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THE PREACHING OF JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807):
A GOSPEL-CENTRIC, PASTORAL HOMILETIC
OF BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

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I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Angela, whose faithfulness, diligence, and dedicated service to Christ and to others never cease to amaze and inspire me. “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.” (Prov 31:29)

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PREFACE

I am unable to recount the many individuals who have given me so much support over the course of my doctoral studies. I have been blessed with the encouragement and kindness of a whole host of people and stand indebted to them for all they have done and to the Lord for placing them in my life during these challenging years of study and research. While I cannot name them all, I do want to express my gratitude to a few of those special people.

First, I want to thank my dissertation committee for the thoughtful and careful reflection and suggestions related to this project. Dr. Hershael York, who supervised my work, provided wise direction and helpful advice with a scholar's eye and a pastor's heart. He has proven to be a wonderful example, friend, and teacher. Dr. Robert Vogel helped me grow as a preacher and as a student of God's Word. Thoughts he expressed during the course of a preaching colloquium regarding the use of studying select preachers as homiletical models persuaded me to pursue that very idea for my dissertation. Dr. Michael Haykin's eager acceptance of my invitation to work on this project and lend his skill as a church historian encouraged me to undertake this work with my whole heart.

I also want to express my appreciation to the people of Highland Avenue Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I served as pastor for nearly thirteen years. It was among this body of believers where my passion to preach God's Word intensified and grew amid the practice of pastoral ministry. I am grateful to them for the opportunity to be their pastor and for the various ways they chose to support my educational pursuits. Although I transitioned to another ministry before my dissertation was completed, I could not have completed this work without them.

During the last phase of my doctoral work, the Lord called me to serve as pastor of Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Shepherdsville, Kentucky. That congregation's amazing love for Christ and hunger and thirst for righteousness have been an amazing example to me of God's grace at work in the lives of His people. I have rejoiced at the opportunity to preach the gospel among them during the completion of this dissertation and at the prospect of a long and fruitful ministry among them in the years ahead.

In addition, I am indebted to a group of faithful brothers in the Lord and pastors from the Cincinnati area whose friendship has blessed me over the course of my ministry and through this season of doctoral study and research. Their thoughtful questions and inquiries about my studies urged me to complete this work in hopes that in some way it may profit other preachers as they proclaim Christ and Him crucified. I especially want to express my appreciation to Kurt Strassner of Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Cincinnati for the many ways he befriended me and prayed for me as I undertook this project.

While it is impossible to adequately express my thankfulness to my parents, Larry and Londa Sowders, I am deeply aware that I could never have accomplished this work without their unconditional and undying love and support over the years. I owe them much more than I could ever hope to repay.

From my wife, Angie, and our four children, Hannah Grace, Micah Keith, Noah Patrick, and Rebekah Xinran, I have received the kind of love and joy that every husband and father longs to experience. They are a treasure and expression of God's abounding grace in my life. I thank them for the many sacrifices they have made for me during the course of my studies and the completion of this dissertation.

Finally, I want to give glory to my God who called me to salvation and has granted me the tremendous honor of preaching His Word. Only by His grace could I be given this high and holy privilege to be called a child of God and a preacher of the gospel. By His grace, He has sustained me throughout my work on this project amid all

my other responsibilities as a pastor, husband, and father. My hope and prayer is that as the material and subject of this dissertation has challenged me to be a more faithful expositor of Scripture and a more humble shepherd to God's flock, it will also benefit others called by God to the work of pastoral ministry. I pray the words of Hebrews 13:20-21, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Larry W. Sowders, Jr.

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2016

CHAPTER 1
THE STUDY OF JOHN NEWTON AND HIS PREACHING

Introduction

John Newton (1725-1807), a converted slave-trader who became a preacher of the gospel and a writer of hymns, was widely recognized in his time as one of the leading evangelicals in the Church of England, but he is not so widely known today. While Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace," is famous throughout the world, and some may be familiar with his intriguing biography and remarkable conversion,¹ Newton's contribution to the evangelical movement in England and the broader English-speaking world seems to be largely forgotten or ignored. Furthermore, despite a few exceptions,² many scholars also have failed to acknowledge Newton as a subject of serious study. Among the few authors who have recognized both Newton's historical importance as well as the value of a scholarly study of his life and thought is D. Bruce Hindmarsh, who explained why he authored his volume on Newton:

¹The principal biographers of Newton include Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); Josiah Bull, *The Life of John Newton* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007); Richard Cecil, *The Life of John Newton*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000); Bernard Martin, *John Newton, A Biography* (London: William Heinemann, 1950); John Pollock, *Amazing Grace: The Dramatic Life Story of John Newton* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); and William E. Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave-Ship Captain, Hymnwriter, and Abolitionist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

²L. E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 257 writes, "Newton himself was one of the most remarkable of the Evangelical leaders, one of the most remarkable men, indeed, in the whole history of the Church of England." See also William Thomas Cairns, "John Newton: A Vindication," in *The Religion of Dr. Johnson and Other Essays* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1969), 24-57.

Newton was a subject worthy of scholarly study, not only for the interest of his life's story, but also for his contribution as a pastoral theologian and for the way his life sheds light on the evangelical tradition in the eighteenth century.³

Hindmarsh is not alone in his assessment of Newton's contribution as a pastoral theologian. Grant A. Gordon has done extensive work in the study of Newton's life and ministry, paying particular attention to the value of Newton's correspondence.⁴ Gordon rightly observes that those who know of Newton's life and ministry recognize the tremendous value of his letters.⁵ More recently, Tony Reinke completed a comprehensive examination of Newton's views on the Christian life with a primary focus on Newton's pastoral letters.⁶ Newton corresponded with a great number of individuals who repeatedly sought his wisdom and spiritual insight on a variety of practical, spiritual, and theological concerns. Through the work of scholars like Gordon, Hindmarsh, and Reinke, Newton's life and his ministry are receiving thoughtful review and analysis that provide valuable insight regarding Newton's historical importance and his role as a pastor, and spiritual advisor or counselor. In addition, Marylynn Rouse, in both her publications and work through the John Newton Project, provides a substantial contribution to the study of Newton and his ministry.⁷

³*John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), v. The original hardback edition, now out of print, was published by Oxford University Press in 1996. The work received high praise from David Bebbington, John Walsh and other respected scholars.

⁴Grant A. Gordon, "John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent" (Th.M. thesis Princeton University, 1987). More recently, Gordon has published *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland Jr.*, ed. Grant A. Gordon (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009).

⁵Newton, *Wise Counsel*, xiii.

⁶Tony Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life: To Live Is Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁷Rouse has edited the classic biography written by Richard Cecil, *The Life of John Newton* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000) in which she includes helpful appendices that provide useful information from her own research into Newton's life. See also John Newton, *Ministry on My Mind: John Newton on Entering Pastoral Ministry* (Stratford-upon-Avon: John Newton Project, 2008), a series of diary entries of Newton transcribed by Rouse; John Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts: Sermon Notes on Romans 8 Verses 26-34 by John Newton* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Heritage, 1997); and John Newton, *365 Days with Newton: A Unique Collection of 365 Daily Readings from the Unpublished Sermons and Writings of John Newton* (Leominster, England: Day One, 2006). To access the work of the John Newton Project go to

These general studies of Newton's life and ministry as well as the attention given to him as a pastoral theologian serve as an excellent foundation and launching point for further reflection and research on this important evangelical of the eighteenth century. Moreover, an analysis of the previous research reveals that additional review of Newton's ministry is needed. In particular, further research on Newton's preaching is essential for a better understanding of the contribution of Newton's ministry. With the exception of the work of Donald Demaray, no extensive investigation of Newton's preaching has been published. In his work, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725-1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism*,⁸ Demaray focuses on Newton's preaching and hymnody. Introductory comments by Demaray describe the need to address these areas of Newton's ministry. He states,

These two areas [preaching and hymnody] of his life and thought have been neglected and sometimes unfairly evaluated. Some say that as a preacher Newton's delivery, including body language, suffered; less frequently do we read that in his own day Newton was known chiefly as a preacher of power and eloquence, and that through his preaching and related activities he made an astonishing impact on eighteenth century church life in England.⁹

Demaray proceeds to make similar comments regarding Newton's hymns. This observation that Newton's preaching and hymnody have been both neglected and treated unfairly, warrants further inquiry and research focused on these subjects.¹⁰

While Demaray's work indeed makes a substantial contribution to fill the gap in the study of Newton's preaching and hymnody, additional work is needed, particularly

www.JohnNewton.org.

⁸Donald Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725-1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰For a discussion of Newton's hymns see Michael A. G. Haykin, "'With Ev'ry Fleeting Breath': John Newton and the Olney Hymns," *The Banner of Truth* 527, no. 8 (2007): 30-39. For a discussion of Newton's preaching, see John Harris, "The Preaching of John Newton," in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Papers Read at the 2007 Westminster Conference* (Mirfield, England: The Westminster Conference, 2007): 115-31.

concerning Newton's preaching. Demaray's treatment of Newton's preaching covers three primary areas of concern. First, he survey's Newton's writings and sermons in order to uncover "the pattern or system of his [Newton's] religious thought, thereby showing his actual preaching message."¹¹ Demaray argues that Newton's message was both doctrinal and ethical. In order to provide a broad overview of Newton's theology on display in his sermons, Demaray considers Newton's beliefs about God, mankind, Jesus Christ, and the church and its mission. Demaray rightly recognizes that the doctrinal content of Newton's message centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He also accurately describes Newton's theology as "moderate Calvinism."¹² He uses the word *moderate* in the sense that Newton's Calvinism was held with a spirit of grace toward those who did not agree with his theological convictions related to his soteriology.¹³ Demaray's study also correctly observes the connection between doctrine and ethics in Newton's thought and preaching. Summarizing Newton's thought on this subject, Demaray states that "the moral life should be a sign of the converted life."¹⁴ In a later chapter, this dissertation will explore this aspect of Newton's thought and the way in which it impacted his preaching.

Second, Demaray provides a discussion of Newton's homiletical method in which the character of the preacher is the primary focus.¹⁵ Demaray argues that a study of Newton's sermons on the basis of their literary value is unwarranted. He maintains that Newton's effectiveness as a preacher did not lie in Newton's homiletical or oratorical

¹¹Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton*, 41.

¹²Ibid., 82.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 41.

¹⁵Ibid., 87.

genius. Rather, Demaray suggests that “what he was gave him the power to preach.”¹⁶ In other words, his effectiveness in the pulpit arose from his character. He was a man known for “his first-hand knowledge of the human heart, his common sense, his piety and meekness, and above all his shepherd’s heart.”¹⁷ Demaray then proceeds to describe some of the foundational aspects of Newton’s sermon preparation and sermon delivery.

Finally, Demaray discusses the effects of Newton’s preaching ministry in both Olney and London. In the evaluation of Newton’s ministry in Olney, Demaray cites the expansion of the number of worship services, the general growth of the congregation, Newton’s ability to minister to youth and children, the addition of prayer and Bible study groups, and a spiritual awakening that was experienced in the church.¹⁸ Similarly, the numerical growth of the church in London, Demaray points to as a sign of Newton’s effectiveness in his second pastorate. In addition, the various preaching tours in which Newton engaged throughout England and his substantial influence on other pastors are listed as evidence of his effectiveness as a preacher.¹⁹ An analysis of the effects of Newton’s preaching in both of his pastorates in Olney and London leads Demaray to conclude that Newton was “best known in his own day as an energetic and powerful preacher.”²⁰

Each of these three areas regarding Newton’s preaching provides a solid introduction and foundational understanding of Newton as a preacher. Nevertheless, questions remain regarding the undergirding principles that guided Newton’s homiletic method. Although Newton did not leave behind a comprehensive description of his

¹⁶Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton*, 88.

¹⁷Ibid., 96.

¹⁸Ibid., 123-50.

¹⁹Ibid., 151-66.

²⁰Ibid., 181.

views on preaching, both in his correspondence and his journals he wrote much about preaching. In addition, the sermons Newton preached provide a window into the homiletic principles that shaped them. Finally, given Newton's great emphasis on pastoral ministry, an exploration of the connection between his pastoral care and preaching should also be explored. While Demaray observes that Newton possessed the humble heart of a shepherd and indicates that this character trait was an important aspect of Newton's preaching ministry, he does not fully develop this point as I hope to in this dissertation.²¹

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to show that John Newton's preaching was consistently focused on biblical exposition and guided by a gospel-centric, pastoral homiletic. In order to substantiate this claim, I will first argue that Newton was an expositor in that his sermons were consistently centered on a specific text of Scripture, its meaning, and its application.²² While the main purpose of this dissertation is not to defend a definition of expository preaching, some attention will be given to this important subject.²³ A definition of expository preaching will be given and a survey of Newton's

²¹Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton*, 92.

²²This understanding of expository preaching is heavily influenced by Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 22, who write, "Preaching is not just building a sermon, telling stories, inspiring an audience, or giving a speech. If the Bible is the Word of God, then preaching is *speaking God's words*. The purpose of preaching is to lay bare the meaning of a passage, to present its application, and to show its relevance to the audience" (italics original).

²³Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 11-39 offers a helpful historical survey of definitions of expository preaching in which he presents three types of definitions and misconceptions of expository preaching before presenting his own "eclectic" definition. While Bryson interacts with significant homileticians like Broadus and Robinson, his survey is not comprehensive and is somewhat dated. A more timely exploration of definitions comes from Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2009), 4-10. See also Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 19.

sermons will show that he was an expositor.

Secondly, I will argue that Newton's exposition of Scripture was guided by a homiletic that was both gospel-centric and pastoral. Therefore, the dissertation will explore Newton's view of the gospel and its place within his preaching. Similarly, Newton's view of pastoral ministry and its relationship to his preaching will also be examined. To defend this thesis, I will make use of Newton's sermons as well as pertinent correspondence and journal entries. This study will also consult and utilize secondary sources in order to understand properly Newton's ministry as well as his impact as a preacher.

Background

My introduction to the life and ministry of John Newton came by reading John Piper's *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce*.²⁴ This book launched me on a journey of learning more about each of those three men by reading more comprehensive biographies of each of their lives. While I benefited from this reading in my personal life and in my ministry, I did not have any academic aspirations for serious research at that time. I simply enjoyed reading of these remarkable men and of the impact they each made for the sake of the gospel.

After I had entered the doctoral studies program at Southern Seminary, I read an essay by J. I. Packer on the preaching of Charles Simeon.²⁵ I completed this reading during one semester of the Christian preaching colloquium and had the opportunity to

²⁴John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002). This is one of several biographical volumes developed from messages Piper delivered at the annual Bethlehem Conference for Pastors.

²⁵J. I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007): 140-54.

discuss it among my peers and with Dr. Hershael York and Dr. Robert Vogel. One of the issues brought up during the discussion was the importance of preaching models, those preachers whose sermons can be studied as a model for our own. This discussion turned my academic interest toward pursuing a study of a historical preaching model.²⁶ In fact, I initially thought of focusing my research on Charles Simeon, who was not only the subject of that essay by Packer but also one in whom I was already interested.

Although Simeon remains of interest to me and his preaching should be studied further, my attention soon turned away from Simeon and toward John Newton. As I began exploring the possibility of studying Newton's preaching, I took a doctoral seminar with Dr. Chad Brand who granted me permission to write a paper for that seminar on Newton's view of Scripture and its use in his pastoral ministry. Through the research for that paper I gained a greater respect for Newton as a pastor who ministered under the authority of God's Word. However, it was my work for a paper on Newton as a spiritual counselor in the course of another doctoral seminar on Puritan and Evangelical Piety taught by Dr. Michael Haykin which crystallized my plan to write a dissertation on Newton's preaching. Through my study of Newton as a spiritual counselor, I came to view him not only as a pastor who ministered under the authority of Scripture but also as a pastor who embodied a deep love and concern for the souls of others. As a result of this deepened respect for Newton, I began to think seriously about what research should be conducted with regard to his ministry of preaching.

Methodology

This dissertation examines John Newton as a preacher. A significant portion of the research, therefore, will be focused on Newton's sermons. An analysis of

²⁶For an example of this type of study which demonstrates the value of historical models and has also influenced my pursuit of this dissertation, see Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of C.H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006). Eswine's book grew out of his Ph.D. dissertation on Spurgeon's preaching.

Newton's sermons begins with a study of the eighty-four published sermons contained in the six-volume set of Newton's *Works*.²⁷ These sermons are an excellent object of scholarly study for at least three reasons. First, the sermons are dated from a wide span of Newton's ministry and thus provide a good perspective on Newton's preaching over a lifetime.²⁸ Second, Newton prepared the sermons for very different audiences in Olney and in London, and therefore they provide insight as to how Newton preached in different contexts. Third, Newton's published sermons are a significant window into the ideals that shaped his preaching ministry. In other words, through the sermons Newton himself selected for publication readers can discern those elements of preaching which he would most vigorously defend and promote. While these published sermons will demand much of the focus in this dissertation, other sermon materials will also be considered. For example, Marylynn Rouse has transcribed and edited several volumes which contain Newton's sermon notes.²⁹ These materials will also be considered in order to gain a more comprehensive view of Newton's preaching.

In addition to research on Newton's sermons, this dissertation will also take into account what Newton wrote about the subject of preaching. In the correspondence and journals published in Newton's *Works*, he left a valuable collection of writings which describe his views about preaching. An examination of these writings will help to evaluate Newton as a preacher since they reveal the connection between his homiletic

²⁷John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985).

²⁸Of these eighty-four published sermons, six were written before Newton began his pastoral ministry while he resided in Liverpool. The sermons are dated January 1, 1760. Twenty of the eighty-four sermons have a publication date of January 20, 1767 and were preached at Olney. Another fifty of the sermons comprise Newton's series on Handel's *Messiah* which he preached during 1784-85 while at St. Mary-Woolnoth in London. The remaining eight published sermons span the years of 1786-1800.

²⁹See John Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts: Sermon Notes on Romans 8 Verses 26-34*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Heritage, 1997) and *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton: A Unique Collection of Daily Readings from the Unpublished Sermons and Writings of John Newton*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Leominster, England: Day One, 2006).

theory and his homiletic practice. They provide practical insight into Newton as a preacher fulfilling his calling in the context of genuine pastoral ministry. Newton's journal entries during the time he was considering the call to pastoral ministry will also be studied to gain further insight into Newton's general views on ministry as well as his particular concern for preaching.³⁰

Because Newton ties his thoughts on preaching so closely to the work of pastoral ministry, this dissertation will also consider Newton as a spiritual counselor. While other writers have conducted studies of Newton's spiritual counsel,³¹ none of those studies describes the connection between his pastoral ministry and his preaching. This dissertation will make use of the previous research on Newton's spiritual counsel with particular attention to how his pastoral concern shaped and guided his thoughts on preaching. A focused study on Newton as a preacher calls for a consideration of Newton's wider pastoral ministry. Again, Newton's *Works* will provide extensive material in this regard, but more recently published material will also be considered.³²

Just as a study of Newton's preaching demands a consideration of his wider pastoral ministry, the context in which Newton preached is also an important factor in understanding Newton's life and ministry. Accordingly, this dissertation will also include a study of Newton's life and his historical context. Because this dissertation is primarily concerned with Newton's preaching, matters of biography and historical context are not treated extensively but only insofar as they provide a context to understanding Newton's ministry and preaching. Newton's life is viewed through the

³⁰The John Newton Project published this journal as *Ministry on My Mind: John Newton on Entering Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Stratford-upon-Avon: John Newton Project, 2008).

³¹See Grant A. Gordon, "John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent" (Th.M thesis, Princeton University, 1987).

³²John Newton, *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland, Jr.*, ed. Grant Gordon (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009) contains previously published letters as well as others which have not been published previously.

work of his principal biographers³³ as well as his own journals published in his *Works*. Some consideration is also given to additional secondary historical material related to eighteenth-century England and the preaching of that era.

Summary of Content

Chapter 1 has introduced the subject of this dissertation by surveying the scholarly work that has concentrated on the life and ministry of John Newton. This introduction serves as an orientation for the reader regarding the importance of John Newton's life and ministry while also pointing out that he has been a neglected subject of scholarly study. More specifically, the lack of focused study on Newton's preaching has been highlighted in order to demonstrate why this dissertation is warranted. In addition, the thesis that John Newton's preaching was consistently focused on biblical exposition and guided by a gospel-centric, pastoral homiletic has been introduced and explained. Additionally, background and methodological information regarding the dissertation has been included in this chapter.

In the next chapter, a biographical survey of John Newton's life and ministry is provided. Such a biography offers a greater understanding and appreciation of Newton's accomplishments and historical significance. Furthermore, the biographical information in the chapter serves to supply a broader vista in which to judge and evaluate Newton's preaching. His childhood, his life at sea, his time in Africa, his marriage, and other aspects of his life and experience shed much light on the man he became and the ministry of preaching he pursued.

Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to Newton's preaching by surveying Newton's sermons. Particular attention is given to Newton's published sermons and his reasons for having those materials published. An overview of these sermons provides

³³Aitken, *John Newton*; Bull, *The Life of John Newton*; Cecil, *The Life of John Newton*; Martin, *John Newton*; Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton*.

some perspective on Newton's ministry of preaching and the value he placed on the preaching of Scripture. A study of Newton's sermons reveals that Newton engaged in expository preaching which is defined in this dissertation as the proclamation of the meaning of a biblical text that both explains and applies the text to a contemporary audience. Additionally, chapter three addresses the historical context of Newton's preaching in eighteenth-century England and the state of preaching during this time period.

Chapter 4 argues that Newton's high view of Scripture served as a foundation of his ministry in general and of his preaching in particular. It also discusses Newton's view of the Bible within the context of what other eighteenth-century evangelicals were saying about the authority and inspiration of Scripture. The way in which Newton made use of Scripture in his ministry of pastoral care and in his preaching is also explored.

Chapter 5 discusses of Newton's piety in order to understand its impact on his ministry and preaching. The chapter contends that Newton's spirituality was a Christ-centered piety which gave a Christ-centered direction to his life, his ministry and his preaching. Newton's aim to see himself and others shaped into the image of Christ and the application of this aim in his role as a spiritual counselor is emphasized. The connection and relationship between Newton's Christ-centered piety and Scripture is also highlighted.

Chapter 6 maintains that the Christ-centered nature of Newton's spirituality is also evident in his preaching. An examination of Newton's view of the gospel is undertaken with a view to showing how the gospel was central to the message he preached. His Christ-centered message is shown to be derivative of an intentionally gospel-centric homiletic which dominated Newton's thought. In addition to the content of Newton's preaching, this chapter also contends that Newton's preaching methods were also guided by his gospel-centric homiletic. In other words, Newton's preaching style

was governed by the content of his message, i.e., the gospel.

In chapter 7, Newton's preaching is examined in the light of his resolves to exercise his ministry guided by the love of Christ and to urge others to pursue a life of holiness. The chapter calls attention to Newton's incredible commitment to pastoral ministry and the relationship of this ministry to his preaching, preaching which displays a rhetoric of love and a rhetoric of holiness. The chapter argues that Newton's rhetoric is a function of a pastoral homiletic that was deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare and the needs of his hearers.

The concluding chapter summarizes the major points of the dissertation and reinforces that Newton's preaching was consistently focused on biblical exposition and guided by a gospel-centric, pastoral homiletic. The value of continued study of Newton's life and ministry is emphasized, and areas of further research related to Newton's preaching are suggested. The chapter concludes with reflection on the use of historical models like Newton as an important component for the study of preaching and contemporary issues within homiletics.

CHAPTER 2

NEWTON'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

Early Years and Life at Sea

Born in London in 1725, John Newton was reared under the diligent instruction of a godly mother who filled her son's mind with the truth of Scripture.¹ Although his mother, Elizabeth, died of tuberculosis before Newton's seventh birthday, she was one of the chief spiritual influences upon his life. She spent many instructional hours with her son and employed a strict regimen for him to memorize Scripture, catechisms, hymns and poems.² These early spiritual lessons and training remained with John Newton for the rest of his remarkable life.

Following the death of his mother, young John Newton's life soon turned in a precarious direction. He had not been close to his father, a sea captain who spent long periods of time away from home, and the relationship between them did not improve following Elizabeth's death. Newton's father, also named John, quickly remarried and when children were born to this new marriage, young John Newton found himself to be something of an outsider. Further strain was placed upon Newton's family relationships when John was sent to boarding school at the age of eight. While these years were not easy for Newton, he came to excel as a student and showed particular promise in the study of Latin, but despite his academic achievement his formal education ended at the

¹Josiah Bull, *The Life of John Newton* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 4.

²Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 27. Part of Newton's spiritual curriculum included the 1647 *Westminster Shorter Catechism* and *A Short View of the Whole of Scripture History*, written by Isaac Watts and published in 1732.

age of ten. His father took him on his first of many sea voyages in 1736 when Newton was only eleven years old.³

From 1736 (the year of his first sea voyage) to 1754 (the year illness would prevent any further voyages), John Newton's life would be torn between life at sea and life in England. When he was seventeen years old his father made arrangements for him to obtain a position in Jamaica that would keep him overseas for several years, but before he left he traveled to Kent to conduct some business for his father. During the course of this business trip Newton met and fell in love with Mary "Polly" Catlett whom he would marry some seven years later. As a result of losing his heart to Polly he deliberately delayed leaving Kent in order to miss the ship to Jamaica and remain in contact with her.

Newton, however, would soon be going to sea against his will. While walking through London in 1744, Newton encountered a naval press gang which forced him into England's navy at a time when war with France was looming on the horizon.⁴ Newton soon found himself serving in the Royal Navy aboard the HMS *Harwich*, but as a result of his rebellious behavior he was eventually transferred to a merchant ship that was headed for Africa in order to capture slaves. On board this merchant ship Newton came in contact with "a buccaneering slave trader" who convinced Newton with promises of great wealth to work for him in Africa as a slave trader.⁵ Newton's dreams of wealth, however, would be dashed due to personal conflict with his employer's African mistress. As a result of this conflict, Newton was treated with intense cruelty, sometimes being chained as a slave himself, often near starvation and death.

³Bull, *The Life of John Newton*, 5.

⁴Aitken, *John Newton*, 40.

⁵*Ibid.*, 54.

Africa and Conversion

By this point in Newton's life he had completely rejected the scriptural truth and spiritual instruction imparted to him by his mother. Now in full pursuit of a life of reckless and riotous living, Newton's spiritual condition at this point in his life is well summarized by Iain Murray when he writes,

After a religious period in his [Newton's] childhood, he came across the literature of unbelief which worked in him like poison. By the time he was on board the *Harwich*, his rejection of Christianity was complete, and swearing and blasphemies were part of his everyday language.⁶

The "literature of unbelief" to which Murray points included Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* which Newton began to read in 1742.⁷ Pollock captures the impact this philosophical work had upon Newton stating that its "words insinuated into John Newton as he stood on the verge of manhood the idea that he must forget his dead mother's gentle insistence that goodness and wisdom grew best from obedience to God's truth revealed in the Bible."⁸ While Newton's hardships in Africa proved to have a great effect upon him for the duration of his life, this suffering would not be the primary means of turning him back to God. In reference to these afflictions in Africa, Cecil reflects Newton's estimation of his spiritual condition in these words:

His haughty heart was now bowed down, but not at all to a wholesome repentance. While his spirits sunk, the language of the prodigal was far from him: destitute of resolution and almost of all reflection he had lost the fierceness which had fired him when on board the *Harwich*, and which rendered him capable of the most desperate attempts; but he was no further changed than a tiger tamed by hunger.⁹

⁶Iain Murray, "John Newton: A Wonder to Myself," *Banner of Truth* (August/September 2007): 7.

⁷John Pollock, *Amazing Grace: The Dramatic Life Story of John Newton* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 25.

⁸*Ibid.*, 26.

⁹John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 1:18.

Indeed, the occasion of Newton's suffering was about to be removed, but the repentance that would set Newton on a completely new course was not all that far away.

Near the end of 1746, another trader freed Newton from his enslavement and gave him a job in one of his slave factories. While working at this job, a sea-captain friend of Newton's father happened to be in the area and was inquiring about the whereabouts of Newton. Upon finding him, the captain was forced to create an extravagant tale about Newton being an heir to a large inheritance in order to persuade Newton to leave his newfound success in Africa. So in February of 1747, John Newton began his long journey back to England aboard the *Greyhound*.

Newton's voyage back to England on the *Greyhound* was to be "the most dramatic turning point in his already dramatic life because his tempestuous experiences at sea triggered profound spiritual experiences that resulted in his Christian conversion."¹⁰ While on the lengthy voyage back to England, Newton continued his sinful and rebellious lifestyle. Newton made these comments in reference to his time on the *Greyhound*,

I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones.¹¹

Newton's sinful profanity and blasphemy continued until the last part of the voyage in January of 1748.

At this time, Newton began reading *The Imitation of Christ* which proved to have a profound effect upon him. As he read, Newton began to wonder if the things he read were actually true. The thought created such a disturbance in Newton's heart and mind that he abruptly ended his reading on the evening of March 9, 1748.¹² The next

¹⁰Aitken, *John Newton*, 69.

¹¹Newton, *Works*, 1:22

¹²Aitken, *John Newton*, 73.

morning, March 10,¹³ Newton awoke to a great storm that was filling the *Greyhound* with sea water. The ship had suffered much damage and survival seemed almost impossible. For the first time in many years, Newton began to pray and his mind turned to Christ. He soon found a Bible on board the ship and began to read the Scriptures seriously and to pray as he read. Newton's reflection upon his time of study and prayer reveals the important role Scripture played in his conversion. He wrote,

I began to think of my former religious professions; the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with; the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel history (which I could not be sure was false, though I was not as yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture premises, there never was, nor could be such a sinner as myself; and then comparing the advantages I had broken through, I concluded at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The Scripture likewise seemed to say the same; for I had formerly been acquainted with the Bible, and many passages upon this occasion returned upon my memory, particularly those awful passages, Prov. i. 24-31; Heb. Vi. 4, 6; and 2 Pet. ii. 20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a Divine original.¹⁴

Such reflection upon Scripture and times of prayer would continue over the next two weeks as the ship slowly made its way to shore in Ireland. During the course of these two weeks, Newton came to embrace fully the truth of the gospel and renounce his former life of sin.

The crew of the *Greyhound* finally made it to Ireland, and Newton eventually made it back to his home in England. Although Newton's life proceeded in a radically new direction from this point forward, over the course of the next six years he indicated in a journal entry that he was deprived of having any "Christian friend or faithful minister

¹³In subsequent years, Newton commemorated this day at sea as the turning point in his spiritual life. He observed a special day of reflection and thanksgiving on the anniversary of the storm, recording it in his diaries as March 21, 1748. The change in date was due to an eleven-day addition to the calendar in 1752.

¹⁴Newton, *Works*, 1:27.

to guide me.”¹⁵ Such a deprivation of spiritual counsel during these early days of his new-found spiritual life suggests a powerful motivation for the role he played as a spiritual counselor to so many. It also provides insight into the profoundly serious manner in which Newton conducted his entire pastoral ministry both in and out of the pulpit.

Marriage and Call to Ministry

Newton became engaged to Polly Catlett, and they married in 1750. His love for Polly began almost at first sight of her in 1742 when he was seventeen years old. He was so severely love-struck that he failed to board the ship setting sail for Jamaica where Newton was to be employed on a sugar plantation as an overseer of slaves. The prospect of earning his fortune in Jamaica could not compete with his complete adoration of Polly Catlett. Pollock, in his biography, states that Newton “dared to claim in middle age that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness he afterwards knew had banished her for a single hour from his thoughts.”¹⁶ The extent of Newton’s love and devotion to Polly is beautifully preserved in the many letters he wrote to her over their years of marriage. These letters were later published and now can be read in his *Works*.

Although Newton continued to find employment on slave ships between 1749 and 1754, a sudden illness prevented any future voyages and propelled Newton on a different career path. Beginning in 1754, Newton served as Tide Surveyor in Liverpool for ten years. During this ten-year period in Liverpool, Newton diligently followed a course of spiritual growth and Christian service. A key part of his spiritual growth was the benefit he received from the teaching and personal instruction of Samuel Brewer, the

¹⁵Quoted in John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 50. For a discussion of this lack of spiritual counsel in Newton’s life and its impact upon his later ministry see Grant A. Gordon, “John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent” (Th.M. thesis, Princeton University, 1987), 64.

¹⁶Pollock, *Amazing Grace*, 30.

pastor of nearby Stepney Dissenting Chapel.¹⁷ Brewer also pointed Newton to other preachers who made a lasting impact on his spiritual development, and it was not uncommon for Newton to spend his Sundays travelling to hear up to three sermons from these preachers.¹⁸ The most notable among these preachers to impact Newton was George Whitefield with whom Newton met briefly on multiple occasions in 1755.¹⁹

In addition to the benefits he received from preaching and personal instruction, Newton also gained spiritual maturity and depth from his own diligent study. Newton made it his common practice “to rise at five o’clock, and to engage for two or three hours in devotional exercises. Often, too, when compelled to be early and late at the watch-house, he spent much time in reading and meditation.”²⁰ Newton was a faithful student of Scripture, and although his formal education had been cut short, he learned both Hebrew and Greek on his own. He mastered the Greek language of the New Testament and became proficient in Hebrew. Newton wrote in October, 1757, “I can read the historical books and Psalms with tolerable ease, but in the prophetical and difficult parts I am frequently obliged to have recourse to lexicons.”²¹ Newton was not only a diligent student of Scripture but also found time to read widely. He read works by Augustine, John Calvin, John Owen, Isaac Watts, William Beveridge, John Wesley, Philip Doddridge and many others.²²

¹⁷Aitken, *John Newton*, 128.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 129. D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 74 describes Whitefield as the “orator par excellence” of the evangelical movement in England and refers to him as “Newton’s Calvinist hero.”

