



Wilberforce: Encouragement for a Balanced Budget Amendment?

TO: LEGISLATORS

FROM: PASTOR RALPH DROLLINGER

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On February 23, 1807, Great Britain's House of Commons voted to end the practice of African slave trading throughout its empire. This historic legislative feat can be attributed to the perseverance of William Wilberforce.

The spiritual mentor behind Wilberforce was John Newton. Newton was a wretched man (his own words), a slave trader who was dramatically saved by the powerful message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is no wonder he is the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace." After his conversion he became a pastor. He ended up having a profound personal impact on William Wilberforce, not a political impact, but a spiritual one.

Newton and other ministers within the church were responsible for helping Wilberforce develop convictions born from Scripture. Their discipleship efforts led Wilberforce to become a man driven by theology and doctrine. He was a lover of God and the Bible. After he became a Christian he decided to spend legislative recesses studying the Bible. It was common for him to spend 10 hours per day studying and memorizing Scripture. This righteous conviction rooted in biblical doctrine is what sustained and directed Wilberforce during his decades-long battle against slavery.

Those are the kind of persevering legislators that America needs today in order to wean our nation from its enslavement to debt.

William Wilberforce would be a forgotten figure in history had it not been for a disciple maker like John Newton. Newton remained singularly focused on his calling, which was making disciples of Jesus Christ by the Word of God. He was perhaps just as responsible for ending the slave trade in Britain as Wilberforce yet he never engaged directly in politics. The church

made Wilberforce who he was through the ministry of the Word.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the darkest chapters in American history is nineteenth-century African slavery. During America's Civil War (1861-1865), Bible scholars on both sides of the slavery issue were firing theological volleys back and forth at one another in an attempt either: (1) to decry the enslavement of one human being by another; or (2) to justify slavery by aligning it with slavery in the Bible.¹ Commenting on this theological warfare, one historian writes, "Abolitionists argued vehemently that, based on the Bible, the spirit of Christianity forbids the enslavement of one race by another. Slavery's defenders in the South argued just as vehemently that the Bible itself did not condemn slavery but took it for granted."² While it is not the purpose of this study to reconstruct and analyze the theological arguments surrounding this human atrocity, it is the firm conviction of this writer that nineteenth-century African slavery in America was in no way biblically justified.³

America is certainly not the only country that has engaged in the abominable practice of chattel slavery. America's progenitor, Great Britain, relied heavily on slave labor for economic reasons throughout its empire. History records that slavery was eventually abolished in both Great Britain and in the United States, the former through a peaceful political process, the latter through a violent civil war. There are many worthy subjects of study within this broad area, but this study's purpose is to help the reader better understand the primary figure behind the abolition of African slavery in Great Britain 200 years ago, the politician William Wilberforce.⁴

His ultimately successful 20-year fight in British Parliament to end slavery is looked upon as a jewel in the crown of Christian legislative accomplishment. While it cannot be denied that Wilberforce fought a meritorious fight, that he persevered against the odds, and that he

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helped eradicate a vile cancer from his part of the world, what sustained him as he fought the good fight for so long? Was he motivated by the simple desire to take back the culture? Or, was there something deeper that put the fire in his bones to fight for righteousness? As the following will show, it was the Word of God that dwelt richly (cf. Col. 3:16) in Wilberforce, a vibrant and growing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that steered his political career, informed his convictions and gave him the motivation to persevere against incredible odds.⁵ The following survey of Wilberforce's life will bear this out. In Wilberforce's own words:

The diligent perusal of the Holy Scriptures would discover to us our past ignorance. We should cease to be deceived by superficial appearances, and to confound the Gospel of Christ with the systems of philosophers; we should become impressed with that weighty truth, so much forgotten, and never to be too strongly insisted on, that Christianity calls on us, as we value our immortal souls, not merely in *general*, to be *religious* and *moral*, but *specially* to believe the doctrines, and imbibe the principles, and practice the precepts of Christ.⁶

