

10 PEOPLE Every Christian Should Know

LEARNING FROM
SPIRITUAL GIANTS OF THE FAITH

Warren W. Wiersbe



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1

Matthew Henry

1662–1712

“Suitable to everybody, instructive to all” is the way Charles Spurgeon described what is probably the best-known commentary on the Bible written in the English language, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*.¹ Since it was first published more than two hundred and fifty years ago, this commentary has appeared in many different editions, including a condensation in one volume.

Spurgeon recommended that every minister of the gospel read straight through *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* at least once during his lifetime. Perhaps he got this idea from his model, George Whitefield, who carried his set of Matthew Henry on all of his travels and read it daily on his knees.

Matthew Henry was born at Broad Oaks, Shropshire, England, on October 18, 1662. His father, Philip Henry, was a Nonconformist minister who, along with two thousand other

clergymen, had been ejected from his church by the Act of Uniformity issued that year by Charles II. These courageous men had refused to compromise their convictions and give “unfeigned consent and assent” to the Prayer Book. They also refused to submit to Episcopal ordination.

Philip Henry had married an heiress of a large estate in Broad Oaks named Catherine Matthews. Her father was not in favor of the match and told his daughter, “Nobody knows where he came from.” But Catherine wisely replied, “True, but I know where he is going, and I should like to go with him!”

Matthew was physically weak, but it was not long before his strength of intellect and character made themselves known. At the age of three, he was reading the Bible; by the time he was nine, he was competent in Latin and Greek. He spent his first eighteen years being tutored at home, in an atmosphere that was joyfully and lovingly Christian.

He loved to hear his father preach. A sermon on Psalm 51:17 first awakened in young Matthew a desire to know the Lord personally. He was only ten years old at the time, but the impression was lasting. When he was thirteen, Matthew wrote an amazingly mature analysis of his own spiritual condition, a document that reads like an ordinary paper. Often, after hearing his father preach, Matthew would hurry to his room and pray that God would seal the Word and the spiritual impressions made to his heart so that he might not lose them. God answered those youthful prayers.

In July 1680, Matthew was sent to London to study with “that holy, faithful minister,” Thomas Doolittle, who had an academy in his home. Unfortunately, the religious

persecutions of the day forced Doolittle to close his academy; Matthew returned to Broad Oaks. In April 1685, he returned to London to study law at Gray's Inn. He was a good student, but he never lost the burning desire to be a minister of the gospel.

A year later he returned to Broad Oaks and began to preach whenever opportunity presented itself, and on May 9, 1687, he was ordained. Before his ordination, he put himself through a heart-searching self-examination in which he seriously studied his own Christian experience, motives for ministry, and fitness for service. The paper contains both confession of faith and confession of sin. He concluded that he was not entering the ministry "as a trade to live by" or to make a name for himself. He also concluded, "I have no design in the least to maintain a party, or to keep up any schismatical faction."

Throughout his ministry, Matthew Henry loved and cooperated with all who trusted Christ and wanted to serve him, no matter what their denominational connections. Even the leaders of the Episcopal Church admitted that Matthew Henry was a good and godly man. This document ought to be read by every prospective minister before he comes to ordination, and it would not hurt those of us who are already ordained to review it on occasion.

A group of believers in Chester invited Matthew Henry to become their pastor, and on June 2, 1687, he began twenty-five happy years of ministry among them. Though he was in demand to preach in other churches in the area, he was rarely absent from his own pulpit on the Lord's Day.

He was married in August of the same year. On February 14, 1689, his wife died in childbirth, although, by the mercy of God, their daughter lived. Matthew married again on July 8, 1690, and God gave him and his wife nine children, eight of them girls, three of whom died during their first year. His only son, Philip, was born May 3, 1700, but he did not follow his father's faith, or his grandfather's. His interests lay in this world and not in the world to come.

God blessed the ministry in Chester so that a new sanctuary was erected and was dedicated on August 8, 1700. The effectiveness of Matthew Henry's pulpit ministry reached even to London, and several churches there tried to secure his service. But he loved his people at Trinity Church in Chester, and refused each invitation.