²⁰Bull, *The Life of John Newton*, 72. The “watch-house” to which Bull refers is the house at the port in Liverpool where Newton was employed.

²¹Quoted in Aitken, *John Newton*, 143.

²²For a listing of the reading Newton recorded in his diary from 1725 to 1756, consult Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*.

During his years at Liverpool, Newton grew spiritually and also came to sense God's call to ministry. Entering the ministry, however, was not a matter that Newton took lightly. He spent a period of six weeks in intense reflection, prayer, and study before making a decision to pursue ordination. During this six-week period which began on Friday, June 23, 1758, Newton kept a private journal which he entitled "Miscellaneous Thoughts and Enquiries on an Important Subject."²³ The journal bears record of how he studied Scripture as well as his own heart while he contemplated entering pastoral ministry. In the first entry of the journal Newton wrote,

May my heart be divested of all prepossession and self-seeking, may I be enabled to see and to follow my duty; and may I maintain the comfortable testimony of a sincere, teachable and obedient conscience in thy sight. O may thy Spirit witness in my heart, and my conversation witness in the world, that I am indeed thy disciple, thine without reserve, thine and not another's, thine and not my own.²⁴

Newton would in no way be hasty in a pursuit of pastoral ministry but would carefully examine himself with the understanding that those who enter the ministry are engaged in a most daunting task. He wrote, "To bring the first news of a Redeemer's entrance into a lost world, was the employment and joy of angels. Who of all the sons of dust and ashes is worthy to complete their message?"²⁵ Nevertheless, Newton's keen awareness that he was unworthy to proclaim the gospel due to his own sinfulness did not deter him from continuing his inquiry. On the contrary, he concluded that he possessed "a fitness to spread the glad tidings of salvation which few can pretend to" and that his own experience of salvation would be a powerful weapon to convince others that they too

²³John Newton, "Miscellaneous Thoughts and Enquiries Upon an Important Subject" has been published recently by the John Newton Project for the first time under the title *Ministry on My Mind*. The journal is kept at Lambeth Palace Library. For more about the work of the John Newton Project, see www.JohnNewton.org.

²⁴John Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Stratford-upon-Avon: The John Newton Project, 2008), 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

could be saved.²⁶

Newton clearly believed that he had some potential as a candidate for gospel ministry, but he was also looking for evidence in his life that he was called by God. He held that having evidence of a call to ministry would enable a minister “to force his way through all kinds of opposition.”²⁷ He identified four marks or evidences of a genuine call from God to the gospel ministry: (1) a desire to see God glorified and souls saved, (2) a sense of the seriousness of ministry, (3) a certain degree of giftedness for ministry, and (4) a direction for the context in which this ministry will be fulfilled.²⁸ The fourth evidence of a call, a direction from God for a ministry context, is particularly noteworthy because of Newton’s personal struggle in this regard. He believed that each God-called minister was gifted but not in identical ways, and therefore, they will not all serve equally well in the same contexts, whether that context be defined in terms of a particular denomination or congregation.²⁹

Over the course of this six-week period of examination, Newton was focused on self-examination through prayer and study of the Bible. Nevertheless, he did not seclude himself from others who might help him during this period of inquiry. Newton wrote to several pastors he knew and asked for their advice in this matter.³⁰ Furthermore, Newton took some specific actions that afforded him an opportunity to gain some practical ministerial experience. He established a time to meet with youth and teach the Bible publicly to them. In reflecting on this experience, Newton said, “We have had three meetings and I have found much enlargement and comfort in speaking to and with

²⁶Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 12-15.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 19.

them, particularly last night, when though I had nothing considerable prepared for the purpose, I found a pleasing liberty and enlargement both in thought and expression.”³¹ Although Newton’s experience was quite limited, he recognized the need for this time of inquiry to include not only his own spiritual reflection and prayer but also these external means of advice and practical experience. On his thirty-third birthday and at the conclusion of his time of deliberations regarding ministry (August 4, 1758), Newton had decided that he would pursue pastoral ministry and “wait for light and direction when and where to move and to begin.”³²

Despite this uncertainty about the specific direction his ministry would take, a review of Newton’s journal reveals that he was certain about his call and had formed strong convictions about the nature of pastoral ministry. Within his journal Newton recorded that he believed that a life of personal holiness was absolutely essential for the pastor.³³ He also indicated that he understood the role of a preacher to be both prophetic and priestly. The pastor spoke for God to the people and pleaded in prayer to God on behalf of his congregation. Such a task would require personal holiness. Newton wrote, “If the Lord is to be sanctified by all who come near him—what clean hands, how pure a heart should he have who leads the way to others?”³⁴

Newton also considered pastoral ministry to be a work requiring “great strength both of mind and body.”³⁵ He stated,

Whenever I think of a minister, I necessarily suppose such a one (if honored and useful) must have extensive knowledge of the scripture, a large stock of divine experience, an eminent degree of discernment and prudence, an ardent thirst for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, and a readiness and aptitude to bring forth

³¹Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 19.

³²*Ibid.*, 20.

³³*Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

out of his treasures those instructions the Lord has given him, according as circumstances require either for stated or occasional services.³⁶

As Newton contemplated the life of the pastor, he seemed to be almost overwhelmed with the tremendous demands of the ministry. The intense spiritual burdens and the continuous activity that Newton expected led him to write, “I confess O Lord there is no one more unfit than me, no one half so unworthy; but am not I in thy hand as clay in the hand of the Potter?”³⁷ Therefore, this period of reflection was not only a time of examination for Newton to consider if he was able to meet the requirements of the pastoral ministry but also a time to ask God to prepare him for that ministry should he determine he was truly called to it.

Furthermore, Newton committed himself to a ministry built upon “three great branches of divine truth.”³⁸ The first of these truths, Newton referred to as “the doctrine of Jesus Christ crucified.”³⁹ Newton sought to establish a Christ-centered pastoral ministry in which he diligently expounded the person and work of Christ because he held the gospel was essential “to rouse a hatred against sin, to feed the springs of grace into the heart, to animate and to furnish every believer for his spiritual warfare.”⁴⁰ Newton’s second foundational truth for ministry was “the great doctrine of love, which is the life and soul of the Gospel.”⁴¹ This doctrine had practical applications for Newton which would become paramount in his life and ministry as he faithfully cared for the members of his churches. Newton also applied this doctrine to his work of preaching. The first sermon he delivered to the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth in London, the place of his

³⁶Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 4.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., 22.

³⁹Ibid., 23.

⁴⁰Ibid., 23.

⁴¹Ibid.,

second pastorate, beautifully exemplifies this doctrine of love. In that address Newton focused on the phrase “speaking the truth in love” from Ephesians 4:15 as a kind of summary statement of his pulpit ministry.⁴² Within this sermon Newton said,

This love which my heart bears, I offer as a plea for that earnestness and importunity which I must use. I came not to amuse you with subjects of opinion or uncertainty, or even with truths of a cold, speculative, uninteresting nature, which you might receive without benefit, or reject without detriment; but to speak the truths of God, truths of the utmost importance to the welfare of your souls in time and in eternity.⁴³

The third divine truth on which Newton sought to ground his ministry was “the doctrine, or rather the practice of Gospel holiness.”⁴⁴ The way in which Newton expresses this point makes it clear that doctrinal truth and practical living were not altogether separate or unrelated matters in his thinking. While that is clear from Newton’s choice of words here, the connection is implicit in the first two doctrines as well. Thus, preaching the doctrine of Christ crucified is to have the practical effect of drawing both believers and unbelievers away from sin. Likewise, the proclamation of the gospel leads to the doctrine of love which ought to have an obvious impact on the way one relates to others. Therefore, from the outset of his thoughts about pastoral ministry, the foundational ideas and doctrines that would indelibly shape Newton’s future ministry were already in place. He then simply waited for a clear direction from God as to the specific context in which this ministry would be pursued.

Ministry in Olney and London

After his decision to pursue pastoral ministry, Newton initially believed that his path would lie among the Dissenters, the spiritual heritage left to him by his late

⁴²See Newton’s *Works*, 5:127-36. Newton titled the sermon “The Subject and Temper of the Gospel Ministry.” It was preached on Sunday, December 19, 1779. Within the introduction of the sermon, Newton states that the text of Eph. 4:15 was to serve “as a kind of motto, to introduce a brief account of the feelings, desires, and purposes of my heart, on this my first appearance before you.”

⁴³*Ibid.*, 5:133.

⁴⁴Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 23.

mother.⁴⁵ However, while visiting in Hunslet in Yorkshire,⁴⁶ Newton had opportunity to talk with the Anglican pastor Harry Crook (1708-1770) who was a friend of John Wesley and George Whitefield and who had at one time been much opposed to the Church of England. Nevertheless, Crook had a change of mind and came to serve as the Anglican vicar in Hunslet. In 1758 Crook extended Newton the opportunity to serve as curate, but Newton was not able to receive the necessary license from the Archbishop of York. While Newton suspected his ties to the evangelicals was behind the refusal, the Archbishop stated that he denied Newton ordination because he lacked a degree from Oxford or Cambridge.⁴⁷

Over the next few years, Newton would receive additional opportunities to preach. These early preaching opportunities proved to be valuable learning experiences for Newton. At his first preaching assignment at the Presbyterian church of John Edwards in Yorkshire, Newton initially felt quite confident and prepared to deliver his sermon. However, after a favorable beginning to the sermon, Newton became confused and could not remember what he had planned to say, and the host pastor had to enter the pulpit and preach in Newton's place.⁴⁸ Learning from his mistake, the next time Newton preached he made use of notes. Newton's comments about this incident reveal that it did not go well either. According to his own description of the event, he read the entire sermon without ever making eye contact with the congregation. He said that he "conned

⁴⁵Newton wrote in his autobiography that this initial desire to minister among the Dissenters arose from his belief that he could not meet the requirements of the Church of England. See Richard Cecil, *The Life of John Newton*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 84.

⁴⁶Rouse points out that Yorkshire proved to be an important place in Newton's spiritual and ministerial formation. In addition to his friendship with Crook, Newton developed close friendships with other notable pastors in Yorkshire—men like William Grimshaw, Henry Venn, John Fawcett, James Scott, John Edwards and Benjamin Ingham. In Yorkshire, Newton also had his first experiences of preaching. See Cecil, *John Newton*, 94-95.

⁴⁷Pollock, *Amazing Grace*, 145-46.

⁴⁸Cecil, *John Newton*, 95.

over my lesson like a boy learning to read, and did not stop till I came to the end.”⁴⁹

Newton then vowed that he would never preach again unless he could preach from his heart.

In addition to these early preaching opportunities among the Dissenters, Newton also received offers to pastor dissenting congregations, but for one reason or another, he chose not to accept those offers. For example, in late 1759 Newton was offered the pastorate of Cow Land Independent Chapel in Warwick. After spending three months preaching in Warwick during a leave of absence from his job as Tide Surveyor in Liverpool, a leave which began in May 1760, Newton was again offered an invitation to pastor in Warwick in November 1760. He refused this invitation as well.⁵⁰

Newton had decided that God’s direction for him was not among the Dissenters but within the Church of England. The path before him, however, proved to be anything but easy. In addition to being rejected for ordination following the offer from Crook in 1758, Newton encountered a great deal more opposition and frustration in his pursuit of ordination in the Church of England. Newton was denied ordination by the Church of England repeatedly for the next six years, but due to the intervention of a young evangelical nobleman, Lord Dartmouth (William Legge),⁵¹ Newton was eventually ordained. Dartmouth had become familiar with Newton through a series of letters that Newton had written originally to John Fawcett. As a result of this assistance, Newton was appointed to his first pastorate in 1764 in Olney where he would serve until 1779.

⁴⁹Cecil, *John Newton*, 95.

⁵⁰See Rouse’s comments in Cecil, *John Newton*, 98-100. Newton had received advice from William Romaine to accept the call to Warwick but had been advised by Samuel Brewer to decline. Apparently, tension between Newton and some in the congregation at Warwick also factored into Newton’s decision.

⁵¹William Legge (1731-1801) was second Earl of Dartmouth.

Newton's Influence as Pastor

Newton spent nearly sixteen years at the church in Olney before he accepted the call to pastor at St. Mary Woolnoth in London where he served from 1779 until his death in 1807. Over the course of Newton's ministry in both Olney and London, his reputation and influence steadily grew. This can be seen on two fronts—in his ministry as a pastor and in his impact on the Church of England and the evangelical movement.

Newton's influence in his work as a pastor is significant because he consistently saw each of his congregations grow and lives change by the power of the gospel. In Olney, for example, Newton began a week-night lecture in addition to the regular Sunday service as well as a gathering for children on Thursdays when he taught them the Bible and hymns.⁵² The regular Sunday worship service also exemplifies the growth in the Olney church. Newton stated in a letter to Alexander Clunie, "Neither short days, uncertain weather or dirty roads make any considerable diminution in our assemblies, and their attention and seriousness give me hope that they do not all come in vain."⁵³ The numerical growth of the Olney church demanded the addition of a gallery to the building within Newton's first year of ministry.⁵⁴

Newton's influence during his ministry in Olney can also be seen in his relationships with two significant individuals—the poet William Cowper and the pastor Thomas Scott. Of the sixteen years Newton spent in Olney, William Cowper (1731-1800) lived there twelve years and suffered greatly from repeated bouts of depression. Newton took Cowper into his own home on two different occasions—once for a period of five months and another for a period of fourteen months—when Cowper's mental state

⁵²Pollock, *Amazing Grace*, 154.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 155. Clunie, a Scottish sea captain and member of an Independent congregation in Stepney, became a close friend and spiritual influence in Newton's life in the years following his conversion.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

was particularly troubled.⁵⁵ Cecil notes that Cowper recorded in his memoirs that his time in Olney with Newton was incredibly beneficial to him.⁵⁶ In fact, Cowper became an active participant in the church's prayer meetings and in visiting the sick.⁵⁷ Cowper also worked with Newton in writing some hymns included in a collection called *The Olney Hymns*, among which is Newton's most famous hymn, "Amazing Grace."⁵⁸

In addition to the positive impact Newton had on Cowper, he also exercised considerable influence over the pastor Thomas Scott (1747-1821) who lived in nearby Ravenstone and who described himself as "nearly a Socinian and a Pelagian and wholly an Arminian."⁵⁹ Although Newton and Scott began to exchange a series of letters in 1775 regarding their theological beliefs, Newton left his greatest impact upon Scott not by means of these letters but in the exercise of his ministry as a pastor.⁶⁰ In 1774, a man and his wife in Scott's parish were critically ill, but Scott had not gone to visit them or care for them in any way because he had not been called to come to their home. In time the woman died and her husband was near death when Scott heard that Newton had gone to visit this couple several times. When Scott discovered what Newton had done, he stated,

Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that whatever contempt I might have for Mr. Newton's doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for

⁵⁵Piper, *The Roots of Endurance*, 56.

⁵⁶Cecil, *John Newton*, 106.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 122.

⁵⁸For discussions of John Newton as a hymn writer, see Michael A. G. Haykin, "'With Ev'ry Fleeting Breath': John Newton and the Olney Hymns," *Banner of Truth* (August/September 2007): 30-42; Donald D. Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725-1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

⁵⁹Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth* (1779; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 12.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those, who as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.⁶¹

This experience not only brought Scott deep regret but also compelled him to reform his pastoral practice when it came to visiting the sick. Furthermore, this incident appears to have been the foundation of a relationship that would develop between these two pastors later. The pastoral example of John Newton became a key to open Scott's life to orthodoxy and eventually to becoming an influential Evangelical pastor.⁶²

When Newton left Olney and moved to London in 1779 to pastor St. Mary Woolnoth, the contextual contrast of his ministry could hardly be greater. Newton was now in an affluent neighborhood in the center of a great metropolis. Despite this dramatic change of venue, Newton's pastoral work seems to have altered little. Cecil describes Newton's pastoral work in London as being "like a father among his children."⁶³ He continually opened his home to his congregation as well as to younger pastors or those entering ministry for times of instruction, encouragement, and counsel. In addition, Newton continued to undertake his pastoral ministry by coming to the aid of all those who were hurting or troubled. Among those who received Newton's counsel during these years in London were William Wilberforce⁶⁴ who served in Parliament and became the cornerstone in the fight to abolish the slave trade, Charles Simeon who became a noted and influential pastor in Cambridge, the renowned author Hannah More,

⁶¹Scott, *The Force of Truth*, 33.

⁶²Scott's influence is well observed in the words of William Carey, who said, "If there be anything of the work of God in my soul, I owe much of it to his [Scott's] preaching, when I first set out in the ways of the Lord," quoted by John Marshall in his introduction to Scott, *Force of Truth*, 20.

⁶³Cecil, *John Newton*, 150.

⁶⁴Each of Newton's biographers deals with Newton's relationship with Wilberforce, but also see Jonathan Aitken, "The Force Behind Wilberforce," *The American Spectator* (March 2007), 60-61. For a broader discussion of evangelical involvement in the abolition of the slave trade, see Roger Fay, "The Clapham Sect and the Abolition of Slavery," in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Papers Read at the 2007 Westminster Conference* (Mirfield, England: The Westminster Conference, 2007), 7-28, which includes a useful bibliography.

and the famous missionary William Carey.⁶⁵

Newton's Wider Influence

In addition to the personal impact Newton made in his pastoral service, his influence and reputation in the Church of England as well as in the evangelical movement both in England and beyond was substantial. Newton's name became well-known in 1764 through the publication of his *Authentic Narrative*,⁶⁶ a compilation of Newton's letters that recounted his life story. Aitken describes the significant impression Newton made with this publication when he writes, "It [*An Authentic Narrative*] made a powerful impact on the evangelical community and also became a popular best-seller, going through a number of editions: ten British, one French, one Dutch, one Scandinavian, and eight American in the three decades after its publication in 1764."⁶⁷

While Newton's *Authentic Narrative* was by far his most successful publication, he also published other works, among them a church history, which also increased his reputation and influence.⁶⁸ In addition to these publications, many of Newton's letters were also published. These letters were published in a variety of formats and under various titles but the most widely known and popular collection was published as *Cardiphonia*.⁶⁹ The letters cover a wide range of subjects and were addressed to a number of individuals. While Newton published the letters in an

⁶⁵Cecil., *John Newton*, 171.

⁶⁶Although virtually everyone recognized Newton as the author, these letters were originally published anonymously under the title *An Authentic Narrative of Some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of _____*. *Communicated in a Series of Letters to the Rev. Mr. Haweis, Rector of Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire and by Him (at the Request of Friends) Now Made Public*. Newton's name was omitted from the title for anonymity.

⁶⁷Aitken, *John Newton*, 169.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹For a careful and insightful summary and analysis of Newton's published letters, see Grant A. Gordon, "John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent" (Th.M. thesis, Princeton University, 1987).

anonymous fashion, concealing his own identity as well as the identity of his correspondents, the letters remain an excellent source for understanding his work as a pastor and spiritual advisor. In addition to the letters, many of Newton's sermons were also published over the course of his life and ministry. The sermons published both during his years in Olney and in London also made a contribution to Newton's rise in popularity and influence.⁷⁰

Furthermore, once in London Newton was in a strategic position to become "a metropolitan religious leader to the evangelical corps."⁷¹ He exercised this leadership in two primary ways. First, Newton's leadership was exercised among English evangelicals through an informal gathering he hosted in his home twice each week.⁷² These home meetings were not only a means of fulfilling his pastoral duties as noted above, but also a means by which Newton left an indelible impression on the evangelicals of his time. Newton consistently opened his home to Christians of any denomination for a time of encouragement and instruction, and these gatherings proved to be particularly important in the lives of younger ministers and those who were candidates for ministry.⁷³ Second, Newton's broader leadership in the evangelical community can also be seen in his role in the Eclectic Society. The Society was primarily a means of fellowship and conversation for key evangelical leaders in the Church of England but "in time would become famous

⁷⁰Donald E. Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725-1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 34.

⁷¹Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*, 310.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 311. Newton's long mentoring relationship with John Ryland, Jr., is a good example of the way Newton took particular interest in a young minister. To read Newton's letters to Ryland with a helpful introductory essay about their relationship, see *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland, Jr.*, ed. Grant Gordon (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009). See also, L. G. Champion, "John Newton's Letters to John Ryland," *Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977): 157-63 (also accessible at http://www.baptisthistory.org.uk/bhs_articles/NewtonRyland.pdf); and Michael A. G. Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses* (Faverdale, England: Evangelical Times, 2009).

as the matrix of the Church Missionary Society and the *Christian Observer* magazine.”⁷⁴ Although more could be said in regard to Newton’s influence as a pastor and evangelical leader,⁷⁵ these examples clearly indicate Newton’s historical importance and his significant contributions as a pastor and evangelical leader of the eighteenth century.

Final Years and Death

While the whole of Newton’s life had its share of difficulty amid his great successes, his final years held incredibly painful losses. Newton’s wife, Polly, died in December of 1790; his long-time friend William Cowper died in May of 1800. Newton also began to feel the decline of old age. Nevertheless, he remained hopeful and joyous as indicated by a letter to Hannah More in the summer of 1800. In this letter Newton wrote about his struggles but concluded that “as I am still able to preach, and am still heard with acceptance, I have no reason to wish to be gone.”⁷⁶ He continued to find great purpose in his ministry and yet knew that his time grew short. In that same letter Newton stated, “But all the past is like the remembrance of a dream, gone beyond recall; the present is precarious, and will soon be past likewise. But oh! the future! Blessed be he who hath brought immortality to light by the gospel.”⁷⁷ Newton had come to terms with his own mortality and continued to find hope and strength in the gospel he preached to

⁷⁴Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*, 313. John Stott revived the Eclectic Society in 1955 in order to fulfill Newton’s purpose in helping younger evangelical ministers. For a discussion the Society, see Aitken, *John Newton*, 293, and L. E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 452.

⁷⁵See, for example, Stuart Piggin, “The American and British Contributions to Evangelicalism in Australia,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 290-309, who notes Newton’s role in the formation of a chaplaincy at the Botany Bay settlement.

⁷⁶John Newton, *Letters of the Rev. John Newton, of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth*, ed. Josiah Bull (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1869), 357. Also quoted in Bernard Martin, *John Newton: A Biography* (London: William Heinemann, 1950), 347.

⁷⁷Newton, *Letters of the Rev. John Newton*, 357-58. Also quoted in Martin, *John Newton*, 347.

others. Though his health declined, he continued to preach regularly “with a considerable degree of his former animation.”⁷⁸

Nevertheless, in time Newton’s age began to show in the pulpit and according to Cecil, this was brought to Newton’s attention by some of his friends. At this stage, Newton was past eighty years old. Urged to lay his pulpit ministry aside, Newton retorted, “What! Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can still speak?”⁷⁹ The time did come, however, for the “old African blasphemer” to bring his pulpit ministry to an end. He preached his final sermon in October 1806 and died a little more than a year later on December 21, 1807. Though Newton’s remains are now buried in Olney, he was first buried at St. Mary Woolnoth in London where his famous epitaph can still be viewed. That epitaph which he penned himself is a fitting summary of his life.

JOHN NEWTON

Clerk

Once an Infidel and Libertine,

A servant of Slaves in Africa,

was,

By the Rich Mercy of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ,

Preserved, Restored, Pardoned,

And Appointed to Preach the Faith

He had Long Laboured to Destroy

He Ministered

Near XVI. Years as Curate and Vicar

⁷⁸Cecil, *John Newton*, 163.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 164.

of Olney in Bucks.
And XXVIII. as Rector
Of These United Parishes.

On Febry. the First MDCCL. He Married
Mary,
Daughter of the Late George Catlett,
of Chatham, Kent,
Whom he Resigned
To the Lord who Gave Her,
On Decr. the XVth. MDCCXC.⁸⁰

⁸⁰Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton*, 36-37.

CHAPTER 3

NEWTON'S PREACHING AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

An Overview of Newton's Preaching

With the highlights of John Newton's life and ministry set forth in the previous chapter, this chapter will present an overview of Newton's preaching ministry within the context of eighteenth-century England. The first section of this chapter will focus on Newton's published sermons but will also draw attention to some unpublished sermon materials in order to provide a basic understanding of Newton's preaching ministry. Newton published eighty-four sermons which have been made available in the six-volume set of his *Works*.¹ These sermons cover the whole of Newton's ministry in Olney and London as well as the period in which Newton lived in Liverpool and was seeking ordination.

The additional sermon material that will be considered here is drawn from sermon notebooks which Newton compiled and have been transcribed and edited by Marylynn Rouse. Rouse has edited two volumes of previously unpublished material written by Newton. The first of these volumes is part of a series on Romans 8 which Newton preached at the mid-week meetings of his church in Olney.² The other volume contains sermon notes from 105 sermons, most of which Newton preached in Olney

¹John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton*. 6 vols. (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985). Consult the appendix for an index of these eighty-four published sermons included in Newton's *Works*.

²John Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts: Sermon Notes on Romans 8 Verses 26-34*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Heritage, 1997), 7.

between 1764 and 1780.³ This survey will begin with the six published sermons of the Liverpool period and will then consider in turn those preached in Olney and in London. The sermon notes transcribed by Rouse will be dealt with in the section which focuses on Newton's preaching in Olney since those materials are primarily drawn from that period of his ministry.

The overview of these sermons will demonstrate that Newton's sermons should be categorized and described as biblical exposition. For the purpose of this dissertation, expository preaching is defined as preaching which is focused on a specific text of Scripture, its meaning, and its application to a contemporary audience. Although the purpose of this dissertation is not to defend a definition of expository preaching, a basic explanation of the definition used for this study and the rationale for its adoption is in order. In seeking to define expository preaching, the aim is to describe what is practiced in the work of expository preaching. Although there is not an agreed-upon definition of expository preaching,⁴ wisdom dictates that some sort of working definition is necessary if the homiletic method of a particular preacher is to be described and defended as being expository.

At the most basic level, expository preaching is the proclamation of the meaning of a biblical text that both explains and applies the text to a contemporary

³John Newton, *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton: A Unique Collection of Daily Readings from the Unpublished Sermons and Writings of John Newton*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Leominster, England: Day One, 2006), 3.

⁴Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 11-39, offers a helpful historical survey of definitions of expository preaching in which he presents three types of definitions and misconceptions of expository preaching before presenting his own "eclectic" definition. While Bryson interacts with significant homileticians like Broadus and Robinson, his survey is not comprehensive and is somewhat dated. A more timely exploration of definitions comes from Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2009), 4-10. See also Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 19.

audience.⁵ While this definition is intentionally brief, its various components should be explained. First, expository preaching is *proclamation*. The preacher is a herald who is sent by God to make a public announcement or declaration. The preacher stands to speak as one who must bear witness to what he has seen and heard. The rich and powerful New Testament terminology related to the task of preaching is critically important.⁶

Second, expository preaching is the proclamation of *the meaning of a biblical text*. The preacher is a herald of God who is sent to announce the revelation of God in Scripture. The preacher does not bear witness to himself, his own ideas, or the ideas of the culture but to the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture.⁷ The Bible as the very Word of God is the content of the preacher's proclamation. Expository preaching is centered upon and controlled by the meaning of the biblical text that has been selected for the sermon. In other words, expository preaching interprets and explains a particular passage of Scripture. The expositor proclaims and explains the text's meaning as determined by the intention of the biblical author.⁸

⁵Kenton Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 35 expresses concern about defining expository preaching too narrowly and maintains that "preaching that is faithful to the message, intent, impact, and perhaps even the form of the text" should be defined as expository preaching. While Anderson's point is well taken, he goes too far in the application of his broadened definition of expository preaching by allowing for an apparently endless number of options when it comes to sermon form. Anderson argues that biblical preaching can take a variety of forms and then presents the preaching forms of John MacArthur, Rick Warren, Eugene Lowry, Rob Bell, and himself as examples of that variety of forms. Such a view of expository preaching that is so expansive essentially renders a definition as meaningless.

⁶John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137 has written, "It is impressive that in all these New Testament metaphors the preacher is a servant under someone else's authority, and the communicator of someone else's word." Stott identifies six metaphors for preaching in the New Testament and notes that the image of a herald is the most commonly used.

⁷Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 22 write, "Preaching is not just building a sermon, telling stories, inspiring an audience, or giving a speech. If the Bible is the Word of God, then preaching is *speaking God's words*. The purpose of preaching is to lay bare the meaning of a passage, to present its application, and to show its relevance to the audience" (italics original).

⁸For a more detailed treatment of a authorial intent and hermeneutics, see Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (September 2001), 451-66, and Scott A. Blue, "The Hermeneutics of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its

Third, expository preaching is the proclamation of the meaning of a biblical text that *explains and applies that meaning to a contemporary audience*. Expository preaching is not a running commentary on a passage of Scripture and is more than the mere explanation of meaning. True expository preaching explains the text and applies the text to a contemporary audience.⁹ Both the explanation of the text’s meaning and the application of that meaning are to be aimed at a contemporary audience.¹⁰ The expositor must seek to explain the meaning of the text in a way that will be understood and received by his hearers, and the expositor must make application of the meaning of the text to those hearers as well.

According to the definition of expository preaching offered here, three key elements should be kept in mind—the preacher, the message, and the audience.¹¹ Each of these three elements are described and explained in the previous paragraphs, but in summary it should be noted that each of these elements are the foundational elements involved in communication of any type. York states, “Communication, by definition involves the intentional transmission of a mutually meaningful concept between at least

Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (June 2001): 253-69.

⁹Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 54 states, “Biblical preaching moves from exegetical commentary and doctrinal exposition to life instruction.” Chapell is just one of many homiletics who argue for the necessity of application in an expository sermon. See also, Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3 (Summer 1999), 70-84.

¹⁰The necessity of “contemporization” is rightly emphasized by Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 19, where he states, “Contemporization is the main task of the expository preacher,” 19. Likewise, Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137, develops the image of the preaching task as that of building a bridge from the biblical world to the contemporary world. He writes, “Now a bridge is a means of communication between two places which would otherwise be cut off from one another by a river or a ravine. It makes possible a flow of traffic which without it would be impossible. What then does the gorge or chasm represent? And what is the bridge which spans it? The chasm is the deep rift between the biblical world and the modern world”

¹¹See York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 136, who write, “Preaching involves three elements: the text, the sermon, and the delivery.” I have adapted that three-fold idea for the purpose of defining expository preaching.

two individuals.”¹² The importance of this basic model of communication should not be overlooked or disregarded because it has significant implications for preaching.

Preaching is a form of communication; it is an act of communication between the preacher who is the source of the communication signal and the preacher’s audience which is the receptor of that signal. However, the preacher as the source of the communication act is not an independent source of the message or signal but one sent under the authority of God to bear witness to what he has seen and heard in the biblical text.¹³ In other words, as an act of communication, preaching involves a sender (God who inspired Scripture, the human author who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the preacher who proclaims Scripture), a signal (the biblical text), and a receptor (the contemporary audience). Since expository preaching is the proclamation of the meaning of a biblical text that both explains and applies the text to a contemporary audience, it is the most effective and faithful method of biblical preaching.

With these basic ideas regarding the essence of expository preaching as a point of reference, the following survey on the preaching of John Newton will reveal that he practiced this form of preaching. He was committed to the ministry of expository preaching. Although Newton did not use this particular label for his preaching, his sermons are consistently characterized by the aspects included in the definition of expository preaching that has been provided. He proclaimed the meaning of a biblical text and then explained and applied that meaning to his audience. The following survey

¹²Hershael W. York, “Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 226.

¹³*Ibid.*, 228. York rightfully argues that the communication model of source, signal and receptor has implications for expository preaching on three levels. The “signal” has a dual source because of the divinely inspired nature of the biblical text. The “signal” is sent by God (level one) and by the human author (level two) of the text. This signal is then proclaimed by the preacher (level three) to a contemporary audience.

will highlight Newton’s biblical exposition in sermons from three distinct periods of his ministry—the period in which Newton sought ordination in the Church of England and resided in Liverpool, and his pastorates in Olney and London.

The Liverpool Sermons

Newton prefaced the publication of his six sermons written in Liverpool with a statement that they were composed with the intention of being preached, but that he had had no opportunity to do so.¹⁴ Despite the lack of opportunity, he remained persistent in his desire to preach. He also provided his rationale for having these sermons published rather than just waiting for the time to come when he could deliver them orally.¹⁵ Within the context of his struggle to be ordained in the Church of England, Newton published these six sermons to have the public’s view of him “satisfied or silenced.”¹⁶ However, Newton did not intend the sermons to be a public vindication of himself but were presented as in the “interest of religion or morality.”¹⁷ The sermons essentially carve out Newton’s convictions concerning the gospel and the nature of the Christian faith. He regarded the subjects addressed in the sermons as important and worthy of publication. He also hoped that God would use him to lead others to contemplate the subjects of these sermons.¹⁸

The first of these sermons, “On the Deceitfulness of the Human Heart” based

¹⁴Newton, *Works* 2:256.

