

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

## Richard Baxter and "The Reformed Pastor."

"ABOUT thirty years ago [actually on February 26th, 1907] the late T. H. Martin, of Adelaide Place, Glasgow, read a most searching paper to the West of Scotland Ministers' Fraternal on *The Reformed Pastor*, by Richard Baxter. It left a very profound impression, and sent many a man back to Baxter with fruitful results. I have read a great many books on the work of the ministry, but in my opinion Baxter's classic has a quality all its own, and the reading or re-reading of it at the present time might go far to renew our fitness for our great task."

From a letter signed "One of Them" in the *Baptist Times*, December 22nd, 1938.

By the kindness of Dr. Martin's son, the Rev. Hugh Martin, M.A., we are privileged to print the paper.

\* \* \* \*

"No man," says Macaulay, "stood higher in the estimation of the Protestant Dissenters than Richard Baxter. . . . The integrity of his heart, the purity of his life, the vigour of his faculties, and the extent of his attainments were acknowledged by the best and wisest men of every persuasion."

A brief sketch of a man who reached such a position in his day is desirable before we proceed to consider the book which is our special concern. Baxter was born at Rowton, in Shropshire, on November 12th, 1615. In his own narrative of his life and times he says that his father "had the competent estate of a freeholder, free from the temptations of poverty and riches; but, having been addicted to gaming in his youth, and his father before him, it was so entangled by debts that it occasioned some excess of worldly cares before it was freed." About the time of Baxter's birth, however, his father came under religious impressions, and seems to have reformed his life. He became the object of scorn on this account to his former associates, and as his son remarks, "all who sought to serve God in sincerity were called by the name of Puritan, Precisian and Hypocrite," so uncommon was a life of godliness in those times.

His father's conduct was so true and consistent that it led to Baxter's own conversion when a youth of sixteen. He has left behind him a catalogue of the sins of his boyhood—among

which the worst he could mention were irreverence towards his parents and occasional gaming for money; while he adds, what few boys would consider a matter of conscience at all, "I was much addicted to the gluttonous eating of apples and pears, which, I think, laid the foundation of that weakness of my stomach which caused the bodily calamity of my life. To this end and to concur with naughty boys that gloried in evil, I have often gone into other men's orchards, and stolen their fruits, when I had enough at home."

Baxter's early education was utterly negligible. He suffered from incompetent teachers, men of worthless character, who were supposed to give him private tuition. From his sixteenth to his nineteenth year he was a pupil teacher at the endowed school at Wroxeter, where he seems to have acquired little strictly scholastic knowledge except "as much Latin as enabled him to use it in after life with reckless facility." Still, he appears to have used his time in private study and reading to considerable purpose. The mental capacity he afterwards displayed could not have been wholly dormant, and the foundation of his immense erudition must have been laid in these early days. His youth covered years in the history of England which were filled with political and religious events ominous of revolution. He could not have escaped their influence had he wished to do so. Indeed, it is obvious that his bent of mind was such that he launched eagerly upon the sea of speculation which opened before his adventurous spirit. During the three or four years which elapsed before he began his ministry at Kidderminster—which were spent in teaching in schools at Dudley and Bridgnorth, and in occasional attempts at exercising his gifts as a preacher—he was in deep mental trouble. He had to fight his way against the spectres of the mind that opposed him at every step towards the light. He so abhorred self-deception that he was determined, he says, to probe every question to its utmost; and though he emerged victorious from the conflict and was a man of profound convictions, he bore the marks of the severity of the struggle all his life.

He was called to the curacy of the Kidderminster Parish Church in March, 1640, though his legal appointment was delayed for a year. It came about, he tells us, in this wise. "The Long Parliament, among other parts of their reformation, resolved to reform the corrupted clergy, and appointed a Commission to receive petitions and complaints against them; which was no sooner understood but multitudes in all counties came up with petitions against their ministers. Among these complainers the town of Kidderminster drew up a petition against their minister; as one that was utterly insufficient for the ministry, unlearned,

preached but once a quarter, which was so weakly as exposed him to laughter and persuaded them that he understood not the very substantial articles of Christianity, that he frequented ale-houses and had sometimes been drunk, and more such as this." The vicar, conscious of his inability, hastily agreed with his parishioners that a curate should be appointed—when Baxter was chosen by a unanimous vote.

