

“TO LOVE THE SOULS OF THE PEOPLE”: ANDREW FULLER AND THE VIRTUE OF LOVE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

PAUL SANCHEZ¹

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) is best known as the theologian behind William Carey (1761–1834) and the English Particular Baptists’ Baptist Missionary Society, which was a catalyst for the emergence of modern missions in the late eighteenth century.² A noteworthy figure in the larger evangelical renewal movement of the era, Fuller made a case for evangelical Calvinism in 1785 when he published *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, which was a formidable challenge to the Hyper-Calvinism that by his time had consumed the Particular Baptists.³ Against the Hyper-Calvinists, who were reluctant to offer the gospel to unbelievers, Fuller contended that Christians were under orders to extend the gospel freely to all people, even if the elect alone would be saved. He agreed that salvation was the prerogative of God alone, but he argued that the Scriptures were equally clear regarding the church’s duty to offer the gospel indiscriminately, especially to those who had never heard it. This theology inspired William Carey and others to venture to distant lands driven by a sense of boldness and expectation that resembled that of the apostolic age.

But this was only a part of Fuller’s legacy. Fuller was the pastor of the Baptist church in Soham in Cambridgeshire from 1775 to 1782, before accepting a call to the Baptist church in Kettering in Northamptonshire, where he served until his death in 1815. Although he had no formal theological training, Fuller exhibited remarkable intellectual energy and theological acumen. With the pastorate as his base of operations, he engaged in theological dialogue and debate on a host of topics, many of which are preserved in his substantial corpus.⁴ Fuller found fellowship and inspira-

¹ Paul Sanchez is the lead pastor of Starnes Cove Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina.

² Andrew Fuller had no relation to Charles E. Fuller, the founder of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

³ For sources on the rise of evangelicalism in England, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990) and Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

⁴ For the most complete edition of his works, see Andrew Fuller, *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* Vol. 1–3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988). All references to works by Fuller, unless otherwise noted, are found in this volume. A new critical edition

tion for his theological work within an informal network of theologically inclined pastors who became his closest friends, including Robert Hall, Sr. (1728–1791), John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), and John Sutcliff (1752–1814). It was in this environment that Fuller became one of the leading theologians of the Baptist tradition, and an outstanding model of the pastor-theologian.

Endeavoring to look more closely at Fuller's pastoral ministry and the theology behind it, a striking theme emerges in his pastoral theology. I will argue that Fuller regarded love as the essential virtue for pastoral ministry. Intellect, rhetorical ability, and other gifts were valuable, but love was supreme. It was the key to faithful and fruitful ministry. Excellence in ministry could be judged by how well one has loved his church and cultivated love within it. A number of scholars have devoted attention to Fuller's pastoral theology in recent years. In *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, Keith Grant argued that Fuller's pastoral theology was characterized by a careful balance of head and heart in a way that was "neither sentimental pietism nor a rationalistic Calvinism but a thoughtful, 'affectionate' faith in Christ."⁵ Nigel Wheeler has produced an impressive study of Fuller's pastoral theology by focusing on his ordination sermons. Wheeler underscored Fuller's emphasis upon personal spirituality as the means and measure of one's effectiveness as a pastor.⁶ Paul Brewster highlighted Fuller's rich spirituality as he focused on Fuller's work as a quintessential pastor-theologian.⁷ Following Wheeler's approach, I have focused my research on Fuller's ordination sermons. In this impressive collection of sermons, we find a theological mentor who urged pastors to pursue love as the preeminent virtue for pastors and the churches they serve. In a day when pastors are experiencing an identity crisis, Fuller offers a vision of ministry that is as unexpected as it is inspirational.

Fuller's ordination sermons provide a collective expression of his pastoral theology. The occasion of pastoral ordination allowed Fuller the opportunity to distill his advice to new pastors in the form of a single sermon for the formation of ministers and the churches they would lead. Thirty-one of these sermons survive.⁸ Although they offer a range of insights and exhortations, love emerges as the central idea that draws together

of his works is currently underway through the work of the Andrew Fuller Center at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Working with the publisher Walter de Gruyter of Berlin, Germany, three of seventeen volumes are currently available.

⁵ Keith Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013).

⁶ Nigel D. Wheeler, "Eminent Usefulness and Eminent Spirituality: Andrew Fuller's (1754–1815) Pastoral Theology in his Ordination Sermons" (PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2009). For the newly published version, see Nigel Wheeler, *The Pastoral Priorities of 18th Century Baptists: An Examination of Andrew Fuller's Ordination Sermons* (Petersborough, ON: H&E, 2021).

⁷ Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010).