¹⁵Regarding the publication of sermons in the eighteenth century, William Gibson writes, “The numbers are clearly so large that the printed sermon constituted not only a major pastoral and intellectual enterprise by the Church but also a major part of the output of the print industry and a significant element in the cultural fabric of the country.” William Gibson, “The British Sermon 1689-1901: Quantities, Performance, and Culture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon: 1689-1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

¹⁶Newton, *Works* 2:257.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

on Jeremiah 17:9-10, is a good example of Newton's convictions concerning the gospel. The sermon exudes a great sense of gospel urgency characteristic of Newton's preaching. He believed that the preaching of the truth should be both plain and urgent. He stated, "Too plain or urgent we cannot be. Our business is most important: opportunities are critical and precious. It is at the hazard of our souls if we speak deceitfully; and at the hazard of yours if we speak in vain."¹⁹ Over the course of the sermon, Newton repeatedly sought to convey the sinfulness of the human heart and how that sin renders one guilty before God. He forcefully reminded his readers that God knows the heart even if others do not. He said, "We see upon the whole, how vile and hateful our hearts must appear in the sight of a heart-searching God."²⁰ Newton presented God as the one who searches the human heart and as the one who is the judge to whom each individual must give account. Yet, Newton's motive was not to create a fear and dread of God but to "fully illustrate the wonderful grace and goodness of God, vouchsafed to us in the gospel" and "to show the impossibility of being saved in any other way."²¹ The sermon not only concludes with an exhilarating summary of the gospel and its promises but also a reminder of the charge given to ministers to preach the gospel, "a doctrine so unpalatable to the carnal mind, as Jesus Christ and Him crucified."²² The other sermons of this series written in Liverpool further serve to explain and exemplify Newton's views of the gospel and his convictions concerning the preaching of the gospel.

One of the clearest convictions of Newton's preaching ministry evidenced in these earliest of Newton's homiletical works is his commitment to the Scriptural text from which he preaches. Each of the sermons is the proclamation of a particular text of

¹⁹Newton, *Works*, 2:260.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 2:271.

²¹*Ibid.*, 2:273.

²²*Ibid.*, 2:274.

Scripture. Furthermore, his general practice was to follow the structure of the text fairly closely. For example, in his sermon, “On the Deceitfulness of the Human Heart,” discussed above, he follows the structure of Jeremiah 17:9-10. His outline for that sermon covers the nature of the human heart, God’s examination of the human heart, and the purpose of that examination.²³ While such an outline, which replicates the structure of the biblical text, may be unnecessary in expository preaching, no sermon can be considered expository in nature that does not expound and explain a particular text of Scripture.²⁴

The other sermons in this collection follow a similar pattern. The second sermon, “On the Savior and His Salvation” taken from 1 Timothy 1:15, is organized around the main points in the text—Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and this is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance. While the third sermon of the series, “On the Christian Name,” taken from Acts 11:26, is also expository, it does not precisely replicate the order of the text.²⁵ The main point here is to observe that Newton closely tied his preaching to specific texts of Scripture which he sought to explain with the goal of application to a contemporary audience. Newton respected the historical context of each biblical text but resisted “confining the words [of the biblical text] to the first occasion of their delivery.”²⁶

In the fifth and sixth sermons of this collection, Newton’s exposition and practical application are quite clear. Each of the sermons is based on the words of Jesus found in John 5:39, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me.” In the introduction of sermon five, Newton

²³Newton, *Works*, 2:261.

²⁴For a list of Newton’s published sermons which includes a reference to the scriptural texts of those sermons, see the appendix.

²⁵Newton, *Works*, 2:292.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 2:261.

explained the meaning of the word *search* and then supplied some practical implications related to this meaning.²⁷ The practical implications of searching the Scriptures which Newton supplied are requirements for rightly understanding Scripture and compose the first major heading of the sermon. Newton asserted that these requirements are sincerity, diligence, humility, and prayer.²⁸ The second major heading of the sermon is focused on the latter part of the text, how the Scriptures testify to Christ. While much of this section of the sermon involves explanation and examples of how the Scriptures testify of Christ, Newton also includes application regarding searching the Scriptures for the knowledge of Christ.²⁹ The sixth sermon continues the same subject and text as in the fifth sermon. Along with further explanation regarding how all the Scriptures point to Jesus Christ, Newton included a lengthy doctrinal exposition of Christology with practical applications of that doctrine.³⁰ In summary, this six-sermon collection is a collection of expository sermons prepared by Newton for publication.

The Olney Sermons

In many respects, the twenty published sermons preached at Olney share a common purpose with those prepared by Newton in Liverpool. Of these twenty sermons, Newton provided two reasons for having them published. First, he stated that he published the sermons as an example of the doctrine taught and believed among them.³¹ This purpose is clearly similar to his purpose in publishing the Liverpool sermons. Newton wanted his evangelical views of the gospel to be promoted. Second, he wrote

²⁷Newton, *Works*, 2:321.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 2:322-29.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 2:336.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 2:348-50.

³¹*Ibid.*, 2:357.

that he published these sermons to promote his reader's edification.³² This second reason demonstrates Newton's concern for the spiritual good of those who would read the sermons. He had a strong desire both to advance God's truth and to see lives changed by that truth.

One of the striking features of this set of twenty sermons is that Newton chose thirteen sermons from a series on Matthew 11:25-30. The thirteen sermons on these six verses of Matthew span over one hundred forty pages of text as published in the Banner of Truth edition of Newton's *Works*. The extensive work of these thirteen sermons is even more remarkable in light of Newton's comment that their published form is "no more than a brief summary" of what was originally heard when the sermons were actually preached.³³ These sermons exemplify Newton's commitment to preaching the text of Scripture. He carefully and thoroughly expounded the text line by line, as he explained what the text means and exhorted its truth upon his hearers and readers.³⁴

A survey of these thirteen sermons on Matthew 11:25-30 shows the way in which Newton worked his way through the text in an expository fashion. The first four sermons of this series are derived from Matthew 11:25. In the first sermon of this series Newton focused on Jesus' words, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25). In reference to the words "I thank thee," Newton stated, "The word signifies to confess, to promise or consent, and to praise. As if it had been said, 'I glorify thy wisdom in this respect, I acknowledge and declare it is thy will, and I express my own consent and approbation.'"³⁵ Newton's point was to explain the way in which Christ

³²Newton, *Works*, 2:357.

³³*Ibid.*, 2:358.

³⁴For a discussion of this method which follows the order of the text, the *secundum ordinem textus*, as a homiletical method linked to the influence of the continental Reformers and English Reformers like Hugh Latimer, see O. C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 354, 360.

³⁵Newton, *Works*, 2:362.

expressed his pleasure in “the Divine counsels.”³⁶ He then exhorted the reader/hearer, “And the more we increase in faith and in the knowledge of God, the more we shall be satisfied in his appointments.”³⁷ The remainder of the sermon is composed of some appropriate implications based on this point. For example, he stated that a faithful ministry of gospel proclamation is accepted by God even if that proclamation does not result in conversions.³⁸ He also made the point that gospel proclamation cannot “wholly fail.”³⁹ In addition, Newton maintained that God’s sovereignty provides strength and comfort amid difficulty in the work of the gospel.⁴⁰ These implications are appropriate because each of them is drawn from the meaning of the text which Newton preached. While this is just one example among this series of sermons, the example is representative of what Newton did throughout the other sermons of this series and in his preaching as a whole.

In the second sermon of the series on Matthew 11:25-30, Newton’s sermon is centered on the notion of how the mysteries of salvation are hidden from the wise and intelligent. The third sermon provided more material on the identity of those from whom these mysteries are hidden. The fourth sermon is focused on the nature of spiritual revelation and those to whom God gives it.

The fifth sermon of this series is taken from Matthew 11:26 and its primary subject is the sovereignty of God in salvation. While this sermon is in one sense a doctrinal sermon which defends a theological claim within the text of Scripture, it remains an expository sermon under the working definition of this dissertation because it

³⁶Newton, *Works*, 2:362.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 2:363.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2:364.

is the proclamation of the meaning of a biblical text that includes the explanation and application of that meaning.

Newton's sixth, seventh, and eighth sermons of this series are derived from Matthew 11:27. The sixth sermon is centered on the knowledge of Christ's person; the seventh is concerned with Christ's authority in the work of salvation; the eighth is focused on the knowledge of God the Father through Jesus Christ. As with the fifth sermon in this series, these three sermons are also quite doctrinal in terms of their content. Nevertheless, the doctrinal content is directly related to the text under consideration. This doctrine is explained and applied as well. For example, after a long section within sermon six in which Newton defends the deity of Christ, he highlights Christ's "wonderful condescension" which offers hope to "awakened sinners"⁴¹ as well as the "encouragement to believe and be saved."⁴² This sermon concludes with a warning to those who are rebelling against Christ.⁴³

Similarly, in the seventh sermon Newton sought to apply a sermon saturated with doctrinal truth by appealing to the affections. He asked, "How are your hearts affected by this subject? Do you not expect that I should close it with suitable word of application?"⁴⁴ Newton then directed the application to three categories of people—those still in their sins, those that have seen their need for salvation, and those who already believe. The eighth sermon of this series concludes in a similar manner in which Newton appealed to mourning souls, careless sinners, and believers.⁴⁵

In sermons nine, ten, and eleven of this series on Matthew 11:25-30, Newton

⁴¹Newton, *Works*, 2:424.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 2:425.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 2:435.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 2:446.

preached from verse 28. Sermon nine considered whom Christ invites to come to him; sermon ten explained that coming to Christ means to believe in Christ; sermon eleven focused on the rest promised to those who believe. The final two sermons of this series are taken from verses 29 and 30, respectively. The survey of this series provides a clear picture of Newton as an expositor who focused on a particular text of Scripture in each of his sermons and explained and applied those texts to his audience.

Although Newton did not always preach consecutively through specific passages or books of the Bible as he did in the series on Matthew 11:25-30, this does appear to be a regular pattern within his pulpit ministry. The series from Matthew 11 discussed above certainly demonstrates this point to a small degree, but this is not an isolated incident.

The previously mentioned series of sermons on Romans 8 which Newton delivered at the mid-week service in Olney also moved consecutively through the text in an expositional manner. While a total of approximately seventy addresses were prepared, the whereabouts of only twenty-eight of them are known.⁴⁶ These extant notes on Romans 8:26-34 also indicate Newton's clear intention to preach with a view toward the application of the texts to the audience as well as evangelistic appeals directed toward unbelievers.⁴⁷ These notes also exemplify the same type of thorough verse-by-verse exposition which characterized Newton's series on Matthew 11:25-30. Of the twenty-eight addresses on this passage in Romans 8, only two of them cover a complete verse.⁴⁸ He prepared four separate messages on Romans 8:26, three on Romans 8:27, four on Romans 8:28, six on Romans 8:29, three on Romans 8:30, two on Romans 8:32, and four

⁴⁶Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts*, 9.

⁴⁷For example, see Newton's conclusion to the first of four sermons he preached from Rom 8:26 in Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts*, 15.

⁴⁸Newton covered all of Rom 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" in one message and Rom 8:33, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies" in one message.

on Romans 8:34.

Taking the longest subset of this series, the six messages delivered on Romans 8:29, as an example of how Newton handled the text, his method of exposition is evident once more. In the initial sermon on this verse, Newton explained his division of the text and how he would speak to each of those divisions in these sermons. He divided the text into two major headings—God’s sovereign acts in regard to the sinful state of man and God’s final goal in these sovereign acts.⁴⁹ Under the heading of God’s sovereign action, Newton included God’s foreknowledge and predestination.⁵⁰ Under the heading of God’s final goal, Newton referred to God’s purpose in conforming believers into the image of Christ as well as God’s purpose in seeing Christ glorified through this redemptive and transformative work.⁵¹

Overall, Newton produced three addresses dealing with the subject of foreknowledge and three dealing with the subject of predestination. He worked his way consecutively through the text as he explained its meaning and applied that meaning to his hearers. For example, Newton explained the meaning of foreknowledge as used in Romans 8:29 and showed examples of how this truth is conveyed in other passages of Scripture.⁵² The message is concluded with application. Newton wrote, “No particular person has any ground from the word of God to think himself excluded. The invitation is to all who desire. Have you the desire?”⁵³ This appeal for unbelievers to heed God’s call to believe is followed by the exhortation for believers to rejoice.⁵⁴ This example

⁴⁹Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts*, 70.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 70-71.

⁵²Ibid., 71-73.

⁵³Ibid., 74.

⁵⁴Ibid.

illustrates how Newton consistently focused on biblical exposition. As he preached through various biblical texts, he proclaimed the meaning of that text and explained and applied that meaning to his hearers.

Newton's exposition of Matthew 11:25-30 and his exposition of Romans 8 serve to show Newton's commitment to biblical exposition. These two series also demonstrate that Newton, occasionally at least, preached consecutively through passages of Scripture. Thomas Scott (1747-1821) also substantiates the fact that Newton had a regular pattern of preaching consecutively through Scripture. While listening to Newton preach on one occasion in Olney, Scott came to believe that Newton had selected the text in Acts with him in mind. He believed that Newton had targeted him in the sermon until he discovered years later that Newton had been "regularly expounding the Acts of the Apostles, and that this passage came in course that evening."⁵⁵ Thus, Newton appears to have preached consecutive expository messages through biblical books as well as expository messages on select biblical passages on a regular basis within his pulpit ministry.

In addition to the twenty sermons which Newton published while in Olney, Marylynn Rouse has published a number of Newton's sermon notes in a daily devotional book. Most of these sermons notes are from sermons Newton preached while pastoring in Olney. Among the sermon notes is a series of twenty-seven sermons from Genesis. Although all the dates for these sermons are not known, the first sermon from Genesis 1:1 began on a Sunday evening in January 1769, and the final sermon from Genesis 49:1 is dated Christmas morning, 1769.⁵⁶ While Newton did not work his way through every text of Genesis, he did preach from these texts in an expository manner. The sermon

⁵⁵Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth* (1779; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 14.

⁵⁶The notes for these sermons can be read in Newton, *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton*. The sermon notes are scattered throughout the daily readings and do not cover the entire book of Genesis.

notes on Genesis 1:1, for example, are structured around the various parts of the text—“In the beginning,” “God,” “God created,” and “the heaven and the earth.”⁵⁷ The manner in which Newton fully developed his points cannot be known from the notes, but he clearly prepared to expound the text, and he also pointed to Christ in this sermon. He stated, “The God who in the fullness of time was in Christ reconciling sinners to himself—he in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.”⁵⁸ He went on to say that God “formed *the earth* as a theatre to display the riches of his glorious grace in the salvation of a people chosen to himself in Christ before the foundation of the world.”⁵⁹ The Christ-centered nature of Newton’s preaching will be discussed in the following section and explored in more detail in chapter 6.

The London Sermons

The greatest number of Newton’s published sermons (fifty-eight of the total eighty-four) derives from the time of his ministry in London. A handful of these sermons were preached on special occasions, but the fifty sermon series on Handel’s *Messiah* are the clear focal point. This remarkable series on the Scriptural texts of the famous oratorio was preached in 1784-85 at St. Mary-Woolnoth and then published in 1786. John Harris labels this series of messages as “[t]he high point of Newton’s preaching ministry in London.”⁶⁰ One reason that this series was such a high point in Newton’s preaching is that it exemplifies the way in which Newton preached Christ from all of Scripture. In his preface to the series, Newton forcefully maintained that the faithful preacher must not turn his attention away from the gospel of Jesus Christ. He stated,

⁵⁷Newton, *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton*. See the daily readings for January 5, 6, 7, and 8.

⁵⁸Ibid. See the reading for January 7.

⁵⁹Ibid. See the reading for January 8 (italics original).

⁶⁰John Harris, “The Preaching of John Newton,” in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Papers Read at the 2007 Westminster Conference* (Mirfield, England: The Westminster Conference, 2007), 124.

He [the minister of the gospel] preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and him crucified. He dares not sophisticate, disguise, or soften the great doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought. And he will no more encounter the prejudices and corrupt maxims and practices of the world with any weapon but *the truth as it is in Jesus*, than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy with a wooden stick.⁶¹

Newton went on to say that because of this Christ-centered conviction concerning the nature of preaching that “the leading and principal subject of every sermon” is Christ.⁶²

Moreover, Newton expressed his desire to preach Christ as he is presented in each of the biblical texts of this series. He wrote,

His [Christ’s] person, grace and glory; his matchless love to sinners; his humiliation, sufferings, and death; his ability and willingness to save to the uttermost; his kingdom, and the present and future happiness of his willing people are severally considered, according to the order suggested by the series of texts.⁶³

Thus, Newton’s commitment to biblical exposition is once again evident. He did not intend to impose Christ upon the text but to expose the way in which each text points to Christ in some way. The following paragraph will discuss an example from Newton’s series on Handel’s *Messiah* which shows Newton as Christ-centered expositor.

In the third sermon of the series, “The Shaking of the Heavens and the Earth,” Newton preached from Haggai 2:6-7. He explained the post-exilic background and context of the passage and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Newton interpreted the prophetic promise of Haggai as being fulfilled in the “presence of Messiah in the second temple.”⁶⁴ He then proceeded to expound the passage under the following three headings: the character of Messiah, the effects of his appearance, and his filling the house with glory.⁶⁵ Newton’s preaching regarding the character of the Messiah was based upon his exposition of the phrase “the desire of all nations” in verse 7. While other translations

⁶¹Newton, *Works*, 4:viii. Italics original.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., 4:31

⁶⁵Ibid., 4:32.

of this phrase are possible, the point here is that Newton sought to deal with the biblical text and explain its meaning. Newton's second sermon heading is related to the "shaking the heavens and the earth," a concept appearing in verse 6. Although Newton chose to deal with these two aspects of the text in an order that is different from the way they appear in the text, he does expound its meaning for his audience in a way that logically leads to his final heading which is linked to the phrase, "He shall fill this house with glory" in verse 7. Following the exposition in each of these three sections of the sermon, Newton turned to application which appears to be his chief objective. In reference to his duty as a preacher, he stated that this duty "both warrants and requires me to address myself not only to your understandings but likewise to your consciences."⁶⁶ He directed this appeal to the consciences of both believers and unbelievers alike. This sermon on Haggai from the series on Handel's *Messiah* is representative of the other sermons in this series and of Newton's preaching in general.

Through this survey of Newton's published sermons, two fundamental observations can be made regarding the preaching of this important, eighteenth-century pastor. First, he consistently practiced biblical exposition. In other words, he preached in an expository fashion which proclaimed the meaning of a biblical text and then explained and applied that text to his audience. Second, Newton's biblical exposition centered upon Jesus Christ and the gospel. More will be said regarding the gospel-centric nature of Newton's preaching and ministry in chapter 6. Within that discussion, attention will be given to how Newton preached from non-messianic texts of the Old Testament. With this basic understanding of Newton's ministry of preaching as set forth in this section, the remainder of the chapter will seek to link Newton's ministry to the broader historical context of the eighteenth century in England and its preaching.

⁶⁶Newton, *Works*, 4:38.

The Eighteenth-Century Context

Eighteenth-century England emerged from a previous century marked by religious and political tension. These tensions brought the nation to civil war from 1642-51 and the execution of Charles I, but they finally subsided with the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1653. Nevertheless, following this period of republican statehood from 1653-1658 under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1659), England found itself once again under the rule of a monarch. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under the reign of Charles II, came the restoration of the House of Lords and the re-establishment of an official state church, the Church of England. While Charles II had promised more religious liberty in England, Parliament passed a number of restrictive acts known collectively as the Clarendon Code which resulted in a severe persecution of Puritans and all those outside the Church of England. The tensions between the established church and other Protestants also extended to Roman Catholics.

When Charles II died, rule of England passed to his brother James II in 1685. James, an avowed Roman Catholic, issued two Declarations of Indulgence in 1687 which suspended the many legal restrictions that had been placed on Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. James' policies faced mounting resistance and a growing apprehension of having a Roman Catholic monarch. James was eventually deposed and replaced with the reign of William III and Mary II following the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-89.⁶⁷

All of the political and religious upheaval of the seventeenth century is important to understanding the general religious ethos of the eighteenth-century English context in which Newton preached.⁶⁸ Newton's pastoral ministry, which began in 1764

⁶⁷Historians refer to the "long eighteenth century," a period beginning with the Glorious Revolution and extending through the 1830's.

⁶⁸For a general introduction to religion in eighteenth-century England, see R. K. Webb, "Religion," in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain M. MacCormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93-101.

and ended with his death in 1807, was conducted during the evangelical revival in England, a revival which Walsh argues “emerged as a reaction to a perceived religious crisis.”⁶⁹ He notes the effects of rationalism, deism, and a declining morality which had left behind a “sense of interior decay that afflicted much of Protestantism” during the early eighteenth century.⁷⁰ While early eighteenth-century England is largely known for its lack of religious enthusiasm, this would dramatically change with the evangelical revival with which Newton was so closely identified. The enthusiasm of the revival became an enormous point of concern within the Church of England and led to serious questions regarding the possibility of Newton’s ordination within the Established Church. Nigel Yates writes,

For the orthodox churchmen of the eighteenth century enthusiasm was a deeply dangerous disease. It evoked memories of the religious struggles of the seventeenth century, and the resulting breakdown in the social and political order, and was to be avoided at all costs. What was to be emulated was a religion of piety and sobriety but one that did not fall into the temptations offered by the scientific discoveries and secular learning of the age that wanted to banish ideas of a God active in the world that he had created. For orthodox churchmen the two evils to be avoided were extreme forms of personal piety, based on a guarantee of personal salvation recognised in the experience of conversion, or the attractions of a radical form of deism from which all notions of the inexplicable or the miraculous were to be ruthlessly expunged.⁷¹

Despite this deep-rooted concern and fear of religious enthusiasm, by the middle of the eighteenth century those inside and outside the Church of England would be confronted with a growing movement of revival.⁷² At the center of this movement

⁶⁹John Walsh, “‘Methodism’ and the Origins of English-Speaking Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 20.

⁷¹Nigel Yates, *Eighteenth-Century Britain: Religion and Politics, 1714-1815* (Harlow, England: Pearson-Longman, 2008), 70. See also William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2001) who focuses on the peace and unity within the Established Church during the eighteenth century and highlights the pervasiveness of a spirit of moderation within eighteenth-century Anglicanism.

⁷²For a helpful introduction to this revival movement, see Richard Turnbull, *Reviving the*

were George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791). These two men represent two streams within this movement which has become known as Evangelicalism. Horton Davies writes, “Evangelicalism in eighteenth century England is a river fed by three tributaries: The Wesleyan, the Whitefieldian, and the loyal Anglican.”⁷³ Among those Anglicans who were key figures in the evangelical movement are men like John Berridge (1716-1793), William Grimshaw (1708-1763), and John Newton.⁷⁴

Although these various streams existed within English evangelicalism, eighteenth-century evangelicals shared the common theological heritage of the broader Protestantism that emerged from the Reformation.⁷⁵ This shared theological heritage which rested on the supreme authority of Scripture and was focused on the salvation provided by Christ indicates that eighteenth-century evangelicalism was more than a movement driven by the fires of religious enthusiasm or emotion. The evangelicals within Methodism, Anglicanism and Dissent were also driven by convictions regarding certain doctrinal truths as well. English evangelicalism, which Newton so heartily embraced, was at once a devotional movement and a doctrinal movement. In other words, to understand evangelicalism properly requires a grasp of its theological thought and its revivalist heart. Hylson-Smith captures the blending of these two aspects of

Heart: The Story of the 18th Century Revival (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2012).

⁷³Horton Davies, *From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1750*, vol. 3 of *Worship and Theology in England*, combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 210.

⁷⁴Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, in *Oxford History of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry and Own Chadwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 479, describes these three men as “the three evangelical originals.” For a discussion of the distinctions between Methodists and Evangelicals in the Church of England, see Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, Vol. 2: 1689-1833* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 169-72.

⁷⁵John Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 272. Coffey’s essay as well as the others in this volume run counter to the widely accepted thesis of historian David Bebbington who argues that evangelicalism emerged in the 1730’s. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

evangelicalism when he writes,

The pioneer Evangelicals of the eighteenth century shared with all their fellow evangelicals a belief in original sin, justification by faith and the new birth, which was not merely a cerebral acknowledgement of a set of doctrines, but was a deep-seated, and indeed passionate, part of the very fabric of their personalities, because it was born of experience. They *knew* that the doctrines were true, because they had found them to be so in their own lives. And such knowledge was like a fire burning within them. They had to share the good news; they could do no other. The message which had transformed their lives was contained in the Bible; and the Bible, therefore, was precious to them. It was their meat and drink; their authority; and the basis for all their faith and practice. And at the very centre of the biblical message was the cross. They proclaimed a person; a savior and redeemer.⁷⁶

Thus, a revival of both doctrine and spirituality which were personally experienced marked eighteenth-century English evangelicalism. This experiential dimension of the evangelicalism placed it in sharp contrast to the more moderate religious disposition of a century that had emerged from a time of tremendous religious division and was predisposed to avoid religious enthusiasm.

In addition to the religious tensions and divisions which served to shape the context of eighteenth-century England and the rise of evangelicalism, the moral climate of the latter part of the seventeenth century also played a significant role. Gordon Rupp states, “A decline in public manners and morals in the last half of the seventeenth century is attested by public documents and by private testimonies from Christians of all parties.”⁷⁷ The final decades of the seventeenth century left England with a “permissive society” and “overtly loosening [moral] standards.”⁷⁸

England was facing great social problems as well. Many men and women fled poverty in rural areas to arrive in metropolitan areas like London only to find them vastly overcrowded and overrun with disease.⁷⁹ Both the social and moral crises became

⁷⁶Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England*, 183 (italics original).

⁷⁷Rupp, *Religion in England*, 295.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 289.

⁷⁹J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), 12. See also Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Penguin

rallying points for those who identified themselves with the evangelical revival.⁸⁰ Indeed, the evangelical revival brought about renewed “campaigns for public decency and higher moral standards.”⁸¹ The spirituality and theology of the revival were not limited to the interior matters of the soul but pressed for a life of good works. While it must be acknowledged that some of the eighteenth century reforms in the areas of morality and society were not entirely achieved on religious grounds, the emphasis on good works in England were primarily religious in nature.⁸² Christian engagement in moral and social causes was fueled by the theology and spirituality of the evangelical revival and was “greatly encouraged by preaching within all the Protestant churches which exhorted individual Christians to undertake good works as a positive illustration of their faith.”⁸³ The following section of this chapter will survey the preaching in England during the eighteenth century.

The Pulpit in Eighteenth-Century England

In his introductory essay to *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century*, O. C. Edwards remarks that there was an “abundant variety of preaching in the eighteenth century.”⁸⁴ While Edwards distinguishes between preaching which took place on Sunday and that which took place the remainder of the week, the

Books, 1982).

⁸⁰See, for example, Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce’s Circle Transformed Britain* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010).

⁸¹Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, 108.

⁸²Ibid., 82. Rolf Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1800* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau, 1972), 204 similarly writes, “Piety and virtue were but plain and simple terms for the two cardinal obligations of every Jew and Christian, to love God and to love man.”

⁸³Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, 8.

⁸⁴O. C. Edwards, Introduction to *Preaching, Sermon, and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 3. For another approach to classification, see Keith A. Frances, “Sermons: Themes and Developments,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon: 1689-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), who identifies most sermons as those related to Christian life and doctrine and a minority group related to everything else.

most significant distinguishing characteristic of eighteenth-century preaching in England is the preaching which was connected to the evangelical revival and that which was not. Thus, the historical divisions made by Horton Davies—1690-1740 and 1740-1830—related to the onset of the revival serve as a helpful guide to understanding preaching in eighteenth-century England.⁸⁵ Davies identifies the period from 1690-1740 as a time when preaching was significantly impacted by rationalistic moralism. Metaphysical preaching, a style of preaching given its name due to its association with metaphysical poets like John Donne, that had been so popular in seventeenth-century England suffered a “rapid loss of respect” in which critics charged that the metaphysical preachers were merely playing with Scripture and showing off.⁸⁶ English taste no longer preferred the metaphysical or Baroque style of preaching.⁸⁷ These preferences had given way to a desire for preaching which reflected Enlightenment reasoning and polite society. James Downey summarizes this transformation when he writes,

The predisposition of Augustan England toward a theology based upon reason, and a preaching that was unimpassioned, stemmed largely from the desire to avoid the kind of fanaticism and intolerance which had been such a horrific part of the religion of the previous age. Never again must such acts be perpetrated in the name of Christianity. And prohibition in religious practice and preaching of the heady wine of ‘enthusiasm’ seemed the most effective guard.⁸⁸

Therefore, men such as John Tillotson (1630-94), the archbishop of Canterbury, advocated for preaching which made use of “ordinary speech” by which to avoid the

⁸⁵Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*.

⁸⁶O. C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching*, 376. For a comprehensive study of metaphysical preaching, see Horton Davies, *Like Angels from a Cloud: The English Metaphysical Preachers, 1588-1645* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1986).

⁸⁷William Gibson, “The British Sermon 1689-1901,” 3 describes this transition by stating, “The year 1689 may reasonably claim to mark the end of two traditions in pulpit literature: the ‘baroque’ sermons of the seventeenth century, represented by such preachers as Donne and Andrewes, and the Puritan sermons of preachers such as Hall and Smith The year 1689 also signaled the emergence of the Tillotson era of preaching and the antecedents of sermons adopted by the Evangelical preachers.”

⁸⁸James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Bekeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield, and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 13.

dramatic and poetic in order to focus on convincing an audience through the reasonableness of thought.⁸⁹ As the eighteenth-century pulpit gave priority and preference to a plain and reasoned sermon, it also allowed for a predominance of moral and ethical sermons. Downey writes, “The high-pitched notes of dogmatism gave way to the dulcet strains of ethical preaching.”⁹⁰

Despite this pessimistic description of preaching in the early decades of eighteenth-century England, the influence of neoclassical rhetorical theory made significant contributions to eighteenth-century homiletics. In his monumental study, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1800*, Rolf Lessenich offers a detailed analysis and description of neoclassical preaching.⁹¹ Lessenich makes the observation that this period of eighteenth-century English history witnessed a return to the plain style of preaching as well as an emphasis on the classical canons of rhetoric.⁹² He cites examples of eighteenth-century rhetoricians like John Lawson (1712-59), John Ward (1679-1758), and Hugh Blair (1718-1800) whose works served to promote neoclassicism in the pulpit.⁹³ While neoclassical rhetorical theory opposed the grand and ornate style of the previous century, it did not dismiss the power of eloquence. The neoclassical rhetoricians like Lawson, Ward, and Blair argued that eloquence serves to persuade when sheer reason alone cannot. Lessenich writes, “Eloquence was the art of

⁸⁹See O. C. Edwards’ introductory essay in *Preaching, Sermon, and Cultural Change*, 12.

⁹⁰Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, 10.

⁹¹Rolf P. Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory*, 41. For a discussion of key preachers throughout Europe who influenced the use of classical rhetorical models see Thomas Worcester, “The Classical Sermon,” in *Preaching, Sermon, and Cultural Change*, 133-72.

⁹²For a description of the five canons—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*—see Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-23.

⁹³For a broader description and study of eighteenth-century rhetoric in Britain and America, see Michael G. Moran, ed., *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

persuading a hearer by a beautiful elocution while simultaneously convincing him by a logical invention and disposition.”⁹⁴

Thus, the neoclassical model made room in preaching for both a rational appeal and a consideration for the affections of the hearers. Lessenich notes that eighteenth-century philosophy commonly held that reason could regulate human emotion and action but that it could not persuade human beings to take action.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the common practice and argument for preaching was to begin with a rational appeal and end with practical application of truth that was primarily directed toward the heart or affections of the hearers.⁹⁶ While it is important to see that eighteenth-century rhetorical theory made a place for *pathos*, Lessenich is right to observe that the primacy of reason within neoclassical models is a product of the rationalism of that period. He writes, “The idea that the reason of an auditor had to be convinced before his passions were stirred bears the marks of eighteenth-century rationalism.”⁹⁷

Eighteenth-century rationalism certainly impacted the eighteenth-century pulpit.⁹⁸ Even when the impact of neoclassicism is taken into account, the fact that much of the preaching during the first four decades of the eighteenth century was dominated by rationalistic moralism as Davies argues seems clear. Many of the influential neoclassical rhetoricians published their key works after 1740. John Lawson’s “Lectures concerning Oratory” was published in 1758. John Ward’s “A System of Oratory” was published in 1759 and Hugh Blair’s “Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres” in 1783. This is not to

⁹⁴Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory*, 6.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 21.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁸For a discussion of this impact, see Nigel Aston, “Rationalism, the Enlightenment, and Sermons,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon: 1689-1901*, 390-405.

suggest that neoclassical rhetoric had no impact on preaching prior to 1740 or that every preacher prior to 1740 was delivering sermons which were thoroughly given over to rationalism. Nevertheless, it does suggest a close correlation between the transformation of the pulpit in eighteenth-century England and the rise of the evangelical revival.

Clearly, a significant shift began to occur in the preaching of this era around 1740. Downey writes, “From the point of view of homiletics the evangelical revival was an attempt to revitalize pulpit oratory.”⁹⁹ Walsh agrees that the longing for revival and reformation in the church during this period is closely tied to an effort to revive and reform preaching as well. He states,

All agreed that no reformation could be lasting until God poured out his Spirit on people. Every effort must therefore be made to pray and preach down that Spirit. This could best be done by a less intellectualistic and a more deliberately affective homiletic style, which would present Christ’s person and mediatorial role in a manner calculated to rouse the affections and bring conversions.¹⁰⁰

In addition, Turnbull maintains that preaching is one of the “prominent features” of the evangelical revival in England.¹⁰¹ With the revival came an emphasis on preaching to the heart. Edwards refers to this shift in eighteenth-century homiletics as a move toward preaching that was directed at the heart and that was rooted in and focused on experience rather than appeals to reason.¹⁰² Thus, the middle and latter parts of the eighteenth century saw this type of experiential preaching in notable men like George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Charles Simeon.

These iconic figures of eighteenth-century England—Whitefield, Wesley, and Simeon—shared a common evangelical interest in preaching which stirred the heart. They also illustrate the way in which the revival and its preaching are so closely tied to

⁹⁹Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, 227.

¹⁰⁰Walsh, “Methodism,” 20.

¹⁰¹Turnbull, *Reviving the Heart*, 17.

