Despite the Banner of Truth Trust's initial republishing of *The Works of John Flavel* in 1968, few researchers explored his theology and pastoral application in the subsequent decades. In 1980, Emory Elliott explored the development of the Puritan funeral sermon.³⁶ However, Elliot focused on changing attitudes toward death in America, and his research did not include the theology and pastoral application of English Puritans. Sceats made a helpful contribution in 1981 in an article on the theme of death in Puritan pastoral theology.³⁷ Sceats highlighted the pastoral theology of William Perkins (1558–1602), the grandfather of Puritans, whose ministry and theology certainly shaped the theology of subsequent generations of English Puritans, including Flavel.

Next, John Galpine's³⁸ work, published in 1985, focuses on Flavel's writings as a representation of Puritan theology of suffering. That same year, in his master's thesis at Regent College, Erik Johnson³⁹ explored suffering in England between 1647 and 1685, which included Flavel's attitudes toward pain and suffering more generally, without isolating death and dying in particular, in light of God's providence. David W. S. Wong⁴⁰ also made a noteworthy contribution to the broader theme of suffering, focusing on Flavel's theology of Christ's suffering and the church's suffering.

In *The Culture of English Puritanism*, Ralph Houlbrooke⁴¹ published a helpful chapter in 1996 describing how seventeenth-century English ministers preached and ministered rites to those dying. However, minimal focus was given to Nonconformists, and Flavel found no inclusion whatsoever in this de-

36 Emory Elliott, "The Development of the Puritan Funeral Sermon and Elegy: 1660–1750" (*Early American Literature* 15, no. 2 (1980): 151–164.

37 Sceats, "Precious in the Sight of the Lord," 326–339.

38 John Galpine, "A Short Life of John Flavel," in *Flavel, the Quaker and the Crown: John Flavel, Clement Lake and Religious Liberty in 17th Century England* (Cambridge, MA: Rhwymbooks, 2000), 13, 26.

39 Erik Johnson, "Puritan Attitudes Toward Providence and Pain: Suffering in England, 1647–1685" (M. C. S. thesis, Regent College, 1985); Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (London: Littlehampton Book Services, 1967).

40 David Wai-Sing Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998).

41 Ralph Houlbrooke, "The Puritan Deathbed, c. 1560–1660," in *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560–1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 122–144.

piction of English Puritanism. Another biographical contribution was that of Ray Freeman, entitled *John Flavel: A Famous Dartmouth Puritan*,⁴² but a pastoral theology of death and dying was not the focus of that work.

A more recent and noteworthy contribution is the work of Yuille, who 2007 published a book on the theme of the believer's union with Christ.⁴³ While this doctrine is central, Yuille's focus was not on a pastoral theology of death and dying in relation to this doctrine. Then, Clifford Boone⁴⁴ focused on the *Works* of Flavel as representative of the seventeenth-century English Puritanism approach to evangelism.⁴⁵ Finally, and arguably the most significant work on Flavel's theology is that of Cosby.⁴⁶ Cosby investigated the relationship between God's sovereign providence and Christians' suffering. Death and dying can be considered a subset of suffering in Christian spirituality. While providence was more central to Cosby's research, this current project focuses on Flavel's anthropology and the grounds for Christian hope at death through the lens of his covenant theology.

Nathan Parker's dissertation⁴⁷ argued that Flavel's beliefs about the return of Christ changed over time. In the early part of Flavel's ministry, he did not speak of the return of Christ as imminent, but by 1689, he was convinced that it was at hand.⁴⁸ This had implications for his evangelism. While Parker's work is a valuable primary source of Flavel's theology, Parker's initial probe reinforced the merit of further probing how Flavel's theology relates to his min-

42 Ray Freeman, *John Flavel: A Famous Dartmouth Puritan* (Dartmouth History Research Group, 2001).

43 Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum*.

44 Clifford B. Boone, *Puritan Evangelism: Preaching for Conversion in Late-Seventeenth Century English Puritanism as Seen in the Works of John Flavel* (Paternoster, 2014).

45 Parker evaluated Boone's analysis, concluding that it correctly analyzed textual variances between the earliest and later editions of Flavel's *Works*: Parker wrote that "a comparison of the 1968 Banner of Truth edition and the first edition of Flavel's *Works* (in 1701) revealed very little difference between the two. Although it is true that most of the differences are minimal, there are some that are not. Further, by the time the 1701 edition came out, Flavel's various writings had been in print and circulating for 37 years, ample time for authorized and unauthorized changes to creep into texts. As we shall see, this is in fact what happened." Parker, "Proselytisation and Apocalypticism," 47.

46 Cosby, "The Theology of Suffering."

47 Parker, "Proselytisation and Apocalypticism," 58.

48 One hope that Flavel held onto in 1689 was that Protestants were on the throne, which might postpone God's judgment: "But God at length, pitying our distresses, hath raised up a man, both zealous for the truth, and a lover of godliness, boldly to assert his cause in the face of danger and toil, and to put a new face on things." From Parker, "Proselytisation and Apocalypticism," 207.

istry in the face of death and dying. In 2021, David Kiehn⁴⁹ investigated Flavel's use of the Lord's Supper for church renewal and revitalization. Kiehn's work is connected to this current project, though it focuses on Christ's suffering and death rather than that of Christians. Further, Kiehn's recent research exemplifies how Flavel's standing as an instructive Puritan and Reformed representative has grown, leading to more particularized areas of investigation into Flavel's theology.