II. WHO WAS WILLIAM WILBERFORCE?⁷

William Wilberforce was born in 1759 in Hull, England. He was a contemporary of some of England's (and histories) greatest preachers, including John Newton, John Wesley and George Whitefield.⁸ God used unusual circumstances in the life of young Wilberforce to bring him into the company of Evangelicals and one of these great men of God was John Newton.⁹ Writes Wilberforce biographer John Pollock:

...when William was turning nine, his father died at the age of forty. Abel Smith became head of the business; the firm changed its name to Wilberforce and Smith, and William's life changed too. Not merely because he would be independent and quite rich when he came of age, but because he was sent, a year after his father's death, to live with his childless uncle and aunt, William and Hannah Wilberforce, at their Wimbledon villa in the Surrey countryside and their London house in St. James's Place. They put him to boarding school at Putney.¹⁰

As it turns out,

These relatives were despised evangelicals, friends of the preacher George Whitefield, a leader in the first Great Awakening, and John Newton, best known today as the author of 'Amazing Grace.' Newton, an old seadog, ex-naval deserter, ex-lecher, and ex-slave-trader who had been converted slowly in and after a storm at sea, fascinated the boy with his yarns. And Newton showed little William 'how sweet the name of Jesus sounds' until his mother, *horrified that he was turning Methodist,*¹¹ took him away.¹¹

An article by Steven Gertz on Wilberforce's relationship with Newton states, "As a boy of eight years [or nine!], he'd [Wilberforce] sat at the feet of the fascinating sea-captain [Newton], drinking in his colorful stories, jokes, songs—and perhaps most importantly, lessons of faith."¹² Later in life:

William remembered as younger Evangelical, John Newton, the parson of Olney in Buckinghamshire who often preached in London and was soon to be famous as a hymn-writer. A boy could hardly fail to be impressed by this jolly, affectionate ex-sea captain and slaver, who as a youth had been flogged in the Royal Navy for desertion and later suffered as the virtual slave of a white man's native mistress in West Africa. Wilberforce listened enthralled to his sermons and his stories, even "reverencing him as a parent when I was a child."¹³

Seeds of faith may have been planted in young Wilberforce's life, yet the real fruit of true salvation was still years away. Wilberforce, Piper notes, "had admired George Whitefield, John Wesley, and John Newton as a child. But soon he left all the influence of the evangelicals behind."¹⁴ As noted previously, Wilberforce's "mother was more high church and was concerned her son was 'turning Methodist.' So she took him out of the boarding school where they had sent him and put him in another."¹⁵ "In the holidays the Wilberforce family began to scrub William's soul clear of Wimbledon and Clapham,¹⁶ a slow process: he [William] wrote manfully to his uncle [who he was pulled away from] of endurance under persecution [from his family], and of increasing 'in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus whom he sent, whom to know is life eternal.'¹⁷ In Wilberforce's life, the intervening time between his childhood exposure to Newton and his later conversion via Isaac Milner's ministry was one of spiritual deadness. Says one writer about Wilberforce's college years, he



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“lost any interest in biblical religion and loved circulating among the social elite.”¹⁸ So far had he drifted, “Newton said sadly that nothing seemed left of his [Wilberforce’s] faith except a more moral outlook than was usual among men of fashion.”¹⁹ Being moral apart from regeneration was no more salvific back then than it is now.

III. COMING TO FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

In the spiritual vacuum of his heart, Wilberforce made room for the popular religion of his day.

In London, he [Wilberforce] had a sitting at the Essex Street chapel founded by Theophilus Lindsey, the ‘father’ of modern Unitarianism, one of the few clergy of the Church of England who had shown courage and principle enough to resign their livings on abandoning, like so many, a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Lindsey still preached the Christian ethic and read the Church services, and his chapel attracted several eminent men: Wilberforce rated him London’s only fervent preacher, since the Evangelical or ‘methodistical’ preachers he had enjoyed with the uncle and aunt were now outside his pale.²⁰

But Wilberforce would eventually be rescued from this anti-biblical notion of Jesus Christ.