¹⁰²Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 427.

the Church of England.¹⁰³ Within the eighteenth-century Church of England, a significant body of evangelical pastors emerged and gained substantial influence within the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Davies summarizes the eighteenth-century evangelical view of preaching in this way:

All the Evangelicals were convinced of the primacy of preaching. In contrast to the moral preaching of Tillotson, their theme was the Cross in which, with St. Paul, they showed that the folly of God was profounder than the wisdom of men. Faith, so they believed, came to men chiefly from hearing the proclamation of the Word. Their own use of preaching was threefold: to awaken men from apathy or formality and thus to convert them with the aid of the Holy Spirit; to build men up in the faith—edification; and to teach men how to manifest the fruits of the Spirit—sanctification.¹⁰⁵

Although evangelical sermons have received unfavorable reviews from some scholars,¹⁰⁶ such preaching within the Church of England was incredibly important for Anglicanism. Hughes Oliphant Old writes, “The preaching of the Evangelical Anglicans was significant in that it nourished the Church. Evangelical Anglicanism nourished a large portion of the English church for a long time.”¹⁰⁷ Like other scholars, Old does not admire these evangelical sermons for their literary qualities. However, he does make the case that

¹⁰³Walsh, “Methodism,” 22 makes an interesting observation in this regard. He writes, “Nowhere was the unpredictability of the English revival more evident than in its place of birth. As observers noted, when the revival arrived, it came, paradoxically, not among the Calvinist Dissenters, who had corresponded about it, published treatises about it, and prayed for it, but in an Arminian Church of England in which the old Puritan Calvinism was virtually extinct, and the prejudice against spirit-filled ‘enthusiasm’ almost an obsession.”

¹⁰⁴Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 212.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 227-28.

¹⁰⁶For example, Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, 233 states that Evangelical sermons “do not make any significant contribution to the sum of English sacred oratory.”

¹⁰⁷Hughes Oliphant Old, *Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*, vol. 5 of *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 541. See also Bob Tennant, “The Sermons of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelicals,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon: 1609-1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), who states, “Preaching was the predominant clerical activity, and directly stimulated administrative innovations, ending, for the Church of England, in the emergence of an Evangelical party with a developed theology and programme extending into the cultural life and policy of the State itself,” 132.

these sermons should be studied for their “pastoral effectiveness.”¹⁰⁸ The evangelicals, both Anglican and otherwise, were concerned to preach sermons that turned the hearts of their hearers to Christ for salvation and to urge them to live and grow in the faith.

Conclusion

The preceding survey of eighteenth-century English preaching and the overview of John Newton’s preaching indicate the ways in which Newton patterned his preaching according to the preaching models of eighteenth-century evangelicals. He withstood the skepticism of his critics within the Church of England who viewed with contempt his identification with the evangelical movement and sought to thwart his ordination. Among others in the Church of England, Newton embraced the doctrinal and devotional emphases of the revival movement. Newton, therefore, sought to expound the biblical text with a pastoral concern for practical application. Yet his preaching did not share the moralistic character that became common in England as a result of the influence of men like John Tillotson. Instead, Newton proclaimed the great doctrines of Scripture with a clear emphasis on Christ and the gospel. The great shift in English preaching that began to occur around 1740 and the close connection between this shift and the evangelical revival makes the study of the preaching during this era of special importance. As an evangelical Anglican, Newton provides a window into the homiletical world of this important era of Christian preaching

¹⁰⁸Old, *Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*, 542.

CHAPTER 4

NEWTON AND THE BIBLE: THE FOUNDATION OF MINISTRY

The preaching and ministry of John Newton was built on the foundation of Scripture. In his preaching, he concentrated on the biblical text and applied the truths of that text to his congregation. He unfolded the great theological truths of Scripture as he proclaimed Christ and the gospel. Newton's high view of Scripture, a view shared by other eighteenth-century evangelicals, served as a foundation of his ministry in general and of his preaching in particular. Therefore, this chapter will first discuss Newton's view of the Bible within the context of what other evangelicals of the period were saying about the authority and inspiration of Scripture. In the pages to follow, Newton will be shown to have believed that the Bible is God's revelation and that this revelation was given by means of divine inspiration. Second, the way in which Newton made use of Scripture in his pastoral ministry and in his preaching will also be explored. The chapter will show that Newton's use of Scripture flowed from his understanding of the nature of Scripture and that because of the authority and sufficiency of the Bible, Newton made use of the Bible in his ministry with great confidence in its ability to address the many and various issues of life.

Scripture in Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism

The eighteenth-century evangelicals were the theological heirs of the broader family of evangelical Protestantism which emerged from and grew out of the Reformation.¹ John Coffey writes, "Evangelicalism, like Puritanism before it, cannot be

¹John Coffey, "Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J.

understood unless it is firmly placed within the longer and broader history of the evangelical Protestant tradition.”² Therefore, evangelicalism shares some important theological tenets with the Reformation. For example, the Reformation was “founded upon the supreme authority of Scripture and centred on intense preoccupation with salvation through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.”³ Each of these theological principles was passed down to the eighteenth-century evangelicals.

While these two theological markers—the authority of the Bible and the saving work of Christ—are integral to a proper understanding of evangelicalism and its connection to the Reformation and Puritanism, more needs to be said about the movement and its expression in eighteenth-century England. Theological continuity exists between eighteenth-century evangelicals and their Reformation and Puritan predecessors, but “there was something genuinely new about the eighteenth-century revivals.”⁴ English evangelicalism was a doctrinal movement and a devotional movement. In other words, to understand evangelicalism properly one must understand its theological thought and its revivalist heart. For example, both theological convictions and a concern for a spiritual awakening of Christianity in England motivated eighteenth-century figures like George Whitefield and John Wesley. Coffey suggests that this longing for revival as well as the practical methods of advancing the cause of the gospel are the two primary ways in which eighteenth-century evangelicalism differed from

Stewart (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 272. Coffey’s essay like the others in this volume run counter to the widely accepted thesis of historian David Bebbington that evangelicalism emerged in the 1730’s by contending for a greater continuity between eighteenth-century evangelicalism and its historical precedents than allowed by Bebbington’s thesis.

²Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” 271.

³Ibid. For a similar description see, Stanly J. Grenz, “Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle,” in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 21-41. Grenz maintains that there are “two central principles that have marked the movement [Evangelicalism] throughout its three-century trajectory: the concern to be a ‘gospel people’ and the concern to be a ‘Scripture people.’”

⁴Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” 275.

Puritanism.⁵

Since a thorough examination of evangelicalism⁶ is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the following discussion will be limited to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture in the eighteenth century. Evangelicalism is built on the belief in the supreme authority of Scripture, a distinguishing characteristic of evangelicalism which historian David Bebbington has called *biblicism*.⁷ Bebbington uses this term to emphasize the way in which the Bible serves not only as the supreme authority in the life of the church but also in the individual lives of Christians. For evangelicals, Scripture and not human reason, intellect, emotion or any other thing is the primary and final arbiter of truth about God and all that God has made.⁸

Even a casual reading of eighteenth-century evangelical literature clearly reveals a great reverence for the authority of Scripture.⁹ Norman Sykes argues that eighteenth-century evangelicals placed Scripture in a “position of authority and popularity as the foundation of doctrine and the inspiration and source of piety.”¹⁰ Such a

⁵Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,” 275.

⁶For a broader historical analysis of evangelicalism, see *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷Bebbington identifies four characteristics of evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism in “Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment,” *Crux* (December 1989): 29-36; “Evangelical Christianity and Romanticism,” *Crux* (March 1990): 9-15; Bebbington links the authority of Scripture to the devotion to the Bible expressed in Evangelicalism in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 12.

⁸This view stands in stark contrast to the Roman Catholic view expressed by Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 65, who states, “None of these authorities [the Rule of Faith and the teaching magisterium of the church] trumps the other, and each is answerable to the other. The authority of the Bible for and in the church, in short, is less a matter of dictation from on high than of conversation in context.”

⁹For a discussion of the authority of Scripture in the Church of England during the eighteenth century, see John Booty, “Reformers and Missionaries: The Bible in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England,” in *Anglicanism and the Bible*, ed. Frederick Hook Borsch (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 117-42.

¹⁰Cited in Booty, “The Bible in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England,” 122.

high regard for Scripture among eighteenth-century evangelicals generally is well-illustrated by specific examples within the evangelical party of the Church of England. William Romaine (1714-1795) believed that the Bible has authority over all areas of life.¹¹ Likewise, Charles Simeon (1759-1836) contended that the knowledge of God and salvation cannot come apart from Scripture.¹² John Wesley also held to high view of Scripture's authority and thought that the Bible and not reason can produce faith.¹³ In addition, Thomas Scott (1747-1821) was "convinced that there was no religion without revelation and no revelation without the Bible."¹⁴ Each of these men are representative of the high view of Scripture that existed among the evangelicals both inside and outside the Church of England.

Although the supreme authority of Scripture was undisputed among evangelicals in the eighteenth century,¹⁵ views of inspiration were not so monolithic. These evangelicals did not deny the inspiration of Scripture but debated the manner in which Scripture was inspired.¹⁶ A good example of this debate can be seen in the minutes of the Eclectic Society, a Christian organization composed of prominent evangelical leaders. According to the January 19, 1800, minutes of the Eclectic Society, the meeting focused on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture.¹⁷ The subject of the meeting was proposed by John Venn (1724-1797), the son of the well-known evangelical

¹¹Booty, "The Bible in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England," 123.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 124.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵L. E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 386.

¹⁶Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

¹⁷John H. Pratt, ed., *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London, During the Years 1798-1814* (1856; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 152.

pastor Henry Venn, who proposed two types of inspiration—plenary and superintendent. By plenary inspiration Venn meant the divine inspiration of the words given to the biblical authors who did not understand all that they were writing.¹⁸ By superintendent inspiration, he meant God’s direction and oversight of the biblical author when he was writing of a historical fact.¹⁹ The comments of Richard Cecil (1748-1810) during this meeting get to the heart of the debate concerning inspiration. Cecil said, “Everybody agrees that *all* Scripture was under an inspiration of superintendence. But there is some danger in considering *all* Scripture as *equally* inspired. God undertakes to furnish man with truth; but he does not undertake to work miracles where no miracle is necessary.”²⁰ Cecil’s view of inspiration was consistent with the view made popular by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) who maintained that there were varying degrees of inspiration.²¹

These varying degrees of inspiration, however, did not imply that certain portions of Scripture were more prone to error but helped “to explain the writing of a wide range of things, all of which are true.”²² The point of debate did not seem to be whether or not Scripture was inerrant or infallible but whether or not inspiration extended to the very words of Scripture or only to the ideas expressed in Scripture. John Venn put it this way, “How far did the Holy Spirit superintend each man’s style and

¹⁸Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 152.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 153.

²⁰*Ibid.* Emphasis original.

²¹Doddridge’s degrees of inspiration were (1) superintendence in which God directs and influences the biblical writer in such a way as to prevent error, (2) elevation in which the biblical writer is enabled to grasp more than what their human faculties might otherwise allow, and (3) suggestion in which God speaks directly to the biblical writer dictating every word.

²²Kenneth J. Stewart, “The Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture, 1650-1850: A Re-examination of David Bebbington’s Theory,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism*, 403. This essay is a response to Bebbington’s argument that eighteenth-century views of plenary inspiration were replaced by a stricter view of inspiration called verbal inspiration. Stewart provides a compelling argument that both verbal and plenary views of inspiration coexisted from the time of the seventeenth century. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 86, contends that the verbal inspiration of Scripture was a view adopted by “the radical Evangelicals of the 1820’s.”

phraseology?”²³ John Newton, who was also present, weighed into the discussion by saying, “When St. Paul says he speaks by *permission*, he implies strongly that on all other occasions it is by *direction*.”²⁴ The consensus of the Eclectic Society meeting seemed to be that Scripture was inspired but in various ways and without error. Newton’s own view on this subject is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Newton’s Doctrine of Scripture

In order to understand and appreciate Newton’s ministry, this section will provide a basic overview of Newton’s doctrine of Scripture by surveying Newton’s sermons and writings in which he addresses the nature and authority of Scripture. What follows is a description of what Newton believed concerning special revelation, the inspiration of Scripture, and the truthfulness and authority of Scripture and the relationship of those beliefs to his ministry as a pastor and preacher.

Scripture Is Divine Revelation

Newton’s published works reveal that he believed Scripture to be divine revelation. In a letter to a gentleman regarding compiling a personal Christian library, Newton cautioned against the reading of many books and urged his reader to read the Bible above everything else.²⁵ He wrote that the Bible is of divine origin and reveals God to man. Newton stated, “God speaks in it [the Bible] and reveals the glory of his perfections, his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace, in a manner worthy of himself, though at the same time admirably adapted to our weakness.”²⁶ His view that

²³Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 153.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 154. Italics original. More will be said of Newton’s comment on this point later in the chapter.

²⁵John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton*. (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 1:236. In this letter Newton advises the study of four “books” (Scripture, creation, providence, and human nature).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 1:239.

the Bible has come from God and reveals God is buttressed by what Newton referred to as Scripture's "simplicity as well as the subject-matter."²⁷ By simplicity, Newton meant that all people, regardless of intellectual ability, can read Scripture and understand its basic message. To understand the Bible, Newton wrote, "does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity."²⁸ By "subject-matter," Newton referred to the Scriptural themes and topics that are of universal interest to the human race. These two characteristics of Scripture, its simplicity and universal relevance, served as practical evidence for Newton that the Bible is God's revelation to mankind.

Newton followed a similar course in addressing the evidence that the Bible is divine revelation in a sermon he preached from Isaiah 60:1-3.²⁹ In the sermon, Newton said, "One strong internal proof that that Bible is a divine revelation, [*sic*] may be drawn from the subject-matter; and particularly that it is the book, and the only book, which teaches us to think highly and honourably of God. I say, the only book; for there is no right knowledge of God where the Bible is not known."³⁰ Therefore, Newton understood the Bible's great subject to be God himself and God's revealed purposes for humanity.

Although Newton regarded the revelation of God in Scripture to be characterized by simplicity, the fact that the subject of the Bible is God and God's purposes for humanity means that the Bible is also full of complexity. Such a view of Scripture called for "caution and modesty" in Newton's view.³¹ In other words, Newton

²⁷Newton, *Works*, 1:239.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹This sermon was the seventh in a remarkable series of fifty sermons Newton preached on the Scripture texts used in Handel's *Messiah*. Newton undertook this lengthy sermon series due to a celebration in London commemorating the centenary of George Frederic Handel in 1785.

³⁰Newton, *Works*, 4:79.

³¹*Ibid.*, 4:305.

did acknowledge that some biblical texts are difficult to interpret. However, such difficulties did not lead Newton away from his belief that God spoke clearly in Scripture. Newton said that because God has a salvific purpose in giving the Bible that God's "manner of teaching is therefore accommodated to our circumstances. He instructs us in heavenly things by earthly."³² For Newton, God's accommodation to human understanding is exemplified in the way God has revealed "himself as the Father, the Husband, and the Friend of his people."³³ Newton's point was that God had revealed himself in these familiar ways so that we might better understand him. These relational categories help human beings to understand particular aspects of God's person. Nevertheless, Newton also believed that such revelation requires that we lay aside our own "preconceived ideas" of these familiar concepts that may not be consistent with God's "perfections."³⁴ All of our ideas must be tested and compared by the full revelation of God given in Scripture.

Newton carefully distinguished between the revelation given in Scripture and spiritual revelation that is given to those who come to faith in the gospel. He made this point quite clearly in his sermon on Matthew 11:25, "The Nature of Spiritual Revelation, and Who Are Favored with It." In this sermon he stated, "The saving knowledge of Divine truth is a revelation."³⁵ Newton, however, went on to say that this type of revelation is not to be equated with revelation when "used in an extraordinary sense, as when of old the Lord made known to his servants, the Prophets, those doctrines and events which, till then, were neither heard nor thought of."³⁶ Newton also was clear in

³²Newton, *Works*, 4:306.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.* 2:392.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 2:393.

his belief that all spiritual revelation given to an individual is “derived from the Scripture.”³⁷ According to Newton, the revelation which is given by the Holy Spirit to an individual regarding the truthfulness of Scripture must be tested by the Scriptures.³⁸

Scripture Is Divinely Inspired

Newton not only believed that Scripture was divine revelation from God to man, but he also believed that Scripture was inspired by God. In the letter mentioned above regarding developing a Christian library, Newton wrote,

The internal characters of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove to every enlightened mind, that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence, [*sic*] are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. Its fulness speaks its author.³⁹

The Bible, according to Newton, was given by inspiration of God. Such inspiration is a matter for the enlightened mind, the mind that has been illumined by the work of the Holy Spirit, to perceive and recognize. In a sermon from Matthew 11:28 titled, “The Present and Future Rest of Believers in Christ,” Newton spoke of the universal longing of the human heart for spiritual rest, a rest that he believed can only be satisfied by the gospel, as another evidence of the divine inspiration of Scripture. He wrote, “From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of every thing [*sic*] that passes, must be given by inspiration from Him who is the searcher of hearts.”⁴⁰

³⁷Newton, *Works*, 2:397.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1:238.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2:470. Newton seemed to be quite fond of this phrase describing God as the “searcher of hearts,” a phrase taken from Rom 8:23. Newton preached a series of sermons on this passage and the phrase is found repeated throughout the notes for one of those sermons. See John Newton, *The Searcher of Hearts*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1997), 30-43.

Newton's understanding of the inspiration of Scripture led him to a deep reverence for Scripture. This reverence and respect for Scripture created a great sense of caution in Newton with regard to textual criticism, a subject with which he was immensely familiar. He stated,

The whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and they who thankfully receive it as his book, will not trifle with it by substituting bold conjectural alterations, which, though they may deem them to be amendments, may possibly disguise or alter the genuine sense of the passage. Some fancied emendations might be pointed out, suggested by very learned men, which do not seem to afford so strong a proof of the sound judgment of the proposers, as of their vanity and rashness. Let the learned men be as ingenious as they please in correcting and amending the text of Horace or Virgil, for it is of little importance to us whether their criticism be well founded or not, but let them treat the pages of divine revelation with reverence.⁴¹

Since all of Scripture is inspired, the Bible is God's book and ought to be treated with reverence and respect. The Bible, for Newton, was not like any other book because it had been inspired.

As mentioned previously, Philip Doddridge made popular a view of inspiration by degrees.⁴² While Newton weighed in on this debate concerning the inspiration of Scripture at the Eclectic Society meeting of January 19, 1800, his comments are a bit vague as to determine whether or not he held to degrees of inspiration as articulated by Doddridge. Some in the Eclectic Society clearly advocated a view of inspiration that extended to the very words of Scripture and not just the ideas.⁴³ During the meeting, Newton said, "Exceptions confirm the rule. When St. Paul says he speaks by *permission*, he implies strongly that on all other occasions it is by *direction*."⁴⁴ Stewart interprets these comments at the meeting to mean that Newton believed that the inspiration of

⁴¹Newton, *Works*, 4:514.

⁴²Kenneth J. Stewart, "The Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture, 1650-1850," 401-3.

⁴³Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 152-54.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 154 (*italics original*).

Scripture was verbal in nature.⁴⁵ Stewart maintains that Newton was in agreement with the view of Rev. H. Foster, another member of the Society present at the meeting, who asserted that the divine inspiration of the Scriptures included both the ideas and the words. Stewart's interpretation of Newton's view seems to be correct, but other statements by Newton make the matter more certain. In a published letter addressed to the "Rev. Mr. B****" Newton was responding to particular questions from his correspondent and stated,

I do not approve of the scholastic distinctions about inspiration, which seem to have a tendency to explain away the authority and certainty of one half of the Bible at least. Though the penmen of Scripture were ever so well informed of some facts, they would, as you observe, need express, full, and infallible inspiration, to teach them which the Lord would have selected and recorded for the use of the church, amongst many others, which to themselves might appear equally important.⁴⁶

In light of this statement, it seems plausible that Newton would have opposed a view of inspiration of varying degrees like that proposed by Doddridge. Newton clearly espoused a view of inspiration in which God actively directs the biblical authors to select and record particular truths or events for the use of the church. Such a view seems to go beyond a model of inspiration in which God merely kept the biblical authors from error. Newton promoted a view of biblical inspiration in which God directs the mind of the biblical author to include the precise content God wanted to be included in Scripture.

Newton went on to write in this letter about historical passages in Scripture that might initially seem "unworthy of the wisdom of the Holy Ghost and dignity of inspiration," and he admitted that "many of them, have often appeared trivial to me."⁴⁷ On this basis, Newton did not conclude that such passages are less inspired or differently inspired than other passages which appear more worthy or dignified. Rather, he

⁴⁵Stewart, "The Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture, 1650-1850," 406.

⁴⁶Newton, *Works*, 2:242.

⁴⁷Ibid.

concluded, “It [the passage of Scripture] must have some importance, because I read it in God’s book.”⁴⁸ Newton exhibited a remarkable depth of humility before Scripture, a humility which is clearly linked to his firm belief in the full inspiration of the biblical text.

Newton’s Use of Scripture

The evangelical view of Scripture held by John Newton is a conviction that has been strenuously criticized and attacked at certain historical moments both from outside and inside the evangelical fold. The responses offered to these various criticisms and attacks upon the traditional evangelical view of Scripture indicate the vital importance the doctrine of Scripture has in evangelical theology and to evangelical preaching. Evangelical scholars have well noted the theological drift produced when the traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture is compromised or denied. As a result of this drift, the practice of ministry is also deeply impacted.

One of the impacts upon practical Christian ministry that occurs with the surrender of a high view of Scripture is the way in which Scripture is no longer seen as useful for practical daily living. What one believes about Scripture will inevitably impact how one makes use of Scripture at a practical level. The connection between what the Bible is and how it is used can be seen even in Scripture itself. For example, Paul connects the inspiration of Scripture and the use of Scripture “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17 NASB). As the inspired word of God, Scripture is the supreme and final authority. J. I. Packer states, “Christianity is ultimately a matter of bowing to His [God’s] authority by obedient response to His revelation.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸Newton, *Works*, 2:243.

⁴⁹J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 95. See also Sinclair B. Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible*

Such a high view of Scripture not only has enormous consequences for the way Scripture is to be used in the church and in the Christian life, but also for the way Scripture shapes pastoral ministry. A high view of Scripture will dramatically impact the pastor's use of Scripture in preaching and teaching as well as his pastoral care of those in the church.⁵⁰ What is at stake in terms of the use of Scripture in preaching and pastoral ministry is the issue of Scripture's authority.

John Newton advanced a view of Scripture in which the Bible is God's divine revelation of himself and God's plan and purpose for humanity. He held a view of Scripture in which the Bible is fully inspired and therefore, authoritative and sufficient. According to Newton, the Bible is the "perfect and infallible system of truth."⁵¹ As a result, Newton has described how the Bible speaks sufficiently to answer every error and human need; he said of Scripture:

Its fulness speaks its Author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek (and we shall not seek in vain) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error, to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every want, directions adapted to every doubt that can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time, are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whoever reads and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty, as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone.⁵²

The inspiration of Scripture led Newton to embrace the all-sufficiency of Scripture. He was confident that Scripture was sufficient to address the needs of all people.

Newton appealed to Scripture and made use of Scripture in his ministry

(Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014), 3.

⁵⁰For a helpful and thorough treatment of the way pastoral care has been impacted by modernism and theological liberalism, see Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 63-82.

⁵¹Newton, *Works*, 1:238.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 1:238-39.

because he had confidence in the power of Scripture to speak to the deepest of human concerns and issues. He stated in a sermon preached in Olney on April 17, 1775, “The manner in which the Word of God addresses our consciences affords a proof that it is indeed from him who knows our frame.”⁵³ Here is the foundation of Newton’s confidence in preaching Scripture and in his pastoral application of Scripture in the care of souls.

In one of the six Liverpool sermons which Newton prepared prior to his ordination and pastoral ministry, he demonstrated his confidence in the Scriptures and their practical importance. He took great care with addressing the exegetical issues related to the text of the sermon, John 5:29.⁵⁴ Furthermore, he articulated the requirements to understand rightly the Scriptures. In the sermon, he offered four basic requirements: sincerity, diligence, humility, and prayer. For each of those four requirements to understand the Scriptures, Newton provided citations from Scripture to substantiate his claims. To illustrate the way in which all of Scripture testifies to Christ, which is the main subject of the text, Newton again made use of several Old Testament citations to support his contention that Jesus Christ “is the main design and subject, both of the whole of Scripture and of each particular book.”⁵⁵ These specific examples illustrate the pervasive way in which Newton made use of Scripture throughout his preaching as the foundation of his pastoral ministry.

Newton made use of Scripture in his preaching and in the extensive work of his pastoral correspondence. Throughout Newton’s letters, readers will find a multitude of uses of Scripture. Very often he provided specific biblical citations related to the

⁵³John Newton, *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton: A Unique Collection of 365 Daily Readings from the Unpublished Sermons and the Writing of John Newton*, ed. Marylne Rouse (Leominster, England: Day One, 2006), April 17 entry.

⁵⁴Newton, *Works*, 2:321.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 2:330.

subject he addresses in the letter, but he may also simply quote a biblical text without citation. In the forty-one letters originally published as separate volumes under the titles *Omicron* and *Vigil*,⁵⁶ Newton offered at least 112 biblical references both with and without a direct quotation of the Scriptural text. In addition, more than one hundred other direct Scriptural quotations appear in these letters but without a specific biblical reference given for those quotations. Newton's most popular collection of letters was a set of 158 letters published in 1781 as *Cardiphonia*.⁵⁷ This collection contains a minimum of 190 biblical references and an additional eighty-four Scriptural quotations that lack a biblical reference.⁵⁸ Whether he simply quoted or gave a specific citation, Newton demonstrated how his high view of Scripture consistently translated into a practical use of Scripture in his ministry.

Examples of each of these practices are far too numerous to recount all of them, but a consideration of few of them will be helpful to see the way in which Newton did this. In a letter to a friend, Newton addressed the subjects of trust in God and helping the poor. Within this letter, Newton encouraged his friend,

I can point out to you better interest and better security than I could possibly give you: Prov. xix. 17, "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again." What think you of this text? Is it the word of God, or not? Is he worthy of belief or not? Is he able to make good his word, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship (which I should be very loath to forfeit), that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disappointed. Read over Matt. vi. 26-34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to primitive times?⁵⁹

⁵⁶The forty-one letters appear in Newton, *Works*, 1:131-422. Twenty-six of the letters were published as *Omicron* in 1774. The remaining letters were published as *Vigil*. The combined set of forty-one letters was first published in 1785.

⁵⁷The full title of the collection is *Cardiphonia or the Utterances of the Heart written in the Course of Real Correspondence On a Variety of Religious Subjects by Omicron*. Grant A. Gordon, "John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent" (Th.M. thesis, Princeton University, 1987), 38, explains that the title was provided to Newton by his friend, the poet William Cowper.

⁵⁸This collection of letters appears in Newton, *Works*, 1:423-704 and 2:3-255.

⁵⁹Newton, *Works*, 1:134-35.

This example illustrates how Newton directly quoted Scripture and gave its biblical citation as well as how he simply gave a biblical reference without quoting the text. Newton urged his friend to consider the promises of God in Scripture and prompted him to consider whether or not he truly believed those promises.

Within the collection of letters published as *Cardiphonia*, Newton included twenty-six letters addressed to a nobleman. In one of those letters dated April 1772, Newton wrote on the depravity of the human heart, a subject he had also addressed in two previous letters to this individual. Toward the end of the letter, Newton wrote,

Every day draws forth some new corruption which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "without me ye can do nothing;" and the necessity of crying with David, "O lead me and guide me, for the Name's sake."⁶⁰

In this instance, Newton provided a quotation of the words of Jesus and the words of David but did not offer the biblical citation for either quote.

Within *Cardiphonia*, Newton also composed several letters to a Mr. B**** who was suffering from some type of tumor.⁶¹ The letter, dated September 28, 1774, has a tender, pastoral tone and is focused on trusting God's purposes. Newton wrote,

Certainly, that at the present juncture, He, to whom all the concatenations and consequences of events are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumour than to be without it; for I have no more idea of a tumour rising (or any other incidental trial befalling you), without a cause, without a need-be without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Salisbury Plain. The promise is express, and literally true, that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to them that love God.⁶²

The clear reference here is to Romans 8:28, but Newton neither identified the quote with quotation marks nor supplied a biblical citation. While no indication of a direct scriptural

⁶⁰Newton *Works*, 1:452.

⁶¹Ibid., 1:619.

⁶²Ibid.

quote is given at that point in the letter, Newton went on to quote other biblical texts within this letter in which he did use quotation marks to indicate he was quoting directly.

For example, he wrote,

Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to what he allots for myself or my friends, and convince me of the propriety of that expostulation, which speaks the language of love as well as authority, “Be still, and know that I am God.”⁶³

The reason why Newton shifts from one method of quotation to another is unclear and may be completely haphazard.

Finally, in a letter published in a collection which was intended as a sequel to *Cardiphonia*, Newton’s use of Scripture continues in the same manner as his other collections. Newton provided both a specific citation and quotes without citation as he did in his other letters. For example, in a letter to Miss M**** dated May 25, 1762, Newton began with a direct quote of 1 Peter 1:3 but with no citation given.⁶⁴ Peter’s words of confidence and assurance written to Christians who were suffering serve to provide a similar tone for Newton’s letter. Near the end of the letter Newton provided a specific citation of Zechariah 3:1-5 and then concluded with an un-cited quotation of Paul who said, “Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?”⁶⁵ This letter and the others referenced above serve as examples of Newton’s method of saturating his spiritual counsel with Scripture.

It should be emphasized that Newton did not conduct his ministry in such a way that he merely pressed for obedience to Scripture. Such a focus in ministry would reduce the Christian life to a form of legalism that Newton sought to avoid.⁶⁶ Although

⁶³Newton *Works*, 1:620.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 6:17.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 6:21.

⁶⁶James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality* (1991; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 87.

calls for obedience to Scripture were certainly included in his ministry, a more fundamental issue related to Newton's view of Christian spirituality is important as well. James Gordon is correct when describing Newton's view of the life of faith; he states that, for Newton, Christian spirituality must not be reduced to "meticulously avoiding sin by rules and prohibitions."⁶⁷ Instead, the life of faith is about being transformed into the image of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit⁶⁸ through "the continuous exposure of the heart to Scripture."⁶⁹ As Newton made use of the Scriptures in his ministry, he was not simply quoting or referencing a biblical text in order to get the recipient of a letter to do something.

Gordon rightly observes that Newton desired a more "instinctive but acquired obedience."⁷⁰ Newton wrote in one of his letters on Paul's command, "Be not conformed to this world." Newton stated that to try and identify the precise point at which this conformity begins is an exercise ill suited for genuine growth in righteousness. He believed that the better path was to have one's mind "formed to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the Word and Spirit of God."⁷¹ Newton's focus was to saturate his spiritual counsel with the truth of God's Word with the aim that those to whom he ministered would be transformed by God's truth.

⁶⁷Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 88. A fuller treatment of Newton's spirituality and the role of Scripture in his spirituality and is provided in the following chapter.

⁶⁸For Newton's view on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the proper interpretation and application of Scripture, see his letter in *Works*, 1:324-31. This letter also appears in John Newton, *Select Letters of John Newton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011), 83-89 and in Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God*, 189-94.

⁶⁹Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 88. For a fuller development of the role of Scripture in evangelical spirituality, see Derek Tidball, "The Bible in Evangelical Spirituality," in *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*, ed. Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 258-74. For an introduction to pastoral theology which includes a historical survey of the field and the unique contribution arising from the Evangelical Revival, see Derek Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1986).

⁷⁰Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 88.

⁷¹Newton, *Works*, 1:275.

In Newton's view, the Bible is not a rule book, and this understanding of Scripture impacted not only the way he made use of the Bible in his ministry but also the way he thought the Bible should be read. In one letter, he offered the following prescription for Bible reading: "To read the Scripture, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense; but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the gospel, as the voice of your Beloved."⁷² This quote clearly shows that Newton was concerned with how the Bible is read and used because through hearing the Scriptures the voice of God is heard.

Conclusion

Like other evangelicals of the eighteenth century, John Newton maintained a high view of Scripture in which the Bible was considered to be divine revelation given to mankind by divine inspiration. Newton believed that God spoke in the Bible and addressed all the pressing issues of humanity. He believed that all of Scripture was inspired by God and was therefore useful for Christian ministry and instructive in all the circumstances in which he and those to whom he ministered found themselves. Thus, Newton founded his ministry on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

This high view of Scripture which was so definitive for the evangelical revival both in the Established church and among the Dissenters is one of the ways that eighteenth-century leaders like Newton were so closely connected to the Puritans and to the Reformation. The divine authority and trustworthiness of Scripture meant that Newton felt a sense of obligation to make use of Scripture throughout the spiritual counsel he provided to so many correspondents and in his preaching from the pulpit. As he pointed others to Scripture, he enabled them to hear so much more than personal

⁷²Newton, *Works*, 1:522.

opinions or human wisdom. He enabled them to hear the voice of God. Newton's view of Scripture served as the foundation for his entire ministry.

CHAPTER 5

NEWTON AND PIETY: THE FOCUS OF MINISTRY

Introduction

As argued in the previous chapter, John Newton's ministry was built on the foundation of the authority of Scripture, but his aim and focus in ministry were not merely to educate or train others in biblical knowledge. He read the Bible and preached the Bible because he firmly believed that people come to know God through the Bible. Newton did not read or study Scripture as an academic or intellectual pursuit but as a spiritual pursuit in the quest to know Christ. This chapter, therefore, will discuss Newton's spirituality or piety (I will use these terms interchangeably throughout this chapter) in order to understand properly its impact on his ministry and preaching. The chapter contends that Newton's spirituality was a Christ-centered piety which gave a Christ-centered direction to his life, his ministry, and his preaching. Newton's aim, to see himself and others shaped into the image of Christ, and the application of this aim in his role as a spiritual counselor will be emphasized. The connection and relationship between Newton's Christ-centered piety and Scripture is also highlighted.

