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THE WAY TO TRUE TO EXCELLENCE:
THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAMUEL PEARCE

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THE WAY TO TRUE EXCELLENCE:
THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAMUEL PEARCE

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With gratitude for those who came before,
with hope for those who will come after.

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PREFACE

This project would have not been possible without the support and help of my amazing wife, Paige. She "held my arms up" when I was tired and discouraged. Samuel Pearce called his wife Sarah "invaluable," and I must say the same for my Paige. I would also like to thank Russell Moore for teaching me, encouraging me, and exhorting me to pursue a Ph.D. so many years ago. Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Michael Haykin. It has truly been one of the great joys and honors of my life to be able to work with him on this project. He never ceases to amaze me with his understanding of history, his vast knowledge, and most of all his deep love for God.

Jason Dees

Birmingham, Alabama

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“In him we see that the way to true excellence is not to affect eccentricity, nor to aspire after the performance of a few splendid actions; but to fill up our lives with a sober, modest, sincere, affectionate, assiduous, and uniform conduct.”¹

Andrew Fuller

Introduction

By the end of the eighteenth century, evangelical Christianity had spread no further than Western Europe and the Atlantic seaboard. As Michael Haykin observes, however, “suddenly in the last decade of the eighteenth century evangelicals launched out from these two geographical regions and began to establish the presence of their faith throughout Asia, Africa, and Australia.”² When John Thomas (1757–1801) and William Carey (1761–1834) stepped off the *Kron Princessa Maria* near Calcutta, India, on November 7, 1793, they were helping initiate the modern missionary movement that changed the evangelical world forever.³ The Baptist Missionary Society, formed a year earlier in Kettering, England, sent them.⁴ The twelve original members of the Baptist

¹Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 3:446.

²Andrew Fuller, *A Heart for Missions: The Classic Memoir of Samuel Pearce* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2006), i.

³Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 1.

⁴The original name for the society was the “Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen,” and it was formed in Kettering on October 2, 1792. Those in attendance

Missionary Society included William Carey, Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), and John Ryland (1753–1825). A less-known member was Samuel Pearce (1766–1799), the pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, England. He would die in 1799 at the very young age of 33, but he was an integral part of the Baptist missionary movement that helped bring about a sea-change in evangelicalism.

For decades after his death, John Ryland and other Baptist leaders referred to Pearce as the “seraphic Pearce.”⁵ Francis Augustus Cox (1783–1853) wrote that “his ardour . . . gave him a kind of ubiquity; as a man and a preacher, he was known, he was felt everywhere.”⁶ He was born on July 20, 1766, in Plymouth, Devon, to devout Baptist parents. Converted in the summer of 1782 through the preaching of Isaiah Birt, he was taken from “a state of trespasses and sins” to a “life in a dear dying Redeemer,” as he put it.⁷ In February of 1789, after three years of studies at the Bristol Baptist Academy, Pearce accepted a call to serve on probation as the pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church, an office to which he was formally called the following year. Michael Haykin notes that “no less than 335 individuals were converted under his ministry and received

at the initial meeting were William Carey, Leicester; John Ryland, Northampton; Reynold Hogg, Thrapstone; John Sutcliff, Olney; Andrew Fuller, Kettering; Abraham Greenwood, Oakham; Edward Sharman, Cottisbrook; Samuel Pearce, Birmingham; Joseph Timms, Kettering; Joshua Burton, Foxton; Thomas Blundel, Arnsby; William Heighton, Roade; John Ayers, Braybrook; and William Staughton, Bristol. See Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 220–23.

⁵Michael A. G. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 2, n. 4. See, for example, J. P., “Christians United in Christ,” *The Baptist Magazine* 25 (1833): 256: “The seraphic ardour of Pearce”; *The Life and Letters of John Angell James*, 3rd ed., ed. R. W. Dale (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1861), 67; Ernest A. Payne, “Samuel Pearce,” in *The First Generation: Early Leaders of the Baptist Missionary Society in England and America*, ed. Ernest A. Payne (London: Carey Press, 1936), 46.

⁶F. A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, from 1792 to 1842* (London: T. Ward & Co./G.J. Dyer, 1842), 1:54.

⁷Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, ii–iii.

into the membership of Cannon Street. This figure does not include those converted under his preaching who, for one reason or another, did not join themselves to the Birmingham cause.”⁸ Despite this notable ministry at Cannon Street, his involvement in the Baptist Missionary Society made him restless and stirred him to offer himself as a missionary. Thus, in 1794 he made application to go to the mission field. Ultimately the Baptist Missionary Society denied Pearce’s application as they determined that Pearce was too valuable for the work of the society in England. Pearce was a master preacher and fundraiser for the cause, and the society determined that his influence at home was the better use of his giftedness.

Beyond his work for Christ in the pulpit and his commitment to the Great Commission, Pearce’s greatest display of gospel holiness may be seen in his commitment to his wife Sarah. The couple met soon after Samuel’s arrival in Birmingham and she was converted under his preaching. They were married on February 2, 1791, and Samuel baptized Sarah later that same year.⁹ Throughout their eight short years of marriage, their love for one another grew deeper and deeper. Samuel once wrote to Sarah that he was more desirous “of enjoying your friendship than the admiration of the crowds of Helen’s, or Venus’s, or Cleopatra’s, or all the females of *Egypt—Greece—Rome* or *Birmingham*.”¹⁰

On October 16, 1798, Pearce preached at the meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society that witnessed the acceptance of William Ward (1769–1823) as a missionary

⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 8–9.

⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 19.

¹⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 21.

within the society. Ward commented to William Carey that Pearce “set the whole meeting in a flame,” saying, “had missionaries been needed, we might have had a cargo immediately.”¹¹ After that meeting, en route home to Birmingham, Pearce was caught in a downpour of rain and subsequently developed a severe chill. Pearce continued to preach through his illness but his condition only worsened. By the spring of 1799 Pearce was desperately ill with tuberculosis. He traveled to Devon that summer to try to recover but it was to no avail. Samuel Pearce died on October 10, 1799, and was buried beneath his family pew in the Cannon Street church building.¹²

With the publication of Andrew Fuller’s memoirs of Pearce a year after his death, Pearce became a model of eighteenth-century Baptist piety. This dissertation will examine three areas of his piety against the backdrop of eighteenth-century evangelicalism: his preaching as a model for a spirituality of the word, his marriage and friendships as a model for a spirituality of love, and his commitment to the Great Commission as a model for a spirituality of mission. With the examination of these three areas, this dissertation will show to what extent Pearce’s spirituality captures the quintessence of late eighteenth-century Baptist spirituality.

Status Questions

In his *A History of the English Baptists*, A. C. Underwood writes, “Space forbids more than a mention of Samuel Pearce.”¹³ He goes on to give a few lines on the

¹¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 35, n.11.

¹²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 40.

¹³A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Baptist Union Publ. Dept., 1947), 168.

prayer life of Pearce saying, “for many in the congregation who heard him pray exclaimed, ‘we scarcely ever seemed to pray before.’”¹⁴ His statement, however, proves true for Pearce across many major works of Baptist history. A survey of some of the most prominent works in Baptist history produces only meager “mentions” in the study of Pearce’s spirituality. He is not mentioned by Leon MacBeth in his *Baptist Heritage* or *Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*.¹⁵ He is also not mentioned in Bebbington’s *Baptists through the Centuries*.¹⁶ Robert Torbet leaves him out of his *History of the Baptists* and John H.Y. Briggs’ *Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought*¹⁷ does not include an entry for Samuel Pearce. Briggs does mention Pearce however in his *Pulpit and People*, but only in regard to his relationship with a pamphlet-writing abolitionist named Richard Hillier who had been a member at Cannon Street Baptist Church.¹⁸ Even Stanley and Cox in their works on the history of the Baptist Missionary Society give not much more than a mention of “The Seraphic Pearce.” His name is found sparingly in both works, each mentioning his relationships with Fuller and Carey, his presence at the foundation of the Baptist Missionary Society, and they both speak of his ability to raise money, each mentioning that Pearce brought a contribution of seventy pounds to the

¹⁴Underwood, *A History*, 168.

¹⁵Leon MacBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987).

¹⁶D. W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

¹⁷John H. Y. Briggs, ed., *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009).

¹⁸John H. Y. Briggs, *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth Century Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009), 182–83.

society's second meeting.¹⁹ As will be shown, only four authors have spent significant time publishing books on his life and spirituality and the shape of Samuel Pearce's spirituality remains a story that still needs to be told.

After Samuel Pearce's death on October 10, 1799, his good friend and fellow Baptist Andrew Fuller began to compile a collection of Pearce's letters and notes, and published *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Pearce: Minister of the Gospel in Birmingham; with Extracts from Some of His Most Interesting Letters*. This landmark work went through a series of editions in Fuller's lifetime, and multiple reprints in the course of the nineteenth century. Fuller's compilation of Pearce's work is the most comprehensive and widely published work on Samuel Pearce's life. Throughout the book, Fuller gives biographical commentary to frame and enhance the various sections of Pearce's written corpus. In more recent days, this book has been republished by Solid Ground Christian Books of Birmingham, Alabama.²⁰ In 1831, Fuller's work was enlarged by Pearce's son, William Hopkins Pearce, who added additional correspondence between his father and other members of the Baptist Missionary Society.²¹

Fuller brings to light many aspects of Samuel Pearce's spirituality, chiefly his commitment to mission. Fuller writes, "Mr. Pearce was uniformly the spiritual and the active servant of Christ; but neither his spirituality nor his activity would have appeared

¹⁹F. A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, From 1792 to 1842: To Which is Added a Sketch of the General Baptist Mission, in Two Volumes* (London: T. Ward and G. & J. Dyer, 1842), 18. Cox also briefly mentions Pearce on pages 3, 22, 40, 50–52. Similarly this account of Pearce raising seventy pounds is found in: Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 15. Stanley also briefly mentions Pearce on pgs. 11, 14, 16, 19, and 37.

²⁰Fuller, *A Heart for Missions*.

²¹Andrew Fuller, and W. H. Pearce. *Memoir of Rev. Samuel Pearce, A.M.: Who Was United with Carey and Others in Establishing Missions in India, 1793* (New York: American Tract Society, 1830).

in the manner they have, but for his engagements in the introduction of the gospel among the heathen.”²² Fuller’s work gives the reader Pearce’s own words from various texts that not only give a wonderful display of his spirituality of mission, but also show his spirituality of the word, of love, of preaching, and of suffering. However, it is only in Fuller’s final section that he briefly interacts with Pearce’s spirituality. He gives five summary statements and paragraphs on what can be gained from a study and observation of Samuel Pearce. He first remarks that Pearce’s life demonstrates that personal holiness flows out of biblical conviction. Second, Fuller comments that Pearce’s life was a display of the great things that God can do in very short period of time. Third, he writes that Pearce manifested the true joy of the Christian faith in all things, and most especially in his suffering. Fourthly, Fuller observes Pearce’s great confidence in the sovereignty of God, trusting the decision of the Baptist Missionary Society as God’s good will. Last, and most important, Fuller says that in Pearce we see, “that the way to true excellence is not to affect eccentricity, nor to aspire after the performance of a few splendid actions; but to fill up our lives with a sober, modest, sincere, affectionate, assiduous, and uniform conduct.”²³

The next major student of Pearce’s life was his great-grandson who was also a descendent of William Carey. In 1913, Samuel Pearce Carey (1862–1953) published a biography of his great-grandfather entitled *Samuel Pearce: The Baptist Brainerd*. Of all the works on Samuel Pearce, this is the most biographical, containing oral history to which only Pearce’s family would have been privy. The biography portrays Samuel

²²Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 28.

²³Fuller, *Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, 444–46.

Pearce in a most positive way, almost hagiographically. Thus in his introduction, Carey cites Herbert Skeats, “No church ever possessed a man with holier character than Samuel Pearce.”²⁴ Carey especially praises Samuel Pearce for his submission to the Baptist Missionary Society’s decision not to go to India, saying that Pearce was, “ready to yield [his darling desire] to the Will of the Father.”²⁵ In this, Carey calls his great-grandfather the “burnt offering” of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Much like Fuller’s work, S. Pearce Carey’s biography demonstrates the broader spirituality of Samuel Pearce, but the book includes limited detailed interactions with Pearce’s spirituality. The work praises Pearce for his lasting contribution to the global church, but it is mostly biographical and inspirational, and almost never analytical. An analysis of and interaction with the accounts of Pearce’s spirituality found within *The Baptist Brainerd* is therefore necessary.

Another twentieth-century student of Pearce’s life was Ernest Alexander Payne (1902–1980). Payne served as the general secretary and president of the Baptist Missionary Society and, in 1936, he published *The First Generation: Early Leaders of the Baptist Missionary Society in England and India*. Payne joins Fuller and S. Pearce Carey in praising Samuel Pearce’s extraordinary spirituality. He writes, “no one did more for the mission [Baptist Missionary Society] in its early days than Samuel Pearce.”²⁶ Payne’s description of Pearce’s spirituality could be summed up with the

²⁴S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce, M.A., the Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, 1913), 15.

²⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 175.

²⁶Ernest A. Payne, *The First Generation: Early Leaders of the Baptist Missionary Society in England and India* (London: Carey Press, 1936), 50.

word “inspirational.” He believed that although Pearce died at a young age, his life inspired a generation of Baptist leaders. In the conclusion of his chapter on Samuel Pearce, Payne cited one of Pearce’s college friends who wrote that he “was much revived and quickened by reading the Memoirs of our dear brother Pearce. Feel ashamed that I have lived so little like him.”²⁷ Payne’s work was critical in preserving the legacy of Samuel Pearce. He mentions discovering a forgotten bundle of farewell letters addressed to Andrew Fuller from Samuel Pearce shortly before he died.²⁸ S. Pearce Carey also entrusted Payne with “two bundles of faded and rather tattered papers” of Samuel Pearce’s.²⁹ It was Payne who added these bundles to the Pearce collection in the Angus Library.³⁰ While Payne was a great preserver and student of Pearce’s work, he never published any interaction with Pearce’s spirituality.

In 1986, the Canadian Baptist historian Michael Haykin first read about Samuel Pearce and was fascinated by this eighteenth-century Baptist’s life and testimony. He has given a considerable amount of time and study to this forgotten pastor and writing about Samuel Pearce has been a regular part of Haykin’s work. Haykin mentions him in several general histories of Baptist life as an important leader from this period.³¹ In 2006, Haykin wrote the introduction to the latest publication of Fuller’s *Memoir of Samuel*

²⁷Payne, *First Generation*, 54.

²⁸Payne, *First Generation*, 51.

²⁹Payne, “Some Samuel Pearce Documents,” 26–27.

³⁰Payne, “Some Samuel Pearce Documents,” 27.

³¹Michael A. G. Haykin, “Baptists Reflecting on Adam & Eve in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 92–99; idem, *A Cloud of Witnesses: Calvinistic Baptists in the 18th Century* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Times, 2006), 65–72; idem, *One Heart and One Soul*, 12, 203–5, 215, 220, 223–25, 233, 236–38, 244, 246, 255–56, 260–61, 263–64, 266; idem, *The Christian Lover: The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers*

Pearce.³² Then, in 2012, Haykin edited a collection of Pearce's letters in *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*. This work marked the first time many of Pearce's love letters to his wife Sarah had been published and is a valuable summary of Samuel Pearce and his relationships with his wife, fellow pastors, and other friends.³³ His biographical introductions in both of these books and his selection of documents in *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory* display the piety of Pearce's life and his commitment to preaching, to mission, and to his relationships with his wife and friends, but did not intend to give a spiritual analysis of Pearce's work. Recently Haykin published a book of seven short essays titled *Ardent Love for Jesus*.³⁴ In the book he gives a biographical sketch of seven leaders in eighteenth-century Baptist life including Samuel Pearce. While it is longer and more developed, this essay is very similar to the previously mentioned introductions. While Haykin's treatment of Pearce gives the reader a wonderful window into the primary sources of Pearce, he along with the aforementioned authors, have left the window open for a detailed analysis of Samuel Pearce's spirituality, a window that this dissertation will enter.

(Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2009), 63–69.

³²Fuller, *A Heart for Missions*.

³³This includes letters from Pearce to Sarah, John Thomas, William Carey, John Ryland, and letters to Samuel Pearce from Sarah.

³⁴Michael A. G. Haykin, *Ardent Love to Jesus: English Baptists and the Experience of Revival in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Bridgend, Wales: Bryntirion Press, 2013).

General Outline and Procedure

This dissertation provides a deep study of three aspects of Samuel Pearce's life and work: his spirituality of the word, his spirituality of love, and his spirituality of mission. These three aspects have been chosen as they relate to the three major bodies of Pearce's work that still exist. Throughout his life only six of Samuel Pearce's sermons were published.³⁵ Happily, a collection of seventy of his sermons in manuscript form from the books of Hebrews and 1 John have been kept intact at the Angus Library in Oxford, England at Regent's Park College.³⁶ While this collection of published and unpublished sermons only represents only a small part of Pearce's preaching, it does provide a window to his understanding of the Bible, biblical theology, and doctrine. In the first major section of this thesis, these sermons, both those that have been published and those in outline form will be analyzed to determine his spirituality of the word.

Due to the work of historians and archivists, there are roughly one hundred and fifty pieces of Pearce's correspondence with pastors, church members, friends, and with his wife Sarah. His deep love for those around him was one of the hallmarks of his life.

³⁵These are *The oppressive, unjust, and prophane nature, and tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, exposed* (Birmingham, 1790); *Reflections on the character and state of departed Christians: in a sermon [on John xi. 11] occasioned by the decease of the Rev. Caleb Evans, Pastor of the Baptist Congregation Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, etc.* (1791); *Motives to gratitude a sermon, delivered to the Baptist congregation, meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham* (1798); *An early acquaintance with the Holy scriptures recommended in a sermon in behalf of the Walworth charity and Sunday Schools for Poor Boys: preached at Mr. Booth's meeting-house, Little Prescott Street, London, August 13, 1797* (Clipstone, 1800); *The duty of ministers to be nursing fathers to the church : and the Duty of Churches to regard Ministers as the Gift of Christ: a charge, delivered by The Rev. John Ryland, D.D. of Bristol; and a sermon, delivered by The Rev. S. Pearce, M.A. of Birmingham; in the dissenters meeting-house, Angel-Street, Worcester; at the ordination of the The Rev. W. Belsher, To the Pastorate of the Baptist Church, meeting in Silver-Street, in the same city* (1797); and *The scripture doctrine of Christian baptism, with some historical remarks on that subject : in a sermon preached April 20, 1794, at the baptism of twelve persons on a profession of faith and repentance, at the Baptist Meeting-House in Harvey-Lane, Leicester* (Birmingham, 1806).

³⁶In July of 2013, I was able to access these sermons and photograph them. They are not written in manuscript form, but only bulleted outlines with occasional longer paragraphs. While more of Pearce's work needs to be published these sermons would be very difficult to prepare for publication.

This is made evident in so many of his letters. For example, in a letter to William Carey when he was praying about joining him in India, Pearce states,

Never did I take pen in hand with such a combination of interesting feelings before. Love for your person, respect for your character, joy at your prospects, gratitude for your communications, desire for your success, and withal a hope that we shall yet meet in the flesh, so variously affect me that I can scarcely compose myself to write at all.³⁷

Samuel Pearce was not selected by the society to join Carey in India, but he continued to preach and serve the Lord through the society with persistence and passion. Foremost in his relationships with others was his devotion to his wife Sarah. Pearce's love for his wife grew deeper and deeper through the years: He referred to her as "the dearest woman—my invaluable Sarah"³⁸ and the "partner of my heart."³⁹ His work and preaching kept them apart for long periods throughout their marriage but their love only grew. On one trip he wrote to her, "O our dear fireside! When shall we sit down toe to toe, and tete á tete [*sic*] again—Not a long time I hope will elapse ere I re-enjoy that felicity."⁴⁰ In this dissertation, Samuel Pearce's letters will be studied and analyzed to determine his spirituality of love.

The most public characteristic of Samuel Pearce's spirituality was his commitment to missions. Without his effort, the Baptist Missionary Society may have never gotten off the ground and certainly would not have had the same success that it did. The rejection by the Baptist Missionary Society in his attempt to join Carey on the

³⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 113.

³⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 22.

³⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 22.

⁴⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 23.

mission field did not deter Pearce from doing what he could to advance the Great Commission. Such a rejection would have left some men bitter, but Pearce was ever faithful. Even if he could not be with William Carey, he was with him in prayer. He wrote the following to Carey in October of 1794: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who inclined your heart to undertake his cause among the heathen, a cause which European Christians may blush that they have neglected so long. But I hope the day is dawning when we shall all feel and sing as angels, “Peace on earth, and good will to men.”⁴¹ This dissertation tells story of the Baptist Missionary Society from Pearce’s perspective. His commitment and passion for mission was not unique among the members of the Baptist Missionary Society, but his is a story that has not often been told. Pearce provides a wonderful model for the missional local pastor. His commitment to his co-laborers on the field should inspire any pastor that desires to be a part of sending the gospel to parts of the world where there is little to no access to the word of Christ.

Conclusion

Samuel Pearce’s is a story that needs telling both by the church and the academy will benefit from a study of his spirituality. In so many ways Pearce is a model for spirituality both in his private life and in his public ministry. His preaching of the Bible, his depth in relationships, and his zeal for the Great Commission was an inspiration to his contemporaries and can serve as such for those reading Pearce in the present and future.

⁴¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 113.

CHAPTER 2
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Early Years 1766–1785

Located between the mouths of the rivers Plym and Tamar, the city of Plymouth, Devon, is ideally situated at the north end of the Plymouth Sound of the English Channel. As a key English port, the city has seen many comings and goings. It was from Plymouth that the Pilgrims left England on *The Mayflower* to establish a new life for themselves and a new colony for their motherland in 1620. It was from Plymouth that Captain James Cook left for his first voyage in 1768 aboard the *HMS Endeavor*, and it was from Plymouth that Charles Darwin left for his second voyage of exploration aboard the *HMS Beagle*. It was also from Plymouth that American troops set sail to invade Normandy, France, in June of 1944. While each of these journeys has dramatically changed the world, there is a lesser-known journey beginning in Plymouth that in the scope of eternity may have had an even greater impact than these.

Samuel Pearce was born in Plymouth, beginning his life's journey there on Sunday, July 20, 1766. He was the son of William (d. 1805), a silversmith and later goldsmith, and Lydia Pearce (d. 1766/1767), both devout Baptists.¹ His mother, however, did not survive his infancy, and therefore Samuel spent his early years in the care of his grandfather in Tamerton Foliot, a village at the junction of two valleys about

¹Michael A. G. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah*

five miles to the north of Plymouth. The Pearce family had a long history in Tamerton Foliot, and it was for Samuel Pearce a home-place anchor throughout his life.² Pearce had a happy childhood in the south Devon countryside and a close relationship with both his grandfather and father. Both men were godly examples for the young Pearce. His father was the chief deacon at the Baptist meeting-house in Plymouth, which was known to be a “sturdy Baptist community.”³ Pearce stayed close to his father throughout his life. In the covenantal agreement that he made with Cannon Street Baptist Church, the church agreed to allow him an annual absence of six weeks that he might visit his father back in Devon. William Pearce believed in his son Samuel and was one of the first to make contributions to the Baptist Missionary Society, a cause that his son championed so passionately. As Samuel Pearce’s great-grandson would one day write, “All his days Pearce was blessed in his father’s godliness and love.”⁴ When Samuel was eight or nine years old he moved back home to Plymouth to attend the town’s grammar school and more importantly to learn his father’s business.

Despite this godly heritage Samuel followed a course of rebellion in his early teen years. “As he advanced in life, his evil propensities, as he has said began to ripen” commented Fuller, “and forming a connection with several vicious school-fellows, he became more and more corrupted.”⁵ Through these years Pearce oscillated between

Pearce (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 3.

²S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce, M.A., the Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, 1913), 47.

³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, 4.

⁴Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 49.

⁵Andrew Fuller, *A Heart for Missions: The Classic Memoir of Samuel Pearce* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2006), 3.

conviction of sin and sinful pursuit. Once when the young Pearce was checking on the welfare of a gravely-ill neighbor he heard the man say, “I am damned forever!” These awful words pierced his soul, and for a time Pearce walked with the Lord but eventually returned to his folly.

Beyond the temptations of adolescence, the Plymouth of the 1770s certainly was not an ideal environment for pious living. These were war years as England engaged in battle during the American Revolution with its own “kinfolk in the transatlantic west.”⁶ Plymouth was busy day and night with ships coming and going and soldiers from all around England roaming the streets. In August of 1779, the then thirteen-year-old Samuel Pearce experienced one of the most dramatic weeks in Plymouth’s long history. For a stretch of four days that August a total of sixty-six war-barques of France and Spain, allies of the American colonies, laid wait just outside of Plymouth’s harbor. There was no English fleet to oppose them yet somehow the ships did not attack. John Wesley later wrote, “The bridle of God was in their teeth.”⁷ This was the city in which the young Pearce grew up, and for at least his first sixteen years of life his heart remained essentially cold to the Lord.

The embers of godliness in Pearce’s heart began to burn under the preaching of a student named Isaiah Birt (1758–1837) who came to the Baptist meeting-house in the summer of 1782 from the Bristol Baptist Academy. Michael Haykin writes, “The Spirit of God drove Birt’s words home to Pearce’s heart. The change in Pearce from ‘a state of death in trespasses and sins’ to a ‘life in a dear dying Redeemer’ was sudden but real and

⁶Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 52.

⁷Cited Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 55.

lasting.”⁸ And as Benjamin Francis (1734–1799) wrote in an elegy for Pearce, “Birt was the star that led thy kindred mind to Bethlehem, where the Saviour thou did’st find.”⁹ Pearce said of his own conversion: “I believe few conversions were more joyful. The change produced in my views, feelings, and conduct so evident to myself, that I could no more doubt of its being from God than of my existence. I had the witness in myself, and was filled with peace and joy unspeakable.” When Birt returned to school, Pearce said goodbye to him with tears and later wrote to his friend, “I am ‘prone to wander;’ yes, ‘I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.’ O that my affections may be more and more united to him! My dear sir, pray for me. Use your interest at the throne of grace on my behalf.”¹⁰

Isaiah Birt would go on to have an influential career in preaching, boldly preaching the gospel and spending a great deal of his energy defending believer’s baptism. In fact, his good friend Robert Hall (1764–1831) often teased him because he “published no sermons save on this baptismal rite.”¹¹ Birt had much more to offer than his Baptist convictions though; the Birmingham Congregationalist, John Angell James, said of him, “Birt was no ordinary man. His preaching was richly evangelical, energetic

⁸Michael A. G. Haykin and David G. Fountain, *A Cloud of Witnesses: Calvinistic Baptists in the 18th Century* (Faverdale North, Darlington, England: Evangelical Times, 2006), 66.

⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 57.

¹⁰Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 5.

¹¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 59. Birt wrote no fewer than four items on this subject: *A Vindication of the Baptists, in Three Letters, Addressed to a Friend in Saltash* (Bristol, England: John Rose, 1793); *A Defence of Scripture Baptism: in Answer to a Pamphlet Addressed to Those Who Esteem the Essence of Religion of More Importance Than the Forms and Ceremonies* (Plymouth: P. Nettleton, 1793); *Strictures on Mr. Mend’s Pamphlet, Entitled The Baptism of Infants, Authorised Scripture* (Plymouth: P. Nettleton, 1797); and *Adult Baptism, and the Salvation of All Who Die in Infancy Maintained: In Strictures on a Sermon, Entitled, “The Right of Infants to Baptism”* (1823).

and attractive. His gift in prayer was extraordinary, while his wisdom and faculty for government were unrivalled. It was my privilege to be on terms of peculiar intimacy with him.”¹² Yet despite all of his success Birt always “reckoned Pearce the chief sheaf of his reaping.”¹³ In a letter to Andrew Fuller while the latter was composing Pearce’s memoirs, Birt kindly said of Pearce,

Very few have entered upon and gone through religious profession with more exalted piety or warmer zeal than Samuel Pearce; and as few have exceeded him in the possession and display of that charity which suffereth long, and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up, that doth not behave itself unseemly, that seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, that beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things [1 Cor 13:4-7]. But why should I say this to you? You know him yourself.¹⁴

Birt eventually succeeded Pearce at the Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1813.¹⁵

One year after his conversion on July 20, 1783, Pearce was baptized with eight others in Sutton Pool by Philip Gibbs.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that four of the eight were also named Pearce, which led Samuel Pearce’s great-grandson and biographer to conclude that this was a result of Samuel Pearce leading his family to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon his baptism Pearce became a member of the Plymouth Baptist church, the “sturdy Baptist community” of Plymouth whose history reached back deep into the seventeenth

¹²Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 59.

¹³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 58.

¹⁴Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 7.

¹⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 60.

¹⁶The city of Plymouth was founded on the Sutton Pool dating back to medieval times. Boats would moor in this pool after harvesting their catch of pilchards and herrings from the rich waters close by. See Felicity Goodall, *Lost Plymouth: Hidden Heritage of the Three Towns* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Birlinn, 2009), 1. Philip Gibbs had been the pastor of the Plymouth Baptist Church for thirty-three years when he baptized Pearce. See Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 58.

century. During the great persecution of all Christian bodies outside of the Church of England from 1660 to 1688 the Plymouth Baptist church's early minister Abraham Cheare (d. 1668) was arrested, cruelly treated, and banished to the island of Saint Nicholas (now known as Drake's Island).¹⁷ While Cheare was being held "he endured great inhumanities from merciless jailers" until he eventually died in 1668. Cheare once said, "A week in prison giveth plainer discovery of a man's spirit than a month in a Church."¹⁸ Cheare's willingness to forgive and strength in the face of trial long affected the Plymouth church, and this faith and fortitude was certainly passed along to Samuel Pearce.

After his conversion and especially after his baptism Pearce's passion for Christ was deep and intense. At times he fell into a kind of perfectionism and would plunge into a state of bewilderment and deep distress when he stumbled and sinned. Eventually the Lord freed him to rest on the unchanging grace of God. In one of his first poems, written when he was only seventeen, his heart of devotion is quite apparent:

Oh, how sweet it is to me,
'Fore my gracious Lord to fall,
Talk with Him continually,
Make my blessed Jesus all!

Other pleasures have I sought,
Tried the world a thousand times,
Peace pursued, but found it not,
For I still retained my crimes.

Never could my heart be bless'd,
Till from guilt I found it freed;

¹⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 5.

¹⁸Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 63.

Jesus now has me released;
I, in Him, am free indeed.

Saviour, bind me to Thy cross,
Let Thy love possess my heart;
All besides I count but dross;
Christ and I will never part.

In His blood such peace I find,
In His love such joy is given,
He who is to Jesus joined
Finds on earth a real heaven.¹⁹

Years at Bristol Baptist Academy 1786–1789

From the time of his conversion in 1782 Samuel Pearce was an evangelist for the gospel, yearning for the salvation of others. Both Isaiah Birt and the senior pastor of the Plymouth Baptist Church, Philip Gibbs, began asking Pearce to preach and eventually in November of 1785 the Plymouth membership voted to affirm his giftedness and call to pastoral ministry. He immediately began to train informally under the direction of his senior pastor, and in August of 1786 he entered the Bristol Baptist Academy.²⁰

When Samuel Pearce arrived at the Bristol Academy in 1786 he joined a long line of aspiring ministers that had been educated at the school since 1720. The vision for the school actually went back to June 3, 1679 when Edward Terrill (d. 1685), a wealthy elder of the Broadmead Baptist Church, deeded the church a large sum of money to be used at the time of his death to prepare young men for ministry in Baptist churches. Even though Terrill died in 1685 and his wife in 1697, it was not until 1720 when Bernard Foskett (1685–1758) came to Broadmead that the academy became a reality. Foskett

¹⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 67.

²⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 5.

came to Broadmead as an assistant minister under the leadership of pastor Kitterell (d. 1727). Since the Terrill fund was used to pay for the majority of Foskett's salary, he saw his primary responsibility as the training of pastors. The first students accepted under Foskett's tutelage were Thomas Rogers²¹ and John Phillips.²² In 1727 Peter Kitterell died and Foskett became the senior minister at Broadmead, at which time Andrew Gifford Jr. (1700–1784) was called to be his associate. After just two years Gifford accepted a call to the Church in Little Wild Street in London, and in 1730 an eighteen-year-old man named Hugh Evans (1712–1781) replaced him. Under the leadership of Foskett and Evans both the church and academy saw many years of successful ministry. However, there are no surviving records from the college before 1770, and the only details known are those that have come from the Broadmead minute books.²³

In 1758, Bernard Foskett died, and Hugh Evans became the pastor at Broadmead. After a long search, the church eventually called Hugh's son Caleb Evans (1737–1791) as the associate minister, and this father-and-son team would work together building the church and the school for twenty-three years. Through the first ten years of their work at the academy an average of two new students per year enrolled to be trained for gospel ministry. This began to change in 1770 when the Evanses wrote to the Baptist Churches in England in Wales in order to garner support for the foundation of the Bristol Education Society.²⁴ This collective effort in funding and resourcing Baptist education in

²¹Thomas Rogers was originally from Pontypool and was a member of the Pithay Church in Bristol.

²²John Phillips was originally from Rhydwylyn, Carmarthenshire.

²³Norman S. Moon, *Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College, 1679–1979* (Bristol, England: Bristol Baptist College, 1979), 1-4.

England was responsible for great growth at the academy, and the training of some of the most influential Baptist ministers of the eighteenth century.²⁵ For example, four of the thirteen pastors who met in Kettering in 1792 to form the Baptist Missionary Society were Bristol graduates.²⁶ When Hugh Evans died in April of 1781, Caleb Evans was the natural choice to be his successor, and the church called him with a unanimous vote.²⁷ Thus, when Samuel came to the school in 1786, he came as a student in the growing academy under the leadership of the esteemed younger Evans.

The academy not only provided Pearce with a quality education, but it also gave him some life-long friendships. The students lived together in a large private residence on North Street in Bristol, and it was in this house that Pearce came to know and love some of his dearest brothers in the faith such as William Steadman (1764–1837) and Josiah Evans (d. 1793). In 1793 Pearce wrote the following account for John Rippon’s (1751–1836) *The Baptist Annual Register* of the death of Josiah Evans:

When I left Bristol, I left it with regret. I was sorry to leave my studies to embark, inexperienced as is I am, on the tempestuous ocean of public life, where the high blowing winds, and rude noisy billows, must more or less inevitably annoy the trembling voyager. Nor did it make a small addition to my pain that I was to part with so many of my dear companions, with whom I had spent so many hours, either in furnishing or unburdening the mind. I need not say, amongst the first of these I considered Josiah Evans Mr. Evans had one essential qualification for friendship, which was faithfulness A world, for such a friend, to lose is gain.²⁸

²⁴The Plymouth church was one of the first churches to join the Bristol Education Society.

²⁵Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 10–14.

²⁶Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 21.

²⁷Norman Moon writes of the younger Evans, “Caleb added to his father’s qualities his well-educated mind, his ready pen and his wide-ranging understanding of the Gospel. His work gained him recognition in that he received an honorary D. D., from both Aberdeen University and from Brown University, U.S.A.” See Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 11.

²⁸Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 18–19.

The students also had a wonderful relationship with Caleb Evans. Steadman once wrote of his principal, “His kindness was exceedingly great. To him I felt the affection of a son for a father.”²⁹ While Caleb Evans was a kind man, he was also very strict. If his students were out past ten o’clock he would fine them one shilling. He also urged them to never allow themselves more than six hours of sleep per night, saying, “all beyond this is luxury, no less prejudicial to the constitution than intemperate meals, and no less hurtful to the powers of the mind than to those of the body; it insensibly weakens and relaxes both.”³⁰ He also had an opinion on the students’ daily pattern, encouraging them to study in the morning and then to do everything else that their days required after noon.³¹ Despite his particular ways, his students loved him and he loved them, and he especially loved Samuel Pearce, who gave a memorial sermon on behalf of Evans.

Pearce’s words give an excellent summary of Evans’s character and practice:

Dr. Evans knew well how to gain our affection whilst he secured our respect. At once we loved the friend and venerated the tutor. So mildly he corrected our mistakes, and so gladly marked our improvement, that the reverberated happiness which our attention to his wise instruction afforded him was one great stimulus to our diligence He was our Evans, our friend Evans.³²

Equally as influential on Pearce’s young mind was Broadmead’s associate pastor and college tutor, Robert Hall, who would later become one of the great preachers

²⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 75.

³⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 77.

³¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 77.

³²Samuel Pearce, *Reflections on the Character and State of Departed Christians In a Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Caleb Evans . . . Preached in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, September 4, 1791. By Samuel Pearce* (Birmingham: J. Belcher, 1791), 23–24.

of the early nineteenth century³³ and who would return to Broadmead as the senior pastor in 1825.³⁴ In the late 1780s he served as a brilliant young associate under Evans.³⁵

Steadman later wrote of Hall:

Doubtless he had a mind of the first order. Its principal quality was that of invention or genius. This was ready at command on all occasions. To was added a most happy facility of language. If I were to compare him to any of the philosophers of England, it would be to Locke; if to any of the divines, it would be to Howe.³⁶

Pearce clearly loved and admired those that the Lord gave for his instruction at Bristol, and he sought to gain as much as he could from these relationships during his college years. Later, when pastoring in Birmingham, he gave this advice to a young friend just entering the Bristol college:

I would determine on a uniform submission to the instructions of my preceptor, and would study those things which would give him pleasure. If he be not wiser than I am, for what purpose do I come under his care? I accept the pecuniary help of the Society on condition of conforming to its will: my example will have influence; let me not by a single act of disobedience, nor by a word that implicates dissatisfaction, sow the seeds of discord in the bosom of my companions.³⁷

Pearce's time at Bristol however was not all about relationships. In another letter to a student he gave this advice, "Guard against a large acquaintance while a student. Bristol friends prove a vile thief, and rob you of many an invaluable hour."³⁸ To another student he asserted, "I hope you will still be cautious in your intimacies. You

³³Michael A. G. Haykin, *Ardent Love to Jesus: English Baptists and the Experience of Revival in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Bridgend, Wales: Bryntirion Press, 2013), 96. For details on Hall, see Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 6n15.

³⁴Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 41.

³⁵Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 40.

³⁶Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 78.

³⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 79.

will gain more by a half-hour's intercourse with God than the friendships of the whole college can impart.”³⁹ Pearce grew enormously in knowledge during his years at Bristol, yet he always felt that his time of preparation was all too short for the enormous task of leading a congregation.⁴⁰

Beyond his time in study and friendships, the Academy also afforded Pearce opportunities to preach. On one occasion Pearce went to preach among the colliers of Coleford, Gloucestershire. He stood on a three-legged stool in a hut to preach the gospel for about thirty or forty miners to “smutty neighbors”⁴¹ as he called them. While he was preaching from John 1:29, such an “unction from above” came upon them that the entire group, Pearce included, were “meted into tears” in love of their blessed “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”⁴² He later wrote of the experience, “Indeed, had I at that time been at liberty to settle, I should have preferred that situation to any in the Kingdom with which I was then acquainted.”⁴³ This would serve as a valuable pastoral experience for Pearce as the Lord had a ministry to many lower-class men and women awaiting him.

Ultimately it was not among the miners that Pearce would settle but in Birmingham, England. In June of 1788 he went to Cannon Street Baptist Church for the first time while still a student at the recommendation of Hall to serve as a supply preacher

³⁸Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 80.

³⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 80.

⁴⁰See the previous citation from Josiah Evans' funeral and referenced as n.29 above.

⁴¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 83.

⁴²Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 96.

for the summer. He was asked to come back to Birmingham for the following Christmas vacation. Thus, the relationship that would become his life's work began.⁴⁴ Pearce was forever grateful for the time he was able to spend in Bristol. He stayed in close contact with the school for the rest of his life and sent a number of young students its way. When his good friend John Ryland became the school's principal in 1793, it only deepened his commitment to and gratitude for his blessed alma mater.⁴⁵

Cannon Street Baptist Church 1789–1799

Samuel Pearce arrived in Birmingham during a golden yet tumultuous time in the city. The eighteenth century was a very important time for Birmingham as it became an important scientific and industrial center known for its inventiveness and productiveness. In 1741 the world's first cotton mill opened in Birmingham, a development that would change the textile industry and world forever.⁴⁶ Numerous other inventions called Birmingham home in the eighteenth-century. In fact, between 1760 and 1850, the core years of the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham residents registered three times as many patents as any other town or city in England.⁴⁷ Most significant, however, was the development of the steam engine by James Watt (1736–1819) and Matthew

⁴³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 83.

⁴⁴Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 97.

⁴⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 87.

⁴⁶Alfred P. Wadsworth, and Julia De Lacy Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1780* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 431.

⁴⁷Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 40.

Boulton (1728–1809).⁴⁸ This was arguably the pivotal moment in the whole Industrial Revolution, and it put Birmingham on the map as a major industrial force. Given the massive growth in industry in the city, it is not surprising that between 1760 and 1801 the town’s population doubled from around 35,000 to 70,000.⁴⁹

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham had long been the home of religious Dissenters of many kinds,⁵⁰ and the expanse of industrialism led to further growth of these various groups. As Chris Upton writes, “By 1790 there were Baptist churches in Cannon Street and Lombard Street; Congregationalist chapels in Carrs Lane and Oxford Street; Quakers in Bull Street; Methodists in Coleshill Street, Bradford Street and Cherry Street; Unitarians in Moor Street and Phillip Street. In addition there was a Jewish synagogue in the Froggery and a newly opened Catholic church in Broad Street (designed to look like a factory so as not to attract attention).”⁵¹ Birmingham seemed in those days to have an ideal cultural mix, but all of that began to break apart in the early 1790s, not long after Pearce came to the city.

In 1780, another minister named Joseph Priestley (1733–1804) came to Birmingham to pastor the Unitarian Church. By that time Priestley had made quite a name for himself as a scientist working with electricity and as a very close friend to the notorious American, Benjamin Franklin. As a scientist he was very much a part of the

⁴⁸Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, 54–55.

⁴⁹Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 92.

⁵⁰English Dissenters included a number of communities in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England who were not a part of the Church of England. This group included Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Unitarians, and Quakers.

⁵¹Christopher Upton, *A History of Birmingham* (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1993), 50.

establishment, being a member of the Royal Society, the French Academy of Sciences, and Imperial Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg. As a theologian though, his reputation was less orthodox. Within a few years of his arrival in Birmingham he had offended almost all of the pastors of the establishment through books such as *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* and *The Importance and Extent of Free Enquiry*.⁵² With the outbreak of the French Revolution, the “establishment” in Birmingham grew increasingly leery of radical thinkers like Priestly and his “non-conformist” friends. On the two-year anniversary of the storming of the Bastille some “friends of liberty” had a meeting at Dudley’s Hotel in Birmingham to drink together and talk about true independence. That night a group of loyalists to the crown crying “Church and King forever” stormed Dudley’s, looking to put an end to their non-conformist radicalism. Coincidentally Priestley did not attend the meeting, but it did not matter as the group went on a rampage, ransacking Priestley’s house and burning the Old Unitarian Church to the ground. These riots lasted from July 14–17, 1791, and changed the atmosphere of the city forever. Priestley would never return to Birmingham after this event that would ultimately bear his name, and he lived out the remainder of his days in the United States. The Priestley Riots changed the atmosphere of the city, and it certainly put all dissenting churches, pastors, and members on watch.⁵³ This was the Birmingham that welcomed Pearce, and these riots led him to ultimately seek refuge. He wrote in a letter to a “very dear friend” in 1791, “The riots in Birmingham occasioned our stay in Bristol to be

⁵²Upton, *A History of Birmingham*, 51.