Matthew was usually in his study before five o'clock each morning, devoting himself to the preparation of his exposition of the Word. He had breakfast with his family and always led them in worship, reading and expounding some passage from the Old Testament. He then returned to his study until afternoon, when he would set out to visit his people. After the evening meal, he would again lead the household in worship, using a New Testament passage for his meditation. He often questioned the children and the servants to make sure they had understood the teaching.

Often in the late evening, he would put in a few more hours of study before retiring. "Take heed of growing remiss in your work," he warned fellow pastors. "Take pains while you live. . . . The Scripture still affords new things, to those who search them." It was not unusual for him to preach seven

times a week, and yet he was always fresh and practical. “No place is like my own study,” he said. “No company like good books, especially the book of God.” We wonder what Matthew Henry would think of those ministers who rush about all week, wasting time, and then “borrow” another man’s sermon for the Lord’s Day.

The key date in Matthew Henry’s life is November 12, 1704; on that day he started writing his famous *Commentary*. On April 17, 1714, he completed his comments on the Book of Acts; but two months later, on June 22, he suddenly took ill and died.

Matthew Henry was not pastoring in Chester when he was called home. On May 18, 1712, he had begun his new ministry in Hackney, London. One of the factors motivating his move was his desire to be closer to his publisher as his *Commentary* was being printed. He had ministered twenty-five years at Trinity Church, Chester, and only two years in London. The funeral service was held on June 25, and he was buried at Trinity Church.

Much of the material in Henry’s *Commentary* came from his own expositions of Scripture given at family worship and from the pulpit. There is also a great deal of Philip Henry in these pages, especially the pithy sayings that season the exposition. Matthew’s purpose in writing the *Commentary* was practical, not academic. He simply wanted to explain and apply the Word of God in language the common people could understand.

Several of his pastor friends gathered up his notes and sermons and completed the *Commentary* from Romans to

Revelation. When you read their expositions, you can see how far short they fall of the high standard set by the original author. In true Puritan fashion, Matthew Henry had the ability to get to the heart of a passage, outline the passage clearly, and then apply its truths to daily life. True, there were times when he spiritualized the text and missed the point; but generally speaking, he did his work well. One does not have to agree with all of his interpretations to benefit from his observations.

In 1765, John Wesley published an edited version of the *Commentary*, hoping to bring it within the reach of the average Christian reader. He felt the current version was too large and too expensive. But, at the same time, Wesley also deleted all that Matthew Henry had to say about election and predestination. He also omitted an “abundance of quaint sayings” and thus took the seasoning out of the dinner. In his preface, Wesley remarked that he used to wonder where some preachers “whom I greatly esteem” obtained the “pretty turns in preaching” that he heard in their sermons; but, after reading Matthew Henry, he discovered their source. I have a suspicion that this was a gentle criticism of his estranged friend, George Whitefield, who used to read Matthew Henry before going into the pulpit.

You will not find Matthew Henry grappling with big problems as he expounds the Word, or always shedding light on difficult passages in the Bible. For this kind of help you must consult the critical commentaries. He did not know a great deal about customs in the Holy Land, since travel to the East was quite limited in that day. Again, the student will need up-to-date commentaries and Bible dictionaries to help him in

that area. However, for a devotional and practical approach to Bible exposition, this commentary leads the way.

I must confess that I have not followed Spurgeon's advice to read straight through *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, but I have used it with profit over the years. I think Henry is especially good in Genesis, Psalms, and the four Gospels. I have never consulted his *Commentary* early in my sermon preparation, but rather have left him (and Maclaren and Spurgeon) until after I had done my own digging and meditating. Often just a sentence from Matthew Henry has opened up a new area of thought for me and helped me feed my people.

I was surprised to discover that Matthew Henry is quoted in our two leading books of quotations. *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* has fourteen Henry quotations and *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (3rd edition) has six. Apparently Matthew Henry is the originator of the phrase "creature comforts" as well as the popular saying "All this and heaven too." Perhaps some enterprising reader could mine some of Matthew Henry's pithy sayings and put them into a book for us.

