

I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!

by John Piper

John Piper explores the extraordinary life and preaching of George Whitefield, highlighting his unique blend of natural talent and spiritual power.

Duration: 1:23:28

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:6, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Church History", "Evangelism"

Description

This sermon delves into the life of George Whitefield, a prominent preacher of the 18th century, highlighting his fervent evangelistic efforts, doctrinal faithfulness, and blind spots, particularly in relation to his support of slavery. Despite his imperfections, Whitefield's preaching impacted many, especially the slave community, leading them to embrace Christianity. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding historical figures in their entirety, acknowledging both their strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately pointing to the righteousness of Christ as the true source of salvation.

Transcript

Would you pray with me? Father in Heaven, we want so much now to be strengthened in our pastoral labors and our evangelistic labors, in our families, and in our own souls, our worship of Christ and our obedience to Him. And so, be pleased to let Whitefield speak and let his life speak again. He was so mighty in the Word and mighty in the Spirit.

And by biography, he lives on, and we praise you for that. He was a sinner, regenerated and justified, and now completely pure in his soul, one day to be raised from the dead, all by grace. And I pray that we would learn from him and be helped by him.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Just so that you don't feel any pressure to write anything down, if it's a juicy Whitefield quote, this manuscript will be online, I think, before I'm done here, with its 89 footnotes.

So, don't feel the need to write anything down because I'm sure it's all here and you can just relax, think, pray, ask the Lord to sanctify this Word to you personally rather than trying to record anything since you just go to your computer and get it all afterwards. The facts about Whitefield's life as a 18th century itinerant Anglican evangelist from the beginning of his ministry until the end are almost unbelievable. I mean, can they really be true? And all I know to say is that multiple attestations of his life from those who knew him and the agreement of biographers who don't like him and do like him, all of that seems to say

these things are so, as incredible as they are.

So let me try to paint a picture of that unbelievable life and then we'll tackle a few things about him. From his first outdoor sermon on February 17, 1739 at the age of 24 to those coal miners in Kingswood near Bristol in England, until his death 30 years later in Newburyport, Massachusetts where he's buried. That was 1770, September 30.

Between those two times, separated by about 30 years, he preached almost daily. It's estimated that he preached 18,000 sermons. And if you count the exhortations and the meditations that he gave verbally, generally, the sober estimates are that he spoke about 1,000 times every year for 30 years.

So, do the math. The daily pace that he kept for 30 years and many of those weeks speaking more than he was sleeping. Henry Venn, the vicar of Huddersfield who knew him well, expressed this amazement for all of us.

He said, Who would think it possible that a person should speak in the compass of a single week and that for years, in general, 40 hours? And in very many, 60? And that to thousands? And after this labor, instead of taking any rest, should be offering up prayers and intercessions with hymns and spiritual songs as his manner was in every house to which he was invited. Now, be sure that you understood what I just read. Many weeks speaking, not preparing to speak, which he had no time to do, but speaking, saying things, 60.

That's 60, not one-sixth. Sixty hours a week, many weeks of his life. And in the slower weeks, 40 hours of speaking.

So, six hours a day, seven days a week, one week, and eight hours a day, seven days a week, another week. That's general. That's not believable unless you get enough biographers and enough contemporary witnesses saying that.

I found in all my reading for the last year, no references to what we would call vacations or days off. When he felt the need to recuperate, he thought in terms of an ocean voyage to America. Those ocean voyages took about eight to ten weeks.

He made 13 of them. That's an odd number because he died in the States. And on those trips, he preached every day.

And that was a relief because once a day was modest and he had time to read and be refreshed. But on land, the pace was unremitting. Two years before he died, at the age of 55, not a surprise, he wrote in a letter, I love the bracing open air.

The following year, it is good to go into the highways and hedges, field preaching, field preaching forever. Day after day, his life was one preaching, preaching, preaching. Now keep in mind, when it says 60 hours or 40 hours of preaching, a week that he was talking without a microphone to thousands of people, out of doors usually with the wind and the competing noises.

This is not believable. A body can't do that. I mean, I'm an absolute wimp standing here with this ridiculous little gizmo assisting me in a tiny little room like this with only 1,500 people instead of outside with 8,000 or 10,000 or 20,000.

The energy it would take to project your voice. These things seem to me unbelievable. Wednesday, April 6, 1740, he's on Society Hill in Philadelphia and he says he spoke twice in the morning to 6,000 people and in the evening to 8,000.

And on Thursday, the next day, upwards of 10,000 gathered and it is reported that when he opened his mouth and used these words of Jesus, he opened his mouth and taught them saying it was distinctly heard at Gloucester Point two miles away down the Delaware River. And there are times when the crowd was 20,000, not 10 or 8 or 6. Every sermon over and over for 30 years, 1,000 times a year, this is a Herculean task. There's never anything like it.