Wilberforce’s subsequent accounts of his long drawn out Conversion or perhaps Re-dedication to the Christ of his boyhood faith—are somewhat contradictory but he gives a prime share to his reading Doddridge’s book with Milner. They possibly looked up relevant passages in the Bible, for Wilberforce says he adopted his religious principles from the ‘perusal of the Holy Scriptures and ...the instruction I derived from a friend of very extraordinary natural and acquired powers.’²¹

Wilberforce had come to salvation in Jesus Christ at age twenty-five,²² a few years before a life-changing meeting with Newton. According to one biographical sketch of Wilberforce’s life, after he won his election to Parliament in 1784, he “agreed to take a tour of the continent.... When he happened to run into his old schoolmaster from Hull, Isaac Milner, and Wilberforce impulsively invited him to join the traveling party. That invitation was to change Wilberforce’s life.”²³

“By the time Milner deposited him on 22 February 1785 at Number 10 Downing Street, Wilberforce had reached

intellectual assent to the Biblical view of man, God and Christ. He thrust it to the back of his mind and resumed his social and political life.”²⁴ In the summer of that year, “slowly intellectual assent became profound conviction.” But, still not a Christian by his own summation, it was not until “the third week of October 1785 the ‘great change’, as he afterwards termed it, had driven Wilberforce to rise early each morning to pray.”²⁵ The story goes that Milner spoke of his Christian faith to Wilberforce, and that the latter “initially treated the subject flippantly, but eventually agreed to read the scriptures daily.”²⁶

IV. WILBERFORCE’S CRISIS OF FAITH

Faced with tremendous difficulty, “feeling weary and confused”²⁷ over how to reconcile his political career with his new life in Christ, Wilberforce “turned to his boyhood hero, John Newton, now sixty years old and Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City.”²⁸ Says Gertz of Wilberforce’s 1785 meeting with Newton: “Now, in a moment of spiritual crisis, wondering whether his reborn faith in God required him to leave politics, Wilberforce knew who could help him most...he mustered his courage and strode to the front door to call on his old friend.”²⁹ It is noteworthy that when it came to his political career, Wilberforce sought counsel from none other than a minister of the Word of God.

NEWTON ADVISED WILBERFORCE TO STAY IN OFFICE AND PURSUE CHRIST AS WELL.

This serves to illustrate that the biblical relationship between the institution of the Church and the institution of the State consists primarily of the former disciplining the latter. Look what happened to England’s culture as a result!

V. THE LIFE OF A SAVED POLITICIAN

Once saved and sure that he should stay in politics, Wilberforce “worked hard to strengthen not only mental but spiritual stamina.”³⁰ Such will be the case I believe in the fight for a Balanced Budget Amendment in America: Will the believing legislators possess the spiritual stamina necessary for the fight ahead? In the process, “The Bible became his best loved book and he learned stretches by heart.”³¹ He did this “so that he could meditate at night,



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or should his eyes trouble him, or when needing guidance in his place in the Commons or at committees.”³² In other words, he let the Word of Christ dwell richly in him. Perhaps most telling of the primacy he put on his salvation over his entire life is the following statement by Pollack:

For Wilberforce wanted to subject not merely his appetites but his politics to Christ: ‘A man who acts from the principle I profess,’ he told a constituent three years after the conversion, “reflects that he is to give an account of his political conduct at the Judgment seat of Christ.”³³

Wilberforce’s reliance and accountability to biblical precepts underlie the tremendous things he did as a legislator—namely, fighting a 20-year battle to abolish the African slave trade. It is unfortunate that the latter fact about Wilberforce is often trumpeted without a proper and necessary emphasis on the aforesaid former of this study. Like a faithful pastor-teacher is continually mindful of James 3:1, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment;” it seems that Wilberforce had similar sentiments about answering to the Lord Jesus Christ one day for his political endeavors as a minister of God for good (Rom 13:4).

It was also only a few years after his conversion that Wilberforce’s heart slowly became set on abolishing the slave trade.

WHAT BIBLICALLY-BASED LEGISLATION WILL YOU PERSEVERE TO ENACT IN OUR COUNTRY IN THE YEARS AHEAD?

