

**THE SERMONS OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD (2 Vols.) The
Reformed Evangelical Anglican Library**

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We live in an age when it is possible to hear any number of sermons from across the world, often within minutes of them being preached. If we can listen to such excellent biblical ministry on the go, is there still a place for the printed word sermon—and that from 250 years' ago? Such were this reviewer's thoughts as he ploughed through the two volumes (and almost 1,000 pages) of sermons from George Whitefield.

Together there are 61 sermons, preached in the thirty or so years up to his death in 1770. They most certainly have the power to warm the heart and be good for the soul. He is always thoroughly clear, and methodical, as if prosecuting a case. Yet his sermons lasted an hour or more, with very few of the contemporary 'illustrations' that some of us have been encouraged to use. Yet these sermons so edifying. Throughout we see a number of concerns, which penetrate the

reader's heart and lift our eyes to Christ. The first is a clear passion for Christ. We have our preachers today who urge us in this, but Whitefield is never far from describing the 'the unspeakable happiness of enjoying God'.

A second is a call to repentance from sin which is, I fear, most unusual today. This is linked to the third theme—that of Justification by faith alone not works. Here's just a taste of what he says: "Before you can speak peace in your heart, you must not only be made sick of your original and actual sin, but you must be made sick of your righteousness, or all your duties and performances". Barely a sermon is given without Whitefield addressing those we might call 'sinners', the 'religious' and the 'faithful'. Whether he is addressing rich and poor, the proud and marginalized, professors and harlots (and it seems he typically addresses all these, and more, including children and 'negroes' in each sermon), he urges people to turn to Christ and receive him.

There's no shirking original sin, or its consequences. Godly Christian living is a further theme—once again, unlike anything we tend to hear today. How many Christmas sermons not only explain the truth of the incarnation, death, and ascension, but also in the light of this call the hearer to give up playing cards, dice, gaming, eating and drinking in excess (or their modern day equivalents)? And then direct that the 'money...to pamper your own bodies...[should] be used to feed the poor'?

No surprise, then, that there is no diluting the cost of following Christ: 'if we are married to Jesus Christ, we shall we willing to bear his cross, as well as to wear his crown'. George Whitefield preached a Christ-centred, grace-filled call to every sinner to live as 'altogether' not 'almost' (half-hearted) Christians.

His love and concern for the Church of England is equally apparent, whether it is in the frequent quoting of or illusion to the Articles, or comment on doctrinal error in others. However, Whitefield was clearly more concerned for the souls of the individuals who heard him than he was in doctrinal side-sweeps, unless necessary for the full and faithful teaching of his message. His comments on the importance of ministerial preparation are a reminder yet again that this battle is never finished. We may not be 'distracted' by the same things today, but the priority of the true gospel and the Bible surely remain (as does the desire to see all ministers converted).

These two volumes are the beginning of a new series, “The Reformed Evangelical Anglican Library”. The editing has a light, but learned, touch. There are some excellent footnotes to highlight historical relevance and context, and to explain the meaning of some of the more obscure words.

Don't expect to read these as a 'short cut' for sermon preparation. Yet the minister or other hungry Christian seeking to feed their soul will find a rich treasure trove. By God's grace, as our eyes are lifted to Christ and strengthened in him, our own humble and faltering efforts in preaching may be just as glorifying to our beloved Lord.

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