Now, add to this that he was continually traveling in a day when you had to go by horse or carriage or on a ship. He covered the length and breadth of England over and over again. He traveled to Wales regularly.

He made two visits to Ireland, was stoned there, carried a scar in his forehead the rest of his life because of the mob violence in Ireland. Fourteen visits to Scotland, seven to America, Bermuda for 11 weeks, not for a vacation, but daily preaching. Every major town on the American seaboard.

Michael Hakin reminds us, what is so remarkable about all this is Whitefield lived at a time when travel to a town 20 miles away was a significant undertaking. He was, J.C. Ryle, I think is accurate, eminently a man of one thing and always about his master's business. Quote, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, from January 1 to December 31, accepting when laid aside by illness, he was almost incessantly preaching Christ, going about the world and treating men to repent and come to Christ and be saved.

Or as another biographer said, his whole life may be said to have been consumed in the delivery of one continuous or scarcely interrupted sermon. He was a phenomenon of his age. And I think probably not of his age only, but of the entire history of Christian preaching for 2,000 years.

There has been nothing like the combination of preaching pace, geographic extent, auditory scope, attention-holding effect, converting power, nothing like it in the history of the world. No preacher, Ryle says, has ever retained his hold on his hearers so entirely as he did for 34 years. His popularity never waned.

Augustus Toplady called him the apostle of the English empire. He was, quote, Anglo-America's most popular 18th century preacher and its first truly mass revivalist. Estimates are, get this, this is adding incredibility to incredibility.

The estimates are that in America, which he came to love more than he loved his England, he would have sided with the revolutionaries had it come to that. He loved this land. The ethos fit him better than England.

He was a modern communicator. It's estimated that four-fifths of the entire population of the American colonies heard Whitefield at least once. So he got no radio, no internet, no television, and they all stood in his presence, four-fifths of the population of the country in those days, sometime during the ministries that he had in his eight years that he spent in America.

So what should we make of this phenomenon? What was the key to his power? At one level, he had natural powers that were unsurpassed. He was naturally gifted in eloquence. And at another level, he had spiritual power from God to convert sinners and transform communities.

There's no reason to doubt that he was an instrument of God in the salvation of thousands. J.C. Ryle said this, I believe that the direct good which he did to immortal souls was enormous. I will go further.

I believe it is incalculable. Credible witnesses in England, Scotland, and America have placed on record their conviction that he was the means of converting thousands of people. So he had an anointing.

He wasn't simply eloquent. There was something on him. Jonathan Edwards could tell this.

He wrote him a letter from his home in Northampton to Whitefield in Georgia in February of 1740, inviting him to come preach in his pulpit. So on October 19, Whitefield recorded this in his journal, Preach this morning, and good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of the exercise. And the people were equally affected.

And the effect on the community there in Northampton was not momentary. It wasn't just Edwards weeping in the pew. It was a lasting impact because Edwards said in about a month there was a great alteration in the town.

So the impact of Whitefield and Wesley and the Great Awakening in those days was profound. There was a spiritual thing going on, not just an eloquent thing going on. William Wilberforce, who led the battle, as you know, against the slave trade in England, was eleven years old when Whitefield died.

Wilberforce's father died when he was nine. When he died, he went to live with his aunt and uncle, William and Hannah Wilberforce, for a couple of years. William and Hannah Wilberforce were very close friends with Whitefield.

This was the spiritual air that Wilberforce breathed in even before he was converted. And when you read the one book that Wilberforce wrote, you can smell Whitefield everywhere because of the prominence of the doctrine of justification by faith in the very terms in which Whitefield expressed it in the remaining sermons. There are only 57 sermons of Whitefield of the 18,000.

There are only 57 extant, except for 18 others, and those aren't in print. So you can get the 57 today from Logos and have them on your computer and you've got everything there is to read of sermons. The journals are still available.

So there was a power in that moment in history coming through the Wesleys, coming through Edwards, coming through Whitefield, not just an eloquence. Henry Vann said, Whitefield no sooner opened his mouth as a preacher than God commanded an extraordinary blessing upon his word. So at that level, there is an explanation of this man in terms of the Holy Spirit and the anointing of God to awaken sinners, bring conviction, bring conversion, bring transformation that would extend for a century of transformation through various people in England.

However, there is another level. Whitefield held people in thrall who did not believe a single doctrinal word that he said. So you know there's more going on here than mere anointing to convict for sin.

And we need to think about this. There were natural oratorical gifts that were remarkable. And how are we to relate those two? How are we to think through what this man did and how he spoke and his personality and what he was by nature, not just by super nature.

Benjamin Franklin, who loved and admired Whitefield and totally rejected his theology, said this, Every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice was so perfectly well turned and well placed that without being interested in the subject at all, one could not help being pleased with the discourse. A pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music. He loved to listen to Whitefield preach hell, heaven, regeneration.

