The SBJT Forum

SBJT: Andrew Fuller is well-known as a model pastor and Christian minister. What can we learn from Andrew Fuller's view of the ministry and what it means to be a pastor?

Nigel D. Wheeler: In the year 1705, at the ordination of Rev. David Rees, Joseph Stennett explained that to "ordain" means "to constitute," "to create," or "to establish" a man in the pastoral office. The purpose of the pastoral office was for the edification of the saints mainly through teaching (Eph 4:11-16). Given this understanding, among Particular Baptists of the 18th century, a primary function of the pastoral office was the preaching of God's word. And for Particular Baptists, ordination sermons were regarded as uniquely important and so they were frequently published. This was partly due to the fact that many Particular Baptists believed that the churches' prosperity was tied directly to the appointment of God-called men to their pulpits.

An important component of an 18th century Particular Baptist ordination service was the "Charge" which was an admonition from one pastor to another pastor on how the office of elder should function effectively. These sermons represent a uniquely practical exposition of the goals, purposes, encouragements, challenges, and execution of the pastoral office. Beyond a systematic exposition of a Particular Baptist pastoral theology, they contain an exposition of pastoral theology purified in the crucible of practiced ministry. Pastors who learned to implement their inherited Particular Baptist theological convictions in their own unique context strove to transmit what they learned to a new generation of pastoral leadership. Therefore ordination sermons further shortened the gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxy by getting to the heart of what was really important to them.

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There are at least thirty-one extant ordination sermons of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). Thirteen of them are charges to an ordinand, nine are addresses to churches, five are single sermons which both address the church and charge the new pastor, two are charges to students, and the last two represent charges to missionaries for India sent through the Baptist Missionary Society. Throughout each of these published ordination sermons one clearly discovers a sketch of Fuller as a man who can be summarized by the phrase, "eminent spirituality leads to eminent usefulness." This is a phrase which I have sought to unpack at length in my dissertation on Andrew Fuller's ordination sermons.

The preeminent sign of true spirituality, or piety, in a minister was the reality of a revealed love for God resulting in a corresponding love for souls. And this love must necessarily be shown through perceptible feelings. These feelings were cultivated through an intimate communion with God, which in turn would produce spiritual fruit in the pastor's life. This communion was enhanced particularly through the study of scripture, through meditation, and through prayer which would affect the heart producing a godly character.

So for Fuller, and all of the Particular Baptists of his day, piety was a very practical thing in that spirituality was always purposeful. It involved the impartation of God's power, producing the fruit of the Spirit, to make the minister spiritually effective in all his ministrations, but especially in evangelism. For Fuller and others, there was a direct connection between the minister's personal holiness and his effectiveness in leading souls to repentance in Christ.

So what can we learn from reading Fuller's ordination sermons today? Well we learn something about the heart of who Fuller was as a pastoral role model. If "success" in the church is measured by faithfulness to the Lord and diligence in implementing the scripture in the church's life, then Andrew Fuller is an incredible example of these traits. In my opinion, for us today within the church, and especially in pastoral leadership, one of the great needs of the hour is to have godly men like Fuller in the Christian ministry. By all accounts Fuller and those of his day experienced numerical as well as and spiritual growth taking the gospel to the utter ends of the earth. In a word Fuller and others experienced the genuine revival of God in their midst. We have much to learn from Fuller today, and his ordination sermons in particular contain a concise practical theological summary of what has proven effective in pastoral ministry in the past. I believe our Lord still blesses fidelity to his word and by mimicking Fuller's faithfulness and diligence as we read his ordination sermons we too *may* appropriate God's grace in like manner and experience a similar out-pouring of the Spirit of God upon the church.

SBJT: A close study of the theology of C. H. Spurgeon will reveal that he was deeply indebted to Andrew Fuller. Did Spurgeon himself recognize this?