Then, says Baxter, his ministry had scarcely begun when his intellectual questionings assailed him afresh, doubts of the truth of the Scriptures, of the life to come and of the immortality of the soul, insomuch that "under the pretence of sober reason," he was almost drawn to "a settled doubting of Christianity." The outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, however, brought him out of this labyrinth where he was winding his painful and solitary way, to consider the stern realities of life. He was obliged to retire from Kidderminster for a while on account of his sympathy with the party of the Parliament, and was invited by Cromwell to become chaplain in his own regiment. This he declined, but was induced later to become chaplain to another regiment under Colonel Whalley. While holding this post he seems to have been much disturbed by the religious and political opinions current among the sectaries, as he calls them, in the army. Being still a Churchman and an episcopalian he thought it his duty to dispute with them, and many pitched battles ensued. He describes one of them, held at Amersham, thus: "When the talking day came I took the reading pew and Pitchford's cornet and troopers took the gallery, and I alone disputed with them from morning until almost night." Too old and wary a campaigner to retire in the presence of the enemy, he naively adds: "I staid it out till they first rose and went away." Cromwell viewed these polemics on the part of Baxter with undisguised aversion. "He would not dispute with me at all," says the good man, with evident surprise.

At the close of the Civil War, Baxter returned to his charge at Kidderminster and worked there for fourteen years, during the whole period of the Commonwealth, undisturbed. His ministry was blessed with extraordinary success and brought him undying fame as a preacher and pastor. He succeeded, indeed, in changing the whole aspect of the town from a religious point of view. The commodious church was so crowded that five galleries were one after another erected within it. He was a strict disciplinarian, and would allow none but the worthy to come to the Lord's Supper, a great innovation in an established church, where it was the custom to grant indiscriminate communion to all and sundry, and an innovation which brought him a good deal of trouble. Multitudes were converted by his faithful

word and example, and a lasting improvement for good was produced far and wide in the West of England.

In addition to his own labours, he was often consulted by men in high places on many questions of Church and State which were being fiercely agitated. He was invited on one occasion to preach before Cromwell, the Lord Protector, when his sermon was not altogether pleasing to the chief auditor. Cromwell sent for him afterwards and held a long discussion of four or five hours' duration in which Baxter did not get his own way, apparently, for he complains that Cromwell uttered a long and tedious speech for over an hour before Baxter could get a word in! The fact is, Baxter had not a clear mind on the principles of civil and religious liberty for which Cromwell stood, and did not arrive at Cromwell's standpoint until long after this period of his life. It was after the Restoration of Charles II. that Baxter began to change his mind and became a Nonconformist. He had already imbibed a profound respect for many Dissenters who were among his personal friends, and it was when he saw these godly men being persecuted, as he says, by ungodly bishops, that he altered his views. Two considerations finally determined him to join the Nonconformists entirely; first, the want of discipline in the Church of England and the promiscuous giving of the Lord's Supper; and secondly, the subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, which required him to say that there was nothing in them contrary to Scripture, "a wholesale order," he says, which he could not endorse.

When the Act of Uniformity came into operation in 1662, Baxter and two thousand other ministers threw up their livings and became the virtual founders of modern Nonconformity. Attempts were made to retain many of the more able and noted of these ministers, and Baxter himself was offered a bishopric by Charles II. which he declined. He was once invited to preach at Court, when his sermon of two hours on the dangers of a sensual and worldly life was so distasteful to the king that he remarked that "Presbyterianism was clearly not the religion for a gentleman."