⁸ The collection of Fuller's ordination sermons is the largest of any eighteenth-century Baptist. For more of this collection, see Wheeler, "Eminent Usefulness and Eminent Spirituality," 167–68. Keith Grant also provides helpful analysis as well as background on

his pastoral theology and his vision for the church. Today as theologians give fresh attention to virtue formation with the help of biblical scholars, philosophers, and psychologists, historical figures like Andrew Fuller provide yet another angle from which to consider relevant questions for reflection. Fuller's rich spirituality and his emphasis upon love, arguably the greatest of Christian virtues, offers fertile ground for reflection and deeper exploration. What is the essence of pastoral ministry? How does one judge excellence in pastoral ministry? And given Fuller's emphasis, what does love look like in the context of the local church? Fuller's ordination sermons provide surprisingly rich answers to these questions.

Fuller's sermons are filled with the language of "love" and "affections." Terms like these and the emphasis behind them reveal the religion of the heart that animated eighteenth-century evangelicals. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) had a notable influence in spreading this spirituality, including among the English Particular Baptists. Michael Haykin called Edwards Fuller's "chief theological mentor after the Scriptures," and an Edwardsean spirituality of love is evident throughout Fuller's corpus.⁹ Keith Grant has noted Fuller's characteristic use of the "vocabulary of the heart," frequently employing terms like "affectionate," "passions," "love," "zeal," and "feeling."¹⁰ Douglas Sweeney defined Edwards's use of the affections as "the matrix of desires, inclinations and aspirations that ground a person's moral life."¹¹ This definition could likewise be applied to Fuller, including his pastoral theology. Even without the precise language and emphases of virtue theory, Fuller's emphasis on love as a somewhat more abstract idea has the potential to provide insight as theologians show renewed attention to the Christian virtue of love. His contribution seems all the more relevant for pastor-theologians when considering his concentration on love specifically within the context of pastoral ministry and the life of the local church.

In his role as mentor to pastors, Fuller put love forward a central telos for pastors. The pastor's love applied first to God, and secondly to the people who were entrusted to him by the great over-shepherd. This love is characterized by humility and servanthood, and it moves toward a bond of union between the hearts of the shepherd and the sheep. It pursues the flourishing of the ones loved, especially in their ecclesial and religious life. Fuller contended that without love the pastor could be little more

pastoral ordination among eighteenth-century Particular Baptists. See Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 58–65.

⁹ Michael Haykin, ed. *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001), 27. For Edwards's spirituality of love, see Ronald Story, *Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). For Edwards's influence on Fuller and the Particular Baptists, see Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012). For Fuller's Edwardsean spirituality, see Nathan A. Finn, "Andrew Fuller's Edwardsean Spirituality" in *The Pure Flame of Devotion*, edited by G. Stephen Weaver, Jr. and Ian Hugh Clary (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2013), 383–404.

¹⁰ Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 9.

¹¹ Douglas A. Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 119.

than a hireling, but with love pastors and their congregations could find a unique sense of joy, as a form of internal good that proceeds from virtue. Embracing love together, the local church walked a path toward flourishing as the body of Christ.

THE VIRTUE OF LOVE IN PREACHING

Andrew Fuller placed preaching at the center of pastoral ministry.¹² In this way he followed the long tradition of the Particular Baptists who prioritized the ministry of the word.¹³ In an ordination sermon based on 1 Corinthians 3:9, Fuller contended that pastors labored in the name of Christ, which implied both the high nature of the calling and the privilege that preaching represented. Christ called pastors to labor tirelessly in “word and doctrine” in service to the church.¹⁴ But Fuller also argued that love should guide and undergird all pastoral preaching. By cultivating love in their preaching, pastors would empower their message and bless their hearers.

The aspiration toward love was first based in Christ’s expectation that his under-shepherds would love the sheep that he entrusted to them.¹⁵ Beyond the basic question of faithfulness, Fuller argued that a ministry without genuine love would be unfruitful. Christ, the over-shepherd, modeled a love beyond parallel when he laid down his life for his sheep. With this mind, pastors must remember that the people entrusted to them were among the sheep for whom Christ died. Fuller argued that ministers should love the sheep on account of their love for Christ: “[Christ] would not trust [his sheep] with one who did not love him. One who did not love him, a hireling, would starve them, or poison them, and flee in a time of danger, John x. 12. Give him the fleece, the flock may care for themselves. But if we love Christ, we shall love his people for his sake.”¹⁶ Furthermore, “It is by this a good shepherd is distinguished from a hireling.”¹⁷ A pastor who loved his sheep would be bold in the ministry of the word, like the young David who risked his life to protect the flock.¹⁸ The preacher should first

¹² See the collection of letters that instruct young ministers in the “great and solemn trust” of preaching, Fuller, Letters I–V in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* 1:712–27. For a secondary source on Fuller’s preaching, see Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*.