Brian Albert: Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) testified that Andrew Fuller's *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* was a classic of the Christian faith and Spurgeon referred to Fuller as "the most notable theologian of the Baptists in the latter 1700's" (see Bob Ross, *A Biography Pictorial of C. H. Spurgeon* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 17). Apparently, Fuller impressed Spurgeon at an early age. In his journal of April 17, 1850, at the vulnerable age of fifteen and approximately four months after his conversion, Spurgeon noted how Andrew Fuller's treatise on Antinomianism had affected him positively as an

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important incentive in regard to holiness. Others also noticed Fuller's influence on the London pastor. Spurgeon recalled his early days at New Park Street Chapel, and how he was criticized for being a "Fullerite," a caricature he considered honorable (see Spurgeon, "The Raven's Cry," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 12:68).

In a fitting act of providence, Spurgeon was baptized in the same river where Fuller sometimes baptized believers. Spurgeon shared Fuller's sincere conviction regarding believer's baptism and the inevitable scorn that came for this commitment. Like Fuller, "the Prince of Preachers" also believed that the health of a local church was linked to the church's fervor for the missionary enterprise. He was convinced that Baptists were blessed because of their commitment to global missions, which in part he traced to Fuller. "From the very day when Carey, Fuller, and [Samuel] Pearce went forth to send the gospel to the heathen, a blessing rested upon our denomination, I believe, and if we had done more for the heathen, we should have been stronger to do more at home" (see "The Waterer Watered," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 11:295–296).

Another similarity with Fuller had to do with prayer. Spurgeon advocated that God does listen to the prayers of sinners, and that answered prayer was confirmation that God existed. This truth was the ground of his conversion. He recounted the negative reception he encountered when he taught this doctrine and was compared with Fuller. "They considered me to be as bad as Andrew Fuller, and to them he was, doctrinally, about the most horrible person that could be; so, outside the chapel gate, I was assailed with questions about God hearing the prayers of unregenerate people" (see "True and Not True," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 51:539-40).

One of the greatest influences that Fuller had on Spurgeon had to do with the subject of conversion. Spurgeon, like Fuller, believed that the Bible warrants unbelievers to come to Christ even if they do not feel like it.

You have thought to yourself "Before I can come, I must feel my need aright." You think you do not feel your need, and you have been troubled a great deal lately because you have not that tenderness of heart that you ought to have. If you cannot come to Christ with a broken heart, come to Christ for a broken heart. He is ready to give it to you. Come and tell him that you want a broken heart. One of the best prayers you can pray is, "Lord, create a right spirit within me." You say, "Sir, I want more than a broken heart: I want even to learn to pray." I remember what Mr. Fuller once said to a young man who was trying to pray, and could not; he whispered to Mr. Fuller, who was kneeling by his side, "I cannot pray." "Tell the Lord so," said Mr. Fuller. Go and tell the Lord about that, and ask him to give you the desire which shall be necessary to make earnest prayer, that you may begin to pray, that you may have a broken heart (see "God's Mercy Going Before," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 60:404).

While Spurgeon admired Fuller and understood in many ways how Baptists of his day were indebted to him, nevertheless he used Fuller's name to challenge his own generation.

Oh, the name of Carey, and Fuller! We Baptists think we have nothing to do now but to go upstairs and go to bed, for we have achieved eternal glory through the names of these good men… Thank God for them: they were grand men; but the right thing is to forget the past, and pray for another set of men to carry on the work (see "Onward," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications/Ages Software, 2001], 19:382).

SBJT: Andrew Fuller was part of a prayer movement that led to revival. What was his personal thinking about the necessity of prayer?

Dustin W. Benge: In 1784, a proposal was adopted at the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association to call all congregations within the Association to ardent prayer for the moving of the Holy Spirit in revival. During the same meeting, Andrew Fuller, who had been asked to deliver one of the sermons, encouraged his fellow ministers, "O brethren, let us pray much for an outpouring of God's Spirit upon our ministers and churches" (see *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* [ed. Joseph Belcher, 1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988], 1:131). The prayer call of 1784 had been the result of a strong theological framework that included the most basic of biblical instruction on the necessity of prayer.