Christ-Centered Spirituality

John Newton's spirituality was centered on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ He wrote, "I trust the great desire of my soul is that Christ may be all in all

¹For a comprehensive treatment of Newton's view of the Christian life, see Tony Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life: To Live is Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). Newton's Christ-centered piety is typical of other eighteenth-century evangelicals. See, for example, the description of Benjamin Francis (1734-99) in Michael A. G. Haykin, *Ardent Love to Jesus: English Baptists and the Experience of Revival in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Bridgend, Wales: Bryntirion Press, 2013), 39-42.

to me, that my whole dependence, love, and aim, may center in him alone.”² A survey of Newton’s published works reveals that his writings and sermons were overflowing with references to Christ and the gospel.³ For example, he wrote of the power of Christ to “enlighten the most ignorant, soften the most obdurate, succour the most tempted, comfort the most distressed, pardon the most guilty.”⁴ He maintained that “the highest wonder ever exhibited to the world, to angels, and men, is the Son of God suffering and dying for sinners.”⁵ He declared that “Christ alone is Lord of conscience,”⁶ and refers to Jesus as the “fountain of grace.”⁷ Of Christ’s sufficiency, Newton said that “though our wants and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all,”⁸ and that Jesus “affords a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care.”⁹ In these and other ways, Newton continually pointed others to Christ and the gospel.

The many references to Christ and the gospel in Newton’s sermons and writings are a result of his Christ-centered spirituality. Reinke correctly observes,

It is not surprising, but it is striking, how consistently Newton focuses his writings and hymns ultimately on the *person* of Jesus Christ. All of Christ’s work and all the combined doctrines of *justification* and *propitiation* and *adoption* are foremost communicated through the relational categories of Christ’s person. At every point in his writings, Newton wants to point other Christians back to Christ, not merely to theological labels. And so Newton points often to the One who gives substance to the concepts and the promises—in order to point us again and again to a man, to the

²Quoted in Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life*, 65.

³Within the six volumes of Newton’s published works, there are over 480 direct references to Jesus Christ and the gospel.

⁴John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton*. (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 6:147.

⁵Ibid., 4:263.

⁶Ibid., 6:229.

⁷Ibid., 1:430.

⁸Ibid., 2:470.

⁹Ibid., 4:13.

God-man, who accomplishes all these things for his eternal glory. A reader of Newton's works is struck by his frequent return to the person of Christ on whom hang all his hopes, not merely to correct outlines of orthodoxy.¹⁰

The fact that his spirituality was intentionally and consciously focused on Christ and the gospel can be seen in a letter dated September 17, 1776, in which Newton wrote,

The love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, is what I would wish to be the abiding object of my contemplation; not merely to speculate upon it as a doctrine, but so to feel it, and my own interest in it, as to have my heart filled with its effects, and transformed into its resemblance; that with this glorious exemplar in my view, I may be animated to a spirit of benevolence, love and compassion to all around me; that my love may be primarily fixed upon Him who has loved me, and then for His sake diffused to all His children and all His creatures.¹¹

The clearly Christ-centered character of Newton's spiritual life is apparent in this statement. He desired to focus on Christ in such a way that he was personally affected and changed. According to Bruce Hindmarsh, Newton's primary concern in terms of experiential piety was that "it was necessary that one's belief was real and not merely nominal—felt in the heart and not simply assented to by the mind."¹² Furthermore, Newton believed that such a focused pursuit of a personal experience with Christ must be an on-going endeavor for every professing believer. In one of his many letters to John Ryland, Jr., Newton said, "A resting in notions of Gospel truth, or in the recollection of past comforts, without a continual thirst for fresh communications from the fountain of life, is, I am afraid, the canker which eats away the beauty and fruitfulness of many professors in the present day."¹³ This type of experiential, Christ-centered spirituality was a focal point of Newton's life and ministry.

While the fervency, warmth, and experiential nature of eighteenth-century,

¹⁰Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life*, 62.

¹¹Newton, *Works*, 2:18-19.

¹²Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 117.

¹³John Newton, *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland, Jr.*, ed. Grant Gordon (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 35.

evangelical piety is evident in Newton's letters, the nature of his spirituality is instructive because Newton was concerned with both mind and affections. He warned that genuine Christian piety must be more than intellectual knowledge. He stated, "A moonlight head-knowledge derived from a system of sentiments, however true in themselves, is, in my judgment, a poor thing."¹⁴ Elsewhere, Newton demonstrated how his own spirituality was deeply heart-felt. In a letter dated April 12, 1781, Newton wrote, "I trust my pen is chiefly devoted to the praise of Jesus your beloved."¹⁵ With this focus on Christ, Newton went on to write,

How can I but wish to praise him, when he has snatched me as a brand from the burning, and quenched the fire of my sins in his own blood? How can I but praise him, if he has given me a glance of his excellency? If any do not love him, it is surely because they do not know him. To see him but once with the eye of the soul, is to be convinced that he is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. His person is glory, his name is love, his work from first to last is grace.¹⁶

Clearly, Newton had experienced the redeeming love of Christ. He was not satisfied with a knowledge of Christ that was severed from this kind of heart-felt experience. He wrote, "But, ah, how faint are my conceptions; how little do I know of him; and how little of that little which I deem my knowledge, is realized to my heart!"¹⁷ The goal of Newton's spirituality was to know Christ in a real and experiential manner, and the ways in which his life fell short of that goal grieved his soul. Newton sought a Christ-centered, experiential piety.

Nevertheless, truth was an essential component of his piety as well. Although Newton was labeled an "Enthusiast" by some bishops in the Anglican Church due to his connections with the evangelical revival, he criticized "those rapturous sallies which are more owing to a warm imagination, than to a just perception of the power and importance

¹⁴Newton, *Works*, 2:18.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 6:349.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 6:350.

of Gospel truth.”¹⁸ According to Newton, “The Gospel addresses both head and heart.”¹⁹ Therefore, Newton’s piety was centered upon Christ in a manner that sought a place for both the mind and the affections. To put it another way, Newton’s piety included both doctrinal or theological content for the mind as well as experiential devotion for the affections. He sought to set his mind on the great truths of the gospel and the person of Christ so that his heart and actions would be transformed. In light of this focus on Christ and the gospel in Newton’s piety, the following paragraphs will seek to summarize his beliefs in these areas.

The most comprehensive statement of Newton’s beliefs concerning Christ and the gospel can be found in his *A Review of Ecclesiastical History* which is essentially a biblical history focused on the New Testament. In this biblical survey, Newton defined the gospel as a “divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, discovering the misery of fallen man by sin, and the means of his complete recovery by the free grace of God, through faith, unto holiness and happiness.”²⁰ While Newton proceeded to define the particular components within his definition, only a few observations need to be made here. First, Newton’s definition of the gospel is centered in Christ and founded on the notion of revelation.²¹ The Scriptures have revealed God and this revelation is centered on the person and work of Christ. Newton wrote, “All the grand peculiarities of the Gospel

¹⁸Newton, *Works*, 2:18.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 2:18.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 3:16. Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, 116 summarizes Newton's view of the gospel in this way: “All men are by nature sinners, utterly unable to do as God commands and subject to his wrath. Jesus Christ made a propitiation for sin by his death and perfect obedience, and he is now exalted to give repentance and forgiveness to all that believe. The Holy Spirit is the only guide into all truth and through the influence of Scripture makes believers wise unto salvation and equips them for good works. Love of God and man is the essence of religion and of the law. Without holiness no one shall see God, but eternal life awaits those who persevere in well-doing though this reward is not of debt but of grace. This was Newton's creed. He chiefly emphasized human depravity, Christ's atonement, and sanctification by the Spirit and the Word.”

²¹For a discussion of Newton’s views on the Bible and revelation, see chap. 4.

centre in this point, the constitution of the person of Christ.”²² Second, only by the gospel does mankind come to comprehend rightly his spiritual condition. The depths of humanity’s sinfulness is grasped by apprehension of the sufferings of Christ. Third, the recovery that comes through faith in the gospel of Christ is one that results in the holiness and happiness of the believer. Thus, the gospel does not leave the believer unchanged. Newton’s view of the gospel, his very definition of the gospel, insists upon an experiential piety that exhibits itself in daily living.

Newton’s concern to define the biblical content of the gospel and the nature of Christ’s person is clear from his definition. This concern is also clear from his effort to address in the concluding chapter of *A Review of Ecclesiastical History* some heretical beliefs during the time of the apostles. Newton asserted that the doctrine of Christ which was preached by the apostles includes the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, and Christ’s death on the cross as a full atonement on behalf of those who believe,²³ and his bodily resurrection.²⁴ Newton defended these fundamental tenets of the gospel and insisted that a departure from these beliefs as contained in Scripture is a departure from the Christian faith. He also insisted that a compromise on these basic gospel doctrines inevitably leads to moral compromise and sin. He argued,

The Gospel truth is a doctrine according to godliness, and has a sanctifying influence; for the grace of God teaches all who are partakers of it, to forsake all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. But errors and heresies, in whatever degree they prevail, have a poisonous effect upon those who admit them. Some are calculated to set aside the whole frame of obedience which we owe to our God and Saviour, and the most refined and plausible will deliver the soul into the power of some easy, besetting, and beloved sin, and furnish arms and arguments to maintain it.²⁵

Once again, Newton maintained a view of doctrinal truth based on and derived from the

²²Newton, *Works*, 3:20.

²³*Ibid.*, 3:276.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 3:286.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 3:291.

teaching of Scripture, and one which is directly linked to practical living.

Newton clearly possessed a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of the soul, a concern he consistently demonstrated for others, as will be seen in the next section of this chapter, but a concern that he also had for himself. He understood the intensity of spiritual battles in the Christian life. Even though he believed in the transforming power of the gospel, he also acknowledged that sinfulness remained in every believer.²⁶ He wrote,

The opposition between nature and grace, flesh and spirit, renders the christian [*sic*] life a state of constant warfare. They are opposite, contrary, contradictory one to the other; no peace or truce can subsist between them. The effects of this conflict extend to every faculty; when grace is in exercise, the motions of sin are noticed, checked and lamented; but they are always sufficiently strong to render our best intentions and best actions defective and polluted.²⁷

Newton freely admitted his own spiritual struggles to his close friend, John Ryland, Jr., in several places in his personal correspondence to him. In a letter dated January 9, 1775, Newton wrote to Ryland, “My chief and abiding trial lies within, but I hope the Lord will sanctify it, to make me by degrees little in my own eyes and to wean me from resting or trusting in anything short of Himself.”²⁸ In another letter to Ryland more than a year later, Newton once again confessed his own spiritual struggle. Following some advice to Ryland regarding serving Christ selflessly and faithfully, Newton stated,

I could give you plenty of good advice upon this head, but I am ashamed to do it, because I so poorly follow it myself. I want to live with him [Jesus] by the day, to do all for him, to receive all from him, to possess all in him, to live all to him, to make him my hiding-place and my resting-place. I want to deliver up that rebel Self to him in chains; but the rogue, like Proteus, puts on so many forms, that he slips from my fingers: but I think I know what I would do if I could fairly catch him.²⁹

²⁶Newton, *Works*, 6:481.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Newton, *Wise Counsel*, 70.

²⁹Ibid., 87-88.

While such candid confession may seem strange or out of place coming from an older pastor and spiritual mentor as Newton was to Ryland, this kind of honest appraisal is typical of Newton. Despite his fame and reputation, he consistently maintained a genuine sense of humility regarding himself and his own piety. In fact, Newton regarded a genuine sense of spiritual humility to be essential in avoiding spiritual atrophy. In an article entitled, “On a Decline in the Spiritual Life,” Newton asserted, “Spiritual pride and self-complacency will likewise infallibly cause a declension in the divine life.”³⁰ He was quite aware of the spiritual battle in his own life and so he described his soul as a “besieged city.”³¹ He recognized the spiritual battle raged not only because of that “legion of enemies without the gates” of his soul but also because of “a nest of restless traitors within, that hold a correspondence with them without; so that I am deceived and counteracted continually.”³² Despite this intense spiritual battle, Newton was confident about the outcome. He said, “Indeed, it is a miracle that I still hold out. I trust, however, I shall be supported to the end, and that my Lord will at length raise the siege, and cause me to shout deliverance and victory.”³³ Thus, the piety of John Newton is a Christ-centered spirituality in which he sought to see himself progressively overcome his own sinfulness and be transformed into the image of Christ.

Christ and Pastoral Ministry

Newton’s Christ-centered spirituality not only led him to seek to be transformed into the image of Christ, but it also motivated him to see others formed into Christ’s image. The extensive nature of his pastoral ministry makes this abundantly

³⁰Newton, *Works*, 6:407. Newton also gave theological error, love for things of the world, and physical illness as potential causes of spiritual decline.

³¹Newton, *Wise Counsel*, 88.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

clear. Newton has been described as “the St. Francis de Sales of the Evangelical movement, the great spiritual director of souls through the post.”³⁴ Newton spent vast amounts of time writing letters through which he offered advice and spiritual counsel to a great number of people who sought out his wisdom for their particular concerns. Many of these letters would eventually be published during Newton’s lifetime or soon after his death.³⁵ Through these letters we gain insight into Newton’s work of pastoral care as he labored to apply the truth of Scripture to the practical and spiritual needs of those who sought his counsel.

As significant as Newton’s letters are to his contribution as a pastoral theologian, his pastoral care was not limited to the counsel he offered through his personal correspondence. Newton was first and foremost a preacher and a pastor. In reference to his pastoral ministry in Olney, Newton stated in a letter, “My afternoons are generally spent in visiting the people, three or four families a day.”³⁶ In addition to the personal visits with the members of his congregation, Newton also met with several people each week for counseling in his study. In the many demands that pressed upon Newton for his time and attention, he was absolutely determined to let nothing deter him from the care of his flock. He wrote, “I have seldom one-hour free from interruption. Letters that must be answered, visitants that must be received, business that must be attended to. I have a good many sheep and lambs to look after, sick and afflicted souls dear to the Lord; and therefore whatever stands still, these must not be neglected.”³⁷ As

³⁴Quoted in Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*, 221.

³⁵Some of Newton’s letters were published in the *Gospel Magazine* under the pen names Omicron and Vigil. Others would be compiled in book form as *Cardiphonia, or the Utterance of the Heart; in the Course of a Real Correspondence*. Newton also published *Letters to a Wife*, a collection of letters he had written to his wife, three years after her death.

³⁶Cited in Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 187.

³⁷Quoted in John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 55. While much could

the above discussion demonstrates, Newton made great efforts to provide pastoral care through both personal correspondence and personal ministry within his congregations.

One significant aspect of employing a dependable, pastoral wisdom in the course of ministry is the possession of an understanding of people. Newton perceived the importance of this type of pastoral knowledge and made a special effort to advance in it. He wrote,

For myself, if it be lawful to speak of myself, and as far as I can judge, anatomy is my favourite branch: I mean, the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace, in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death.³⁸

Newton was a people person in the best kind of way. He clearly had great concern for individuals, their needs, their struggles, and their souls, and he labored to understand them both practically and spiritually. Grant Gordon is correct in his observation that Newton's effectiveness in this area of his pastoral ministry was in part due to his "power of observation."³⁹ Gordon maintains that Newton's ability to observe the lives of people around him and to deduce patterns of behavior that he could then connect to specific biblical principles enabled Newton to offer wise and relevant counsel to those to whom he ministered. According to Richard Cecil's biography, Newton's continual observation of those around him led Newton to comment that a pastor should "always be in his study."⁴⁰ In other words, the pastor is always studying human nature in his observation of those around him. The intensity of this study of human nature for pastoral work led Cecil to remark, "In the knowledge of God, of his word, and of the human heart in its

be gained from a study of Newton's direct counsel in the lives of men like William Cowper, this will not be taken up in this dissertation.

³⁸Quoted in Bruce Jenkins, "The Wisdom of John Newton," in *Triumph through Tribulation: Papers read at the 1998 Westminster Conference* (Mirfield, England: The Westminster Conference, 1998), 71.

³⁹Grant A. Gordon, "John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent" (Th.M thesis, Princeton, 1987), 91.

⁴⁰Newton, *Works*, 1:92.

wants and resources, Newton would have stood among mere scholars, as his name-sake the philosopher stood in science among ordinary men.”⁴¹

Newton’s insight into human nature is certainly a pivotal component of his great genius as a spiritual counselor. The wisdom of Newton’s counsel which grew out of his careful consideration of the human heart has been a subject observed and discussed by others.⁴² Newton was a spiritual counselor who possessed great wisdom as well as great tenderness. Although some have criticized Newton for being harsh in some of his letters, the overall impression Newton leaves is that he was a man of compassion, love and tenderness.⁴³

While these qualities are certainly important in an understanding of Newton as a pastor, the focus here is to emphasize the Christ-centered nature of Newton’s pastoral work and counsel. Grant Gordon provides an excellent overview of the theological themes that appear throughout the corpus of Newton’s letters, and he identifies six distinct theological subjects that appear with frequency—human depravity, progressive sanctification, Satanic opposition, the sovereignty of God, the necessity and benefits of suffering, and the all-sufficiency of Christ.⁴⁴ Identifying these six theological subjects is both instructive and helpful in rightly understanding Newton’s pastoral ministry. The theological dimension of Newton’s letters underscores the fact that Newton’s piety, as discussed above, involved the mind as well as the heart. Nevertheless, more needs to be said concerning the theological dimension of Newton’s spiritual counsel.⁴⁵ Not only did

⁴¹Newton, *Works*, 1:92.

⁴²See Jenkins, “The Wisdom of John Newton,” and Newton, *Wise Counsel*.

⁴³For a rebuttal to the possible misreading of Newton’s letters as too harsh and insensitive see Gordon, “John Newton: A Study of a Pastoral Correspondent,” 49. For a plea to appreciate the “habitual tenderness” of Newton see Piper, *The Roots of Endurance*, 53.

⁴⁴Gordon, “John Newton,” 84-91.

⁴⁵By emphasizing the theological dimension of Newton’s spiritual counsel, I am not arguing that other elements are unimportant. Gordon, 91 rightly maintains that “the force in Newton’s counsel is

Newton dwell on important theological subjects but his focus on Christ appears to have undergirded and guided him as a spiritual counselor.

While Newton's high view of Scripture served as the foundation of his work as a spiritual counselor, Jesus Christ was the primary focus and aim of that work. As noted in the previous chapter, Newton was not primarily concerned with motivating those under his ministry simply to obey Scripture. He was primarily concerned with seeing others formed into the image of Christ. As Gordon correctly points out, Newton's Christ-centered counsel was "not something theoretical" for him.⁴⁶ The doctrine of Christ crucified was a matter of practical spirituality and faithful obedience to the Scriptures. Therefore, this section of the chapter will explore the way Newton pointed others to Christ in their times of temptation and trial.

The previous section of this chapter showed that Newton's writings are filled with references to Christ and the gospel. He continually pointed others to Christ and the gospel because he believed only Christ and the gospel could answer the real needs of the human heart. Through the gospel of Christ believers are led to holiness and happiness. Newton wrote,

The riches of grace and wisdom in this dispensation [of the gospel] are unsearchable and immense, imparted in different measures, and increased from time to time, according to the good pleasure of the Spirit of God, who furnishes his people with light and strength proportioned to their exigences [*sic*], situation, and the services or trials he calls them to; not without respect to the degree of their diligence, obedience, and simplicity in waiting upon him.⁴⁷

According to Newton, true faith in Christ and the gospel will not be found apart from a life of godly obedience and holiness. He believed that the gospel doctrines of free grace

not only the result of his theological perspective but of his method of learning and his style of communicating." Gordon lists the power of observation, the power of illustration, the power of humiliation, the power of affection, the power of identification, the power of expression, and the power of application as other elements which increase the impact of Newton's spiritual counsel.

⁴⁶Gordon, "John Newton," 90.

⁴⁷Newton, *Works*, 3:17.

and justification by faith consistently lead to a fulfillment of the “practical duties of Christianity.”⁴⁸ He also believed that faith in Christ provides substantial support through every challenge brought into the life of the believer. Through a living faith in Christ, the believer

renounces all confidence in the flesh, and rejoices in Christ Jesus as his Saviour; and thus he attains to worship God in spirit and in truth, is supported through all the conflicts and trials of life, possesses a stable peace in the midst of a changing world, goes on from strength to strength, and is, at length made more than conqueror, through him that has loved him. This is the life of faith.⁴⁹

Faith in Christ as well as a consistent focus upon Christ’s love is central to Newton’s thought. He stated,

The constraining love of Christ engages the heart and every faculty in his service. His example illustrates and recommends precepts, his presence inspires courage and activity under pressure, and the prospect of glory to be revealed is a continual source of joy and peace, which passeth the understanding of the natural man.⁵⁰

Throughout his correspondence as a spiritual counselor Newton showed the application of these views concerning the centrality of Christ in every season of the believer’s life.

Newton’s view of Christ and the gospel reflects the common experiential emphasis made by other evangelicals and is therefore not unique.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this experiential emphasis of the gospel in Newton’s writing is key to a proper appreciation of his pastoral ministry. Throughout his many letters to various correspondents, the Christ-centered counselor of souls was continually pointing others to the person and work of Christ. In his letters to a nobleman, Newton wrote that

we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed unto us

⁴⁸Newton, *Works*, 3:33.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 3:32.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 3:34.

⁵¹James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality* (1991; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 4, describes the evangelical stating, “Lived doctrine centered on Christ, growth towards maturity measured by Christ, and moral renewal after the image of Christ provide the goals of the Christian spiritual life.”

under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the Scripture, holds out to our faith a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to ever objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty, he is our Righteousness; if we are sick, he is our infallible Physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenceless [*sic*], he is the compassionate and faithful Shepherd who has taken charge of us, and will not suffer any thing to disappoint our hopes, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust, and has engaged to guide us by his counsel, support us by his power, and at length to receive us to his glory, that we may be with him for ever.⁵²

In this particular passage, the very essence of Newton's approach to providing spiritual counsel is seen in its fullness. He did not always connect the counsel he offered with the same breadth of gospel expression as found in this letter, but throughout his many other letters to other individuals, Newton frequently emphasized one or more of the themes found here.

Throughout the letters of John Newton, readers will find that he addressed a wide range of subjects and issues, but one of the most recurring subjects is that of trials and afflictions being experienced in the lives of his correspondents. On these occasions, Newton's counsel was especially filled with appeals to the comforts and hope found in the gospel as well as plenteous instruction on how to look to Christ for strength, encouragement, and sympathy. Space will not permit an exhaustive discussion of the many examples of this aspect of Newton's spiritual counsel. Therefore, what follows is a sampling from a few of his letters in which Jesus Christ was central to his counsel to correspondents in their moment of trial and affliction.

Christ's Presence

One of the ways that Newton provided Christ-centered spiritual counsel was by focusing upon the spiritual presence of Christ. In a letter addressed to Mrs. G**** dated June 20, 1776, counsel was given to the recipient who had been experiencing a time of separation from Christian fellowship. She was reminded that "Jesus is all-sufficient, and

⁵²Newton, *Works*, 1:439.

he is always near.”⁵³ Through the “word of grace” and the “throne of grace,” Newton counseled this believer to embrace the presence of Christ.⁵⁴ He wrote of the experience of Christ’s presence with believers in this way, “Every room in the house, yea, every spot they stand on, fields, lanes, and hedge-rows, all is holy ground to them; for the Lord is there.”⁵⁵ This is a particularly striking example of Newton’s spiritual counsel because during the initial years of his Christian life, Newton himself faced this same struggle in isolation from other believers. With great tenderness and compassion, Newton proceeded to write in this letter, “Yes, madam, though we cannot see him, he sees us; he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves.”⁵⁶ Through the remainder of the letter Newton pointed Mrs. G**** to Christ and to the great joy and comfort found in communion with him while she experienced this isolation from other believers.

On May 25, 1775 Newton wrote a letter to a man regarding the joy of a birth of a child and his own personal joy in their adopted daughter.⁵⁷ In response to the man’s question about Newton’s spiritual life, Newton recounted the various ways that God had blessed. He wrote,

Blessed be his name, he keeps and supports me. He keeps the flock committed to my care, so that we are in the main preserved from offences and from strife. Now and then he brings a stray lamb into the fold, and often he is seen in the fold himself. Then the sheep are happy, for they know his voice, and admire his love. And we know he is present when we cannot see him, or else the wolf would quickly break in and scatter us.⁵⁸

In this example, Newton emphasized the presence of Christ in the church rather than with an individual believer. Nevertheless, he makes a similar point—the presence of Christ

⁵³Newton, *Works*, 1:679.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 6:106.

⁵⁸Ibid., 6:107.

brings joy to his people. While Newton clearly took up biblical imagery here concerning Christ as shepherd, he applied it in an unexpected way. As shepherd, Christ's presence brought happiness. As the chief shepherd of souls, Christ's presence and work among the flock was a spiritual reality that caused Newton to rejoice. Newton's second application in this letter is in regard to the security or protection that Christ's presence brings.

Within the previous example, Newton mentioned the possibility of those times when the presence of Christ is not evident. He discussed the same subject in another letter addressed to Miss M. B****. The letter, dated November 11, 1775, is concerned about the value that comes when the believer even feels cut-off from the presence of Christ. According to Newton, Christ will "withdraw from our perceptions: and as, in the absence of the sun, the wild beasts of the forest roam abroad; so when Jesus hides himself, we presently perceive what is in our hearts, and what a poor shift we can make without him."⁵⁹ Once again, the centrality of communion with Christ and the necessity of that communion is clearly foundational to the spiritual counsel Newton offered. Christ's presence gives strength and blessing; Christ's perceived absence drives the believer to realize his desperate need for his Savior.

Newton offered his biblical understanding of Christ's presence in a sermon in which he spoke of God dwelling with his people. He believed that every believer is "sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and anointed with the holy unction, becomes a consecrated temple of the Holy Ghost."⁶⁰ He also points to the Scriptures which teach that Christ dwells in the hearts of believers.⁶¹ Furthermore, Newton briefly outlined in this sermon his belief that Christ's presence is also with his church. Through his presence among them, Christ blesses his church but "if he withdraws, *Ichabod* may be

⁵⁹Newton, *Works*, 1:637.

⁶⁰Ibid. 4:333.

⁶¹Ibid.

written upon their solemn assemblies.”⁶² Newton spoke in a similar way in an earlier sermon as well. He stated,

This is his church, comprising all the members of his mystical body. He dwells in each of them individually; he dwells in and among them collectively. Where two or three are met in his name, where his ordinances are administered and prized, where his Gospel is faithfully preached and cordially received, there he is present in the midst of them. There his glory is seen, his voice heard, his power felt, his goodness tasted and the savour of his name is diffused as a precious ointment, which refreshes the hearts of his people, renews their strength, and comforts them under all their sorrows and cares.⁶³

Elsewhere, Newton spoke of the presence of Christ in terms of “a real, though mystical union between Christ and his people.”⁶⁴ He continued, “They dwell in him by faith, he dwells in them by his Spirit.”⁶⁵ Newton taught that God’s presence is a blessing provided for all of God’s people regardless of their status in the world. He stated, “He is equally near to them that fear him in every situation of life; as the sun shines, as freely and fully, upon a cottage as upon a palace.”⁶⁶

Similarly, in a letter to a lady who had suffered from some sort of physical illness, Newton referred to the blessing of knowing the Lord’s presence.⁶⁷ He wrote of the assurance that comes from knowing the Lord’s presence in every circumstance. He referred to his own personal struggle that came with living in London and his frequent desire to leave behind the “noise, smoke, and dust” of the city so that he might “spend a day or two among woods, and lawns, and brooks, and hedge-rows, to hear the birds sing in the bushes, and to wander among the sheep and lambs, or to stand under the shadow of

⁶²Newton, *Works*, 4:334. Italics original.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 4:36.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 4:85.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 4:119.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 6:364-67.

an old oak upon a hilltop.”⁶⁸ Although Newton experienced these longings, he recounted the contentment he found in knowing that the Lord was with him in London just as he had been with him in rural Olney. He wrote,

No, welcome noise, and dust, and smoke; so that we may but be favoured with his gracious presence in our hearts, houses, and ordinances. This will make all situations nearly alike, if we see the Lords hand placing us in it, are enabled to do his will, and to set him before us, as our Lord and our Beloved.⁶⁹

Such tender words would have been a source of encouragement and hope to the poor and common people who gathered to hear Newton preach the Scriptures. Furthermore, these examples from Newton’s sermons not only share a common theme with the examples from his letters, but they also illustrate the way he made use of this spiritual truth to encourage and console believers. These examples also show that the presence of Christ was important for both the individual Christian and the corporate church.

Christ’s Sympathy and Consolation

Newton’s spiritual counsel also expressed Christ-centeredness in the emphasis laid upon the sympathy with which Christ meets the believer in the trials and afflictions of life. Throughout his correspondence, Newton wrote of Christ as our great High priest who was made like us in our humanity in his incarnation.⁷⁰ Because of Christ’s incarnation, Newton stated that Christ has “an experimental sympathy with his poor people.”⁷¹ As a result, Newton wrote in a letter to Lord Dartmouth dated August 1775,

He [Christ] knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us. Hence arises encouragement. We have not a high priest who cannot be touched

⁶⁸Newton, *Works*, 6:365.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 1:458; 1:512; 1:596; 2:143; 2:34-37; and 6:66 are some examples.

⁷¹Ibid., 1:512.

with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted even as we are.⁷² He appealed to the humanity of Christ in a letter to a lady who was experiencing physical illness and wrote, “Circumstances and creatures may change; but he [Christ] will be an unchangeable [*sic*] friend. The way is rough, but he trod it before us, and is now with us in every step we take; and every step brings us nearer to our heavenly home.”⁷³ By pointing to Christ as high priest, Newton called his readers to consider how Christ “feels and exercises in the highest degree those tendernesses and commiserations, which I conceive are essential to humanity in its perfect state.”⁷⁴

Additionally, in a letter concerning temptation in the life of a believer, Newton again looked to Christ’s experience of temptation as a source of counsel and comfort. He wrote, “The great duty and refuge of the tempted now is, to apply to him [Christ]; and they have the highest encouragement to do so, in that they are assured he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.”⁷⁵ As an encouragement to prayer Newton also looked to Jesus in his mediatorial office.⁷⁶ He reminded his correspondent that “we have an Advocate with the Father, who is able to pity, to pardon, and to save to the uttermost.”⁷⁷ Newton appealed to the many examples in the life of Christ in which he demonstrated the amazing depths of his compassion and mercy toward those who are afflicted. For example, Newton referred to Jesus’ response to the death of Lazarus in order to comfort a grieving lady. In his letter to this lady, Newton wrote, “He [the Lord] allows, that afflictions are at present not joyous, but grievous; yea, he was pleased when upon earth to

⁷²Newton, *Works*, 1:512.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 2:183.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 2:20.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 1:230.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 2:143.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

weep with his mourning friends when Lazarus died.”⁷⁸

Even though Christ is now ascended to heaven, he is no less sympathetic in his now exalted state. Christ is not an “unconcerned spectator of his suffering children. No, with the eye, and the ear, and the heart of a friend, he attends to their sorrows; he counts their sighs, puts their tears in his bottle.”⁷⁹

In addition to Christ’s sympathy, Newton pointed believers to the consolation found in Christ. In a letter dated October 31, 1767, Newton wrote to a woman experiencing physical sickness of some kind. He said, “I trust this sickness of your body is, and shall be, for the health of your soul; yea, perhaps even now, if you were able to write, you would tell me that, as your afflictions abound, your consolations in Christ do much more abound.”⁸⁰ Newton continued on in this letter to express pity for those who have no God and no friends to whom they can go in times of sickness. In this manner, he elevated the glorious privilege of the believer who finds consolation in Christ so as to encourage Mrs. W**** to “meditate upon these things” and from this meditation “find your heart sweetly composed into a frame of resignation to bear, as well as to do, the will of your heavenly Father.”⁸¹

Christ’s Image

One of the most important points recurring throughout Newton’s letters is the way in which suffering works to conform believers to the image of Christ. A letter to “Mrs. ****” dated December 1776 was entirely devoted to the subject of the purpose of trials and affliction. Among the several benefits that come out of times of trial, Newton included the way that afflictions “advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord, who was a

⁷⁸Newton, *Works*, 2:33.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 2:20

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 6:71.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 6:72.

man of sorrows for our sake.”⁸² Another letter to the same individual but dated nearly two years later continued to address the benefits received from affliction. In this letter, the recipient was counseled to submit to God’s will in her trials in order to “come out of the furnace refined, more humble, and more spiritual.”⁸³ The context of the previous letter clearly indicates that this is a further description of what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ. The same theme is found also in a letter to Mrs. **** in which Newton stated, “So again, it is by our own sufferings we learn to pity and sympathize with others in their sufferings: such a compassionate disposition, which excites our feelings for the afflicted, is an eminent branch of the mind of Christ.”⁸⁴ Through suffering the believer advances in spiritual growth and is conformed to the image of Christ.