¹³ For a comprehensive resource on the Particular Baptists, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The British Particular Baptists*, Vol. 1–3 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998). For a work that gives helpful background on Particular Baptist ecclesiology, see James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675–1705* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

¹⁴ Fuller, “Ministers Fellow Laborers with God,” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:491–92.

¹⁵ Fuller, “Pastors Required to Feed the Flock of Christ” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:477.

¹⁶ Fuller, “Pastors Required,” 1:477–78.

¹⁷ Fuller, “Pastors Required,” 1:478.

¹⁸ Fuller, “Pastors Required,” 1:478. Fuller envisioned more than preaching as he developed this argument, but preaching seemed to be central to his point.

love Christ, but then also love Christ's people as the Lord's appointed under-shepherd. A pastor who does anything less could only be a hireling.

Love is more than a feeling, but Fuller contended that a minister must himself feel the message that he preached. On this point, Keith Grant noted Fuller's emphasis on "the important place of feelings, the heart, and emotional responses to the gospel."¹⁹ This heartfelt or affectionate preaching would inspire and enlighten its hearers. In an ordination sermon based on John 5:35, Fuller gave two central objectives for Christian preaching: "*enlightening of the minds, and affecting the hearts of the people.*"²⁰ For one to attain this, he must himself be stirred by the word of God, having an affected heart and an enlightened mind. Fuller encouraged, "And if you would enlighten others, you must be a 'shining light' yourself. And if you would affect others, you yourself must feel; your own heart must 'burn' with holy ardour."²¹ Fuller called these objectives "spiritual light" and "holy love" and considered them to be essential to preaching. Before doctrine is preached, it must also be felt with a holy love. Along with the knowledge necessary for proclamation, one must personally know and love the God about whom he preached. One must be "intimately acquainted with Christ" if he would invite sinners to know him.²²

A spirit of love should be evident in one's preaching. As the preacher felt the message, he likewise appealed to the "passions" of the people. Because God created humanity with the capacity to love, the preacher rightly gave careful consideration to this in the formation of his people. However, recognizing that men and women's passions are naturally bent away from God because of sin, the preacher helps reorient human love. The pastor "presents to our view 'a crown'—to our love of pleasure; and informs us that 'in [Christ's] presence there is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.'"²³ As the preacher declared the truth of the gospel, it was not a truth of the mind only, but a truth to be felt and embraced. To the newly minted pastor, Fuller stressed that the preacher should not expect a response from his hearers that he himself had not experienced: "You will need, also, my brother, a heart *warmed* with Divine things, or you will never be 'a burning and shining light.'"²⁴ This began in the pastor's study and was carried with him into the pulpit. For Fuller, this was more than zeal, which alone "will not do."²⁵ Without love, preaching will tend to be weak and off target. He asked rhetorically, "How can we preach against sin, without feeling a holy indignation against it? It is this that will cause us, while we denounce sin, to weep over the sinner." A bare acknowledgement

¹⁹ Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 99.

²⁰ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge and Love Necessary for the Ministry," in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:478–79. Italics are original.

²¹ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:479.

²² Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:480.

²³ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:480.

²⁴ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:480. Italics are original.

²⁵ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:480.

of sin fell short. Fuller declared unequivocally, "O! if we ever do any good in our work, it must be the effect of love to God and love to men—love to the souls of men, while we detest, and expose and denounce their sins." Fuller pointed to the Apostle Paul as an exemplar of this holy love in the ministry. Paul's letters displayed the virtue of love to which every minister of the word should aspire.

Fuller contended that the very nature of the gospel called for love from the preacher. Fuller made this point in an ordination sermon based on Colossians 4:3–4, where he said, "*The gospel is a message of love, and therefore it ought to be preached with great affection.*"²⁶ If a someone preached the gospel without love, he undermined his message because the gospel itself was a message of love. He warned, "To preach these things with an unfeeling heart is not to preach 'as we ought' to preach."²⁷ The solution to a loveless gospel message was to cultivate "the affectionate."²⁸ Contrived expressions of emotion would avail nothing. The goal was sincerity of heart and a spirit of compassion. Fuller held up Christ as a source inspiration: "Christ wept over sinners, and so should we."²⁹ By looking to Christ, and by fellowship with him, one could cultivate this same love. Furthermore, a faithful preacher will love those to whom he preaches when he recognized the weight of his message and the pending day when everyone will stand before a holy God. If ministerial faithfulness required love, then pastoral development should give significant attention to the formation of this essential virtue.