⁵³Upton, *A History of Birmingham*, 52–57.

prolonged a fortnight.”⁵⁴ He went on in this letter to describe his return to Birmingham with his new wife Sarah, “On our return we found our habitation had been quite emptied of furniture, and, though we had found the goods replaced, yet my books and papers were so deranged that to this hour they are not all restored to order again.”⁵⁵

In 1737, seven men and ten women of Birmingham met to form the Cannon Street Baptist Church. After initially meeting in the Bull Ring, where Market Hall now stands, the church was able to purchase a portion of Guest’s cherry orchard. Eventually Cannon Street was cut through the orchard and the church erected a chapel and secured a cemetery. In its first fifty years of ministry the congregation of Cannon Street Baptist Church is best described as “unstable.” In 1745 the church considered dissolving, being unable to find a pastor, and by 1755 the membership numbered only fourteen. At that time the church called James Turner (d. 1780), who would faithfully serve Cannon Street for twenty-five years until his death. Under his leadership the church grew by at least a factor of ten, numbering 140 by 1776. After he died a tablet was erected in his honor that read, “He was a clear, judicious, acceptable, and successful preacher and a faithful defender of all of the doctrines of the everlasting gospel.”⁵⁶ Cannon Street’s instability returned, however, in 1786 when the church’s next pastor, Henry Taylor, left to become a Methodist.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite this, by the time of Pearce’s arrival the church had

⁵⁴Andrew Fuller and W. H. Pearce, *Memoir of Rev. Samuel Pearce, A.M.: Who Was United with Carey and Others in Establishing Missions in India, 1793* (New York: American Tract Society, 1830), 20.

⁵⁵Fuller and Pearce, *Memoir of Rev. Samuel Pearce*, 20.

⁵⁶J. E. Hale, *Cannon Street Baptist Church: Its History from 1737–1800, with Some Accounts of its Pastors* (Birmingham: Hudson and Son, 1800), 9.

⁵⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 92–93.

grown to around 200 members.⁵⁸ The meeting-house was also impressive for a dissenting Baptist church, being twice enlarged, first in 1763 and then again in 1780. Birmingham historian William Hutton said of the structure that it had “some beauty, but more conveniency.”⁵⁹

On February 7, 1789, after the above-mentioned supply preaching by Pearce at Cannon Street, the church sent him an invitation to become their pastor on probationary status. This offer with a salary package of £80 annually was signed by seven deacons and 120 members. On March 13 Pearce wrote back to accept the offer, and he began his ministry with them in June.⁶⁰ After one year the church officially called Samuel Pearce, and on July 18, 1790 he accepted and wrote to the church, “May the union be for God’s glory, for the good of precious souls, for your prosperity as a Church, and for my comfort as your minister.”⁶¹ He was able to negotiate a six-week summer vacation each year so that he could visit his father in Plymouth.⁶² On August 18, 1790, Samuel Pearce was ordained to be a minister of the gospel with Caleb Evans, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, and Robert Hall all taking part. In the words of Joseph Hale, “The great talent, sacred virtues, burning zeal, and unwearied labors of this man of God” made him “a rare gift of heaven to the church worshipping at Cannon Street.”⁶³

⁵⁸Cannon Street Baptist church was Turner’s first and only pastoral charge. He came to the church in 1754 when there were only 14 members but by 1776 that number had risen to 140. Haykin, *One Heart*, 92.

⁵⁹Haykin, *One Heart*, 92–93.

⁶⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 94–95.

⁶¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 95.

⁶²Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 97.

⁶³Hale, *Cannon Street Baptist Church*, 10.

Pearce's Ministry in the Church

The ministry of Samuel Pearce was marked with a zeal for the gospel. The gospel was in the words of Andrew Fuller “his darling theme” from his first days at Cannon Street to his last.⁶⁴ In his last letter to the church Pearce wrote: “Oh, my dearest friends, let me as one alive almost from the dead, let me exhort you to stand fast in that blessed Gospel, which for ten years I have now preached among you,—the gospel of the grace of God; the gospel of free, full, everlasting salvation, founded on the sufferings and death of God manifest in the flesh.”⁶⁵ In his ten short years at Cannon Street no less than 335 individuals were baptized and received into the ministry of the church. This does not include the many men and women who were converted under his pulpit but did not join the church.⁶⁶ By the time Pearce died the church had grown from a roll of 220 to a roll of 370. Cannon Street had no Sunday school at Pearce's arrival, but by 1795 he gathered together a group in St. Mary's Square not very far from the church for training. In three years the group had grown to more than 1200 for five and a half hours of training in addition to the worship service on Sundays.⁶⁷

Outside of his ministry at Cannon Street, Pearce was regularly invited to preach throughout England at churches of various sizes and reputations. In July of 1795, he received an invitation from the General Evangelical Society of Dublin, Ireland. The

⁶⁴Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 430.

⁶⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 98.

⁶⁶Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 97.

⁶⁷Hale, *Cannon Street Baptist Church*, 12.

following May, on the final day of the month, he set off preaching in a number of Baptist and Presbyterian congregations. Pearce was burdened for the lost and for the health of the Baptist churches in Ireland committing himself to pray for salvation and church health in that country. He later wrote to a friend, speaking of these churches, thus: “When I came to Dublin they had no meeting of any kind of religious purposes... Indeed they were so dead to piety that, tho’ of their own denomination, I saw & knew less of them than of every other professors in the place.”⁶⁸ This did not keep Pearce from leaving quite an impression on the Irish. A Dublin deacon wrote to John Rippon saying: “We have had a jubilee for some weeks. That blessed man of God, Mr. Pearce, has preached among us with great sweetness, and with much power.”⁶⁹

Beyond gospel zeal, Pearce was a gifted communicator of God’s word. “His address,” says Fuller, “was easy and insinuating; his voice pleasant . . . his language chaste, flowing, and inclining to the florid.” Fuller went on to say that in preaching Pearce would “impart not the Gospel but his own soul also.”⁷⁰ He was known as “the silver tongued.” John Ryland writes in his book on the life of Andrew Fuller, “I used to think that Benjamin Francis as an aged man and Samuel Pearce as a young man were the two most popular preachers I have personally known, who, without rising to sublime eloquence owed no part of the popularity to eccentricity.”⁷¹ There were, however, times

⁶⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 33.

⁶⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 33.

⁷⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 101.

⁷¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 102.

when preaching was a real struggle for him. In one 1796 letter Pearce wrote these words to a friend:

At some times, I question whether I ever knew the grace of God in truth; and at others I hesitate on the most important points of the Christian faith. I have lately had peculiar struggles of this kind with my own heart, and have often half concluded to speak no more in the name of the Lord. When I am preparing for the pulpit, I fear I am going to avow fable for facts and doctrines of men for the truths of God. In conversation I am obliged to be silent, lest my tongue should belie my heart. In prayer I know not what to say, and at time think prayer altogether useless.⁷²

Like all men, Pearce struggled with the enormity of gospel ministry, but even through the greatest trials he was able to find constant hope and rest in three things: a recollection of the supernatural nature of his conversion, an awareness of sin that only the gospel could appease, and the evidence that true piety is to be found only in those who treasured Christ.⁷³

A particular struggle in Pearce's life, especially in the early days of Pearce's ministry at Canon Street was with the doctrinal heresies of Socinianism and Arminianism. During this struggle he wrote to his friend, Steadman:

I have, since I saw you, been much perplexed about some doctrinal points, both Arminian and Socinian, I believe through reading very attentively, but without sufficient dependence on the Spirit of truth, several controversies on those subjects; particularly the writings of Whitby, Priestley, and others. Indeed, had the state of mind I was in about ten weeks since continued, I should have been incapable of preaching with comfort at all. But in the mount of the Lord will he be seen. Just as I thought of giving up, He who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them as the rivers of water are turned, was pleased, by a merciful though afflicting providence, to set me at a happy liberty.⁷⁴

⁷²Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 99.

⁷³Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 99–100.

⁷⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:374.

He was so disturbed during this struggle to the point of an inflammation of the bowels. Joseph Priestly had clearly had a strong impact on the city of Birmingham and it is no surprise that the young preacher would have been influenced by him, and as he mentioned, Whitby and others. He eventually found his orthodox footing in the glory of Jesus. He wrote, “And where should I, where could I, where did I flee, but to Him whose glory and grace I had been of late degrading, at least in my thoughts? Yes, there I saw peace for guilty consciences was to be *alone* obtained through an almighty Saviour.”⁷⁵ Ultimately however, Pearce found this struggle to make him more spiritual in preaching, to “prize the gospel more than ever, and to be more guarded against future temptations.”⁷⁶

Sarah

Another constant source of hope and rest for Samuel Pearce was his beloved wife, Sarah Hopkins Pearce (1771–1804). When Pearce first came to Cannon Street, he came as a young, single man. Shortly after he arrived in Birmingham he met the daughter of Joshua Hopkins, who was a grocer and a deacon in the church. Being unafraid of tension with the deacon body in his new church he was quickly smitten by the eighteen-year-old Sarah. She appeared to have been converted under his preaching, and the two were soon very much in love. Pearce sent her these words on Christmas Eve, 1790, “Sarah, I am inspired at the propensity which never leaves me, till I have thrown open my whole heart, and returned a copy of it to the dear being who long since compelled it to a voluntary surrender, and whose claims have never since been disputed.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:374.

⁷⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:374.

⁷⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 19.

The two were married on February 2, 1791 and moved into a house on St. Paul's Square in Birmingham. In November of that same year Samuel was able to baptize Sarah in what must have been one of the most moving services at Cannon Street. Throughout their years of marriage together their love would only grow. In their fourth year of marriage he wrote to her from Plymouth, "O, my Sarah, had I as much proof of my love to Christ as I have of my love to you, I should prize it above rubies."⁷⁸ Later that same year, 1795, he wrote to tell her while away on a preaching trip, "every day improves not only my tenderness but my esteem for you."⁷⁹ Sarah clearly felt the same way for Samuel, saying once in a letter to her sister Rebecca shortly after the latter's marriage that she prayed that Rebecca might "enjoy the most uninterrupted happiness . . . for indeed I can scarce form an idia [*sic*] . . . this side of Heaven of greater equal to what I have enjoyed."⁸⁰ The couple had five children together and enjoyed a most blessed decade of sincere love. It was a love story that ended all too soon with Samuel falling asleep in Christ on October 10, 1799, and Sarah on May 25, 1804. They were both thirty-three at the times of their deaths.

What most delighted Pearce about his wife was her deep piety and her love for the gospel. Close friends of hers noted that since her conversion she had had "a strong attachment to evangelical truth" and "a longtime desire for the universal spread of the gospel," and by her own admission, she was, "deeply interested in all that interested Samuel."⁸¹ One story that carefully captures the character of Sarah Hopkins Pearce is

⁷⁸Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 102.

⁷⁹Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 102.

⁸⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 23.

found in a rare article by Joseph Belcher, titled, “The Wife of Samuel Pearce.” When Belcher was just a young boy Sarah Pearce came to visit his dying mother just a few weeks after Samuel had died. After showing great care in conversing with his mother she took his sister and him to another room to pray for their ultimate happiness. Belcher never forgot Sarah Pearce’s act of charity and truly believed that God answered their prayers that day.⁸²

Missionary Involvement

Shortly after his settlement in Birmingham Pearce became acquainted with a learned shoemaker named William Carey (1761–1834) from the village of Moulton.⁸³ In 1789, Carey had become the pastor of the Harvey Lane Baptist Church in Leicester, and in May of 1791 he invited Pearce to come and preach for his evening service. This was the first time that the two pastors met, but immediately a friendship was born. The next year Carey would publish his groundbreaking missionary manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792). The following May in Nottingham in front of a group of seventeen ministers⁸⁴ Carey preached his famous sermon from Isaiah 54:2–3 wherein he said, “Expect great things [from God]. . . . Attempt great things [for God],” and the tipping point for what would become the modern missionary movement had come.⁸⁵ The following October, Pearce attended and

⁸¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 24.

⁸²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 202.

⁸³Hale, *Cannon Street Baptist Church*, 10.

⁸⁴Pearce was not in attendance that day in Nottingham. See Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 132.

⁸⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 132. The phrases *from God* and *for God* were added later for explanatory purposes.

preached at the first meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society in Kettering. There were twelve original members of the Baptist Missionary Society, including Pearce, William Carey, Andrew Fuller, and John Ryland.⁸⁶ After this initial meeting Pearce threw his whole soul into the advocacy of this missionary cause.

That same month, October of 1792, Pearce preached the first sermon on behalf of the society in his church at Cannon Street and an offering of £70 was collected for the new society. This was an enormous sum of money considering that Pearce's entire annual income was only £100.⁸⁷ At the society's second meeting Pearce introduced this great gift to the amazement of all who attended. It was the encouragement that the society needed to implement their vision. Soon two missionaries, William Carey and John Thomas (1757–1801), were chosen to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the heathen of India. Pearce's preference for the group's first missionary venture was the Pellew Islands near the Philippines, but the group eventually settled on Bengal as it seemed a better choice for missionary success.⁸⁸ Throughout 1793, the whole society and especially Pearce worked to garner prayer and support for these two brave pastors.⁸⁹ On

⁸⁶The original name for the society was the "Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen" and it was formed in Kettering on October 2, 1792. Those in attendance at the initial meeting were: William Carey, Leicester; John Ryland, Northampton; Reynold Hogg, Thrapstone; John Sutcliff, Olney; Andrew Fuller, Kettering; Abraham Greenwood, Oakham; Edward Sharman, Cottisbrook; Samuel Pearce, Birmingham; Joseph Timms, Kettering; Joshua Burton, Foxton; Thomas Blundel, Arnsby; William Heighton, Roade; John Ayers, Braybrook; and William Staughton, Bristol. See Michael A G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 220–23.

⁸⁷Pearce got a raise from £80 to £100 after he was ordained in 1789. See Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 137.

⁸⁸Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 1.

⁸⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 139–42.

November 7, 1793, just more than a year after the Baptist Missionary Society's first meeting, Carey and Thomas made landfall in India and the world was forever changed.⁹⁰

By 1794 Pearce was so gripped by the cause of missions and the reports from Thomas and Carey that he began to study Bengali on his own, and he began to secretly pray and fast for direction in his own life. On one of these days of prayer and fasting Pearce found himself reading Jonathan Edwards's (1703–1758) *Life of David Brainerd*, meditating on 2 Corinthians 2–6, and then going before the Lord in prayer. Pearce recalled: "I feared I had offended the Lord. I felt but little zeal for the mission, and was about to conclude with a lamentation over the hardness of my heart, when on a sudden it pleased God to smite the rock with the rod of his Spirit, and immediately the waters began to flow."⁹¹ At that moment he was overwhelmed by "a heavenly glorious melting power." He saw afresh "the love of a crucified Redeemer" and the "attractions of his cross."⁹² He later wrote of the experience saying that God showed him in a new way:

The interest that Christ took in the redemption of the heathen, the situation of our brethren in Bengal, the worth of the soul, and the plain command of Jesus Christ, together with an irresistible drawing of soul, which by far exceeded any thing I ever felt before, and is impossible to be described to or conceived of by those who have never experienced it—all compelled me to *vow* that I would, by his leave, serve him among the heathen. The Bible lying open before me, (upon my knees,) many passages caught my eye, and confirmed the purposes of my heart. If ever in my life I knew any thing of the influence of the Holy Spirit, I did at this time. I was swallowed up in God. Hunger, fulness, cold, heat, friends, and enemies, all seemed nothing before God. I was in a new world All was delightful; for Christ was all, and in all.⁹³

⁹⁰Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, 16.

⁹¹Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 390–91.

⁹²Haykin, *Ardent Love*, 106.

⁹³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 391.

On October 8, 1794 Pearce wrote a very bold appeal to the Baptist Missionary Society that he sent overseas. In this letter he told his fellow members the history of God's particular work in his life that led to his burden for the heathen. He beautifully expressed the need for men like himself to have this burden and to go. Toward the end of the letter he told the society that he understood the hardships and demands entailed. He wrote,

I do often represent to myself all the possible hardships of a mission, arising from my own heart, the nature of the country, domestic connexions, disappointment in my hopes, &c. &c.; and then I set over against them all these two thoughts,—*I am God's servant; and God is my friend.* In this I anticipate happiness in the midst of suffering, light in darkness, and life in death.⁹⁴

The committee, "after the most serious and mature deliberation," voted not to send Pearce. Though they were fully satisfied as to his qualifications, and though they greatly approved of his spirit, they believed that the mission itself would be better served with him staying in station which he already occupied.⁹⁵

This enormous disappointment did not prove to discourage Pearce away from his faithful service at Cannon Street and from his commitment to the Baptist Missionary Society. As he said to his wife Sarah upon hearing the news, "I am disappointed, but not dismayed. I ever wish to make my Saviour's will my own."⁹⁶ Pearce's skill at fund-raising and his ability to bring new churches and pastors into the Society was matched only by Ryland in Bristol. On October 16, 1798, at Kettering, Pearce gave one of his finest sermons, "like an apostle," as Fuller would later write, "setting the whole meeting a flame," added William Ward (1768–1823). It was on this night that Ward, later to be one

⁹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

⁹⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

of the most invaluable of Carey's co-workers in India, was accepted as a missionary with the Baptist Missionary society. It was that same night as Pearce returned back to Birmingham that Pearce was caught in a heavy downpour of rain. He was drenched to the skin and developed a severe chill that would ultimately lead to an illness from which he would not recover.

Death

After Pearce fell ill in the rainstorm he foolishly continued a very rigorous preaching schedule at Cannon Street thinking that "pulpit sweats" would effect a cure. Eventually, he became so ill that he could barely speak. He invited William Ward to come and supply his pulpit saying, "If you love me—come and help me. Come and secure the hearts of hundreds of Birmingham Christians, who only want to know you, to love you too."⁹⁷ By the spring of 1799 Pearce was gravely ill with pulmonary tuberculosis. Leaving his wife and children he went to Devon with the hopes that rest there might lead to a cure. Despite dozens of pastors and hundreds of Christian men and women praying for his cure, Pearce's condition did not improve. On May 31, 1799, he wrote these words to his beloved congregation:

Separated as I have been a long time from you, and during that time of separation having suffered much both in body and mind, yet my heart has still been with you, participating in your sorrows, uniting in your prayers, and rejoicing with you in hope... You, beloved, who have found the peace-speaking virtue of this blood of atonement, must not be satisfied with what you have already known or enjoyed. The only way to be constantly happy, and constantly prepared for the most awful changes which we must all experience, is, to be constantly *looking* and *coming* to a dying Saviour; . . . If you *thus live*, (and oh that you may daily receive fresh life

⁹⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

⁹⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 35.

from Christ so to do!) ‘the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds,’ and you will be filled with ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory.’⁹⁸

These words echo the preaching of Pearce as he had told his congregation, “Be not satisfied with present attainments – go on to the perfection of Christ.”⁹⁹ In mid-July Pearce returned to Birmingham, faithfully suffering the pain of death until he fell asleep in Christ on October 10, 1799. The following week he was buried beneath the family pew in the Cannon Street chapel and was eventually interned at the foot of the stairs going up to the pulpit. Several years after the death of this thirty-three-year-old preacher a memorial was placed in the chapel in his honor, which gave his name, age, and the words of Hebrews 13:7–8, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.”¹⁰⁰ Not long after Pearce’s death, William Ward, who had been so influenced by the Birmingham preacher well summarized his character with these words: “Oh! how does personal religion shine in Brother Pearce! What a soul! What a death in his soul to the world! What ardour for the glory of God!”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:417–18.

⁹⁹Samuel Pearce, “Sermon on Hebrews 6:1–3,” Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

¹⁰⁰Hale, *Cannon Street Baptist Church*, 11–12.

¹⁰¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 40.

CHAPTER 3
LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICAL
SPIRITUALITY

Introduction

“Spirituality is a recent and ticklish word,” Bulgarian Orthodox scholar and priest Alexander Golitzin has written. As he went on to explain, the term usually denotes the attitudes and practices of the Christian life and is often, although not invariably, considered in relative isolation from theology proper.¹ The actual term comes from the Latin *spiritualitas*, which, in turn, is derived from *spiritus*, meaning “spirit.” The noun *spiritualitas* did not appear until the fifth century and then only sporadically. In the twelfth century, however, it began to appear more frequently, in three distinct contexts: religious (opposite: *carnalitas*, “carnality”), philosophical (opposite: *corporalitas*, “material”), and ethico-juristic (opposite: *temporalitas*, “secularity”). From the seventeenth century through most of the nineteenth century, the terms “devotion” and “piety” were preferred to express the same idea. Only at the end of the nineteenth century did the word “spirituality” gradually establish itself—and that initially among historians.²

¹William M. Johnson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, vol. 2 (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), s.v. “Spirituality: Eastern Christian,” by Alexander Golitzin.

²Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), s.v. “Religion Past and Present,” by Hans Dieter Betz.

Walter Principe has distinguished three levels of meaning for the term. First, one may speak of spirituality at the most basic level as a person's primal, conscious experience of participation in ultimate reality as he or she understands it—for Christians, this would be the reality of the triune God disclosed in Jesus Christ. Second, he distinguishes spirituality as an experience of ultimate reality in an articulated or expressive form, as people give words or some other tangible expression to their first-level experience. Here spirituality refers to what is experienced through such things as theological treatises, liturgies, hymns, poetry, visual art, journals, sermons, actions, and sermons. Finally, one may speak of spirituality on a third level as the scholarly investigation of these historical or contemporary glimpses of the human experience of God—in other words, the academic discipline of spirituality.

From the earliest use of the term in Christian writing, spirituality has been connected to living in accord with the Holy Spirit.³ Thus, true spirituality was regarded as being intimately bound up with the Holy Spirit and His work. A good summary passage in this regard is Galatians 5:25: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” Within Paul's anthropology, flesh and spirit (*sarx* and *pneuma*) refer not to a body/soul dualism but respectively to life apart from or life rooted in the living Spirit of Jesus Christ. To the extent that the whole being participates in the reality of God made available through Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, such persons are *spiritual*.⁴ Thus,

³The term was first used by an anonymous writer, possibly Fautus of Riez (d. 490), who told a correspondent to “so act as to advance in spirituality (*in spiritualitate*).” See Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2007), xix.

⁴Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. “Spirituality,” by Erwin Fahlbusch. You don't give page numbers for encyclopedic entries; just the title of the entry and the author's name; see n.98 above.

in the words of Lisa Dahill, “the New Testament language from which the term spirituality arose, had a holistic orientation encompassing physical, emotional/psychic, and ethical/social dimensions of persons’ lives, as well as their relationship with God.”⁵ And as Michael Haykin has noted: “the Spirit undergirds and empowers the entirety of our lives as Christians.”⁶ To paraphrase John 15:5: apart from the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing that is pleasing to God. English non-conformist minister and writer, Nathanael Ranew (c.1602–1678), rightly summarizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit this way:

The Holy Spirit first comes to the soul and person of a Christian, applies Christ to him, brings Christ into him, makes him his temple, and a habitation of God and Christ to dwell in the heart. The Spirit comes, inhabits, sweeps, and cleanses; furnishes the heart with light, that was darkness; with truth that was error and deceitfulness; with power, that was weakness; life, warmth and qualifications of heavenly graces, that was cold, dead, and altogether sinful; and draws the glorious image of Christ upon the soul. He enlivens, establishes, enlarges, and encourages, and fills the spirit with peace and joy unspeakable.⁷

Thus, Christian spirituality is the outworking by the power of the Holy Spirit in the real life of a person’s Christian faith—all that he or she does with what he or she believes. Spirituality thus cannot be deduced totally from theological presuppositions nor can it be totally inferred from experience. “It arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged into the crucible of the desire to live out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully,” writes Alister McGrath.⁸ Thus, in investigating Christian spirituality, both theological and experiential factors must be considered.

⁵Fahlbusch, “Spirituality.”

⁶Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near*, xix.

⁷Nathanael Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 98.

⁸McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 9.

Furthermore, temporal, societal, and cultural factors need to be examined, for the Christian life is ultimately a life that is lived out within a specific time, place, and culture. Therefore, in order to understand different types or eras of Christian spirituality, the larger contexts of time and life need to be delineated. The following is a consideration of the branch of spirituality known as Evangelical.

Evangelical Spirituality

Roughly thirty years before the birth of Samuel Pearce, a movement began that would define his entire life.⁹ In Northampton, Massachusetts, in the latter part of December 1734, “the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work,” to cite the town’s Congregationalist pastor. As he went on to say, “There were very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons, who were, to all appearance, savingly converted, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner.”¹⁰ The work would continue through the end of 1734 into the spring of 1735 as Edwards noted:

This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town: so that in the spring and summer

⁹In his *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*, Thomas Kidd dates the beginning of the Evangelical revivals more than ten years earlier with the Connecticut Revival of 1720–1722. He writes, “The Connecticut revival of 1720-22 was the first major event of the evangelical era in New England. It touched congregations in Windham, Preston, Franklin, Norwich, and Windsor, Connecticut. It seems to have resulted in several hundred new memberships and perhaps even more conversions, but its significance has been obscured because of the lack of print coverage surrounding the revival. Revivals had begun in force, but printers did not yet fully back the creation of awakenings as major media events the way they would in the early 1740s. Because it received little contemporary notice, the Connecticut revival has not only been largely forgotten, but at the time it remained a regional revival and did not flow to other parts of the colonies.” Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 284-88, Kindle.

¹⁰Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842), 328–30, Kindle. Quotation from Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), locs. 1088-89, Kindle.

following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God: it never was so full of love, nor of joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then. There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house.¹¹

This revival would have a global impact as David Bebbington has noted, “The movement in America, which Whitefield fanned into a larger flame, is usually styled ‘The Great Awakening.’ But it was part and parcel of The Eighteenth-Century Revival, a quickening of the spiritual tempo in Britain and beyond.”¹²

Now, Bebbington has dated the beginning of Evangelicalism to the 1730s¹³ citing this Northampton Revival and others like it as inauguration of the movement.¹⁴ He has also identified four leading characteristics of Evangelicalism, which have come to be known as the “Bebbington quadrilateral”¹⁵ and have become a way of defining Evangelicalism throughout Christian scholarship. The first characteristic is biblicism. Bebbington writes, “The overriding aim of early Evangelicals was to bring home the message of the Bible and to encourage its devotional use.”¹⁶ Second, Bebbington observes the importance of the cross, crucicentrism, in Evangelicalism. “Nothing in the Christian system,” according to John Wesley (1703 –1791), “is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement. It is properly the distinguishing point between Deism and

¹¹Edwards, *On Revival*, locs. 1118–21, Kindle.

¹²David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1989), 20–21.

¹³David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Taylor and Francis, 1989), 1, Kindle. Bebbington writes, “The decade beginning in 1734 witnessed in the English-speaking world a more important development than any other, before or after, in the history of Protestant Christianity: the emergence of the movement that became Evangelicalism.” Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 20.

¹⁴Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 20.

¹⁵Carl Trueman, *The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 14.

Christianity.”¹⁷ Third, Bebbington notes that evangelicals are marked by conversion. Evangelicals believe that people are not naturally Christians and therefore need to be transformed by the gospel.¹⁸ The final and most distinctive characteristic of Evangelicalism identified by Bebbington was its activism. Evangelicals are active “primarily in spreading the gospel,” which includes evangelism and doing “all sorts of humane work of charity.”¹⁹ The following section will take a closer look at each of these evangelical characteristics within the context of the late eighteenth century, the time of Pearce.

Biblicism

Evangelicals shared at least three of Bebbington’s four characteristics with their Puritan predecessors but none so pronounced as their commitment to the Bible. From the time of William Tyndale’s translation of the English Bible in the 1520s, Protestants in England began to treasure the Bible as the central ground of their spirituality. Tyndale set the standard here; as he once commented: “[I] perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.”²⁰ In many ways, due

¹⁶Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

¹⁷Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14, citing Wesley to Mary Bishop, February 7, 1778, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. J. Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 281.

¹⁸Michael Haykin, “Evangelical Spirituality in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century,” a lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, May 2010. For a concise statement of Bebbington’s position, see also David Bebbington, “Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment,” *Crux*, 25, no. 4 (December 1989): 29–36; idem, “Revival and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 17–41.

¹⁹Bebbington, “Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment,” 29.

²⁰Michael Haykin, “The Shape of Puritan Piety,” a lecture presented at The Southern Baptist

to Tyndale's translation, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the people of England became, in the words of David Daniell, a "people of the book."²¹ Biblicism was also one of the distinguishing marks of Puritanism that followed the Reformation era. As the Puritan divine Richard Baxter (1615–1691) declared of the value of religious experience:

We must not try the Scriptures by our most spiritual apprehensions, but our apprehensions by the Scriptures: that is, we must prefer the Spirit's inspiring the apostles to indite the Scriptures before the Spirit's illuminating of us to understand them, or before any present inspirations, the former being the more perfect; because Christ gave the Apostles the Spirit to deliver us infallibly his own commands, and to indite a rule for following ages: but he giveth us the Spirit but to understand and use that rule aright. This trying the Spirit by the Scriptures is not a setting of the Scriptures above the Spirit itself; but it is only a trying of the Spirit by the Spirit; that is, the Spirit's operations in themselves and his revelations to any pretenders now, by the Spirit's operations in the Apostles and by their revelations recorded for our use.²²

This strong devotion to the Word of God among English Christians would not change in the eighteenth century and became a key mark of Evangelicalism. John Wesley often referred to himself as a *homo unius libri*, a man of one book,²³ and he spoke of the way of salvation as being "written down in a book." He went on to say, "O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me."²⁴ Opponents of John Nelson, an early Methodist preacher, went so far as to say that he

Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, May 2010, as cited in *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 3.

²¹Haykin, "Puritan Piety."

²²As cited in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), 32.

²³John Wesley, and Charles Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions: In Three Volumes* (London: T. Trye, and Holbourn, 1754), 1:6.

²⁴T. Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Kansas, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1978), 8:348.

“made [his] Bible [his] god!”²⁵ This confidence in the Word of God clearly flowed out of a high view of inspiration. Henry Venn (1725–1797), founder of *The Clapham Sect*, referred to the Bible in 1763 as “the infallible word of God.” Selina Hastings, founder of the Calvinistic Methodist movement The Countess of Huntington’s Connexion, had written into its confession of faith in 1783 the denomination’s belief in “the infallible truth” of the scriptures; and Edward Bickersteth (1786–1850) wrote of the Bible in his extremely popular, *A Scripture Help* (1816), “It is truth without any mixture of error.”²⁶

Similar to the Puritans before them, Evangelicals also stressed personal Bible reading. Evangelical Spirituality was about a relationship with God that was nurtured through personal and prayerful reading of scripture. George Whitefield (1714–1770) spoke of praying every line and every word of Scripture. This characteristic of personal Bible reading continued into the nineteenth century.

However, Evangelicalism represented a significant shift from Puritanism and a good deal of Protestantism, since one of its distinguishing marks was the common practice of group Bible study. In 1675, the German theologian, Philipp Spener (1635–1703), known as the “Father of [German] Pietism,” published a book entitled *Pia Desideria*, proposing the idea that Christians come together in private meetings for Bible study, hymn singing, and the sharing of Christian testimonies. Spener’s group idea greatly influenced Count Zinzendorf (1700–1760) and Moravian spirituality, and through the Moravians influenced John Wesley and the Methodist movement. Wesley would add his own distinctive mark of discipline on these cell groups or societies. He urged his

²⁵Bebbington, “Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment,” 30.

²⁶Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

groups to stand firm in “the good, old Bible way,” and to “go straight forward, knowing nothing of various opinions, and minding nothing but to be Bible Christians.”²⁷ These groups led to rapid growth not only in the Methodist church but also all across Evangelicalism and were a defining mark of Evangelical Spirituality.

Though personal Bible study and group discipleship certainly had their place in eighteenth-century Evangelicalism, the biblicism of the movement is best seen in its emphasis upon preaching. Like those who had heard the sermons of the Puritan divines before them, those who heard early Evangelical preachers, like the fiery Whitefield or the brilliant Edwards, felt that that they were being brought into immediate and powerful contact with the realities of God.²⁸ Evangelical sermons were gospel-centered and filled with Christian doctrine, coming from various texts throughout the Bible but most often from the New Testament epistles or gospels. While there exists very little statistical data from the eighteenth century, the preaching ministry of Evangelicals from that period was likely similar to their late nineteenth-century counterparts. *The British Weekly*, an interdenominational paper, conducted a survey in the late nineteenth century on the texts chosen by Evangelical preachers. Three-quarters were drawn from the New Testament. John’s gospel was the most popular source, followed closely by 1 John and the other three gospels. In the Old Testament, most texts came from the Psalms, Genesis, and Isaiah, and no sermon was taken from Philemon, 2 or 3 John, Lamentations, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, or Zephaniah. The single verse that inspired most sermons

²⁷Randall, *What a Friend*, 49. See N. Curnock, ed., *Journal of John Wesley*, 6, as cited in A. S. Wood, *The Burning Heart John Wesley: Evangelist* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1978), 192.

²⁸Randall, *What a Friend*, 50.

was Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”²⁹

Crucicentrism

A focus on the cross was not only a defining characteristic of Evangelical preaching, but it was also a defining mark of the entire movement. The great leader of Anglican Evangelicals in the early nineteenth century, Charles Simeon (1759–1836), preached a sermon before the University of Cambridge in 1811, titled “Christ Crucified, or Evangelical Religion Described.”³⁰ The cross was central in Evangelical Christianity because of a high view of the atonement as being utterly central to the atoning work of Christ. Evangelicals believed that Jesus Christ in his death paid the penalty of sin and rescued humanity from sin and death. Thomas Scott (1747–1821), the great English commentator, famous for his *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* and *The Force of Truth*, discovered to his delight, “Christ indeed bore the sins of all who should ever believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment, in his own body on the tree.”³¹ Belief in a substitutionary atonement originally distinguished Evangelicals from even the strictest divines of several other schools of the time. For example, the famous devotional

²⁹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

³⁰Bebbington, “Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment,” 30.

³¹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15, as cited in Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 65.

writer, William Law (1686–1761), explicitly repudiated the idea that Christ suffered in our stead.³²

The Evangelicals learned their crucicentrism from their Puritan forbearers. The atoning work of Christ was a central doctrine in Puritan thought and writing. As John Owen (1616–1683) wrote, “What is required hereunto hath been at large before declared. It is as he is revealed in and by Jesus Christ; as in him he hath found a ransom, and accepted the atonement for sinners in his blood; —as he is a God in covenant, so he is himself the object of our waiting.”³³ Perhaps the famous Puritan author John Bunyan (1628–1688) put it best:

And hence it is said, that Christ did what he did for us; He became the end of the law for righteousness for us; he suffered for us; he died for us; he laid down his life for us, and he gave himself for us. The righteousness then that Christ did fulfill, when he was in the world, was not for himself simply considered, nor for himself personally considered, for he had no need thereof; but it was for the elect, the members of his body... This righteousness then, even the whole of what Christ did in answer to the law, it was for his, and God hath put it upon them.³⁴

It was the work of Christ and the event of the cross that remained primary across Puritanism and Evangelicalism and in the words of Wesley previously mentioned, “Nothing in the Christian is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement.”³⁵

The crucicentrism of early Evangelicalism is well illustrated in an early hymn of Isaac Watts (1674–1748), “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” written in 1707.

³²Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15–16, cited in William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, 20th ed. (London: Romsey, 1816), 266.

³³John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Gould (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 6:619.

³⁴John Bunyan, and John Putnam Gulliver, “The Pharisee and the Publican,” in vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of John Bunyan* (Philadelphia: Bradley, Garretson and Co., 1871), 247.

³⁵Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

Watts came to be known as the “Father of English Hymnody,” and this is one of his most beloved and popular hymns. In the words of one recent commentator on this hymn, Peter Newman Brooks, “When I survey the wondrous cross,” is “arguably the most moving, and even perhaps the greatest of the hymns of Christendom.”³⁶ The hymn begins,

When I survey the wond’rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory dy’d,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

The hymn begins with the word, “survey,” meant to communicate a deep examination of or consideration of the whole work of the cross. In the words of Haykin, “To ‘survey’ the cross means not being content with a brief and hasty glance at the crucifixion of Christ, but to look at the full extent of the significance of the cross—for rightly viewed, it is a place of wonders.” Lines 3–4 are clearly taken from Philippians 3:7–9, wherein Paul is eager to trade all that he had gained in life and even to count it as loss in order to gain the righteousness that is from Christ. Thus, when a believer “surveys” the cross, he or she is humbled before an infinitely powerful and loving God who gave his life for his or her soul. This “survey” of the cross brings about great humility in the life of any believer.

Throughout the song, Watts gives very detailed descriptions of the cross urging the singer to a deeper understanding of the price that Christ paid, writing,

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down;
Did e’re such Love and Sorrow meet,
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

The song ends with a response to the cross that only the believer can give. Watts points that not even “the whole realm of nature” could repay God for the amazing price that

³⁶Peter Newman Brooks, *Hymns as Homilies* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 1997), 58.

Jesus paid on the cross. However, in response to the love of God in Christ the believer can give what he does have which is “[his] soul, [his] life, [his] all.”³⁷

Conversionism

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley, who shaped much early evangelical thinking, recorded the following words in his diary:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death... I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.³⁸

One week before on May 17, 1738, John’s brother Charles (1707–1788) had had a similar experience, writing in his diary, “I spent some hours this evening in private with Luther, who was greatly blessed to me, especially his conclusion of the second chapter. I laboured, waited, and prayed to feel ‘Who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*.’”³⁹ Four days later while lying sick in bed a woman named Mrs. Turner came to him saying, “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and believe, and thou shalt be healed of thy

³⁷Michael Haykin, “Isaac Watts (1674–1748): The Hymnwriter as Spiritual Mentor,” a lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, May 2010, cited in Peter Newman Brooks, *Hymns as Homilies* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 1997); Madeleine Forell Marshall and Janet Todd, *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982); Bernard Lord Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London: Epworth Press, 1942); Donald Davie *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Frank Colquhoun, *Hymns That Live: Their Meaning & Message* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981); Gordon Rupp, *Six Makers of English Religion 1500–1700* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957).

³⁸Ian M. Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 25.

³⁹Arthur Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze; Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the Eighteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 109.

infirmities.” Upon hearing her words his prayers had been answered, and he was physically healed and spiritually converted.⁴⁰

These conversion experiences of the Wesley brothers became commonplace through the revivals of the eighteenth century and were a defining factor in the budding evangelicalism of that day. Ultimately Evangelicals, like the Puritans before them, believed that a person is justified by faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. And without such faith a human being is estranged from God in his or her sinfulness, hopeless to by themselves win salvation. Thus, salvation must be received and not achieved. Critics of this understanding of conversion argued that if salvation was available without good works, the door was opened for any form of folly. However, the Evangelicals replied that gratitude was the strongest motive for moral behavior. Henry Venn, the Evangelical Vicar of Huddersfield, declared that “faith is not understood, much less possessed, if it produce not more holiness, than could possibly be any other way attained.”⁴¹ And in the words of the famous hymn-writer William Cowper (1731–1800):

To see the Law by Christ fulfill’d,
And hear his pard’ning voice;
Changes a slave into a child,
And duty into choice.⁴²

Assurance was another doctrine closely associated with the Evangelical understanding of conversion. Bebbington explains Evangelical conversion saying, “Once a person has received salvation as a gift of God, he may be assured, according to

⁴⁰Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “Charles Wesley in 1739 by Joseph Williams of Kidderminster,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 42 (1979-1980), 183–84.

⁴¹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 6, cited in Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man*, 3rd ed. (London: n.p., 1779), xi.

Evangelicals, that he possesses it. Not only is he a Christian; he knows he is a Christian.”⁴³ This is perhaps best expressed in the words of John Newton (1725–1807), the Calvinistic Church of England clergyman. He tells of his own conversion with the very personal words of assurance in his famous hymn, “Amazing Grace”:

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav’d a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev’d;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ’d.⁴⁴

Assurance had been an important theme of pre-Evangelical Protestant spirituality, but the experience had never been regarded as the standard possession of all believers. As Newton demonstrated in “Amazing Grace,” Evangelicalism claimed assurance as an immediate result of new birth.⁴⁵ While Evangelicals held to a Puritan understanding of justification, Puritans, closely following the theology of John Calvin (1509–1564), believed that conversion not only meant the initial act of coming to faith but also meant the daily renewal and growth in following Christ. Therefore, Puritans often struggled to find any assurance in their salvation. Bunyan, for example, details a very strenuous time

⁴²Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (London: SPCK, 2001), 22.

⁴³Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 6.

⁴⁴D. B. Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 276–77.

⁴⁵Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 7.

of doubt in his life before he was assured of the righteousness achieved for him by Christ in his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.⁴⁶

According to Bebbington, the Puritans and Dissenters “held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the experience of believers.”⁴⁷ One proof that Bebbington cites for this assertion is the following text from the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646): “Infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it.”⁴⁸ Evangelicals, by contrast, were convinced that “assurance is the normal possession of the believer.”⁴⁹ Once while reflecting on his own conversion, Whitefield wrote to Wesley in 1735, “For these five or six years I have received the witness of God’s Spirit; since that, blessed be God, I have not doubted a quarter of an hour of a saving interest in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ And in an oft-reprinted sermon about the indwelling of the Spirit of God, Whitefield told his hearers that to “say, we may have God’s Spirit without feeling it . . . is in reality to deny the thing itself.”⁵¹ As Haykin asserts, “This robust sense of assurance delivered evangelicals from the introspective piety of the Puritans.”⁵²

⁴⁶John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Boston: J. Allen, 1717).

⁴⁷Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43; Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin’s Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), loc. 1580, Kindle.

⁴⁸The Westminster Confession of Faith 18.3. Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, locs. 1581–82, Kindle.

⁴⁹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 45; Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, loc. 1583, Kindle.

⁵⁰As quoted in David W. Bebbington, “Revival and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 22. See also Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, locs. 1584–86, Kindle.