Baxter also had an audience, along with other divines, with the king, whom they tried to dissuade from the reactionary policy his advisers were thrusting upon him in church affairs. Baxter's own account of what he said is worth quoting, as showing the honesty and boldness of his speech. "I presumed to tell him that the late usurpers so well understood their own interests that to promote it they had found the way of doing good to be the most effective means, and had placed and encouraged many thousand faithful ministers in the Church, even such as detested their usurpation. Wherefore I humbly craved his majesty's

patience to ask that he would never suffer himself to be tempted to undo the good which Cromwell had done, because they were usurpers that did it, or discountenance a faithful minister because his enemies had set him up." Such plain speaking could not be palatable to Charles and his advisers.

It is unnecessary to pursue Baxter's career as a Nonconformist in detail. Suffice it to say that he was subject to all manner of persecution under the various Acts passed against dissenters. He was not allowed to preach except on sufferance, he often changed his residence, and lived mostly in retired spots, since the Five Mile Act prohibited from living within that distance of any corporate town under pain of arrest. He did not remain idle, however. Books and pamphlets on all the questions of the day issued from his pen with astonishing rapidity. He is responsible for no less than 168 separate productions, which if put together would fill sixty octavo volumes.

His writings finally brought him into trouble. He was several times in prison for short terms for venturing to preach, but his publication of a commentary on the New Testament, in which he animadverted strongly on the character and conduct of certain bishops, led to his final arrest in 1685, in the reign of James II. He was brought into the Court of King's Bench before the notorious Chief Justice Jeffreys who furnished Bunyan with the features of Lord Hategood. Calamy relates the course of the trial, which was a scandal and a disgrace. When Baxter appeared he pleaded for time to prepare his defence. Jeffreys burst into a storm of rage. "Not a minute to save his life," cried the judge, "I can deal with saints as well as with sinners." The Court was crowded with Nonconformist and Church of England divines who loved and honoured Baxter. At his side stood Dr. Wm. Bates, the most eminent of the Nonconformists. Two Whig barristers of great note, Pollexfen and Wallop, appeared for the defendant. When the former began his address the judge interrupted him. "Pollexfen, I know you well. I will set a mark on you. You are the patron of the faction. This is an old rogue, a schismatical knave, a hypocritical villain. He hates the liturgy. He would have nothing but long-winded cant without book." And then his lordship turned up his eyes, clasped his hands and began to sing through his nose, in imitation of what he supposed to be Baxter's style of praying: "Lord, we are Thy people, Thy peculiar people, Thy dear people." Pollexfen gently reminded the Court that his late Majesty had thought Baxter deserving of a bishopric. "And what ailed the old blockhead, then," cried Jeffreys, "that he did not take it?" His fury rose to madness. He called Baxter a dog and swore it would be no more than justice to whip such a villain through the city.

Baxter's second counsel attempted to interpose, but was browbeaten and compelled to sit down. Baxter then put in a word for himself. "My lord," said the old man, "I have been much blamed by dissenters for speaking respectfully of bishops." "Baxter for bishops!" cried the judge. "That's a merry conceit indeed. I know what you mean by bishops, rascals like yourself, Kidderminster bishops, factious, snivelling Presbyterians." Baxter again essayed to speak, and again Jeffreys bellowed, "Richard, Richard, dost thou think we will let thee poison the Court? Richard, thou art an old knave. Thou hast written books enough to load a cart, and every book as full of sedition as an egg is full of meat. By the grace of God I'll look after thee. I see a great many of your brotherhood waiting to know what will befall their mighty don. And there is a Doctor of the party at your elbow. But by the grace of God Almighty I will crush you all." Then one of the junior counsel proceeded to show that the words in Baxter's book would not bear the construction put upon them in the indictment, but as soon as he began to read the context Jeffreys shouted, "You shan't turn Court into a conventicle." The Chief Justice would hear nothing, and prepared to deliver sentence. Then Baxter ventured on the remark, "Does your lordship think that any jury will convict a man on such a trial as this?" "I warrant you, Mr. Baxter," said Jeffreys. "Don't trouble yourself about that." And he was right. The Sheriff had a packed jury, who instantly returned a verdict of guilty. The sentence was two years' imprisonment. Jeffreys further desired to have Baxter whipped at the cart's tail, but this was disallowed by his brethren on the bench. So ended a trial, like many another in those days, which was a perfect travesty of justice.