If you want to get to know this expositor and his father better, secure *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, published by Banner of Truth. Matthew Henry wrote the biography of his father, and it is a classic. J. B. Williams wrote the son's life, but it is not as exciting.

When he was on his deathbed, Matthew Henry said to a friend, "You have been asked to take notice of the sayings of dying men—this is mine: that a life spent in the service of God and communion with Him is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in this world."

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2

Jonathan Edwards

1703–1758

It is unfortunate that many people imagine Jonathan Edwards as a ranting Puritan preacher, pounding the pulpit and trying to frighten sinners into heaven. Of course, most of these people have probably never read his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” or even examined the life of this godly man. For Jonathan Edwards was a quiet scholar, a loving father, a concerned pastor, a burdened missionary, and a man who loved God and longed more than anything else to glorify him.

Edwards was born into the home of Reverend Timothy Edwards in East Windsor, Connecticut, on October 5, 1703. He was the only son in the family; he had ten sisters. He came from good Puritan stock, especially on his mother’s side of the family. Her father was Reverend Solomon Stoddard,

revered pastor of the Congregational Church at Northampton, Massachusetts.

Stoddard was the accepted spiritual leader of the churches in the Connecticut Valley; in fact, some people called him “Pope” Stoddard. He pastored there for fifty years, and under his ministry at least five special spiritual awakenings had been experienced.

Jonathan Edwards received his schooling at home; at an early age he learned Latin, and later he took on Greek and Hebrew. He had two passionate interests in those early years—science and religion. He watched spiders and wrote an amazing essay about them. He saw the mind and heart of God in creation; everything in nature revealed to him something about God.

But his interest in spiritual things was remarkable for a boy so young. He prayed five times each day. With some of his friends he built a “booth” in the swamp, and there they would gather together to discuss spiritual matters and pray. I must confess that the boys’ clubs my friends and I formed in our youthful years centered more around fun and games.

In 1716, when he was thirteen, Edwards entered Yale college, where he invested four years in undergraduate study and then two more years studying theology. It was while he was at Yale that he had two life-changing experiences. The first was his conversion when he was about seventeen years old. Since childhood he had revolted against the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. But as he read 1 Timothy 1:17, he had a remarkable experience of the sense of God’s greatness and glory, and all his theological objections disappeared.

“As I read the words,” he wrote in his personal account, “there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. . . . From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by Him.”

Edwards was never content to have only book knowledge of God. He sought to experience God in his own life in a personal way. He was not an ivory-tower theologian, spinning webs of words. He always centered on the experience of the heart; it was this conviction that brought him many spiritual blessings as well as many spiritual battles.

His second crisis experience was more intellectual than spiritual, although Edwards would never divorce the mind and the heart. He read John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and made an about-face in his approach to the problem of how people think and learn. He came to the conclusion that “knowledge” was not something divorced from the rest of life, but that a man’s senses helped to teach him truth. In other words, sensory experience and thinking must go together. Again, Edwards saw the importance of uniting the mind and the heart.

This approach would govern his philosophy of preaching for the rest of his life. He would first aim for the heart and move the affections before trying to instruct the mind. In one of his most important books, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards wrote, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”¹ However, he opposed emotion for

emotion's sake. He carefully explained the difference between shallow emotionalism and true affections that prepare the way for men and women to receive God's truth.

On January 12, 1723, Jonathan Edwards solemnly dedicated himself to God. Earlier he had made a list of resolutions that he read once each week and sought to obey daily. From time to time, he added to this list as he saw special needs in his life. He used it not as a law to bind him, but as a compass to guide him and as a mirror to help him examine his progress in his spiritual walk.