Much could be said from an historical perspective about the providential workings of God through specific people and circumstances that brought the issue to a rolling boil in Wilberforce’s heart, but suffice to say that God rose up the right person, at the right time, for the right task.³⁴

VI. WILBERFORCE’S “TWO GREAT OBJECTS”³⁵

Slavery was rampant in the nation of Great Britain during Wilberforce’s lifetime. “The [slave] Trade was legalized by Royal Charters of 1631, 1633 and 1672 and by Act of Parliament in 1698. One of the most prized

fruits of the War of Spanish Succession was the Assiento clause of the Treaty of Utrecht, giving Britain the sole right to supply slaves to the Spanish Colonies.”³⁶ In the years following his conversion to Jesus Christ Wilberforce became convinced that God had called him through His providence to a specific task: “Wilberforce stated this mission in his diary entry on October 28, 1787, when he was a young twenty-eight-year-old parliamentarian. With the menacing black clouds of the French Revolution rolling up on the horizon and Britain’s own social conditions providing cause for grave concern, he wrote simply: ‘God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the reformation of manners.’”³⁷ These convictions were what led him to tirelessly pursue the abolition of slavery for 20 years, and 38 years for societal reform. Colson observes that during these years, Wilberforce came to an important conclusion concerning the second of his two aims: “It was the great genius of Wilberforce that he realized that attempts at political reform without, at the same time changing the hearts and minds of people, were futile.”³⁹

Wilberforce’s platform to reform the manners of Britain is worth mentioning due to the methodology he used to effect change. Writes Pollock:

Interestingly, the campaign was never specifically religious. Wilberforce never tried to enlist the religious or even the professedly moral. Some of the grandees whose support he gained were in fact notoriously dissolute. But Wilberforce believed strongly that the destinies of a nation could best be influenced by deeply committed followers of Christ, and that conversion to Christ was a person’s most important political action as well as religious.⁴⁰

Not only did Wilberforce’s perspective on the public arena demand placing a premium on personal salvation, it also emphasized the importance of understanding sound doctrine. Piper sheds valuable light on Wilberforce’s biblical presuppositions:

What made Wilberforce tick was a profound biblical allegiance to what he called the ‘peculiar doctrines’⁴¹ of Christianity. These, he said, give rise in turn to true ‘affections’ for spiritual things, which then break the power of pride and greed and fear and lead to transformed morals, which lead to the political welfare



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of the nation. No true Christian can endure in battling unrighteousness unless his heart is aflame with new spiritual affections, or passions.⁴²

OH THAT ALL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND THE SENATE WOULD EMBIBE ON THE AFOREMENTIONED QUOTE!

By placing such a premium on Christ and sound doctrine, is there any question about the epistemological basis from which Wilberforce operated? Wilberforce diagnosed the root cause of Britain's sliding moral condition as being connected with a low view of genuine Christian doctrine! What a fascinating and accurate analysis! Is it not the same with today's debt crisis the false doctrine Are we reaping the fruits of the Social Gospel, a false Christianity that has been sold for the past 100 years?

Observing the attitude of his day, Wilberforce commented, "The fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the 'peculiar doctrines' of Christianity went more and more out of sight, and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment."⁴³

If Christian morals and Christian doctrines need be connected as Wilberforce suggests, should not a country that desires a return to a God-honoring culture strive to reconnect them? This makes the case for the evangelism and discipleship of governmental leaders! In Wilberforce's case, the fruit of his efforts was discernable throughout British life into the next century: "Whatever its faults, nineteenth-century British public life became famous for its emphasis on character, morals, and justice and the British business world famous for integrity."⁴⁴ What sweet relief to a country once ravaged by untold human suffering! It was salvation in and the doctrines of Christ that energized Wilberforce's political life and motivated him to reshape his culture.⁴⁵

Wilberforce' personal passion for Christ not only did much benefit of his day, but for the years to come. "It was a full forty-six years later and only three days before his death on July 26, 1833, when the bill for the abolition

of slavery throughout the entire British Empire passed its second reading in the House of Commons."⁴⁶ Not only had he succeeded in abolishing the slave trade in 1807, but his efforts shut down the entire insidious institution. A lifetime of work changed the world for the benefit of millions of people. But make no mistake: It began with one changed heart that who would one day change the world. Wilberforce faithfully pursued his God-given mission. Will you?