Didn't believe any of it. Virtually everybody agrees with Sarah Edwards. She recounted after he came to Jonathan Edwards' church in Northampton, Sarah wrote to her brother to say what happened.

Everybody agrees with what she said. She said, He is a born orator. You have already heard, she's saying, you have already heard of his deep tone, yet clear and melodious voice.

Oh, it is perfect music to listen to that alone. You remember that David Hume thought it worth going 20 miles to hear him speak. And Garrick, the actor who envied Whitefield's gifts, said he could move men to tears in pronouncing the word Mesopotamia.

It is truly wonderful to see what a spell this preacher often casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible. And then she raises the question that in the last 15 years of Whitefield scholarship has been very controversial and I want to tackle it. She said, A prejudiced person, I know, might say this is all theatrical artifice and display, but not so will anyone think who has seen and known him.

He is a very devout and godly man and his only aim seems to be to reach and influence men the best way. He speaks from the heart all aglow with love and pours out a torrent of eloquence which is almost irresistible. Now, Harry Stout, professor of history at Yale, has written a book called *The Divine Dramatist, George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, which I read very carefully all the way through, cover to cover.

He's not so sure that Sarah Edwards is right about the purity of Whitefield's motives. This book by Harry Stout, which you will not find in the bookstore because I told them not to carry it, so you can criticize me if you said you ought to have it there because Piper quotes from it. This is the most sustained piece of historical cynicism I have ever read.

In the first hundred pages of Stout's book, I wrote in the margin the word cynical 70 times. But, having restrained myself tremendously at this point in being negative about this book, I do think we need to come to terms with what he faced. And if we face it head on, I think we will find something deeper than Stout found.

Even asking his kind of question about drama, the *Divine Dramatist*, I think we find something different than he found. He says, the key to understanding him is, now these are all quotes. These are very pejorative and they're all his.

The amalgam of preaching and acting. Whitefield was the consummate actor. The fame he sought was the actor's command performance on center stage.

Whitefield was not content simply to talk about the new birth. He had to sell it with all the dramatic artifice of a huckster. That's the worst sentence in the book, I think.

I'll read it again. Whitefield was not content simply to talk about the new birth. He had to sell it with all the dramatic artifice of a huckster.

He should be ashamed of that sentence. He really should. And if you watch this, Harry Stout, you should be ashamed of that sentence.

Tears, this is continuing to quote him, Tears became Whitefield's psychological gesture. Whitefield became an actor preacher as opposed to a scholar preacher. So that gives you a flavor of what he's saying.

Now, that last sentence is at one level, I believe, true. Whitefield became an actor preacher as opposed to a scholar preacher. He was an actor preacher as opposed to a scholar preacher.

He was not a Jonathan Edwards. He had a closer friendship with Benjamin Franklin, the deist, than he did with Jonathan Edwards, whose theology he totally agreed with. They were wired so differently.

If you look at the picture of his little traveling pulpit, it's like a little stage, not a pulpit, not like one of these or a wooden one. It's a little platform where he could have all of his body free. His preaching was full of action.

Cornelius Winter, his assistant near the end of his life, said, I hardly ever knew him go through a sermon without weeping. Sometimes he exceedingly wept, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome that for a few seconds you would suspect he never could recover, and when he did, nature required some little time to compose himself. So you get the picture of how flamboyantly active and melodramatic or dramatic he was.

Another contemporary from Scotland, John Gillies, reported how Whitfield moved with such vehemence upon his bodily frame that his audience actually shared his exhaustion and felt a momentary apprehension for his life. So, I do not doubt that Whitfield was acting in one sense as he preached. That is, he was taking the part of his characters in the drama of the sermon, pouring all of his energy into making their part real.

When he takes the part of Adam, for example, I got this from one of his sermons, in the garden, and says to God, If thou hast given me this woman, If thou hast not given me this woman, I had not sinned against thee, so thou mayest thank thyself for this transgression. That's pretty dramatic, telling God, Thank yourself for my sin. What would that sound like if you're speaking to 8,000 people? That's pretty loud.

How are you going to do that without energy? But the question is, why was Whitfield acting? Why was he so full of action and drama? Was he, as Stout claims, and here comes a whole other sequence of pejorative, cynical phrases. Was he, as Stout claims, plying a religious trade, pursuing spiritual fame, craving, that's his word, respect and power, driven by egotism, putting on performances, integrating religious discourse into the emerging language of consumption? Is that what's going on? I think the most penetrating answer is given by Whitfield himself as he talks about acting on the stage in London. This is right at the core of my discovery and what I think makes him tick, so listen carefully for the next minute or so to this quote.

I think this is the key to understanding how his spiritual power and his natural power intersect and the meaning of his so-called acting in his preaching. James Lockington was present at this sermon that I'm about to quote in London and Whitfield is speaking. So what I'm about to read you, written down verbatim by this James Lockington and is Whitfield's own reflection on acting.

I'll tell you a story. Picture him saying this to 3,000 people in London. I'll tell you a story.

The Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 1675 was acquainted with Mr. Butterton, the actor. One day, the Archbishop said to Butterton, Pray, inform me, Mr. Butterton, what is the reason you actors on the stage can affect your congregations with speaking of things imaginary as if they were real while we in the church speak of things real which our congregations only receive as if they were imaginary. Why, my Lord, says Butterton, the reason is very plain.

We actors on the stage speak of things imaginary as if they were real. And you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary. Therefore, added Whitfield, I will bawl.

I will not be a velvet-mouth preacher. I think that little vignette is the key. There are three ways to talk in this text.

You can speak of the unreal imaginary as if it were real. That's what actors do on the stage. Or you can speak about the real world as if it were unreal.

Namely, indifferently and bored. And that's what pastors do, Butterton said in his day. Or you can speak about the real spiritual world as if it were wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real because it is.

And Whitfield would say, I believe, why do I preach the way I do? Why is there so much action and so much passion and so much animation? It's not because I am a repressed actor from the days of my youth when I loved so much to take my school parts. It's because I will outact the actors because what I have to say is so much more real than what they have to say. So this kind of acting is different than the acting on the stage.

He's acting with all his might not because it takes greater gimmicks or charades to convince people of the unreal, but because he had seen something more real than actors on the stage in London had ever dreamed. For him, the truths of the Gospel were so real, so wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real that he could not and would not preach as though they were unreal, as though they were merely interesting. So, thinking in terms of here is a repressed actor.

This was not repressed acting, this was released acting. It was not acting in the service of imagination, it was acting in the service of reality. This was not rendering the imaginary as real, this was rendering the super real of the real as sheer, awesome, breathtaking real.

This was not affectation, this was passionate re-presentation. This was not the mighty microscope using all of its powers to make the small look impressively big, this was the desperately inadequate telescope bending every power to give some small sense of the majesty of what too many preachers saw as tiresome and boring. There's no disagreement here that God uses natural vessels and that Whitefield's vessel was extraordinary.

What a voice! Two miles away. There's no disagreement that Whitefield was a stupendous natural talent. He was driven, affable, eloquent, intelligent, empathetic, single-minded, steel-wheeled, venturesome, and a voice like a trumpet you could hear two miles away, and he would have been that if he'd never been born again.

That's what historians like Stout are trying to come to terms with. But then, something happened to this vessel. All of his natural gifts suddenly were subordinated to a reality.

Because Whitefield was born again. He was converted. It was the spring of 1735.

He was 20 years old. His birthday is in December. He was part of the Holy Club at Oxford.

John Wesley part of it. Charles Wesley part of it. They were all pursuing God by discipline.

None of them was saved. I always chose the worst sort of food. I fasted twice a week.

This is Whitefield talking. My apparel was mean. I wore woolen gloves, a patched gown, dirty shoes.

I constantly walked out on cold mornings till part of one of my hands was quite black. I could scarce creep upstairs. I was obliged to inform my kind tutor who immediately sent for a physician for me.

In other words, he was into mega-asceticism. Trying desperately like Martin Luther to find spiritual reality. His health broke.

He took a break from school. During this break, Charles Wesley, who wasn't much farther along spiritually than he was, put into his hand Henry Schugle's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. If you've not read it, read it.

And here's what happened in his own words. I must bear testimony to my old friend Mr. Charles Wesley. He put a book into my hands which is called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

Whereby God showed me that I must be born again or be damned. I know the place. It may be superstitious, perhaps, but whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to the place where Jesus Christ first revealed Himself to me and gave me the new birth.

Schugle says a man may go to church, say his prayers, receive the sacrament, and yet, my brethren, not be a Christian. How did my heart rise? How did my heart shudder like a poor man that is afraid to look into his account books lest he should find himself a bankrupt? Yet, shall I burn that book? Shall I throw it down? Shall I put it by or shall I search into it? I did. And holding the book in my hand, thus addressed the God of heaven and earth, Lord, if I am not a Christian, if I am not a real one, for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is that I may not be damned at last.

I read a little farther and the cheek was discovered. Oh, says the author, they that know anything of religion know it is a vital union with the Son of God. Christ formed in the heart.

Oh, what a way of divine life did break in upon my poor soul! Oh, with what joy, joy unspeakable, even joy that was full of and big with glory was my soul filled. I don't think Harry Stout reckoned seriously enough with the power and the depth and the supernatural reality of that change in Whitefield. Needs to be reckoned with.

What happened there was that Whitefield was given a supernatural life, a spiritual life, and thereby the ability to see what was real. That's what happened. That's what the new birth is.

His mind was opened to see reality. Here's the way he described it. Above all, my mind being now opened and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books and praying over, if possible, every line and word.

This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life and light and power from above. I got more true knowledge from reading the book of God in one month than I could have acquired from all the writings of men.