On February 15, 1727, Jonathan Edwards was ordained and became assistant to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. On July 20 of that same year, he married Sarah Pierrepont, an exemplary Christian lady who bore him eleven children. It is worth noting that Jonathan Edwards used to spend at least one hour each evening with his children before they went to bed. He often studied thirteen hours a day, yet he took time for his family. He and his wife were very happy together; their marriage and their home were a testimony to the goodness and grace of God.

In February 1729, Solomon Stoddard died, and Jonathan Edwards became the pastor of his church, perhaps the most important congregation outside Boston. Spiritual life in the American colonies was very low, and there was a desperate need for revival. Preachers were generally well-educated, but they lacked a burden for souls and power in preaching. Some of them were not even converted themselves!

"I am greatly persuaded," wrote George Whitefield when he visited New England, "that the generality of preachers

talk of an unknown, unfelt Christ. And the reason why congregations have been so dead is because dead men preach to them.”

But the preachers were not the only ones to blame. While the founders of the churches had, for the most part, been converted people who feared God, their children and grandchildren were too often unconverted but baptized church members.

The churches operated under what was known as the Half-Way Covenant. This permitted people to unite with the church if they had been baptized but had not made a profession of faith in Christ (they were baptized as infants, of course). Their children were then baptized as “half-way members,” but they were not permitted to share the Lord’s Supper or vote in church elections.

But Solomon Stoddard had gone even further in opening the doors of the church to unsaved people. He decided that the Lord’s Supper was a saving ordinance and that unconverted people should not be barred from the table. The result, of course, was a church composed largely of unconverted people who gave lip service to the doctrine but who had never experienced the life of God in their own hearts.

Obviously, the new pastor and his flock were on a collision course. Edwards had experienced eternal life in an overwhelmingly personal way. It was his conviction that truth must be experienced in the heart as well as understood in the mind. In his study of the Word, he concluded that church membership and the Lord’s Supper were for saved people alone. He realized that many of the “children of the covenant”

in the colonies were living in sin, apart from God, and destined for eternal destruction.

In 1734 he preached a series of sermons on justification by faith. The time was ripe, and the Spirit began to move. In the next year, Edwards saw more than three hundred people unite with the church. Some notable sinners in the town were converted, and some remarkable events took place. This was one of the early phases of the spiritual movement in America historians call the Great Awakening, which covered a period from about 1725 to 1760.

Whenever the Spirit works, the flesh and the devil start to work to counterfeit God's blessing; and it was not long before excesses appeared in the revival movement. George Whitefield had joined the movement in 1740, and in some of his meetings people fainted, cried out with fear, and even experienced fits of shaking. Whitefield, like Edwards, did not encourage these activities, but had no control over them. Ministers who opposed religious enthusiasm openly criticized Edwards and accused him of leading the people astray, so Edwards wrote and published a book on how to discern a true working of God's Spirit: *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*. It is still today one of the best studies of religious psychology available.

That same year (1741), Edwards was invited to preach at Enfield, Connecticut, and on July 8, he preached "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," perhaps the most famous sermon ever preached in America.

The text was Deuteronomy 32:35: "Their foot shall slide in due time." There is no question that Edwards had one

purpose in mind: to shake the people out of their religious complacency and into the saving arms of the Lord. Edwards was always quiet in his delivery; he read from a manuscript and rarely looked at the people. He did not pound the pulpit or shout. He simply opened up the Scriptures and warned lost sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

The Spirit of God broke into the meeting, and many people came under conviction. Some cried out in fear. A minister sitting on the platform pulled at the preacher's coat-tails and said, "Mr. Edwards! Mr. Edwards! Is not God also a God of mercy!" Edwards had to stop preaching and wait for the congregation to become quiet. He concluded the sermon, led in prayer, and closed the meeting. Those who remained afterward to talk to the preacher were not necessarily upset or afraid. In fact, people were impressed with the cheerfulness and pleasantness of the expressions on others' faces.

Concerned with the salvation of the lost, Jonathan Edwards could not continue to live with the compromising situation that he had inherited at Northampton. In 1748, he informed the church that he would not receive as new members persons who had not given evidence of salvation, nor would he permit unconverted people to come to the Lord's table. Even though ministers in that day had far more authority and respect than they do today, this step was daring and was violently opposed by most of the other church leaders.