WILBERFORCE PERSISTED BY MAKING HIMSELF STRONG IN THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE⁴⁷ VIA AVAILING HIMSELF TO BE DISCIPLED BY GREAT MEN OF THE CHURCH LIKE ISAAC MILNER AND JOHN NEWTON.

It is important to note that Wilberforce was not strong in his own strength (1 Cor. 1:27b), but in his humility lay his strength. In 1785, at the risk of ostracism, Wilberforce met with the Newton, whom Parliament despised. Yet through this meeting, and the sound teaching he received in both his child and adult years, Wilberforce grew bold in Christ. Newton later stated of Wilberforce, "It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His Church and for the good of the nation."⁴⁸ Wilberforce's relationship with Newton came about despite the counsel of his close colleague, Prime Minister William Pitt, who attempted to pressure him away from Newton. Pitt castigated Newton as an Evangelical who would, "render your talents useless both to yourself and mankind." Nothing, as it turned out, could have been further from the truth. Many legislators who read this will have to surmount the same counsel of their colleagues. Likened to the Apostle Paul in Gal 1:10, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." The answer to that question is critical. Will you end up sitting at the seat of scoffers or the counsel of the Godly (cf. Psa. 1)?⁴⁹

Wilberforce did not shirk from the truth written on his heart by the Word of God. Writes Pollack:

In planning moral reform he showed awareness that politics are influenced more by the climate of an age than by the personal piety of statesmen and politicians. Wilberforce believed, nonetheless, that England's



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destiny lay safest in the hands of men of clear Christian principle, and that submission to Christ was a man's most important political as well as religious decision.⁵⁰

Accordingly, "very early in his own pilgrimage Wilberforce set out to bring his friends to Christ."⁵¹ Wilberforce knew that salvation in and submission to Jesus Christ was preeminent factors in the life of effective politicians.⁵²

HOW MUCH OF AN EMPHASIS ARE YOU PLACING ON EVANGELIZING THE LOST IN CONGRESS?

Piper notes Wilberforce's strategy, "Alongside all his social engagements, he carried on a *steady relational ministry*, as we might call it, seeking to win his unbelieving colleagues to personal faith in Jesus Christ"⁵³ (emphasis mine). Edward Eliot serves to manifest the Christian/political philosophy of Wilberforce. Wilberforce won Eliot to Christ after the latter's wife died while giving birth. Subsequently, "The two [Wilberforce and Eliot] could open their hearts to each other. Both knew the difficulties of walking with God when pressed by the rush and other temptations of political life."⁵⁴ Wilberforce's emphasis on evangelism throughout his political career remained consistent with his political philosophy.

VII. WILBERFORCE'S THOUGHTS ON MORALISM

Wilberforce wrote a treatise in 1797 on the actual state of Christianity among the professing Christians of his day, entitled, *A Practical View of Christianity*.⁵⁵ Pollock notes, "A Practical View took the reader on a discursive journey to discover how Christianity should and could guide the politics, habits and attitudes of a nation from the highest to the lowest."⁵⁶ In it Wilberforce states that he wrote with the intent "to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity."⁵⁷ The volume's depth proves especially remarkable considering Wilberforce regarded himself no more than a "Layman."⁵⁸ Yet with doctrinal accuracy and prowess Wilberforce outlined much of the failure of eighteenth-century British Christianity. For instance:

The truth is their opinions on these subjects are not formed from the perusal of the word of God. The Bible lies on the shelf unopened; and they would be wholly ignorant of its contents, except for what they hear occasionally at church, or for the faint traces which their memories may retain of the lessons of their earliest infancy.⁵⁹

Wilberforce saw a deplorable lack of biblical reliance amongst the professing Christians of his day.⁶⁰ Sadly, such a state is far too often characteristic of the Church in the twenty-first-century as well. Wilberforce drills deeper:

How different, nay, in many respects, how contradictory, would be the two systems of mere morals, of which the one should be formed from the commonly received maxims of the Christian world, and the other from the study of the Holy Scriptures!⁶¹

WILBERFORCE'S DISTASTE FOR RANK MORALISM APART FROM A DOCTRINALLY-ROOTED METHODOLOGY OF DEVELOPING ONE'S EPISTEMOLOGY FROM THE WORD OF GOD IS READILY APPARENT.