⁵¹George Whitefield, “The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of All Believers,” in *Sermons on Important Subjects* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1833), 433; Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of*

This is not to say that Evangelicals held to some sort of “easy believism.” Edwards in fact was very helpful to the movement in urging the church to look for marks or fruit of salvation. In *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), he sets out a checklist of signs that conversion had been valid. He even warns, “as to fixing on the precise time when they put forth the very first act of grace, there is a great deal of difference in different persons; in some it seems to be very discernible when the very time was; but others are more at a loss.”⁵³ But ultimately, Evangelicals could be so sure of their salvation because they had confidence in the power of God in salvation and not in their own power. “Conversion is a great and glorious work of God’s power,” wrote Jonathan Edwards, “at once changing the heart, and infusing life into the dead soul.”⁵⁴ Thus, Evangelicals believed that it was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought true conversion. Preaching or pleading with someone individually to trust in Christ were thought to be legitimate human means for bringing about conversions, but the Spirit was still held to be responsible.⁵⁵

Activism

Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) was licensed to preach in the Church of Scotland in 1799. For about ten years he worked as both a mathematician and a preacher,

the Earth, locs. 1589-90, Kindle.

⁵²Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George, *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 78–79.

⁵³Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 7, cited in Jonathan Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” in *Select Works* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 1:40.

⁵⁴Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” *Select Works*, 1:40.

⁵⁵Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 8.

saying of his week during those years that after satisfactorily completing his ministerial duties, “a minister may enjoy five days in the week of uninterrupted leisure.” In 1810, however, Chalmers had an evangelical conversion during his ministry from then on was said to have visited 11,000 homes in his Glasgow parish during a single year!⁵⁶ This is a prime illustration of what Bebbington calls “activism,” his final characteristic of Evangelicalism. Evangelicals were very active in seeking the salvation of souls and the good of their fellow man. More than anything else, this characteristic differentiates the Evangelicals from their Puritan predecessors. In large part this change began with the Northampton Revivals of 1734–1735. Jonathan Edwards remarked that this activism was the result of the many conversions of the period. “Persons, after their own conversion, have commonly expressed an exceeding great desire for the conversion of others. Some have thought that they should be willing to die for the conversion of any soul.”⁵⁷

Pastors of the Evangelical movement threw themselves fully into their work. Wesley’s early preachers were totally committed to spread the gospel. Accounts tell of one preacher who attended class and band meetings, visited the sick, and preached five or six times a week; of another, who, when stationed at York in 1760, rode a circuit of 300 miles every six weeks, visiting some sixty societies; and of a third, who frequently managed to get no more than eight hours of sleep a week.⁵⁸ Wesley himself was full of energy, preaching in his lifetime more than 40,000 sermons and issuing more than 400 publications. Famous Biblical commentator, Adam Clarke (1760–1832), gave up tea and

⁵⁶Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11.

⁵⁷Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 10, cited in Edwards, *Narrative*, 47.

⁵⁸Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11.

coffee on Wesley's advice in 1782 and consequently "saved several whole years of time" over the rest of his life for devotion to Christian scholarship. Time was scarce for these Evangelical preachers, and a work-week of between 90 and 100 hours was expected of these pastors. Considering all of this tireless work, Bebbington comments, "It is hardly surprising that the Wesleyan Methodists maintained a 'Worn-Out Ministers' Fund.'"⁵⁹

All of this hard work was not in vain as Evangelicalism had rapid and sustained growth from the time of the revivals of 1740 well into the nineteenth century. Between 1750 and 1800, General Baptists more than doubled in number, and the Particular Baptists saw even more substantial growth growing from 10,000 in 1750 to more than 86,000 by 1838.⁶⁰ The number of churches in the Particular Baptist Western and Midland Associations approximately doubled between 1780 and 1820, and the average church doubled in membership through this same period. On top of all of this growth in the Calvinistic Dissenters' membership numbers there was a great rise in the number of those who attended regularly as "hearers" who were not members. "One church," writes Bebbington, "at Gold Hill in Buckinghamshire, had five hearers for every member by 1818."⁶¹ Other groups saw similar growth; for example, the Congregationalists grew nearly 35 percent in ten years, going from 26,000 in 1790 to 35,000; in 1800.⁶² The Methodists however outpaced everyone else, growing from

⁵⁹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11.

⁶⁰Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 151.

⁶¹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 21.

⁶²Currie, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 47.

23,110 members in 1767 (the first year a count was taken) to 302,048 by 1830.⁶³ It is helpful to understand the implications of this revival through the lens of a pastor from the time. Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) provides some wonderful insights in an 1810 letter written to William Carey (1761–1834): “I preached a sermon to the youth last Lord’s Day from 1 Thessalonians 2:19. I think we must have had nearly one thousand. They came from all quarters. My heart’s desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved.” Writing to another friend, John Ryland (1753–1823), on December 28, 1810, Fuller was still rejoicing, “I hope the Lord is at work among our young people. Our Monday and Friday night meetings are much thronged.” Several months later, he went on to tell Ryland, “The Friday evening discourses are now, and have been for nearly a year, much thronged, because they have been mostly addressed to persons under some concern about their salvation.”⁶⁴

Thomas Kidd believes that this theme of revivalism is so central to evangelicalism that he regards the work of the Holy Spirit in revival as the fifth distinctive to the movement, adding it to Bebbington’s quadrilateral. His position is that Bebbington does not adequately distinguish early evangelicalism from movements that preceded it. Kidd writes, “Evangelicalism did, no doubt, inaugurate new emphases on the discernible moment of an individual’s conversion, or the ‘new birth,’ and the simultaneous conversion of many individuals during revivals.” He goes on to explain that missing from Bebbington’s definition is a new attention to the person of the Holy Spirit, particularly in revival in

⁶³Currie, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 151.

⁶⁴Cited in Michael Haykin, “The Life and Times of Andrew Fuller,” a lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, May 2010.

evangelicalism.⁶⁵ Bebbington, on the other hand, includes the work of the Holy Spirit in revival within the broader distinctive of activism.

The revival among Particular Baptists and other protestant groups in England eventually led directly to missionary endeavours abroad. While Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches had long been engaged in missions around the world, there was no wide-scale missions endeavour among Protestants before the end of the eighteenth century. There had only been a handful of Protestant mission efforts prior to this time. For instance, there was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1699), The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (1710), and The London Missionary Society (1785) which attempted to unite Dissenters and Anglicans for global mission. The Moravians also had some missionary success in the eighteenth century, reaching places as diverse as Greenland, Lapland, Ceylon, and the West Indies.⁶⁶

Probably the most influential individual on the burgeoning missionary movement in the early to mid-eighteenth century was David Brainerd (1718–1747). On April 1, 1743, the twenty-four-year-old Brainerd, of Haddam, Connecticut, began working as a missionary to Native Americans. His first missionary efforts were among the Housatonic Indians in a settlement near present day Nassau, New York. In a year with them he started a school for Native American children and began to translate the Psalms into their language. On June 19, 1745, after a year in a settlement northeast of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Brainerd made his first preaching tour to the Indians at Crossweeksung,

⁶⁵Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 65-68, Kindle.

⁶⁶Randall, *What a Friend*, 151.

New Jersey. At Crossweeksung, God moved in amazing power and brought awakening and blessing to these Native Americans. Within a year there were 130 people in the Crossweeksung church, and in May of 1746, the whole newly-converted Christian community moved from Crossweeksung to Cranberry to have their own land and village. Brainerd stayed with these Native Americans until he was too sick to minister and eventually died in the care of Jonathan Edwards's family on October 9, 1747.⁶⁷ The following year Jonathan Edwards published Brainerd's journals in his *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749). This book has never been out of print and has an immeasurable impact on the modern missionary movement.⁶⁸ William Carey, who came to be known as "The Father of Modern Missions," was greatly inspired and influenced by Brainerd, often mentioning him in his journal: "I was much humbled to-day by reading Brainerd. O what a disparity betwixt me and him, he always constant, I as inconstant as the wind!"⁶⁹ In another place he urged those workers of Serampore:

Let us often look at Brainerd in the woods of America, pouring out his very soul before God for the perishing heathen, without whose salvation nothing could make you happy. Prayer, secret, fervent, believing prayer, lies at the root of all personal godliness. A competent knowledge of the languages current where a missionary lives, a mild and winning temper, and a heart given up to God in closet religion; these, these are the attainments which more than all knowledge or all other gifts, will fit us to become the instruments of God in the great work of human redemption.⁷⁰

⁶⁷John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 127–31.

⁶⁸John A. Grigg, *The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁹George Smith, *The Life of William Carey, D. D.: Shoemaker and Missionary, Professor of Sanskrit, Bengali, and Marathi in the College of Fort William, Calcutta* (London: J. Murray, 1887), locs. 1165-66, Kindle.

⁷⁰Smith, *William Carey*, locs. 1678–82, Kindle.

It was Carey who inspired a dozen or so men, including Andrew Fuller and Samuel Pearce, to meet in Kettering in October of 1792 to form the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen, which of course later became the Baptist Missionary Society, and the modern missions movement was born.

Finally, the activism of the Evangelical movement led to social change. In 1797, the English statesman William Wilberforce (1759–1833) published his influential book, *A Practical view of the prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this country contrasted with Real Christianity*. This book sold more than 7,000 copies in six months, and in it, Wilberforce spoke about the various social demographics, the increase in prosperity, the growth of towns and cities, and the growing social problems of the day in the light of the gospel. He argued for a turn from nominal Christianity to real Christianity on the part of the rich, which would in turn bring about social change for all. Wilberforce's socio-political activity was most well defined by his campaign against slavery, although other campaigns were launched, for example the promotion of Sunday observance. John Wesley who had published his abolitionist book, *Thoughts on Slavery*, in 1774, wrote one of the last letters of his life to Wilberforce urging action against the "execrable villainy" of the slave trade.⁷¹ From 1789

⁷¹The letter is a deep and passionate plea for the end that Wilberforce was trying to reach. It was written from Balam, on February 24, 1791, and says, "Unless the divine power has raised you us to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*,² I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God before you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it. Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in our colonies that the *oath* of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this? That he who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things." Charles Yrigoyen and Ruth A. Daugherty, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart & Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 56.

Wilberforce regularly introduced measures in the House of Commons to end the slave trade and had an influence on his friend William Pitt the younger (1759–1806), the Prime Minister during that period. Eventually through massive public opinion campaigns, convictional preaching in English churches, much prayer, and the tireless work of Wilberforce, the slave trade was abolished in 1807. After this victory, Wilberforce spent the rest of his life pressing to make slavery illegal. One month after his death in August of 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed ending slavery in England to this day.⁷²

⁷²Randall, *What a Friend*, 155. As cited in John Charles Pollock, *Wilberforce: God's Statesman* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Publications, 2001), 134.

CHAPTER 4
BAPTIST SPIRITUALITY
OF THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Roots in Puritan Piety

English Baptists emerged from English Puritanism, and therefore it is only to be expected that Baptist spirituality is deeply rooted in Puritan piety. Defining Puritanism is notoriously difficult. The term “Puritan” originated in 1564, or thereabouts, a term of insult launched at nonconformist clergy within the newly-formed Elizabethan church.¹ These Puritans had sought to reform the Church of England for one hundred years but eventually were expelled in 1662, when the Act of Uniformity required Puritan ministers to repudiate their denominational ordinations, renounce their oath to the Solemn League and Covenant, and be reordained under the bishops.² Eventually in 1665, the Five Mile Act prohibited these ejected ministers from coming within five miles of their former parishes or any city or town.³ A limited definition of Puritanism is a reform or renewal movement within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglicanism. However, a more expansive definition sees Puritanism as a movement of spirituality. As Michael Haykin asserts, “Whatever else the Puritans may have been— social, political, and

¹John Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

²Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason, *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

³Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 23.

ecclesiastical Reformers— they were primarily men and women intensely passionate about piety and Christian experience.”⁴

In this definition, what united the Puritans was both their doctrine, Calvinism, and their conviction that every aspect of their spiritual lives came from the work of the Holy Spirit.” In this regard, Benjamin B. Warfield (1851– 1921), the distinguished American Presbyterian theologian, has this to say about this Puritan preoccupation: “Puritan thought was almost entirely occupied with loving study of the work of the Holy Spirit, and found its highest expression in dogmatico-practical expositions of the several aspects of it.”⁵ The Puritan preoccupation with the work of the Holy Spirit worked itself out in many practical ways: the puritan concern for sanctification, the necessity of the Spirit in Gospel preaching, and in the encouragement for the believer to face the necessary trials and joys of the Christian journey.⁶ In all of this the Puritans understood the primacy and the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit.

This broader understanding then of Puritanism is not limited to those that labored within the Anglican church but includes the Dissenting bodies of the day—the English Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and the Particular (or Calvinistic) Baptists. Very few of the seventeenth-century Puritan Baptists are known with the exception of John Bunyan (1626–1688) and to a lesser degree Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691), William

⁴Michael A. G. Haykin and Jeffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin’s Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 77, Kindle.

⁵Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, Kindle Location 77, citing Benjamin B. Warfield, “Introductory Note,” to Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), xxviii.

⁶J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 12–17.

Kiffin (1616–1701), and Benjamin Keach (1640–1704).⁷ Their story is one of struggle, suffering, and faithfulness as was demonstrated in the previously-mentioned life of Abraham Cheare, who pastored Samuel Pearce’s home church in Plymouth.

Late Eighteenth-Century Baptist Spirituality

Eighteenth-century Baptist Spirituality can best be understood through a survey of three broad categories: word, relationships, and mission. As it will be presented in later chapters, these three categories of spirituality are largely represented in the life and works of Samuel Pearce.

Spirituality of the Word

Preaching

Perhaps the best place to begin in understanding eighteenth-century Baptist piety is with the truths Baptists had been confessing since the seventeenth century. After the Toleration Act was passed in England in 1689, a group of one-hundred Particular Baptists met in London to affirm a confession of faith that had been written in 1677. The *Second London Confession* or *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* would become the standard for eighteenth-century Particular Baptist congregations. It is a modification of the Confession of the Westminster Assembly (1647) and the Savoy Declaration (1658), with changes to suit the Baptist views on Church polity and on the subjects and mode of baptism.⁸ It comes as no surprise that these Baptists had a high view of scripture. This *London Confession* begins with these words:

⁷Brian L. Hanson and Michael Haykin, *Waiting on the Spirit of Promise: The Life and Theology of Suffering of Abraham Cheare* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Papers, 2014), Kindle edition. 63–68.

⁸Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 3:738.

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience; although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will, which is necessary unto salvation.⁹

Foremost among Baptist theologians in the eighteenth century was the London pastor John Gill (1697–1771). Being a naturally gifted thinker, Gill mastered Greek at the age of eleven and went on to pastor the Baptist Church in Southwark, London.¹⁰ Gill was a prolific writer publishing many works throughout his life but none so helpful as his two-volume set *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1767) and *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1770). In the former, Gill affirms the same high view of Scripture found in the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*:¹¹

It seems therefore most agreeable that [the] words [of the Bible] also, as well as matter, were given by divine inspiration; and as for difference of style, as it was easy with God to direct to the use of proper words, so he could accommodate himself to the style such persons were wont to use, and which was natural to them and agreeable to their genius and circumstances.¹²

This eighteenth-century Baptist love for the word of God is most plainly seen in preaching. The preaching of this day was largely expositional, at times using a large portion of the scripture as the primary preaching text, but more often the sermon was based on a verse or even part of a verse. In this, the preaching was similar to the Puritan

⁹*The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (Oxford : Pavlik Press, 2012), 95–98, Kindle.

¹⁰This church had previously been pastored by Benjamin Keach and later became the New Park Street Chapel and the Metropolitan Tabernacle pastored by Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892).

¹¹A compatibilist view of inspiration reconciles God's inspiration of every word of scripture with the human authorship of the Bible. In God's divine providence he uses the language, experience, and knowledge of the human authors to by the power of the Holy Spirit communicate God's very words to the human readers.

¹²John Gill, *Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 1:16.

preaching which preceded it. While this chapter will not attempt to give a complete overview of eighteenth-century Baptist preaching, it will outline three defining characteristics common to the Baptist preachers of this era demonstrated in the preaching of one well-known pastor, Andrew Fuller,¹³ and one lesser-known preacher of the same period, Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795).¹⁴ In the biblical preaching of these two men, three biblical themes are clearly seen: the centrality of Christ in the Bible, the love of God in salvation, and the responsibility of men and women to live holy and obedient lives.

Eighteenth-century Particular Baptists believed Jesus to be the reigning King of the universe; this was not only a confessional conviction but also formed part of their practical theology. The centrality of Christ that is seen in scripture is also a constant theme in their preaching. The following passage from Fuller, preached to a congregation of Jewish men and women in London, makes this theme clear:

It is suggested that, whenever Messiah should come, the great body of Scripture prophecy should be accomplished in him: “In the volume of the book it is written of me.” That the prophetic writings abound in predictions of the Messiah, no Jew will deny: the only question is, are they fulfilled in Jesus? You know (I speak to them who read the Bible) that “the seed of the woman was to bruise the head of the

¹³Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) was born in Wicken, Cambridgeshire, and grew up to become a Baptist minister. He pastored two congregations, at Soham (1775–1782) and Kettering (1782–1815), until his death. He is best known for his work with the Baptist Missionary Society and for his defining work, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1782). He also published *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Pearce: Minister of the Gospel in Birmingham; with Extracts from Some of His Most Interesting Letters*, which was the most comprehensive and widely published work on Samuel Pearce’s life.

¹⁴Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795) was the son of John Beddome (1674–1757), a Baptist minister of Alcester Baptist Church in Warwickshire, England, and the pupil of Bernard Foskett (1685–1758), who served as the principal of Bristol Baptist Academy. After being set apart for Gospel ministry by the Prescott Street Baptist Church of London in 1739, Benjamin Beddome went to Bourton-on-the-Water as a candidate for the pastorate of the town’s Baptist church in the spring of 1740. He labored with the congregation for three years until July of 1743 when the church finally extended an invitation to Beddome to officially become the Church’s “teaching elder.” Altogether Beddome would serve the church at Bourton for 55 years until his death in 1795.

serpent.” You know that God promised Abraham, saying, In *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. You know that Jacob, when blessing the tribe of Judah, predicted the coming of *Shiloh*, unto whom the gathering of the people should be. You know that Moses spoke of a *Prophet* whom the Lord your God should raise up from the midst of you, like unto him, to whom you were to hearken, on pain of incurring the Divine displeasure. You know that the Messiah is prophetically described in the Psalms, and the prophets, under a great variety of forms; particularly as the *Anointed* of the Lord—the King—the Lord of David, to whom Jehovah spoke—the “child born,” whose name should be called “the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace”—the “Rod out of the stem of Jesse”—“God’s servant, whom he upholds; his *elect*, in whom his soul delighteth”—“him whom *man despiseth*, and whom the nation abhorreth”—“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”—“the Lord our righteousness”—“Messiah the Prince”—“the Branch”—“the Messenger of the covenant,” &c. Thus it was that in the volume of the book it was written of him. Whoever proves to be the Messiah, your fathers rejoiced in the faith of him.¹⁵

After walking through the life of Jesus and giving eight proofs that he was the messiah, Fuller concludes his argument with these powerful words.

Such are some of the evidences from which we conclude that Jesus is the true Messiah. Time, place, family, miracles, character, sufferings, resurrection, and rejection by his own countrymen—all are fulfilled in him. Never was such a body of prophecy given and accomplished in any other case. If you will shut your eyes upon the light, you must abide the consequence; for our parts, we feel the ground upon which we stand, when we say, ‘We know that the Son of God is come.’¹⁶

Similarly, Beddome points to the centrality of Christ in his preaching. One example comes from his sermon “Ministerial Subordination to Christ” based on John 1:8 where there is reference to John the Baptist, “He was not that light.” Beddome says of John,

He was a created and reflected light; the light that he had was received, and he could only shine by being shone upon. But Christ is the fountain of light; as he hath life, so he hath light in himself, and dispenses according to his sovereign pleasure unto others. He is that light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world; the light of knowledge, grace, comfort, and glory, is all from him.¹⁷

¹⁵Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1:217.

¹⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:212.

¹⁷Benjamin Beddome, “Ministerial Subordination to Christ,” in *Sermons Printed from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev. Benjamin Beddome of Bourton-on-the-Water with a Brief Memoir from the*

The centrality of Christ in both the preaching of Fuller and Beddome is meant to urge Christians toward obedience and action. It was the centrality of Christ in Baptist theology that defined other aspects of their spirituality such as human relationships and mission.

Another consistent theme of eighteenth-century Baptist preaching was the love of God in salvation. Jesus Christ came as the perfect example of love for the Father and of love for us. Fuller explains this two-way and perfect love of Jesus in his sermon, “Conformity to the Love of Christ,” saying,

There never was such an example of the “love of God” as that which is furnished by the obedience and death of Christ. It was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father. He did not know his nearest relations, but as doing his Father’s will. When the bitter cup was presented to him, he said, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.” What was this but exposing his breast, as we should say, to the sword of justice; consenting to be made a sacrifice, that God might be glorified in the salvation of sinners? It was love, working in a way of grief, that caused that affecting exclamation, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” . . . As there never was such love to God as that which was manifested by Christ, so neither was there ever such *love to men*. “He loved us, and gave *himself* for us—loved us, and washed us from our sins *in his own blood*. The love of creatures is ordinarily founded on something lovely in the object; but Christ died for us while we were yet enemies.”¹⁸

The following from Beddome is more direct and flows from his Calvinistic understanding of the love of God. He believed that there is nothing that humanity could do to “cause” God to love us, making the love of God all the more precious: “God’s love to us is prior to our love to Christ. The love itself is so, though not the manifestation of it. Time was when we did not love Christ; but God’s love to his people never had a beginning, as it

Author (London: William Ball, 1835), 272.

¹⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:313–14.

will never have an end.”¹⁹ Beddome knew well of humanity’s sin and the frailty of our love toward God. In a sermon titled “On the Love of God” he was able to reassure his congregations not with regard to their ability to love God but rather with regard to God’s measureless ability to love them:

God’s love to us is infinitely superior to our love to Christ. The latter is mingled with coldness and indifference. Such is the imperfection of it, that the Christian often questions its reality; but God’s love is like his nature, boundless; as incapable of addition as it is of diminution. When we compare our love to that of God, we may well say, “Unto us belongeth shame.” We read of “the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of the love of God which passeth knowledge.” It is as immeasurable as the heavens, as unfathomable as the sea.²⁰

Yet another characteristic of eighteenth-century Baptist preaching is the responsibility of men and women to live holy and obedient lives. Obedience and holiness were responses to the centrality of Christ and the immeasurable love of God. In gratitude, the believer obeys. As Beddome preached, “What we do must not be to gratify our inclination, promote our own interest, or please either the good or the great, but in obedience to the will of God. To be acceptable it must likewise be universal and persevering; not from mercenary, but grateful motives; not for life, but from love; not that God may love, but because he hath loved us.”²¹ In a sermon on the trials of David from Psalm 40, Andrew Fuller preached that all of life’s trials and griefs are given by God to produce a holiness in believers that will bring eternal glory to God. He aptly warns his

¹⁹Beddome, “On the Love of God,” 19.

²⁰Beddome, “On the Love of God,” 19–20.

²¹Benjamin Beddome, “Sermon V, John iii. 7,” in *Twenty Short Discourses, Adapted to Village Worship, or, The Devotions of the Family/Published from the Manuscripts of B. Beddome* (London: Samuel Burton, 1824), 29.

hearers that the opportunities for God's glory that God allows to come our way may never come again:

When you see a good man brought into the furnace of affliction it may well make you fear and tremble—you may fear that the Lord will bring you into the same affliction, for none of us are exempt; all our present peace, and present comforts hang, as I may say, or are suspended, upon a thousand tender strings, and if any one of them should break, our minds are divested of peace, and sink in wretchedness. When you see a single string of any of your acquaintance broken, and the sorrows with which they are visited, it may well make you fear and tremble, and make you sensible of God's mercy towards you; but it will also have this effect through the operations of the Spirit of God, if you properly improve it, it will have the effect of leading you to trust in the Lord. Do you sink in deep mire? Are you plunged, from whatever cause, as into a horrible pit? You are thereby taught by the example of the Psalmist to put your trust in God; from his example take comfort, and charm your griefs to rest. Oh that we could learn more from the example of God's servants under all the ills of life, to commit our way to him, to live to him under every situation to which he calls us!²²

If the most important component of an individual's or a church's spirituality is the preaching of the word, then there is no doubt that the Baptists of this era had a biblical spirituality.

Hymnody

In addition to the preaching of God's word in Baptist biblical piety, hymn singing enabled eighteenth-century Particular Baptists to give expression to their personal faith. Hymn singing in worship was an item of debate among Baptists in the late seventeenth century.²³ By the eighteenth century, however, hymn singing had become widely accepted among most Baptists. Hymns were used to teach biblical doctrine, and many of them were written by Baptist ministers as summaries of their sermons. This

²²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:384.

²³Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism Among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690–1791* (Chipping Norton, UK: Nigel Lynn for Roger Hayden and the Baptist Historical Society, 2006), 159.

singing gave the congregations an opportunity to express their knowledge of God's word through heartfelt singing. Pastors like Bernard Foskett, John Beddome (1674–1757), John Ash (1724–1779), and Caleb Evans all wrote hymns and used hymns in worship. Joseph Stennett (1663–1713) published an early Baptist hymnbook, *Hymns in Commemoration of the suffering of Jesus Christ; Composed for the celebration of His Holy Supper* (1697), which included fifty hymns by its third edition in 1709. In that same year Stennett published *Hymns composed for the Celebration of the Holy Ordinance of Baptism*. Stennett's hymns were clearly bibliocentric and doctrinal. In the preface of his *Commemoration* hymnal he wrote these words:

I have prescrib'd to myself, in the composition of them all to keep the Cross of Christ continually in view I have endeavour'd to assist the Devotion of those who communicate at his Sacred Table, by suggesting what I thought most proper to dispose 'em to Humility and Repentance, to Faith and Hope, to Admiration and Joy, to Love and to Gratitude I have cited those Scriptures in the Margin from whence the Thoughts, and frequently the very Words, are taken; by which means the Reader, if he is Pleas'd to turn to the Passages refer'd to, may easily explain to himself those phrases and allusions which at the first glance appear somewhat hard and obscure.²⁴

An example of this biblical and doctrinal purity is seen in the crucicentricism of Stennett's songs. In the following stanza he describes the work of Christ on the cross, drawing from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19, and Galatians 3:13:

Stretch'd on the cruel tree
He bled and groan'd and cry'd;
And in a mortal Agony
Languish'd awhile and dy'd.²⁵

²⁴Hayden, *Continuity*, 161, cited in Joseph Stennett, *Hymns in Commemoration of the Sufferings of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ Compos'd for the Celebration of His Holy Supper* (London: J. Darby for John Baker, 1709), ii–iv.

²⁵Hayden, *Continuity*, 161.

Building on the tradition of Stennett and including the works of popular hymn writers of the early eighteenth-century like Isaac Watts, and John Ash, Caleb Evans published the first Baptist hymnal in 1769, *A Collection of Hymns Adapted to Public Worship*. It included hymns by various Baptist hymn writers including sixty-two by Anne Steele (1716–1778). Anne Steele’s hymns were written around the themes of praise to Jesus, personal devotion, patience and endurance, death and heaven, and were full of scripture. Her hymns were especially instructive for the church as they were rich in scripture and expressive of a deep devotion to Christ. Notice the warm prose built on the solid foundation of scripture in the following stanzas. Steele built this song on the calling of Christ clearly seen in texts like Matthew 4:19 and 16:24–25 and the exclusivity of the gospel seen in Acts 4:12 and John 14:6:

See, Jesus stands with open arms,
He calls, he bids you come;
Guilt holds you back, and fear alarms;
But see, there yet is room.²⁶
Jesus, the spring of joys divine (Isaiah 12:3)
Where all my hopes and comforts flow;
Jesus, no other name but Thine
Can save me from eternal woe.²⁷

Steele taught the doctrines of Jesus calling, saving, comforting, and strengthening through her rich and moving songs.

In 1787, John Rippon published *Selection of hymns, from the best authors, intended to be an Appendix to Dr. Watts’s Psalms and Hymns*, which provided a much

²⁶Hayden, *Continuity*, 167, as cited in Steele, *Anne Steele’s Hymns*, 11. For more on the life and hymn writing of Anne Steele, see Cynthia Y. Aalders, *To Express the Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality of Anne Steele* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008); and J. R. Broome, and Anne Steele, *A Bruised Reed: Anne Steele, Her Life and Times; Together with Anne Steele’s Hymns, Psalms and a Selection of Her Prose Works* (Harpenden, England: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 2007).

²⁷Hayden, *Continuity*, 167, cited in Steele, *Anne Steele’s Hymns*, 33.

wider choice of pieces to follow the sermon in public worship. His hymnal made full use of the hymns of the Wesleyan and Evangelical Revivals, a point not without significance in enhancing the moderated Calvinism of the denomination as it worshipped week by week. The *Selection*, which owed much to Rippon's judgment and good taste, reached a tenth edition by 1800, and by 1844, *The Comprehensive Rippon* contained 1174 hymns and became the standard nineteenth-century Baptist hymnbook.²⁸ Ash and Evans's *Collection* and Rippon's *Selection* had a defining impact on the doctrine, understanding of scripture, and personal and corporate spirituality of the Particular Baptists of this era.

Catechizing

Beyond the centrality of the Bible in corporate worship, the Bible was also an important part of the home in eighteenth-century Baptist life, especially through the use of catechisms. From the mid-seventeenth century onward, Baptists had brought catechisms to print. In 1644, Christopher Blackwood (1606–1670) had published *A Soul Searching Catechism wherein is opened and explained ... the six fundamental points*. Vavasour Powell (1617–1670) had produced *The Scripture Concord or Catechism* as early as 1646, and William Kaye (1615–1690) of Stokesley published *The Reformed Protestant's Catechism . . . in which the Apostles' Creed is unveiled as comprehending the mysteries of salvation, the Lord's Day and private worship* in 1658. However, the most popular Baptist catechism was drawn up by Benjamin Keach in the 1690s and simply became known as *The Baptist Catechism*. Keach's catechism was in regular circulation until the mid-nineteenth century in both Britain and America and was

²⁸This hymnbook was used by Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle until 1866, and it would have great influence on all successive Baptist hymnbooks in England and the United States. Hayden, *Continuity*, 157–74.

reproduced by a variety of editors over the next 150 years, including John Rippon in 1793.

Ten years prior to Rippon's publication, John Sutcliff (1752–1814) published a catechism aimed specifically at children, *The First Principles of the Oracles of God*. One of the most popular editions of *The Baptist Catechism* was Benjamin Beddome's *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism by way of Questions and Answers*, published in 1752. As Beddome wrote, "When we consider the melancholy State of those Churches and Families, where catechizing is entirely thrown aside, how many of them have degenerated from the Faith, and others from the Practice of the Gospel; little needs to be said in the vindication of this exercise to those in whom a zeal for both still remain."²⁹ Catechizing of this nature was a very formative influence and provided a Baptist identity set securely within Reformed and Evangelical orthodoxy. Bernard Foskett introduced regular, weekly catechizing of the children at Broadmead, Bristol, as early as 1726. In the Western Association Letter of 1742 Foskett commended the practice to the churches of the Association, urging them to catechize children and young servants both at home and in the church, saying, "We hope Brethren you do not neglect the morning and the evening sacrifice of prayer and praise which should be attended, also reading some portion of the divine word to prepare for and assist in the discharge of such an indispensable duty in your several families."³⁰

²⁹Benjamin Beddome, *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism* (Bristol, England: W. Pine, 1752), ii.

³⁰Hayden, *Continuity*, 152–57, cited in the Western Association Circular Letter (1742).

Conclusion

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of the Bible in eighteenth-century Baptist spirituality. Biblical doctrine and obedience to scripture was central in every corner of their piety. It drove the way they preached, sang and worshiped, related to one another, and engaged the world.

Spirituality of Relationships

In the Church

Not unlike the apostles and church fathers before them, the forefathers of the Particular Baptist movement established their churches in the face of great opposition from the establishment around them. The seventeenth century was a difficult time for all dissenters but most especially for the Baptists and Quakers. Thus, the unity and communion of the family, the local church, and the broader network of churches became a very distinct part of Particular Baptist spirituality. So, when in 1644, William Kiffin, John Spilsbury (1593–1668), and thirteen other pastors met in London to write the first *London Baptist Confession*, they were sure to include language specifying the importance of communion within the church and communion among churches:

And although the particular Congregations be distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit City in itself: yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one another in all needful affairs of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.³¹

By 1689 when a group of Baptists again came to London to establish their doctrine in the *Second London Baptist Confession*, the language for the church had become even more specific and communion even more important:

Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities, and necessities; which communion, according to the rule of the gospel, though especially to be exercised by them, in the relation wherein they stand, whether in families, or churches, yet, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended to all the household of faith, even all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.³²

Beyond the broader confessions of faith each church wrote very specific covenants for their own congregations. The church covenant defined the fellowship of the body. Those who had signed and agreed to the covenant were bound in fellowship with one another. As G. F. Nuttall has explained, “The drawing up of a covenant and committing it to writing added to its solemnity; while the appending of signatures (or marks) of those who entered into it both underlined its binding characteristic and satisfied their self-consciousness as individuals.”³³ The Church Book of the Bromsgrove Baptist Church near Birmingham had the covenant as one of its very first entries, dated August 5, 1672.³⁴ It is introduced by a statement that declared it is God’s personal work of grace which has brought the members into church fellowship. It further recorded that having put on Christ in baptism, members have given themselves up “in a visible manner to the Lord and to each other angels and men according to the will of God.” Church covenants were a binding document upon all who entered into membership.³⁵

³¹*1644 London Baptist Confession*, Article 46.

³²*The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (Oxford: Pavlik Press, 2012), locs. 1279–84, Kindle.

³³Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 77.

³⁴The church was founded in 1666 by John Eckles.

³⁵Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, 77.

In 1697 Benjamin Keach wrote what would become the normative covenantal document for many Particular Baptist churches. Keach began this document with an explanation of the “true church,” saying,

We believe a true Church of Christ is not National nor Parochial but doth consist of a number of godly persons who upon Profession of their Faith and Repentance have been baptized, and in solemn manner have in a Holy Covenant given themselves up to the Lord and to one another, to live in love, and to endeavor to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace: Among whom the Word of God is duly and truly preached; and holy Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and all other ordinances are duly administered according to the Word of God and institution of Christ in the Primitive Church: watching over one another and communicating to each other Necessities, as becometh Saints; living Holy lives, as becomes their sacred Profession, and not to forsake the assembling of themselves, as the manner of some is; or to take leave to hear where they please in other places when the Church is assembled, but to worship God, and feed in that Pasture, or with that Church, with whom they have covenanted and given up themselves as particular members thereof.³⁶

These covenants were promises that the members of these churches were making to one another that they might work alongside one another for Christ and enjoy sweet fellowship with one another in Christ. When a confessing Christian was recognized as fruitful and faithful by his local church and accepted as a covenantal member, he or she had great reason to be assured in salvation.

Under the ministry of John Beddome, Alcester Baptist Church in Warwickshire adopted a covenant in 1712 that paints a picture of Christians in church working together under the direction of Christ and for the mutual benefit of each other. The members were encouraged to work together in “all sweetness and saintlike love to each other.”³⁷ The task was to contend for the faith and purity of the Gospel and resist

³⁶Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d Wherein a True Gospel-Church Is Described: Together with the Power of the Keys, and Who Are to Be Let in, and Who to Be Shut Out* (London: n.p., 1697), 6–7.

³⁷Hayden, *Continuity*, 150.

any who opposed “the Order, Ordinances, Honour, Liberty, and privileges”³⁸ of the church. Members were to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, by avoiding all causes and causers of division, and positively, by bearing each others’ burdens, and providing mutual help, and “not daring to rip up the weakness of any to those without the Church, nor to those that are within.”³⁹ This covenant was adopted during a time when persecution was still a very real threat, and the members promised not to abandon one another in the face of persecution. They promised to keep the business of church meeting confidential, and they pledged not to marry unbelievers. They also indicated a willingness to share their human wealth with any in need in the church and promised to “watch over one another’s conversation for good ... [and] to provoke one another to holiness, love and good works.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, they were deeply committed to the ongoing works of the church as stated, “We do all purpose constantly to attend the meetings appointed by the Church both on the Lord’s Days and on other Days, nothing hindering except distance, sickness, or the works of mercy and necessity.”⁴¹

In Marriage

While eighteenth-century Baptists understood the importance of relationships with one another in the context of a local church, a spirituality of Christian relationships were also clearly seen in the home. Samuel Stennett (1727–1795), a Seventh-day Baptist minister in London and prolific hymn-writer, wrote twelve discourses on domestic duties,

³⁸Hayden, *Continuity*, 150.

³⁹Hayden, *Continuity*, 151.

⁴⁰Hayden, *Continuity*, 151.

⁴¹Hayden, *Continuity*, 151.

which were later published together. Each of these is an exposition of a specific passage and gives the reader instruction for a specific relational function within the home. These discourses range from instruction on family worship to showing hospitality in the home to duties of masters to servants. Stennett's book opens the door into the lives of Baptist families and individuals in the late eighteenth century. In the following pages we examine two of these discourses in more detail, "Reciprocal Duties of Husbands and Wives," and "Domestic Friendship."⁴²

Stennett begins his discourse on marriage by defining marriage from a Biblical perspective. He walks through Biblical texts on marriage, encouraging the deep commitment in marriage that Jesus of course, commends. He concludes this section saying, "what has been observed concerning the nature, authority, and grounds of the conjugal relation, will open the way for consideration of the duties enjoined in our text."⁴³ He then goes on to discuss five key components that are central in a healthy marriage—religion, natural temper, good sense, worldly circumstances, and external accomplishments.

Stennett begins his discussion with religion, saying, "I mention [religion] first, not only because it is the most important concern of all, but because the exhortation in

⁴²Matt Haste writes, "*Discourses on Domestic Duties* was published in 1783 and earned Stennett high esteem as an author and practical theologian. Family handbooks had been popular in English literature since the time of the Puritans and yet, his biographer concluded, "We know of no writer who either before or since has done such ample justice to the subject in all its bearings In fact, [William] Jones thought so highly of Stennett's work that he recommended that this collection of sermons be read in every Christian home on an annual basis." Matt D. Haste, "'Nurseries of Heaven': Samuel Stennett's Visions for Marriage and Family" (a paper presented at the annual meeting for the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, California, November 2014). Haste has done extensive work on the spirituality of marriage specifically among eighteenth-century Baptists.

⁴³Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (Edinburgh: Ritchie, 1800), 126.

our text is addressed to those husbands and wives who make profession of it.”⁴⁴ His basic premise is that husbands and wives are dependent on the guidance of God in marriage, thus they must trust in Him. Christians must not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever in order that they may share a full and complete union with their husband or wife.

The next two things that Stennett discusses are natural temper and good sense. Stennett argues that a relationship with God produces a holy and joyful temperament in the home: “Some may affect to think and speak of religion as a severe gloomy kind of business; but the reverse is the case. It does not in its natural operation, deprive youth of that sprightliness, pleasantry and agreeableness, which marks that period of life, but tends rather to promote it.”⁴⁵ He goes on to say that good sense enables families to perform their duties with advantage and success. Good sense will keep families from many evils and will procure comforts. He says, “It was [good sense] that gave the finishing hand to the striking portrait the wife man draws of the virtuous woman in the Proverbs.”⁴⁶

Finally, Stennett discusses worldly circumstance and external accomplishments. While faith in God (religion), natural temper, and good sense are primary in Stennett’s assessment, he does not neglect the very real concern of material need. He says that when young people enter into a marriage without the reasonable prospect of being able to provide for themselves and their families, this leads to very unhappy consequences. Stennett says that it is the duty of every man to do something toward providing for his own sustenance and that of his or her offspring. The external

⁴⁴Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 128.

⁴⁵Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 132.

⁴⁶Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 133.

accomplishments that Stennett refers to are the overflow of the obedient and believing heart found in the faithful husband and wife. He cites the apostle Paul in saying that the wife is to respect her husband and the husband is to love his wife. Thus does a marriage please God and produce contentment and happiness in the man and the woman.⁴⁷

Stennett's discourses provided a framework for the understanding of marriage and the instruction therein among late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Baptists.

In Friendship

In Stennett's discourse on "Domestic Friendship," he gives a very robust explanation of friendship in the eighteenth century. His three goals in this chapter are to lay down the true and proper grounds of domestic friendship, enumerate some of the natural and pleasing expressions of friendship, and give directions for the cherishing and promotion of friendship.⁴⁸ His base text for this discourse is Psalm 133, as he explains that when brethren dwell together, with good will, it truly is pleasant and good.

Stennett begins with a discussion on how and when a relationship actually happens between people, or the grounds for a relationship. The first determinative factor in a friendship is relationship, or how the parties are related to one another. This could mean that the two parties are actually related, so, for example, a husband and a wife should have a very intimate friendship, as should parents with their children, and siblings. Second, a person's character carries great importance in terms of their friendships. Stennett includes in character a person's features, temper, sentiment, manners, circumstances, and religion. So, for example, he writes of sentiment, "Two people who

⁴⁷Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 134–45.

think alike on most subjects, on communicating their ideas, will instantly conceive an esteem and affection for each other. Their kindred souls, cast as it were in one mould, will unite, and with passionate fondness embrace.”⁴⁹ He concludes with the very bold statement that, “religion contributes most to domestic friendship.”⁵⁰ Stennett’s belief in the centrality of religion in friendship was certainly true of members of the nonconformist church, who, as previously mentioned, were incredibly dependent on one another for encouragement as well as survival.

In his second major section on friendship, Stennett enumerates the pleasing expressions of friendship. The first expression of friendship is forbearance. Stennett remarks that oftentimes differences of opinion among mankind create dislike, disgust, or downright malevolence, but the love of friendship overcomes these differences wherein two people can bear with one another despite differing viewpoints.⁵¹ Second, Stennett remarks that sympathy is an expression of friendship. While an acquaintance may run from trouble, a true friend will run to it, and friends rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.⁵² Stennett’s third expression of friendship is assistance. He writes that friends gain a mutual benefit from one another. If two people love one another, they should endeavor to assist one another in doing good.⁵³ Fourth, Stennett believes that friends gain conversation from one another. He writes, “The wisdom and

⁴⁸Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 335.

⁴⁹Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 339.

⁵⁰Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 341.

⁵¹Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 345–47.

⁵²Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 347–49.

goodness of God in giving us a power of communicating to each other by articulate sounds the sentiments and feelings of our hearts, cannot be enough admired and acknowledged.”⁵⁴ Last, Stennett writes that friends rejoice in one another’s welfare. When friends are united in pleasure both parties actually experience greater pleasure; this is God’s sovereign design in the joy of community.⁵⁵

Building from the grounds of friendship and the expression of friendship, Stennett concludes his section on domestic friendship with directions. These instructions are deeply rooted in a biblical understanding of relationship and communal well-being. He encourages his readers to let the interest of the whole be preferred to the interest of any one part, to regularly discuss people’s affairs and business within the relationship, to control one’s own temper, and to make religion their grand object.⁵⁶ Stennett’s views and instructions on friendship were well respected and influential among his contemporaries. His discourses had a deep and lasting impact on eighteenth-century Baptist life in England. As John Gill remarked in the funeral sermon for Samuel Stennett’s father, Joseph Stennett: “The loss of such an indulgent... and loving friend is a great one indeed.”⁵⁷

⁵³Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 352–53.