Fuller emphasized that both the matter and manner of preaching needed careful consideration. He did so in an ordination sermon based on 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8, a text about which Fuller said, "I know of nothing more impressive on the subject of the Christian ministry than this whole chapter."³⁰ In terms of content, the preacher's message should not only reveal sin, but also offer the remedy in Jesus Christ. Far from suggesting a simplistic message, Fuller urged the pastor to preach with depth of doctrine. However, Fuller regretted that so many failed to give attention to the manner of preaching, which was crucially important in its own right. The preacher should impart his own soul to the hearers. He should preach "faithfully, firmly, earnestly, affectionately."³¹ Furthermore, "Manner is a means of conveying truth. A cold manner disgraces important truth."³² Fuller pointed pastors to the apostles who modeled a passionate manner of preaching. Christian ministers should likewise preach with holy affection

²⁶ Fuller, "The Nature of the Gospel, and the Manner in which it Ought to be Preached," in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:496. Italics are original.

²⁷ Fuller, "The Nature of the Gospel," 1:496.

²⁸ Fuller, "The Nature of the Gospel," 1:496.

²⁹ Fuller, "The Nature of the Gospel," 1:496.

³⁰ Fuller, "Affectionate Concern of a Minister for the Salvation of His Hearers," in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:508–10.

³¹ Fuller, "Affectionate Concern," 1:510.

³² Fuller, "Affectionate Concern," 1:510.

and with a love that does justice to the gravity of their work for souls who will perish without Christ.³³

When Fuller prioritized love, it was never at the expense of truth. Fuller perceived of love as being bound with truth. He alluded to this when he said, "The truth is a system of *love* and *goodness*—an overflow of Divine blessedness."³⁴ Love of God and his people called for dedication to truth. Fuller admonished, "Still your faithfulness must be tempered with love. There is such a thing as unfeeling fidelity—and preaching *at* people, rather than *to* them."³⁵ He pointed to Christ as the perfect example. Jesus rebuked hypocrites, wept over sinners, and he also declared a gospel of forgiveness.³⁶ Keith Grant well summarized Fuller's point: "Fuller recognized the important place of feelings, the heart, and emotional responses to the gospel, but this emphasis upon the affections did not displace, but rather arose from, thoughtful preaching and reasoned hearing."³⁷ Fuller made a similar emphasis when he preached a sermon titled "Holding Fast the Gospel," based on 2 Timothy 1:13.³⁸ He declared that the preacher must be faithful to the content of the gospel when he preached, but without love it might become "a bigoted and blind attachment to doctrines, which will be of no use, even if they be true."³⁹ The preacher needed both faith and love, both fidelity to the truth and a heart that is warm to God and humanity. Fuller summarized his point when he said, "The union of genuine orthodoxy and affection constitutes true religion."⁴⁰ As a virtue, then, love was not separated from truthfulness or courage, but without love the others might fall on deaf ears.

THE VIRTUE OF LOVE IN MEMBER CARE

Preaching was central, but the stewardship of shepherding also called for more personal ministry to God's people. Andrew Fuller enjoined ministers to pursue pastoral care with the same aspiration toward love that characterized faithful preaching. If love began in the pulpit, it extended far beyond, into members' homes, in private prayer, counseling, visiting the sick, and comforting the grieving. A loving pastor gave of himself to serve members with humility and gentleness.⁴¹ In one ordination sermon, Fuller challenged pastors to be "unostentatious; gentle and affectionate; disinterested; and

³³ Fuller, "Affectionate Concern," 1:510.

³⁴ Fuller, "Churches Walking in the Truth the Joy of Ministers," in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:529–30.

³⁵ Fuller, "The Work and Encouragements of the Christian Minister" in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:499. Italics are original.

³⁶ Fuller, "The Work and Encouragements," 1:499.

³⁷ Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 99.

³⁸ Fuller, "Holding Fast the Gospel," in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:547–49.

³⁹ Fuller, "Holding Fast," 1:548.

⁴⁰ Fuller, "Holding Fast," 1:549.

⁴¹ Fuller, "Pastors Required," 1:477–478.

consistent in their deportment, not only among unbelievers, where even hypocrites will preserve appearances, but also among the people of their charge.”⁴² Fuller pointed to Christ’s example, who “endured all things for the elect’s sake; and so shall we, if we be of his mind.”⁴³ Seeking to inspire pastors with Christ’s example, Fuller declared, “If we be true ministers of Christ, *we shall love the souls of men as he loved them.*”⁴⁴

