

# **Being a Pastor:**

**a conversation with Andrew Fuller**

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# Table of contents

Abbreviations	17
Foreword by Jeremy Walker	13
Introduction	19
Andrew Fuller timeline	29
Part I: Historical considerations	31
Chapter 1: An historical survey of the ordination sermon in eighteenth-century English Dissent	31
Chapter 2: Pastoral ministry according to Andrew Fuller	65
Part II: The ordination sermons of Andrew Fuller	87
1. The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas	87
2. Pastors Required to Feed the Flock of Christ	108
3. Spiritual Knowledge and Love Necessary for the Ministry	111
4. On an Intimate and Practical Acquaintance with the Word of God	120
5. Ministers Appointed to Root out Evil, and to Cultivate Good	128
6. Ministers should be Concerned not to be Despised	134
7. Ministers Fellow Labourers with God	139

8. The Nature of the Gospel, and the Manner in which it ought to be Preached	145
9. The Work and Encouragements of the Christian Minister	151
10. Preaching Christ	161
11. The Influence of the Presence of Christ on a Minister	168
12. Habitual Devotedness to the Ministry	171
13. Affectionate Concern of a Minister for the Salvation of his Hearers	176
14. Faith in the Gospel a Necessary Prerequisite to Preaching It	181
15. The Young Minister Exhorted to Make Full Proof of his Ministry	187
16. Ministers and Churches Exhorted to Serve One Another in Love	196
17. Ministerial and Christian Communion	200
18. Holding Fast the Gospel	204
19. The Pastor's Charge	208
Part III: Modern pastoral applications	209
Chapter 3: A timeless solution	211
Chapter 4: Take heed to yourself	215
Chapter 5: Take heed to your flock	223
A concluding word	235
Appendix 1: A letter by Andrew Fuller on pastoral rule	237
Appendix 2: A letter by Andrew Fuller on pastoral purity	241
Appendix 3: William Carey's summary of his ordination	245
Appendix 4: Study Questions on Andrew Fuller, <i>The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas</i>	247

Appendix 5: Other Particular Baptist ordination sermons of the eighteenth century	251
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**Illustrations**

Andrew Fuller's pulpit	2
Matthew Henry	32
John Gill	48
Philip Doddridge	55
Andrew Fuller	64
John Sutcliff	74
Jonathan Edwards	81
Abraham Booth	160
Francis Holcroft	191
<i>(Courtesy of Kelly O'Doherty, Emmanuel Church, Cambridge)</i>	
Samuel Pearce	193

# Chapter 1: An historical survey of the ordination sermon in eighteenth-century English Dissent

The preaching of Scripture has always been an essential element of Christian worship. As O. C. Edwards, Jr., stated in his monumental history of the subject: ‘There is no activity more characteristic of the church than preaching.’<sup>1</sup> We see the truth of this played out in the life of the New Testament church from the first Christian sermon preached by Peter in Acts 2 to Paul’s injunction to his confidant Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:2, where he tells his younger ministry partner to ‘preach the word in season and out of season.’ This apostolic emphasis on preaching also played a major role in English church history. As Raymond Brown has observed, ‘In any account of religious life and thought in post-reformation England it is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence of the sermon.’<sup>2</sup> For example, in a diary entry for February 5, 1781, Andrew Fuller described preaching thus:

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<sup>1</sup> O. C. Edwards Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 1:3.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Brown, ‘Baptist Preaching in Early 18th Century England’, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 1 (January 1985). Christopher J. Ellis rightly speaks of the ‘dominance

A pulpit seems an awful place! An opportunity for addressing a company of mortals on their eternal interests. Oh how important! We preach for eternity. We, in a sense, are set for the rising and falling of many in Israel. And our own rise and fall is equally therein involved.<sup>3</sup>

Fuller exemplified this sentiment in his own ministry at both Soham and Kettering, and, as evident in this volume, it was regularly expressed in his sermons to ordinands to the Baptist ministry. For instance, in a sermon entitled *Pastors Required to Feed the Flock of Christ*, which was based on John 11:16, Fuller reminded the new minister of Christ's love for his people as 'Chief Shepherd' and explained that his duty was to 'feed' them as a shepherd feeds his sheep. By implication, Fuller was heightening the importance of preaching, connecting the work of the preacher to that of Christ in his office as The Good Shepherd. But the 'oversight' that Fuller highlighted goes beyond the ministry of the Word and includes ruling, protecting, and caring for the sheep more generally. And key to this oversight was the minister's character.<sup>4</sup>

Christian ministry and personal godliness are intimately yoked together in a number of New Testament writings. Paul's list of qualifications for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1–13, for instance, are predominantly character-based. In keeping with this train of thought—godliness and pastoral ministry—this chapter will outline the emphasis that English Dissent in the long eighteenth century placed on the character of a minister as integral to the discharge of pastoral duties. Of course, this is not the only theme

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of preaching in Baptist worship' (*Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* [London: SCM Press, 2004], 134). See also Ellis' whole chapter on the role of preaching in Baptist worship: *Gathering*, 124–149.

3 Andrew Fuller, *The Diary of Andrew Fuller, 1780–1801*, ed. Michael D. McMullen and D. Timothy Whelan, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol.1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 24.

4 Andrew Fuller, *Pastors Required to Feed the Flock of Christ* (*Complete Works*, I, 477–478; below, pages 109–110).

to appear in this tradition's ordination sermons. Issues such as calling, the practical duties of ministry, and the need for sound doctrine were also regularly expressed by preachers at ordinations. These other themes will be noted but the focus of this chapter will be on the encouragement to godliness found in ordination sermons as they were preached by English Dissenting ministers. This provides a historical background to Fuller's own understanding of a godly ministry.

The sampling in this chapter will be limited but representative. After a quick look at the history and nature of English Dissent, the importance of ordination sermons for this tradition is considered, and then ordination sermons from three representative ministers—the Presbyterian Matthew Henry (1662–1714), the Particular Baptist John Gill (1697–1771), and the Congregationalist Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)—will be examined with regard to their thinking about the character of the pastor.

## **English Dissent—what is it?**

Elizabeth I was content with a church that was 'Calvinistic in theology, [but] Erastian in Church order and government [i.e. the state was ascendant over the church in these areas], and largely mediaeval in liturgy.'<sup>5</sup> In response to this ecclesiastical 'settledness', there arose the Puritan movement in the early 1560s, which sought to reform the Elizabethan church after the model of the churches in Protestant Switzerland, especially those in Geneva and Zürich.<sup>6</sup> Initially, Puritan concerns were centred on the reform of the Church's worship and liturgy. In the 1570s and 1580s, however, the ecclesiological positions known as Presbyterianism and Congregationalism were developed by Puritan authors,

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<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: Carey Press, 1946), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Defining Puritanism is notoriously difficult. See Ian Hugh Clary, 'Hot Protestants: A Taxonomy of English Puritanism', *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no.1 (January 2010): 41–66.