Although Fuller never wrote a treatise on prayer, he demonstrates his understanding of the necessity of prayer in his lengthy exposition on "The Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:9–15. Fuller interpreted this biblical text as Christ "putting words in their mouths" (see *Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:578), and thus saw clear pastoral implications of the teaching of Christ on the necessity of prayer within the life of a believer. Fuller begins his exegesis by establishing that prayer must be dependent upon the character of the one to whom we are allowed to draw near, namely, "Our Father " (Mt 6:9). The recognition of God as "Our Father" implies that sinners have become "adopted alien[s] put among the children" (*Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:578), and can therefore approach God as such. Within the words, "Our Father, who art in heaven" (Mt 6:9) there is an immediate consciousness that worship should be the main initiative of prayer. Fuller says, "As the endearing character of a father inspires us with confidence, this must have no less a tendency to excite our reverence; and both together are necessary to acceptable worship" (*Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:578). It is not merely reverence to God that prayer warrants, but it also serves to encourage the one praying of the absolute supremacy and almighty power to which they bring their requests. Fuller distinguished prayer as the supreme doxological experience of the believer beholding God, not only as Father, but a Father who dwells in heaven fully capable of answering his children's requests. A corporate element is observed within the words, "forgive us" (Matt 6:12). He affirms the catholicity of these words explaining, "the prayer of faith and love will embrace in its arms brethren at the greatest distance; and not only such as are known, but such as are unknown, even the whole family of God upon earth" (*Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:579).

After addressing the things of "first importance," Fuller says, "We are allowed to ask for those things which pertain to our immediate wants, both temporal and spiritual" (*Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:579). Fuller outlines, "There are three petitions in respect of God's name and cause in the world, so there are three which regard our own immediate wants; one of which concerns those which are temporal, and the other two those which are spiritual" (*Complete Works of Fuller,* 1:580). All three of these requests conclude with a doxology that grants great confidence to the one praying. Throughout his exposition, Fuller weaves the theme of confidence. Confidence within the one appealing to God in prayer that we could not, following the pattern of The Lord's Prayer, ask for anything that would not be fully granted. Fuller's theology of prayer serves to be the motivation through which he instructs others to pray and to experience the benefits thereof.

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SBJT: We have two sets of Andrew Fuller's expository sermons, the one on Genesis and the other on Revelation, the first and last books of the Bible respectively. How would a contemporary preacher benefit from looking at Fuller's sermons on the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50, for instance?

Josh Monroe: When William Carey (1761–1834) first argued that British Christians should begin an effort to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of India, he titled that argument, "*An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*." His phrase, "the use of means," may well seem curious in our own day, but in his day, it was downright controversial. By that phrase, Carey meant that Christians ought to engage those outside of Christ actually and persuasively in an effort to see them come to Christ. The primary Baptist progenitor of this argument was Andrew Fuller, who himself argued that the gospel was to be offered to any and all. This notion spoke directly against the prominent High Calvinism of his day by returning to the evangelical Calvinism of a century earlier. Carey, in arguing for the means of evangelism, was simply taking his cues from Fuller, such that if Carey is the father of modern missions; Fuller is the grandfather.

When we turn to Fuller's advice on preaching, we do not need to look far to find an emphasis on evangelism. He argued that the first goal in the pulpit was that "*In every sermon we should have an errand; and one of such importance that if it be received or complied with it will issue in eternal salvation*" (see Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller* [Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007], 752-759 italics original). In light of this, it is quite curious that his sermons on Genesis, and on the Joseph cycle in particular, rarely if ever contained what we would today consider an evangelical or gospel call. But it is precisely at this point that Fuller's sermons on Joseph are so beneficial to a contemporary preacher. Rather than funneling the text into his own points, themes, and final gospel crescendo, he preached the text on its own terms as a biblical narrative. He examined the motivations of the protagonists and antagonists, and he traced the design of the story's Author in the lives of those characters. The superintending providence of God was the theme of his sermons, as it was the theme of the Joseph cycle to begin with.