To this statement Wilberforce adds the coup de grace to any notion that he would support moralism in the public square:

The diligent perusal of the Holy Scriptures would discover to us our past ignorance. We should cease to be deceived by superficial appearances, and to confound the Gospel of Christ with the systems of philosophers; we should become impressed with that weighty truth, so much forgotten, and never to be too strongly insisted on, that Christianity calls on us, as we value our immortal souls, not merely in *general*, to be *religious* and *moral*, but *specially* to believe the doctrines, and imbibe the principles, and practice the precepts of Christ.⁶²

Wilberforce's emphasis on societal change was fueled by an evangelistic fervor. He had his hopes pinned on the truth of God's Word as the means of bringing solidarity to the nation and its peoples. For this reason, he had firm opinions about the role of the Church in promoting biblical understanding rather than moralistic campaigning. For example, in reaction to the radicals of his day, Wilberforce felt it necessary



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To encourage the increase of devoted clergymen who would promote ‘true honest practical Christianity’. He saw the role of clergy as that of reconcilers, harmonizers and quieters: he would not have liked radical parsons who preached political revolt, even against glaring injustice, for revolt bred distress and confusion for the common man. Wilberforce’s eye was on the happiness of families rather than on the creation of a distant better order through civil strife; the French Revolution had been proof enough of the misery such might cause.⁶³

VIII. SUMMARY

The ministry of evangelism and discipleship in the life of a governmental leader made William Wilberforce strong in Christ and broke the back of slavery in Britain.⁶⁴ And so should be the primary ministry of the Church today in the lives of leaders.

TODAY THE PRIMARY MANIFEST MINISTRY OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH SHOULD BE PRE-POLITICAL

It should concentrate its energies on evangelizing, teaching and discipling legislators in Christ. New affections for God are the key to new morals and lasting political reformation.”⁶⁵

If Evangelicals desire to have more ‘Wilberforce’s’ in office it follows that evangelism and discipleship of governmental leaders is critically necessary. John Piper sets forth the following challenge:

Is it not remarkable that one of the greatest politicians of Britain and one of the most persevering public warriors for social justice should elevate doctrine so highly? Perhaps this is why the impact of the church today is as weak as it is. Those who are most passionate about being practical for the public good are often the least doctrinally interested or informed. Wilberforce would say: You can’t endure in bearing fruit if you sever the root.⁶⁶

How true and how sad. Wilberforce was not merely full of good and moral ideas; rather, he was full of God’s wisdom and His Holy Spirit. This illustrates the need for and outcome of evangelizing and discipling today’s governmental leaders.

ARE YOU A MODERN-DAY WILBERFORCE?

John Newton made an investment of discipleship in Wilberforce that paid handsome dividends for millions.

In 1786, Newton wrote of Wilberforce, ‘I hope the Lord will make him a blessing both as a Christian and a statesman. How seldom do these characters coincide! But they are not incompatible.’ To Newton’s credit as a spiritual counselor and friend, few politicians have ever done so much as Wilberforce for the cause of Christ or the church.⁶⁷

William Wilberforce is a wonderful biblical model of an Evangelical in the political arena!

IX. CONCLUSION

Our country needs political leaders like Wilberforce who will persevere in the present battle of debt enslavement and other biblically-aborrent governmental policies. May the perseverance of this political battle be aided by disciplers like John Newton. Amen!

¹ For more on this topic see: H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, *American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents*, Vol. 2, 1820-1960 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 167-212.

² George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001), 74.

³ That which germinated the overturn of slavery in America was not political activism, Abraham Lincoln, or the Civil War. It was the winning out of correct Bible interpretation; that correct theology influenced the state. Again, that is why Bible study is so astronomically important—because politics and policy, wars and actions, stem from the beliefs people hold close in their hearts. Actions are reflective, but beliefs are causal.