There followed nearly two years of debate and discussion, and the result was the dismissal of the pastor. Edwards preached his farewell sermon on July 1, 1750, a pastoral message that showed no animosity or bitterness, although

certainly the preacher was a man with a broken heart. His text was 2 Corinthians 1:14, and his emphasis was on what would happen when ministers meet their congregations at the future judgment.

History has proven that Edwards was right and his congregation wrong. The colonial churches that rejected the working of God and refused to examine people as to their spiritual experience eventually turned from the faith and became liberal. The churches that followed Whitefield and Edwards continued to win the lost, send out missionaries, and train ministers who were true to the faith. An unconverted ministry and an unconverted membership are the devil's chief weapons in opposing the work of God.

Jonathan Edwards moved his wife and large family to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he ministered as a missionary to the Indians. His income was reduced, of course, and yet God provided all their needs. Freed from pastoral duties and church problems, Edwards now had more time to study and write; during those Stockbridge years (1751–58) he wrote several of his most important works, some of which were published after his death. In 1757 he was named president of Princeton College, an office that his son-in-law Aaron Burr later held. He took office in 1758 when a smallpox epidemic was invading the area; he caught the infection through an inoculation that backfired, and on March 22 he died.

We have had more than two hundred years to evaluate the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards. He was perhaps the greatest thinker that America ever produced, and yet he had the heart of a child. He was a great theologian, and yet

his books and sermons touch life and reach into the heart. He was a rare blend of biblical scholar and revivalist. He had a longing to see people know God personally, but he refused to accommodate his theology just to get results. He was also a man concerned about missions. Even the *Encyclopedia Britannica* admits, “By his writings and example, he gave impetus to the infant evangelical missionary movement.”

Edwards was not afraid to give his people solid doctrine. His Resolution 28 reads: “Resolved to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, so that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.” Some preachers today seem to have time for everything else but Bible study and the preparation of spiritual nourishment for their people. It is easy to borrow a sermon from a book or listen to a recording of another preacher’s message.

Edwards used imagination in his preaching. Like every good teacher and preacher, he turned the ear into an eye and helped people to *see* spiritual truth. He knew that the mind is not a debating chamber—it is a picture gallery.

He was a courageous man who held to his biblical convictions even though they cost him his church and the loss of many friends. He stood with George Whitefield when many were opposing him. Edwards encouraged spiritual awakening even though he knew there would be excesses and abuses. He would have enjoyed Billy Sunday’s reply to the critic who said that revivals did not last: “Neither does a bath,” said Sunday, “but it’s good to have one once in a while!” Edwards preached for decisions in an era when ministers were not supposed to disturb the congregation.

The Works of President Edwards, a single volume, may be available in your local library. Ola Elizabeth Winslow has written one of the best biographies, *Jonathan Edwards*, published by Macmillan in 1940. She also edited a helpful anthology of his most important sermons and writings, *Jonathan Edwards: Basic Writings* (New American Library).

Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell by Dr. John Gerstner (Baker Books) is a fascinating and very readable study of this important subject. Dr. Gerstner is perhaps our leading evangelical scholar when it comes to the life and theology of Jonathan Edwards. For a satisfying but readable study of Edwards's theology, read *Jonathan Edwards, Theologian of the Heart*, by Harold Simonson (Eerdmans).

Our nation is desperately in need of spiritual awakening. But our emphasis on evangelism apart from doctrine will certainly not do it. The Great Awakening was the result of solid doctrinal preaching that addressed itself to both the heart and the mind. It was preaching that dared to expose sin in the church. And God used it to sweep thousands into his family.

Perhaps it is time that we dug again these old wells and learned why their waters flowed with life so fruitfully and so bountifully.