⁵⁴Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 357.

⁵⁵Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 361–63.

⁵⁶Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, 363–69.

⁵⁷John Gill, “The Mutual Gain of Christ and Christians in their Life and Death. Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Joseph Stennett, D. D.,” in *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts in Two Volumes*, (London: George Keith, 1773), 1:550.

Spirituality of Mission

The Particular Baptists of the eighteenth century were actually an unlikely group to lead the charge in the modern missionary movement. Like most of the dissenting groups in Great Britain at the time, they were highly Calvinistic. They described themselves best in the words of Isaac Watts, albeit a Congregationalist, “We are a garden wall’d around, chosen and made peculiar ground.”⁵⁸ John Gill (1697–1771) had such a high view of God’s sovereignty and such a low view of the responsibility of man that he had a very poorly developed missiology. In the words of Roger Hayden, “Gill was able to preach and teach a message which produced a tragic inertia about mission that almost destroyed Baptist churches which adopted his system.”⁵⁹ Gill was preaching and writing during a time when John Wesley was the leading preacher of the day, and some of his writings were in reaction to the Arminianism of Wesley. Gill did not believe in giving a well-meant offer of the gospel to all men. He wrote in response to Wesley:

The Gospel is indeed ordered to be preached to every creature to whom it is sent and comes; but as yet it has never been brought to all the individuals of human nature; there have been multitudes in all ages that have not heard of it. And that there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay, I deny that they were made to any; no, not to God’s elect; grace and salvation are provided for them by the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the Gospel, and applied by the Spirit.⁶⁰

With John Gill as an oracular voice in Baptist life, missionary fervor was a distant thought for many; but the passing of Gill in 1771 gave way to a new set of Baptist leaders

⁵⁸Hayden, *Continuity*, x.

⁵⁹Hayden, *Continuity*, 181.

⁶⁰Hayden, *Continuity*, 192.

with new ideas and a deep desire to hear from the Lord and to be led by the Holy Spirit of God.

On April 23, 1784 John Ryland (1753–1823) received in the mail a treatise by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) dealing with corporate prayer and revival. Edwards’s work officially entitled, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in the Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth, pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time*, will be henceforth referred to as the *Humble Attempt*. Ryland soon shared the treatise with John Sutcliff and Andrew Fuller and the book caused a stir in the hearts of these eighteenth-century Baptist leaders.⁶¹ In June of that year, Fuller was scheduled to preach at the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association in Nottingham. He preached a sermon from 2 Corinthians 5:7 entitled, *The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith*. Fuller openly spoke about the impact that Edwards’s *Humble Attempt* had made upon him, and he urged his hearers to engage in “earnest and united prayer” to God for “an outpouring of Spirit upon our ministers and churches, and not upon those only of our own connection and denomination, but upon ‘all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours’ (1 Corinthians 1:2).”⁶²

As soon as Fuller finished preaching, Sutcliff rose to urge the group to heed the words of Fuller and establish a monthly prayer meeting for the outpouring of God’s Holy

⁶¹Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 158.

⁶²Haykin, *One Heart*, 163.

Spirit and the consequence of revival in the churches of Great Britain. Sutcliff

recommended that there be corporate prayer for one hour on the first Monday evening of the month and most likely drafted The Prayer Call of 1784, in which he wrote,

The grand object in prayer is to be, that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified... We shall rejoice if any other Christian societies of our own or other denomination will unite with us, and do now invite them most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt. Who can tell what the consequences of such an united effort in prayer may be! Let us plead with God the many gracious promises of his word, which relate to the future success of his gospel.⁶³

This prayer call was deeply rooted in scripture, and united churches across Great Britain. Its dependence on the Spirit of God issued in a missionary fervor that would see great fruit in the coming years.⁶⁴ These humble prayers began to change the course of Baptist thought and life and demonstrated a deep spirituality of mission, eventually giving way to the modern missions movement that has forever changed the course of church, global, and eternal history.

Beyond urging them toward prayer, Jonathan Edwards had an even greater impact on the Baptist missionary movement theologically. In his book *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, Mark Noll states that when Robert Hall (1728–1791) recommended Jonathan Edwards’s philosophical treatise entitled *The Freedom of the Will* to Andrew Fuller in 1775, this was “a critical moment in Baptist history.”⁶⁵ Fuller’s reading of Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* was crucial in shaping the work on which his own

⁶³Haykin, *One Heart*, 164.

⁶⁴Haykin, *One Heart*, 164–65.

⁶⁵Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 196.

reputation as a theologian largely rests, namely his book, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785). The latter was a seminal book, and in the words of Michael Haykin contributed to the “profound revitalization” of Particular Baptist life.⁶⁶ The theology of Fuller rejected High Calvinism in favor of a theology that held human responsibility in tension with divine sovereignty.⁶⁷ In the words of Tom Nettles, “*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* brought together in a clear, organized fashion Fuller’s theological conclusions on an issue he had struggled with since his conversion.”⁶⁸ In urging Calvinists with a high view of divine sovereignty to put that belief alongside a biblical understanding of human responsibility, he opened a door for Baptists and others to engage in the vast world of gospel-preaching to the nations.⁶⁹

The theological argument for a missionary movement was further advanced in 1792 when William Carey published his pivotal call to missions: *Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. Without emotional coloring and rhetoric, Carey’s *Enquiry* argued that the mandate which Christ laid upon the church in Matthew 28:18–20 to evangelize the nations was binding for all time. Carey further maintained that it was the responsibility of the churches of his day to plan for and execute the task of the Great Commission. He went after the objections of

⁶⁶Michael A. G. Haykin, “A Habitation of God, through the Spirit: John Sutcliffe (1752–1814) and the Revitalization of the Calvinistic Baptists in the Late-Eighteenth Century,” *Baptist Quarterly* 34 (1992): 306.

⁶⁷P. J. Morden, “Andrew Fuller and *the Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*,” in John H. Y. Briggs, *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth Century Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009), 129.

⁶⁸Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 243.

⁶⁹Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:243.

the High Calvinists against mission, traced the history of mission, gave statistical data on the state of global evangelism, set out practical solutions to the “problems” of going on mission, and urged the church to prayer and to action in global disciple making.⁷⁰

Traditionally, John Collett Ryland (1723–1792), the father of Carey’s close friend, John Ryland, is said to have told William Carey, “Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid and mine,” though many scholars believe this to be a fabrication.⁷¹ Fuller does tell us that at several of the meetings of the Northamptonshire Association between 1787 and 1790, Carey’s convictions were the topic of conversation. “Some of our most aged and respectable ministers,” Fuller wrote, “[thought that] it was a wild and impracticable scheme that he [Carey] had got in his mind, and therefore gave him no encouragement.”⁷² Fuller did not, however, specify the ministers that discouraged Carey’s vision. But despite the discouragement from many of the men William Carey most respected, his passion for the lost continued to burn. Those most intimately acquainted with Carey remembered that for several years he never engaged in prayer without interceding for the conversion of the heathen.⁷³

On Wednesday, May 30, 1792 at the Northamptonshire Associational Meeting in Nottingham, England, William Carey preached from Isaiah 54:2–3: “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.” In this passage Carey saw a picture of the barren

⁷⁰Haykin, *One Heart*, 190–92.

⁷¹Haykin, *One Heart*, 194.

⁷²Haykin, *One Heart*, 194.

and desolate Church of his own day, and in the promise of a new and wider destiny for Judah laid the prospect of countless new children in the Christian family to be drawn from all the earth. Carey believed that God was about to do great things by extending the kingdom of Jesus throughout the globe, and therefore Christians had to attempt great things in the spreading of the Gospel overseas. From this sermon came the phrase that is so often attributed to Carey, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God,” though the original version was more simply put, “Expect great things; attempt great things.”⁷⁴

All of this missional spirituality among eighteenth-century Baptists led to a meeting at Mrs. Beeby Wallis’s home in Kettering where thirteen men met to form *The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen*. In less than a year the society would raise awareness, gather prayer support, ascertain financial resources, and send its first missionary to India. William Carey was that missionary who set sail in June of 1793. Samuel Pearce was also in attendance that day in Kettering and was deeply inspired by the missional environment of his eighteenth-century Particular Baptist life and spirituality.⁷⁵

⁷³Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:291.

⁷⁴Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 14. The text of Carey’s Nottingham sermon has not been preserved. That the original form of Carey’s motto was “Expect great things; attempt great things” rather than “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God” has been argued by E. A. Payne, “John Dyer’s Memoir of Carey,” *Baptist Quarterly* 22 (1967–68): 326–27, and A. C. Smith, “The Spirit and the Letter of Carey’s Catalytic Watchword,” *Baptist Quarterly* 33 (1989–90): 226–37.

⁷⁵Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, 14–15.

CHAPTER 5

SAMUEL PEARCE'S SPIRITUALITY OF THE WORD

Introduction

In May of 1794, Pearce, Fuller, and Sutcliff were preaching for the opening of a Baptist meeting house at Guilsborough, in Northamptonshire. The previous chapel had been consumed by fire, and the event was a great celebration. Pearce spoke in the morning on Psalm 76:10 (“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain”).¹ People were so moved by his preaching that at the afternoon meal the people of Guilsborough were privately expressing to each other their pleasure with the sermon, until finally a gentleman rose at the table and made a public request of Pearce, asking him preach again the next morning. With equal simplicity and zeal, he replied, “If you will find a congregation, I will find a sermon.”² The meeting was set for 5 a.m. the following day so that the local farmers could come to hear Pearce and still make it out to their duties at an early time. More than 200 people came out in the early hour to hear the twenty-seven year old preach.

After Pearce had preached the following morning Fuller commented to him at the breakfast table, “Brother Pearce, I was gratified with your discourse this morning, and

¹Michael A. G. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 25

²F. A. Cox, *History of the English Baptist Missionary Society: From A.D. 1792 to A.D. 1842* (Boston: Isaac Tompkins, 1844), 52. Henceforth the title of this book will be referred to as *History of the BMS*.

hope it will do much good; but I know you will excuse my freedom if I say, that I thought you did not seem to close when you had really finished. I wondered that, contrary to what is usual with you, you seemed, as it were, to begin again at the end, — how was it?” Pearce replied, “It was so; but I had my reason.” Fuller persisted, “Well then, come, let us have it.”³ Finally after being pushed once more Pearce paused, hesitated a little and said,

Well, my brother, you shall have the secret, if it must be so. Just at the moment I was about to resume my seat, thinking I had finished, the door opened, and I saw a poor man enter, of the working class; and from the sweat on his brow, and the symptoms of his fatigue, I conjectured that he had walked some miles to this early service, but that he had been unable to reach the place till the close. A momentary thought glanced through my mind, — here may be a man who never heard the gospel, or it may be he is one that regards it as a feast of fat things; in either case, the effort on his part demands one on mine. So with the hope of doing him good, I resolved at once to forget all else, and, in despite of criticism, and the apprehension of being thought tedious, to give him a quarter of an hour.⁴

As Haykin would later comment of Fuller and those present at the breakfast table, “they were deeply impressed by Pearce’s evident love for souls. Not afraid to appear as one lacking in preaching skill, especially in the eyes of his fellow pastors, Pearce’s zeal for the spiritual health of all his hearers had led him to minister as best he could to this ‘poor man’ who had arrived late.”⁵

³Cox, *History of the BMS*, 52, Fuller and Pearce were good friends and Fuller’s manner was said to be friendly and “jockular.”

⁴Cox, *History of the BMS*, 53. In Pearce’s preaching the salvation message of Jesus was always clear, as he said of the one who believes in Jesus, “His salvation is secure, his savior has finished his work, an infinite price has been paid for him, [and thus] when his savior rests, he will rest also.” See Samuel Pearce, “Sermon on Hebrews 4:10–11,” Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 26.

Evangelism

As the above narrative demonstrates, Pearce's deep love for souls was evident in all aspects of his life,⁶ but maybe most especially in his preaching. It was for his preaching that he was most widely known. His preaching was clearly loved by the members of the Cannon Street church, as Hale commented, "The great talent, sacred virtues, burning zeal, and unwearied labors of this man of God are known...He was indeed a rare gift of heaven to the church worshipping at Cannon-street, and in every part of his character "being dead he yet speaketh."⁷ But beyond his ministry at Cannon Street, Pearce was well loved and respected as a preacher. In the Midland association of churches to which Cannon Street Baptist Church belonged, Pearce was recognized as the chief preacher and the driving-force. He was called upon every year to preach at the annual meetings of the association, and whether he was in Tewkesbury, Upton-on-Severn, Shifnal, or Dudley "men always felt his unique Divine unction."⁸ As will be seen more in depth in later chapters Pearce was recognized as a great preacher by other Baptist associations, especially the Northampton Baptist Association, and he was also recognized as a great preacher throughout the British Isles and Ireland. Pearce's outstanding gift in the pulpit was not only marked by a burden for evangelism, but also by his biblical preaching, passion, gospel centeredness, and versatility.

⁶Pearce urged his congregation toward evangelism saying, "propagating the Gospel is a duty incumbent on all Christians." Samuel Pearce, "Sermon on Hebrews 5:11-End," Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

⁷Hale, J. E. *Cannon Street Baptist Church, Birmingham: Its History from 1737 to 1880, with Some Account of Its Pastors* (London: Elliot Stock, 1880), 10.

⁸S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce, M.A., the Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, 1913), 118.

Biblical

Pearce's sermons were richly biblical. He was a master of expounding a text fully. Though each of his six published sermons were pointed at a particular topic they were also each undeniably expositional, and not simply expositional in form but in content as well. Pearce was decidedly committed to the preaching of the Bible and to the preaching of Christ through his biblical lens. Thus his biblical expositions were filled with the glory of Jesus, his cross, resurrection, and eternal Kingdom. Jesus was the center of and the goal in Pearce's pulpit. As Fuller wrote, "That which in his view constituted the glory of the gospel was, that God is therein revealed as "the just God and the Saviour—just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."⁹ In considering the Old Testament scriptures Pearce preached, "Providence to be Christ is the only person in whom this prophecy is fulfilled – and it moves him above the angels and so Christian religion above the Jewish, how rich in meaning is the old Testament scriptures!"¹⁰

Passion

The "Seraphic Pearce," as he was called, was widely known for his passion in the pulpit. As Cox commented: "His pulpit exercises were full of heart, and free in language. They were, indeed, declamatory more than argumentative; but singularly pathetic and persuasive."¹¹ He wrote of his own preaching in a 1792 letter to Steadman, "In preaching, I have often peculiar liberty; at other times barren. I suppose my experience is like that of most of my brethren; but I am not weary of my work."¹² It is

⁹Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 3:431–32.

¹⁰Samuel Pearce, "Sermon on Hebrews 2:5–9," Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

¹¹Cox, *History of the BMS*, 51.

¹²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:372.

amazing that Pearce was not weary as his preaching schedule was daunting. William Ward once wrote of Pearce:

I am happy in the company of dear brother Pearce. I have seen more of God in him than in any other person I ever knew. Oh how happy should I be to live and die with him! When well, he preaches three times on a Lord's day, and two or three times in the week besides. He instructs the young people in the principles of religion, natural philosophy, astronomy, &c. They have a benevolent society, from the funds of which they distribute forty or fifty pounds a year to the poor of the congregation. They have a sick society for visiting the afflicted in general; a book society at chapel; a Lord's day school, at which more than two hundred children are instructed. Add to this, missionary business, visiting the people, an extensive correspondence, two volumes of mission history preparing for the press, &c.; and then you will see something of the soul of Pearce. He is every where venerated, though but a young man; and all the kind, tender, gentle affections make him as a little child at the feet of his Saviour.

Yet still Pearce continued in the previously mentioned letter to Steadman, "I hope still that I am willing to spend and be spent, so that I may win souls to Christ, and finish my course with joy."¹³

His labors proved to be blessed by God and very fruitful. Thus, in a later letter to Steadman, Pearce apologized to his friend for not replying sooner:

The word preached has lately been remarkably blessed. In less than five months I baptized nearly forty persons, almost all newly awakened. Next Lord's day week I expect to add to their number. These persons came to my house to propose the most important of all inquiries—"What must we do to be saved?" I have been thus engaged some weeks, during the greatest part of most days. This, with four sermons a week, will account for my neglect.¹⁴

It was said of Pearce's preaching "At times, he would rise into raptures, and glow like a seraph; and notwithstanding the disadvantage of a voice which failed him in his most animated moments, his oratory was irresistible."¹⁵ Pearce himself admitted that he felt

¹³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:372.

¹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:379.

¹⁵Cox, *History of the BMS*, 51–52.

freedom in the house of God in his prayers and in his preaching, and he fought for his heart to be fully devoted to God and to his work once even saying, “If I go to hell myself, I will do what I can to keep others from going thither; and so in the strength of the Lord I will.”¹⁶ His passion for God in his life overflowed in his preaching and his character perhaps best “shines forth” in his own exclamation, “O to be a Mercury, for ever rolling round and near the sun!”¹⁷

Gospel-Centered

Pearce was often accused by the hyper-Calvinists of preaching a false gospel, but as Fuller wrote it was his opponents that were really the ones guilty of falsehood. Fuller gave a nice summary of Pearce’s gospel-centeredness in the defense of his preaching from these types of attacks:

If a man, whatever be his depravity, be necessarily a free agent, and accountable for all his dispositions and actions—if gospel invitations be addressed to men, not as elect nor as non-elect, but as sinners exposed to the righteous displeasure of God—if Christ’s obedience and death rather increase than diminish our obligations to love God and one another—if faith in Christ be a falling in with God’s way of salvation, and unbelief a falling out with it—if sanctification be a progressive work, and so essential a branch of our salvation as that without it no man shall see the Lord—if the Holy Spirit instruct us in nothing by his illuminating influences but what was already revealed in the Scriptures, and which we should have perceived but for that we loved darkness rather than light—and if he incline us to nothing but what was antecedently right, or to such a spirit as every intelligent creature ought at all times to have possessed—then Mr. Pearce *did* preach the gospel; and that which his accusers call by this name is *another gospel*, and not the gospel of Christ.¹⁸

Jesus was the center of Pearce’s preaching and no matter the text Pearce reminded his hearers of their, “fresh obligations to Jesus Christ who atoned for our sins

¹⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:372–73.

¹⁷Cox, *History of the BMS*, 52.

¹⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:431.

by his blood.”¹⁹ Pearce’s confidence in preaching the gospel came from the faith that he had in God who had called him to preach and who sustained him in all things. As he wrote in a letter to Ryland after he had fallen ill with the tuberculosis that would eventually kill him, “the Lord has prepared me to receive a fresh display of his fatherly care, and his (shall I call it?) punctilious veracity. If I should be raised up again, I shall be able to preach on the faithfulness of God more experimentally than ever.”²⁰ His heart was fully devoted to God and he realized that his ability to preach was from God and for God. He said once in a letter to a Mr. Matthias in Dublin: “I rejoice that God reigns; that he reigns over all; that he reigns over *me*; over my crosses, my comforts, my family, my friends, my senses, my mental powers, my designs, my words, my preaching.”²¹ His confidence was in God alone and he knew that God had called him to preach. Even when he became ill, he took to preaching all the more, thinking “pulpit sweats” might heal him. He loved preaching the gospel to his people, but, as will be later noted, he longed throughout his whole ministry to preach the gospel in places where it had never been heard. He had confidence in the strength of God displayed through the power of the gospel that even in those places, sinners would be saved. He thus wrote in an October 28,

¹⁹Samuel Pearce, “Sermon on Hebrews 7:20,” Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University. Pearce also reminded his hearers that “the Levitical law” was only introductory only pointing to Jesus, from “Sermon on Hebrews 7:11–19” and he regularly pointed them to the confidence they ought to have in Christ. For example, “Sermon on Hebrews 7:4–10, “If Abraham gives so much by Melchizedek’s company what shall we obtain by Christ.”

²⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:423.

²¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:404.

1794 journal entry: “Still panting to preach Jesus among my fellow sinners to whom he is yet unknown.”²²

Versatility

A final characteristic of Pearce’s preaching is that it was versatile. The sermons that will be surveyed in this chapter have a very broad range. They cover everything from the explanation of complex political issues to the definition of Baptist doctrine. At times Pearce is very exegetical, but then he can quickly move to being incredibly practical. He was a gifted teacher of theology in his preaching, but he also was a great teacher of history and current events. It was very natural for the members of Cannon Street to look to him as a leader and spiritual father.

What follows in this chapter will be given over to an analysis of Pearce’s preaching. Its evangelistic nature, passionate language, gospel-centeredness, and versatility will all be displayed and analyzed through a survey of six sermons of Pearce that have been published. There is also extant a set of notes that have not been published that Pearce used to preach through the book of Hebrews. However, these are fragmented and at times unorganized and do not lend themselves to extended commentary and thus will not be considered.²³ These published sermons can be understood in three broad categories: political sermons, a funeral sermon, and doctrinal sermons.

²²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:389.

²³These sermons are only in the form skeletal outlines, and often include a very limited or very sparse section on application. It leaves one to wonder if Pearce created the application for a particular passage as he was preaching. The notes, however, do show a very organized outline that was characteristic to the preaching of Pearce.

Political Sermons

The late eighteenth century was a tumultuous time for Great Britain. In the 1790s, the British were involved in eleven different wars.²⁴ Beyond foreign trouble the country faced domestic trouble as well. The Age of Enlightenment had changed the way that people thought about themselves and their leaders, and since the early seventeenth century people had felt the freedom to challenge the status quo. Preachers were some of the chief leaders among those who spoke out on political issues, and Samuel Pearce was in a long line of Baptist preachers who had been very vocal about honoring their convictions more than their king.

Political speech or dissent however was not limited to the Baptists. Jennifer Farooq comments in her *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London*: “Eighteenth-century political sermons have received more attention from historians than any other type of sermon.”²⁵ Most of the scholarly analysis has been done on sermons delivered on specific occasions (such as anniversary days, occasional fast and thanksgiving days, or elections), but there has also been a great deal of study on sermons addressing a particular theme, or sermons before specific audiences (such as the royal court or parliament) to illuminate the political nature of these occasions or preachers’ political influence on prominent audiences.²⁶ Farooq goes on to say, “There is no doubt that the most extended and contentious political statements tended to be delivered on these significant political

²⁴“List of Wars Involving the United Kingdom,” accessed May 18, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_involving_the_United_Kingdom.

²⁵Jennifer Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK : Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 216.

²⁶Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London*, 216–17.

occasions.”²⁷ In the following two sermons by Pearce, one can see in one sermon contentious political statements, while the other was delivered on a significant political occasion.

Political Statement

*The oppressive, unjust, and prophane Nature, and Tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, Exposed,*²⁸ was preached by Pearce on February 21, 1790. This sermon thus came early in this ministry, and was preached at his own church, the Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. The sermon was preached on a Sunday but it was for a special gathering of “Protestant Dissenters” and the Committee of Seven Congregations of the three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters in Birmingham subsequently made the request for this sermon’s publication. The sermon’s text was Psalm 119:161, “Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.”²⁹

²⁷Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London*, 217. Farooq goes on to say, “The tendency to focus on anniversary and occasional sermons actually underestimates the importance of sermons in political discussions and partisan debates. Examinations of the role of sermons in developing political awareness also have not taken into account the extent to which sermons integrated with other media, such as newspapers, pamphlets and histories. Sermons had long been a source of political information, and this did not end with the advent of new sources from explosion of print. Instead, preachers adapted to this new environment.” For more information on eighteenth-century preaching, see also James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit. A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter E. McCullough, *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and Wm. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory, from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of Its Literary Aspects* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962).

²⁸From here on the title will be shortened to *Corporation and Test Acts*.

²⁹Samuel Pearce, *The Oppressive, Unjust, and Prophane Nature, and Tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, Exposed, in a Sermon, Preached Before the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, Meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, February 21, 1790. By Samuel Pearce. Printed at the Request of the Committee of the Seven Congregations of the Three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters in Birmingham* (Birmingham, England: J. Thompson; and J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London, 1790), 2–3.

The sermon was true to its title and was a very clear indictment of the Corporation and Test Acts, along with an encouragement to his hearers to remain faithful to their Christian conviction. He began the sermon by explaining David's context and likening it to their own. David was being pursued and persecuted by King Saul without cause just as the Dissenters of England were being persecuted without justifiable reason. Pearce outlined this passage concluding, "First, that David was persecuted on account of religion: but, Secondly, David declares this was no just cause for persecution—'without cause.'"³⁰ Pearce went on to say, "The inference is easy. No difference in religious opinions and practices is a justifiable cause for persecution."³¹ Pearce believed that he and his fellow dissenters were being persecuted, as they were being made to endure hardship on account of their religious opinions. Therefore Pearce openly declared that he and his fellow dissenters opposed the Test and Corporation Acts on the following grounds:

- I. They are oppressive to us as Dissenters.
- II. Injurious and disgraceful to the nation at large.
- III. Dishonourable to God, and our holy religion.³²

The Corporation Act made it illegal for a person to be placed, elected, or chosen in, or to, any office of place in any corporation that had not taken the sacrament of the Lord's Supper within one year of their election according to the rites of the Church of England.³³ Similarly, the Test Act required any person in a civil or military office,

³⁰Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 5.

³¹Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 5.

³²Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 7.

³³Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 7–8. The Corporation Act was passed in 1661.

receiving pay from the King to take the Lord's Supper from the Church of England within three months of assuming office.³⁴ Pearce saw these laws as oppressive to all dissenters as they excluded every nonconformist from a share in the executive part of the laws of the land, and rendered them "incapable of any office, of trust, or profit under government."³⁵ While these acts kept nonconformists from power they did not exclude them from paying taxes, and doing their duty as a citizen. Pearce commented that this was inconsistent with the claims of Britain to be a place of liberty. He said, "Let Dissenters no longer, while these oppressive acts remain, boast that they are Sons of Britain: no, brethren, we are rather Slaves to Britain; heavy are our burdens, and cruel our task masters!"³⁶

Pearce's second major opposition to these acts was that they were injurious and disgraceful to the nation at large. The laws limited the number of countrymen who could serve, and they also caused divisions in the country. Pearce argued that the safety of the country was in jeopardy until the laws were repealed. He further argued that the laws were a disgrace to the nation. Dissenters were good and faithful citizens, yet the nation had laws in place that excluded them. He also said that these laws caused chicanery, and deceit: "Should therefore the sovereign of Britain find ever so strong a desire, to possess a conscientious Dissenter with an office he thought him most calculated

³⁴Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 9. The Test Act was passed in 1673. King George II later changed the limit on receiving the Lord's Supper from the Church of England from three to six months.

³⁵Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 10.

³⁶Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 12.

to fill... he [the dissenter] must either recant, turn hypocrite, lose his place, or ruin himself and family.”³⁷

Finally, Pearce argued for a repeal not just as a man and citizen of Britain but as a Christian man saying, “We pursue a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, because they are dishonouring to God and our Holy religion, by prostituting the sacred ordinance of the Lord’s Supper to the purpose of qualification for civil offices.”³⁸ He went on to explain that by enforcing a sacrament of Christ, the Church of England and the King totally dishonor the Lord. He uses the Lord’s words in commanding the Lord’s Supper to argue against the laws’ legitimacy: “Jesus Christ saith, just before he was about to realize his last sufferings, ‘Do this in remembrance of me.’ The Test Acts saith in effect, ‘Before you enter on any office of emolument, or trust, Do this to *qualify* you for enjoying it.’”³⁹ He further went on to say that the Test Act held out a temptation to hundreds, entreating them to come to the table of Christ in an unworthy manner, putting them in direct disobedience of the command of Christ.⁴⁰

Pearce concluded this sermon with a passionate and emboldened plea to take a stand for the rights of mankind, not only for the enjoyment of their own generation but more so for those generations that would follow after them:

In the interval let nothing shake our fidelity to our God. Let us never sacrifice the peace of our bosoms or our duties to our Maker at the shrine of avarice or fame. Let the temptation be ever so great, still let us hold fast our integrity; ever having it in our power to say, in the language of David, If we are persecuted it is without a cause, our hearts still stand in awe of God’s word.—No, blest Redeemer! we will

³⁷Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 19–20.

³⁸Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 20.

³⁹Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 20.

⁴⁰Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 21.

never prostitute the memorials of thy death and sufferings, to obtain secular advantages—We will stand in awe of thy word which faith “as often as ye do this do it in remembrance of me.”—No, we will never go to Calvary to seek temporal emoluments! Never will we visit Gethsemane with our feet while our hearts are set on our idols! We will never make thy tomb the path to earthly preferment!—We will rather endure shame, and disgrace, contempt, and persecution, than prophane with unhallowed hands and lips, thy sacred institutions; and if through a zeal for thy honour, our enemies triumph over us; we will not return railing for railing, but teach them by our conduct, that going to the holy altar with suitable dispositions, tends to conform us more to the blest pattern thou hast exhibited in thine own person, for our imitation.⁴¹

So while clearly Pearce stood against these laws and desired them to be changed, his greater appeal was not to rebellion but to his fellow dissenters to refuse to be moved by the pressure of the laws or the culture around them. Rather, they were to remain strong in their conviction, caring more about the acknowledgement of God that they did about the acknowledgement of men. He reminds them in the following concluding words of his sermon that their light and momentary problems are not worth comparing to their coming eternal joys:

It matters not much, compared with this, whether our names are enrolled in the registers of corporations, or offices of profit or honour, under civil government; so we have but our names written in the Lamb’s book of life, and are prepared for, and by-and-by are introduced to immortal and never fading glories, in the world to come, there no more to complain of oppression, persecution, or disgrace, but exalted to the highest honours, enjoy uninterrupted tranquility, and joys, which know neither bound, nor end.⁴²

Political Occasion

Motives to Gratitude was preached by Pearce quite late in his ministry, to his own congregation in Birmingham.⁴³ It was delivered on the occasion of a public

⁴¹Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 31.

⁴²Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 32.

⁴³It was actually the second to the last sermon that Pearce would preach.

thanksgiving on Thursday November 29, 1798. The day had been set apart by George III for public gratitude after the defeat of a French invasion of Ireland in the fall of 1798, and most especially after the victory of Horatio Nelson (1758–1805) over the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile that August. These were very important military campaigns for the British; Brian Lavery calls the Battle of the Nile, “the most decisive naval victory of its age.”⁴⁴ Napoleon Bonaparte had made plans to invade Egypt in order to constrict Britain’s trade routes and to threaten its possession of India, but these plans were decisively crushed by the Nelson and his men. Nelson’s sailors saw their victory as a gift of God’s grace. As one of Nelson’s chief captains, Ralph Willett Miller (1762–1799), reported in a letter to his wife, “There being no longer an enemy to contend with, we beat the retreat and solemnly return thanks to Almighty God through whose mercy we had been instrumental in obtaining so great and glorious a victory to His Majesty’s arms.”⁴⁵ Their sentiment of gratitude spread all the way up through the ranks to the king himself so that was eager to put in place this day of thanksgiving.

Pearce chose Luke 17:15–16 as his text which tells the story of the grateful Samaritan. He began his sermon by defining a grateful heart as “a heart suitably affected with the kindness it has received from another, and expressing, to the utmost reach of language and conduct, its sense of obligation to its benefactor.”⁴⁶ He then moved to an

⁴⁴Brian Lavery, *Nelson and the Nile* (London: Endeavour Press Ltd.), locs. 46–47, Kindle.

⁴⁵Lavery, *Nelson and the Nile*, locs. 4711–13.

⁴⁶Samuel Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude: a Sermon, Delivered to the Baptist Congregation, Meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham; on Occasion of the Public Thanksgiving, Thursday, Nov. 29, 1798. By Samuel Pearce, M.A.* (Birmingham, England: Printed Belcher, 1798), 3.

exposition of the text and laid out his thesis, which was to excite his hearers' gratitude to God for the benefits that they enjoyed as men, as Christians, and as Britons.⁴⁷

Pearce urged them as men to consider the care of God over all creation, but to especially consider his kindness to men. He urged his hearers to recognize their need for God and their insignificance in comparison to him, and to improve their sense of divine obligation:

Review the conduct of divine providence towards us, from the days of helpless infancy, to the present hour. How hath his hand supplied, and his arm sustained us? With what tender and constant care hath he watched over us? From what unnumbered evils hath he saved us? And with what various and important favors hath he enriched us? And all this whilst we were either too young to reflect upon his goodness, or so abominably ungrateful as to refuse to celebrate it...O, whilst he is thus passing by us, and proclaiming his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness," may we feel the firings of our gratitude effectually touched, till every power bursts forth in unison, and the grateful song, which first founded on the hill of Zion, be refounded throughout the tribes of man. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"⁴⁸

Pearce reminded his hearers first of all about the Gospel. He walked them through a beautiful explanation of this gospel beginning with the very grace of God to reveal truth. He observed that "Christianity has been justly styled 'A religion for sinners,'"⁴⁹ and that any sinner who honestly considered his sin would be left to ask, "what must I do to be saved?"⁵⁰ He then helped his hearers to recall the just punishment that they deserved and the wrath of God that was to come upon so many who had never

⁴⁷Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 7.

⁴⁸Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 9–10.

⁴⁹Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 11.

⁵⁰Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 12.

heard the good news of the gospel. He then noted that Jesus was the great and final sacrifice for sin:

Such is the way of peace, revealed in the religion of Jesus. It admits justice It teaches the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, for the purpose of our salvation; declaring that Jesus “died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” Now this, as far as we can conceive, is the highest act of benevolence that ever engaged the attention of the universe. Our Lord speaks of it in terms, which because they are indefinite, are therefore of so much stronger import, saying, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son,” to save sinners who believe.⁵¹

Finally, he emphasized for his hearers of the work of the Holy Spirit for repentance, faith, and holiness. As Christians they had access to God, sweet communion with one another, and the blessings of being a disciple of the King.⁵²

In the final section of this thanksgiving sermon he urged his hearers to be grateful as Britons. He brought to their minds the attacks from France in Egypt and Ireland and told them that it was only God’s care that had spared them. A French victory would have totally disrupted their business and livelihood, their peaceful city of Birmingham, and their houses of worship. He took the opportunity to enumerate for them the moral failures of Britain, despite a deep knowledge of God; despite the great kindness of God, the people of their country in so many ways had forgotten about God. He also told them that the mercy of their victory was an answer to prayer: “Often from within these walls have our fervent cries arisen to the throne of God, that he would abandon us neither to civil tumults, nor hostile foreigners; and now that he hath heard our prayer, shall we refuse him praise?”⁵³

⁵¹Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 15.

⁵²Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 15–17.

⁵³Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 20–23.

He concludes the sermon with three practical applications for his hearers. He encourages them to: express a sense of obligation for the God's mercy on their country by breaking away from national sins; discover their own gratitude by endeavoring to excite that of others; and to show gratitude to God through benevolence to distressed fellow creatures, specifically the widows and orphans of those who died in battle.⁵⁴

Observation and Evaluation

These two sermons tell us a great deal about the preaching of Pearce. Both of them were defined by a topic or an event, but also they were both firmly planted in God's word and highly biblical. In both cases Pearce began with the scripture and his appeal to scripture ran throughout both sermons. In *Corporation and Test Acts* the theme of David being persecuted without cause, but continuing to love the word of God carried throughout the sermon. In *Motives to Gratitude* Pearce begins the sermon with a faithful exposition of his passage, Luke 17:15–16, in order to establish a theme of gratitude which then carries throughout that sermon. While both sermons are very biblical they are also both incredibly practical and pointed at his hearers. In *Corporation and Test Acts* Pearce very skillfully instructed his hearers on the nature of the particular legislation at hand. He was not just blindly critiquing the law, he understood the law and had thought through the laws from a Biblical worldview. His of course was an enormously helpful voice especially in a day when the resources for looking at culture through a theological lens were very limited. Likewise in *Motives to Gratitude* Pearce's sermon was very practical. His biblical sermon not only instructed his hearers on what gratitude is, it also stirred

⁵⁴Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 24.

their hearts toward gratitude, and as gave them practical applications of what gratitude does. Pearce did not only want his congregation to hear the word of God, but also for them to do the word of God.⁵⁵

Both of these sermons were also evangelistic and gospel-centered. Due to the topics at hand it would have been very easy for Pearce to abandon gospel-centeredness for the sake of clarity in addressing the unjust laws and the idea of gratitude but he did not. Jesus was clearly at the center of both sermons. In both sermons Pearce also made an appeal for repentance and faith. In *Corporation and Test Acts* Pearce concluded by reminding his hearers of the glorious “by-and-by” with “never fading glories,”⁵⁶ and his whole third point was for people to “go to Calvary” in the taking of the Lord’s supper for King Jesus, not for King George. In *Motives to Gratitude* Pearce’s second point is a call to gratitude for the salvation of God and as mentioned above he walks his hearers through an incredibly faithful presentation of the gospel, lifting up Jesus as the one who is worthy of all.⁵⁷

⁵⁵It is interesting that in Pearce’s plea for his hearers to show benevolence to their distressed fellow creatures he does not mention the French who were defeated. He does mention the widows and orphans of those who have fallen in defense of Britain but not the widows and orphans of those Frenchmen who were attacking. It is interesting that this preacher who had such a concern for the souls of all men, and for the salvation of the nations, did not urge his hearers toward benevolence or prayers for the defeated French. He did mention these fallen French earlier in his sermon, reminding his hearers of the blood of Christ that was spilled on their behalf saying, “Since in that sacred volume, which I revere as the fair gift of heaven, to man, I am taught, that ‘of one blood God hath made all nations,’ it is impossible for me not to regard every man as my brother, and to consider, that national differences ought not to excite personal animosities. Let a human soul be disembodied, and to what nation—to what colour, to what clime does it then belong? Let it have tenanted what body it may, it is vast in its capacities, it is immortal in its duration; and who, with these sentiments, can reflect on the combustion of the French Admiral’s ship in the late action, when a thousand immortal souls—(alas, how few prepared for the event!) were in a moment precipitated into eternity, without a groan!” See Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 19.

⁵⁶Pearce, *Corporation and Test Acts*, 32.

⁵⁷Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 10–17.

Gospel-centeredness kept these sermons balanced. In the first sermon Pearce was heavily critiquing the government and the laws of the land, yet in the second sermon Pearce was participating in a day of thanksgiving issued by the King himself and even urging his hearers to thank God for their country. This kind of balance is only possible from a preacher who does not bow to idols but is firmly planted in the gospel. Pearce did not serve the idol of patriotism, or the idol of being “anti-establishment;” he served Jesus and his Kingdom, a Kingdom that cuts through any establishment on earth. For this reason Pearce could both critique his country for its ills and praise his country for its good. In *Motives to Gratitude* he actually does both in the same sermon, and even in the same section of the sermon.⁵⁸

Lastly, these sermons, true to the nature of Pearce, were filled with deep passion. Both sermons were organized and rich in content but they were also filled with passion. For example, in *Corporation and Test Acts* Pearce was able to move from a very tedious and detailed explanation of the legislation to an emboldened plea that his hearers take a stand and let nothing shake their fidelity to God. Also, *Motives to Gratitude* includes impassioned and rapturous praise for the goodness, and power, and worthiness of God: “Praise ye the Lord! Praise God in the sanctuary. Kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth. Both young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord—who hath raised up an horn of salvation.

⁵⁸In the third section of this sermon Pearce opens with these words, “Though the blessings we enjoy as Christians claim our highest praise, yet much gratitude is due from us as Britons; and as we are invited by the supreme magistrate to national thanksgiving, on this day, I should ill answer the end of our meeting did I not take notice of national mercies. It is to be greatly lamented that we are more disposed to discontent on account of what we have not, than to gratitude for what we enjoy.” He then goes on to correct his country for their failure in gratitude and praise. See Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 17–20.

Praise ye the Lord.”⁵⁹ Pearce had the incredible ability to bring to life and to stir the soul even when discussing the most tedious things. And the passion in these sermons was sure to have been felt long after they were preached.

Funeral Sermon

Reflections on the Character and State of departed Christians is not a funeral sermon per se. It was a sermon given by Samuel Pearce “occasioned by the decease of the Reverend Caleb Evans, D.D.” Evans had been the pastor of the Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol and the president of the Bristol Baptist College since 1781 when he succeeded his own father Hugh Evans after the latter’s death. The younger Evans had been Pearce’s chief tutor during his time at school, and he was well loved and admired by his student. On May 23, 1791, Evans was suddenly stricken with paralysis and his conditioned worsened over the months following, eventually leading to a second attack of paralysis in August 7 and death on August 9, 1791 in Bristol.⁶⁰ This sermon was preached nearly a month later on September 4, 1791 in Birmingham for the Cannon Street congregation. The sermon was really more of a memorial sermon than it was a funeral sermon. Pearce wanted the members of his own congregation to appreciate the departed Evans who had had such a deep impact on the young preacher’s life and on the Baptist denomination at large.

A prevalent feature among eighteenth-century dissenting funeral sermons or memorial sermons was the inclusion of a scriptural text that was preselected by the

⁵⁹Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 16.

⁶⁰George Pryce, *A Popular History of Bristol* (Bristol, England: Mack, 1861), 187.

deceased.⁶¹ In Pearce's own funeral sermon preached by John Ryland in 1799 no such passage is highlighted,⁶² but the sermon that Pearce preached for Evans was clearly an expositional sermon preached from a particular text. It is unknown if Pearce chose this text on his own, or if Evans and Pearce had discussed the text before he died, as Pearce simply says, "I know of no scripture more suited to direct such an effort, than that you find recorded"⁶³ in John 11:11, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth."

Pearce began his sermon with an exposition of the text and told the story of Jesus' encounter with his disciples when he received the news of Lazarus' illness. Jesus referred to his death as "sleep" and it was this language that guided Pearce's exposition of the text and his eulogy on Evans's life. He said that his goals in the sermon were twofold: for he and his congregation to "assist our reflections on the character of a true Christian, living; and secondly, on the state of a true Christian, when dead."⁶⁴

Pearce gave three sub-points to his delineation of the character of a true Christian. The first was that a "true Christian" is called the "friend" of Jesus. He then went on to define what it meant to be a friend, saying that a friend of Jesus holds Christ

⁶¹Penny Pritchard, "The Protestant Funeral Sermon in England, 1688–1800," *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon, 1689–1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 326.

⁶²John Ryland and J. Brewer, *The Promised Presence of Christ with His People a Source of Consolation Under the Most Painful Bereavements. A Sermon Delivered at the Baptist Meeting-House, Cannon-Street, Birmingham, On Lord's-Day Evening, October 20, 1799; Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Samuel Pearce, A.M. Late Pastor of the Church Assembling There, Who Died October 10, in the Thirty-Fourth Year of His Age. By John Ryland, D. D. To Which Is Prefixed an Oration Delivered at the Grave, October 16, 1799, by the Rev. J. Brewer* (Clipstone, UK: Morris, 1800). Ryland's sermon for Pearce is richly biblical and gospel-centered, but the sermon was not preached from one particular passage in the way that each of Pearce's published and unpublished sermons were preached.