The spiritual process of growth that arises from experiences of affliction is spoken of as “the school of the cross” in which believers are instructed in “the happy art of extracting *real* good out of *seeming* evil, and to grow tall by stooping.”⁸⁵ According to Newton, such learning is not naturally received but is a product of the effects of grace in the heart. He maintained that “grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering; yea, it cares not what it endures, so sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased.”⁸⁶ Newton wrote similarly of enduring temptation. He said, “By enduring temptation, you as a living member of the body of Christ, have the honour of being conformed to your Head.”⁸⁷ Newton considered the experience of temptation as a means

⁸²Newton, *Works.*, 2:24.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 2:25.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 2:198.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 2:217. Italics original.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 1:230.

of bringing believers into conformity with the character of Jesus Christ. Newton went on to say, “As by temptations we are conformed to the *life* of Christ, so likewise, by the sanctifying power of grace, they are made subservient to advance our conformity to his *image*.”⁸⁸ Newton considered the sympathy and assistance that one believer can offer another as one way that the image of Christ is formed in the believer.⁸⁹ As Christ comes to the assistance of those tempted, believers who are conformed to the image of Christ also come to the aid of others who experience temptation and affliction. In many ways, conformity to the image of Christ is the chief goal that Newton envisioned for the believer and this conformity is almost entirely forged in the crucible of suffering.

The spiritual counsel offered in Newton’s many letters is thoroughly Christ-centered and anchors every thought to the message of the gospel. Just as a longing and love for Christ and the gospel filled the heart of John Newton, so his spiritual counsel was filled with Christ and the gospel. He remained centered on Christ and the gospel as he directed others to consider the presence of Christ, the consolation and sympathy of Christ, and the over-arching aim of being conformed to the image of Christ.

Newton also understood that he had nothing substantial to offer those in need of counsel apart from communicating the message of the gospel to them. He wrote in a letter, “O for a ray of Divine light to set me at liberty, that I might write a few lines worth reading, something that might warm my heart and comfort yours! Then the subject must be Jesus.”⁹⁰ His spiritual counsel was derived fully and completely from the gospel. In a letter to another pastor, Newton also focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ and stated,

Come, let us not despair; the fountain is as full and as free as ever: precious fountain, ever flowing with blood and water, milk and wine. This is the stream that heals the wounded, refreshes the weary, satisfies the hungry, strengthens the weak,

⁸⁸Newton, *Works*, 1:231. Italics original.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., 2:180.

and confirms the strong: it opens the eyes of the blind, softens the heart of stone, teaches the dumb to sing, and enables the lame and paralytic to walk, to leap, to run, to fly, to mount up with eagle's wings; a taste of this stream raises earth to heaven, and brings down heaven upon earth. Nor is it a fountain only; it is a universal blessing, and assumes a variety of shapes to suit itself to our wants. It is a sun, a shield, a garment, a shade, a banner, a refuge: it is bread, the true bread, the very staff of life; it is life itself, immortal, eternal life!⁹¹

In this statement to another minister of the gospel, Newton not only provided gospel-centered counsel to his friend but also revealed his passionate, Christ-centered approach to pastoral work. Newton used the gospel to draw himself and his fellow pastor away from despair because he understood the incredible transformative power of the gospel of Christ. He understood the limitless applications of the gospel in the broad and varied needs of all people. The boundless “fountain” of the gospel and “its universal blessing” to all “our wants” was the driving-force of Newton’s spiritual life and his pastoral ministry.

In another letter, Newton assured his correspondent by pointing to the gospel by asking, “Has he not made known unto us his love, his blood, his righteousness, his promises, his power, and his grace, and all for our encouragement?”⁹² This gospel-centered question shows that Newton believed the gospel to be a source of “encouragement” for those who believed it. Therefore, he counseled, “Away then with all doubting, unbelieving thoughts; they will not only distress your heart but weaken your hands.”⁹³ By continually explaining the gospel and pointing to Christ, Newton believed that he, his congregation, and all who sought his counsel would find strength, comfort, hope, direction, and encouragement for all of life.

Newton wrote to a friend who was in a protracted experience of suffering and as a result was quite discouraged.⁹⁴ Over the course of the letter Newton took his friend

⁹¹Newton, *Works*, 2:68.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 2:143.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 6:377.

on an imagined walk to envision the suffering of Christ. His reason for doing this was his conviction that joy must come from “a source which is invariably the same; in other words, from Jesus.”⁹⁵ Newton then went on to write of Jesus, “O, that name! What a person, what an office, what a love, what a life, what a death, does it recall to our minds.”⁹⁶ By this recollection of Jesus Christ, Newton invited his troubled friend to “leave *our* troubles to themselves for awhile” and “take of view of *his*.”⁹⁷ Newton’s intention was not to minimize the struggle and suffering of his friend. He readily acknowledged its severity in the opening of his letter.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, he considered the suffering of Jesus to be infinitely greater than the suffering of his friend. He said that to compare the sufferings of Christ with our suffering is “to weigh a mote against a mountain; against the universe!”⁹⁹ Through this comparison, however, Newton wanted to show that though at times our troubles feel “very heavy” by looking at Christ’s suffering those same trials are seen to be “light.”¹⁰⁰ Newton wanted to encourage his friend with all that Christ’s suffering had accomplished so despair might be replaced with joy.

His Christ-centered emphasis might be summarized best in his own words:

The best advice I can send, or the best wish I can form for you, is, that you may have an abiding and experimental sense of those words of the apostle, which are just now upon my mind,—”Looking unto Jesus.” The duty, the privilege, the safety, the unspeakable happiness, of a believer, are all comprised in that one sentence.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵Newton, *Works*, 6:378.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.* Italics original.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 6:377.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 6:378.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.* 6:379.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 6:4

Conclusion

The chapter has argued that the piety of John Newton was thoroughly centered on Christ and provided an overall Christ-centered direction to his life and his ministry. He consistently focused on the gospel for his own spiritual health and believed that his role as spiritual counselor for others must also be focused on the gospel, a gospel revealed in Scripture and powerful in the spiritual transformation of believers. He filled his counsel with thoughts on the presence of Christ, the consolation of Christ, and the sympathy of Christ. Newton's goal, to see himself and others shaped into the image of Christ, and the application of this aim in his role as a spiritual counselor has been examined in an effort not only to understand better Newton himself but also as a means of gaining a better appreciation of his ministry of preaching.

CHAPTER 6

NEWTON'S GOSPEL-CENTRIC HOMILETIC

The life and ministry of John Newton was built on the foundation of the authority of Scripture and focused on a personal piety centered on Jesus Christ. Newton's piety or spirituality was focused on Christ and the gospel which reveals Christ. The previous chapter has discussed Newton's view of the gospel and its role in his spirituality as well as the way his spirituality shaped his pastoral ministry. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the way the gospel shaped and directed Newton's preaching. The chapter will argue that both the content of Newton's preaching and the methods of his preaching were centered on the gospel. Therefore, the chapter will be divided into two major sections; the first section will demonstrate that the content of Newton's preaching centered on the message of the gospel, and the second section will demonstrate that Newton's preaching methods were guided by his message, the gospel. In other words, in both content and commitment, Newton's preaching was marked by a gospel-centric homiletic.

Preaching and the Message of the Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ was central to the preaching of John Newton. Even from the moment that he began to contemplate entering pastoral ministry, he was determined that his ministry and his preaching would be centered on Christ and the gospel. As mentioned previously, in his "Miscellaneous Thoughts and Enquires Upon an Important Subject," a document which records his reflections during a time of personal examination regarding whether or not to pursue pastoral ministry, Newton wrote of his

commitment to “three great branches of divine truth.”¹ The first of those truths that Newton described was given the heading, “The Doctrine of Jesus Christ Crucified.”² Within this section of his journal, Newton asserted that his preaching would emphasize Christ’s “person and offices, his wonderful love and condescension, his power, faithfulness and readiness to save, the grandeur of his works, the perfection of his example, his life, passion, death and resurrection.”³ In this commitment to preach Christ crucified Newton was making the gospel central to his message. Later, in a letter to the dissenting pastor Samuel Palmer, Newton wrote, “The doctrine of Jesus Christ, and him crucified, is the Sun of the intellectual world.”⁴ For Newton all things, including preaching, revolved around Christ and the message of the gospel. He believed in the necessity of this type of gospel-centered preaching for the spiritual well-being and growth of believers and for the salvation of unbelievers. He stated, “I think a discourse of this kind should seldom be concluded without a solemn expostulation to sinners—of the danger of neglecting this great salvation, and to saints—to show their love to the Lord by hating and renouncing everything that is evil.”⁵ Thus, prior to beginning his ministry of preaching, Newton was convinced of the centrality of the gospel for the ministry of preaching.

Such Christ-centered, gospel thinking which dominated Newton’s mind and shaped his views on preaching was not unique to him but arose from the influence evangelicalism had on Newton. The necessity of keeping Christ and the gospel at the

¹John Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, ed. Marlynn Rouse (Stratford-upon-Avon: The John Newton Project, 2008), 22. The other two “branches” are examined in chap. 7.

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid.

⁴Cited in Tony Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life: To Live is Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 61.

⁵Ibid.

forefront of ministry and preaching was a concern held by other eighteenth-century evangelicals in England and once more indicates the way in which Newton was so closely tied to the evangelical movement.⁶ Charles Simeon, for example, promoted a view of Scripture which was centered on Christ so that Christ is to be heard speaking through every part of Scripture.⁷ Others, like Henry Venn, saw the dangers of the type of preaching that was totally given over to moralistic appeals while failing to proclaim the gospel.⁸ Newton would concur with both Simeon and Venn on these matters. The following paragraphs will explore each of these aspects, the necessity of preaching the gospel rather than moralism and Christ-centered hermeneutics, as they relate to Newton's preaching. The way in which Newton applied the gospel to believers and unbelievers as well as his concern for unity in the gospel will also be explored.

A Christo-centric Hermeneutic

First, Newton's preaching was guided by a Christ-centered hermeneutic which led him to preach gospel-centered sermons. In a sermon on Malachi 3:1-3 Newton proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prophecy concerning the Lord coming into the temple. Newton maintained that unless Jesus Christ is regarded as God who has come in the flesh "the whole tenor, both of the Old and New Testament is unintelligible."⁹ In other words, Jesus Christ is essential to properly interpreting all of

⁶See Horton Davies, *From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1750*, vol. 3 of *Worship and Theology in England*, combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 212, who argues that the cross was the "theme" of evangelical preaching in eighteenth-century England.

⁷John Booty, "Reformers and Missionaries: The Bible in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England," in *Anglicanism and the Bible*, ed. Frederick Houk Borsch (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 128-29. For an examination of Simeon's preaching, see J. I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 140-54.

⁸Booty, "Reformers and Missionaries," 120.

⁹John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton*. (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 4:45.

Scripture. Although in this particular sermon, Newton was preaching from an overtly messianic text, he clearly believed, as will be shown below, that Christ is central to interpreting every Old Testament text and not merely the messianic texts. His comment in this sermon simply illustrates a pattern of biblical interpretation in Newton's preaching. This pattern in Newton's ministry—that Christ and the gospel which reveals Christ are central to the Scriptures, and therefore, must be central to preaching as well—will be developed further in the following paragraphs.

Before further analysis of Newton's sermons and his Christo-centric hermeneutic, the basis of this type of interpretation in Newton's thought must be understood. Newton offered the basis of his Christo-centric hermeneutic in his sermon on John 5:39 entitled, "On Searching the Scriptures." He explained that Christ "is the main design and subject, both of the whole Scripture and of each particular book."¹⁰ While he acknowledged that Christ may not be readily apparent in every text of the Old Testament, he considered Christ to be central to each text in terms of "prophecies, types, and ceremonies."¹¹ According to Newton, the prophecies or promises of God's redemptive work all point to Christ.¹² Within this sermon Newton traced the broad plan of God's redemptive work beginning with Genesis 3. He included references to God's promises to Abraham and David and the way these redemptive promises culminated in Christ. From this understanding of God's redemptive promises and their fulfillment in Christ, Newton concluded that

to almost everything we read in the Gospel, we may annex the observation that the evangelists have made upon a few instances (in order, as it may be presumed, to direct us in searching out the rest), "Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophets."¹³

¹⁰Newton, *Works*, 2:330

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Newton regarded promise as a "branch of prophecy." See Newton, *Works*, 2:330.

¹³Newton, *Works*, 2:331.

In other words, Newton perceived a promise-fulfillment pattern in the Scriptures that was centered on Jesus Christ.¹⁴ He believed that the specific references that New Testament authors made regarding the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ legitimized this approach to the interpretation of Scripture.

Furthermore, Newton saw various types of Christ in the Old Testament. He considered Old Testament individuals such as Adam, Enoch, Isaac, Joseph,¹⁵ Moses, and David to prefigure Christ in some way. Newton stated, "Some more immediately represented his [Christ's] person; others prefigured his humiliation; others referred to his exaltation, dominion, and glory."¹⁶ In addition, Newton saw Christ in the ceremonies of the Old Testament. He not only considered the Mosaic Law as a means of leading people to Christ but also that the gospel was preached to Israel through these ceremonies.¹⁷ For Newton then, the Old and New Testaments are closely tied together to the extent that neither can "be well understood singly."¹⁸ In Newton's hermeneutic, both Testaments must be read and interpreted together and both testify of the Lord Jesus Christ. He stated,

Keep this in your mind when you read the Scripture. Assure yourselves, that there is nothing vain or useless in the *word of God*. Compare one place with another; the Law with the Gospel, the Prophets with the Evangelists: pray unto God that he would open your understandings to understand the Scriptures, as he did for the disciples, Luke xxiv.; and in a little time you will find, that Christ is not only spoken of in a few verses, here and there, but that as I said before, he is the main scope and

¹⁴Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 206 writes of this approach to preaching Christ from the Old Testament by saying, "The way of promise-fulfillment is embedded in redemptive history, for God gives his promises at one stage of redemptive history and brings them to fulfillment in subsequent stages."

¹⁵See Newton's *Works*, 3:320-21 for the way in which he regarded Joseph as a type of Christ. In the hymn, "Joseph made known to his Brethren," Newton connects Joseph's welcome of his brothers to Christ's gracious welcome of repentant sinners.

¹⁶Newton, *Works*, 2:332.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 2:333.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

subject of every book, and *almost* every chapter.¹⁹

Newton's comment regarding a comparative approach to studying the Bible indicates that he held to a view of biblical interpretation in which Scripture interprets Scripture. He also clearly believed in the necessity of having one's understanding opened for a proper interpretation of Scripture and that this divinely illuminated understanding of the Bible would find Christ at the center of every biblical book.

While Newton saw Christ throughout the Old Testament and sought to employ a Christ-centered biblical hermeneutic, he also knew the danger of allegorical interpretation that is not sanctioned and supported within the New Testament. He addressed this subject in a sermon from the *Messiah* series. In the introduction to the sermon on Lamentations 1:12, Newton warns of interpreting the Bible in such a way "that every single passage has an immediate and direct relation to him [Christ]."²⁰ As indicated in the discussion above, Newton held to a view of biblical interpretation in which Christ is central to the whole of Scripture. Nevertheless, he did not regard Scripture's Christo-centric nature to mean that the connection to Christ is always immediate. When this aspect of biblical hermeneutics is lost, Newton maintained that improper allegorical interpretation would occur and raise doubts "whether there be any fixed and determinate sense of Scripture that may be fully depended upon."²¹ Therefore, when preaching Lamentations 1:12, a text which Newton was not convinced directly refers to Christ, he chose to preach by means of accommodation. For Newton, to preach by accommodation meant to first explain the literal sense of the text and then apply the text as an example of doctrine that is taught explicitly in Scripture.²² Newton explained that the sorrows referred to in Lamentations 1:12 are the sorrows of Jerusalem but that

¹⁹Newton, *Works*, 2:335. Italics original.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 4:260.

²¹*Ibid.*, 4:261.

²²*Ibid.*

the text can then be applied to the sorrows of Christ.²³ In other words, the great sorrow of Jerusalem during the time of Babylonian exile becomes an illustration of the great sorrow of Christ in his suffering and crucifixion.

Daniel Szczesniak offers an excellent analysis of Newton's Christ-centered hermeneutic in his study of the *Olney Hymns* which Newton co-authored with William Cowper. Based on his study of this collection of hymns, Szczesniak rightly argues that Newton believed that "the focal point of all of divine revelation—including the Old Testament—was Jesus Christ."²⁴ While Szczesniak cites Demaray's study of Newton's preaching as support for his own conclusions, the two scholars seem to have different points to make regarding Newton's preaching. Demaray seems to argue that Newton's preaching centered on Christ because he was selectively preaching only those biblical texts which speak of Christ.²⁵ In other words, according to Demaray's view Newton chose to preach only those biblical texts which pointed to Christ. Szczesniak, on the other hand, clearly maintains that Newton considered Christ to be central to all of Scripture. Szczesniak states, "Christ, for Newton, was the alembic through which the tales, tropes, and teachings of the Old Testament were meant to be poured."²⁶ That Szczesniak is correct can be seen not only from Newton's hymns but also from his sermons. The following paragraphs will provide an analysis of some of Newton's sermons in order to substantiate this claim.

In Newton's sermon "The Glory and Grace of God Revealed in Jesus Christ," Newton asserts that the revelation of the knowledge of God in the Old Testament is

²³Newton, *Works*, 4:263.

²⁴Daniel Szczesniak, "Poetic Pedantry or Pastoral Passion: Olney Hymns and John Newton's Old Testament Hermeneutic," *Churchman* 123, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 21.

²⁵Donald E. Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725-1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 103.

²⁶Szczesniak, "Poetic Pedantry," 21.

“ascribed to Christ, inasmuch as he was the Lord, Guide, and Teacher of his church from the beginning, and instructed Moses and the prophets in the things concerning himself.”²⁷

Similarly, in the second sermon of a two-sermon series on John 5:39, Newton summarized his key points from the first sermon by stating that

the Scriptures when properly searched into and compared, do clearly and in every part testify of Christ, that he is the end of the Law, the sum of the Prophets, the completion of the promises, the scope of the types and ceremonies, and the great object of the whole Old-Testament dispensation.²⁸

Within this same sermon, Newton provided an example of how his Christo-centric hermeneutic is employed in the study of the Old Testament. He referred to Jesus as the antitype of Joshua who saved God’s people from ruin at the hands of their enemies and describes Jesus as “the true Captain of the Lord’s hosts.”²⁹ He then connected this saving power of Christ to Jesus’ statement in John 16 that he has overcome the world.³⁰ In light of these statements within his sermons and his commitments to focus on the person and work of Christ in his preaching, Newton appears to have preached in a manner that focused on Christ and the gospel because he believed that Christ and the gospel are the central focus of the entire Bible. His preaching operated under a Christ-centered hermeneutic which produced sermons centered on the gospel.

Newton’s Christo-centric hermeneutic was built on these foundational biblical patterns observed in the sermons mentioned above, but Newton extended this model of biblical interpretation to other biblical texts that are not so clearly Christ-centered. In Newton’s sermon on Psalm 51:15, he provided an example of how he moved a sermon to focus on Christ. He stated that David is an example of “the evil that is in the heart of

²⁷Newton, *Works*, 2:439.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 2:339.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 2:348.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 2:349.

man.”³¹ This point becomes the path Newton followed in the sermon to preach Christ and him crucified.

In the sermon, Newton explained David’s desire to be reconciled to God following his fall into sin, and that this sin had brought David to pray as he did in this verse of the psalm, “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.” Over the course of the sermon, Newton applied the text to backsliding and doubting believers who, like David in the psalm, “cannot speak *to* the Lord, nor *of* him, nor *for* him, as they wish and ought to do.”³² Newton said that for the lips of those in this spiritual condition to be opened God must first open their eyes. He illustrated his point with the example of Hagar who could not find water in the wilderness until the Lord opened her eyes. He proclaimed, “We need not dig in the earth nor climb the skies, nor cross the seas; our remedy is *near*; we need no costly offering of silver or gold; our remedy is *cheap*. Come, pore no longer upon your empty bottle, but look to the fountain, the river, the ocean of all grace.”³³ Newton then called his audience to “[l]ook unto the Lord Jesus Christ,” and spent the second half of the sermon consistently focused on Christ.

Although Psalm 51:15 does not immediately appear to be about Christ or the gospel, Newton’s exposition of the verse is clearly about Christ and the gospel. As explained above, Newton did not claim that every verse of the Old Testament is directly about Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, as Newton expounded this verse within its context, his sermon moved to Christ and the gospel.

Several other examples of Newton’s Christo-centric hermeneutic appeared in a collection of his sermon notes. From his sermon notes on Genesis 1:1, Newton

³¹Newton, *Works*, 2:564.

³²*Ibid.*, 2:567. Italics original.

³³*Ibid.*, 2:574. Italics original.

expounded the passage and identified the God who created the heavens and the earth as “the Lord Jehovah: Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. The God who in the fullness of time was in Christ reconciling sinners to himself—he in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.”³⁴ In reference to the creation of the earth, Newton wrote that God “formed the earth as a theatre to display the riches of his glorious grace in the salvation of a people chosen to himself in Christ before the foundation of the world.”³⁵ In Newton’s sermon notes on Psalm 63:7 in which David writes, “Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice,” Newton reflected on the helplessness of human beings. He asserted that God helps “those who know that they in themselves are helpless, that see and approve his way, his covenant in Jesus, that plead his promises for help.”³⁶ He went on to write in these notes, “This is the gospel declaration: a tender of help and hope for the helpless and hopeless.”³⁷ These comments reflect Newton’s commitment to connect each biblical text to the broader biblical message of God’s redemption in the gospel of Jesus Christ. His preaching was centered on the gospel because he interpreted Scripture with a Christo-centric hermeneutic.

The Gospel Not Moralism

Second, Newton was driven to keep the gospel central to his sermons rather than promoting moralism, the belief that is focused on behavior modification rather than internal transformation. He did not want moralism or any other ideological system to push the gospel to the margins of his preaching ministry. Newton, therefore, denounced the preaching of John Tillotson for his failure to point to Christ in every sermon and

³⁴John Newton, *Three Hundred Sixty Five Days with Newton: A Unique Collection of 365 Daily Readings from the Unpublished Sermons and Writings of John Newton*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Leominster, England: Day One, 2006), January 7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, January 8.

³⁶*Ibid.*, October 29.

³⁷*Ibid.*, October 30.

equated his preaching with the Stoic philosophy of Seneca who was primarily concerned with ethics.³⁸ Tillotson was among those who sought to preach dispassionate sermons in order to establish and maintain peace amid the religious strife that had characterized England during the seventeenth century. The result was that his highly reasoned sermons became ethical discourses. Newton's primary point in his criticism of Tillotson was that his preaching had failed at a doctrinal level because he had failed to see that Christ and the gospel are central to all of Scripture.

Throughout his preaching of the Old Testament, Newton repeatedly made his way to the message of the gospel. His approach to this task was not one which forced the gospel message on the text but one which saw the gospel as central to each text. His sermon on Jeremiah 17:9-10 is a good example that shows how Newton placed the gospel at the center of his preaching. In this sermon, Newton strongly impressed on his hearers that God knows every heart and all the sin of the hearts of every human being, and he urged his audience to see God as their rightful judge. Newton pressed these points in order to draw them to the gospel. He said that he desired to "more fully illustrate the wonderful grace and goodness of God, vouchsafed to us in the Gospel."³⁹ He revealed his purpose in preaching this text from Jeremiah as he warned those who heard the sermon, "[t]hink not to satisfy the Divine justice by any poor performances of your own; think not to cleanse or expiate the evil of your hearts by any of your own inventions; but 'behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'"⁴⁰ So then, the gospel becomes the cure for the sinful nature of the human heart which is exposed in Jeremiah 17. With this focus on the gospel, the sermon does not fall into the trap of moralism or with appeals merely to be a better person.

³⁸John H. Pratt, ed., *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London, During the Years 1798-1814* (1856 repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 79.

³⁹Newton, *Works*, 2:273.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2:275.

Similarly, Newton preached from Micah 6:6-8 on the theme, “No Access to God but by the Gospel of Christ,” a title which may seem completely foreign to the text which calls for the people of God to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Here is a text that might easily be given over to moralistic preaching, but this is not the path Newton pursued in this sermon. Once again, Newton emphasized the way that his audience is guilty before God for the failure to obey the commands of this biblical text. Newton declared that no one can claim before God to have done justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God at all times.⁴¹ Moreover, Newton contended that no human being except Christ could possibly fulfill these commandments. He stated,

[God] has shewed you that which is good, which is the only and sufficient ground whereon to build your hopes: he has shewed or revealed it, for otherwise you could never have found it out. What the law cannot do in that it is weak and ineffectual through the flesh, God has done by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. The Lord Jesus Christ is that good to which the prophet refers; Moses and the Prophets, and all the Scriptures, testify of him, and Micah among the rest.⁴²

Again, Newton demonstrated a connection between the gospel and an Old Testament text which may not initially appear to be about the gospel.

Likewise, Newton’s sermon on the third commandment also illustrates his gospel-centered preaching as opposed to moralistic preaching. In this sermon, Newton made a strong argument regarding the great guilt of breaking this commandment. He provided the context of the giving of the command at Sinai, a scene of trembling and fear, but he also pulled the command forward by making a connection to an even more fearful moment when Christ returns.⁴³ Newton defined taking the Lord’s name in vain as “to use it falsely or profanely; inconsiderately, without due reverence; or unprofitably, and without a suitable necessity.”⁴⁴ He then argued that everyone is guilty of breaking this

⁴¹Newton, *Works*, 2:546.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.* 2:517.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

commandment by means of perjury, false oaths, swearing, giving “lip service” to God, and by professing Christ but remaining in sin. Newton declared, “[Y]ou will be consumed, like stubble, before the flame of his indignation.”⁴⁵ Newton’s conclusion to the sermon is not a plea to refrain from breaking the commandment but to plead for “the necessity and value of the Gospel.”⁴⁶ He stressed that only by the gospel can the punishment for breaking this command be avoided. He stated,

But if you humble yourself, and apply to Jesus, there is yet hope. He died for sinners, the chief of sinners, and the greatest of sins. For his sake, all manner of sin and blasphemy is pardonable: “He is able to save to the uttermost.” But he must do the whole, and have all the glory. Believe in his name. This is the first step; without grace derived from him, you can do nothing. Remember his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; and that he is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour, on behalf of those who are ready to perish.⁴⁷

In this sermon, as in the others discussed above, Newton demonstrated his commitment to preach the gospel not moralism. Even in sermons that could easily remain centered on behavior or ethical conduct, Newton consistently placed the focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Preaching Evangelistically

This discussion of the centrality of the gospel in Newton’s preaching indicates a third trait of Newton’s preaching, namely, he preached in an evangelistic manner.⁴⁸ All of his sermons have some type of an evangelistic component to them because the gospel is so fundamental to all of his preaching. Therefore, his sermons are filled with explanations of the gospel and appeals directed to unbelievers to put their faith in Christ for salvation.

⁴⁵Newton, *Works* 2:525.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 2:526.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 5: *Modernism, Pietism, and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 543 observes that evangelical Anglicans “were particularly effective in recovering evangelistic preaching.”

In a meeting of the Eclectic Society⁴⁹ on October 14, 1799, Newton commented that he would “never preach a sermon without such a view of Jesus Christ that a man shall understand the gospel from that sermon.”⁵⁰ An analysis of Newton’s published sermons reveals that he was able to achieve this goal in his preaching. In each of the six published sermons which Newton prepared in Liverpool prior to his ordination and his pastoral ministry, the gospel was explained and appeals made to unbelievers.⁵¹

One good example of this is from Newton’s sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15 which he entitled, “On the Saviour, and His Salvation.” Early in the sermon, he explained that Paul’s statement, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” is a “short, but comprehensive proposition, including the purport of the whole Gospel.”⁵² This is the essence of the gospel message which Newton sought to make clear in all of his preaching. In proclaiming this message, Newton also issued the call for those who heard him to put their faith in Christ. Later in this sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Newton asserted that New Testament Christianity is simply

to believe in Jesus Christ; so to believe in him, as to obey him in all his commands, to trust him in all his dispensations, to walk in his steps, copying out the bright example of his love, meekness, patience, self-denial, and active zeal for the glory of God, and the good of mankind.⁵³

This summary of the gospel is typical of those found in the other sermons Newton composed while residing in Liverpool.

The same commitment to present the gospel in every sermon is also evident in

⁴⁹Newton and several other evangelical pastors established the Eclectic Society in 1783 with the goal to promote fellowship among pastors as well as biblical and practical Christianity. The Church Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and *The Christian Observer* magazine were formed as a result of these meetings.

⁵⁰Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 142.

⁵¹See Newton, *Works*, 2:273-75; 2:301ff; 2:308-09, 2:313-14; 2:330-33; 2:340ff.

⁵²Newton, *Works*, 2:278.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 2:289.

the twenty sermons Newton published during his ministry in Olney.⁵⁴ For example, he offered an explanation of the gospel in a sermon concerning the relationship between faith and works. In this sermon on James 2:26, Newton stated, “There is no acceptance for any of the sons of Adam, with the just and holy God, but through Jesus Christ as our righteousness received by faith, and that in this concern works of every kind are absolutely excluded. This is the capital doctrine of the Gospel.”⁵⁵ Throughout these twenty sermons Newton is focused on presenting the gospel to his audience. While the first thirteen sermons in this collection are devoted to an exposition of Matthew 11:25-30, a text that is readily given to evangelistic preaching, the other sermons in the collection also have an evangelistic component. Even those sermons on Old Testament texts, such as Exodus 20:7, Micah 6:6-8, and Psalm 51:5, contain clear explanations of the gospel and calls to place faith in Christ.⁵⁶

Another example of the way Newton explained the gospel in his sermons is found in his sermon on Isaiah 7:14, part of the *Messiah* sermon series he preached in London. Newton explained throughout the sermon that Jesus Christ is the promised Immanuel who came into the world to save sinners who are alienated from God. While he warned that “God is against us” as sinners, he affirmed that this “enmity” between us and God is taken away when the gospel is believed.⁵⁷ Newton told his audience that the gospel “brings us the welcome news, that there is forgiveness” for sinners and “that God is reconciled in his Son to all who seek his mercy.”⁵⁸ This sermon is one of fifty messages contained in this series focused on the biblical texts of Handel’s oratorio.

⁵⁴Newton, *Works*, 2:362, 2:367; 2:371, 2:378, 2:381; 2:403; 2:405, 2:410, 2:412; 2:424-25; 2:427, 2:435; 2:438, 2:446; 2:479-80; 2:481, 2:490; 2:499, 2:501-02; 2:505, 2:508; 2:531, 2:538; 2:556-57.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 2:551.

⁵⁶Each of the OT sermons is discussed earlier in this chapter.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 4:65.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

Because these biblical texts are messianic by choice, Newton's sermons would inevitably emphasize the gospel.⁵⁹ An absence of gospel proclamation from these portions of Scripture would be a great travesty and yet, the sermons in this series further demonstrates that Newton was able to explain the gospel in each of his sermons. These examples illustrate that over the course of his ministry of preaching, Newton provided clear explanations of the gospel in his sermons.

To substantiate further the claim that Newton's sermons contained explanations of the gospel, a survey of those published sermons which might be less likely to appeal to the gospel is necessary. The following discussion will consider some sermons which Newton preached on a variety of occasions outside the normal services of the church. One such sermon was preached on a national fast day appointed for Wednesday, February 21, 1781. Newton's sermon, "The Guilt and Danger of Such a Nation as This," was taken from Jeremiah 5:29 and included a sustained warning regarding the sins of the English people. That warning culminated with an exhortation to fear the judgment of God and to repent.⁶⁰ Newton concluded with an evangelistic appeal to put faith in Christ.⁶¹

A second example is a sermon Newton preached for the funeral of Richard Conyers, pastor of St. Paul's Church in Deptford. The central theme of the message was the affection and devotion which Conyers had for his congregation. Within the sermon, Newton reminded the congregation that Conyers had come to saving faith in Christ after he began pastoral ministry and then presented the gospel that Conyers believed and

⁵⁹Newton, *Works*, 4:5, 8; 27, 28; 34-35, 36, 39; 42, 45, 46, 51; 98, 100-02; 110, 112-14; 124-25; 134, 135-36, 137-38; 142-43, 148-49; 152, 160-61; 168, 172-73; 174, 182-83; 206-08; 211-13, 216-19; 251-52, 259; 299, 301; 311-12; 320, 322-23; 324, 325, 326, 332-33; 372; 379-80, 382, 388-89; 395-96, 398-99; 406-07, 409-10; 413-14; 426, 434; 435-36, 438-39, 443-44; 475-76, 478-79; 480-81, 488-90; 491, 497-98; 505, 506-08, 513-14; 518, 523-24, 526-27; 559-60, 567-69; 572-73, 577-78, 582-83.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 5:163.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 5:164-65.

preached.⁶² Newton concluded the sermon with this warning,

the Saviour, whom you have too long slighted, is now once more preached to you. He is still upon a throne of grace, able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. But hereafter he will appear on a throne of judgment, “taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his Gospel.”⁶³

A third example of Newton’s preaching of the gospel in sermons outside the normal worship of the church is a message addressed to the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge Among the Poor. The sermon was addressed to an audience that would have been composed of many pastors and other Christians committed to this organization. Nevertheless, Newton presented the gospel clearly and simply. He also explained his view that the gospel must include belief that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, that Christ made atonement for sin in his sacrifice on the cross, and that it can only be applied to one’s soul by the transforming power and presence of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴ Despite the decidedly Christian demographic of the meeting, Newton also addressed the possibility that some in the audience were not believers and called on them to put faith in Christ.⁶⁵ Each of these examples demonstrates that Newton was deeply committed to preaching the gospel in every sermon, even those sermons delivered on special occasions. He presented the gospel and urged those who did not believe to come to Christ for salvation.