Fuller considered visitation to be a vital task for pastoral ministry.⁴⁵ He stated it plainly on one occasion: “A considerable part of the pastoral office consists in visiting the people, especially the afflicted.”⁴⁶ As he emphasized what he considered to be two key objectives for Christian ministry—“*enlightening the minds and affecting the hearts* of the people”—he applied these also to “the more private duty of visiting the people.”⁴⁷ Fuller offered the Apostle Paul’s example of ministering “from house to house,” as referenced in Acts 20:20. As pastors did this, they should exhibit the same “shining” and “burning” as in the pulpit, demonstrating spiritual insight, passion, and love. This more personalized shepherding allowed for a deeper level of application of the word than is typically possible in the pulpit. Fuller also highlighted the unique benefit of pastoral visitation that allowed the pastor to hear from his sheep: “[Members] will be able to impart their feelings freely and unreservedly; and you will be able to administer the appropriate counsel to much better purpose than you possibly could from the pulpit, and with greater particularity than would be becoming in a public address.”⁴⁸ The minister who demonstrated this sort of love could provide a deeper level of encouragement, as well as reproof, than would ever be possible otherwise.⁴⁹ Nigel Wheeler argued that it fostered an “openness of communication” and “if a pastor’s people knew he loved them and truly wished their best for eternity, Fuller believed he could say almost anything to them without their being offended.”⁵⁰ In this intimate setting, the pastor fostered a bond with his people, and cultivated the virtue that Fuller believed to be at the heart of ministry. Excellence in ministry required nothing less.

Fuller, however, warned of the risks related to pastoral visitation. He cautioned one aspiring pastor accordingly: “Love your brethren, and be familiar with them; not, however with that kind of familiarity which breeds disrespect, by which some have degraded themselves in the eyes of the people

⁴² Fuller, “The Reward of a Faithful Minister” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:542.

⁴³ Fuller, “The Reward,” 1:543.

⁴⁴ Fuller, “The Reward,” 1:543. Italics are original.

⁴⁵ For the secondary sources on this, see Wheeler, “Eminent Usefulness and Eminent Spirituality,” 197–99, and Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor–Theologian*, 120–29.

⁴⁶ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁴⁷ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:478–81.

⁴⁸ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁴⁹ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁵⁰ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness,” 198.

and invited the opposition of the contentious part of them.”⁵¹ The pastor should visit regularly, but briefly, thoughtfully, and purposefully. Even with those whom he visited frequently, he should take care to conduct himself as a pastor, not merely a casual visitor. Gossip was also a liability, Fuller warned: “Pastoral visits should not degenerate into religious gossiping—a practice in which some have indulged to the disgrace of religion.”⁵² Casual and thoughtless questions about other members easily degraded into gossip and slander. Fuller noted how easily this gave opportunity to the Devil: “Satan promptly furnishes a subject where there is such a dearth; and hence gossiping has generally produced tales of slander, and practices which have proved a scandal to the Christian name!”⁵³ Fuller also warned about the less obvious but equally serious risk of idleness: “I trust, my brother, you know the preciousness of time too well to squander it away in idle visits. And yet, visiting is an essential part of your work, that you may become acquainted with the circumstances, the spiritual necessities of your people.”⁵⁴ The potential risks should not be a discouragement against a robust visitation ministry, but a wise pastor should guard himself as he ministered to the people.

Although he did not use the language of virtue, Fuller envisioned pastoral love as a way of being. In his sphere of influence, he charged pastors to aspire to have a gentle and affectionate spirit toward their people. In every aspect of ministry, love was the telos, but in no case was this more important than in pastoral rebuke. Perhaps often taking place during pastoral visitation, Fuller cautioned, “If you are compelled to reprove, beware that your reproof be conveyed, not in ill temper, but in love; not to gratify self, but to do your brother good.”⁵⁵ He held up humility as an indispensable part of love, which would lead ministers to give careful thought to their own motives and manner of expression.⁵⁶

In an ordination sermon based on 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8, Fuller placed love at the fore of pastoral qualifications. He defined it as the “affectionate concern after their salvation” and called it “one of the most important qualifications for the ministry.”⁵⁷ He explained why love was a *sine qua non* even among other qualifications or giftings: “This qualification is that without which the greatest gifts, natural and acquired, are nothing as to real usefulness.”⁵⁸ Love, for example, was more vital than intellect: “Genius may amuse, but ‘love edifieth.’ A strong mind and a brilliant imagination

⁵¹ Andrew Fuller, “Letter to a Young Minister in Prospect of Ordination” in Appendix 4, Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 132–133.

⁵² Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁵³ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁵⁴ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:481.

⁵⁵ Fuller, “Ministers and Churches Exhorted to Serve One Another in Love” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:545.

⁵⁶ Fuller, “The Reward,” 1:542.

⁵⁷ Fuller, “Affectionate Concern of a Minister for the Salvation of His Hearers” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:508.