3

John Henry Newman 1801–1890

If people today think at all of John Henry Newman, it is probably as the author of the familiar hymn “Lead, Kindly Light.” Those who are somewhat acquainted with church history will identify him as one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, which shook the Church of England and eventually led Newman himself into the Church of Rome. But it is Newman the preacher I want to examine in this chapter, the man whom W. Robertson Nicoll called “the most influential preacher Oxford has ever known,”¹ and whom Alexander Whyte admired so much that he wrote *Newman: An Appreciation*.

Newman was born in London on February 21, 1801. His family would be identified with the moderate evangelicals in the Church of England. At age fifteen, Newman experienced conversion. He was educated at Trinity College, Oxford, where he fell under the influence of Richard Whately. “He,

emphatically, opened my mind, and taught me to think and to use my reason,” Newman later wrote in his famous autobiography, *Apologia pro vita sua*. This was probably the beginning of Newman’s drift from the evangelical emphasis and into the High Church party, and eventually to the Church of Rome.

However, it was his dear friend Richard Hurrell Froude who influenced Newman the most. “He taught me to look with admiration towards the Church of Rome,” Newman wrote, “and in the same degree to dislike the Reformation.” Froude did more than this: he introduced Newman to John Keble—brilliant Oxford scholar, humble Anglican pastor, and a man utterly devoted to the Church of England. Keble is remembered today as the writer of “Sun of My Soul, Thou Savior Dear,” taken from his once-popular book of religious poetry, *The Christian Year*.

In 1824 Newman was ordained, and in 1828 he began his ministry as vicar of St. Mary’s, Oxford. I can never forget stepping into that historic church one summer day and actually climbing the stairs into Newman’s pulpit. As I stood there, I could hear faintly the Oxford traffic outside; but I quickly found myself carried, via imagination, to a Sunday afternoon service at which Newman was preaching. The church was filled with worshipers, mostly the younger fellows of the colleges and the undergraduates. Newman came in—“gliding” is the way one observer described it—and made his way to the pulpit, where he adjusted the gas lamp, laid his manuscript before him, and then in a musical voice that haunted, began to preach in a way that penetrated one’s very being. “It was from the pulpit of St. Mary’s that he began to conquer and to

rule the world,” wrote Alexander Whyte, one of Newman’s most ardent Protestant admirers.

The rest of the story need not delay us. On July 14, 1833, Keble preached the “assize sermon” at St. Mary’s, and his theme was “national apostasy.” It was this sermon that gave birth to the concern that eventuated in what we know as the Oxford Movement (not to be confused with the Oxford Group Movement begun by Frank Buchman and later re-named Moral Re-armament). The burden of the movement was spiritual renewal in the Church of England. Newman, Keble, Froude, E. B. Pusey, and their associates sought to restore the spiritual authority of the church and to return the church to its ancient moorings. Their motives were commendable; their methods perhaps left something to be desired.

One of their chief ministries was the publication of “tracts for the times.” Various men—not all as gifted as Newman—wrote on subjects pertaining to the Church of England. The critics noticed a Rome-ward trend in the tracts, but the writers persisted. It was *Tract Ninety* that wrote *finis* to Newman’s leadership in the movement and his ministry at St. Mary’s. In this famous pamphlet, Newman tried to prove that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England could be honestly interpreted from a Roman Catholic point of view. The result was official censure—the politics of the controversies from 1833 to 1845 are worthy of study—and Newman could do nothing but either step aside or recant. Deeply hurt by the church leaders he had thought would encourage him, Newman left Oxford; and on October 8, 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic church.

I find the history of the Oxford Movement fascinating. In it one finds events and leaders that parallel situations we have today. There is really nothing new under the sun. People today who want to “purify” or “renew” the church would do well to read up on the Oxford Movement and then avoid its mistakes. *The Oxford Movement* by R. W. Church, dean of St. Paul’s, is the best introduction. A more modern study is *The Oxford Conspirators* by Marvin R. O’Connell. It is desirable to read Newman’s own account in *Apologia pro vita sua*, and keep in mind that he wrote this some twenty years after these events.

But now to Newman’s preaching.