⁶³Samuel Pearce, *Reflections on the Character and State of Departed Christians in a Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Caleb Evans . . . Preached in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, September 4, 1791. By Samuel Pearce* (Birmingham, England: J. Belcher, 1791), 6.

⁶⁴Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 8.

in high esteem, loves other followers of Jesus, and is deeply interested in the interests of Christ. He went on to point out the evidences in Caleb Evans's life that he was a true friend of God. Evans held Jesus in the highest esteem, as Pearce noted: "Eminently a friend to Jesus, the honors of his person, the deity of his nature, and the glory of his mediatorial office he warmly and ably defended, both in public discourses, and private conversation."⁶⁵ Pearce went on to describe Evan's love for other believers:

He despised no man; he loved all as the creatures of God, and was at all times happy to promote their welfare; but especially he loved the household of faith. In him the indigent believer always found a friend ready to weep in his sorrows, direct him in his difficulties, and assist him in all his necessities. Many instances are still present to the recollection of his friends, wherein the fatherless have found in him a father, and by extraordinary exertions he hath made the widows heart to sing for joy.⁶⁶

Last, in this review of Evans's friendship with Jesus, Pearce gave an overview of Evans's life's work and duties, showing that Evans' interests were in line with the interests of Christ. He said, "For the interest of Christ at large, how great his concern it is impossible to say."⁶⁷ He went on to outline the many duties of Evans; pastor, college president, associational leader, author, theologian, and teacher and how they were all pointed at the glory of Christ. Expert historian on the English protestant dissent, Penny Pritchard, wrote that the funeral sermons of the eighteenth century were a great window into the daily life of the preachers of that era.⁶⁸ While this sermon supports her thesis and shows

⁶⁵Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 14.

⁶⁶Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 15.

⁶⁷Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 15.

⁶⁸Pritchard goes on to say, "A disproportionately high number of dissenting funeral sermons were published from that era so these provide a very good window into the daily patterns of men from that time." Pritchard, "The Protestant Funeral Sermon in England, 1688–1800," 328.

characteristics common to the other funeral and memorial sermons of that era, Evans's was no common life. This was an extraordinary man who deeply loved his Lord.

Pearce's second major point or goal in this sermon was to consider the state of a true Christian, when dead, which was to be asleep. Pearce said that this sleep meant three things for the Christian. First Pearce said that sleep led their thoughts to inactivity. Evans was no longer man, master, husband, parent, minister, author, friend, tutor, or apologist that he had been so busy being; sleep meant that Evans had found rest. Pearce also said that sleep meant that Evans had found relief from pain. For months Evans had been in great pain, paralyzed and dealing with a failing body, but upon his falling asleep in Christ all of that pain instantly and forever relieved.⁶⁹ Finally, Pearce preached that sleep was a reference to the resurrection. Just as Jesus had called the "sleeping" Lazarus back to life, so Jesus would one day call Evans to a resurrected life. At this point Pearce's preaching became emboldened and most dramatic:

The trumpet shall sound—that life-giving sound shall awake his sleeping dust;—quickened by the power of God, he shall shake off his robes of mortality;—his body, now in a state of corruption, shall be fashioned like unto Christ's own glorious body; arrayed in garments of immortality, he meets his coming Lord in the air. On him his Lord shall smile, on him bestow a crown, even a crown of righteousness, which fadeth not away. His happy spirit now joins the myriads of kindred spirits,—the spirits of just men made perfect, in contemplating the mysterious glories of the incarnate God, and participating of the pleasures which flow from the eternal throne.⁷⁰

Observation and Evaluation

When considering this memorial sermon for Caleb Evans it is important to note that Pearce did not just jump into a display of Evans's character but he got there

⁶⁹Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 21–28.

through the preaching of a biblical text. Even this “memorial” for a man was rooted in scripture and centered on Jesus. It was a sermon that was biblically-driven and gospel-centered. Typical of a nonconformist preacher, Samuel Pearce was able to expose pages of truth from one simple biblical phrase, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.”

This sermon also displayed Pearce’s meticulous organization in preaching. Pearce’s sermons were beautifully outlined leaving no room for confusion on what he was trying to communicate. In this particular sermon Pearce had two main points each with three sub-points. Beneath the sub-points were other points of support and explanation. This structure grew together into a faithful, well reasoned, and aesthetically pleasing sermon. This was true of each of Pearce’s published sermons. This kind of logical structure coupled with Pearce’s passion and skill with the English language make reading his sermons a very fulfilling task.

The “Seraphic Pearce” fills this sermon for his friend Evans with a particular passion and personal love. He was squarely confident in the salvation or friendship with Jesus that Evans enjoyed:

Such a light in the gospel hemisphere, we might have thought would have been long continued to illuminate and refresh the churches! Such a friend to Christ, to his people, to his cause, we would have wished long to have enjoyed!—but wise heaven otherwise decreed. This star will shine on earth no more! This friend shall no more exert himself on earth for Jesus!⁷¹

The sermon in so many ways honored Evans as a man, minister, friend, and, particularly applicable to Peace, tutor, Pearce said, “The pious tutor no more trains up the youthful

⁷⁰Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 30.

⁷¹Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 18.

mind.... His exertions for their improvement in useful knowledge and heavenly virtue; his efforts to fit them for usefulness...cease—and cease forever.”⁷²

The sermon, though a memorial, has the same kind of evangelistic thrust, gospel-centeredness, and passion that was common in other examples of Pearce’s preaching. Jesus as always was the focal point of Pearce’s sermon and the sinners’ hope of redemption in the work of Christ was paramount. As he wrote, “In one instant all the Saints of the Lord shall feel his almighty influence, and live to die no more: for as we are planted together in the likeness of our Saviour’s death, so shall we be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”⁷³ As Pearce spoke of Evans and his friendship with Jesus he was also inviting his hearers to enjoy that friendship through the power of the gospel. In urging his hearers to faith in the hope of the resurrection he pleaded, “The resurrection opens up to us a light to cheer us amidst all the gloom of mortality. Who would be unwilling to tread the valley of the shadow of death, whilst he believed it the path to a better and immortal life?”⁷⁴ While faithfully teaching the passage, and sincerely eulogizing his friend and mentor, Pearce pleads with his hearers to believe and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, concluding his sermon with a final Kingdom cry for those in Christ to be faithful in what they have been called to do until they see the face of their Savior, and until their days of service are complete:

And feeling the Lord is removing his ministers from the church (and he has removed many of late) how doth it behove their hearers to give attention to their sacred message, whilst they have them to attend upon. And how should we, who in providence are called to that important work, labor to fill up our time in our

⁷²Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 21.

⁷³Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 31.

⁷⁴Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 31.

Master's service; that whenever our Lord may come, we may be found in his employ, and meeting his approbation, be removed from this uncertain state, to the world of uninterrupted bliss, amidst the joys of saints, the shouts of angels, and the smiles of God.⁷⁵

Doctrinal Sermons

Throughout the history of the church, Christian preaching has been necessarily linked with Christian doctrine. It is no wonder then that half of Pearce's six published sermons were centered on doctrine. The first was preached in 1794 and was on Christian baptism. That same year there were only an estimated 20,000 Baptist church members in all of England. While there were most likely several thousand more whose record was unknown, it was still a very small group compared to the more than eight million people living in the country at that time.⁷⁶ Baptists were regarded as strangers and aliens in their time, but believer's baptism by immersion was a central belief in Baptist life. Baptism was a ceremony of great moment, one that Baptists believed could not be separated from entry into the church, for it was understood to be the biblical mode of Christian initiation. Baptism was both a public proclamation of faith and a valued way of having fellowship with the Savior who died and rose again.⁷⁷

The second area of doctrine that Pearce addressed in a published sermon was on the doctrine of the ministry. It is found in a sermon that he gave as a part of an

⁷⁵Pearce, *Reflections on the Character*, 32.

⁷⁶Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 151.

⁷⁷David W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press), locs. 2950–54, Kindle.

ordination service in 1796.⁷⁸ Baptists had a high view of the ministry. A church without pastoral leadership was anomalous. As will be seen in the presentation of Pearce's sermon, ordination was a public and formal occasion, attended by ministers from adjacent churches and solemnized by the laying of hands on the candidate. And as previously mentioned in the case of Pearce, in order to avoid the ordination of the unfit, a pastor would officiate in his church for some time, sometime for a few years, before being called by the church to submit to ordination.⁷⁹ Churches took great care to not only safeguard themselves against false teaching and poor leadership, but they also believed that they had a responsibility to raise up future church leaders. Furthermore, it was generally accepted that only the ordained could administer the Lord's supper. As Bebbington notes: "John Gill, the chief authority on church order in the eighteenth century, stipulated not only that a private member should be prohibited from presiding at the Lord's table but also that a minister should not officiate at the ceremony in a church other than his own."⁸⁰

Finally, Pearce preached on the doctrine of scripture and the need to bring children up in the knowledge of scripture by the means of Sunday School. Pearce and his contemporaries had a very high view of Scripture, as Andrew Fuller wrote,

⁷⁸John Ryland, and Samuel Pearce, *The Duty of Ministers to Be Nursing Fathers to the Church and the Duty of Churches to Regard Ministers As the Gift of Christ: a Charge, Delivered by The Rev. John Ryland, D. D. of Bristol; and a Sermon, Delivered by The Rev. S. Pearce, M.A. of Birmingham; in the Dissenters Meeting-House, Angel-Street, Worcester; at the Ordination of the the Rev. W. Belsher, to the Pastorate of the Baptist Church, Meeting in Silver-Street, in the Same City: Together with An Introductory Address, By the Rev. G. Osborn, and Also Mr. Belsher's Declaration of Religious Sentiments* (Birmingham, England: Belcher, 1796). Henceforth this sermon shall be referred to as *Duty of Churches*.

⁷⁹Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, locs. 2936–40, Kindle.

⁸⁰Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, locs. 2940–42, Kindle.

It is certain that those who wrote the books which compose the Old and New Testaments profess to have been Divinely inspired. “The Spirit of God spake by me, and his word was in my tongue: the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me.—The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, &c.—Thus saith the Lord.—All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.—Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.—The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” We must, therefore, either admit these writings to be the word of God, or consider them as mere imposture. To pretend to “venerate them as authentic records of the dispensation of God,” and yet deny their inspiration, is absurd; it is believing the writers in what they say of other subjects, and disbelieving them in what they say of themselves. If their writings be not what they profess them to be, they are imposture, and deserve to be rejected.⁸¹

It was this high view of the inspiration of God’s word and the sufficiency of scripture that led Pearce to desire the training of children at a young age through Sunday School. The Sunday School Society had been founded in England in 1785 mainly through the efforts of two laymen, William Fox (1736–1826) and Robert Raikes (1725–1811). Fox was a deacon at Abraham Booth’s church, the church where Pearce preached the sermon to be discussed. This society was ecumenical from the start with committee members drawn equally from all dissenting denominations. In the early days of this society they had a great need for help in terms of building awareness, recruiting workers, and in raising money.⁸²

Christian Baptism

The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Baptism; with Some Historical Remarks on that Subject was preached by Samuel Pearce on April 20, 1794 at the Baptist meeting house in Harvey-Lane, Leicester. Twelve people in that church had come to faith in Jesus and Pearce had been invited to preach at their baptismal service. Just a year before

⁸¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:699.

⁸²Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 137.

the church had sent their pastor, William Carey, to India to serve as the first missionary of the modern missions movement and Pearce attributed God's favor upon them as approval of their generosity, as he wrote,

Your generous acquiescence in the removal of a man you so deservedly esteemed, has not been forgotten by Him whose cause you have made this sacrifice to promote. Regard, my brethren, your recent prosperity as a proof of your divine Saviour's approbation, and be encouraged cheerfully to make any future sacrifice to which providence may call you.⁸³

Pearce's text was Acts 28:22, "But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for, as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." Pearce explained that "these words were addressed to the Apostle Paul, by some of the principal Jews in Rome, when he was sent from Jerusalem a prisoner to that city."⁸⁴ Pearce was preaching in a day, as previously mentioned, when people who held to the conviction of believer's baptism made up a very small minority of the population and they were also "spoken against." This sermon was encouraging not only to those persons being baptized in Leicester in April of 1794, but it was also apparently encouraging to generations of Baptists in the years that followed, as evidenced in the fact that this sermon was reprinted at least three times between 1794 and 1825.⁸⁵

Pearce began the sermon with an exposition of his text and then quickly applied the passage to their current situation. He wrote, "I feel myself this morning in

⁸³Samuel Pearce, *The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Baptism: With Some Historical Remarks on That Subject; in a Sermon, Preached on the 20th of April, 1794, at the Baptism of Twelve Persons on a Profession of Faith and Repentance, at the Baptist Meeting-House in Harvey-Lane, Leicester: Published at the Unanimous Request of the Church, and Many Individuals in the Congregation* (New York: N.p., 1825), 5. Henceforth this sermon title will be shortened to, *Christian Baptism*.

⁸⁴Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 7.

⁸⁵The sermon was published by Belcher in Birmingham in 1794 and again in 1806, and then printed in Birmingham and reprinted in New York in 1825.

some respects circumstanced like the Apostle of the Gentiles: I appear a Teacher of a sect almost every where spoken against, not only in private circles, but in public assemblies.”⁸⁶ Pearce and those being baptized at the church at Harvey Lane believed that “Jesus Christ has limited this ordinance to persons professing faith and repentance; and that the primitive and scriptural way of administering it, is by the immersion of the whole body in water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”⁸⁷ In this sermon Pearce thus endeavored to defend the beliefs that first, baptism should be administered by immersion only, and second, that baptism should be confined to those who make a personal profession of faith and repentance.⁸⁸

On the point that baptism should be administered only by immersion, Pearce gave four major reasons. First, he said, “to immerse, is the primary signification of the word employed by Christ, to express the act of Baptism,”⁸⁹ and that this term was used by Christ in the giving of his commission. Second, Pearce pointed to the account of Christ being baptized in the Jordan River and cited Matthew 3:16, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.”⁹⁰ Third, Pearce pointed to baptism by immersion as the primitive practice and that the biblical accounts of baptism took place in particular places that were chosen because they had much water. Finally, Pearce pointed to significance of baptism for the New Testament and said its meaning was only congruent with immersion; as he said, “The Apostle Paul, in his Epistles, both to the

⁸⁶Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 8.

⁸⁷Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 9.

⁸⁸Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 9.

⁸⁹Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 10.

Romans and Colossians, compares it to a burial, which every child knows is the covering of the body entirely; not casting a few particles of earth upon it.”⁹¹ Pearce then gave a very thorough history of the development of the practice of sprinkling. He showed how the churches abandonment of the biblical teaching of immersion happened gradually and concluded by saying, “On the whole it appears, that the appreciating of inward religion at too low a rate, and the exterior of Christianity too highly, gave birth to that general departure from the apostolic mode of baptizing, which we now lament, and wish is possible to reform.”⁹²

Pearce’s second major point in this sermon was to “justify the limitation of this ordinance to persons professing faith and repentance.”⁹³ He gave three major sub-points. First, he stressed that the bible never commanded that any other kind of person apart one who was regenerate be baptized. Second, that the only biblical examples of baptism are of those who expressed repentance and faith, and third that only those who express repentance and faith can fulfill the great end for which baptism was appointed.⁹⁴ Regarding the first sub-point he pointed his hearers to the Great Commission of Christ (Matt 28:19–20), saying that baptism was of the highest order in this commission and was an essential part of disciple making. To justify his second sub-point Pearce gave an exhaustive survey of the passages in the New Testament that dealt with baptism or that

⁹⁰Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 12.

⁹¹Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 13.

⁹²Pearce noted that Baptism had been deemed so absolutely necessary to salvation, that when no water was near, it has been administered with sand; at other times it had been given to the dead, and frequently the genius of the compassionate had been exercised in devising means for baptizing unborn babies, whose lives might have been endangered in their delivery. Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 17.

⁹³Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 17.

narrated the story of a person or a group of people being baptized. In preaching his third sub-point he defended the idea that only those who profess Christ can achieve the end for which baptism exists. As he said,

The precise design of our Lord in appointing it [baptism] appears to be noticed by Paul, Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;” that is, by profession. It is a public expression of our embracing the religion of Jesus Christ, and our desire and design of surrendering ourselves entirely to his service.⁹⁵

He then went on to use the catechism of the Church of England to rhetorically ask, if repentance and faith are deemed requirements for a person to be baptized, how is this repentance and faith to be applied to or seen in an infant child?⁹⁶

In the final major section of Pearce’s sermon he gave a historical defense of his position on Baptism and encouraging news on the growth of the Baptist church, as he wrote,

In America, where it was once a crime, there were in 1790, near 900 congregations; above 1,100 ordained and licensed ministers, and more than 66,000 persons of this profession; and though there had been no remarkable revival in the preceding twelve months, yet 1,500 members had been added to the churches, and 30 new churches constituted; and, blessed be God, there is one negro church in Africa, and adult Christians, baptized on profession of faith, are the only constituents of this Christian society.⁹⁷

He concluded his sermon with a few basic remarks appealing to the command of Jesus in the Bible for baptism, and to the importance of baptism in Christian worship. He then honored those who were coming before the church in obedience to the command of Christ, as he said, “If a public dedication to Christ be calculated to honour our divine

⁹⁴Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 17.

⁹⁵Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 24.

⁹⁶Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 25.

master, the candidates for baptism this morning have a claim on your respect, and their conduct is worthy of your imitation.”⁹⁸

Ordination Sermon

The Duty of Churches to regard Ministers as the Gift of Christ was a sermon given by Samuel Pearce at a meeting house in Worcester on the occasion of the ordination of W. Belsher to the pastorate of the Baptist Church in the same city. Pearce’s sermon was coupled with a charge, *The Duty of Ministers to be nursing Fathers to the Church*, delivered by his friend John Ryland of Bristol.⁹⁹ In the order of the service that day Pearce’s sermon came at the conclusion.¹⁰⁰ He preached from Ephesians 4:11, “He gave some—pastors and teachers,” and his words were pointed mainly at the members of the Silver Street Church as to how they were to receive and care for their minister that the Lord had graciously given them.¹⁰¹

Pearce began his sermon with a humble tone but preached with incredible boldness to the congregation. In his usual form he began with an exposition and explanation of the passage as he connected the words of Paul in Ephesians 4 with the prophecy of Jeremiah and showed his hearers God’s plan to give the church the gift of ministers: “The passage I have selected, places your minister exactly in that point of view, in which you cannot behold him without respect:, at the same time that it secures you

⁹⁷Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 33.

⁹⁸Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 33.

⁹⁹Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 2.

¹⁰⁰Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 4.

¹⁰¹Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 40.

from esteeming the servant above his Lord: it teaches you to regard him as a gift; but, at the same time, a gift not to be despised; for, he is the gift of Christ.”¹⁰² Pearce then drew four remarks from the passage for them to consider. First, Pearce showed the congregation that the Ephesians passage suggested “the care which the blessed redeemer exercises care over his church upon earth.”¹⁰³ Even though the life of a Christian is often filled with hardship and pain, Pearce argued that it was the minister that God gave to care for his people. He went on to say that even if the pastor himself is taken away through persecution or even through a natural death, God was faithful to provide his church often with “those who have excelled their predecessors in piety, wisdom, and success.”¹⁰⁴

Second, Pearce told the church that because ministers are considered to be a gift of God, the people who have been given a faithful pastor are thus obligated with a peculiar gratitude.¹⁰⁵ The congregation at Silver Street had been looking for a pastor for five years and God had answered their prayers, Pearce urged them thus to give thanks. He said, “many churches in the same situation have been waiting and praying for a similar blessing; our brother might have been given to them instead of you; consider yourselves as peculiarly favored, and be peculiarly grateful.”¹⁰⁶

Third, Pearce said that if ministers are the gifts from Christ then they ought to be highly esteemed for the sake of Christ.¹⁰⁷ He said, “True friendship prizes a gift more

¹⁰²Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 42.

¹⁰³Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 42.

¹⁰⁴Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 44.

¹⁰⁵Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 45.

¹⁰⁶Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 45.

for the giver's sake, than for its intrinsic value; and, though I would not suggest that ministers have a less claim on the affections and respect of a people than other good men; yet, it is as the gifts of Christ, that they demand peculiar regard."¹⁰⁸ He told them that it was as they held on to this idea of their minister being a gift from Jesus, that they should be able to forgive his shortcomings by burying them in his virtues, or by covering them with love.¹⁰⁹

Pearce's fourth observation of the text was by far his longest exhortation to his Worcester listeners: "This is the last observation I shall make on the sentiment of the text, and to this I wish more amply to engage your attention."¹¹⁰ If ministers are the gifts of Christ, he told them, then the congregation should seek to prize the minister for the work to which he has been called.¹¹¹ He then went on to give five exhortations as to how, as a congregation, they were to prize—in his words "improve"—their minister.

The first exhortation from Pearce was that the church members pray for their minister, pray for his heart and holiness, and pray for his work.¹¹² Second, Pearce urged them to "make your minister's work as easy to him as your can."¹¹³ Under this exhortation Pearce urged them to remunerate their minister well and to be sure to guard his time. If they wanted to take care of the gift that God had given them, then they would

¹⁰⁷Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 46.

¹⁰⁸Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 46.

¹⁰⁹Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 46.

¹¹⁰Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 47.

¹¹¹ Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 47.

¹¹²Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 48–49.

¹¹³Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 49.

enable him to live comfortably even as “God takes care for oxen”¹¹⁴ and they would guard his time from frivolous work.¹¹⁵ Third, Pearce told them that if they wanted to “improve” the gifts of their pastor they would be present at all of the services of the church. “You must duly attend the sacred ordinances that he administers,”¹¹⁶ he said, for “public ordinances will be followed with little profit, unless you seriously attend to ministerial instruction, and devoutly engage in divine worship.”¹¹⁷ Fourth, Pearce told the congregation that they could not prize the gift of a pastor, unless they embraced the truth he delivers and yielded themselves to his biblically-driven leadership.¹¹⁸ Here Pearce urged the congregation to trust their pastor, to submit to his leadership, and to respect his calling and experience. Pearce’s final point was that in order for the congregation to improve their minister they ought to render his as “extensive” of a blessing as they could. As he said, “He is given by Christ ‘to edify,’ that is, to build the church of God, to put more stones into the sacred edifice, that the superstructure may rise.”¹¹⁹

Scripture and Training

An Early Acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures was preached by Pearce on behalf of the Walworth Charity and Sunday School for Poor Boys at the Particular

¹¹⁴Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 51.

¹¹⁵Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 51–52.

¹¹⁶Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 52.

¹¹⁷Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 53.

¹¹⁸Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 54.

¹¹⁹Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 59.

Baptist Church of Little Prescott-Street, London on August 13, 1797.¹²⁰ The proceeds from the sale of the sermon were to be given to the school. Pearce preached from 2 Timothy 3:15, “And that from a child thou has known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” and he urged those present to give their support to the cause of Sunday Schools.

Even though this is a plea for support it is also very much an exposition of the text. Pearce said, “In our text, and its connexion, the apostle commends the scriptures to our regard on three accounts.”¹²¹ First, said Pearce, there is “the divinity of their origin.”¹²² For Pearce the Bible was not simply the wisdom of men but it was the very wisdom of God himself. Second, Pearce went on, the Holy Scriptures are pure and “like their divine author, are pure light, and in them is no darkness at all.”¹²³ Third, Pearce said that the Scriptures were full of great benefit, namely that they were able to make one wise unto salvation.¹²⁴

Pearce then moved to an explanation of the gospel of grace and a plea for sinners to find the hope of the gospel as is revealed in the Bible. As he noted: “In these sacred pages too we find the God of mercy kindly inviting us, guilty as we are, to ‘come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and obtain grace to help in time

¹²⁰Samuel Pearce, *An Early Acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures Recommended in a Sermon in Behalf of the Walworth Charity and Sunday-Schools for Poor Boys; Preached at Mr. Booth's Meeting-House . . . London, August 13, 1797; by the Rev. Samuel Pearce, A.M* (Clipstone, UK: Morris, 1800), 2. Henceforth this sermon title will be shortened to *Early Acquaintance*.

¹²¹Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 8.

¹²²Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 8.

¹²³Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 8–9.

¹²⁴Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 9.

of need.”¹²⁵ He went on to explain the person and work of Jesus, and the necessity of faith in him in order to find life. For the man who has been saved through his faith in Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible, God grants him divine wisdom: “How desirable is this wisdom which cometh down from above! How blessed the man whose bosom it illuminates, enraptures, and exalts!”¹²⁶ After a compelling explanation of the beauty and usefulness of Scripture, Pearce transitioned to urging his listeners to consider the benefits of Sunday Schools:

Yet easy of acquisition as this wisdom may be, it is not limited in its duration, nor feeble in its influence; like the benevolent institution of Sunday Schools, whereby children the most ignorant and wretched are prepared for activity and usefulness in maturer years, when they may reduce the instructions given them to practice; so, the knowledge of the scriptures is preparatory both to a life of goodness, and a heaven of blessedness.¹²⁷

Pearce then explained the usefulness and necessity of training up children in the Bible. Surprisingly he gave his listeners the example of Islam where children were trained in the reading of the Qur’an from a young age as a model to follow. He reminded them of the then-recent disturbances of the Gordon Riots in London and the Priestley Riots in Birmingham and predicted that children who were better educated in the Bible would be less inclined toward mob rule.¹²⁸ He emphasized that knowledge of Scripture among the poor of England would lead to less poverty and fewer societal ills. His final exhortation in this section was to give them biblical examples and historical examples of

¹²⁵Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 11.

¹²⁶Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 14.

¹²⁷Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 16.

¹²⁸Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 17–20. Pearce reminded them of the events of 1780 in London and of 1791 in Birmingham, which were references to these two riots. For more information on the Priestley Riots, see chap. 2.

men that God had used in mighty ways who gained knowledge of the Bible from their earliest years including Moses, Jeremiah, and Timothy.¹²⁹ Pearce concluded the sermon by exhorting his listeners to support the society and Sunday Schools in general, but also to keep watch over their own souls. The sermon ended with this strong warning and gospel plea that all of his hearers be confident in their own salvation:

Friends and Benefactors! We shall meet these children in another world. We shall see some of them, I hope, among the followers of the Lamb: and if so, we shall hear them bless God for having given them the Holy Scriptures, and the means of understanding them. And should we also be of that happy company, the remembrance of having been instrumental in their salvation, will add to the numerous sources of our enjoyment. But let us take heed, lest while we have contributed to make others wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, we ourselves should have our portion with the unbelievers. If unhappiness could have place in heaven, surely it would be in the heart of a child saved by means of early instruction, who would see his instructor, or benefactor lost!¹³⁰

Observation and Evaluation

The doctrinal sermons of Pearce provide helpful insight into who he was as a preacher. They were sermons preached in three very different settings, with very different audiences, and with very different purposes, yet they all displayed the characteristics common to the preaching of Pearce. He had an ability to speak to the moment with clear and passionate conviction. His depth of thought and organization of his thoughts made each of these sermons powerful. In his biblical preaching Pearce joined clear and precise logic with deep passion and rhetorical skill that made his sermons compelling.

First, in each of the three sermons Pearce began with the text, and was faithful to the text throughout the sermon. Beyond an explanation of the passage, Pearce was

¹²⁹Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 24.

able to stress the posture, tone, and goal of the text throughout these sermons. In *Christian Baptism*, for example, he preached from Acts 28:22, which was a challenge from Roman Jews to the Christianity of Paul. Paul responded to the challenge that he received by giving a gracious, biblical, and logical defense and this is exactly the posture that Pearce took throughout his sermon. In *Duty of Churches* Pearce took his text from Ephesians 4:11, “He gave some—pastors and teachers,” and throughout this sermon Pearce was able to find the note of gift-giving in the text. The exhortations that Pearce gave the church at Silver Street were totally natural when rightly viewed through the lens of understanding their preacher as a gift, and Pearce was able to set this tone from the very beginning of his sermon. In *Early Acquaintance*, Pearce preached from 2 Timothy 3:15 on the power of the Scriptures. If the message of the Scriptures is powerful enough to save sinners, then the inferred goal of this passage is that those who believe the scriptures ought to faithfully teach them to others. In all of these sermons we see that biblical preaching has to do with more than just explaining the mechanics of a particular text. It has to do with understanding the context, tone, and goal of a particular passage. In his ability to do this Pearce was able to bring the full weight of the Bible to bear when he preached.

Each of these sermons was doctrinal and very practical but they were also, true to the nature of Pearce, gospel-centered and evangelistic. The gospel is central throughout *Christian Baptism* and as he explained that repentance and faith are necessary for baptism, Pearce was calling his hearers to the same repentance and faith. Throughout *Duty of Churches* Pearce presented the kindness of Christ that draws men to repentance.

¹³⁰Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 32–33.

He concluded the sermon by exhorting the members of the Silver Street to take part in the filling of the church with those who are yet to believe the gospel:

By the awakening, the enlightening, the renewing of such as these, seek to build up that part of the church to which you particularly belong. Look into your families; are there none of this description there? Reflect on the character of your neighbors—are there none among them? These are the persons, whom, by every affectionate persuasion, you must compel to come in, that the Lord' house may be filled.¹³¹

As he urged them to stay strong in this ministry of evangelism he reminded them to keep the eternal Kingdom in mind, and to “join the happy and affectionate apostle in saying, What is my hope? What is my joy? What is my crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?”¹³² Pearce seems to have regularly ended his sermons with an eschatological appeal. Thus, Pearce even ended his appeal on behalf of Sunday Schools by urging his hearers to take a record of their own soul and to be sure that their faith was in Jesus so that they would join their students in the Kingdom of Christ.¹³³ For Pearce, Christianity was not just a good religious system that helped men to do good deeds. Rather, it was always centered on Jesus, on his cross, his resurrection and on the new life he gives, as Fuller noted,

Mr. Pearce's affection to the doctrine of the cross was not merely, nor principally, on account of its being a system which secured his own safety. Had this been the case, he might, like others whose religion originates and terminates in self-love, have been delighted with the idea of the grace of the Son; but it would have been at the expense of all complacency in the righteous government of the Father. He might have admired something which he accounted the gospel, as saving him from misery; but he could have discerned no loveliness in the Divine law as being holy, just, and good, nor in the mediation of Christ as doing honour to it. That which in his view

¹³¹Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 61.

¹³²Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 62.

¹³³Pearce, *Early Acquaintance*, 33.

constituted the glory of the gospel was, that God is therein revealed as “the just God and the Saviour—just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.”¹³⁴

Finally, and also very characteristic of Pearce’s preaching, there was the passion and conviction that he displayed in each of these sermons. As previously mentioned, being a Baptist in the 1790s put Pearce and his hearers in a very small and obscure group, but this did not cause Pearce to waiver in his convictions. He believed that baptism by immersion was of the highest order in disciple-making and cited a bold appeal by the Puritan Richard Baxter (1615–1691) to make his point:

This is not like some occasional historical mention of baptism, but it is the very commission of Christ to his Apostles, for preaching and baptizing, and purposely expresseth their several works in their several places and order. Their first task is by teaching, to make disciples; the second work is to baptize them; the third work is to teach them all other things which are afterwards to be learned in the school of Christ. To condemn this order, is to renounce all rules of order; for where can we expect to find it, if not here.¹³⁵

Pearce’s passion and conviction were also on display in his sermon to the church at Silver Street. He spoke to these hearers with boldness, warning them against their own selfishness and sin and urging them to love and respect their pastor. As Pearce said, “And would it not be highly unreasonable for an individual to complain, and say, ‘My minister has neglected me today?’” Thus Pearce precisely and boldly urged his listeners: “Give your minister credit for this, that, as he has had the most experience, so he must be the best judge of what is seasonable; and rather water his ministry with your prayers, than blacken it by your complaints.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:431–32.

¹³⁵Pearce, *Christian Baptism*, 17–18.

¹³⁶Pearce, *Duty of Churches*, 55.

CHAPTER 6

SAMUEL PEARCE'S SPIRITUALITY OF LOVE

Introduction

Andrew Fuller was convinced that at the core of every human being's conduct and thought there is a guiding principle, a mainspring, as it were. And he had no doubt that for his friend Pearce, that principle was "holy love." Fuller knew Pearce well, and there is no evidence or reason to doubt his evaluation. He did not wish to present Pearce as a flawless individual, but he was concerned to set him before the Christian world of his day as a man whose character constituted "the true *beauty of holiness*."¹ This chapter, then, looks at four key realms in which Pearce's character as one of "holy love" was displayed: in his friendships, in his love for the church, in his marriage, and in his love for God.

Holy Love: For His Friends

It is curious that Pearce once advised Matthew Griffith during his time at Bristol, "Guard against a large acquaintance while you are a student. Bristol friendship, while you sustain that character, will prove a vile thief, and rob you of many an invaluable hour."² He did go on to explain, "Get two or three of the students, whose

¹Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 3:429.

²Michael A. G. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 171.

piety you most approve, to meet for one hour in a week for experimental conversation and mutual prayer. I found this highly beneficial.”³ It is interesting that Pearce would advise against “a large acquaintance” as he himself was a man who had so many wonderful friendships and who found such deep joy in his relationships. As Fuller says of him, “He was a lover of good men. He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation, prayer, and praise.” Pearce’s friendships were deep, but they were also very wide as Fuller further explains, “His spirit was truly catholic: he loved all who loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”⁴

College Friends: A Friendship with Josiah Evans

In December of 1792, at twenty-six years old, Samuel Pearce wrote a “brief sketch of the character of [his] late dear friend and brother Mr. Josiah Evans”⁵ in a letter

³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 171. Citing Andrew Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce. A.M.* (Dunstable, UK: J. W. Morris, 1808), 132–35. For the identification of Matthew Griffith as the recipient of this letter, see Andrew Fuller, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce*, 138. Matthew Griffith, a Baptist from Worcester, had asked Pearce’s advice about how to prepare for studies at Bristol Baptist Academy. Griffith went to the Academy, but his conduct there was far from being above reproach. He ended up being asked to leave the college for having engaged in “antenuptial fornication” (premarital sex). John Newton (1725–1807), who was actually the means of introducing Griffith to Pearce, wrote to Ryland that he was deeply distressed by Griffith’s conduct: “his conduct has hurt me much, because I loved him much, I shall mourn and pray for him in secret. The Lord grant that he may be humbled by what is past, and get strength, by the proof of his own weakness. I mean, may the Lord pardon him, and lead him to a more simple dependence upon himself who alone is able to keep us from falling, or to raise us when we are down” (John Newton, Letter to John Ryland, Jr., May 28, 1801, Bristol Baptist College Archives, Bristol). On Matthew Griffith, see Grant Gordon, ed., *Wise Counsel: John Newton’s Letters to John Ryland, Jr.* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 347, 350–51, 390–91, 393.

⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432–33.

⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 79.

to Evans's uncle Joshua Thomas (1719–1797).⁶ Through the following excerpts of this letter we can discern Pearce's early thinking about understanding friendship:

I had not long known him before I discovered that union of good qualities in his heart which commanded my affection and respect, and distinguished him as a proper person to select for the peculiar intimacies of pious friendship. Our apartments were adjoining; we spent most of the hour of relaxation together, and in a few weeks felt a mutual attachment. I believe I had more advantages for ascertaining his real character than either of our fellow students, for he was rather of a reserved disposition, and made sure of a friend before he had laid open his heart with any degree of freedom and confidence.

I found him possessed of an equable temper of mind, seldom agitated to an undue degree at the changing scenes around him, but steadily pursuing that object to which the maturest deliberation directed him. He was not hasty indeed in determining, but when he had once resolved he was generally inflexible. Perhaps he was too positive; but it is certain that an error here is not so injurious to a student as the opposite extreme. Resolutions hastily formed are in general as hastily abandoned; and minds disposed to these sudden revolutions cannot make those advances which attend a persevering application.

Mr. J. Evans had one essential qualification for friendship, and that was faithfulness. I believe he never discerned anything in my temper or conduct which he thought would be injurious to my proficiency as a student or to my spirituality as a Christian (after our intimacy commenced) but he watched for the first suitable opportunity of laying it before me with the reasons of his disapprobation. On some of these occasions he would urge his friendly admonitions and counsels with such affectionate eloquence that the result has been our retiring together with tears lamenting our mutual imperfections before God, and beseeching wisdom and grace from above to ornament our profession, and in every step to pursue something worthy of our being and character. Some of the moments we have thus spent I believe were marked with as true humiliation of heart as any we ever knew, for as we did not conceal the various states of our minds from each other; we had no occasion to restrain our feeling and guard our expressions in these exercises. On the contrary we felt as much freedom as though we had been apart and realized the presence of none but our Maker. "A world for such a friend, to lose, is gain."

As a Christian, his views of evangelical truth were (according [to] my judgment) clear and consistent, his faith in them was without wavering, and the influence they had upon his heart and conduct was universal and permanent. He

⁶The Welsh Baptist Joshua Thomas (1719–1797) was pastor of the Baptist cause in Leominster for forty-three years. For his life and thought, see Eric W. Hayden and Joshua Thomas, Carroll C., and Willard A. Ramsey, eds., *The American Baptist Heritage in Wales* (Lafayette, TN: Church History Research and Archives Affiliation, 1976).

lived near to God. He watched over the state of his mind daily. I never found him unprepared for spiritual conversation. The things of God lay nearest his heart, and “from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” His letters abound in good and pious sentiment and I esteem the few I have in possession as “apples of gold in baskets of silver.” I never peruse them without some advantage, and by them, though dead, he yet speaks to me and helps me to converse with him.⁷

In the controlled seminary setting of Bristol, there was not very much time for relationships. It is interesting to note that Pearce mentions Evans and himself spending the “hour” of relaxation together.⁸ As previously cited, Evans would have likely been one of Pearce’s “beneficial friendships” of experimental conversation and mutual prayer while he was a student. Through the course of Pearce’s life he was a man regularly in the company of others, yet he seemed to admire that Evans was so choicé in his friendships, and he clearly enjoyed the fact that he was counted among those whom Evans held dear. He describes their friendship as pious, which as we discovered in the previous chapter was synonymous with being “spirit-filled,” holy, or God-fearing.⁹ These types of friendships would mark the life of Pearce. In a later examination of his friendship with William Summers, it will be that holiness was the chief aim of their relationship with one another.

⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 80–81.

⁸From the time of Bernard Foskett, the Bristol Academy was known for its rigor. John Rippon wrote that Foskett was “severe, rather than enchanting; employing the memory more than the genius, the reasoning more than the softer powers of the mind,” he was eager to acknowledge that “several of the greatest ministers who have adorned our denomination since the days of the Reformation were educated by him.” Norman S. Moon, *Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College, 1679–1979* (Bristol, England: Bristol Baptist College, 1979), 7, as cited in John Rippon, *Essay towards a History of the Baptist Academy at Bristol* (London: Dilly and Button, 1795), 7.

⁹The idea of piety flowed into evangelicalism both from the eighteenth-century Continental Pietism and from Puritan Piety it was concerned with a religion of the heart, or an experience of the living God. For more on the influence of pietism on Evangelicalism see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), locs. 486-89, Kindle.

Evans and Pearce were friends during a foundational time in their lives. It was at Bristol that these young ministers cultivated devotion, learned a strict order in their passions, and learned the value of daily tasks. These young men learned to work hard in their pursuit of Christ and ministry with one another, and they helped to shape one another.¹⁰ The proximity of their lives in Bristol was very important and no accident in the providence of God. As Stennett wrote, “in the ordinary course of things it is the immediate presence of a friend, and personal intercourse with him, that excites and keeps alive this generous passion.”¹¹ Stennett even further described people living in close quarters as Pearce and Evans did, saying, “their persons, their actions, their amiable qualities, and everything about them that is adapted to excite, esteem, and love, are in full view.”¹² Pearce understood his special vantage of Evans, saying, “I had more advantages for ascertaining his real character than either of our fellow students.”¹³

From his particular point of view, Pearce was able to discern in Evans another one of Stennett’s true and proper grounds for domestic friendship, and that was his character. Stennett includes the ideas of temper, sentiment, manners, circumstances, and religion in defining a man’s character, and it is interesting that Pearce roughly follows

¹⁰One can learn a great deal about Pearce’s own experience at Bristol through his advice to Matthew Griffith. He urges the young student to “cultivate a spirit of habitual devotion.” Going further, he explains, “Warm piety connected with my studies, especially at my entrance upon them, would not only assist me in forming a judgement on their respective importance, and secure the blessing of God upon them; but would so cement the religious feeling with the literary pursuit, as that it might abide with me for life.” He further urges Griffith to observe the strictest order saying, “Let every hour have its proper pursuit; from which let nothing but a settled conviction that I can employ it to better advantage ever cause me to deviate. Let me have fixed time for prayer, meditation, reading, languages, correspondence, recreation, sleep, etc.” This is from Samuel Pearce, “Letter to Matthew Griffith” (Birmingham, England: Belsher, 1798). See also Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 169–72.

¹¹Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestic Duties* (Edinburgh: Ritchie, 1800), 342.

¹²Stennett, *Discourses*, 342.

this outline in his explanation of the character of Evans. Stennett stresses the importance of sentiment in friendship, saying, “two people who think alike on most subjects, on communicating their ideas, will instantly conceive and esteem affection for each other.”¹⁴ Pearce admired Evans’s convictions and ideas, saying, “He lived near to God. He watched over the state of his mind daily.”¹⁵ For Pearce, holiness was connected to the discipline of thought in knowing God and his word. This was important to Pearce as a friend, and this is clear in his letters, sermons, and circular letters. Pearce had no interest in idle talk and therefore sought friends whose overflow would be edifying and full of truth. It is a powerful testament to his love for Evans that Pearce continually read his friend’s letters for spiritual edification, calling them “apples of gold.”

Pearce was most impressed by Evans’s faithfulness, calling faithfulness the “essential” quality for friendship. Evans was not afraid to have difficult conversations with Pearce, and he was always on guard for Pearce’s spirituality. He says then that their friendship was marked by “true humiliation of the heart.”¹⁶ They were vulnerable before one another, caring for the needs of one another before their own. This kind of humility was the true mark of a faithful and good friend. Pearce admired faithfulness in others because it was such a central quality in his own life. He was faithful to his friends, faithful to his wife, faithful to his church, and faithful to his co-laborers in Christ.¹⁷

¹³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 81.

¹⁴Stennett, *Discourses*, 339.

¹⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 81.

¹⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 81.

¹⁷Any kindness that was shown to him he desired that it be returned to the one showing it. An example of this came in the conclusion of a letter to Fuller written in April of 1799, during his season of

Evans was for Pearce a faithful friend at a pivotal time in his life; Pearce cared for him during his life and humbly honored him in his death. In a parting word of respect, Pearce concluded his words to Thomas, “whilst I contemplate and admire his [Evans’] character I hope I can say ‘*Sequor*’ although I must lament that it is ‘*non equis passibus*.’” Using Latin, Pearce was saying: “I follow, but not with equal steps.”¹⁸ The loss of this friendship must have been incredibly difficult for the young pastor, but it was only one of the many pains that Pearce would have to endure in his short life.