⁵⁸ Fuller, “Affectionate Concern,” 1:508.

may excite their admiration, but this will attract the hearts of the people. Look at the men who have been the most honoured [in ministry]; and you will find that they are not the brightest geniuses, but the humble and affectionate.”⁵⁹ Fuller illustrated his point with the Apostle Paul, who deeply loved his countrymen and yearned for their salvation. The Apostle John also modeled selfless love. Fuller cited 3 John 4, which illuminated John’s joy for his spiritual children in their obedience to the truth. John considered them “the brightest jewels in his future crown.”⁶⁰ No one, however, embodied this love more perfectly than Jesus himself.⁶¹ Christ’s example had the power to stir the hearts of ministers as they pursued this genuine love in their care for the flock.

As important as it was, Fuller warned that visitation ministry could be difficult. The pastor who challenged a wayward brother or sister knew how taxing it could be, especially when the pastor genuinely loved the sheep. Fuller counseled ministers to be prepared in heart for the member who might resist correction: “But if a minister tell the truth, there is a great danger of his being counted an enemy, and treated as such. Faithful reproof, therefore, must be self-denying work.”⁶² Love meant selflessness and longsuffering, as well as the love of truth. Fuller admonished, “The grand secret, I think to render this part of our work as easy as possible, is to *love the souls of the people*, and to do everything from pure good-will, and with a view to their advantage—‘speaking the truth in love.’”⁶³ In a letter to a young minister Fuller simplified his point even further: “The great secret of ruling a church is to convince them that you love them, and say and do everything for their good.”⁶⁴ If love was the chief virtue for pastors, member care was one of the chief ways to demonstrate the pastor’s love to the people.

THE VIRTUE OF LOVE SHARED

Although Fuller’s ordination sermons were addressed first to the new minister, these messages also afforded him the opportunity to address the church as well. Beginning with the pastor’s love for the church, Fuller also envisioned a reciprocal love that flowed from the people and back to the pastor. In an ordination sermon based on Matthew 25:21, Fuller acknowledged the difficulty of pastoral ministry, but if the pastor could gain the hearts of his people, his ministry could become a labor of love.

Fuller exhorted ministers to strive for the love of their people with the recognition that their success in ministry depended upon it. Fuller said plainly, “You could never expect to do them good unless you were interested

⁵⁹ Fuller, “Affectionate Concern,” 1:508.

⁶⁰ Fuller, “Affectionate Concern,” 1:509.

⁶¹ Fuller, “Affectionate Concern,” 1:509.

⁶² Fuller, “Ministers Fellow,” 1:492.

⁶³ Fuller, “Ministers Fellow,” 1:492–493. Italics are mine.

⁶⁴ Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal*, 132.

in their affections.”⁶⁵ A pastor’s effort to win the hearts of the people began by applying love to every area of the ministry. Fuller pointed out that some ministers struggled to disciple their people simply because they had failed to love them in the process. A minister might complain saying, “They would not receive the doctrine I taught; they were always opposing it, always caviling at it, and have often caused my heart to ache.” But Fuller responded, “Did you teach them in love? Did you bear and forbear with them? If they have gone astray like lost sheep, have you searched after them with a desire to restore them?”⁶⁶ But if a pastor’s instruction proceeded from the heart, it would endear him to the people. Fuller clarified that one should never sacrifice truth in the pursuit of affection, but too often a sound message was delivered from a cold heart: “Still your faithfulness must be tempered with love. There is such a thing as unfeeling fidelity—and preaching *at* the people, rather than *to* them.”⁶⁷

Pastors should be content with their flock, even if small or composed of a lower cross section of society. Cultivating mutual love called for a calm contentment in his present station, with confidence in his heavenly reward. Fuller rebuked the haughty spirit that consumed itself with “gathering a respectable congregation.” Even the smallest church had eternal worth and carried a lofty stewardship before God. Fuller challenged the pride that craved applause more than love: “We should not study to please men so much as to please God. If we please him, we shall please all who love him, and, as to others, they are not on any account worthy of being pleased at the expense of displeasing God.”⁶⁸ The heart that craved applause more than the love of God and his people had destroyed many ministers. Fuller charged his hearers to keep the ultimate end in mind: “You *may* sit down when *God* says, ‘Well done!’ for then your trust will be discharged; but it is at your peril that you rest satisfied with anything short of this. Keep *that* reward in view, and you will not, I trust, be unfaithful in the service of your Lord.”⁶⁹ As a pastor, Fuller knew these temptations well, and he offered his vision of pastoral love as a hopeful remedy and as a source of renewal for pastoral ministry.

Fuller also spoke to churches to inspire them to love their pastor. In an ordination sermon based on Psalm 68:18, and its Christological application in Ephesians 4:8, Fuller argued that Christ gave ministers to the church as a gift, with an emphasis on *gift*. If ministers are a heavenly gift then the church should treasure them.⁷⁰ Fuller addressed the congregation saying, “Ministers are *received for* and are *given to* you by Christ” and “if you *love* Christ, you will make much of your minister, on account of his being *his*

⁶⁵ Fuller, “The Work and Encouragements,” 1:496–97.