The centrality of the gospel in Newton’s preaching generated sermons that present the gospel clearly and with great urgency. In his sermon on Matthew 11:25 which speaks of how the gospel is hidden from the wise and prudent but revealed to babes, Newton concluded the sermon by calling for a response of faith:

If, therefore, you feel yourself a lost sinner, see a beauty and sufficiency in Jesus,

⁶²Newton, *Works*, 5:174-75.

⁶³*Ibid.* 5:189.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 5:199-202.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 5:222.

have a hunger and thirst after his righteousness, and are made willing to expect the blessing in his way; you may look upon this as a token for good. Such views and desires as these never are found in any heart till he communicates them. By nature we are averse and contrary to them. Give him the glory of what he has begun; and oppose your temptations, fears, and doubts, with this argument, drawn from your own experience, as the wife of Manoaah formerly reasoned: "If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have enabled and encouraged us to call upon him; neither would he at this time have shewn us such things as these."⁶⁶

Although Newton is noted for his tenderness as a pastor, a tenderness that is evident in the above quotation, he could also be quite solemn in his warnings to unbelievers. In another sermon Newton stated, "The law condemns you already; if you receive not the Gospel, you must perish without remedy: for other name or means whereby men can be saved there is not under heaven. Once more you are warned of danger; once more the refuge is set before you."⁶⁷ In these and in various ways, Newton appealed to unbelievers to put their faith in Christ.

The Gospel for Believers

Just as Newton applied the gospel to the lives of believers within his ministry of pastoral care (see chapter 5), he also preached the gospel to believers in his sermons. Newton believed that the gospel message which he preached for the conversion of sinners was the means to see believers sanctified. He preached the gospel as a means of bringing joy to those who already believed it. This is clearly evident in his remarks concerning the music of Handel's *Messiah* as compared to the Scriptural message within that composition. He stated in his introductory sermon of the *Messiah* sermon series,

There is no *harmony* to a heaven-born soul like that which is the result of the combination and coincidence of all the Divine Attributes and Perfection, manifested in the work of redemption; mercy and truth meeting together, inflexible righteousness corresponding with the peace of offenders, God glorious, and sinners saved. There is no *melody* upon earth to be compared with the voice of the blood of Jesus speaking peace to a guilty conscience, or with the voice of the Holy Spirit applying the promises to the heart, and sweetly inspiring a temper of confidence and adoption. These are joys which the world can neither give nor take away, which

⁶⁶Newton, *Works*, 2:381.

⁶⁷*Ibid.* 2:468.

never pall upon the mind by continuance or repetition; the sense of them is always *new*, the recollection of them is always pleasant. Nor do they only satisfy the soul, but sanctify the soul. They strengthen the faith, animate hope, add fervency to love, and both dispose and enable the Christian to run in all the paths of holy obedience with an enlarged heart.⁶⁸

For Newton, the gospel brings joy and satisfaction to the soul of a believer that is far more profound and substantial than even the greatest of all musical compositions. A few examples will now be given to show how Newton accomplished preaching the gospel to believers.

In one sermon of a series on Matthew 11:27, Newton focused on the authority of Christ in the work of salvation. At the conclusion of his exposition, Newton applied the text to three groups of people. He spoke directly to those who do not believe the gospel, to those who are coming to see their need for Christ, and to those who already believe. Newton encouraged believers by pointing them to Christ's authority over their salvation as a guarantee that Christ is able to care for them.⁶⁹ He urged them to look to the powerful and authoritative Christ who was also their shepherd and asked, "What then can you want who are at his providing? What have you to fear who are under his protection? Why then do you so often distrust, so often complain?"⁷⁰ Newton continued this line of thought and then concluded the sermon with words regarding the eternal hope believers have in Christ. He stated, "The path which he has marked out for you is difficult, but he has trod it before you, and it leads to glory. The time is short. Yet a little while, and you shall receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."⁷¹

In another sermon on Matthew 11:29, Newton also sought to apply the gospel message to believers. Newton appealed to struggling believers by explaining that circumstantial difficulties will not last. Newton said,

⁶⁸Newton, *Works*, 4:3. Italics original.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 2:436.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 2:437.

The end is sure. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved;” and all who are in his [Christ’s] way have his promise and power engaged in their behalf, that they shall certainly endure, that he will so lead, guide, support, and strengthen them, that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate them from his love.⁷²

Similarly, Newton called believers to consider that greatness of Christ’s suffering on their behalf as a means of enduring their own suffering. In his message on Isaiah 53:4-5, he explained that “the remembrance of what he [Christ] bore for them alleviates the pressure of all their sufferings, and affords them a ground whereon they may rejoice, ‘yea, glory in tribulation also.’”⁷³ Likewise, in his sermon on Isaiah 53:6, Newton called believers to look to the message of the gospel in order to find strength in their suffering. He asserted that the believer’s union with Christ through faith in the gospel is the foundation for their ability to endure and persevere. Newton said, “He who has all power in heaven and in earth is engaged for their support. When they faint, he revives them; when they are wounded, he heals them; when their foot slippeth, he upholds them.”⁷⁴

In his twenty-fifth sermon of the *Messiah* series, Newton preached from Psalm 16:10 on Christ’s resurrection. Within the sermon, he acknowledged that he preached to a congregation of professing Christians. Nevertheless, he endeavored to apply the truth of the resurrection to their lives by suggesting that it was a doctrine which was not merely to be believed. Newton declared, “The powers of darkness know that Christ is risen.”⁷⁵ Once again, Newton’s concern for the experiential effect of the gospel in the lives of his hearers is quite evident in these words. He then proceeded to describe some of the ways in which the truth of the resurrection should impact believers. According to Newton, the resurrection of Christ should produce a sense of assurance in the heart of believers. He argued that since Christ was raised for the justification of believers, “[T]hey can rejoice

⁷²Newton, *Works*, 2:501-2.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 4:223.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 4:239.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 4:285.

in the knowledge of their acceptance, and rely upon him for their perseverance.”⁷⁶

Additionally, Newton called believers to find hope in the resurrection as an example of the power of God which is at work for them. He cited the example of the way in which the disciples’ fear was to turn to joy when they came to know that Christ had been raised.⁷⁷ Newton repeatedly preached the gospel and its various facets in ways that applied those truths to the lives of believers.

Gospel Unity

While Newton’s convictions regarding gospel-centered preaching were not unique among the evangelicals of his day, Newton’s theological stance on the centrality of the gospel in regard to the unity of the evangelical movement as a whole sets him apart from many others and further informs our understanding of his gospel-centric homiletic.⁷⁸ Newton was critical of the practice of submitting to a particular theological system and wearing the theological label attached to that system. A key aspect of his criticism of this practice was his concern that one’s held beliefs be derived from Scripture rather than a theological system.⁷⁹ However, he was also concerned about disunity over matters of secondary importance among those who professed and preached the gospel.

As a result of his desire to see unity among evangelicals, Newton addressed this subject in a meeting of the Eclectic Society on December 23, 1799. At the meeting, Josiah Pratt raised the question regarding the preaching method of the apostles and the

⁷⁶Newton, *Works*, 4:287.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 4:290.

⁷⁸D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “I Am a Sort of Middle Man: The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton,” in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 30, argues that Newton was not “an original theologian like Jonathan Edwards, a spectacular preacher like George Whitefield, or a theological synthesizer like John Wesley. His achievement was rather as a broker of consensus who preached and wrote in a ‘politically’ correct theological style in the service of evangelical solidarity.”

⁷⁹Newton, *Works*, 4:iv-v.

current methods of evangelical preachers. Newton remarked that “Paul was a reed in non-essentials” but “an iron pillar in essentials.”⁸⁰ Newton believed that this should be the same practice for him and his fellow preachers. He said, “A minister has almost hit the marks if, when his sermon is over, some call him an Antinomian, and some an Arminian.”⁸¹ Newton was not advocating that preachers vacillate or be unclear in their sermons but that preaching the plain truth of Scripture would often draw criticism from those of various parties within evangelicalism.

While Newton might bear some criticism for his unwillingness to specify the exact boundary between primary and secondary issues, he was not guilty of compromise in matters of truth.⁸² He acknowledged that some of his contemporaries accused him of wavering in matters of biblical truth but insists that this is not the case on “points nearly connected with the honour of God, and essential to the life of faith.”⁸³ Newton saw this as an issue that is directly related to preaching. In describing his ideal preacher, Newton wrote that the preacher will

not be restrained to the credit or interest of any detached denomination of Christians, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. On the other hand, knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible mean by which fallen man can obtain either peace or rectitude, he most cordially embraces and avows it. Far from being ashamed of it, he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and him crucified. He dares not sophisticate, disguise, or soften the great doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought. And he will no more encounter the prejudices and corrupt maxims and practices of the world with any weapon but *the truth that is in Jesus*, than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy with a wooden sword.⁸⁴

Newton’s desire for unity among believers is evident here. Equally evident, however, is

⁸⁰Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 151.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²Newton, *Works*, 4:v.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 4:vii.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 4:vii-viii. Italics original.

his firm commitment to the truth of the gospel and the necessity and urgency of preaching the gospel. He was unwilling to compromise the truth of the gospel to make it acceptable to the world because he understood that the gospel alone can save those who do not believe. His preaching must be centered on the gospel because any other message is completely and utterly inadequate to stand against the false ideologies and philosophies of the world.

Therefore, Newton's gospel-centric homiletic not only arose from his view that the gospel is the central message of the Scriptures but also because he was convinced that the message of the gospel was the only means of combating evil, sin, and every false ideology. The gospel is central to Newton's sermons because he considered the gospel to be central to Scripture. Although every passage of Scripture does not contain a specific reference to Christ, or point to Christ by means of prophecy or type, Newton understood the gospel to be central to all of Scripture. The gospel provides the cure for the sinful condition of humanity which is revealed throughout Scripture in a multitude of different ways. The gospel also is the source of sanctification and satisfaction for every believer. For these reasons, Newton faithfully and consistently proclaimed the gospel in his sermons. According to Newton, Christ is revealed in the gospel. The gospel reveals the person of Christ as the means to atone for sin and transform lives. As Newton committed himself to preach Christ crucified, he committed himself to preach the gospel from all of Scripture.

Preaching and the Methods of the Gospel

The previous section of this chapter has shown that the content of Newton's preaching was focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ. This section will examine the way the gospel shaped Newton's preaching methods. In other words, he chose a preaching style that was based on his commitments to the gospel and its centrality to preaching. The following paragraphs will substantiate this claim with Newton's own statements

regarding his preaching style as well as some examples from his sermons. Consideration will also be given to secondary sources which provide some evaluations of Newton's preaching.

Newton's preaching style is best described as plain and simple.⁸⁵ In the preface to the twenty published sermons which were preached at Olney, he expressed his commitment to "speak plain truths to a plain people."⁸⁶ This commitment partially derives from a consideration of the simple, working people of this small Buckinghamshire village, but it also arises from Newton's belief that the gospel itself is plain and simple.

Newton found biblical support for both of these ideas, a concern for his hearers and the nature of the gospel message, in the preaching of the apostle Paul. Newton wrote of Paul's preaching style and method in his *A Review of Ecclesiastical History*. He cited Paul's words in 1 Corinthians regarding the way in which Paul had determined to preach to them. Although Newton understood the Corinthians to be "a polite and ingenious people," Paul did not embrace the common rhetorical methods of the time.⁸⁷ Newton argued that Paul had contemplated the rhetorical method he would employ in preaching the gospel to the Corinthians and that his determination to preach only Christ crucified is Paul's commitment to preach "the whole scheme of Gospel doctrine."⁸⁸ According to Newton, this did not mean that Paul laid aside rational arguments or a skillful use of language to make his points but that Paul refused to preach in a manner that relied on

⁸⁵Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life*, 92 observes, "In the pulpit you will not find Newton talking about political debates, or quoting famous Greek poets, or dispensing flowery illustrations. The absence of adornment is intentional; its rooted in Newton's conviction to remain biblically simple."

⁸⁶Newton, *Works*, 2:358.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 3:241.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

human ability to convince an audience with clever and lofty speech.⁸⁹ Newton maintained that Paul insisted on a type of preaching that acknowledged dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit and that did not adapt to the audience being addressed.⁹⁰ These arguments indicate Newton's concern for preaching methods that are both appropriate to the audience and consistent with the gospel which is a divinely revealed message that cannot be believed apart from the work of God's Spirit.

Furthermore, Newton claimed that Paul's preaching methods were also governed by the experience of the gospel in his own life. Newton stated, "Instead of vain conjectures, he [Paul] spoke from certain experience."⁹¹ Paul preached what God had revealed to him. He preached with authority as one who had been sent by God. He preached "from the feeling and fulness [*sic*] of his heart, the words of simplicity and truth."⁹² When this personal experience of the gospel and simple proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit are absent, Newton believed that "unsuccessful preaching" would prevail.⁹³

In a letter to John Ryland, Jr. dated March 13, 1782, Newton addressed his young friend about the importance of simplicity in preaching. Newton issued a warning about the dangers of presenting complex argumentation in sermons. He related to Ryland how a visiting pastor preached for his congregation in Olney and left the congregation utterly confused. Newton wrote,

Poor things, he had set their little wits a wool gathering; they had picked up some of his words, phrases and half-thoughts, but his ideas they had no idea of, however some of them were aiming to be wondrous wise and deep and dark, and I was forced to preach half way through the first chapter of Ephesians to get them into their sober

⁸⁹Newton, *Works*, 2:242.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 2:243.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*, 2:244.

senses again. They, who know sin so as to hate it, have a good knowledge. And as they believe God permitted sin, they will still believe he is wise and that the permission is no impeachment of his wisdom. Oh it is a mercy that people need not to be learned men, fine reasoners, metaphysicians, in order to receive the Gospel and be happy.⁹⁴

These instructions to Ryland show the way Newton applied the biblical principles he found in the Pauline epistles to practical ministry. Newton's concern that gospel ministry is to consider the audience and his belief that the gospel can be understood by all people are evident.

Similar ideas related to the need for simplicity in preaching are found in some of Newton's remarks given at the Eclectic Society meetings. In these remarks, he also drew a connection between simplicity and effective or powerful preaching. For example, at the March 5, 1798, meeting of the Eclectic Society the topic of discussion was the requirements for effective preaching. Newton stated, "Effect, I believe has been produced in my preaching by a solemn determination to bring forth Jesus Christ as the Great subject in all my discourses."⁹⁵ As discussed earlier in this chapter, this always is foremost in Newton's preaching, but his comment here also reveals his conviction that preaching the gospel is essential to be effective as a preacher. Newton offered a similar comment at another meeting of the Eclectic Society on June 24, 1799. On that occasion, those present at the meeting were discussing how to prepare for the pulpit. Newton remarked, "The grand thing in preaching is to produce effect. Make Christ the prominent figure."⁹⁶ Furthermore, Newton maintained that a preacher's popularity depends on preaching in a simple manner. He said, "There can be no popularity without simplicity."⁹⁷ Therefore, in matters related to an effective pulpit ministry, matters which

⁹⁴John Newton, *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland, Jr.*, ed. Grant Gordon (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 155.

⁹⁵Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 20.

⁹⁶Ibid., 116.

⁹⁷Ibid., 92.

are closely tied to a preacher's methods used in the pulpit, Newton consistently pointed to the message of the gospel and to simplicity as essential components.

Newton's concern for simplicity of style can also be seen in his sermons. He believed that the task of preaching was an urgent task, and therefore, it should be conducted with a sense of urgency and directness. In a sermon, he indicated that it is impossible for a preacher to be "too plain or urgent."⁹⁸ The simplicity and directness of Newton's sermons produce a keen sense of urgency in his preaching. Near the end of one sermon, Newton stated in an appeal for his hearers to respond, "Time is short, life is precarious, and perhaps, to some, this may be the last opportunity of the kind that may be afforded them."⁹⁹

Similarly, Newton gave a sustained description of the nature and state of sinful humanity in order to underscore the need for salvation.¹⁰⁰ In his sermon, "The Judge of the Race is Jesus," Newton admonished, "You are upon the brink of danger, if you are not already entered this race: you stand upon a precipice, and hell from beneath has opened its mouth to receive you. But a respite is still afforded; the Lord waits to be gracious; and as yet there is room."¹⁰¹

In addition, Newton often made use of direct appeals through a series of questions posed to his listeners as he does in his sermon on Acts 11:26. He asked,

Is not this an unaccountable event upon your plan, that the name which first went out from Antioch, under the greatest disadvantages, should so soon overspread the world, without arts or arms, without any force, or any motive of an external kind? Is it possible, that any kind or degree of enthusiasm could influence, not a *few*, at one time, or in one place, but *multitudes* of all ages, sexes, tempers, and circumstances, to embrace a profession which, in proportion to the strictness where with it was followed, was always attended with reproach and suffering? . . . Does the tendency of the Gospel displease you? Is it an enemy to that virtue you are so fond— [*sic*]to

⁹⁸Newton, *Works*, 2:260.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:289.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 2:283-84.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 2:538.

talk of? ¹⁰²

With these simple and direct methods, Newton preached with urgency and called his hearers to respond in faith and obedience.

Newton's simple style and method of preaching are also observable in the outlines and structures of his sermons. Generally, the sermon structure closely followed the structure of the biblical text from which Newton was preaching. For example, Newton developed a three-part outline for the sermon on Isaiah 40:3-5 which mirrors the content of the text concerning the coming of the Messiah. The sermon outline is as follows:

- I. The state of the world at his [Christ's] coming—A wilderness,
- II. The preparation of his way. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."
- III. The manner and effects of his manifestation. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it."¹⁰³

Here the sermon structure follows the precise order of the biblical text and is clearly connected to that text.

Likewise, his sermon, "The Ascension of Messiah to Glory," based on Psalm 24:7-10, follows a four-part outline that is clearly taken from the biblical text and follows the order of the biblical text:

- I. His [Christ's] title, "The Lord of hosts."
- II. His victories, implied in the expression, "The Lord strong and mighty in battle."
- III. His mediatorial title, "The King of glory."
- IV. His authoritative entrance into the holy place.¹⁰⁴

In other instances, Newton's sermon outlines are structured according to the

¹⁰²Newton, *Works*, 2:300-301.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 4:19.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 4:294.

biblical text from which he is preaching but do not precisely replicate the order of the text. One example of this is Newton's sermon on Hebrews 1:5 which states, "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" In the sermon, Newton focused on explaining three aspects of the text in the following order: "my Son," "Begotten," and "this day."¹⁰⁵ Newton changed the order in the sermon in order to conclude with thoughts on the "day" Christ was manifested in his incarnation and resurrection which "took place in time."¹⁰⁶ This method of developing sermons which were closely tied to the biblical text is a product of Newton's commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture as articulated in a previous chapter. While Newton felt constrained by the contents of the biblical text, his methodology also reveals that he did not feel constrained to the precise ordering of the text and that such a methodology was not incompatible with the authority of Scripture.

Given Newton's simple and plain style that is centered solely on the gospel, it is not surprising that his preaching is frequently the target of scholarly criticism. Church historian Gordon Rupp says of Newton, "He was not the most distinguished of preachers of his day, though his bluff manner had its own directness and power."¹⁰⁷ Hughes Oliphant Old observes, "From a literary standpoint John Newton's sermons are not especially interesting."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Old does admit that Newton's sermons were filled with "simple, direct language."¹⁰⁹ He goes on to say of Newton, "Often the strength of his sermons is largely dependent on his clear, simple sermon outlines. It is

¹⁰⁵Newton, *Works*, 4:305.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 4:311.

¹⁰⁷Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 482.

¹⁰⁸Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 541.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 556.

one of the primary characteristics of his style.”¹¹⁰ While Rupp and Old acknowledge something good in Newton’s preaching, their stylistic criticisms appear to be unfounded. Even if Newton was not among the most gifted preachers of his time, to fault Newton for his lack of literary style or for his frankness is unwarranted.

These critiques are unwarranted because Newton was consciously choosing to preach in this manner because of his views regarding the nature of preaching the gospel. As Old himself admits, Newton employed a “democratized rhetoric” as a direct result of his desire to preach the gospel to all classes of people.¹¹¹ According to Old, this democratic rhetoric includes Newton’s effort to replace “theological jargon” with the “sort of language used in newspapers.”¹¹² Although Old is correct in his assessment, one clarification is needed. Newton wanted his audience to hear the Bible preached in a way that would be easily understood by them, but this does not appear to be his most fundamental concern. Newton sought to preach in the homiletic style which was common among the evangelicals of the period, a style which is sometimes characterized as the *simplicitas evangelica*.¹¹³ The simplicity of the gospel message itself compelled Newton and other evangelicals to preach with a simple style.¹¹⁴ In fact, Newton’s choice to preach with simplicity of style is a choice quite at home in the world of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory. Lessenich notes a number of rhetorical theorists of the period, including John Lawson, John Ward, and Hugh Blair, who encouraged the use of a plain

¹¹⁰Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 556.

¹¹¹Ibid., 558.

¹¹²Ibid., 557.

¹¹³See Nigel Aston, “Rationalism, Enlightenment, and Sermons,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon: 1689-1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 390, and Rolf P. Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1800* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau, 1972), 1. This is contra Bob Tennet, “The Sermons of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelicals,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon*, 132, who concludes that there is not a “defining set of stylistic parameters” for the evangelical sermon.

¹¹⁴Davies, *From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1750*, 230.

style;¹¹⁵ he also states that according to these rhetoricians “plainness and simplicity were constantly described as the result of art and study, perfectly compatible with elegance and eloquence.”¹¹⁶ Hylson-Smith agrees with this assessment of preaching among Anglican evangelicals. He states, “As a rule the sermons were simple, and not intended to arouse the admiration of their hearers. The preachers had an unambiguous purpose: they wanted to communicate an essentially straightforward message of salvation in direct, uncomplicated language.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, to criticize Newton’s preaching style seems unfair unless this entire school of rhetorical thought is critiqued along with him.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the gospel shaped and directed Newton’s preaching in terms of the content of his sermons and the methods by which he preached. The content of his preaching arose from a Christ-centered hermeneutic that compelled him to preach the gospel in all of his sermons. Newton avoided preaching moralistic messages and instead proclaimed the gospel from all of Scripture and sought to apply it to both believers and unbelievers. Just as the message Newton preached was gospel-centric so too were his preaching methods. He preached in a style that was rooted in his understanding of the gospel. He preached the gospel plainly, simply, directly, and with a great sense of urgency.

¹¹⁵Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory*, 2, credits the influence of John Wilkins' *Ecclesiastes, or, A Discourse concerning the Gift of Preaching as it falls under the Rules of Art* which was published in 1646 with use of plain style in preaching during the eighteenth century. For a survey of significant English works on rhetoric published in the eighteenth century, see Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 511-17.

¹¹⁶Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory*, 10.

¹¹⁷Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1734-1984* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 51.

CHAPTER 7

NEWTON'S PASTORAL HOMILETIC

The homiletic of John Newton was firmly committed to making the gospel central to every sermon. Newton's theological and biblical convictions formed the foundation of both the content and the methods of his preaching, but such convictions were always deeply intertwined with Newton's immense pastoral concern for the souls of those who sat under his preaching. Therefore, this chapter examines Newton's preaching and his commitment to pastoral ministry. It argues that Newton's preaching rhetoric was a function of a pastoral homiletic that was intensely concerned with the spiritual welfare of his hearers. His pastoral homiletic was guided by a rhetoric of love and a rhetoric of holiness. For the purposes of this study, *rhetoric* is being used to refer to the use of language for the purpose of persuasion.¹ Newton relied on sincere expressions of pastoral love and affection in his ministry and preaching as a means of persuading his hearers.² He sought to persuade them to follow the biblical pattern of holiness that he continually presented to them in his life and preaching.

Newton's concern to preach in a manner guided by love and holiness was evident even prior to his decision to pursue pastoral ministry. As stated in the previous chapter, Newton recorded in a journal his commitment to three principles that would

¹Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

²In terms of the classical canons of rhetoric, this aspect of Newton's preaching is a reliance on *ethos* which serves to persuade an audience on the basis of the character of the speaker. For an explanation of this and the other "artistic proofs" (*logos* and *pathos*) see Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 18-19.

form the impetus for the long and fruitful ministry that would eventually unfold in his life. He expressed his commitment to pursue a ministry centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ; this was the subject of chapter 6. Newton also expressed his commitment to “the great doctrine of love, which is the life and soul of the Gospel” and to “the doctrine, or rather the practice of gospel holiness.”³ These doctrinal truths served to shape the overall ministry of Newton as well as his preaching. This chapter will, in two sections, explore how Newton’s homiletic was guided by these principles; the first will examine the way the gospel of God’s love affected Newton’s sermons; the second will examine the influence of gospel holiness on Newton’s sermons.

The Rhetoric of Love

The love of God was vital to Newton’s ministry and his preaching. He considered God’s love to be fundamental to the gospel itself and therefore, to find it as a major point of emphasis in his ministry and preaching is unsurprising. As discussed in chapter 5, he made the love of God displayed in Christ central to his piety.⁴ Thus, this doctrine which Newton considered to be basic to the gospel and to Christian piety was also a basic component of his pastoral ministry. In the journal where he recorded his thoughts on entering pastoral ministry, Newton stated,

If the Lord please I would make it the business of my life to state, illustrate and recommend this divine essential principle [the doctrine of love], publicly and from house to house—especially by my example: by being gentle, forbearing, forgiving, and affectionate to all, and aiming all my actions to promote the glory of him, who loved me and gave himself for me.⁵

Newton’s expression of love toward others is observable not only in his vast work of pastoral correspondence but also in other aspects of his ministry as well. Thomas Scott, a

³John Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, ed. Marylynn Rouse (Stratford-upon-Avon: The John Newton Project, 2008), 23.

⁴John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 2:18-19.

⁵Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 23.

minister in the Church of England who was not genuinely converted until after he entered the ministry and who found the friendship and example of Newton to be a primary influence leading to his conversion, recounted an instance in which Newton's love for others guided his ministry. A man and his wife, both members of Scott's congregation, were near death. Because he had not been asked to visit this suffering couple, Scott neglected going to minister to them even though he knew of their condition. Newton, however, had gone repeatedly to visit this wife and husband. Newton's pastoral concern for those who were not even part of his congregation caused great distress in Scott's conscience. Reflecting on Newton's actions, Scott wrote, "He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those, who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins."⁶ This example demonstrates the depth of Newton's love for the souls of others that was a common expression in his ministry.⁷

Newton's concern for others and his expressions of love toward those inside and outside his congregations did not go without effect in the pulpit. Although Marcus Loane criticizes Newton's preaching, he states that Newton's "parent-like tenderness and deep affection for his people" rendered his shortcomings in the pulpit of little consequence in the evaluations of his congregation.⁸ When Newton proclaimed the truth of Scripture to his congregations, when he called for repentance and godly living, when he spoke words of encouragement and hope found in the gospel, his audience knew he spoke to them with concern for their souls. They understood that this preacher deeply loved them, and this understanding gave Newton's preaching a lasting and powerful

⁶Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth* (1779; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 33.

⁷Richard Turnbull, *Reviving the Heart: the Story of the 18th Century Revival* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2012), 131.

⁸Marcus L. Loane, *Oxford and the Evangelical Succession* (London: Lutterworth, 1950), 106-7.

impact.

Newton's desire to demonstrate his love toward those to whom he ministered came from his understanding of the biblical model of pastoral ministry provided by the apostle Paul. Newton argued in *A Review of Ecclesiastical History* that Paul's love for Christ motivated his entire ministry and that "one of the surest evidences of love to Christ, is a love to his people."⁹ Newton briefly surveyed a number of Pauline texts in which the apostle expresses his love and affection for the church, and although he maintained such love ought to characterize every pastor, he also asserted that such love is so fundamental to the Christian faith that it should be evident in the life of every believer.¹⁰

Although Newton's love for his hearers did much to persuade his congregation, he understood that a display of Christian love would not be sufficient to persuade all. Based on biblical evidence concerning the manner in which the preaching of the apostles was received in various locations, Newton conceded that preaching the gospel will result in persecution.¹¹ While some will reject the gospel and persecute those who preach it, Newton argued that the selfless love and concern for the spiritual good of souls displayed in Paul's ministry and epistles is the biblical pattern for pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, Newton's ministry does demonstrate that following this biblical pattern will serve to convince some people of the genuine character of the gospel itself and open avenues for the preacher to speak into the lives of those who already profess faith.

Newton produced three addresses that demonstrate how his rhetoric of love functioned in his ministry. The first address was published in 1768 and made available to those living in Olney. In this address, Newton spoke to a number of spiritual issues

⁹Newton, *Works*, 3:221.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 3:224.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 3:248-49.

confronting the people of Olney, but his primary motive was to convey his love and concern for the people of the town. He began by stating, “Every person in the parish has a place in my heart and prayers, but I cannot speak to each of you singly. Yet I am desirous to give full proof that I watch for the welfare of your souls.”¹² He went on to ask his readers to “receive this paper in good part, as a token of my love, read it with attention.”¹³ He called believers to remain faithful to the gospel and sought to persuade unbelievers to examine his preaching by the standard of the New Testament. He also reproved those who were neglecting to attend public worship, lamented the common disregard of Scripture, decried the prevalence of adultery and other sexual sins, and expressed his concern over the general state of “open impiety and infidelity spreading among some persons.”¹⁴ The subject matter of this address reveals much about the way Newton loved others. He did not refrain from broaching difficult and potentially volatile issues in his practice of pastoral ministry. For Newton, however, the confrontations, warnings, and appeals for repentance in this address to the people of Olney were issued out of concern for the spiritual good of the people and the value of their souls.¹⁵

The second address, a letter dated November 1, 1781, is similar to the address Newton produced for the people of Olney but was directed to the members of Newton’s church, St. Mary Woolnoth, in London. He based the letter on the words, “I beseech thee to hear me patiently” in Acts 26:3.¹⁶ As with the address to the people of Olney, Newton presented this published letter to convey his concern for the well-being of his

¹²Newton, *Works*, 6:551.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 6:560.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 6:563.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 6:565.

congregation.¹⁷ One concern Newton expressed was “that so many of those to whom I earnestly desire to be useful, refuse me the pleasure of seeing them on the Lord’s day.”¹⁸ Newton was disturbed by the fact that some of his parishioners were attending worship services at other churches.¹⁹ While a good number of people were attending the services, Newton was aware that some of those in the London congregation did not approve of his preaching and ministry due to his evangelical views. His success in this new ministry post appeared to be well-established despite the fact that some had left the church after his arrival; nevertheless, out of concern for the spiritual good of those who had departed, Newton sought to win a hearing for the gospel. He stated, “I can have no interest to forward by this address, except that interest which I feel in your welfare. I have no favour to solicit from you, but that you would attend to the things which pertain to your eternal happiness.”²⁰ Each of these two addresses exemplify the way Newton’s rhetoric of love functioned within his ministry to persuade others by the gospel for the good of their own souls.

The third address to be considered here is Newton’s first sermon preached at St. Mary Woolnoth in London on December 19, 1779. This sermon is an important component in understanding Newton’s preaching in terms of his rhetoric of love. He entitled the sermon, “The Subject and Temper of the Gospel Ministry” and based it on the words “speaking the truth in love” from Ephesians 4:15. In the opening words of the sermon, Newton said that the text was chosen “as a kind of motto, to introduce a brief account of the feelings, desires, and purpose of my heart, on this my first appearance

¹⁷Newton, *Works*, 6:567.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 6:568.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 6:570.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 6:580.

before you.”²¹ Newton gave attention to the matter of speaking the truth of Scripture but maintained that

the cause of truth itself may be discredited by improper management; and therefore, the Scripture, which furnishes us with subject-matter for our ministry, and teaches us what we are to say, is equally explicit as to the temper and spirit in which we are to speak. Though I had the knowledge of all mysteries, and the tongue of an angel to declare them, I could hope for little acceptance or usefulness, unless I was to speak ‘in love.’²²

Here is the essence of Newton’s rhetoric of love. Simply communicating the truth from the pulpit is not enough. Attention must also be given to the manner in which this truth is spoken. A rhetoric of love must guide the preacher. Newton’s rhetoric of love is rooted in the gospel which is a “declaration of the astonishing love of God to mankind”²³ and the nature of human beings as those created in the image of God.²⁴ Newton stated,

Whoever, therefore, has tasted of the love of Christ, and has known, by his own experience, the need and the worth of redemption, is enabled, yea, he is constrained, to love his fellow-creatures. He loves them at first sight; and, if the providence of God commits a dispensation of the Gospel, and a care of souls to him, he will feel the warmest emotions of friendship and tenderness, while he beseeches them by the tender mercies of God, and even while he warns them by his terrors.²⁵

Newton pleaded with those who heard him preach with an affection and love that both entreats and warns. His rhetoric was one which was animated by love. He said, “If I love you, therefore, I cannot be content with delivering my message; my spirit must and will be deeply engaged for its success.”²⁶ His point was that merely to convey the information or truth contained in Scripture was not sufficient. Rather, his purpose as a preacher was to persuade his hearers as a result of and by means of a message spoken in

²¹Newton, *Works*, 5:129.

²²*Ibid.*, 5:131.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, 5:132.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, 5:133.

love.