Spiritual Improvement: Friendship with William Summers

Samuel Johnson, the famed eighteenth-century English lexicographer, defines the word friend as “one joined to another in intimacy and mutual benevolence.”¹⁹ Pearce had found such a friend in William Summers. The two clearly enjoyed a deep and almost immediate intimacy. Summers very quickly gained the trust of Pearce, as we read in a letter from Pearce to Summers from September of 1790, “Genuine friendships are seldom formed in haste; but there is no general rule without some exceptions.”²⁰ With Summers,

greatest pain, “I heard at Bristol that you and your friends had remembered me in your prayers at Kettering. Whether the Lord whom we serve may see fit to answer your petitions on my account or not, may they at least be returned into your own bosoms.”

¹⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 82.

¹⁹Samuel Johnson, “Friend (noun),” in *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic by Samuel Johnson*, ed. Brandi Besalke, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?p=6493>. In the original definition, the words “mutual benevolence” and “intimacy” are given in the reverse order.

²⁰Pearce Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 61–62. Compare Pearce's remarks to Samuel Etheridge: “in our path thro life, tho we meet with so many travelers, & we hope with many who are going to Zion with their faces thitherward; yet, it is not often that we meet with men, whose openness of mind, steadiness of attachment, & spirituality of temper, invite our friendship with . . . force & sweetness.” “Letter to Samuel Etheridge, April 20, 1796,” in *Baptist Autographs in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1741–1845*, ed. and trans. Timothy Whelan (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 83.

Pearce could be honest and totally vulnerable. In the words of Fuller, “Here [with Summers] we sometimes see him, like his brethren, groaning under darkness, want of spirituality, and the remains of indwelling sin; but frequently rising above all, as into his native element, and pouring forth his ardent soul in the expression of joy and praise.”²¹

This intimacy gave way to the mutual benevolence with one another that both men deeply enjoyed. Andrew Fuller comments about Pearce, “Among his numerous religious friendships, he seems to have formed one for the special purpose of spiritual improvement. This was with Mr. Summers, of London, who often accompanied him in his journeys; to whom, therefore, it might be expected he would open his heart without reserve.”²² These journeys of which Fuller was speaking were yearly hiking trips through the Dartmoor mountain range in Devon. They loved these hikes together, but what they chiefly sought in these excursions was mutual help to “ascend the Hill of the Lord.”²³ He thus writes in an August 19, 1793, letter to Summers, “When I take my pen to pursue my correspondence with you, I have no concern but to communicate something which may answer the same end we propose in our annual journeys, viz. lending some assistance in the important object of getting and keeping nearer to God. This, I am persuaded, is the mark at which we should be continually aiming, nor rest satisfied until we attain that to which we aspire.”²⁴

²¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:375.

²²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:375.

²³Pearce Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 111–12.

²⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:375.

Pearce and Summers both understood the necessity of community for spiritual growth and were essential in the pattern of one another's spirituality. In another letter to Mr. Summers, dated June 24, 1794, Pearce writes,

We, my friend, have entered on a correspondence of heart with heart; and must not lose sight of that avowed object. I thank you sincerely for continuing the remembrance of so unworthy a creature in your intercourse with Heaven; and I thank that sacred Spirit whose quickening influences, you say, you enjoy in the exercise. Yes, my brother, I have reaped the fruits of your supplications. I have been indulged with some seasons of unusual joy, tranquil as solitude, and solid as the Rock on which our hopes are built. In public exercises, peculiar assistance has been afforded; especially in these three things—The exaltation of the Redeemer's glory—the detection of the crooked ways, false refuges, and self-delusions of the human heart—and the stirring up of the saints to press onward, making God's cause their own, and considering themselves as living not for themselves, but for *Him* alone.²⁵

It is clear then that in their true friendship they were regularly praying for one another and urging one another along in godliness. Pearce mentions that Summers's prayers gave his heart an unmoving joy and peace. This depth in prayer between friends was a mark of Pearce's friendships, and his receiving and giving prayer is a constant in his correspondence.

From the above letter we can deduce that the prayers and encouragement from Summers was a great help to Pearce in at least three particular areas. He first mentions "the exaltation of the Redeemer's glory." Through their friendship, Summers helped Pearce to glorify his Lord, and this is seen throughout their correspondence. For example, in another letter to Mr. Summers dated November 10, 1794, he exclaims, "O my brother, help me to praise! I cannot say that I am quite so exalted in my frame today; yet still I acknowledge what I have lived upon for weeks—that were there no being or

²⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:376.

thing in the universe beside God and me, I should be at no loss for happiness. Oh, 'Tis heaven to rest in his embrace, And no where else but there.'"²⁶

Pearce's friendship with Summers also served to him in "the detection of the crooked ways, false refuges, and self-delusions of the human heart." In a September 2, 1794, letter to his wife, Sarah, he remarked, "Daily I feel convinced of the propriety of a remark which my friend Summers made on his journey to Wales, that 'it is easier for a Christian to walk habitually near to God than to be irregular in our walk with him.'"²⁷ It is interesting that Summers's comment stayed on his mind and in his heart, helping him in his pursuit of contempt for the world, of humility, and of more heavenly-mindedness.

Finally, Summers and Pearce were united in the desire to be used for "the stirring up of the saints to press onward, making God's cause their own, and considering themselves as living not for themselves, but for *Him* alone." In June of 1794, Pearce reported back to Summers the following: "Above fifty have been added to our church this year, most of whom I rejoice in as the seals of my ministry in the Lord."²⁸ Pearce understood his ministry to be a shared effort. From his time in college through his ministry in Birmingham to his involvement in the Baptist Missionary society, he shared the burden of his ministerial responsibilities with other ministers. He drew from their strength and gave more because of their love. In turn he poured his life out not only to those under his pastoral care but to his friends and to all good men. Fuller writes, "He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation,

²⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:376–78.

²⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:377.

²⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:376.

prayer, and praise. His heart was tenderly attached to the people of his charge; and it was one of the bitterest ingredients in his cup during his long affliction to be cut off from their society.”²⁹

Pearce and Carey

Samuel Pearce’s closest friendship was with the acclaimed missionary William Carey. Pearce admired Carey for his work and loved Carey deeply as a brother. Early on in his work with the Baptist Missionary Society, Pearce began to feel a call to join Carey on the mission field in Mudnabatty, India. Though he never received an appointment from the Baptist Missionary Society to join Carey on the field, this “Macedonian Call” would never leave his heart. Even to Pearce’s dying days he longed to be with his friend and to join his work. As previously mentioned, even in his work in England it was his support of Carey through the Baptist Missionary Society that brought Pearce the most pleasure in life.³⁰

William Carey landed in India on November 7, 1793, and was there until his death on June 9, 1834. His achievements in those forty years have led to his being acknowledged as “The Father of the Modern Missionary Movement.” His first years on the mission field were incredibly difficult both in his personal life and in his work. In these difficult years, Carey was able to draw on two great sources for his strength: first, from his undying confidence in the strength and sovereign care of God. This from a journal entry on April 8, 1794, “All my hope is in, and all my comfort arises from, God; without His power no European could possibly be converted, and His power can convert

²⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

³⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 110.

any Indian; and when I reflect that He has stirred me up to the work, and wrought wonders to prepare the way, I can hope in His promises, and am encouraged and strengthened.”³¹ Second, he drew strength from those friends that he had left behind in England who believed in him so deeply. The encouragement from the Baptist Missionary Society, and especially Samuel Pearce, was vital for the success of Carey’s mission. Carey felt the freedom to share with Pearce his deepest struggles being confident in the compassion of his friend:

Now I must mention some of the difficulties under which we labour, particularly myself. The language spoken by the natives of this part, though Bengali, is yet so different from the language itself, that, though I can preach an hour with tolerable freedom so as that all who speak the language well, or can write or read, perfectly understand me, yet the poor labouring people can understand but little; and though the language is rich, beautiful, and expressive, yet the poor people, whose whole concern has been to get a little rice to satisfy their wants, or to cheat their oppressive merchants and zameendars, have scarcely a word in use about religion. They have no word for love, for repent, and a thousand other things; and every idea is expressed either by quaint phrases or tedious circumlocutions. A native who speaks the language well finds it a year’s work to obtain their idiom. This sometimes discourages me much.³²

The faithful Pearce was always quick to respond to Carey with some of the most loving and encouraging words that we have in the whole corpus of his work. He reminds Carey of the promises of Christ and of the Society’s confidence in his calling. He reminds Carey that even the work of Jesus began slowly, writing, “For three years we read of few baptized by the first disciples of our Lord; but, on the fourth, three thousand and five

³¹George Smith, *Biography of William Carey—The Father of Modern Christian Missions* (London: Murray, 1885), locs. 1220–23, Kindle.

³²Smith, *Biography of William Carey*, locs. 1363–73, Kindle.

thousand openly avowed him. The Lord send you such another Pentecost!”³³ In another letter he reminded his friend of the work in Greenland, “You know the Brethren laboured nearly six years without effect in Greenland; but they persevered, and now a tenth part of the inhabitants of that country are professors of the faith of Christ.”³⁴ Throughout his letters, Pearce’s deep love for Carey is obvious, and his joy in their partnership for the gospel is equally as clear. Together they were confident in the work and the grace of Christ and that through him the effort would succeed.

After Pearce was rejected by the Baptist Missionary Society in his appeal to go on mission, Carey became the encouraging friend that he needed, writing in 1795,³⁵

Oh my dear Pearce, had you had come in reality when your mind was so intensely set upon it, me thinks a great happiness could not have befallen men in this life. I know your disposition your zeal for the Lord Jesus so well, that I conclude such a help is necessary to stimulate and excite me languid mind to action; and such a companion requisite to cooperate with and strengthen me, and to advise me respecting the great work of our Lord. But the welfare of the Churches, conscience, honesty, reason and, I had almost said, Scripture forbid it. I must no more expect to see your face till I see you at the great Day of the Lord.³⁶

Pearce had come to the same realization that he would likely never see Carey again on this side of eternity. As he wrote to Carey in the following excerpt, the thought of seeing Carey made the thought of seeing Jesus in heaven all the more sweet. He wrote, “I fear [I had almost said] that I shall never see your face in the flesh; but if anything can add to the

³³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 151.

³⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 147.

³⁵Pearce did not receive this letter until the spring of 1796. It was a reply to Pearce’s letter written a year earlier on March 25, 1795. Both Carey and his missions partner John Thomas (1757–1801) were both devastated when they learned that Pearce would not be joining them. Carey however was encouraged in a 1796 letter from Fuller to cheer up Pearce from the disappointment. Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 181.

³⁶Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 180–81.

joy which the presence of Christ and conformity, perfect conformity, to him will afford in heaven, surely the certain prospect of meeting with my dear brother Carey there is one of the greatest.”³⁷ That day of reunion would not come until June of 1834 when Pearce at long last welcomed Carey to their eternal home. By that time Carey’s son Jonathan had married Pearce’s daughter Anna, and the two families were forever tied together.

Characteristics of a Friend

Unlike Samuel Stennett, we have no systematic record of Pearce’s understanding of friendship, but through his letters the reader can learn much about all that he gained through friendship. Fuller said of Pearce, “He was a lover of good men— He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation, prayer, and praise.”³⁸ Friendship for Pearce was more than something that he merely enjoyed; it produced results that brought glory to Christ. Beyond the holiness that Pearce’s friendships produced, as seen in the aforementioned friendship with William Summers, let us consider three other “products” of his Christian friendships.

Pearce’s friendships in Christ brought about joy. In considering the life of Samuel Pearce, it is clear that he found the most joy when he was with those he loved. This is seen in his marriage, in his church, and even very clearly among his friends. Pearce’s dearest friendships were with members of the Baptist Missionary Society. These men were more than just co-laboring pastors but rather were the dearest of friends, as he would later say without shame. “There is no part of my life which I reflect on with so much pleasure as that which has been spent in behalf of the Society under whose

³⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 149.

³⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

patronage you are.”³⁹ The stirring of Pearce’s joy by these wonderful friends is often seen in his correspondence with Carey after their meetings. In one such letter, he said,

O! who but the Christian feels such pleasures as are connected with friendship for our dear Lord Jesus Christ? Were there no hereafter, my dying breath should praise him for giving me a heart decidedly for him and his glorious cause on earth. May my whole life be spent for him! O! I feel, indeed I feel, that nothing is worth living for but His glory and the good of his Church.⁴⁰

Pearce’s friendships in Christ brought about unity within diversity. He experienced incredible unity among his friends, not because of a common education level, age, or in some cases homeland but because of their common love for Jesus. Pearce beautifully explains this in a letter to the American Baptist William Rogers (1751–1824):

It is certainly as impossible for Christians to maintain a pious intercourse without Love, as for the magnetic needle to point anywhere but to the pole. Condemn me not then, if I address you in a less distant form than heretofore In situation, in publicity of character, in mental vigour, in age, in literary acquirements, in a thousand things we may differ, but still we are one in Christ Jesus, that dear centre of union to holy angels and holy men—to perfect saints above, and imperfect saints below.⁴¹

Rogers was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia from 1772 to 1775⁴², and, though they never met one another, Pearce was united with Rogers in Christ, in zeal, and in a love for the lost. Pearce wrote to Williams that he wished to “throw the arms of [his] affection across the Atlantic and embrace [him] as a beloved brother in the Lord.”⁴³ In this particular letter Pearce is encouraging Williams with the news of the missionary zeal

³⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 110.

⁴⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 110.

⁴¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 117.

⁴²See “Biographical Sketch of William Rogers, D. D.,” *The New Baptist and Evangelical Repository* 1 (London: Harjette and Savill, 1825): 1–3.

in Great Britain and urging him to lead in the formation of a missionary society in the United States. In 1812 Pearce's dream would finally be realized when the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions sent the first American Protestant missionaries, Adoniram (1780–1850) and Ann Judson (1789–1826), Luther Rice (1783–1836), and Samuel (1785–1841) and Harriet Newell (1793–1812) to Asia.⁴⁴ As will later be examined, his ardent love for the lost connected Pearce to all others who shared his passion for the Great Commission. When he considered the lost and dying souls of this world, he knew, in the words of Fuller “that they were culpable in the sight of God; but he knew also that he himself was a sinner, and felt that they were entitled to his compassion.”⁴⁵

Pearce's friendships in Christ also grew stronger in times of affliction. Some of the dearest correspondence between Pearce and his friends came in his dying months. In a letter to Fuller, Pearce wrote, “If ever I felt love in its tenderness for my friends, it has been since my affliction.”⁴⁶ He went on to explain, “I never conceived myself by a hundred degrees so interested in the regards of my friends as this season of affliction has manifested...there is something in affliction itself, which, by increasing the delicacy of our feelings and detaching our thoughts from the usual round of objects which present themselves to the mind when in a state of health, may be easily conceived to make us

⁴³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 118.

⁴⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 120 n. 12. The Judsons and Rice became convinced of believer's baptism during their voyage to India and were baptized by William Ward in Calcutta, thus they became the first Baptist missionaries.

⁴⁵Fuller, *Complete*, 3:433.

⁴⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 183.

susceptible of stronger and more permanent impressions of an affectionate nature.”⁴⁷ In his own affliction and in the affliction of others Pearce loved deeply. He was incredibly compassionate in his ministry to the sick. His sympathetic conversation, affectionate prayers, and endearing manner of urging people toward Christ soothed many a troubled heart.⁴⁸ When he conversed with the broken-hearted, he reminded them about the tenderness of Jesus, and their wounds began to heal. Even Fuller speaks of Pearce’s sweet ministry to him in the face of affliction.⁴⁹

Friendship in Death

Pearce’s death was slow and painful; the last year of his life was an up and down battle for his health, for his voice, and even for his mind. He wrote once to Carey’s successor at Harvey Lane Baptist Church, Leicester, “my mind is calm; and though my body be weakness itself, my spirits are good . . . though I can hardly speak two sentences without a pause.”⁵⁰ Throughout the year he was too ill to work, to speak, and at times even to write. At one point in a letter written in March of 1799, Pearce explains to Carey that though he had intended to write him once a month, he had to apologize for he had not written for five months. This delay in writing was, as Pearce explained, connected to his failing health during this time.⁵¹ Through his pain, his love for his friends grew even

⁴⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 183–84.

⁴⁸Fuller, *Complete*, 3:435.

⁴⁹Fuller, *Complete*, 3:435.

⁵⁰S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce, M.A., the Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, 1913), 198.

⁵¹Pearce wrote to Carey, “The fact is that on my return from the last Kettering Mission meeting I took a violent cold, which, being neglected, got worse. And, thinking that pulpit sweats would effect a cure, I remitted none of my labours either at home or among the villages; on the contrary, after walking

greater in this difficult time. As Pearce would explain to Carey, “It is now March 1799 and I have not yet written. Is it because I have ceased to love you? No, my dear brother! I must first lose all my recollection, my reason, and my virtue.”⁵² Pearce is explaining that he would rather lose his mind, and even his good name, before losing his friends. Though one might think this statement to be hyperbolic it is certainly in line with the depth of love that is evident throughout the Pearce corpus.

Pearce was the ever-selfless lover of souls; he never loved in order to be loved, he always pursued, and any kindness that was shown to him he desired that it be returned to the one showing it. In his season of greatest pain he concluded a letter to Andrew Fuller with these words, “I heard at Bristol that you and your friends had remembered me in your prayers at Kettering. Whether the Lord whom we serve may see fit to answer your petitions on my account or not, may they at least be returned into your own bosoms.”⁵³

Holy Love: For His Church

In the spring and early summer of 1799, Pearce went to Plymouth to try and find relief from the pulmonary tuberculosis that would eventually take his life.

Throughout this time, however, he remained in contact with his beloved Cannon Street Baptist Church. In a letter written on May 31, he declared, “As a church, you cannot

several miles, I sometimes preached an extra sermon. This was imprudent. My lungs became inflamed and at length were so exceedingly irritable that I could not even converse in private for two minutes without pain and danger. The doctor ordered me to keep myself undisturbed and unemployed, saying that if it were the end of March instead of November he could give me better hopes of recovery, for he thought that either a warmer climate or a warmer season was absolutely necessary.” Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 180–81.

⁵²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 180.

⁵³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 184.

conceive what pleasure I have enjoyed in hearing that you are in peace, that you attend prayer meetings, that you seem to be stirred up of late for the honour and prosperity of religion. Go on in these good ways, my beloved friends, and assuredly ‘the God of peace will be with you.’”⁵⁴ It is impossible to understand Pearce’s holy love without understanding his love for his church. The church in Birmingham was (to use the words of S. Pearce Carey) his “single pastorate,” or his only pastoral charge. He served his people faithfully for ten years, and in that time the church experienced much growth and spiritual fruit. Today the church has changed its name to Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church and has moved from its original location,⁵⁵ but it is still a healthy and thriving church.⁵⁶ This is a great testament to Pearce and to his devotion for his people but more so to God and to his grace and preserving power. Pearce echoes this sentiment with these timeless and encouraging words in the conclusion of the above-mentioned letter, “Yes, if after all I should be taken entirely from you, yet God will surely visit you and never leave you, nor forsake you.”⁵⁷

In order to understand Pearce’s deep love for the people of Cannon Street it is right to begin with his ecclesiology. Every member of Pearce’s congregation was precious to him, for Pearce was by conviction a Congregationalist, believing that all of

⁵⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 195.

⁵⁵Cannon Street comes right off of New Street in downtown Birmingham and is linked it with Cherry Street and the Birmingham Cathedral. This is truly the heart of the historic city. Today Cannon Street is full of shops and businesses.

⁵⁶See the website of the church at <http://csmbc.co.uk/>.

⁵⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 195.

the saved in Christ rightly come together to constitute a local church. In his personal confession of faith, Pearce wrote the following:

I believe that in order to accomplish the purposes of the grace of God, respecting the calling, sanctifying and saving of his people, Jesus Christ hath appointed a Gospel ministry, to continue in the world till the end of time, when all the elect shall be gathered in; that it is the duty of all those who are called by grace to unite in Christian communion, and publicly to assemble for the purposes of divine worship; and that a number of Christians united in one faith, and by mutual consent thus assembling together, yielding obedience to the laws of Jesus Christ, constitute a Christian church.⁵⁸

He later continued,

I believe that a society of Christians, or a Christian church thus formed, is wholly independent of any synod, council or other ecclesiastical magistracy, and has the sole right of conducting its own affairs (as the choosing of a minister, admission or exclusion of members and the administration of the various parts of church discipline) without the interference of any man, or body of men whatever, whether civil or ecclesiastical; and that it is the duty of all the friends of Christianity to withstand every encroachment on the liberties of their conscience, or their conduct, by which the peace and good of society is not injured, that hereby they may prove themselves the true disciples of him who hath said, ‘my kingdom is not of this world.’⁵⁹

Thus, for Pearce, the visible church, or the Christian church, was given to accomplish the purpose of God, and each church and the members consisting thereof were given authority to bind and to loose by Jesus himself (Matt 18:18). Therefore his role and care as an overseer was a precious and high calling. He referred to himself before his congregation as “your very affectionate, though unworthy, pastor.”⁶⁰

The congregation of Cannon Street Baptist was his “beloved charge,” and he was daily trusting in “the chief Shepherd” to “keep them holy, humble, spiritual,

⁵⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 59.

⁵⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 60.

⁶⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 195.

affectionate, prayerful and thankful.”⁶¹ His heart burned that his people would more than anything know Christ. In his dying correspondence we find Pearce pleading with his congregation that they would be marked by faithfulness to his decade-long work in their midst, “O my dear brethren and sisters, let me, as one alive almost from the dead, let me exhort you to stand fast in that blessed gospel which for ten years I have now preached among you.”⁶² Though Pearce was one of the finest and most sought-after preachers in all of England and could have most certainly gone to pastor another more established church,⁶³ he was faithful to those souls the Lord had given him to shepherd in Birmingham. It was the joy of their souls that he sought in his preaching and in his prayers.⁶⁴ Fuller wrote of him, “He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation, prayer, and praise. His heart was tenderly attached to the people of his charge; and it was one of the bitterest ingredients in his cup during his long affliction to be cut off from their society.”⁶⁵ When he knew that his time was short with his flock, he gave them these words, “If you thus live (and oh that you may daily

⁶¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 195.

⁶²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 194.

⁶³He was known as the “silver-tongued.” “I used to think,” writes Dr. Ryland in his *Life of Andrew Fuller*, “that Benjamin Francis as an aged man and Samuel Pearce as a young man were the two most popular preachers I have personally known, who, without rising to sublime eloquence owed no part of their popularity to eccentricity.” Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 102.

⁶⁴ Pearce urged his hearers on to faithfulness continually in his preaching, urging them to carry out “the duty of church members,” strive to “enter the rest of Christ,” and to “live circumspect lives.” See Samuel Pearce, “Sermon on Hebrews 3:12–13, Sermon on Hebrews 4:3–8, Sermon on Hebrews 3:7–11,” Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

⁶⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

receive fresh life from Christ so to do!) ‘the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds’ and you will be filled with ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory.’”⁶⁶

Holy Love: For His Wife

On Wednesday February 3, 1791, Samuel Pearce wrote with delight to his dear friend William Summers:

The occasion of my writing is a source of joy inexpressible to myself—a joy in which I know you will participate. I am no longer a bachelor. Your amiable friend permitted me to call her my own yesterday. One dwelling now contains us both, and Paul’s Square contains that dwelling. Pray that our union to each other may lead us more to communion with God Himself.⁶⁷

He was, of course, united with the former Sarah Hopkins, a third-generation Baptist, and the daughter of a deacon in the Cannon Street Baptist Church. Pearce was quickly smitten with Sarah after his ordination at the Birmingham church in August of 1790, for by December 24 of that same year he was throwing open his whole heart for his new love:

Were I averse to writing, as children are to haunted houses or ghostly church yards at midnight, one of your dear epistles could not fail of conquering the antipathy and transforming it into desire. The moment I peruse a line from my Sarah, I am inspired at the propensity which never leaves me, till I have thrown open my whole heart, and returned a copy of it to the dear being who long since compelled it to a voluntary surrender, and whose claims have never since been disputed.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 194.

⁶⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 121.

⁶⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 65.

Sarah lived in Alcester⁶⁹ before they were married and the couple depended on these “epistles” to correspond with one another. Typical of the passionate Pearce he could barely contain his excitement when receiving one of Sarah’s letters:

How impatiently did I walk, & sit, & stand, yesterday, every moment hoping, & then every moment repining. I enquired of the residents in the parlor, ‘Pray have you a letter for me?’ I repeated my question to the domestics in the kitchen—I applied to the warehouse—but all said ‘No.’ ‘Are you sure’ I added, and could hardly believe them when they repeated their negative.⁷⁰

The couple were married just over a month later on February 2, 1791, and Sarah would continue to be his closest friend and greatest support throughout his ministry and life.

Sarah appears to have been converted under the preaching of Pearce and was baptized in November of 1791. The couple was however very much equally yoked in every way. Pearce had the utmost respect and love for Sarah, for her beauty, her mind, and her spirituality. In one letter he only wishes that he were “equaled fitted for epistolary intercourse”⁷¹ with her. Later, in 1791, Sarah engaged with a Mrs. Biggs in a debate about the nature of the Trinity. Pearce encouraged Sarah to disengage with Mrs. Biggs but not because he thought she was a threat to her theology saying, “I am under no apprehensions of her altering your sentiments. I believe you have been taught them by the Holy Ghost who dwelleth in you . . . and that you will be kept therein by the power of God.”⁷² Pearce delighted in Sarah’s Christian piety. As he told her in a letter from the summer of 1793, “I cannot convey to you an idea of the holy rapture I felt at the account

⁶⁹Alcester is about 20 miles south of Birmingham.

⁷⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 66.

⁷¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 66.

⁷²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 69.

you gave me of your soul prosperity.”⁷³ Her friends noted that she had had “a strong attachment to evangelical truth” and “a longing desire for the universal spread of the gospel.”⁷⁴

As Haykin observes, “Pearce’s love for his wife clearly deepened with the passing of the years.”⁷⁵ He then goes on to cite several passages pointing to the couple’s growing love. For example, in an April 1, 1791, letter Pearce tells Sarah that he was more desirous “of enjoying your friendship than the admiration of crowds of Helen’s, or Venus’s, or Cleopatra’s, or all the females of Egypt—Greece—Rome or Birmingham.”⁷⁶ He also cites a letter that was probably written in early 1792, wherein Pearce tells Sarah, “O that you were now within these longing arms & then there would be no occasion to write.”⁷⁷ In another December 13, 1794, letter Pearce wrote in reply to his beloved wife’s letter, “your letter filled me with a joy that awakened my sensibilities to the most satisfactory enjoyment which can possibly arise from sensible and mental objects.”⁷⁸ In a 1795 letter written while Pearce was away on a preaching trip to London, he wrote to tell her, “every day improves not only my tenderness but my esteem for you.”⁷⁹ As further proof of Haykin’s observation, consider this 1796 letter Pearce wrote Sarah from Ireland:

⁷³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 24.

⁷⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 24.

⁷⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 21.

⁷⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 21.

⁷⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 21.

⁷⁸Samuel Pearce, “Letter to Sarah Pearce, December 13, 1794,” Reeves Collection, Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

⁷⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 22.

Last evening . . . were my eyes delighted at the sight of a letter from my dear Sarah. . . . I rejoice that you, as well as myself, find that “absence diminishes not affection.” For my part I compare our present correspondence to a kind of courtship, rendered sweeter than what usually bears that name by a certainty of success Not less than when I sought your hand [in marriage], do I now court your heart, nor doth the security of possessing you at all lessen my pleasure at the prospect of calling you my own, when we meet again.⁸⁰

Even though they were deeply committed to one another they were also both committed to the Lord’s calling in their lives which often meant that they were apart geographically, but never emotionally, spiritually, or even in their imaginations. As Haykin writes, “Pearce’s understanding of what should lie at the heart of their marriage found expression in a letter that he wrote to his future wife a little over two months before their wedding: ‘may my dear Sarah & myself be made the means of leading each other on in the way to the heavenly kingdom & at last there meet to know what even temporary separation means no more.’”⁸¹ In another letter written to Sarah a little more than a year after their marriage Pearce writes, “I thought of taking tea with you this evening: *that* would have been highly gratifying to us both; but it must be our meat and drink to do and submit to the will of our heavenly Father.”⁸² He goes on to encourage her in the work of the Lord saying, “All is good that comes from him, and all is done right which is done in obedience to him. Oh to be perfectly resigned to his disposal—how good is it!”⁸³

⁸⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 23.

⁸¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 20.

⁸²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:371–72.

⁸³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:372.

Throughout Pearce's life there was, in the words of Fuller, a "singular submissiveness to the will of God,"⁸⁴ and as Fuller observed, "this disposition was generally most conspicuous when his own will was most counteracted."⁸⁵ It was with this submissiveness that he led his wife, Sarah. When his daughter Louisa became very ill with fever, a month after his rejection from the Baptist Missionary Society in November of 1794, these were his words to Sarah:

I feel for *you*. I long to know how our dear Louisa's pulse beats: I fear still feverish. We must not, however, suffer ourselves to be infected with a mental fever on this account. Is she ill? It is right. Is she very ill . . . dying? It is still right. Is she gone to join the heavenly choristers? It is all right, notwithstanding our repinings Repinings! No; we will not repine. It is best she should go. It is best for *her*: this we must allow. It is best for *us*: Do we expect it? Oh what poor, ungrateful, short-sighted worms are we! Let us submit, my Sarah, till we come to heaven.⁸⁶

Even in his dying days he did not lose his faith in the good will of God. Once towards the very end of his life, while beholding her and grieving, he said, "O my dear Sarah, do not be so anxious, but leave me entirely in the hands of Jesus, and think, if you were as wise as he, you would do the same by me. If he takes me, I shall not be lost; I shall only go a little before: we shall meet again never to part."⁸⁷

Beyond their personal affairs, Pearce was very open with Sarah about his ministry. She very much shared the burden of the ministry with him in Birmingham and was involved with him in the work of pastoral care. She was also involved with him abroad in her spirit and in her prayers. In one letter that he wrote while traveling in

⁸⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:392.

⁸⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:392

⁸⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:392

⁸⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:428.

December of 1794, “I have heard more news from Carey—things go well in India—the Lord will carry on his work there. I am full of employ here.”⁸⁸ In another letter that he wrote to Sarah while preaching in Ireland in June 1796, he wrote,

Last night told an immense crowd of professors of the first rank, “that if they made custom and fashion their plea, they were awfully deluding their souls; for it had always been the fashion to insult God, to dissipate time, and to pursue the broad road to hell: but it would not lessen their torments there that the way to damnation was the fashion.” I feared my faithfulness would have given them offence: but, I am persuaded, it was the way to please the Lord; and those who I expected would be enemies are not only at peace with me, but even renounce their sensual indulgences to attend on my ministry. I do assuredly believe that God hath sent me hither for good.⁸⁹

Pearce was always at peace with his own death and illness, but it was difficult for him. Beyond the incredible pain that he had to endure, his illness prevented him from being an available pastor for his church or a strong husband and father for his wife and children. His July 26, 1799, words to Isaiah Birt are telling:

I feel an undisturbed tranquility of soul, and am cheerfully waiting the will of God. My voice is gone, so that I cannot whisper without pain; and of this circumstance I am at times most ready to complain. For, to see my dear and amiable Sarah look at me, and then at the children, and at length bathe her face in tears, without my being able to say one kind word of comfort,—Oh! . . . Yet the Lord supports me under this also; and I trust will support me to the end.⁹⁰

Pearce’s relationship with Sarah was a central part of his spirituality. She was a dear expression of God’s grace in his life, and his pursuit of her was always grounded in his pursuit of God and in his deep love for Jesus. As he wrote her in his dying year, “I long

⁸⁸Samuel Pearce, “Letter to Sarah Pearce, December 13, 1794,” Reeves Collection.

⁸⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396.

⁹⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:421.

to give you a thousand, ten-thousand embraces. May the Lord hear our daily prayers for one another.”⁹¹

Holy Love: For God

Jonathan Edwards wrote in his famous sermon, *Charity and its Fruits*, “All virtue that is saving or distinguishing of true Christians, is summed up in Christian love.”⁹² Above his love for his friends, his church, and even his wife, it was Pearce’s holy love for God that marked his life.⁹³ As Fuller wrote,

It is not enough to say of this affectionate spirit, that it formed a prominent feature in his character; it was rather the life-blood that animated the whole system. He

⁹¹Samuel Pearce, Letter to Sarah Pearce from Tamerton to Alcester, Warickshire, May 3, 1799 (Reeves Collection). It is worth noting here Sarah’s deep love for her husband and deep faith in God. Her letters after Pearce’s death are very telling. On July 11, 1800, she wrote a Mrs. Franklin confiding with her pain from the loss of Pearce, “Oh could I feel but half the resignation respecting the loss of my beloved Pearce! But I cannot. Still bleeds the deep, deep wound; and a return to Birmingham is a return to the most poignant feelings. I wish however to resign him to the hand that gave and that had an unquestionable right to take away. Be still then every tumultuous passion, and know that he who hath inflicted these repeated strokes is God: that God whom I desire to reverence under every painful dispensation, being persuaded that what I know not now, I shall know hereafter.” See Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 206. She did return to Birmingham and continued to minister to the people in that town, she was also comforted by the reports of her husband’s incredibly useful life as she reported here in another undated letter to Mrs. Franklin, “I am just returned from hearing two more of our friends declare before the church what God hath done for their souls; and my dear Pearce was the instrument of bringing them out of darkness into marvellous light. Rejoice with me that the seed so long sown springs up. Gratitude excites a desire to praise my God, the gracious Giver of every mercy.” See Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 216. Just months after Pearce died, his youngest son joined him in death. This was obviously an incredible load for the already broken Sarah. But despite this she displayed the faith of her husband and trusted the providence of the almighty God. She wrote of this faith to her husband’s friend William Rogers on June 16, 1801, “The dear objects of my tenderest regret claimed all, and had it not been for the idea of rejoining them to part no more, but to be forever with the Lord, my heart would long ago have sunk under these repeated strokes; for since he deprived me of my invaluable partner, he has also taken from me a dear little babe who bore the name of its father, and, in my fond eyes, one of the fairest and most lovely blossoms human nature ever displayed—though alas! Withered and dropped at an early period. Well, my dear sir, the time is hastening when all these mysterious providences shall be explained to the satisfaction of all who love and serve the Lord our God in sincerity and truth.” Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 210–11.

⁹²Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1854), 8.

⁹³God was truly Pearce’s truest and best friend and he urged his congregation to pursue the same kind of deep friendship with the Lord saying, “As Melchizedek met Abraham when returning from conquest and befriended him – do to the Lord the same.” See Samuel Pearce, “Sermon on Hebrews 7:1–3,” Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

seemed, as one of his friends observed, to be baptized in it. It was holy love that gave the tone to his general deportment: as a son, a subject, a neighbour, a Christian, a minister, a pastor, a friend, a husband, and a father, he was manifestly governed by this principle; and this it was that produced in him that lovely uniformity of character which constitutes the true *beauty of holiness*.⁹⁴

Pearce's friends compared him to the disciple whom Jesus loved, and as Fuller went on to say, "His religion was that of the heart. Almost every thing that he saw, or heard, or read, or studied, was converted to the feeding of this divine flame."⁹⁵ For Pearce, all of life was devotion; everything was a matter of the heart, and his sermons were an overflow of the heart. This holy love for God drove his ministry of the word and his understanding of mission, as has been described in chapter five and will receive further elaboration in chapter 7.⁹⁶ In the following section, I try to understand Pearce's holy love for God in his love of the gospel, zeal for personal holiness, unshakable gratitude and joy, and confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Love of the Gospel

"To adore God, to contemplate his glorious perfections, to enjoy his favour, and to submit to his disposal, were his highest delight,"⁹⁷ Fuller wrote. Pearce loved the word of God and the full truth of God; everything he wrote and said was full of scripture. He sought and found his God in the Bible. And the word of God dwelt richly in his soul.

⁹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:429.

⁹⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:429.

⁹⁶This section will primarily focus on Pearce's correspondence. A deeper survey of his sermons and doctrinal statements, which also displays his holy love for God was given in chap. 5.

⁹⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

In his joy, pain, victory, and defeat, it was the Bible that guided him. Fuller, in commenting about Pearce's rejection from the Baptist Missionary Society, wrote the following, "The reader will recollect how he went over the great principles of Christianity, examining the grounds on which he rested, in the first of those days which he devoted to solemn fasting and prayer in reference to his becoming a missionary; and with what ardent affection he set his seal anew to every part of Divine truth as he went along."⁹⁸

His love for God's word led Pearce to a very deep, very nuanced, and very full understanding and love for the gospel. He lived in an era when there was a lot of confusion about who was and who was not able to receive the gospel. While a full discussion of this will be given in the next chapter on Pearce's spirituality of mission, it is appropriate to say now that Pearce held to both a high view of both God's sovereignty and of man's responsibility, and thus he deeply treasured God's grace and had no confidence in his own flesh. He wrote in his treatise on *The Doctrine of Salvation by Free Grace Alone*:

What more doth the gospel require of men than to believe what is true, to love what is good, to do what is right and to be sorry for what is wrong? And is it possible for any acts of divine mercy to make these obligations cease? If Christianity be properly attested, ought it not to be believed? If God is good, ought he not to be loved? If the commandments of Christ are right, should they not be obeyed? And if he discovers to us our faults, ought we not to repent of them? All these in fact are natural duties arising from our necessary relation to the great God as our creator and moral governor, and it can never be demonstrated that God's special designs of grace to some annihilate the obligations of all the rest, any more than an earthly prince's discovering extraordinary regard to some of his subjects releases all his other subjects from their allegiance to him and subjection to the laws.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

⁹⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 136–37.

Pearce was so confident in God’s grace that the more he did for God, the less he thought of himself. “All the satisfaction I wish for here, is to be doing my heavenly Father’s will. I hope I have found it my meat and drink to do his work... The more I do for God, the less I think of it; and am progressively ashamed that I do no more.”¹⁰⁰ Thus he preached Christ and him crucified. This was his, “darling theme,” said Fuller, “from first to last.”¹⁰¹ He felt both the joy of belief and the implications of unbelief. This can be seen in his plea to a young gentleman in Dublin, a certain “Master B –,” who had likely come to hear Pearce preach in his home city. Pearce wrote, “Let your whole heart and soul be in this great business of religion. If it be not fought and secured, how tremendous the consequences. The soul is lost, lost, lost, for—ever!”¹⁰² His urgency for the soul, though, was always firmly planted in the truthfulness of God’s holy word. He went on to quote Isaiah 55:6 and James 4:8, saying, “Oh seek, therefore, my dear youth, ‘seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.’ Draw nigh to him, and ‘he will draw near to you.’”¹⁰³ His deep love for the gospel and the grace of God in Christ was the foundation for his understanding of a sinner’s justification, and it was this deep love for the gospel that fueled every other aspect of his holy love for God.

¹⁰⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

¹⁰¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

¹⁰²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 154.

¹⁰³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 154.

Zeal for Personal Holiness

Pearce's religion was not one of self-love. "Had this been the case," noted Fuller, "he might . . . have been delighted with the idea of the grace of the Son; but it would have been at the expense of all complacency in the righteous government of the Father."¹⁰⁴ He not only delighted in the grace and pardon that he received in Christ, but he also loved the divine law of God and saw it as holy, just, and good.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Pearce, like his Baptist contemporaries, understood the process of sanctification and being made holy in God first through the grace of God's word. The American Baptist William Rogers said at a 1785 associational meeting in Philadelphia, "The instrument used in sanctification is the divine word, which has transforming effect."¹⁰⁶ And Pearce's friend Fuller affirmed that, saying, "The word of God is represented as a means of sanctification. But no effect of this kind can be produced beyond the degree in which we imbibe it. One great object of our Lord's intercession with the Father, on our behalf, was, 'that we might be sanctified through the truth, even by his word, which is truth.'"¹⁰⁷

Beyond imbibing God's word Pearce understood the necessity of prayer in pursuing sanctified holiness. As he explained to the young student friend from Dublin: in order to be born again, "your heart must be changed . . . you must be renewed in the spirit of your mind. But this is a great thing, and what you can neither do yourself, nor can any

¹⁰⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

¹⁰⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

¹⁰⁶L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 54.

¹⁰⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:169.

creature do it for you; yet you must not be discouraged from seeking it, nor despair of obtaining it.”¹⁰⁸ He then encouraged this student to seek sanctification and holiness in prayer, all the while trusting in the grace of God. The student had confided in Pearce the imperfections of his prayers and that he did not think them worthy before a holy God. Pearce replied by saying, “God doth not answer our prayers for the sake of the goodness that is in them, but for the sake of His goodness, in whose name we pray. It is not for us to say, is our prayer worthy? But we must say, is Christ worthy?”¹⁰⁹

An eighteenth-century orthodox creed says the following in its article on sanctification or the pursuit of holiness:

They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, thro’ the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, are also farther sanctified really and personally, thro’ the same virtue by his word and spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.¹¹⁰

Pearce’s pursuit of sanctification and holiness was marked most by a remarkable zeal. He had a deep passion to be holy so that he could know and see the Lord and know God more deeply. It was in knowing God that Pearce gained his deepest joy, “O! who but the Christian feels such pleasures as are connected with friendship for our dear Lord Jesus Christ?”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 154.

¹⁰⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 154. Pearce continues in this letter, “All God gives me, he gives for Christ’s sake, and there is enough in one Christ for all his people, and as long as there is any virtue in his intercession, so long we may come with all boldness to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need.”

¹¹⁰Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2011), 3:438–39.

¹¹¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 110.

One of the marks of a good pastor according to the apostle Paul is that he works for the joy his people. Pearce's personal zeal for knowing God through personal holiness flowed into his desires for his church and his friends to know God through holiness and to find joy in this. As Fuller preached in a sermon at the Cannon Street Church in 1802, "The reward of a true pastor is in the people of his charge, in their sanctification and salvation. What else is his hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?"¹¹² This desire can be seen throughout Pearce's sermons and correspondence. In one sermon to the church at Cannon Street on Hebrews 5:11–14 and growing in Christ, he urges his congregation to strive for the meat of God and to be "diligent in seeking divine knowledge."¹¹³ In another letter to a student at the Bristol Baptist Academy, he exhorts him with these words, "O how doth it behove us, if we are true friends of him, to abound yet more and more in all our zealous and scriptural efforts, to fight the good fight of faith, and contend earnestly for those glorious truths respecting the person of Jesus, which were, by himself, and his own apostles, delivered to the saints."¹¹⁴

His desire to see the people under his care finding the joy of knowing God is clearly displayed in his correspondence with the previously mentioned student from Dublin. He wrote,

Believe me, from the first conversation that I had with you to the present moment, I have felt no small degree of solicitude for your eternal interests. Happy, indeed, shall I be to find that you continue anxious to secure them, for what are all the honours, the pleasures, or the wealth of this world, when compared with the spiritual and abiding blessings of religion? Could we insure all that is esteemed by men, and enjoy it uninterruptedly for a thousand ages, yet, when those ages were past, how

¹¹²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 1:202.