Also in 2021, Jeff Strickland⁵⁰ explored the doctrine of a Christian's joy of assurance in Flavel's writings. In Chapter 4 of Strickland's dissertation, he shows Flavel's joy in looking to Christ. In this chapter, Strickland focuses on a Christian's joy in the assurance of salvation in Christ—because of Christ's person and His work. While the doctrines of joy in assurance overlap with the themes explored in this project (e.g., spirituality, emotion, theological grounds for assurance, etc.), Strickland's work does not directly analyze Flavel's anthropology nor the theology of death and dying.

Finally, in 2022, Paul Gibson's⁵¹ research further confirmed the growing interest Flavel has generated in recent and increasingly more narrow doctrines of exploration. Gibson's scholarship offers an in-depth analysis of Flavel's view of Christ's humiliation, including his death, burial, and resurrection. His work is valuable to my undertaking, particularly in reaction to Christ's role as Mediator to secure the Christian's hope. Yet, the gap in the literature on Flavel's theology still exists to explore his theology of death and dying, among numerous other areas of further study.

1.2.2 Current Demand

The need to further investigate late seventeenth-century mentality and affective piety remains pressing. Ann Thompson, a current Puritan scholar, asserted that the Calvinism of further Reformers in the mid-1600s built upon Calvin's high view of divine sovereignty with sweeping implications for ministry to those experiencing suffering. This assertion she supports by pointing to the likes of

49 David Kiehn, "Keeping the Heart United to the Sovereign Crucified Savior: Applying John Flavel's Pastoral Approach to the Lord's Supper for Church Renewal and Church Revitalization" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021).

50 Jeff Strickland, "The Joy of Assurance as the Essence and Expression of John Flavel's Spirituality" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021).

51 Paul Gibson, "The Humiliation of Christ in the Preaching of John Flavel (1627–1691)" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2022).

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646), Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), and Flavel (ca. 1627–1691). Thompson argued that the doctrines taught by such Puritans, once embraced by the general public, worked to detach Christians from what they previously had “felt was true” about man in relation to God within the world. Cosby summarized, “Ann Thompson suggests that Flavel employed the use of deistic understanding of a ‘clockwork universe’ in reference to God’s sovereignty.”⁵² In 2017, Thompson republished her book. She posited that an “abrupt transformation” became evident in the 1640s “in the nature and art of suffering.” This she “attributed to the reactionary forces inherent in puritanism.”⁵³ Is this notion accurate? Does Flavel’s treatment of mentality in the face of death and dying confirm or disprove the reputation of Puritans as fatalistic and distant from the transcendent God?

Given the state of research on this topic, this study aims to build upon the slowly increasing attention that Flavel has begun receiving in scholarly undertakings. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the gap in scholarly literature regarding how those within the Reformed tradition apply their theology to significant aspects of the human experience. Applications from other historical works may be inferred regarding Reformed views of providence and election address dying and grief. The uniqueness of this work is that Flavel’s view of death and dying is the direct inquiry focus. As such, this research project aims to shed more light on the history and peculiarities of Reformation views and their pastoral applications of the doctrines of death, dying, and eternal destiny.

Scholarly inquiry regarding the extent to which the Reformation influenced people’s lifestyles and visions of life has primarily received academic attention in general historical studies rather than in historical theology. Further German scholarship on Reformed views of death and dying is also extant; however, as English translations of those works do not yet exist, they were not included in this literature review. Overall, nonetheless, the line of investigation regarding how dying and death were developed within the historic Reformed tradition has been largely neglected. This project, therefore, seeks to contribute to this gap in the scholarly literature, focusing on the English Reformation in general and Puritan Reformers specifically.

52 Cosby went on to disprove Thompson’s suggestion by demonstrating how Flavel understood God’s active providence in the world through secondary causes. Cosby, “The Theology of Suffering”; Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-Century Anti-Providential Thought* (Routledge, 2017), 24.

53 Thompson, *The Art of Suffering*, 24.

1.3 Delimitations, Methodology, and Primary Source Materials

1.3.1 Delimitations

Further research beyond the scope of this undertaking is needed to uncover complementary contributions of other theologians and ministers who labored as contemporaries of Flavel and to paint a more complete picture of the Puritan theology of death, dying, and the person's eternal destiny. Nonetheless, the study of Flavel is here offered as a barometer for current theologies of death, dying, and biblical comforts therein. While numerous other theologians from Flavel's time period would each add dimensions to our understanding of developments within the Reformed tradition on viewing life, death, and eternity, Flavel's sermons and writings stand out in both breadth and depth. Though the emotional experience of death and dying in the Early Modern period is interesting, it is not the focus of this research. This research is limited to Flavel's views of death and dying in the context of his own theology and pastoral work.

1.3.2 Research Methodology

My interest in this study is especially to examine Flavel's understanding of death and dying for those who enjoy union in Christ and how He ministered pastoral comforts to believers who experienced the loss of a loved one or who were preparing their souls for eternal life after the death of their bodies. The methodology selected to best uncover Flavel's writings on this theme was the use of word studies. Specifically, key words searched in all of Flavel's writings included "death," "dying," "soul," "body," "death bed," "eternal/eternity." Each paragraph Flavel wrote containing a key word or phrase was then color-coded and organized based on the topic it addressed. For instance, paragraphs dealing with emotions were clustered together as were paragraphs relating to sin or union to Christ. Upon gleaning and organizing the qualitative data from all of Flavel's writings, subsequent steps were taken to analyze his views.

This methodology presents further delimitations for this research. By limiting the data to be analyzed from Flavel's writings to paragraphs containing these key words, the researcher risks omitting other portions of his theology that deal with these themes in concept. Additionally, researchers must guard against pulling quotations out of context with Flavel's authorial intent.

Toward this end, (1) this dissertation seeks to understand Flavel's view of death and dying in the context of his theology in the stream of the broader