That's what happens when you're born again. Your mind is altered so that when you go to the Bible you see wondrous things out of His law. And then it's a fight for the rest of your life, which is why the psalmist prays that way.

Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of Your law. Now this means that Whitefield's acting, his passionate, energetic, whole-souled preaching was the fruit of his new birth. Because his new birth had given him eyes to see life and light and power from above.

So he saw the glorious facts of the Gospel as real and through those facts he saw the Savior and what He accomplished as wonderful and terrifying and magnificent and real. And so he cries out, I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher. None of His natural abilities vanished.

They were all taken captive to obey Christ. Let my name be forgotten. Let me be trodden under the feet of all men if Jesus may thereby be glorified.

There was the change. So Whitefield had a new nature. He'd been born again and with this new nature God enabled him to see what was real.

And Whitefield knew in his soul I will never ever speak of this real as though it were unreal. I will not join these boring pastors. I will not preach that way.

So he became quite different and a phenomenon. I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher. But he didn't abandon acting.

He would outact the actors in his preaching because they became actors to make imaginary things look real. And he became the preacher actor to make the real things look like what they really are. Extraordinary.

Glorious. Wildly. Magnificently.

Terrifyingly real. He didn't, let's clarify here, he didn't pause in his preaching to have a little drama on the stage. We'll skip.

He didn't stop and show a clip from a movie. That for him, had they existed, that for him would have missed the whole point. Preaching was the play.

Preaching was the drama. The reality of the Gospel had consumed him. This was the witness.

This was the witness. You know, this was the witness. This was the reenactment of the real.

The preaching itself had become the active Word of God. God was speaking. Reality was not simply being shown.

Reality was happening. And this means that in the end, Whitfield's acting was not acting in the theatrical sense. If a woman is an actor, actress, and her role is assigned to be a mother, and on the stage, well, let's put it out in the world, there's a house that's burning.

Her child is in the second floor, and the cameras are everywhere rolling in on her from every side. And her job is, you scream, and you call the fireman, and you point to the child in the window, and she does it. She's screaming, and tears are rolling down her face, and she's grabbing the fireman everywhere.

It's my baby! It's my baby! Everybody knows she's acting. If the same thing happens in your neighborhood, you hear the sirens, and you go out of your door, and you look, you see the big black smoke from the end of the block, you run down there, and there's this woman. It's my baby! It's my baby! Up there, look, she's got to go! Or she starts running, and they take her down.

Nobody says she's acting. It looks exactly the same. Exactly! There's a difference.

It's real! It's real! You don't call it acting. It is, and it isn't. It looks like it.

It's because there really is a child up there. There really is a fire. The child could really die.

This really is the mother. Everything's real. And that's the way it was for Whitfield.

The new birth had opened his eyes to what was real, and the magnitude of what was real. God, creation, human beings, sin, Satan, divine justice and wrath, heaven, hell, incarnation, perfections of Christ, death of Christ, atonement, redemption, propitiation, resurrection, Holy Spirit, saving grace, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation with God, peace, sanctification, love, the second coming of Christ, new heavens, new earth, everlasting joy. These were real! Spectacularly, gloriously, supremely, over everything, real! And he felt it to the bottom of his bones because he had been born again.

When he warned of wrath and pleaded for people to escape and lifted up Christ, he wasn't playacting. He was calling down the kind of emotions and actions that correspond to such realities. That's what preaching does.

It seeks to exalt Christ and describe Him and offer salvation and persuade sinners with emotions and words and actions that correspond to the weight of the reality. Now, let's be more specific. When I say he saw reality and therefore his so-called acting is not acting because it's in the service of reality not in the service of imagination made to look like reality.

What was the reality that he saw? Let's be more specific. This is evangelistic preaching. He had a flock in London that he would go back to regularly and others would care for it while he was away but mainly he's an evangelist.

He's a Billy Graham type only preaching a thousand times more than Billy Graham did without a microphone or than my daddy did. I read the Banner of Truth collection of sermons all the way through. I haven't read all 57 sermons but I read that book of collected sermons and what you get is an incredible impression that these are unbelievably doctrinal.

You're even saying, you're kidding me. He said this to 8,000 people? I don't even know how to say this to 8,000 people. I mean, you've got to say this slowly and carefully because it's so complex.

How did he do this? That's the first impression I got is that these are amazingly doctrinal. And as you know, I suppose the doctrine was the doctrine of grace. He used that phrase over and over.

Doctrines of grace or reformation doctrines. Calvinism. From first to last, Stout says rightly, he was a Calvinist who believed that God chose him for salvation and not the reverse.

J.I. Packer observes Whitfield was entirely free of doctrinal novelties. Whitfield said, I embrace the Calvinistic scheme not because Calvin but Jesus Christ has taught it to me. And then he wrote to John Wesley in 1740, I never read anything that Calvin wrote.

I mean, can you bear witness in such a way? What an effective way to bear witness to the truth of Calvinism. And that was his way. He said that in 1740.