¹¹³Samuel Pearce, "Sermon on Hebrews 5:11–End," Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

¹¹⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 77.

miserable should we be without religion? But life is short, and the pleasures of life are embittered by many crosses and trials, so that our earthly comforts yield but little good, “nor yield that little long.” It is, therefore, most blessed advice that our Saviour gives, John 6:27, “Labour not for the bread that perisheth, but for that bread which endureth in everlasting life,” etc. Observe, my dear young friend, what our Saviour teaches you in these words. First, that religion is to the soul, what bread is to the body. It feeds, nourishes, and strengthens the mind. Secondly, this heavenly bread affords abiding comfort and support. It endures to everlasting life. Thirdly, the enjoyment of this sacred food deserves our most earnest pursuit. Labour for it.¹¹⁵

He went on to encourage the student to “not give over wrestling with God till we obtain all the blessings which the blood of Jesus hath procured for sinners.”¹¹⁶ Further encouragements to pursue godliness filled the rest of the letter.

Gratitude and Joy

When preaching to a congregation at Ipswich in September of 1798, Andrew Fuller asserted, “A right spirit towards God is a spirit of love to him, a spirit of faith in God, a spirit of gratitude to God, a spirit of submission to God, a spirit of obedience to God, and so of every grace of the Spirit of God.”¹¹⁷ In all of these ways Pearce displayed a right spirit towards God, but he particularly displayed this spirit in various marks of gratitude. In the Particular Baptist theological tradition of his day, his gratitude flowed out as a response to God’s amazing grace.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 153–54, citing John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register: Including Sketches of the State of Religion Among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad* (London: n.p., 1793), 3:498–99.

¹¹⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 153–54.

¹¹⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:837.

¹¹⁸The Reformed tradition of earlier Baptist theologians such as John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, John Gill, and contemporary theologians Andrew Fuller, and Isaac Backus emphasized God’s grace and the human response of gratitude. See Mark Dever, “John L. Dagg,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 59.

Pearce never lost his youthful zeal or wonder that God would call him to salvation and much more to the work of ministry. The mindset in the following excerpt from a letter written to Isaiah Birt in 1782 stayed with him throughout his life:

Oh how abundantly thankful then ought those to be, whom he has called by divine grace to the knowledge of himself! What an unspeakable mercy is it, that he has called me by divine grace to the knowledge of himself! What an unspeakable mercy is it, that he has distinguished me in such a peculiar manner, as to (give me leave to use your own words) be taken into his service, adopted into his family, made an heir of God, a joint heir with Jesus Christ!¹¹⁹

Ultimately, Pearce believed himself to be the most blessed man on earth. He wrote the following to his wife, Sarah, in May of 1793:

O that I felt more of that myself, which I cannot but recommend to my best friends. Surely, if one of God's creatures hath more reason than another for praise, I am he. Indulged with bodily health—mental peace—domestic comforts—providential supplies—ministerial acceptance, usefulness, with the undissembled friendship of a crowd of the people of God—Lord, who and what am I to be so distinguished?¹²⁰

The above excerpt tells us much about the things that Pearce treasured and the extensions of God's grace that he enjoyed. It is interesting that in the next six years of Pearce's life, God would test Pearce's gratitude and joy by withdrawing many of these graces. His bodily health was taken away for the full final year of Pearce's life. Through this time his mental peace was tested, he was rejected in his attempt to be useful overseas by some of his dearest friends, and for the final year of his life he was kept away from ministering to his beloved congregation; yet through all of that, he never lost his joy, his faith in Christ, or his gratitude to God.

Pearce's gratitude is undeniable throughout his correspondence and characterized even in the way Pearce was imagined by his friends. Shortly after Pearce's

¹¹⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 52

death on October 10, 1799, William Grant (d. 1799) died upon his arrival in India.¹²¹ In order to cope with the loss of these two friends Fuller wrote an account of Grant meeting Pearce in heaven. It is a happy meeting and the two men are both full of joy and gratitude. They talk with King David about the faithfulness of God to do what he has promised. Just as the temple was built after the death of David according the promise of God, the work of mission would be accomplished even in the absence of Pearce and Grant.¹²² It is telling that even in this scene imagined in the mind of Fuller, Pearce is full of joy and gratitude. The scene opens with the blessed Pearce standing alone, praising God saying, “It is enough that I am with Him, and that He will feed me, and lead me to living fountains of water; and that God hath already wiped away all tears from my eyes.”¹²³ Despite his grateful correspondence and his reputation among his friends, Pearce did not consider himself to have a grateful heart, writing,

Indeed, I am surrounded with goodness; and scarcely a day passes over my head but I say, “Were it not for an ungrateful heart, I should be the happiest man alive; and that excepted, I neither expect nor wish to be happier in this world. My wife, my children, and myself, are uninterruptedly healthy, my friends kind, my soul at rest, my labours successful, etc. Who should be content and thankful if I should not?” O my brother, help me to praise!¹²⁴

¹²⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 83.

¹²¹Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 38.

¹²²Fuller’s vision proved to be prophetic as the missionary movement that Pearce and Grant were both instrumental in sparking would be one of to the greatest advances of the gospel in the history of the church.

¹²³“Conversations in Heaven,” in *Miscellaneous Pieces of Various Religious Subjects: Being the Last Remains of The Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. J. W. Morris (London: Wright and Cramp, 1826), 145.

¹²⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 108.

Pearce's own great treatise on gratitude as previously studied came in the second to last sermon that he preached for the congregation at Cannon Street. The sermon was preached on Thursday November 29, 1798, on the occasion of a public thanksgiving.¹²⁵ His text was Luke 17:15–16 on the grateful Samaritan. He said that the grateful heart is beneficial and describes “a heart suitably affected with the kindness it has received from another, and expressing, to the utmost reach of language and conduct, its sense of obligation to its benefactor.”¹²⁶ He emphasized the gratitude of the Samaritan in response to the grace that he had been given, writing: “He hastens to the presence of his deliverer, glorifies God aloud, falls down at Immanuel's feet, and from the fulness of his heart, gives him the most affectionate thanks.”¹²⁷ He then gave his hearers three points to stir their hearts to gratitude for the blessings of God. His first point is that God, the creator, has demanded gratitude from all of his creatures. Our very existence is a gift from the Almighty God, and “Man is distinguished above all other beings in the world by his intellectual sowers, which essentially differ from mere animal instinct, and thereby exalt his nature unspeakably above that of ‘the brutes which perish.’”¹²⁸ Pearce's second point is that we should be grateful not only as men but also as Christians. Christians have received from God great benevolence. As Pearce wrote,

Such is the way of peace, revealed in the religion of Jesus. It admits the justice of the principle, which probably, handed down by tradition from the earliest age, the nations had so generally adopted; but, rejecting all their uncommanded victims, it

¹²⁵This was a public thanksgiving for the victory of Horatio Nelson (1758–1805) over the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile (1798) and the defeat of a French invasion of Ireland that fall. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 37.

¹²⁶Samuel Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude* (Birmingham, England: James Belcher, 1798), 3.

¹²⁷Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 5.

¹²⁸Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 7.

exhibits a sacrifice “Of nobler name, and richer blood than they.” It teaches the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, for the purpose of our salvation; declaring that Jesus “died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” Now this, as far as we can conceive, is the highest act of benevolence that ever engaged the attention of the universe.¹²⁹

Last, Pearce exhorted his listeners to be grateful as Britons. Since he was preaching this sermon on a day when the English government had invited the nation to enjoy a day of thanksgiving, he reminded them of the incredible mercies that they enjoyed in their countries: “[We should never] cease thankfully to reflect, that we are placed in a climate so highly conducive to comfort and health—that we have been so long exempt from those fatal epidemics.”¹³⁰ Pearce emphasizes the divine protection and blessings that had been given to his hearers. Thus, in light of their blessings as men, Christians, and Britons, Pearce exhorted his readers to “gladly embrace a proposal which breathes a spirit of conciliation, and prove by our liberality this day, that we are steady friends to the interests of our country, and to the interests of benevolence.”¹³¹

Trust in the Sovereignty of God

In John Bunyan’s classic allegorical tale, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the protagonist, Christian, says these words to himself as he climbs the Hill of Difficulty: “The hill, though high, I covet to ascend, The difficulty will not me offend; For I perceive the way to life lies here. Come, pluck up heart, let’s neither faint nor fear; Better, though difficult, the right way to go, Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.”¹³² Samuel

¹²⁹Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 15.

¹³⁰Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 17.

¹³¹Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, 24.

¹³²John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), loc. 27, Kindle.

Pearce clearly took Pilgrim’s words to heart as he, even when enduring great difficulty, consistently trusted in the sovereign goodness of God. He even commented in a letter to John Ryland during the months of some of his deepest pain:

I was delighted the other day, in re-perusing the Pilgrim’s Progress, to observe that when Christian came to the top of the hill Difficulty, he was put to sleep in a chamber called Peace. “Why how good is the Lord of the way to me!” said I. I have not reached the summit of the hill yet, but notwithstanding he puts me to sleep in the chamber of Peace every night.¹³³

Fuller said of Pearce, “There have been few men in whom has been . . . a readiness to hope the best of the lowest; not ‘breaking the bruised reed,’ nor ‘quenching the smoking flax.’”¹³⁴

The two great trials of Pearce’s life were first his rejection by the Baptist Missionary Society to join Carey abroad in 1794 and then his year-long fight with pulmonary tuberculosis in 1798 and 1799. Through both of these trials he displayed great hope in God, “the fountain of happiness.”¹³⁵ Pearce, like Paul, had learned to be content in all circumstances (Phil 4:11–12) because his deep faith and hope was in the unchanging God. As he was being considered for work overseas away from the pleasantries of England, he wrote,

It has pleased God also lately to teach me, more than ever, that HIMSELF is the *fountain* of happiness; that likeness to him, friendship for him, and communion with him, form the basis of all true enjoyment; and that this can be attained as well in an Eastern jungle, amongst Hindoos and Moors, as in the most polished parts of Europe. The very *disposition* which, blessed be my dear Redeemer! He has given me, to be any thing, do any thing, or endure any thing, so that his name might be glorified,—I say, the *disposition* itself is heaven begun below! I do feel a daily panting after more devotedness to his service, and I can never think of my suffering

¹³³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 197–98.

¹³⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

¹³⁵Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 47.

Lord without dissolving into love—love which constrains me to glorify him with my body and spirit, which are his.¹³⁶

Pearce was so willing to serve with Carey that in many ways he had already joined the work in his heart and mind. His letters and journal give testimony to this. Therefore, the rejection came as a horrible blow, and it had to have been an embarrassment. In one letter to Carey he talked about having to tell his church that he had been considering leaving them. This was incredibly difficult for Pearce to accept, but his faith was consistently committed to the sovereignty of God:

It was not long after, that some of our church, guessing from the strain of my preaching the state of my mind, questioned me upon the subject, and I frankly told them all my heart. On this, various meetings of consultation were held, and I suffered much, but fainted not; and, during that struggle, I felt, for the first time, the plenary import of that phrase, “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” No domestic attachment, nor flattering prospects of reputation nor wealth, which, in unworthier moments, have had too much ascendancy over me, and had now any influence. Love to Christ, and love to sinners—heathen sinners—reign triumphant in my soul; and I trust I did then feel what it was to be wholly devoted to God.¹³⁷

A constant support during this time of struggle was his wife, Sarah. When he wrote to tell her of his rejection, he was in good spirits, trusting the sovereignty of God. He also had faith that his friends in the society had sought the will of God in making their decision. He wrote the following to Sarah in November of 1794 shortly after the rejection:

I am disappointed, but not dismayed. I ever wish to make my Saviour’s will my own. I am more satisfied than ever I expected I should be with a negative upon my earnest desires, because the business has been so conducted that I think (if by any means such an issue could be insured) the mind of Christ has been obtained. My

¹³⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

¹³⁷Fuller, *Heart for Missions*, 49.

dear brethren here have treated the affair with as much seriousness and affection as I could possibly desire, and I think more than so insignificant a worm could expect.¹³⁸

As previously mentioned in chapter two, on October 16, 1798, Pearce preached a sermon from Psalm 90:16–17 in Kettering that would inspire William Ward throughout his ministry. Following the sermon that night, however, he was caught in a downpour and was drenched to the skin as he traveled home. He developed the pulmonary tuberculosis that would claim his life a year later. This year-long fight with disease would be the greatest of trials, but Pearce endured, faithfully confident in God. He said of his ailing body, “it is often a chamber of pain; but let pain be as formidable as it may, it has never yet been able to expel that peace, which the great Guardian of Israel has appointed to keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus.”¹³⁹

Pearce was confident in God’s plan for his life, confident in God amidst pain, and as to be expected he was even confident in his death. His highest aim was the glory of Christ—above his own comfort, reputation, and even above his own life. Writing to John Ryland in July of 1799: “But, O my dear Lord, if by this death I can most glorify thee, I prefer it to all other, and thank thee that by this mean thou art hastening my fuller enjoyment of thee in a purer world.”¹⁴⁰ He knew that with the Lord he would finally be,

¹³⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383–84. Pearce, in hearing of the trials that Carey was experiencing with his wife, found himself incredibly grateful for his Sarah. He wrote in his journal on October 15, 1794, an entry that again displays his confidence in the eternal will of God, “Tonight, reading some letters from brother Carey, in which he speaks of his wife’s illness when she first came into the country, I endeavoured to realize myself not only with a sick, but a dead wife. The thought was like a cold dagger to my heart at first; but on recollection I considered the same God ruled in India as in Europe; and that he could either preserve her, or support me, as well there as here. My business is only to be where he would have me. Other things I leave to him. O Lord, though with timidity, yet I hope not without satisfaction, I look every possible evil in the face, and say, ‘Thy will be done!’” Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:386.

¹³⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 198.

¹⁴⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 198.

in the words of Robert Robinson, “freed from sinning”: “A sinless state! ‘O ’tis a heaven worth dying for!’ I cannot realize anything about heaven, but the presence of Christ and his people, and a perfect deliverance from sin, and I want no more. I am sick of sinning. Soon I shall be beyond its power. ‘O joyful hour! O blest abode! I shall be near and like my God!’”¹⁴¹ He longed to be with his Lord Jesus, and in this trial Pearce developed to the full god-like character. In a dying letter to Ryland from Plymouth in April of 1799, Pearce wrote,

For the sake of others I should be happy could I assure you that my health was improving. As to myself, I thank God that I am not without a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. I find that neither in sickness, nor in health, I can be so much as I wish like Him whom I love. “To die is gain:” oh to gain that state, those feelings, that character, which perfectly accord with the mind of Christ, and are attended with the full persuasion of his complete and everlasting approbation! I want no heaven but this; and, to gain this, most gladly would I this moment expire. But if to abide in the flesh be more needful for an individual of my fellow men,— Lord, let thy will be done; only let Christ be magnified by me, whether in life or death!¹⁴²

He concluded this letter to his dear friend with the eternal hope that even though they may not meet again in life, they would be together one day with the Lord, saying, “Our hearty love to all around, till we meet in heaven.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹It is difficult to read Pearce’s words without thinking about the final stanza of Robert Robinson’s 1757 hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. Pearce would have been very familiar with these words: O that day when freed from sinning,/I shall see Thy lovely face;/Clothed then in blood washed linen,/How I’ll sing Thy sovereign grace;/Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,/Take my ransomed soul away;/Send thine angels now to carry,/ Me to realms of endless day.

¹⁴²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:415.

¹⁴³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 199.

A Concluding Word

On January 19, 1795, Pearce was inspired by the words of Ignatius of Antioch's "My love is crucified," in his letter to the Romans. In response to Ignatius' words he penned the following poem for his Lord. They capture his heart of love, especially his love for God. As Fuller said of him: "To adore God, to contemplate his glorious perfections, to enjoy his favour, and to submit to his disposal, were his highest delight."¹⁴⁴

"My love is crucified"

Warm was his heart, his faith was strong,
Who thus in rapture cried
When on his way to martyrdom,
My love is crucified.

Warm also be my love for him,
Who thus for sinners died;
Long as I live be this my theme,
My love is crucified....

When first my soul by living faith,
My bleeding Lord espied,
My lips declar'd at every breath,
My love is crucified.

And since my happy heart has known
His sacred blood applied,
This still has been my sweetest song,
My love is crucified.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

¹⁴⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 218.

CHAPTER 7

SAMUEL PEARCE'S SPIRITUALITY OF MISSION

Pearce's Love for Missions

On April 19, 1770, when Samuel Pearce was not yet four years old, the great British explorer Captain James Cook discovered what he would call “Botany Bay.” It was due to the great quantity of plants collected in this place that Captain Cook gave the “new world” its name.¹ It has been well noted that the journals and stories of Cook had a major impact on the missionary zeal of William Carey, and it can safely be assumed that Cook's stories had a similar impact on the Plymouth-born Pearce. It was in 1788, while Pearce was a student at the Bristol Baptist Academy, that he heard news of a ship full of convicts sailing to Botany Bay in order to establish a criminal colony, and he longed to be with them. He described the desire in this October 8, 1794, journal entry:

It was not long after that the first settlers sailed for Botany Bay. I longed to go with them, although in company with the convicts, in hopes of making known the blessings of the great salvation in New Zealand. I actually had thought of making an effort to go out unknown to my friends; but, ignorant how to proceed, I abandoned my purpose. Nevertheless I could not help talking about it; and at one time a report was circulated that I was really going, and a neighbouring minister very seriously conversed with me upon the subject.²

¹Andrew Kippis, *Narrative of the Voyages Round the World, Performed by Captain James Cook: with an Account of His Life During the Previous and Intervening Periods* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, n.d.), 86.

²Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 381.

Pearce's biographer and great-grandson, Carey, tells us that he cared for the heathen from the very first week of his conversion and "bravely he strove to be Australasia's first missionary."³ Throughout his time at the Bristol Baptist Academy, his fervor for the salvation of the heathen was very intense. He recalled some of his sweetest times in school as the weekends when he went to preach in a mining community north of Bristol called Coleford:

I felt particular sweetness in devoting the evenings of the week to going from house to house among the colliers, who dwelt in the Forest of Dean, adjoining the town, conversing and praying with them, and preaching to them. In these exercises I found the most solid satisfaction that I have ever known in discharging the duties of my calling. In a poor hut, with a stone to stand upon, and a three-legged stool for my desk, surrounded with thirty or forty of the smutty neighbours, I have felt such an unction from above that my whole auditory have been melted into tears, whilst directed to "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" and I, weeping among them, could scarcely speak, or they hear, for interrupting sighs and sobs. Many a time did I then think, thus it was with the apostles of our Lord, when they went from house to house among the poor heathen. In work like this I could live and die. Indeed, had I at that time been at liberty to settle, I should have preferred that situation to any in the kingdom with which I was then acquainted.⁴

However, after Pearce's graduation the Lord would lead him to Birmingham in order to serve the Cannon Street congregation, and being engaged in the "novelties, cares, and duties" of pastoral ministry he lost interest in foreign service for several months.⁵ But as the providence of God would have it, Pearce eventually found himself in the Cherry Street Methodist Church listening to a Methodist preacher, Dr. Thomas Coke

³S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce, M.A., the Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, 1913), 127.

⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 381–82.

⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

(1747–1814).⁶ Coke was an influential preacher and he was instrumental in the creation of many missionary societies. Carey said of him, “Eighteen times he crossed the Atlantic at his own expense, in those days of small ships and of rare and long voyages, for the furtherance of the Gospel and of the Methodist movement. ‘The world was his parish’ even more truly than it was Wesley’s.”⁷ He was sixty when he preached in Birmingham and his text was Psalm 68:31: “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,” and upon hearing Coke’s appeal and heart for the nations, Pearce wrote, “I felt a passion for missions.”⁸ He then “felt an interest in the state of the heathen world far more deep and permanent than before, and seriously thought how I could best promote their obtaining the knowledge of the crucified Jesus.”⁹ This was Pearce’s “Burning Bush” moment,¹⁰ and while at that time he did not feel the call of the Lord to go abroad, he did resolve to

⁶Thomas Coke (September, 9 1747–May 2, 1814) was the first Methodist Bishop and is known as the Father of Methodist Missions. He was born in Brecon, South Wales and he eventually became the town’s mayor in 1772. That same year he was ordained in the Church of England and served as an assistant priest in Somerset. He had however allied himself with the Methodist movement and when a new rector arrived at his parish, this caused him great trouble. He was eventually released from his post on Easter Sunday 1777. Coke met John Wesley in August 1776, becoming one of his closest assistants. Wesley called Coke “the flea” because he seemed always to be hopping around on his missions. Coke was known in many Christian circles for his passion for missions and was an integral part in forming missions organizations both for Methodism and for other Christians groups. He went on numerous trips throughout the British Isles, and several times he journeyed to America and to the West Indies. Following Wesley’s death in 1791 Coke became Secretary to the British Conference, having been widely supposed to be Wesley’s desired successor. He was elected president of the conference in 1797 and 1805, and on both occasions tried to persuade the Conference to confer on him the official title of Bishop. See J. W. Etheridge, *The Life of Thomas Coke* (N.p.: Jawbone Digital, 2014), locs. 1243–49, Kindle. For more on Bishop Thomas Coke, see Francis Bourne Upham, *Thomas Coke* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910).

⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 127–28.

⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

¹⁰Beyond Coke’s influence, Pearce’s love for missions was frequently encouraged by the enthusiasm of Edward Williams (1750–1813), a neighboring Independent minister, and challenged by news of Moravians working in Greenland. No denomination had a monopoly of truth. See Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 138–39.

render the cause of missions “all the assistance I could at home.”¹¹ The following Lord’s day, Pearce preached from Psalm 67:3, “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!” exhorting his congregation to have faith in the global increase of the church.¹² The members of Cannon Street were clearly moved by their pastor’s words and were a critical part of making the vision of global missions a reality.

As previously mentioned, Jonathan Edwards’s pamphlet *A Humble Attempt* (1746) was introduced to the Baptist churches of England throughout the mid-1780s, and since that time churches had begun to hold prayer meetings for the revival of the religion, the reunion of God’s people, and “the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe.”¹³ When Pearce arrived at the Cannon Street Church in 1790 the attendance of these prayer meetings increased, but after hearing Coke’s sermon, Pearce had an even deeper desire for his church to become a people of prayer for revival and mission. Therefore, the Sunday preceding the next monthly gathering, Pearce preached from Matthew 6:10, “Thy kingdom come,” and he urged his congregation with “ardour and affection” toward the serious exercise of prayer. Pearce was overjoyed when his usual prayer meeting crowd tripled and stayed this large for some time.¹⁴

Pearce’s warm response to Thomas Coke’s sermon would never grow cold. Week after week, he continued to exhort his congregation to join the mission of Christ. As he wrote,

¹¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

¹²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

¹³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 128.

¹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

As to my own part, I continued to preach much upon the promises of God respecting the conversion of the heathen nations; and by so doing, and always communicating to my people every piece of information I could obtain respecting the present state of missions, they soon imbibed the same spirit; and from that time to this they have discovered so much concern for the more extensive spread of the gospel, that at our monthly prayer-meetings, both stated and occasional, I should be as much surprised at the case of the heathen being omitted in any prayer as at an omission of the name and merits of Jesus.¹⁵

Beyond his preaching, a fire in Pearce's own heart for the advancement of the gospel had been lit. In his own prayer life, and in his personal devotions, he was constantly pleading with God for the salvation of the lost. This fire would never go out.

Pearce's Involvement in Missions

If Samuel Pearce is known for anything it is the part he played in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. What is not known is how critical Pearce was to the success of the mission, especially in the early days. Pearce life of mission beyond the Baptist Missionary Society has also virtually unknown but a great model for missionary zeal and usefulness.

Formation of the Baptist Missionary Society

Jonathan Edwards believed that the Great Awakening in New England in the 1730s and 1740s was a sign that the last days of history were about to begin. He believed that this era would be marked above all by the spread of the gospel throughout the globe. He further believed that "extraordinary and united prayer" would trigger this latter-day

¹⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382. Pearce had great confidence in the promises of God as he saw God's faithfulness to keep his promises as evidence of his love. He preached to his congregation, "God would therefore be unfaithful if he loved not those to whom the promise is made." See Samuel Pearce, "Sermon on Hebrews 6:9-12," Pearce Sermons, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

expansion of the Church.¹⁶ As previously mentioned, he published *An Humble Attempt* to urge his fellow Christians to this end, and in the summer months of 1784 this pamphlet had a profound impact on John Ryland, John Sutcliff, and Andrew Fuller. Edwards was able to strike a balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and in the later months of 1784, Edwards's work had a profound impact on Andrew Fuller as he was preparing his own manuscript for *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation*, a work that was published in 1785.

Fuller's work was a rebuttal of hyper-Calvinist thought held by many of his Particular Baptist contemporaries and predecessors. They believed that unconverted sinners were under no moral obligation to repent and believe in the gospel, since they were rendered incapable of doing so by total depravity and therefore could not justly be held accountable for failing to do what they were unable to do.¹⁷ Edwards's theology had convinced Fuller that unconverted sinners' inability to repent and believe was the consequence of sin and not a natural state over which they had no moral obligation. Therefore, the importance of *The Gospel Worthy* in preparing the ground for the Baptist missionary endeavor cannot be overstated. Fuller's theology enabled Particular Baptists to hold the concepts of moral obligation and human responsibility in the center of their soteriology. In the words of Brian Stanley, "Fuller had established that divine sovereignty did not eliminate the responsibility of the unconverted to believe in Christ.

¹⁶Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 4. Henceforth this book title will be abbreviated *History of the BMS*.

¹⁷Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 5. Abraham Taylor's tract, *The Modern Question* (1742), and Jonathan Edwards's major philosophical treatise, *An inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions Respecting that Freedom of the Will which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency* (1754) were influential in forming Fuller's thought and theology.

What was now needed was someone to make explicit the converted to bring the gospel to the world.”¹⁸

Three years after the publication of Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy* in 1788, a twenty-seven-year-old William Carey was in Birmingham, raising money for repairs on the Baptist chapel in Moulton, a village about fifty miles east of Birmingham. This was two years before Pearce arrived in Birmingham, but Carey had been serving the village church since 1785, where he received a stipend of £11 per year, topped off by a grant of £5 from the Particular Baptist Fund in London.¹⁹ With such limited resources the church depended on outside funding. While in Birmingham, Carey met Thomas Potts, a merchant of Livery Street and a soon-to-be deacon at the Cannon Street Church. Potts was not only enamored with Carey’s passion for the work in Moulton, but also for Carey’s desire to do all in his power to begin a missionary society, and to see the evangelization of the whole world. Potts urged Carey to write a pamphlet on global missions and offered to cover the cost of its printing. A modest and perhaps nervous Carey stated that he did not have the skill for such a task, to which Potts replied with this challenge, “If you cannot do it as you wish yet do it as you can. You have just now bound yourself to do all you are able for this purpose, and I must keep you to your word.”²⁰

With this challenge, along with encouragement from his friends Ryland and Fuller, Carey set out to write *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means*

¹⁸Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 5–6.

¹⁹John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward. Embracing the History of the Serampore Mission* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1859), 1:7.

²⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 129.

for the Conversion of the Heathens (1792), a work that would later be called “the first and still the greatest missionary treatise in the English language.”²¹ The essay included five major sections, with the first outlining Carey’s missiology, which followed the thought of Fuller, saying that Christians had an “obligation” to use “means” in order to reach the lost. In the second section, he gave a historical review of the missions movement and concluded the work with a section on the necessity of the church to pray for a “glorious outpouring” of God’s grace. His third and fourth sections, however, made up the bulk of the essay. In these, he gave a statistical survey of the geography and population of the heathen world and outlined a practical solution to begin engaging this world for the Kingdom of Christ. Carey estimated that there were 731 million people on earth and that the “vast proportion” of them remained in heathen darkness. Though Carey began work on this essay in 1788, it would not be published in pamphlet form for another four years.²² With the publication of Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy* and Carey’s *Enquiry*, the stage was now set for a Baptist missionary movement to begin.

In May of 1789 Carey left Moulton to begin pastoring the Harvey Lane Baptist Church in Leicester, England, a city only about thirty-five miles north-east of Birmingham, and at some point over the next two years Carey began building a friendship with Pearce, who of course came to Birmingham in the summer of 1790. Thomas Potts most likely introduced the two men to one another, and the young pastors quickly developed a very deep friendship.²³ In May of 1791 Pearce preached the evening

²¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 130.

²²Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 12–13.

²³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 130–31.

sermon at Carey's ordination and formal introduction as the pastor of Harvey Lane Church, and that night Carey read a long excerpt from his *Enquiry* and words deeply resonated with Pearce as he had already taken hold of the missionary vision. He later wrote of the experience, "On the evening of that day he read to the ministers a great part of his manuscript . . . this added fresh fuel to my zeal. But to pray and preach on the subject was all I could then think of doing."²⁴

The following May, Carey's pamphlet was finally published, and as mentioned in chapter four, within three weeks of the publication he preached before the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association on May 30, 1792, in Nottingham. This was of course Carey's famous sermon wherein he encouraged his fellow pastors to "Expect great things. Attempt great things."²⁵ He preached from Isaiah 54:2–3, "Enlarge the place of thy tent," and he insisted that God's promise to expand his Kingdom was also his command. He argued that because God was going to do great things by enlarging the Kingdom of Jesus throughout the globe, Christians were bound to attempt great things in spreading the gospel overseas.²⁶

Everyone in the room was moved by Carey's words. John Ryland wrote that the ministers who heard the sermon were so caught up in the wonder of God's mission that he would not have been surprised "if all the people had lifted up their voice and wept."²⁷ However, at the business meeting the following morning, no one was willing to

²⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

²⁵Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 14–15.

²⁶Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 13–14.

²⁷Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 14. John Ryland and Andrew Fuller, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated, in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller Late*

make a motion toward the formation of a Missions society until finally, being further urged by Carey, Fuller made the following resolution: “Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next Ministers’ meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist society for propagating the Gospel among the Heathen.”²⁸ Pearce was not present for this important meeting as he was preaching from Hebrews 8:6 before his own Midland Baptist Association, one hundred miles southwest at Upton-on-Severn.²⁹

Fuller’s Nottingham resolution became a reality on October 2, 1792, in the back parlor of Mrs. Beeby Wallis’s home in Kettering. The Wallis house had been nicknamed the “Gospel Inn,” as it had long been an open house for preachers. For this meeting, Samuel Pearce made the nearly sixty-mile journey east to join these Northamptonshire pastors who shared with him such a deep passion for missions. He would later write, “When I heard of a proposed meeting . . . for the express purpose of considering our duty in regard to the heathen, I could not resist my inclination for going, although at that time I was not much acquainted with the ministers of the Northamptonshire association.”³⁰ There was actually no attendance recorded in the minutes of this meeting but thirteen names were recorded as those who had pledged to make an annual gift to the society.³¹ Pearce was only one of two attendees that were not members of the Northamptonshire Association. The other was William Staughton

Pastor of the Baptist Church at Kettering, and Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society (Charlestown, MA: Ethridge, 1818), 242.

²⁸Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 14. Citing John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register, for 1790, 1791, 1792, and part of 1793* (London: Brown, James, and Cottle, 1793), 1:375, 419.

²⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 133.

³⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

(1770–1829), a student from Bristol Academy who happened to be in the area as he was preaching in view of a call to succeed John Ryland at Northampton.³² Pearce had actually baptized Staughton at Cannon Street and had sent the young preacher to the Bristol Academy for training.³³

With the exception of Ryland, Fuller, Sutcliff, and Pearce, the rest of those in attendance were pastors of no fame and no means. They were village pastors with meager salaries and with no fortune to their names, yet these thirteen all proudly gave. Staughton, a poor student at the time of the meeting, would later write, “I rejoice more over that ten-and-sixpence than over all I have given in my life besides.”³⁴ Carey had pledged all of the proceeds from his *Enquiry*, which would make him the largest contributor by far in the society’s first year. He also pledged himself, as he would be the first to leave home and comfort to carry out his own vision for the conversion of the heathen. At the first meeting, however, a collection of only £13 2s 6d³⁵ was taken up.³⁶ They left that meeting with the great problem of trying to carry out their enormously ambitious vision with very limited resources. The looming question for the new Baptist Missionary Society, called then The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel

³¹Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 15.

³²Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 14–15

³³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 136.

³⁴Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 136.

³⁵This would have been equal to approximately a fifth of Pearce’s annual salary.

³⁶Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 137–38.

Among the Heathen, was how would they construct a sufficiently broad base of domestic support to finance their dreams for overseas operations?³⁷

Pearce's Leadership in and Fundraising for the New Baptist Missionary Society

History was being made in the Wallis parlor at Kettering, though none of the men could have known how profound an impact their little meeting would make on the history of the church. Pearce's biographer, Samuel Pearce Carey, described the magnitude of the meeting with these beautifully written words:

Long ago the Lord had slipped away with modest silentness at night from the midst of "the Eleven" near to Bethany. No others knew that He had gone. In Jerusalem no sign nor sound was given that the great Event had come to pass. "He shall come in like manner," the two messengers had said to the up-gazing disciples. The history of the Church is the verification of this prophecy, for He has ever come most mightily in this unobserved fashion. He was "coming again" to His Church that evening towards vast world-conquests, when He burned in the hearts of those humble pastors in Widow Wallis's parlour, and moved them to their daring and their gifts. He did not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets. He blew no trumpet before Him. The busy world took no note of that little Kettering company. Nevertheless it was of prodigious import, and its line has gone out through all the earth, and its impulse to the end of the world.³⁸

Of the meeting Pearce wrote, "There I got my judgment informed, and my heart increasingly interested. I returned home resolved to lay myself out in the cause."³⁹

Pearce returned to Birmingham to preach to his congregation on "the duty of all Christians to exert themselves for the spread of the Gospel." Interestingly, his text was Psalm 22:9: "Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my

³⁷Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 15.

³⁸Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 138–39. Though a great tribute to Pearce, is this quotation evidence of the theological liberalism of S. Pearce Carey who, judging from these words, seems to deny the bodily return of Christ?

³⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

mother's breasts." But Pearce ran from this text to a bold plea with his congregation for the mission of Christ. He gave his people a full account of the Kettering meeting and then invited them to a special meeting for the following Tuesday. At that meeting an auxiliary missions society was formed just for those citizens of Birmingham.⁴⁰ The expressed mission of this auxiliary society was to receive funds for the mission and "co-operate by every other means in their power with the primary society."⁴¹ Pearce was appointed the treasurer of this unique society, Thomas King the treasurer, and six other members joined including Carey's friend, Thomas Potts.⁴²

When the Baptist Missionary Society had their second meeting on November 1, 1792, in Northampton, the tone was much dimmer than it had been the month before. Fuller was ill and could not attend, and Carey was also unable to come. The November skies were cold and grey, and the society had only been able to raise an additional £26 4s in promised gifts. Then, when spirits were still low, Pearce produced, not in promise, but in cash, Cannon Street's gift of £70. Ryland reported that the clouds at once lifted and that everyone had a new spirit.⁴³ Pearce further brought news of the new auxiliary society, and those at the Northampton meeting expressed the hope that similar corresponding united societies would be formed elsewhere and promptly made Pearce a full member of the Committee.

⁴⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 139.

⁴¹Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 15.

⁴²Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 139.

⁴³Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 140.

At the third meeting of the Society two weeks later, it was agreed that any “corresponding society” should have the right to send two delegates (or one delegate with two votes) to any meeting of the primary society.⁴⁴ At the same meeting the delegates decided that the Baptist Missionary Society needed to have a destination in mind in order to truly garner the support of churches across England. Samuel Pearce’s preference for the first field of service was the Pellew Islands, a tiny group situated to the east of the Philippines in the Indian Archipelago. Early voyagers had found the people of these islands “delicate in their sentiments” and “friendly in their disposition.” They were also known to be far more intelligent and polished than other islanders.⁴⁵ Carey, however, had sent word to John Thomas, a friend of Sutcliff’s, who had recently returned from Bengal and intended to return to India with a companion to work as an evangelist amongst the Hindu population. The Committee deputed Fuller to interview Thomas, which he did and was impressed by the evangelistic warmth of his Calvinism.⁴⁶

When the committee met on January 9, 1793, they greeted the characteristically-late Thomas with open arms. He was quickly accepted as the society’s first missionary after answering a few questions, and no sooner had they accepted him than Carey offered to join him on mission. The committee quickly accepted Carey, as Fuller wrote they had “long considered him as a person peculiarly formed and fitted for

⁴⁴In 1793, the term “corresponding society” was replaced by “assistant society” in order to not be confused with a like-termed political group of the day, but the function of the “assistant society” remained the same. Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 16.

⁴⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 141.

⁴⁶Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 16.

so arduous an undertaking; and had formed themselves into a Society with a view to carry into execution what he had proposed.”⁴⁷

Pearce secured a promise from both Carey and Thomas to come to Birmingham in order that the members of Cannon Street Baptist Church could follow their work in Bengal with a deep and personal interest. Pearce personally followed and supported their work most deeply and was willing to do whatever he could to support their cause. He replied to the request of Fuller on February 23, 1793:

I am willing to go any where, and do any thing in my power, but I hope no plan will be suffered to interfere with the affecting—hoped for—dreaded day, March 13 (the day of our brethren Carey and Thomas’s solemn designation at Leicester). Oh how the anticipation of it at once rejoices and afflicts me! Our hearts need steeling to part with our much-loved brethren, who are about to venture their all for the name of the Lord Jesus. I feel my soul melting within me when I read the 20th chapter of the Acts, and especially verses 36–38. But why grieve? We shall see them again. Oh yes; them and the children whom the Lord will give them;—we and the children whom the Lord hath given us. We shall meet again, not to weep and pray, but to smile and praise.⁴⁸

The following week Pearce went with Thomas to collect from friends in Bristol. A trip on which Thomas commented, “Brother Pearce continues indefatigable in desires and exertions for promoting the good work.”⁴⁹

Carey’s farewell from Leicester was delayed for one week until Wednesday, March 20, 1793, but still Pearce came to pray for and support his friend. He even accompanied Carey and Thomas to London to help arrange for their voyage.⁵⁰ Pearce’s church continued to catch the fire that had been ignited in their souls by their young

⁴⁷Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 17; John Ryland and Andrew Fuller, “BMS Committee Minutes, 13 November 1792, 10–13; 9 January 1793, 14–18,” *Baptist Magazine* 8 (1816): 452.

⁴⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:379.

⁴⁹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 143.

pastor. In addition to the £70 given in the November meeting, the members of Cannon Street Baptist Church gave an additional £127 10s 10¼d in the first year. Other auxiliary societies like the one in Birmingham were formed and challenged to generosity. Societies were formed in Halifax, Hampshire, Folkestone, and one in Yorkshire, which raised £200 in the first year.⁵¹ With preparation made and funds coming in, Thomas, Carey, Carey's wife, Dorothy, her sister, and their four young children set sail for India on June 13, 1793. By November 10, 1793, just thirteen months after the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, Carey and Thomas landed in Bengal, convinced, in Carey's words, that "the work is God's—it has been favoured by God—we shall surmount all difficulties, and the glory will redound to God again."⁵²

Pearce's Desire to Go on Mission

From the very first meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society in October of 1792, Pearce's heart was drawn on mission for God to the heathen. He later wrote about that Kettering meeting:

My mind became now inclined to go among the heathen myself. Yet a consideration of my connexions with the dear people of God in Birmingham restrained my desires, and kept me from naming my wishes to any body, (as I remember), except to brother Carey. With him I was pretty free. We had an interesting conversation about it just before he left Europe. I shall never forget the *manner* of his saying, "Well, you will come after us." My heart said, Amen! and my eagerness for the work increased; though I never talked freely about it, except to my wife, and we then both thought that my relation to the church in Cannon Street, and usefulness there, forbad any such an attempt.⁵³

⁵⁰Haykin, *One Heart*, 232–33.

⁵¹Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 144–45.

⁵²Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 36.

⁵³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:382.

Fuller wrote of Pearce, “From the day of the departure of the missionaries, no one was more importunate in prayer than Mr. Pearce; and on the news of their safe arrival, no one was more filled with joy and thankfulness.”⁵⁴ Upon hearing the news of their landing from his deacon Potts, who was in contact with the ship’s captain, he wrote back to Thomas and Carey saying, “I sat up all night to copy the letter of your Captain for the satisfaction of interested brethren. What shall I say? We love you in Christ Jesus, and we ardently pray for you every day.”⁵⁵ His heart was with the missionaries in support, but increasingly began to desire to be with them in person.

Fuller and the other members of society had, of course, noticed Pearce’s zeal in promoting the mission from England, but in October of 1794 they came to find out that he had for some time been seriously considering joining the team in India.⁵⁶ In the last week of September 1794, fresh letters came from Carey and Thomas outlining their need for co-workers. Having no workers to send, the group commissioned Pearce to question the interest of his old college friend William Steadman (1764–1837). Steadman had just taken a church in Broughton and Stockbridge but was full of “piety, scholarship, humility, and zeal.”⁵⁷ On October 4, 1794, Pearce wrote a letter to Steadman to inquire of his interest but he went much further. He revealed to his friend his deep desire to join Carey and Thomas on the field and proposed that they both leave their England home to join the work. The burning desire to go is clear in Pearce’s words:

⁵⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:379.

⁵⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 151.

⁵⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:379.

⁵⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 159.

I thought it right to mention this circumstance; and one thing more I cannot refrain from saying, that, were it manifestly the will of God, I should call that the happiest hour of my life which witnessed our *both* embarking with our families on board one ship, as helpers of the servants of Jesus Christ already in Hindostan. Yes, I could unreluctantly leave Europe and all its contents for the pleasures and perils of this glorious service. Often my heart in the sincerest ardours thus breathes forth its desires unto God,—“Here am I, send me.” But I am ignorant whether you from experience can realize my feelings. Perhaps you have friendship enough for me to lay open your meditations on this subject in your next. If you have had half the exercises that I have, it will be a relief to your labouring mind; or if you think I have made too free with you, reprove me, and I will love you still. Oh if I could find a heart that had been tortured and ravished like my own in this respect, I should form a new kind of alliance, and feel a friendship of a novel species. With eagerness should I communicate all the vicissitudes of my sensations, and with eagerness listen to a recital of kindred feelings. With impatience I should seek, and with gratitude receive, direction and support, and I hope feel a new occasion of thankfulness when I bow my knee to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Whence is it that I thus write to *you*, as I have never written to any one before? Is there a fellowship of the spirit; or is it the confidence that I have in your friendship that thus directs my pen? Tell me, dear! Tell me how you felt, and how you still feel, on this interesting subject, and do not long delay the gratification to your very affectionate friend and brother.⁵⁸

Having now verbalized his heart’s desire to his friend Steadman, Pearce finally felt the courage to tell his friends in the Baptist Missionary Society of his willingness and even desire to join Carey in Bengal. When his friends and co-laborers in the society first heard this, they, in Fuller’s words, “endeavoured to persuade him that he was already in a sphere of usefulness too important to be relinquished.”⁵⁹ Pearce ultimately was not satisfied with their answers and made a formal offer of his services to the committee. He further urged them to assemble that they may hear the reasons which induced him to make the proposal and take a day of solemn prayer in order to consider his appeal. The date for this hearing was set for November 13, 1794.