Fuller considered the stories of Joseph to be true records of real persons with whom a real God had much to do. In his own words, "It is a history, perhaps, unequalled for displaying the various workings of the human mind, both good and bad, and the singular providence of God in making use of them for the accomplishment of his purposes" (see Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller,* 411). When preaching through these stories, Fuller always had an eye to why the characters acted as they did and to what caused them to sin so villainously or walk so saintly; but his explanations were not those of the dry English teacher making silly supposition. They were instead the insight of a man who had inherited the Puritan tradition of being a physician of the soul. Through Fuller's exegetical narration, the hearts and minds of Joseph, Israel, the brothers, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, and Pharaoh became very familiar in their similarity to the hearts and minds of Fuller's audience. Consequently, God's interaction with the characters in the narrative became God's interaction with Fuller's congregation, and their own hearts were impacted with what changed the hearts of Joseph and the rest. This is subtle evangelism, but it is suitable evangelism, which took Scripture's story itself as the means by which conversion and eternal salvation were pursued from the pulpit.

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SBJT: Ellen Charry has coined the term "aretegenic" to describe the way that, up until the modern day, theological texts were designed to shape and form character. Is this an appropriate term by which to describe Andrew Fuller's theological writings and if so, can you give an example?

Ryan Hoselton: Andrew Fuller's conviction that Christian orthodoxy was conducive to moral excellence and happiness saturated his writings. According to Ellen Charry, when religious thought began to interact with Locke, Hume, and Kant, theologians resigned from their chief responsibility—to encourage virtue and happiness in God by instructing sinners in the knowledge and love of God (see Ellen Charry, *By The Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]). Modern epistemology reduced truth to information and facts, eliminating its moral dimension. In contrast, Andrew Fuller perpetuated the "aretegenic" epistemology (i.e., conducive to producing virtue) of the classic theologians, insisting that virtue and knowledge were not only inseparable but also that one nurtured the other. He reasoned that any compromise of Christian truth ineluctably led to an ethical compromise: "the worst principles will … be productive of the worst practices" (see Andrew Fuller, *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared as to their Moral Tendency,* in *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller* [ed. Joseph Belcher; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; repr: Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988], 2:149). Virtue was impossible without a correct knowledge and love of God.

Fuller applied his understanding of Christian truth as aretegenic to confront Thomas Paine's deism in his work, *The Gospel Its Own Witness* (see *Works,* 2:3-107). For Fuller, the moral value of Christian doctrine attested to its veracity: "If Christianity can be proved to be a religion that inspires the love of God and man; if it endues the mind of him that embraces it with a principle of justice, meekness, chastity, and goodness, and even gives a tone to the morals of society at large; it will appear to carry its evidence along with it" (*Works*, 2:7).

Fuller argued that the Christian understanding of God's character had a profound impact on human morality. He explained that God's *natural* perfections—such as his power, immutability, and aseity—captivate admiration for his *greatness*. However, God's *moral* perfections—including his justice, truthfulness, and holiness—attract love for his *goodness* (see *Works*, 2:9). God's moral law for mankind is an extension of his moral perfections, and the law's essence consists in the command to love God and your neighbor (see *Works*, 2:15). Love for God and man augments the desire to imitate God's good and just ways, bringing glory to the Creator and happiness to the creature. The moral character of God "is displayed" most gloriously "in the doctrines and precepts of the gospel"—doctrines that summon man to renounce his evil and rely entirely upon God for virtue (see *Works*, 2:9).

Fuller's contention with Paine's deism was that it exalted God's natural perfections but disregarded his moral perfections (see *Works*, 2:9). Deism declared nature normative for human morality and self-love the means for attaining virtue. Perhaps with an eye to the French Revolution, Fuller countered, "Instead of returning to God and virtue, those nations which have possessed the highest degrees of [the light of nature] have gone further and further into immorality" (*Works*, 2:19). Self-love—rather than inspiring benevolence—was "the source of all the mischief and misery in the universe" (*Works*, 2:17).

Fuller closely observed as evangelical social forces combated the ignominy of the slave trade in England, concluding that a society governed by self-love provided no motivation to love one's neighbor: "theft, cruelty, and murder … assume the names of wisdom and good policy" (*Works*, 2:8). In contrast, "Christianity is a living principle of virtue in good men," it "is a tree of life whose fruit is immortality, and whose very leaves are for the healing of the nations" (*Works*, 2:49). The love and knowledge of the true God offers hope for virtue, happiness, and human flourishing in this world, and assurance for it in the next.

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