Between 1824, when he was ordained, and 1845, when he left Oxford, Newman preached over one thousand sermons, ten volumes of which are available today. His eight volumes of *Parochial and Plain Sermons* represent the best of his pulpit ministry at St. Mary’s. *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day* and *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* are two volumes that complete the Protestant years. *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* and *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* come from his Roman Catholic years.

I was amazed when I learned that Whyte had been such an admirer of Newman; for if any preacher emphasized the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, it was Whyte. Yet Whyte told a friend that he valued Newman’s sermons more than those of F. W. Robertson! On March 14, 1876, Whyte and some friends visited Newman at the oratory in Edgbaston and were received graciously. Whyte even incorporated in

his *Catechism* a revision from Newman that clarified the doctrine of transubstantiation. There is no escaping the fact that Alexander Whyte admired John Henry Cardinal Newman.

Let us begin with the obvious reason: Newman's sermons, not unlike Whyte's, were directed to the conscience. "The effect of Newman's preaching on us young men," wrote William Lockhart, "was to turn our souls inside out!" In this, Whyte was a kindred spirit of Newman, for few evangelical preachers can expose sin and "perform spiritual surgery" like Alexander Whyte! But another factor was Newman's "other-worldliness." He, like Whyte, had an utter disdain of earthly things. Whyte reveled among the mystics and constantly called his congregation to a life of reality in the things of the Spirit. While Whyte would point sinners to the Lamb of God, however, Newman would find this life of the Spirit in a sacramental system.

Newman's ability to examine a text and then develop it into a sermon was something Whyte greatly admired. "For, let any young man of real capacity once master Newman's methods of exposition, discussion, and argumentation; his way of addressing himself to the treatment of a subject; his way of entering upon a subject, worming his way to the very heart of it, working it out, and winding it up," wrote Whyte in his *Appreciation*, and that man would "soon make his presence and his power felt in any of our newspapers or magazines."²

Add to this Newman's pure English style—"the quiet perfection of his English style," wrote Whyte's biographer—and you can understand why the old Covenanter so much appreciated the preaching of Cardinal Newman.

Whyte was careful to point out his disagreements with Newman, not the least of which was Newman's neglect of preaching the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. When Newman's sermons are "looked at as pulpit work, as preaching the Gospel," wrote Whyte, "they are full of the most serious, and even fatal, defects. . . . They are not, properly speaking, New Testament preaching at all. . . . As an analysis of the heart of man, and as a penetrating criticism of human life, their equal is nowhere to be found. But, with all that, they lack the one all-essential element of all true preaching—the message to sinful man concerning the free grace of God. . . . Newman's preaching—and I say it with more pain than I can express—never once touches the true core, and real and innermost essence, of the Gospel."³

Why bother to read the sermons of a man who did not preach the gospel, a man who eventually preached himself right out of an evangelical tradition and into a sacramental system? Because Newman can help teach us how to preach to a man's conscience, how to get beneath the surface and apply spiritual truth where it is needed. Newman was a better diagnostician than a dispenser of healing medicine ("I never take down Newman's sermons for my recovery and my comfort," admitted Whyte); but it is easier to apply the medicine after you have convinced the patient of his need.

It is worth noting that Newman warned against magnifying preaching above the other ministries of the church. In this, I think, he was reacting against the tendency on the part of some evangelicals of the day to turn their preachers into celebrities. Newman believed strongly in the continuity of

the church and the need for sermons to minister to the body collectively. He himself shunned and even fled from becoming “a popular preacher,” and he had little confidence in men who used the pulpit to promote themselves.

It is unfortunate that Newman did not know the better evangelical men of that day. He saw only (or perhaps only wanted to see) a ministry that emphasized correct doctrine and dedicated zeal, but lacked Christian character and true spiritual power. R. W. Church described evangelicals as people with “an exhausted teaching and a spent enthusiasm.” The evangelical churches were “respectable” and popular with men of position, but (added Church) “they were on very easy terms with the world.”⁴ If there was one thing Newman hated with a holy zeal, it was a religion of words without reality, words that described an experience but failed to effect it in the lives of people.