⁴ To get a sense of the political courage necessary to lead this charge, consider the following: “Britain two hundred years ago was the world’s leading slave-trading nation; uprooting the vile practice threatened the annual trade of hundreds of ships, thousands of sailors, and hundreds of millions of pounds of sterling.” (John Pollock, “A Man Who Changed His Times,” in *Character Counts: Leadership Qualities in Washington, Wilberforce, Lincoln, and Solzhenitsyn*, ed. by Os Guinness [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999], 81.)



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⁵ Today this same God-given wisdom is available to every Christian legislator who believes in Jesus Christ and submits himself/herself to the Word of God.

⁶ William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, ed. Kevin Charles Belmonte, with an introduction by Charles Colson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), 5-6.

⁷ John Piper wisely suggests, “To understand and appreciate the life and labor of William Wilberforce, one of the wisest things to do is to read his own book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, first, and then read biographies” (John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), 117). Let the reader also read Piper’s book, *The Roots of Endurance* for a cogent synthesis on the vibrant faith in Christ that fuelled Wilberforce’s political efforts. The politician who is willing to study the life of William Wilberforce through his writings and those writings about him will be richer for the experience.

⁸ Though Wilberforce was personally encouraged by both Wesley and Newton, he “almost certainly he never heard Whitefield, who in the early autumn of 1769, at about the time of William’s coming south, left for his sixth and last visit to America, where he died.” (John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 5.)

⁹ Contra, Charles Colson, “Introduction,” in Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, xxii. Colson writes, “By the time Wilberforce knew of him, Newton was a clergyman in the Church of England, renowned for his outspokenness on spiritual matters.”

¹⁰ John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 4.

¹¹ John Pollock, “A Man Who Changed His Times,” 79.

¹² Steven Gertz, “Pastor to the Nation: Newton responded to thousands of requests for spiritual counsel with letters advising the lowly and the great,” in *Christian History & Biography*, Issue 81, Winter 2004, p. 37.

¹³ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 5.

¹⁴ Piper, 123.

¹⁵ Piper, 123.

¹⁶ Explain the significance of the Clapham.

¹⁷ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 6.

¹⁸ Piper, 123.

¹⁹ Pollock, “A Man Who Changed His Times,” 79.

²⁰ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 33. Pollack further states of Wilberforce’s spiritual instruction at that time: “In no sense was he an atheist. Lindsey’s disciples at Essex Street worshipped the Deity, a benevolent Providence in some way also the judge of man’s actions, but they rejected Christ’s divinity, the Christian view of the Atonement, and the authority of Scripture.” (Pollack, *Wilberforce*, 33-4). Wilberforce may have been no atheist, yet nor was he a Bible-believing Christian!

²¹ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 35.

²² J. D. Douglas, “William Wilberforce,” ____.

²³ Charles Colson, “Introduction,”

²⁴ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 35.

²⁵ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 37.

²⁶ Colson, “Introduction,” xxi.

²⁷ Colson, “Introduction,” xxi.

²⁸ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 38.

²⁹ Gertz, 37.

³⁰ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 44.

³¹ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 44.

³² Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 146.

³³ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 46. Wow!

³⁵ J. Douglas Holladay, “A Life of Significance,” in *Character Counts: Leadership Qualities in Washington, Wilberforce, Lincoln, and Solzhenitsyn*, ed. by Os Guinness (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999), 69.

³⁶ Garth Lean, *God’s Politician: William Wilberforce’s Struggle* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Helmers & Howard, 1987), 3.

³⁷ J. Douglas Holladay, “A Life of Significance,” 69.

³⁸ “Of course the opposition that raged for these twenty years [of Wilberforce’s legislative battle] was because of the financial benefits of slavery to the traders and to the British economy, because of what the plantations in the West Indies produced” (Piper, 130-1).

³⁹ Colson, “Introduction,” xxiv.

⁴⁰ Pollock, “A Man Who Changed His Times,” 86.