The following analysis of Newton's sermons provides some insight and understanding of how Newton's rhetoric of love was employed in his preaching. The first sermon under consideration was preached in Olney and was focused on the third commandment in Exodus 20:7. Newton explained the importance of obedience to this commandment in order to show proper reverence to God.²⁷ He also briefly expounded the basic concepts that appear in the text, but he gave much more attention to the ways in which this commandment was being disobeyed. As he approached this task of pointing out sinful practices, he acknowledged that his message may be unpleasant to hear. Within that context, Newton underscored the preacher's responsibility of delivering messages that encourage and lift up the broken and distressed, but he also reminded his hearers that other subjects must be addressed.²⁸ Due to the sinfulness of the human heart, Newton asserted,

We are therefore constrained frequently to insist on far less pleasing subjects, to lift up our voices like a trumpet, to demand a general attention while we attempt to shew our hearers their transgressions and their sins, that we may thereby make the doctrine of the cross of Christ welcome and desirable. It is painful to the patient, and without doubt, unpleasing to the humane artist, to probe a deep and dangerous wound; but necessity commands, and, without it a complete and lasting cure is not to be expected.²⁹

By prefacing his coming rebuke with these words, Newton was not merely softening the stern tone of the sermon. Rather, he was seeking to win a hearing by revealing his true motives for what he was about to say in the sermon.

Although the task of confronting sin is not a pleasant one, Newton performed the task not only as a requirement of his office but also because of his love for people. He attempted this potentially painful" duty in hopes of a full recovery of spiritual health

²⁷Newton, *Works*, 2:516.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 2:518-19.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 2:519.

for those who would hear his words. Even the imagery of the physician caring for the well-being of his patient communicates Newton's care for the souls of his hearers.

A similar course of action is taken in another sermon preached at Olney on 1 Corinthians 9:24 in which Paul employs the image of a race to describe the Christian life. Within the sermon Newton clarified his role as a preacher in this race. He said that preachers have a responsibility to invite all people to run the race and to "declare the prescribed rules" of the race.³⁰ He proceeded then to explain the importance of setting forth the rules of the race so that those in the race are not disqualified. Nevertheless, Newton considered his role as a preacher to be more than a disinterested party who serves to notify people of the rules. He stated, "And we cannot but be grieved to see how little these cautions are regarded by the multitudes."³¹ As Newton observed how some fail to heed his warnings as a preacher, he was grieved. Even with this short sentence, Newton was employing his rhetoric of love to persuade his congregation. He spoke the truth to his hearers as one who was affected by their responses to the message he proclaimed.

Later in the sermon, Newton displayed this same rhetoric in a different way. He revealed his intense concern for the spiritual welfare of his audience through an earnest plea for them to turn to Christ. After warning them of the danger of rejecting Christ, he spoke of God's grace and mercy being offered to them in the gospel. He urged his congregation to "no longer refuse his [God's] gracious invitation, or trifle with your precious souls."³² Not only did Newton believe the souls of his hearers are precious, but he articulated that belief in his preaching. He worked to win a hearing by means of clear expressions of his love for them. He intended to persuade others to respond in obedience to the demands of the gospel by means of showing them his love for them.

³⁰Newton, *Works*, 2:531.

³¹*Ibid.*, 2:532.

³²*Ibid.*, 2:538.

Further evidence of Newton's rhetoric of love is found in the thirty-first sermon of the *Messiah* series. The sermon is based on Romans 10:15 in which Paul extols the beauty of those who preach the gospel. Newton divided the sermon into two major sections. The first section of the sermon was focused on the nature of the gospel message, and the second section was focused on those who preach the gospel. Within the second section of the sermon, Newton highlighted the personal fulfillment that arises in a preacher when there is a recognizable love between that preacher and his people. Newton described the rewarding experience of seeing lives transformed by the preaching of the gospel. He stated,

To see his [the Lord] name made precious to the hearts of sinners; to see those who were blind admiring his excellency; to see those who were so far off from God brought so nigh; to see those who were wretched rejoicing in his goodness; to hear those whose lips were filled with folly, falsehood, or blasphemy, proclaiming his praise; such salutary effects of their ministry fill them likewise with praise and joy: and when their hearers express the power and spirit of the Gospel in their tempers and conduct, they can say, "Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord."³³

As a preacher of the gospel, Newton was so deeply concerned for the souls of his hearers that he found immense satisfaction and fulfillment when their lives were changed by the gospel. To see his hearers embrace the gospel and live out the principles of the gospel filled him with "praise and joy." Those words, *praise* and *joy*, convey the extent of Newton's love for the souls of others. By explicitly communicating this concern in his sermons, he not only reinforced the love which he displayed in his day-to-day practice of ministry, but also served to persuade his audience to listen and heed his words.

Within this same sermon, Newton proceeded to speak of the love of the people for their pastor. Newton said that when a preacher has won the affections of his people that this fully compensates "for all the scorn of an unkind world."³⁴ Newton continued by contrasting the satisfaction derived from the ability of a speaker to captivate an

³³Newton, *Works*, 4:352.

³⁴*Ibid.*

audience and that of the preacher who is loved by his congregation. He said, “It would be a small thing to be able merely to hold a multitude by the ear; but to be approved and loved by those to whom the Lord has made them useful is a high honor, and a source of sublime pleasure.”³⁵ Newton explained that a sincere preacher does not seek the “applause” of his congregation but their “edification.”³⁶ According to Newton, those preachers who are interested only “to promote their own interest or reputation” serve to “prostitute” the name of Christ.³⁷ In these statements, Newton made clear that his desire for a relationship of mutual love with his congregation was not motivated by self-concern, and he was not interested in obtaining that love from them by the use of flattering words. Newton’s rhetoric of love was not an instrument for self-advancement, but for the good of the souls of those whom he loved.

In addition, Newton outlined the way a congregation can express their love for a pastor. One of the ways to do this, according to Newton, is “[b]y taking kindly and in good part his most searching discourses in public, or even his reproofs and admonitions in private, if needful. For they know that he watches over their souls.”³⁸ Newton described a situation in which people love a pastor for speaking plainly to them for their spiritual well-being. Newton envisioned a preaching ministry that is overflowing with a rhetoric of love to the point that all those within the congregation recognize the pastor’s love for their souls and therefore, welcome any sermon he might preach to them.

In summary, Newton’s rhetoric of love was based on the love of God displayed in the gospel and patterned after the Scriptural example of the ministry of the apostle Paul. Newton’s rhetoric of love was built on the practical expressions of pastoral care in

³⁵Newton, *Works*, 4:352-53.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 4:353.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 4:354-55.

his ministry and was repeatedly spoken in a variety of ways to his congregations. As a means of communicating his genuine interest in the spiritual well-being of others, it became a key to Newton's ability to persuade and gain a hearing with those to whom he preached.

The Rhetoric of Holiness

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Newton's preaching rhetoric was a function of a pastoral homiletic that was intensely concerned with the spiritual welfare of his hearers. The previous section has shown that his pastoral homiletic was guided by a rhetoric of love. This section will explore the rhetoric of holiness which also guided Newton's pastoral homiletic. Newton not only sought to persuade his hearers by means of sincere expressions of pastoral love and affection in his ministry and preaching, but he also sought to persuade them to follow the biblical pattern of holiness that he continually presented to them in his life and preaching.

Gospel Holiness

Newton expressed this commitment to preach on the subject of a holy life as the desire "to set forth, as I shall be enabled, the glorious character and privilege of walking with God, and maintaining a conversation in heaven, in the midst of an ensnaring, troublesome world."³⁹ Newton wanted his hearers to lead lives of holiness because such a life is not only pleasing to God, but also because it is a privilege for them as well. He not only wanted this life for his hearers, but he also wanted it for himself. He wrote, "O for such a holiness of heart as might shine through and sanctify every action of my life."⁴⁰ Newton understood a holy life to be a most serious issue. He conceived a holy life as one in which behavior is determined by a proper spiritual

³⁹Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 23.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 21.

outlook. He aspired to live with a type of seriousness that grew from “a fixed persuasion of the presence of God, the value of souls, the shortness of time, the influence of example, the love of mankind and the vastness and reality of eternal things, all impressed upon the mind together.”⁴¹ Newton longed to see these attitudes in himself for the good of his own soul, and he hoped to convince others to seek after them as well.

According to Newton, the pursuit of a holy life was not optional for the true Christian. He regarded holiness to be essential to the life of a genuine believer. As noted in an earlier chapter, Newton bore concern for the unity of the evangelicals across denominational lines, and this concern led him to insist that a spirit of grace be shown to those believers who differed on matters that were non-essential to the faith. He defined those essentials somewhat broadly stating, “Essentials in Christianity are those things without which no man can be a Christian in the sight of God, and by the decision of his word.”⁴² Newton went on to say that these Christian essentials are of two types: faith and holiness.⁴³ Genuine believers are those who exercise faith in Christ and who pursue a life characterized by holiness. Newton argued that both faith and holiness must be found in the life of anyone who is a sincere Christian. He wrote, “The most specious appearances of holiness, which are not accompanied with faith in Christ, may be safely rejected as counterfeits. On the other hand, a profession of faith which is not evidenced by the fruits of holiness, by gracious tempers, and a tenour of life becoming the Gospel, is dead, delusory, and destructive.”⁴⁴ From a more general vantage point, Newton described holiness as possessing “a supreme love to God, and a hatred of all sin” which

⁴¹Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 21.

⁴²Newton, *Works*, 3:231.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 3:232.

are “beyond the power of fallen nature.”⁴⁵ For this reason, Newton pursued a life of holiness and urged his hearers to pursue the same through faith in Christ.

Application and the Conscience

Newton’s concern for holiness gave shape to his preaching in the area of application. As explained earlier in this dissertation, Newton preached expository messages that included the application of the meaning of the text to the lives of his audience. The demand for holiness in the Christian life leads to the application of the Scriptures to daily life. Although he often called for his audience to respond with specific actions, Newton also pressed for obedience to the Scriptures by means of an appeal to the consciences of those who heard him preach. The type of application Newton sought after was not primarily an outward one. He aimed for the conscience and addressed the hearts of his hearers. He made this type of appeal explicit in his sermon on Haggai 2:6-7 when he stated,

But as I do not stand here to amuse you with a declamation on a subject in which you are not immediately interested, and as my office as a preacher both warrants and requires me to address myself to your understandings but also to your consciences, I must be allowed, before I conclude, to propose this question to your consideration, Is Messiah, the desire of all nations, the object of your chief desire? How much depends upon the answer! Do you wish to know your present state in the sight of God?⁴⁶

Newton revealed that his goal as a preacher was not to speak about a subject irrelevant to the lives of his hearers. Furthermore, he was not concerned merely to inform their understanding. While he did preach to inform the mind or understanding, he ultimately sought to appeal to the conscience. In a meeting of the Eclectic Society, Newton commented on his method of preaching with this advice, “Be not didactic. Aim

⁴⁵Newton, *Works*, 3:232.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 4:38.

at the conscience. Soldiers aim at the faces.”⁴⁷ He wanted to see an internal transformation in the lives of those who heard his preaching, and he believed this transformation could only occur when the truth of the text was applied to the conscience. In the sermon from Haggai mentioned above, he sought to apply the truth of the text to the conscience of his hearers by means of a question, a practice that occurs with some frequency in Newton’s sermons. Newton strove to have his hearers interrogate their own souls regarding what they most desired. He aimed for an internal response of faith in Christ that would result in new life of holiness and godliness.

While Newton preached this sermon from Haggai and his other sermons to an audience filled with people, his preaching often took on a very personal nature. He frequently made use of the second person personal pronoun to accomplish that effect. This can be seen in the above quotation from the sermon on Haggai and in other sermons as well. A sermon Newton composed while living at Liverpool serves as a good example. One of the points he made in this sermon on Romans 8:32 is the value which God places on a human soul. Newton called his hearers to respond to the gospel through a series of direct appeals. He stated,

Suffer not your hearts to be entangled in the vanities of the world; either they will fail, and disappoint you in life, or at least you must leave them behind you when you die. You must enter an invisible unknown state, where you cannot expect to meet any of those amusements or engagements which you now find so necessary to pass away the tedious load of time that hangs upon your hands. You, to whom a few hours of leisure are so burdensome, have you considered how you shall be able to support an eternity? You stand upon a brink, and all about you is uncertainty.⁴⁸

Once more, Newton’s concern for an active response is evident. His sermon was not intended to convey information that left people unchanged but to persuade his audience to respond in faith and obedience to the Scriptures. Newton preached to produce an

⁴⁷John H. Pratt, ed., *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London, During the Years 1798-1814* (1856; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 116.

⁴⁸Newton, *Works*, 2:312.

effect in the lives of his congregations by means of “reaching the heart.”⁴⁹ This concern for the heart is evident when Newton stated, “When there is more knowledge in the head than experience in the heart, many and various are the evils that often ensue.”⁵⁰ His rhetoric of holiness endeavored to move individuals to be transformed.

Another good example of this type of appeal is found in a sermon Newton preached in Olney. In part of the application of the text, Newton addressed those who refer to themselves as Christians and lead moral lives but who also deny the truths of Scripture regarding Christ. To those individuals, Newton said,

But if you are thus minded, however sober your deportment, or professedly benevolent your disposition, though you may be applauded as a pattern of generosity, a philosopher or a saint, by your acquaintance and neighbours, if the Scriptures are true, you can be but as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the sight of God.⁵¹

This example not only provides further illustration of Newton’s use of the second person personal pronoun as a means of appealing to his hearers, but it also serves as a reminder that Newton’s view of holiness did not deal with external action only. Holiness was a matter of a transformed heart that accompanied personal faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Newton’s rhetoric of holiness was not simply a matter of calling his congregation to obedience. Rather, it functioned to call individuals to a response of faith that results in a holy life.

Application and Scripture

In addition to his use of the second person personal pronoun in appealing the consciences of his audience, Newton also used direct quotation of biblical texts in a manner that created the impression that those texts were being spoken to the congregation

⁴⁹Pratt, *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders*, 20.

⁵⁰Newton, *Works*, 2:388.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 2:377-78.

personally. In a sermon on Matthew 11:29, Newton preached in a manner that makes the listener feel Christ is speaking to them personally. Newton repeated Christ's words, "Learn of me" as he applied the text to his audience. Speaking to his congregation as though Christ Himself were present, Newton stated, "Therefore, *Learn of me*. Be not afraid to come to me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Great and mighty as I am, you may freely apply to me in every doubt and difficulty."⁵² Following some further comments on the text, Newton said,

Again, *Learn of me*. I know the cause why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take *me* for your example: I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account; in the path I mark out for you, you may perceive my own footsteps all the way.⁵³

Leaving this impression that Christ was speaking directly to his congregation, Newton preached so that individuals would obey Christ's call. He appealed to their hearts and not just their minds with this rhetoric of holiness.

Newton relied on the power of the Scriptures to penetrate the hearts of those to whom he preached by simple and direct quotation of biblical texts within the sermon. He included multiple quotations of Scripture throughout his sermons. Almost every page of published sermon text has at least one reference to a biblical text other than the sermon text itself. Although some of Newton's sermons contained as few as five direct quotations of Scripture, other sermons contained as many twenty-five or more direct quotations of Scripture. In fact, sermon seven of the *Messiah* series has thirty-six separate biblical quotes.⁵⁴ In these various quotations, Newton sought to provide biblical support for his arguments and claims. He relied on the authority of Scripture throughout his preaching ministry. He relied on the authority of Scripture for truth he conveyed in

⁵²Newton, *Works*, 2:484. Italics original.

⁵³Ibid., 2:485. Italics original.

⁵⁴Ibid., 4:79-90.

each of his sermons, but this truth was always aimed to persuade his hearers by means of the conscience and heart.

Sermon seven of the *Messiah* series is a good example of the way Newton used Scripture in his sermons both to support his points from Scripture and to persuade his hearers to obey from the heart. The sermon is based on Isaiah 60:1-3 and is entitled “The Morning Light.” Within the first section of the sermon, Newton showed that the images of light and darkness, images which are central to the sermon text, are used figuratively in Scripture to communicate the ideas regarding moral and spiritual righteousness. Therefore, Newton appealed to a number of biblical texts in which these images of light and darkness are used. In the second section of the sermon, Newton discussed the way in which the church is to shine with the light of Lord “as the moon shines, but with a borrowed light derived from the sun.”⁵⁵ As with the previous section of the sermon, Newton once again appealed to a variety of biblical passages that substantiate his point. The third section of the sermon addressed the concern of rejecting the light of the Lord, and likewise included scriptural references beyond the sermon text to establish this point. The fourth section of the sermon is similar.

In the fifth and final section, Newton began to use various biblical texts in a different way. The tenor of the sermon became more focused on application, and the scriptural quotations reflect that shift. In reflecting on Isaiah’s text, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come,” Newton stated, “The call of my text may be taken in a general sense, like that of the apostle, ‘Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.’”⁵⁶ Newton’s point in this section was to underscore that only the light of gospel has the power to transform sinners. Newton claimed with scriptural support that even good and faithful preaching, apart from the work of God through that preaching, is

⁵⁵Newton, *Works*, 4:83.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 4:88.

inadequate to bring genuine change in those who hear.⁵⁷ In response to this truth, Newton conceded, “We are aware of the difficulty, yea, the impossibility of succeeding in our endeavor to save the souls of our hearers, if we had only to depend upon our own arguments or earnestness.” He then proceeded to criticize preachers who forsake the gospel in order to satisfy the desires and preconceived ideas of those to whom they preach and pledges only to preach the gospel and concludes with these words:

God forbid that we should glory in anything else [the gospel]! Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach and prophecy to dry bones; and he who sends us can cause the dry bones to live. “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” The word of his salvation is sent to you. “The Lord is risen indeed!” “Arise, shine; for your light is come.” In his name, we proclaim pardon and peace to all who will seek him. But seek him to-day, while it is still called to-day; to-morrow is not yours. Seek him now, while he may be found. Harden not your hearts. Tremble, “lest the promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should finally come short of it.”⁵⁸

These final words of the sermon contain a string of scriptural quotations that Newton spoke directly to his congregation. The call of the Scripture texts themselves became the call of the preacher in the sermon. He pressed for obedience by using the Word of God as the authoritative and powerful means of transforming hearts and lives.

To summarize, this section of the chapter has shown that a rhetoric of holiness guided Newton’s pastoral homiletic. Newton sought to persuade his hearers to live holy lives as a response of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The belief that both faith and holiness are essential to the Christian life is central to Newton’s rhetoric of holiness. Therefore, he applied the Scriptures by appealing to the consciences of his hearers and by means of the authority and power of the Scriptures themselves.

Newton possessed a deep pastoral concern for the souls of those who sat under his preaching. Therefore, Newton’s preaching rhetoric was a function of a pastoral homiletic that expressed his concern for the spiritual welfare of his hearers. A rhetoric of

⁵⁷Newton, *Works*, 4:89.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 4:90.

love and a rhetoric of holiness guided his pastoral homiletic. Newton relied on sincere expressions of pastoral love and affection in his preaching in order to persuade his hearers to believe the gospel and live in an obedient life of faith and holiness.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

John Newton was a man who made a considerable impact during the Evangelical Revival of eighteenth-century England. His accomplished life and ministry has also left a lasting legacy for the church and for those who are called to serve in pastoral ministry. His vibrant spirituality, his tender pastoral heart, and, as this dissertation has sought to demonstrate, his preaching prove to be worthy subjects of reflection and scholarly attention. More specifically, this dissertation has shown that Newton's preaching was consistently focused on biblical exposition and guided by a gospel-centric, pastoral homiletic. The three basic components of this thesis regarding Newton's preaching (its expository nature, its gospel-centeredness, and its pastoral focus) have been explored and developed throughout the preceding chapters of this dissertation. The study of Newton's sermons has shown that he preached expositional sermons that were focused on a specific biblical text, its meaning, and its application.

Newton's sermons were expository in nature. He preached from a specific text and generally followed the structure of that text for his sermon while seeking to explain its meaning and apply it in a gospel-centered, pastoral fashion. The exposition of the Scriptures is a natural by-product of Newton's beliefs concerning the authority of Scripture. Both in preaching and in his broader ministry, Newton based his work on the divine authority of the Bible. He ministered and preached with a sense of obligation to employ the Scriptures so that others would hear the voice of God speaking to them. Nevertheless, Newton's use of the Scriptures was not merely to enforce compliance to a set of rules. He preached the Bible for the same reason he read and studied the Bible; he

preached and studied the Scriptures because he believed that God is made known through the Scriptures. Therefore, preaching is essentially spiritual in nature. Newton's spirituality or piety was thoroughly centered on Jesus Christ and so was his preaching. His aim was to see himself and others shaped into the image of Christ. He, therefore, preached with a clear focus on Christ and the gospel. He considered the gospel to be the central focus of all of the Bible. According to Newton, the gospel reveals the person of Christ as the only means of atoning for sin and bringing genuine transformation in the life of a believer. Because of this clear focus on the gospel in preaching, Newton consciously chose to preach with a simple style. Furthermore, Newton's preaching flowed from a sense of gospel urgency for the spiritual well-being of others. His preaching rhetoric is one of both love and holiness. He sought to persuade his hearers to pursue lives of faith and holiness by means of sincere expressions of pastoral love.

While this study of Newton's sermons has helped to understand the foundational principles that shaped him as a preacher, its significance is not limited to matters of historical interest. The study of Newton's preaching undertaken in this dissertation serves to show the on-going relevance of Newton's ministry and preaching. A number of significant topics have emerged that bear importance for contemporary preaching. First, a study of Newton's preaching invites a consideration of what is meant by expository preaching. Although this dissertation did not engage the debate concerning a definition of expository preaching, it does provide a context for that discussion. In other words, Newton becomes a model through which contemporary students of preaching can consider the nature of biblical exposition in the pulpit. Preachers are able to reflect on the various form and style expository preaching might take in different contexts.

Second, through this present study of Newton's sermons, readers are brought to the subject of Christ-centered preaching. While a number of different approaches have

been made in an effort to outline the proper method of Christ-centered proclamation and to describe the nature and necessity of this type of preaching, the issue remains an on-going topic within contemporary homiletics.¹ A study of Newton's preaching can serve as a means of moving this conversation forward by providing one example of how Christ-centered preaching was conducted in the past. In addition, Newton's gospel-centered preaching is a humble reminder that the practice of preaching in a Christ-centered manner is not new. Therefore, contemporary homiletics will continue to be helped in this area by on-going study of preachers from the past as well as the present.

Third, Newton's sermons provide an entry point into thinking about the significance of application in preaching.² In particular, the relationship between the preacher's broader pastoral ministry and the application of the Bible to the congregation is highlighted. Newton's pastoral heart, his desire to be practical, and his plain, direct manner invite contemporary preachers to give thought to these aspects of preaching and pastoral ministry. His ministry underscores the importance of the preacher having a good knowledge of his congregation in particular and of the human condition in general. Preaching must never be severed from the broader ministry of a pastor and his relationships with those to whom he preaches.

As each of these three points indicates, the study of the preaching of a historical figure like Newton can be a means of opening a wide variety of relevant issues related to preaching. To study Newton's preaching, or any other preacher of the past, is

¹See, for example, Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Edmund Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007).

²For the argument in support of the necessity of application in preaching, see Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3 (Summer 1999): 70-84.

not an endeavor that must be limited to gaining an understanding of the preaching of someone else. Rather, such a study has the potential to open up new vistas from which preachers can reflect more deeply about their craft and calling so that they are more effective preachers of the Word of God.

In examining Newton's preaching in terms of its expository, gospel-centric, and pastoral nature, this dissertation has focused on the foundational principles that gave shape to and guided Newton's homiletic method. The study of these foundational principles suggests a number of avenues for the further study Newton's preaching. For instance, in the discussion of the gospel-centered nature of Newton's sermons, some attention was given to the evangelistic emphasis in those sermons. A more detailed study of that aspect of Newton's preaching appears to be a worthy endeavor. The simplicity of style in Newton's sermons also offers another possible avenue for additional study. A more detailed analysis of Newton's sermons with regard to stylistic considerations could prove to yield a number of interesting points that would not only shed light on his preaching but offer a window into this aspect of preaching during the eighteenth century. In addition, more attention should be given to Newton's methods of persuasion. While this dissertation has argued that Newton sought to persuade by means of a rhetoric of love and a rhetoric of holiness, additional study on his rhetorical methods would be of value. Undoubtedly, a number of other issues related to Newton's preaching could be explored with great benefit.

Although the primary aim of this study has been to demonstrate the thesis that Newton's preaching was expository, gospel-centered, and pastoral, a secondary aim has been to promote the importance and advancement of the study of the life, ministry, and preaching of this significant figure in the history of the church. Newton hoped that God might use his "little name" to strengthen the church and further the cause of Christ

throughout world.³ Through the study of Newton’s sermons, the hope continues that others may benefit from the faithful ministry of this pastor and preacher. This is not to suggest that Newton’s preaching or ministry was without fault, but to point to him as a good example of a faithful pastor who served well. In the preface to his first published sermons, Newton said, “Every particle of truth is valuable in itself, by whatever means or instruments it may be conveyed to us; and like a torch displays itself by its own light, without any relation to the hand that bears it.”⁴ His point in this remark was to encourage an honest evaluation of his preaching. He hoped the message he preached, the truth of the Scriptures, would be heard despite his own insignificance and inadequacies. Although he considered himself to be an imperfect and humble “hand” carrying the light of God’s truth, he strived to proclaim that truth with his utmost ability and with a great sense of urgency. He is, therefore, a worthy model for those who are committed to preaching the Scriptures with ever increasing faithfulness, clarity, and effectiveness.

³John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 2:257.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2:258.

APPENDIX
AN INDEX OF NEWTON'S PUBLISHED SERMONS

Sermons from Volume 2 of Newton's Works:

Six sermons intended to be preached but put it written form; dated January 1, 1760
(Liverpool)

1. ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART (Jeremiah 17:9-10)
2. ON THE SAVIOUR AND HIS SALVATION (1 Timothy 1:15)
3. ON THE CHRISTIAN NAME (Acts 11:26)
4. ON ALL THINGS BEING GIVEN WITH CHRIST (Romans 8:32)
5. ON SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES (John 5:39)
6. THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED (John 5:39)

Twenty sermons preached at Olney; dated January 20, 1767

1. THE SMALL SUCCESS OF GOSPEL MINISTRY CONSIDERED (Matthew 11:25)
2. IN WHAT SENSE THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL ARE HID FROM MANY (Matthew 11:25)
3. THE CHARACTERS OF THOSE FROM WHO THE GOSPEL DOCTRINES ARE HID (Matthew 11:25)
4. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL REVELATION AND THOSE WHO ARE FAVOURED WITH IT (Matthew 11:25)
5. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE ASSERTED AND ILLUSTRATED (Matthew 11:26)
6. OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST (Matthew 11:27)
7. OF THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST (Matthew 11:27)
8. THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN CHRIST (Matthew 11:27)
9. LABORING AND HEAVY LADEN SINNERS DESCRIBED (Matthew 11:28)
10. OF COMING TO CHRIST (Matthew 11:28)
11. THE PRESENT AND FUTURE REST OF BELIEVERS (Matthew 11:28)
12. OF THE YOKE OF CHRIST (Matthew 11:29)
13. THE SERVICE OF CHRIST EASY AND PLEASANT (Matthew 11:30)
14. BELIEVERS CAUTIONED (Romans 14:16)
15. THE EXTENT AND SANCTION OF THE THIRD COMMANDMENT (Exodus 20:7)

16. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMPARED TO A RACE (1 Corinthians 9:24)
17. NO ACCESS TO GOD BUT BY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (Micah 6:6-8)
18. OF A LIVING AND DEAD FAITH (James 2:26)
19. GUILT REMOVED AND PEACE RESTORED (Psalm 51:15)
20. OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH (1 John 5:19)

Sermons from Volume 4 of Newton's Works:

Fifty Expository Discourses on Handel's *Messiah* (Preached 1784-85 in London; published in 1786)

1. THE CONSOLATION (Isaiah 40:1-2)
2. THE HARBINGER (Isaiah 40:3-5)
3. THE SHAKING OF THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH (Haggai 2:6-7)
4. THE LORD COMING TO HIS TEMPLE (Malachi 3:1-3)
5. IMMANUEL (Isaiah 7:14)
6. SALVATION PUBLISHED FROM THE MOUNTAINS (Isaiah 40:9)
7. THE MORNING LIGHT (Isaiah 60:1-3)
8. THE SUN RISING ON A DARK WORLD (Isaiah 9:2)
9. CHARACTERS AND NAMES OF MESSIAH (Isaiah 9:6)
10. THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE AND SONG (Luke 2:8-14)
11. MESSIAH'S ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM (Zechariah 9:9-10)
12. EFFECTS OF MESSIAH'S APPEARANCE (Isaiah 35:5-6)
13. THE GREAT SHEPHERD (Isaiah 40:11)
14. REST FOR THE WEARY (Matthew 11:28)
15. MESSIAH'S EASY YOKE (Matthew 11:29-30)
16. THE LAMB OF GOD, THE GREAT ATONEMENT (John 1:29)
17. MESSIAH DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MAN (Isaiah 53:3)
18. VOLUNTARY SUFFERING (Isaiah 50:6)
19. MESSIAH SUFFERING AND WOUNDED FOR US (Isaiah 53:4-5)
20. SIN CHARGED UPON THE SURETY (Isaiah 53:6)
21. MESSIAH DERIDED UPON THE CROSS (Psalm 22:7-8)
22. MESSIAH UNPITIED AND WITHOUT COMFORT (Psalm 69:20)
23. NO SORROW LIKE MESSIAH'S SORROW (Lamentations 1:12)
24. MESSIAH'S INNOCENCE VINDICATED (Isaiah 53:8)
25. MESSIAH'S RISING FROM THE DEAD (Psalm 16:10)
26. THE ASCENSION OF MESSIAH TO GLORY (Psalm 24:7-10)
27. MESSIAH THE SON OF GOD (Hebrews 1:5)
28. MESSIAH WORSHIPPED BY ANGELS (Hebrews 1:6)
29. GIFTS RECEIVED FOR THE REBELLIOUS (Psalm 68:18)
30. THE PUBLICATION OF THE GOSPEL (Psalm 68:11)
31. THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, GLAD TIDINGS (Romans 10:15)
32. THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL (Romans 10:18)
33. OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH UNREASONABLE (Psalm 2:1-3)
34. OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH IN VAIN (Psalm 2:4)
35. OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH RUINOUS (Psalm 2:9)

36. THE LORD REIGNETH (Revelation 19:6)
37. THE EXTENT OF MESSIAH'S SPIRITUAL KINGDOM (Revelation 11:15)
38. KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:16)
39. JOB'S FAITH AND EXPECTATION (Job 19:25-26)
40. THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED (1 Corinthians 15:20)
41. DEATH BY ADAM, LIFE BY CHRIST (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)
42. THE GENERAL RESURRECTION (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)
43. DEATH SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY (1 Corinthians 15:54)
44. TRIUMPHS OVER DEATH AND THE GRAVE (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)
45. DIVINE SUPPORT AND PROTECTION (Romans 8:31)
46. ACCUSERS CHALLENGED (Romans 8:33)
47. THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST (Romans 8:34)
48. THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED (Revelation 5:9)
49. THE CHORUS OF ANGELS (Revelation 5:12)
50. THE UNIVERSAL CHORUS (Revelation 5:13)

Sermons from Volume 5 of Newton's Works:

1. THE SUBJECT AND TEMPER OF GOSPEL MINISTRY (Ephesians 4:15)
Preached on Sunday, December 19, 1779 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London
2. THE GUILT AND DANGER OF SUCH A NATION AS THIS (Jeremiah 5:29)
Preached on Wednesday, February 21, 1781 at St Mary Woolnoth, London
3. ON THE DEATH OF DR. CONYERS (1 Thessalonians 2:8)
A funeral sermon for Richard Conyers; preached on Sunday May 7, 1786 at St. Paul's, Deptford
4. THE BEST WISDOM (Proverbs 11:30)
Preached on Wednesday, November 21, 1787 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London
5. THE GREAT ADVENT (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
Preached April 23, 1789 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London
6. THE IMMINENT DANGER AND ONLY SURE RESOURCE OF THIS NATION (Jonah 3:9)
Preached on Friday, February 28, 1794 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London
7. MOTIVES TO HUMILIATION AND PRAISE (Hosea 11:8-9)
Preached on December 19, 1797 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London

Sermon from Volume 6 of Newton's Works:

1. THE CONSTRAINING INFLUENCE OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST (2 Corinthians 5:13-15)
Preached March 30, 1800 at St. Mary Woolnoth, London

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ABSTRACT

THE PREACHING OF JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807): A GOSPEL-CENTRIC, PASTORAL HOMILETIC OF BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
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This dissertation examines the preaching ministry of John Newton as a model of biblical exposition that was guided by a gospel-centric, pastoral homiletic. Chapter 1 defines the thesis of this dissertation, introduces the subject of this dissertation by surveying the scholarly work that has concentrated on Newton's life and ministry, and demonstrates the lack of focused study on Newton's preaching. Chapter 2 is a biographical survey of Newton's life and ministry. Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to Newton's preaching by surveying Newton's sermons and demonstrates that Newton's preaching should be regarded as expository. Attention is also given to the eighteenth-century historical context in which Newton preached.

Chapter 4 argues that Newton's high view of Scripture served as a foundation of his ministry and preaching. Chapter 5 is a discussion of Newton's Christ-centered piety with regard to its impact on his life, ministry and preaching. Chapter 6 maintains that Newton's Christ-centered spirituality is evident in his gospel-centric preaching and the homiletical methods that guided him. Chapter 7 examines Newton's preaching and his commitment to pastoral ministry. It argues that Newton's preaching rhetoric was a function of a pastoral homiletic that was deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of his hearers. The final chapter summarizes the major points of dissertation and reflects on the importance of the use of historical models like Newton for contemporary preaching.

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MINISTERIAL

Church Planter, Ohio Valley Baptist Association, 2000-2001
Pastor, Highland Avenue Baptist Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001-2014
Pastor, Cedar Grove Baptist Church, Shepherdsville, Kentucky, 2014-

ACADEMIC

Garret Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2011

ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Homiletics Society