Baxter was released early in 1687, before the two years were up, by the intervention of his friends. But he never wholly recovered from the effects of his confinement, though he lingered in ill-health for several years and died on December 8th, 1691.

The amount and quality of Baxter's work constituted a marvel to his friends. They never could understand how one who from his youth was afflicted with various chronic diseases, and held soul and body together only with difficulty, could accomplish so much. Sir James Stephen, in his essay on Baxter, speaking of the difficulty of characterising him in a few words, says, "Men of his size are not to be drawn in miniature." He speaks of him as "calling to his aid an extent of theological and scholastic lore sufficient to equip a whole college of divines, and moving beneath the load with unencumbered freedom."

Baxter's two most famous books are *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* and *The Reformed Pastor*. I now turn briefly to review

the latter. Doddridge said that this was "a most extraordinary performance, and should be read by every young minister, and the practical part of it reviewed every three or four years; for nothing would have a greater tendency to awaken the spirit of a minister to that zeal in his work for want of which many good men are but shadows of what they might be."

As a modern book on the ministry it might be considered defective in various ways, the growth of the Church in many directions and the changed circumstances of religious life having altered our conceptions of ministerial duty. But in the prosecution and enforcement of the essential motives of the minister's work it cannot be surpassed. When we leave out its references to the controversies of Baxter's own day and make all allowance for the archaic terms he uses, and the quaint old-world allusions which were customary among his contemporaries, the prime thought of the book is well worth earnest study.

Baxter was asked by the ministers of the county of Worcester to preach to them on a Day of Humiliation which they proposed to hold on December 4th, 1655. He was unable through ill health to fulfil his engagement, but the sermon he had prepared was expanded into the treatise and published. It is dedicated "To my Reverend and Dearly beloved Brethren, the faithful ministers of Christ in Britain and Ireland." In the course of his dedicatory remarks he says: "If it be objected that I should not have spoken so plainly and sharply against the sins of the ministry, or that I should not have published it to the view of the world; or at best that I should have done it in another tongue and not in the ears of the vulgar; and especially at such a time when Quakers and Papists are endeavouring to bring the ministry into contempt . . . I confess I thought the objection very considerable, but that it prevailed not to alter my resolution is to be ascribed to the following reasons. (1) It was prepared for a solemn humiliation agreed upon. (2) It was our own sins that the confession did concern, and who can be offended with us for confessing our own sins, and (3) if the ministry had sinned only in Latin I would have made shift to admonish them in Latin; but if they will sin in English, they must hear of it in English. (4) Too many who have undertaken the work of the ministry do so obstinately proceed in self-seeking, negligence, pride and other sins that it is become our necessary duty to admonish them. If we saw that such would reform without reproof, we would gladly forbear the publishing of their faults, but when reproofs themselves prove so ineffectual that they are more offended at the reproof than at the sin, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy."

The general plan of the work is as follows: 1. The Over-



sight of ourselves, its nature and motives. 2. The Oversight of the flock, its nature, manner and motives. 3. The Application as to the use of personal humiliation and as to the duty of the pastor's work. The best part is undoubtedly the first, dealing with the minister's oversight of himself. It is that part which is most universally applicable, much of the two other sections being local and temporary in character. I cannot do better than give you a brief resumé, quoting as often as may be Baxter's own terse and pungent language.

WHAT IS IT TO TAKE HEED TO OURSELVES?

1. See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls. Many a tailor goes in rags that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher, but because he was a justified, sanctified man and consistently faithful in his master's work. Can any reasonable man imagine that God could save men for offering salvation to others while they refused it themselves, and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused. It is a common calamity and danger of the Church to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, who worship an unknown God and preach an unknown Christ, and pray through an unknown Spirit, and recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, alike unknown. He is like to be but a heartless preacher that hath not the Christ in his heart.