⁶⁶ Fuller, “The Work and Encouragements,” 1:498.

⁶⁷ Fuller, “The Work and Encouragements,” 1:499. Italics are original.

⁶⁸ Fuller, “The Work and Encouragements,” 1:499.

⁶⁹ Fuller, “The Work and Encouragements,” 1:500. Italics are original.

⁷⁰ Fuller, “Importance of Christian Ministers Considered as the Gift of Christ” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:521.

gift.”⁷¹ Members should show their love by committed attendance and by generous giving, and in a way that is “not as done to him, but to Christ.” In love, they should pursue peace in the congregation and “shun those things that tend to provoke the Lord to withdraw his gifts, and to cease to dwell among you.”⁷² In an ordination sermon based on 3 John 4, Fuller summarized his point well: “If the truth thus dwells in you . . . you will love your *pastor*, for the truth’s sake which he preaches; and if you love him, you will make a point of attending his ministry, of contributing to his support, and of consulting his peace and happiness in every possible way.”⁷³ Gratitude and a love of truth will inspire a church to love their pastor. In another sermon, Fuller raised the obvious point that pastors were human and would make mistakes, and so he charged the church to love their pastor by being gracious to him in light of his imperfections. They should pray for him and assume the best in him.⁷⁴

The goal of reciprocal love also applied to the members, one to another. On one occasion, Fuller told a church succinctly, “Be careful to cultivate a spirit of love.”⁷⁵ He encouraged members to give careful thought to their attitudes with the aim to “cultivate a humble savoury spirit” toward one another.⁷⁶ If they displayed love with an affectionate spirit toward each another, unity would be the sure result. Fuller elevated sincerity to first importance and he argued that love was a faithful guide for the life of the local church: “The great art of church government is to love in sincerity.”⁷⁷ Although Fuller was not the type to be hesitant to offer correction, he counseled churches that love would guide them well: “Love will dictate what is proper on most occasions. It will do more than a thousand rules; and all rules without it are nothing.”⁷⁸ Rather than overrule God’s commandments for the church, love will help the church to fulfill them. With a zealous pursuit of this virtue, both pastor and church could enjoy the deeper internal good of Christian love expressed in the fellowship and ministry of the local church.

THE VIRTUE OF LOVE FOR GOD

As a minister aspired to love his people well and to cultivate their love, it would be a serious misstep to neglect the calling to love God first. As one who was invested in the formation of pastors, Fuller lamented the phenomenon of ministers who labored tirelessly to love and serve their people but who neglected the greater commandment to love God and

⁷¹ Fuller, “Importance of Christian Ministers,” 1:521. Italics are original.

⁷² Fuller, “Importance of Christian Ministers,” 1:522.

⁷³ Fuller, “Churches Walking,” 1:530.

⁷⁴ Fuller, “Churches Should Exhibit the Light of the Gospel” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:531–33.

⁷⁵ Fuller, “A Peaceful Disposition” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:535.

⁷⁶ Fuller, “Churches Should Exhibit,” 1:534.

⁷⁷ Fuller, “Churches Should Exhibit,” 1:534.

⁷⁸ Fuller, “Ministers and Churches,” 1:545.

to delight in his love. The virtue of love to which pastors rightly aspired should be grounded in the God who is love.

Fuller provided some practical steps to help pastors stoke the fire of their hearts toward God. In a sermon based on John 5:35, Fuller exhorted ministers to apply themselves to cultivating "holy love." As important as it was to gain "holy wisdom," ministers should also long to "burn with ardent love."⁷⁹ To begin with, Fuller advised ministers to read about exemplary saints from the past: "*Read the lives of good men*—the lives of such men as God has distinguished for gifts, and graces, and usefulness."⁸⁰ Although no figure save Christ was sinless, such stories inspired believers to emulate great figures of the past, which also had the effect of stirring one's heart for the God that they served. But above all, it was in the holy Scriptures that God's people found their deepest and most edifying fellowship. It was there that they heard the voice of God and the most gracious message that he sent to them. This was the surest source of communion with the transcendent God of heaven. Fuller proclaimed that the reading of Scripture "will set our hearts on fire."⁸¹ Nothing else had such potential to foster holy love. In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:9, Fuller encouraged that God was near to those who sought him: "If we be with God, God is with us; and that is the greatest encouragement we can have." This love, something much deeper than warm feelings or good intentions, was the Christian's delight. It was worthy of the attention that Fuller ascribed to it and more.