⁴¹ Explains Piper, “By that term [‘peculiar doctrines’], he simply meant the central distinguishing doctrines of human



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depravity, divine judgment, the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, justification by faith alone, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the practical necessity of fruit in a life devoted to good deeds.” (Piper, 120.)

⁴² Piper, 118.

⁴³ William Wilberforce cited in Piper, 116.

⁴⁴ Pollock, “A Man Who Changed His Times,” 87.

⁴⁶ Holladay, 70.

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy to add here that Wilberforce was a man of prayer. Writes E. M. Bounds, “Said William Wilberforce, the peer of kings: ‘I must secure more time for private devotions. I have been living far too public for me. The shortening of private devotions starves the soul; it grows lean and faint. I have been keeping too late hours.’ Of a failure in Parliament he says: ‘Let me record my grief and shame, and all, probably, from private devotions having been contracted, and so God let me stumble.’ More solitude and earlier hours was his remedy.” (Edward M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999), chapter 19.) This shows maturity in Wilberforce’s Christian life and suggests that even his political endeavors were bathed in prayer and supplication before God. Note also Wilberforce’s opening quotation in the same chapter of Bounds’ book: “This perpetual hurry of business and company ruins me in soul if not in body. More solitude and earlier hours! I suspect I have been allotting habitually too little time to religious exercises, as private devotion and religious meditation, Scripture-reading, etc. Hence I am lean and cold and hard. I had better allot two hours or an hour and a half daily. I have been keeping too late hours, and hence have had but a hurried half hour in a morning to myself. Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean. But all may be done through prayer — almighty prayer, I am ready to say — and why not? For that it is almighty is only through the gracious ordination of the God of love and truth. O then, pray, pray, pray!” (Ibid.)

⁴⁸ Piper, 128; as quoting from Robert Issac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, abridged edition (London: 1843), 47.

⁴⁹ The mature believer can see through his temptation with the biblical discernment of Eph 6:12

⁵⁰ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 66.

⁵¹ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 66. This is congruous with a clear biblical understanding and all that Wilberforce has already reasoned as previously mentioned .

⁵² After all, Romans 13:4 calls elected political leaders “ministers of God for good.”

⁵³ Piper, 134. In his book, Pollock pays tribute to Wilberforce’s Christian influence among his colleagues when he writes, “In contrast to 1780, when scarcely one man of strong religious and humanitarian conviction sat in the House of Commons, Wilberforce had many disciples.” (Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 279.)

⁵⁴ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 66. Pollock notes God’s salvific work in Eliot’s life. For instance, “Wilberforce’s sympathy became one of Eliot’s chief props in the months that followed [after his wife died giving birth], until he grew to share Wilberforce’s faith. ‘I was little better than an infidel,’ Eliot commented some years later, ‘but it pleased God to draw me by [the bereavement] to a better mind’” (second bracket in original). (Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 65.)

⁵⁵ According to Pollock, “*A Practical View* is a Biblical view, presented intelligibly if haphazardly. It sets out the essential Christian doctrines by Scripture texts, and then discourses about the imitation which passed for religion in 1797. The very discursiveness which powered the book’s impact on a generation rather bored by closely reasoned theologies, makes it wearisome to the modern reader and checkmates literary and theological critiques: it is a slippery eel of a book.” (Pollock, 147.)

⁵⁶ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 148.

⁵⁷ Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, xxxi.

⁵⁸ Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, xxx.

⁵⁹ Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, 4.

⁶⁰ “The more he [Wilberforce] looked at the religion of the New Testament the more he wanted to show how far it lay from the religion of the polite in England, whose blend of a little piety with a little moralizing offered nothing to a man whose inward eye had seen his corruption in the blinding light of the glory of the Lord.” (Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 146.)

⁶¹ Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, 4.

⁶² Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, 5-6.

⁶³ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 259.

⁶⁴ It was the personal pursuit of growing in Christ (i.e. studying the Word, praying diligently, valuing doctrine over moralism, etc.) that kept Wilberforce strong.

⁶⁵ Piper, 119.

⁶⁶ Piper, 159-60.

⁶⁷ Gertz, 39.