I don't know if it was true when he died. I never read anything that Calvin wrote. I love it.

What Whitfield saw when his new eyes were opened were the five points of Calvinism. He was simply blown away. This is just a few months after his conversion.

And his main helper was Matthew Henry. Plus his Bible. He was blown away by election and perseverance and their connection.

So, E.P. This became for him the rock solid foundation of his life and ministry. Here's what he wrote. Oh, the excellency of the doctrine of election and of the saints' final perseverance to those who are truly sealed by the Spirit of promise.

I am persuaded, till a man comes to believe and feel these important truths, he cannot come out of himself. But when convinced of these and assured of the application of them to his own heart, he then walks by faith indeed, not in himself, but in the Son of God who died and gave himself for him. Love, not fear, constrains him to obedience.

A year later he wrote to John Wesley, The doctrine of election and the final perseverance of those who are truly in Christ, I am ten thousand times more convinced of, if possible, than when I saw you last. He loved, assured, he had a deep love for his safe place in the mighty hands of God. He said, Surely I am safe because put into his mighty arms though I may fall yet I shall not utterly be cast away.

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus will hold and uphold me. Now, a lot of people quietly are drawn to these things as they see them in the Bible and don't say anything because they haven't gone deep enough, like Whitfield did, for them to sound glorious, sweet, precious, good news. But not so Whitfield.

Whitfield was not quiet about these things. They are strewn throughout his preaching. He said to Wesley, I must preach the Gospel of Christ and this I cannot do without speaking of election.

In his sermon based on 1 Corinthians 1 verse 30, the sermon was called Christ, the Believer's Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. He exalts in the doctrine of election. Now remember, he's lifting up his voice to thousands of ordinary people.

For my part, I cannot see how true humbleness of mind can be attained without a knowledge of the doctrine of election. And though I will not say that everyone who denies election is a bad man, yet I will say with that sweet singer, Mr. Trail, it is a very bad sign. Such a one, whoever he be, I think cannot truly know himself.

For if we deny election, we must partly at least glory in ourselves. But our redemption is so ordered that no flesh should glory in the Divine Presence. And hence, it is that the pride of man opposes this doctrine, because according to this doctrine and no other, he that glories must glory only in the Lord.

But what shall I say? Election is a mystery that shines with such resplendent brightness that to make use of the words of one who has drunk deeply of electing love dazzles the weak eyes of some of God's children. However, though they know it not, all the blessings they receive, all the privileges they do or will enjoy through Jesus Christ flow from the everlasting love of God the Father. Now, I attempted right there to sustain some level of pitch, and I can't even do it with a microphone.

I feel my head growing faint, pushing like that. I'm going to faint if I keep doing that. Whitfield reminds Wesley in a letter, 1741, Though I hold particular election, yet I offer Jesus freely to every individual soul.

Oh, how he believed in the universal offer of the Gospel, an authentic offer held out to every soul. He did. Indeed, Whitfield does not hide his understanding of definite atonement or irresistible grace as he pleads with men to come to Christ.

He preached a sermon on John 10, 27 to 28, called The Good Shepherd. He speaks clearly of the particular sense in which Christ died for His own. Now, this is an evangelistic sermon preached to thousands.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, He is speaking of you. For says He, I know My sheep. I know them.

What does He mean by that? Why? He knows their number. He knows their names. He knows every one for whom He died.

And if there were to be one missing for whom Christ died, God the Father would send Him down again from Heaven to fetch Him. The preaching that drove the Great Awakening and didn't shrink back from limited atonement or particular atonement, that there is a unique sense in which Christ died for His bride. A covenant, bride winning, getting sense.

And then He mounts His passionate plea, all of it based on irresistible sovereign grace. Oh, come! Come! See what it is to have eternal life. Do not refuse it.

Haste sinner! Haste away! Make the Great, the Good Shepherd. May He draw your souls. Oh, if you never heard His voice before, God grant that you may hear now.

Come! Come! Come to the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him I leave you. Amen! And that was the end of His sermon.

Did you hear it? May He grant you to come! You can do evangelism like that, brothers. Irresistible grace does not get in the way of passionate calls to faith any more than at the tomb of Lazarus, His deadness got in the way of Lazarus! Come forth! And the Word created. There's no contradiction there.

It's what the Word is for. So, among the doctrines of the Reformation that filled the evangelistic sermons of Whitefield, the most prominent was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. His signature sermon, if there could be one, judging by how many times it was referred to, His signature sermon is called, The Lord, Our Righteousness, based on Jeremiah 23.6. The Lord, Our Righteousness.

He never elevated justification to the exclusion of sanctification or regeneration. He had this phrase, Christ without and Christ within. Christ without and Christ within is essential to the gospel.