As another part of pursuing this love, Fuller called ministers to self-evaluation. Self-analysis should include the breadth of one's life and doctrine, but Fuller called for giving special attention to the heart. Even in the eighteenth century, the busyness of ministry and life could distract one from pursuing love of God as the essential virtue that Fuller believed it was. In this way, the minister needed to be a Christian first and a pastor second: "*Live the life of a Christian*, as well as of a minister. Read as one, preach as one, converse as one *to be profited*, as well as to profit others."⁸² Fuller addressed the temptation for ministers, "to handle Divine truth as ministers, rather than as Christians—for others, rather than for ourselves."⁸³ Preachers should never assume that their own act of preaching automatically benefited them. Like those who heard it, they too must receive it in faith. Fuller warned that the minister's study of Scripture must be more than a source for material to give for others. It must be a source for feeding the minister himself. Pastors should take care to avoid the pitfall in which familiarity with the Bible breeds indifference to it. Pastors must reserve regular times for private communion with God as a source for intimacy and empowerment: "Walking with God in the closet is a grand means, with his blessing, of illuminating our minds and warming our hearts. When Moses

⁷⁹ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:481.

⁸⁰ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:482. Italics are original.

⁸¹ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:482.

⁸² Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:482. Italics are original.

⁸³ Fuller, "Spiritual Knowledge," 1:482.

came down from the mount, his face shone bright, and his heart burned with zeal for the honour of God and the good of his people.”⁸⁴ Fuller did not presume that ministers would necessarily relive Moses’s experience on the mountain, but the same God who spoke to Moses continued to commune with his people, especially through the word and prayer. If pastors were going to love their people well, they needed the fruit of their own devotional life which more than anything else was both an expression and a source of Godward love.

Love of God necessarily included holy obedience. The act of love on the part of the created toward the Creator produced a life of obedience. Fuller exhorted, “Hold forth the word of life, not only by precept, but by a *holy practice*.” Fuller warned would-be pastors that without holiness “in vain will be all our pretensions to being ‘burning and shining lights.’”⁸⁵ In this pursuit, Fuller charged pastors to be full of the Spirit. In an ordination sermon based on Acts 11:24, Fuller used Barnabas as one such example.⁸⁶ Being full of the Spirit would strengthen the believer’s bond with God and protect against the world’s influence. Too many had fallen “under the influence of the love of this world” to become “*drunken* with its cares or pleasures.”⁸⁷ Fuller summarized his point well: “If we are destitute of the Holy Spirit, we are blind to the loveliness of the Divine character, and destitute of any true love to God in our hearts; and if destitute of this, we shall not be able to see the reasonableness of that law which requires love to him with all the heart.”⁸⁸ Always trusting in the perfect work of Christ and the grace therein, every Christian, but especially those called to shepherd God’s people should pursue holiness as an act of love toward God.

CONCLUSION

In the busyness, and often business-oriented, ministry of the twenty-first century, many pastors function without consciously aspiring toward virtues that in times past have significantly shaped the vision of the Christian ministry. Intellectual virtues, for example, that in times past helped to make pastors theological leaders in society have widely been neglected since the turn of the last century. The Christian virtue of love likewise warrants attention, and by looking at an eighteenth-century Particular Baptist, we find a remarkable contrast to a common picture of pastoral ministry today. In Fuller’s estimation, love was the preeminent virtue for pastors, which merited the prominence that he gave it in the formation of ministers in his native England. As an eighteenth-century Baptist, Andrew Fuller was more biblicist than classicist. A well-studied theologian, he was not ignorant of the classics, but he preferred to use biblical terms and categories both in

⁸⁴ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:482.

⁸⁵ Fuller, “Spiritual Knowledge,” 1:482.

⁸⁶ Fuller, “The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated by the Character and Success of Barnabas,” in *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:135–44.

⁸⁷ Fuller, “The Qualifications,” 1:138.

⁸⁸ Fuller, “The Qualifications,” 1:139.

his theological construction and his preaching.⁸⁹ His work lacks some of the deeper philosophical reflection of virtue theory, but his rich spirituality and biblically-shaped pastoral theology of love offers a fascinating angle to explore in a time when virtue formation is receiving renewed attention.

Fuller painted a picture of excellence in ministry that placed love above all else. He regarded love as the essential virtue for pastoral ministry and the key to faithful and fruitful ministry. Excellence in ministry could be judged by how well one has loved his church and cultivated love within it. If excellence required love, then the training of pastors should give significant attention to the formation of this virtue. Answering how this should be done on a practical level today raises more questions than answers, but the renewed attention to virtue formation provides some hope for fresh consideration, which I expect will draw inspiration from the wealth of resources in church history. On the most basic level, Fuller demonstrates how a Christ-modeled love should undergird the whole of pastoral ministry. On this most basic level, the point is refreshingly simple to grasp.

⁸⁹ For the best source on Fuller's theological method, see Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, 37–64.