⁵⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:380.

⁵⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:379.

Pearce set apart the month preceding this hearing for, in the words of his biographer Carey, the “special watching of his own spirit concerning his dedication of himself to the missionary’s calling.”⁶⁰ Throughout the month, Pearce resolved to devote one day in every week to prayer and fasting and to keep a journal of the exercises of his mind during the whole of that period.⁶¹ The journal allows an intimate look into the heart of Pearce, as Fuller wrote when citing passages from his journal in Pearce’s memoirs, “a few passages, however, from this transcript of his heart, while contemplating a great and disinterested undertaking, will furnish a better idea of his character than could be given by any other hand.”⁶² The following paragraphs of this chapter include excerpts from this journal.

Pearce’s first entry is dated October 8, 1794:

Had some remarkable freedom and affection this morning, both in family and secret prayer. With many tears I dedicated myself, body and soul, to the service of Jesus; and earnestly implored full satisfaction respecting the path of duty—I feel an increasing deadness for all earthly comforts; and derive my happiness immediately from GOD himself. May I still endure, as Moses did, by seeing him who is invisible.⁶³

It is obvious from this entry that Pearce is ready to be led away from the comforts of England. It is interesting that he says that he is ready to derive his happiness “immediately” from God. He means that he was learning to draw on the persons of the Godhead for his joy and not merely on the blessings that God gave.

⁶⁰Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 160.

⁶¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

⁶²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

⁶³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

In an October 10, 1794, entry, following a midweek prayer meeting, Pearce commented that he had “learned more of the meaning of some passages of Scripture than ever before,” saying,

I had often meditated on Philippians 3:7–8, and Galatians 6:14, but never *felt* crucifixion to the world, and disesteem for all that it contains, as at that time. All prospects of pecuniary independence, and growing reputation, with which in unworthier moments I had amused myself, were now chased from my mind; and the desire of living *wholly* to Christ swallowed up every other thought. Frowns and smiles, fullness and want, honour and reproach, were now equally indifferent; and when I concluded the meeting, my whole soul felt, as it were, going after the lost sheep of Christ among the heathen.⁶⁴

This theme of being wholly devoted to Christ was also present in his October 17 entry:

This is the first day I have set apart for extraordinary devotion in relation to my present exercise of mind. Rose earlier than usual, and began the day in prayer that God would be with me in every part of it, and grant the end I have in view may be clearly ascertained—the knowledge of his will Read also part of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and the first chapter to the Philippians. Oh that for *me* to live may be *Christ* alone! Blessed be my dear Saviour! in prayer I have had such fellowship with him as would warm me in Greenland, comfort me in New Zealand, and rejoice me in the valley of the shadow of death!⁶⁵

Pearce’s devotional time through this period of “special watching” was clearly sweet and deep. He joined Paul in counting everything as loss for the sake of Christ and in being crucified to the world. It is telling that Pearce was so aware of his desire for wealth and fame, even as a servant of Christ, but that his private devotions and desire for missional usefulness had led him to be totally swallowed up in God. His prayer in this season led him to a warmth, a comfort, and a joy in God that could take him anywhere and allow him to do anything. His heart had been prepared for total obedience to wherever the Lord would lead and for whatever the Lord would command.

⁶⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

⁶⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:386–87.

In the following October 15, 1794, entry Pearce was meditating on the massive number of souls that did not know Jesus and had no access to Jesus. This was the powerful argument of Carey in his *Enquiry*, and his statistics began to press in on the heart of Pearce:

There are in Birmingham 50,000 inhabitants; and, exclusive of the vicinity, ten ministers who preach the fundamental truths of the gospel. In Hindostan there are twice as many millions of inhabitants; and not so many gospel preachers. Now Jesus Christ hath commanded his ministers to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: why should we be so disproportionate in our labours? Peculiar circumstances must not be urged against positive commands: I am therefore bound, if others do not go, to make the means more proportionate to the multitude.⁶⁶

Again in the above passage Pearce mentions money. He enjoyed a relatively comfortable life in Birmingham, being paid £100 per year at his church in addition to any money he may have received for other preaching engagements. This was especially generous considering his age. The future was bright for the talented young preacher, and he surely could have gone anywhere but he was struck, as any westerner should be, by the disproportionate access to the gospel that he enjoyed. His resolve thus was to go; as he said, “bound,” to go, if others did not. He longed as he said in an October 18 entry to enjoy the eternal Kingdom with men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation. He wrote, “How pleasant will it be to sit down at the Lord’s table with our swarthy brethren, and hear Jesus preached in their language! Surely then will come to pass the saying that is written, In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, all are One in him.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:386.

⁶⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:387.

As this momentous October rolled along, Pearce even began studying the Bengalee language and culture and these tasks gave him both pleasure and a deeper motivation to go. He wrote the following two entries on October 23, and 29, 1794:

Have found a little time to apply to the Bengalee language. How pleasant it is to work for God! Love transforms thorns to roses, and makes pain itself a pleasure. I never sat down to any study with such peculiar and continued satisfaction. The thought of exalting the Redeemer in this language is a spur to my application paramount to every discouragement for want of a living tutor. I have passed this day with an abiding satisfaction respecting my present views.⁶⁸

Looked over the Code of Hindu Laws today. How much is there to admire in it, founded on the principles of justice! The most salutary regulations are adopted in many circumstances. But what a pity that so much excellence should be debased by laws to establish or countenance idolatry, magic, prostitution, prayers for the dead, false-witnessing, theft, and suicide. How perfect is the morality of the gospel of Jesus; and how desirable that they should embrace it! Ought not means to be used? Can we assist them too soon?⁶⁹

Even the tedious task of learning a language had become a joy for Pearce. With these two entries it seems that Pearce had moved from contemplating whether or not he was to go to preparing to go. However, beyond his burden for this particular people, it is telling that his primary motivation for going was “exalting the Redeemer in this language.” Pearce’s missiology and desire for missions was always aimed at his desire for God. He wanted to see the glory of God known on earth so that many sons and daughters may be brought to glory in God. In considering the Hindu laws and the evils that they established, his heart immediately went to tragic triumph of Satan over those souls that he desired to win for the glory of God. He lamented: “There is reason to think that their shasters were penned about the beginning of the Kollee Jogue, which must be soon after

⁶⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:388.

⁶⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:390.

the deluge: and are not 4,000 years long enough for 100,000,000 men to be under the empire of the devil?”⁷⁰

Obviously one of Pearce’s great barriers in going was that it was more than his life that would be affected. His wife, Sarah, was rooted in the Cannon Street church and felt a particular burden for their ministry in Birmingham. By this October 24, 1794, entry God had clearly changed her heart and had given her an openness to wherever the Lord may lead:

On coming home, the sight of Mrs. P. replaced my load. She had for some time been much discouraged at the thoughts of going. I therefore felt reluctant to say any thing on this subject, thinking it would be unpleasant to her; but though I strove to conceal it, an involuntary sigh betrayed my uneasiness. She kindly required the cause. I avoided at first an explanation, till she, guessing the reason, said to this effect:—“I hope you will be no more uneasy on *my* account. For the last two or three days I have been more comfortable than ever in the thought of going. I have considered the steps you are pursuing to know the mind of God, and I think you cannot take more proper ones. When you consult the ministers, you should represent your obstacles as strongly as your inducements; and then, if they advise your going, though the parting from my friends will be almost insupportable, yet I will make myself as happy as I can, and God can make me happy any where.”⁷¹

What is so striking about this entry is that clearly Samuel and Sarah had not been talking in depth about his decision to go. He mentioned his attempts to conceal his thoughts from his wife, yet she initiated the conversation as if the Lord had clearly been speaking to her independently. It was going to be hard for her to leave the area that she had always known and loved, but she was willing and trusted the Lord to bring her joy.

This month was unlike any other in Pearce’s life. He was being pulled in so many different directions by so many different people. His friend John Ryland gave him

⁷⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:390.

⁷¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:389.

many objections to his going, as mentioned in a November 3, 1794, entry. His friend Carey was clearly urging him to go. Pearce loved his congregation in Birmingham but also had a deep burden for the lost in India. Fuller omitted Sarah's struggle from his published version of Pearce's journal, but it is clear that she deeply wrestled with leaving her family, friends, and life in England behind. Ultimately however God did give Sarah a heart to go.⁷² But Fuller's publication of this journal did survey all of Pearce's emotions, and it is clear by the end of the month that his heart was overwhelmingly set on going. When the committee met they did not consider this diary, but Andrew Fuller and a few of the other committee members who had a chance to read these words after Pearce's death believed that if they had seen the diary they would not have been able to oppose Pearce's application.⁷³ Yet Pearce had full faith in the decision that the committee would make as he says in this final journal entry from November 7, 1794, "This is the last day of peculiar devotion before the deciding meeting. May I have strength to wrestle with God today for his wisdom to preside in the committee, and by faith to leave the issue to their determination!"⁷⁴

At last, the day of decision came. On November 13, 1794, the committee met in Northampton. The morning was spent in solemn prayer and fasting, and then Pearce

⁷²In his journal Pearce mentioned Sarah's struggle and even mentioned the idea of a missionary leaving his wife at home for the cause of missions. Pearce however could not reconcile with the thought of leaving Sarah for the mission field, either biblically or personally. He understood his biblical covenant and commitment to her and she was his closest companion. Sarah would ultimately submit to whatever Samuel desired and the Lord even gave her a desire to go and serve the Lord wherever she was most needed. From Samuel Pearce, "Diary of Samuel Pearce, October 8, 1794" Reeves Collection, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford University.

⁷³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

⁷⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:392.

read an account of how the Lord had been drawing him to the mission field. This was a narrative that he had prepared separately from his private journal, an account that included much of what was previously reviewed in the first section of this chapter. Two of Pearce's deacons, Potts and King, accompanied him to the meeting. The deacons were zealous for the cause of missions, but they also deeply loved their pastor and were torn as to their desired outcome. At two o'clock in the afternoon Pearce, Potts, and King withdrew and gave themselves to prayer while the committee continued to meet.⁷⁵

Ryland and Sutcliff could not be present at the meeting, but their opinion was well known that Pearce was for the mission's sake indispensable in England. Even Fuller in his invitation to the committee meeting had written:

His post is of great importance. I could not conduct the Mission without his assistance. He is very useful in Birmingham. His learning, piety, character, and popular abilities promise to render him one of the first ministers in the Denomination. I admire the disinterestedness, ardour and magnanimity of his soul, though he should never go.⁷⁶

After meeting for two hours, even though the members of committee were fully satisfied with Pearce's qualifications and greatly approved of his spirit they said no because of his work at home in Birmingham and even more so on account of the mission itself, which required his unique ability to raise awareness and money.⁷⁷

This was a great blow to Pearce, but he refused to give way to bitterness or dismay, but continued in his faithful pursuit of God and his mission. For the rest of his life he often hinted that his heart was to be overseas, yet he continued to be faithful to the

⁷⁵Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 172–73.

⁷⁶Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 172.

⁷⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

work that he had been called. After the decision was handed to him he wrote the following words to his faithful wife:

I am disappointed, but not dismayed. I ever wish to make my Saviour's will my own. I am more satisfied than ever I expected I should be with a negative upon my earnest desires, because the business has been so conducted that I think (if by any means such an issue could be insured) the mind of Christ has been obtained. My dear brethren here have treated the affair with as much seriousness and affection as I could possibly desire, and I think more than so insignificant a worm could expect.⁷⁸

Pearce's Continued Work for the Baptist Missionary Society

The rejection did not slow down Pearce's involvement in the cause. If he could not go abroad, Pearce seemed all the more resolved to give himself to the work at home. In March 1795, after a life-threatening illness, he wrote to Fuller: "Through mercy I am almost in a state of convalescence. May my spared life be wholly devoted to the service of my dear Redeemer. I do not care where I am, whether in England or in India, so I am employed as he would have me; but surely we need pray hard that God would send some more help to Hindostan."⁷⁹ In October 1795, the Birmingham assistant society that he had formed was fully incorporated into the parent society for the sake of convenience. Its officers became members of the Baptist Missionary Society, among them were Pearce's faithful deacons: Thomas King, who eventually became the Society's treasurer, and Thomas Potts. Both men were spurred on by the passion of Pearce to serve the Baptist Missionary Society until their respective deaths in 1831.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383–84.

⁷⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:383.

⁸⁰Stanley, *History of the BMS*, 19.

In January of 1796, Pearce was first informed of a young man of wonderful character, a Mr. Fountain, who was being considered by the committee to go on mission. He quickly replied, “Your letter, just arrived, put—I was going to say—another soul into my little body; at least it has added new life to the soul I have.”⁸¹ It was as if he saw himself in the young Mr. Fountain and was compelled to spur the committee on to letting him go and then to share with them in the joy of sending another laborer onto the field. He went on in the same letter, “I cannot be contented with the thought of being absent from your proposed meeting. No, no; I must be there, (for my own sake I mean,) and try to sing with you, ‘O’er the gloomy hills of darkness.’”⁸² He never wanted to be far from the work. He always rejoiced to see the fountain of God going forward in India. His greatest joys came in receiving news from Carey and Thomas, and while he supported them through letter, fund-raising, prayer, and preaching he always longed to be with them in person, as he said in an August of 1796 letter to Fuller:

Brother Carey speaks in such a manner of the effects of the gospel in his neighborhood as in my view promises a fair illustration of our Lord’s parable, when he compared the kingdom of heaven to a little leaven, hid in three measures of meal, which insinuated itself so effectually as to leaven the lump at last. Blessed be God, the leaven is already in the meal; the fermentation is begun; and my hopes were never half so strong as they are now that the whole shall be effectually leavened. Oh that I were there to witness the delightful process! But whither am I running? . . . I long to write you from Hindostan!⁸³

Irrespective of where he was or of what he was doing, his heart was never far from the mission. At times it seemed that he gained more joy from Carey and Thomas’s

⁸¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:384.

⁸²“O’er the Gloomy Darkness” by Welsh Calvinistic Methodist William Williams Pantcelyn (1717–1791) was the 428th hymn of Dr. Rippon’s hymnbook and was frequently sung at the BMS meetings. See Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:384.

⁸³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:384.

successes than they did and longed to be counted worthy enough to preach the gospel to a people who had never heard. Beyond all of this, he deeply desired that the story of his beloved committee be told, and so he edited and prepared the first three volumes of *The Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society*. Even when important business or pastoral duty kept him away from a meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society his thoughts and prayers were never far away.⁸⁴ And so it was in early October 1798 that he developed the pulmonary tuberculosis that would eventually take his life due to being caught in a rainstorm on his way home from a Baptist Missionary Society meeting in Kettering. He had preached that night for the commissioning of the missionary William Ward from Psalm 90:16–17: “Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” He was observed to be singularly solemn and affectionate in that discourse. Fuller wrote, “If he had known it to be the last time that he should address his brethren in that part of the country, he could scarcely have felt or spoken in a more interesting manner. It was a discourse full of instruction, full of a holy unction, and that seemed to breathe an apostolical ardour.”⁸⁵ The kind of rejection that Pearce faced from the Baptist Missionary Society, after he had given so much of his own life to the cause of missions, after so much prayer and excitement toward the prospect of going, and after such a passionate plea to the committee, could have left Pearce bitter for the rest of his life. Instead, in faithfulness he continued to be obedient to commission of Jesus in the ways

⁸⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:384–85.

⁸⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:409.

that God in his providence allowed. Pearce's unwavering character may best be summed up in the words of Fuller when he wrote,

In Mr. Pearce we saw a devotion ardent, steady, pure, and persevering: kindled, as we may say, at the altar of God, like the fire of the temple, it went not out by night nor by day. He seemed to have learnt that heavenly art, so conspicuous among the primitive Christians, of converting every thing he met with into materials for love, and joy, and praise. Hence he laboured, as he expresses it, 'to exercise most love to God when suffering most severely;' and hence he so affectingly encountered the billows that overwhelmed his feeble frame, crying "Sweet affliction! sweet affliction! Singing as I waded to heaven."⁸⁶

Pearce's Missional Journey to Ireland

In July of 1795 Pearce received an invitation from the General Evangelical Society in Dublin. They asked him to come help spread the gospel of the grace of God in Ireland. On August 3 of that year Pearce replied to a Dr. M'Dowal with these words:

For the present, I am sorry to say, I must decline your proposal, being engaged to spend a month in London this autumn on the business of our mission society, of which you have probably heard. When I formed my present connexions with the church in Birmingham, I proposed an annual freedom for six weeks from my pastoral duties; and should the 'Evangelical Society' express a wish for my services the ensuing year, I am perfectly inclined, God willing, to spend that time beneath their direction, and at what part of the year they conceive a visit would be most serviceable to the good design.⁸⁷

The Dublin Society was pleased with Pearce's reply, and on May 31, 1796, he set sail for Dublin, planning to spend the month of June and into July preaching the gospel on the Emerald Isle. The Lord gave Pearce great success during his Irish journey. Fuller wrote, "His preaching was not only highly acceptable to every class of hearers, but the word came from him with power; and there is abundant reason to believe that many will, through eternity, praise God for sending his message to them by this dear ambassador of

⁸⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:445.

⁸⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:393–94.

Christ.”⁸⁸ He was asked to return two years later but was prevented due to the Irish Rebellion of 1798.⁸⁹

In Ireland his preaching was as Spirit-filled and bold as it was in Birmingham.

In a letter to Sarah, written little more than a week after his arrival, he wrote,

I thank God that I possess an abiding determination to aim at the *consciences* of the people in every discourse. I have borne the most positive testimony against the prevailing evils of professors here; as sensuality, gaiety, vain amusements, neglect of the sabbath, &c.; and last night told an immense crowd of professors of the first rank, ‘that if they made custom and fashion their plea, they were awfully deluding their souls; for it had always been the fashion to insult God, to dissipate time, and to pursue the broad road to hell: but it would not lessen their torments there that the way to damnation was the fashion.’⁹⁰

The Lord honored Pearce’s boldness; he was nervous that after being so bold in the morning that no one would come to the evening service where Pearce had planned to preach on public worship, but in a sanctuary that held fifteen hundred people, Pearce “was delighted and surprised, at the five o’clock meeting, to see the place nearly full.”⁹¹

He went on to say, “Surely this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in my eyes.

Never, never did I more feel how weak I am in myself—a mere nothing; and how strong I am in the omnipotence of God.”⁹²

⁸⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:395

⁸⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:395. Inspired by the American and French Revolutions the Society of United Irishmen formed in 1791 eventually leading to this 1798 rebellion. The heat of the conflict was in Dublin beginning in the spring of 1798, clearly conflicting with Pearce’s trip. See Thomas Bartlett, “The 1798 Irish Rebellion,” accessed June 25, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/irish_reb_01.shtml for more details.

⁹⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:395–96.

⁹¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396.

⁹²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396.

It is interesting that Fuller gives so much attention to this period of just a few weeks in Pearce's life. In his classic memoir, Fuller includes nearly every letter connected to Pearce's Dublin trip, including letters that contain small and tedious details. Pearce's biographer, Carey, barely mentions his Dublin travels, and they are all but forgotten in other publications mentioning his name. One must remember that, in giving his friend's memoirs, Fuller wanted to prove that his fellow founding member of the Baptist Missionary Society indeed had a deep heart for missions. Pearce clearly proved this in his support-raising for the missions effort, he proved this in his desire to join Carey in Bengal, and he proves once again his heart for missions in his own going to Ireland. Thus it is right to read this account as if reading the account of a missionary boldly leaving his homeland for the cause of Christ.

Therefore, consider the words of the missionary in the same letter to Sarah as he wrote, "I feel a superiority to all fear, and possess a conscious dignity in being the ambassador of Christ. O help me to praise! for it is he alone who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: and still pray for me; for if he withdraw for a moment, I become as weak and unprofitable as the briars of the wilderness."⁹³ Consider the support for the missionary from his home church as Pearce reported: "You cannot think how much I am supported by the assurance that I have left a praying people at Birmingham; and I believe that, in answer to their prayers, I have hitherto been wonderfully assisted in the public work, as well as enjoyed much in private devotion."⁹⁴ Consider the missionary as he wrote to his friend Summers for additional support and help:

⁹³Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396.

⁹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396.

Come to Dublin, and come directly! . . . I thank God that I came hither, and hope that many, as well as myself, will have cause to praise him. Never have I been more deeply taught my own nothingness—never hath the power of God more evidently rested upon me. The harvest here is great indeed; and the Lord of the harvest hath enabled me to labour in it with delight.⁹⁵

Eventually his friend Summers did come to join his work in Ireland, and in his descriptions of their work together there is a deep joy and excitement in the movement of God. The Lord was calling people to salvation and calling men into ministry through this explosion of fruitful work. Large crowds were coming out to hear him preach, and by the end of his time in Dublin, an offer for him to come and work for three or six months every year was given to him.⁹⁶ Pearce had in effect, become for a short time, a missionary, and having even been offered a longer stay as a missionary, he said to Carey upon his return in an August 12, 1796, letter, “It is not long since I returned from a kind of mission to Ireland.”⁹⁷ His post as God would have it, though, was not with the Irish or even with the converted heathen that he longed to see in India but with the faithful men and women of Cannon Street, and after six Lord’s days in Ireland it was to those men and women of Birmingham that he would return.

Pearce’s Theology of Mission

The two most significant documents in understanding Pearce’s theology of mission were written for two very distinct purposes. The first document is the Circular Letter of 1795 written for the annual meeting of the Midland Baptist Association on May 26–27, 1795. The letter is a theological treatise on *The Doctrine of Salvation by Free*

⁹⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:396–97.

⁹⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:399.

⁹⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:402.

Grace Alone, written to trained gospel ministers. The letter was a response to the confused soteriology of the day. In this circular letter, Pearce struck a biblical balance between obligations of man and the sovereignty of God. It proved to be a helpful document as it has been reprinted many times.⁹⁸ The second document was his 1798 *Letter to the Lascars*.⁹⁹ This letter was not written to educated ministers but to strangers from Southeast Asia. It was a powerful apologetic to people who had never heard the gospel and who had lived their whole lives under the influence of Islam. In the following section both of these documents will be examined in order to discover in a more robust way Pearce's theology of missions.

The Doctrine of Salvation by Free Grace Alone

Pearce began the Circular Letter of 1795 on *The Doctrine of Salvation by Free Grace Alone* with a humble approach to theological conflict, saying that “these are the trials from which no age of Christianity, not even the apostolic, has been exempted.”¹⁰⁰ He began the letter by defining this doctrine the face of the attack that “some assert that good works are the cause of justification; some that good works are united with the merits of Christ and so both contribute to our justification; and others that good works neither in

⁹⁸The Philadelphia Baptists William Rogers and William Staughton had this circular letter reprinted in 1803: Samuel Pearce, *Circular Letter of the Elders and Messengers of the Several Baptist Churches Met in Association at Bewdley, in Worcestershire, England* (Burlington, England: Stephen C. Ustick, 1803). It was also reprinted again in 1855 by the New York Baptist Association and, in 2004, by *The Founders Journal*. See Samuel Pearce, “Circular Letter of the Elders and Messengers of the Several Baptist Churches Met in Association at Bewdley, in Worcestershire, England,” *The Founders Journal* 57 (Summer 2004): 26–33.

⁹⁹John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register for 1798, 1799, 1800, and Part of 1801* (London: Messrs. Button and Condor, 1801), 3:433–38.

¹⁰⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 132.

whole nor in part justify, but the act of faith.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, Pearce affirmed the doctrine of justification as outlined in the *Second London Confession of Faith* saying,

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, . . . for Christ’s sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith’ which ‘is the alone instrument of justification.¹⁰²

He then went on further to explain:

In this point do all the other lines of our confession meet. For if it be admitted that justification is an act of free grace in God without any respect to the merit or demerit of the person justified, then the doctrines of Jehovah’s sovereign love in choosing to himself a people from before the foundation of the world, his sending his Son to expiate their guilt, his effectual operations upon their hearts, and his perfecting the work he has begun in them until those whom he justifies he also glorifies, will be embraced as necessary parts of the glorious scheme of our salvation.¹⁰³

The letter however was primarily written to respond to another attack on this Baptist understanding of justification. It had been asserted that this Baptist doctrine gave an unjust and offensive idea of God, that it relaxed the obligations of men to faith and holiness, that it withheld consolation from penitent sinners, and sapped the foundations of true morality in the world.¹⁰⁴ Pearce defended the character of God as displayed in Baptist doctrine in six points, affirming the mercy, righteousness, and honour of God displayed in his doctrine. He further explained that rather than being an enemy of religion or of the righteousness of men, these doctrines actually serve to motive the elect to act in righteousness. He concluded this section with a simple summary given in three points:

¹⁰¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 132–33.

¹⁰²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 133. Pearce cites *The Second London Confession of Faith* 11.1–2,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 265–66.

¹⁰³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 133.

The doctrine of distinguishing grace, when simplified, is summed up in three propositions:

1. All men have rebelled against God, and so rendered themselves obnoxious to his everlasting wrath.
2. It is the pleasure of God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to extend a gracious pardon to a great number of his rebellious creatures and receive them into his favour as though they had never sinned.
3. God doth not extend his purpose of salvation to all, but while he saves some, leaves others exposed to the awful consequences of their crimes and the righteous awards of his most holy law.¹⁰⁵

Some observations and conclusions should be drawn from Pearce's letter. First of all, it is clear that Pearce understood the fault or responsibility for sin not to be God's but to be man's. He cited John Gill to say that any man not coming to Christ "is criminal and blameworthy, since the disability and perverseness of his will are not owing to any decree in God, but to the corruption and vitiosity of his nature through sin."¹⁰⁶ Men were then not only responsible for their sin but were also responsible by God's grace to repent of their sin upon receiving a well-meaning offer of the gospel. The implication then for missions is obvious in that such offers of the gospel should be made generously to all men and women whom God may call unto Himself. Second, it is important to note that salvation does not come to those of worldly wealth or worldly esteem but to those whom God calls through the gospel. Again, there is an implication for missions in that the nobleman of England and the barbarian of Africa have an equal standing before God without the effectual calling of Christ. Just months before Pearce wrote this letter he

¹⁰⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 134.

¹⁰⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 141.

¹⁰⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 137, as cited in John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (London: Aaron Ward, 1735), 1:159–60.

himself was willing to leave his ministry among the well-to-do merchants of Birmingham to go and work among the poor heathen of Hindustan. Third, this doctrine asserted that the judgment of God against sin is real and is “awful.” Pearce felt the weight of this and knew that hundreds of millions and even billions of souls had been lost to hell. Beyond his desire for the glory of God his compassion for these lost drove his calling and word in life. Last, Pearce’s doctrine gave him confidence in God to save any kind of person, irrespective of their background or geography. It was this kind of confidence in the work of God and not man that led Pearce to the kind of missional plea that we see in his *Letter to the Lascars*, the document to which we now turn.

Letter to the Lascars

Pearce’s biographer Carey said of this letter, “Nothing could show more strikingly, how Pearce ever did what he could, even when he was shut out from doing what he would.”¹⁰⁷ A Lascar was an Indian or Southeast Asian sailor, and Pearce would have long had contact with these kinds of foreigners even from his boyhood days in the port of Plymouth. He was motivated to write this evangelical tract in London seeing off his missionary friends. While many of his fellow countrymen would have despised these foreigners, seeing them as less than fully human, Pearce saw them as men for whom Christ died.¹⁰⁸

His letter was full of love from the very beginning to the very end. He began this gospel appeal with a friendly Christian greeting:

¹⁰⁷Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 190.

¹⁰⁸Carey, *Baptist Brainerd*, 190.

You are far from home, and in a country of strangers. Most of the Europeans you have been accustomed to observe, have perhaps discovered a desire for nothing but gain, or honour, or personal indulgence. But you know not all. In this strange land there are many who think of you, weep over you, and pray to the great Allah¹⁰⁹ for you. Their hearts are filled with the most affectionate concern for your happiness.¹¹⁰

After winning their attention with his kindness, Pearce began his appeal beginning with the basic theism that they shared. He went on to appeal to the responsibility that men and women have before the God who created them saying,

who are made capable of this great attainment, you, who must live forever, are accountable for all your actions. God hears everything you say, and sees everything you do. God knows all your thoughts, and desires, and purposes; and he will call you to an account for all at the great Day when he shall judge the world in righteousness.¹¹¹

Pearce then reached for the hearts of these Lascars by asking the very simple, yet very pointed question, “Were you ever concerned to know what you must do to please God?”¹¹² Pearce then appeals to God’s position as the judge over everything that he has made and to the place of mankind as his servants. Pearce told them that the just punishment that the Englishman and Lascar alike deserve for failing to think upon God, praise God, and love God is eternal hell. He appealed to revelation for this truth and that the requirements of God have been revealed to mankind, specifically God’s law through the prophet Moses in whom the Lascars believed. Yet, all men have broken God’s eternal law and are thereby under the curse of God, as Pearce wrote, “Alas! alas! All men have broken this good law. We have broken it; you have broken it; and therefore we are

¹⁰⁹He is using Allah to refer to God, contextualizing his appeal.

¹¹⁰Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 173.

¹¹¹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 174.

¹¹²Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 174.

all sinners under the curse of God. And, oh! what a dreadful thing it is for a rational, immortal being to be cursed by the blessed God, and cursed forever.”¹¹³ After methodically and rationally showing the Lascars their guilt through sources that they recognize, Pearce then turned to the merciful grace of God displayed through Christ saying, “The God whom we have offended, hath taken pity on us, and in his love and mercy, has raised up an all-sufficient Saviour.”¹¹⁴ He went on to describe this savior, saying that he is “a Saviour fit for us, and fit for you; able to save us both to the uttermost; to restore us to the enjoyment of God.”¹¹⁵ He pleaded with the Lascars to repent of their sins and to believe in this savior in order that they may be saved. As he explained to these Lascars: “But the remission of our sins cost him most grievous sufferings, for nothing besides his precious blood was sufficient for our redemption. Yet so much was his heart set upon our salvation, that he was content to undergo the severest torments, and to die the most shameful and cruel death, rather than we should be lost forever.”¹¹⁶ Pearce concluded with a sweet yet earnest appeal. He wrote, “Jesus died for Lascars! Jesus suffered unnumbered tortures for Lascars! O Lascars, have you no love to Jesus?”¹¹⁷ He urged them to give their whole lives to Him and for Him as living sacrifices, and when they did, he promised that in Jesus they would surely find peace,

¹¹³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 175.

¹¹⁴Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 175.

¹¹⁵Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 175.

¹¹⁶Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 178.

¹¹⁷Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 179.

joy, delight, and purity.¹¹⁸ His concluding appeal was perhaps most compelling, entreating, and strong and is worth including in its entirety:

Consider, dear Lascars! this Jesus, though he died, yet he arose again to life on the third day, after which he ascended up into heaven, to dwell with his Father, and to govern the world, until he shall come the second time to judge all men, and fix their states for ever, when it will be found that those who have believed on him, and owned him before men, shall be eternally saved, but those who persist in disbelieving on his name, shall be everlastingly condemned. Lascars! believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved!¹¹⁹

The *Letter to the Lascars* teaches the student of Pearce's thought not only much about his theology of missions but also much about his spirituality and character as a Christian. First, his ability to connect with these men with whom he had very little in common in a winsome and compelling way is striking. In the way of Paul at Mars Hill in Athens, Pearce was able to find the common ground of human observation and of the words of Moses to lead these men toward a compelling presentation of the Gospel. The way in which he was able to weave in theology with his arguments was nothing less than masterful. Second, Pearce's evangelism and mission was full of rich, biblically-grounded theology. He was able to contextualize his message in a way that Lascars would understand while presenting a very robust explanation of the gospel. He masterfully explained the nature of sin, the fullness of God's justice, the price of justification, the response of faith and repentance, the promise of sanctification, and the hope of glorification clearly, concisely, and yet completely. While some evangelists may be tempted to leave out the less tasteful components of the gospel, for example the wrath of God and the sacrifice of Christ, these are the very components that Pearce draws upon to make his message all the more appealing. Finally, Pearce in this appeal was compassionate and compelling. He approached these Lascars not as enemies but as

¹¹⁸Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 179.

¹¹⁹Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 179.

beloved friends. The warmth and grace in his appeal was so clear that it was obvious that Pearce was full of prayer in the writing and in the delivery of this letter. His desire for the salvation of these men was so strong that it was as if he had known and loved them for many years. But what drove Pearce's passion for the Lascars was not that he had known and loved them for so long, but rather that he had for so long known and loved his Lord. As Fuller concluded, it was Pearce's deep love for God that drove his love for all else and most especially for missions.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Introduction

Fuller concluded his *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Pearce* by reminding his readers, “We do not esteem a man for one, or two, or three good deeds, any further than as these deeds are indications of the real state of his mind. We do not estimate the character of Christ himself so much from his having given sight to the blind, or restored Lazarus from the grave, as from his going about continually doing good.”¹ In Pearce, Fuller observed a man that was continually doing good, and was ever faithful to all that God had given him. And it was this kind of consistency and faithfulness that Fuller said was “the way to true excellence.”² In this Pearce was a model not only for pastors, but for all men of God and though now he has now been in the Lord’s arms for more than two hundred years, the testimony of his life is still a relevant study for Christian spirituality. For years after Pearce’s death he was remembered and loved by those who knew him best as “Seraphic” and this dissertation has sought to understand what they meant by this term and why Fuller recommended him as a model.

¹Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 3:446.

²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 446.

Spirituality of the Word

Pearce was faithful to the word of God, never shaking in his commitment to preach God's truth. In his own confession he said of the Bible, "I believe that this eternal God, for the benefit of his rational creatures in this world, hath been pleased to reveal unto them, by different modes and in different ages, that information which was necessary for the regulation of their faith and conduct; that what remains of this revelation is contained in the Holy Scriptures."³ He loved and believed the Gospel and had so much confidence in God's power to save. Throughout his correspondence he continually spoke of his desire to be wholly devoted to God and to put to death his own ego or desire for aggrandizement, it is evidence in his life and legacy that God granted Pearce great grace in this as Christ was surely the center of his whole person, especially his preaching.

Pearce was a great model for biblical preaching. He was not only a master of explaining a biblical text but he also understood and communicated the posture, tone and goal of the text. In this Pearce was able to bring the full weight of the passage to his hearers. Those who listened to Pearce truly had an experience with God, and were able to experience God through his words. This is evidenced by the effectiveness of his ministry, and his reputation with other pastors. As Fuller wrote, "He loved the Divine character as revealed in the Scriptures—To adore God, to contemplate his glorious perfections, to enjoy his favour, and to submit to his disposal, were his highest delight."⁴

³Samuel Pearce, Michael A. G. Haykin, Samuel Pearce, and Sarah Hopkins Pearce, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2012), 54–55.

⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

Pearce's ministry of the word was also gospel-centered and evangelistic. He had a great burden for souls, those in his congregation, those in his country, and perhaps most especially for those who had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout his sermons he pleaded with sinners to place their faith and trust in Jesus. As Fuller wrote, "It was love that expanded his heart, and prompted him to labour in season and out of season for the salvation of sinners—This was the spring of that constant stream of activity by which his life was distinguished."⁵ His church, his friends, his wife, and even his children were all deeply inspired by his love for the lost and desire to Christ exalted. This is evidenced in the legacy of his children as two of them grew up to serve as missionaries in India.⁶

Pearce's spirituality of the word was perhaps most uniquely marked by his bold passion. His preaching was not marked by dramatic effect or emotionalism, but rather it was a passion driven by the word of God. It was the gospel that excited Pearce, as Fuller wrote, "He loved the gospel—The truths which he believed and taught dwelt richly in him, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."⁷ In this, he is an excellent model for a preacher of any generation, Pearce was able to connect with his congregation not because he used flashy or synthetic methods, but because God's word had truly affected every part of his being.

⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:434.

⁶Geoff Thomas, "The Seraphic Samuel Pearce," *Banner of Truth Online Journal*, December 27, 2001, accessed June 25, 2015, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2001/the-seraphic-samuel-pearce/>.

⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:430.

Spirituality of Love

It would be difficult to study the life of Samuel Pearce and not feel a warm and fraternal connection to him. There was a love that flowed from him that elicited a deep connection between him and so many. As Fuller wrote of him: “All his counsels, cautions, and reproofs, appear to have been the effect of love—It was a rule dictated by his heart, no less than by his judgment, to discourage all evil speaking; nor would he approve of just censure unless some good and necessary end were to be answered by it.”⁸ This love led him to many deep and wonderful relationships, from his relationship with his father, to his relationship with other pastors, to his relationship with a young man in Ireland. These relationships on all levels brought him a deep sense of belonging and, in the words of Fuller, “real happiness.” As Fuller continued, “There are few characters whose enjoyments, both natural and spiritual, have risen to so great a height. He dwelt in love; and ‘he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.’ Such a life must needs be happy.”⁹

Pearce was a great lover of his friends, he was ever faithful to them and they were often in his prayers. Pearce also regularly and humbly sought the counsel and prayers of those brothers with whom he shared friendship. He went to great pains throughout his life to serve his friends, and regularly sought their well-being. And it was through these friendships that Pearce found a great measure of happiness and joy. As

⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:434.

⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:436–37.

Fuller noted, “He was a lover of good men—He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation, prayer, and praise.”¹⁰

Pearce was also a faithful pastor. Though his duties often called him away from the flock that he loved so deeply, he was ever faithful to the men and women of his charge. Though he had numerous opportunities to seek a more prominent preaching post he did not seek the praise of man, and carefully tended the sheep of Birmingham over which Jesus had given him charge. Fuller commented on this pastor’s heart saying, “His heart was tenderly attached to the people of his charge; and it was one of the bitterest ingredients in his cup during his long affliction to be cut off from their society.”¹¹

Pearce was a model for all Christian husbands, but he was especially a model for pastors. Pearce was enormously busy and productive through his life as Fuller noted, “In him we see how much may be done for God in a little time . . . if we take a view of his labours, perhaps there are few lives productive of a greater portion of good.”¹² Yet his busyness was never an excuse for Pearce to neglect the duty that God had given him as a husband. He treasured his wife when he was near to him, and when he was far. She was always an important part of his ministry and found delight in the things that delighted her husband. He was quick to confide in her and she was truly and invaluable partner for his life’s work. Her love for God stirred Pearce to an even deeper love for his Savior, as Haykin wrote, “What especially delighted Pearce about his wife was her Christian piety Close friends of Sarah noted that since her conversion she had had ‘a

¹⁰Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

¹¹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:432.

¹²Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:444.

strong attachment to evangelical truth’ and ‘a longing desire for the universal spread of the gospel.’ And by her own admission, she was ‘deeply interested in all that interested.’”¹³

Finally, Pearce was a model for the love of God. As Fuller wrote “holy love” was the governing principle of his whole life.¹⁴ He was even compared to the disciple Jesus loved, in large part because Pearce was so devoted to God. His success as a pastor, denominational leader, husband, father, and follower of Christ was inextricably linked with his total devotion to his Lord. Knowing God was his highest aim, and every thing that he “saw, or heard, or read, or studied, was converted to the feeding of this divine flame.”¹⁵

Spirituality of Mission

While, as Fuller said, the spirituality of Samuel Pearce cannot be confined to a few events or deeds it can better understood and perhaps even summarized in his response to a particular event. In October of 1794 he was rejected by the Baptist Missionary Society, the very missions society that he helped to form and worked so tirelessly to fund. Were it not for Samuel Pearce the Baptist Missions Society may not have gotten past its second meeting, yet when this talented, humble, and passionate young man applied to go and be a missionary to India to take part in the work that he had such a great burden for he was ultimately rejected by some of his best friends. It was really only through the study of Pearce’s personal journal that anyone can understand

¹³Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 24.

¹⁴Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:429.

¹⁵Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:429.

how devastating this must have been for Pearce. As Fuller commented after reviewing the journal, “Since his death a few of them have perused it, and have been almost ready to think, that if they had seen it before, they would not have dared to oppose his going.”¹⁶

One would have thought that after such a blow, Pearce would have been bitter or at least that he would have distanced himself from the Society, but the opposite is true. Pearce continued to work hard for sake of the mission, preaching salvation for the heathen and faithfully raising support for Carey, Thomas, Ward, and the other missionaries that would be sent in his place. Pearce spent the remaining four years of active ministry that the Lord gave him faithful to the post that was assigned and doing what he could to preach the gospel to those poor souls who had never heard.

Conclusion

In all of this Samuel Pearce displayed the way to true excellence. He was not eccentric, nor was his life only defined by a few actions or deeds, but rather the fullness of his life was marked by a “sober, modest, sincere, affectionate, assiduous, and uniform conduct.”¹⁷ This was a conduct marked by a deep love for Jesus, his word, his people and his mission. Pearce spent his days seeking to be swallowed up in God until his dying day. He spent that day, October 10, 1799, in the company of his beloved wife Sarah, who in order to comfort her dying husband, sang to Samuel the John Newton (1725–1807) hymn, “Be gone, Unbelief; my Savior is Near.” The final stanza reads as follows:

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the med'cine is food;

¹⁶Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:385.

¹⁷Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:446.

Though painful at present, 'twill cease before long,
And then oh how pleasant the conqueror's song!¹⁸

Upon hearing this, the failing Pearce looked at her and repeated with an inexpressible smile, the last line, "The conqueror's song!" With these words he conquered, closing his eyes, and falling fully into his savior's kind arms.¹⁹

¹⁸John Newton, "Be Gone, Unbelief; My Savior is Near," in *Olney Hymns* (London: W. Oliver, 1779), 37.

¹⁹Fuller, *Complete Works*, 3:428–29.

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ABSTRACT

THE WAY TO TRUE EXCELLENCE: THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAMUEL PEARCE

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The Way to True Excellence: The Spirituality of Samuel Pearce is a dissertation that seeks to understand why and how the late eighteenth century pastor, Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) was a model for spirituality. Pearce was the pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, England from 1790 until death in 1799. Pearce only lived to be thirty-three years old, but he had a very successful ministry in Birmingham, was sought after as a preacher through Great Britain, and was an integral part of the Baptist missionary movement that helped bring about a sea-change in evangelicalism.

For decades after his death, John Ryland and other Baptist leaders referred to Pearce as the “seraphic Pearce.” One year after his death Andrew Fuller published Pearce’s memoirs, *Memoirs of the late Rev. Samuel Pearce*, and the latter became a model of eighteenth-century Baptist piety. In this thesis, three areas of his piety are examined against the backdrop of eighteenth-century evangelicalism: his preaching as a model for a spirituality of the word, his marriage and friendships as a model for a spirituality of love, and his commitment to the Great Commission as a model for a spirituality of mission. With the examination of these three areas, this thesis seeks to

show to what extent Pearce's spirituality captures the quintessence of late eighteenth-century Baptist spirituality.

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