Here's what he said. We must not put asunder what God has joined together. We must keep the medium between the two extremes, not insist so much on the one hand upon Christ without as to exclude Christ

within as the evidence of our being His and as a preparation for future happiness, nor on the other hand so depend on inherent righteousness or holiness wrought in us as to exclude the righteousness of Jesus Christ without us.

Oh, how jealous he was to refer to this and the particularity. This is what's so amazing. You're preaching to masses of people, ordinary people, and you're dealing with the particularities of how justification works.

We have rooms where people are quiet, there's nobody taking off their clothes in the tree behind me, which happened to him several times, people exposing themselves to try to distract the audience, peeing on him from the trees. That's not happening here, and it generally doesn't happen in your church. Nobody barking on the edge, nobody running horses through the crowd and trampling old women down, and yet we don't talk about the particularities of doctrine.

What's the excuse? You've got a captive audience, and here he is. I fear, he lamented in one sermon, I fear they understand justification in that low sense which I understood it a few years ago as implying no more than remission of sins. But it not only signifies remission of sins past, but also the federal right to all good things to come, as the obedience of Christ is imputed to believers, so his perseverance in that obedience is imputed to them also.

Now that's complicated, and he's bellowing it out. He goes on, never did a more, never did greater or more absurdities flow from the denying of any doctrine than will flow from the denying of the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness. The world says because we preach faith, we deny good works.

This is the usual objection against the doctrine of imputed righteousness, but it is a slander, an impudent slander. Well, that's the way he preached. Doctrinally.

Indeed, it was a slander. It was a slander on him, because George Whitefield, though he was an evangelist who mainly preached, and some people to repentance and faith in Christ, such that they were experiencing regeneration and owning Christ as their righteousness. Though that was his bread and butter, he devoted endless efforts to collecting money to support orphans in Georgia where he had established the Bethesda community.

And other kinds of charities as well. And this was a huge reputation that he had. Franklin, Benjamin Franklin said, Whitefield's integrity disinterestedness and indefatigable zeal in prosecuting every good work I have never seen equaled.

I shall never see excel. So if you say to me that preaching justification by faith alone apart from works of the law grounded in the imputed righteousness of Christ to me undermines good works, I will call Benjamin Franklin to witness against you. Would that we could all have a Franklin in our lives to call to witness that we practice what we preach.

In other words, his impassioned belief in the imputation of Christ's righteousness didn't hinder the practical pursuit of justice and love. It empowered it. The connection between doctrine and practical duties of love was, I think, the secret of Whitefield's power in great measure.

All the masses in America knew this. They knew this. They knew that he practiced what he preached.

They knew that he was a good man. Almost. I'm almost done.

Almost was he a good man. He wasn't a perfect man. Justification by faith didn't make him a perfect man.

Regeneration didn't make him a perfect man. In fact, the effects of reading history and doing biography over the last years has pressed upon me the persistent discovery that contradictions and paradoxes of sin and righteousness abound everywhere in the holiest of people. I have no heroes who are flawless.

And the better I know them, the worse they are. What do you do with that? He was no exception. So I want to rightly honor him, and I think we will rightly honor him if we're honest about his blindness in spite of his doctrinal faithfulness and goodness.

The most glaring blindness of his life, and there were others, was his support of the American enslavement of blacks. Before it was legal to own slaves in Georgia, and I don't know if you knew it went like this, not legal, legal, not legal. Before it was legal to own slaves in Georgia, Whitefield advocated for the legalization in Georgia for the sake of his orphanage and making it more affordable.

1748, he wrote to the trustees of Bethesda, which he had founded, and said, had a Negro been allowed to, had a Negro been allowed, I should now have had a sufficiency to support a great many orphans without expending half, about half the sum which had been laid out. Georgia never can or will be a flourishing province unless Negroes are allowed. I am as willing as ever to do all I can for Georgia and the orphan house if either a limited use of Negroes is approved or some more indentured servants sent over.

If not, I cannot promise to keep any large family or cultivate the plantation in any considerable manner. Close quote. 1752, four years later, George became a royal colony and now it was legal and Whitfield joined the ranks of slave owners that he had denounced in his earliest years.

Now that in itself is not unusual. Most of the slave owners were professing Christians. But in Whitfield's case, things got more complex.

He didn't fit the mold of a wealthy Southern plantation owner. Almost all of them resisted evangelizing and educating the slaves. They knew intuitively education would tend toward equality which would undermine the whole system.

And evangelism would imply that slaves could become children of God which would mean that they were brothers and sisters and that would undermine the whole system. Which by the way is why the apparent New Testament tolerance of slavery is in fact a very powerful subversion of the institution. Now, Whitfield ironically this is everywhere in history everywhere in your life and mine for those who have better eyes to see than we do ironically, Whitfield did more to bring Christianity to the slave community in Georgia than anyone else in history.