Newman desired to elevate worship in the church. While I do not agree with his sacramentalism, I do applaud his purpose; it is my conviction that true worship is the greatest need in our churches today. How easy it is to have words without power (Paul was aware of this—read 1 Thess. 1:5) and program without substance, especially in an evangelical church. Newman would have agreed with William Temple’s definition of *worship*: “to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” We do not experience this kind of worship in many churches today, and often the preacher is to blame. Newman spoke about the

“rudeness, irreverence, and almost profaneness . . . involved in pulpit addresses, which speak of the adorable works and sufferings of Christ, with the familiarity and absence of awe with which we speak about our friends.”

Next to irreverence and the “unreality of words,” Newman abhorred preaching that tried to cover “three or four subjects at once.” He insisted that each sermon have a definite purpose expressed in a concrete statement. “Definiteness is the life of preaching,” he wrote in *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects*, “a definite hearer, not the whole world; a definite topic, not the whole evangelical tradition; and, in like manner, a definite speaker. Nothing that is anonymous will preach.”⁵ Of course, the ultimate aim of all preaching is the salvation of the hearer, but this can be accomplished only when the preacher is prepared and knows what his aim is. We preach to persuade, and we must preach to the emotions as well as to the intellect, always using simple and concrete language.

The thing that impresses me about Newman’s sermons is their freshness of spiritual expression. He did not preach on the “topics of the day.” He carefully explained some first principle of the Christian life, some doctrine of the Christian faith, and wedded it to the practical life of the worshiper. He shunned oratory and sought to make the message of the Word the most important thing and the messenger the least important. He did not even debate the great issues involved in the Oxford Movement. Rather he strengthened and extended the movement by avoiding the issues and dealing with the fundamental truths that gave rise to these issues.

There are men called by God to preach on the issues of the hour, and we need their ministry. But for permanent strengthening of the church, we also need preachers who will dig again the old wells and lead us intelligently down the old paths and who, renouncing cheap pulpit rhetoric, will focus the white light of revelation on the human heart and examine us in that light. In short, today we need preaching that appeals to the conscience, penetrating preaching, clinical preaching, preaching that moves men to cry, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Newman’s preaching did this.

But let us go one step further: let us apply the blessed medicine of the gospel (something Newman did not do) and reply to those under conviction, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!” Newman would run to the beaten man at the side of the road and pour in the wine; but he could not pour in the oil.

If you want to get acquainted with Cardinal Newman, start with *Newman: An Appreciation* by Whyte. Then secure *The Preaching of John Henry Newman*, edited by Newman scholar W. D. White. White’s scholarly introduction will acquaint you with Newman’s world and his philosophy of preaching. I think both Newman and White were too hard on the evangelicals, but this is a minor fault in an otherwise capable essay. White included thirteen sermons that Newman considered his best. If you are interested in owning more of Newman’s sermons, visit your local Catholic bookshop or watch the used-book stores in your area.

The best modern biography of Newman is Meriol Trevor’s two-volume *Newman*. The first volume is subtitled *The Pillar*

of the Cloud, the second *Light in Winter*. The author has also abridged this work into a one-volume edition titled *Newman's Journey*.

Newman wrote materials other than sermons, some excellent and some not so good. *A Newman Reader*, edited by Francis X. Connolly, will give you a rich sampling of his writings. My favorite edition of his autobiography, *Apologia pro vita sua*, is the one edited by David J. DeLaura. It contains all the necessary texts of Newman's controversy with Charles Kingsley, plus helpful notes that clarify material in the text.

One final observation: When I read Newman's sermons, I find myself examining not only my heart but also my preaching. I find myself asking: Am I a faithful physician of the soul? Am I preaching to the conscience? Am I faithful to declare truth, not simply my "clever ideas" about truth? Do I offer Christ as the only Redeemer? Do I get beneath the surface and help my hearers where they need it most? While I disagree with Newman's theology, I appreciate his preaching and have learned from it.