Whitfield wrote letters to newspapers defending the evangelism of slaves and arguing that to deny them this was to deny that they had souls which many of course were denied. Harry Stout observes rightly in fact, these letters that Whitfield wrote represented the first journalistic statement on the subject of slavery and as such they marked a precedent of awesome implications beyond anything Whitfield could have imagined. As he defended evangelism and the fact that they are souls had an impact beyond anything he could imagine.

Whitfield said he was willing to face the whip of southern planters if they disapproved of his preaching the new birth to slaves. He recounts one of his customary efforts among the slaves in North Carolina on this second trip to America like this. I went as was my custom among the negroes belonging to the house.

One man was sick in bed and two of his children said their prayers after me very well. This more and more convinces me that negro children if early brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord would make as great proficiency as any among white children. I do not despair if God spares my life.

I do not spare of seeing a school of young negro singing the praises of him who made them in a psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord. Thou has put into my heart a good design to educate them. I doubt not but thou will enable me to bring it to good effect.

Gary Nash wrote a whole study on the slave trade and slave business in Philadelphia and he says that the advent of black Christianity in Philadelphia is owing to Whitfield's first preaching tour there. He estimates that perhaps one thousand slaves heard Whitfield's sermons in Philadelphia and what they heard was that they had souls. Just as surely as any white man had a soul.

Whitfield's work for the slaves in Philadelphia was so effective that Whitfield's most, I mean Philadelphia's most prominent dancing master Robert Bolton sold his old, renounced his old vocation and gave his school over to the blacks for a school. Quote, by summer's end, over fifty black scholars meaning students had arrived at the school. All owing to Whitfield the slave owner.

From Georgia to North Carolina to Philadelphia, Whitfield sowed the seeds of equality through heartfelt evangelism and advocacy for education and fundraising. Blind as he was to the contradiction of buying and selling slaves with that effort. Let me close one of his sermons and close this.

Close one of his sermons the way he did. Here then I conclude but I must not forget the poor negroes. No, I must not.

Jesus Christ has died for them as well as for others. Nor do I mention you last because I despise your souls but because I would have what I shall say, make the deeper impression upon your hearts. Know that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness.

Who knows but that He may be found of you. For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free. Even you may be the children of God if you believe in Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the same now as He was yesterday and will wash your sins in His own blood. Go home then. Turn the word of the Lord.

Turn the word of His text into a prayer and treat the Lord to be your righteousness. Even so come Lord Jesus. Come quickly in all our souls.

Amen Lord Jesus. Amen. And amen.

That kind of preaching infuriated slave owners. One wonders if there wasn't rumbling around in Whitfield's own soul something's wrong. Because he really did perceive that such radical evangelism implied things that he didn't stand for.

He went public with his censures of slave owners and published words like these God has a quarrel with you for treating slaves as though they were brutes. If these slaves were to rise up in rebellion all good men must acknowledge the judgment would be just. That's incendiary.

It's just a hundred years we are strangers. What are my blind spots? Apparently Whitfield did not perceive the implications of what he was saying. At least not fully.

What was clear was that the slave population loved Whitfield. I'm not making any excuses here. I know how horribly racist it is to say, some of my best friends were slaves.

They really liked the Massa. It's no excuse. It's just reality.

You need to hear a whole reality. For all his imperfections and blindness and the contradictions in his life that were all undermining slavery as he evangelized and educated. They loved him more than any other 18th century figure Whitfield established the Christian faith in the slave community.

Whatever else he failed in they were thankful for that. So the greatest preacher of the 18th century, perhaps the greatest preacher in the history of the church was a contradictory figure. He confessed that there was sin remaining in him.

When he died in Newburyport where he's buried in this country, the slave community were the most prominent grieving people at his funeral. Thousands of them. He treated them like people within the cultural expectations that they on their horizon could see.

He knew that he was a sinner and he would have confessed if you do your biography, John Piper year after year after year, what you will find is sinners. That's all you will find except for one, Jesus Christ. So grant oh God that all of our study of history will reveal the goodness of a Whitefield that can only be explained in terms of the transformation that he experienced in the new birth and the sin of the Whitefield which points away from himself to the grace on which he depended and the righteousness of another who alone was righteous that was counted as his.

I close with this quote from Whitefield. I know no other reason he said why Jesus has put me into the ministry than because I am the chief of sinners and therefore fittest to preach free grace to a world lying in the wicked one. Father in heaven, we don't want to be naive about history or about the saints or about ourselves.

We are not here to lift up models which save us by winning our imitation. They don't. They save us by pointing us to one who was perfect and whose righteousness by faith is credited to our account.

So even the sin of your servant has directed me to you just like his devotion and just like his unbelievable natural capacities. So I thank you for George Whitefield. I thank you for the grace that saved him.

I thank you for the Christ without and the Christ within and I grieve that he was not a better man and I am very slow to point my finger because what will be said of my faults when the whole is known. So humble us under your mighty hand and empower us to be faithful in this glorious gospel for which he lived and in which he died. In Jesus name I pray.

Amen.

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