2. Keep your graces in vigilant and lively exercise. Preach to yourselves before you preach to others. If you publish the distempers of your own soul, as you cannot help doing, you will affect your flock. When I am cold my preaching is cold and when I am confused my preaching is confused. Watch over your own hearts, keep out lusts and passions and worldly inclinations, keep up the life of faith and love and zeal. Be much at home and be much with God.

3. Take heed to yourselves lest your example contradict your doctrine. If you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues, you will be the greatest hindrances of your own labour. This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than prating. It is a palpable error of some ministers who study hard to preach exactly and study little or not at all to live exactly. How curiously (i.e. carefully) have I heard some men preach and how carelessly have I seen them live! They that were most impatient of barbarisms, solecisms, and paralogisms in a sermon could easily tolerate them in their life and conversation.

4. Take heed to yourselves that you want not the qualifications necessary for your work. What knowledge is needed, what acquaintance with the fundamental principles of religion, with the exposition of Scripture, with the subtleties of conscience and with the prejudices that keep men from the truth? What men should we be in skill, resolution and unwearied diligence, in order to convince our hearers, to let irresistible light into their consciences, to screw the truth into their minds and work Christ into their affections, and to drive sinners to a stand? Will a common measure of diligence and ability and prudence serve for such a task as this? I know that laziness hath learned to allege the vanity of study and how entirely the Spirit must qualify us for our work—as if God commanded us the use of means and then warned us to neglect them; as if it were His way to cause us to thrive in a course of idleness and to bring us to knowledge by dreams when we are asleep, or to take us up into heaven and show us His counsels while we think of no such matter, but are idling away our time on earth! O that men should dare by their laziness to quench the Spirit—and then pretend the Spirit for the doing of it! Take heed therefore lest you mar the work of God by your own negligence.

Consider then some motives to awaken us to this duty toward ourselves.

1. You have a soul to be saved and a heaven to win or lose, and therefore it concerneth you to begin at home. Shall we fail ourselves, and all because we preached so many sermons of Christ while we neglected *Him*, of the Spirit while we resisted Him, of faith while we did not ourselves believe, of repentance while we continued unpenitent, of a heavenly life while we remained carnal. Believe it, sirs, God is no respecter of persons: He saveth not men for their coats or callings; a holy calling will not save an unholy man.

2. Take heed to yourselves because you have a depraved nature and sinful inclinations as well as others. If one thief be in the house he will let in the rest. One sin inclineth the mind to more; a small disease may cause a greater. Many a noisome vice may spring up again that you thought had been weeded out by the root.

3. Take heed because the tempter will ply you with temptations more than other men. If you will be leaders, you give the larger mark. The devil is a greater scholar than you and a nimbler disputant and will trip up your heels before you are aware. He will play the juggler with you undiscerned and cheat you of your faith or innocency and you shall not know that you have lost it. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the

subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait, and the bait will be suited to your temper and disposition.

4. Take heed because there are many eyes upon you. You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it.

5. Take heed because your sins are more aggravated than other men's. You sin against more light and knowledge. Your sins have more hypocrisy in them, and are more perfidious to the cause of religion.

6. Take heed because your great work requires greater grace.

7. Take heed for the honour of your Master and His truth. As you may render Him more service, so may you render Him more disservice than others.

8. Take heed because the success of your labours depends upon the spiritual fitness of the instrument God uses. He cannot use the self-seeker, the man of unserious mind, or those unfaithful to the call of duty. Specially are they unusable who live in sin, for that man cannot be true to Christ who is in covenant with the enemy. A traitorous commander that shooteth nothing against the enemy but powder may cause his guns to make as great a sound as those that are loaded with bullets, but he doth no hurt to the enemy. The people themselves will not regard the teaching of a man who does not live as he preaches, for all that a minister does is a kind of preaching. They will take the pulpit to be but a stage, where ministers must show themselves and strut and play their parts.

In the second section of the Treatise, that on the Oversight of the Flock, there is little to arrest attention in the first part regarding the nature of the work. When, however, he comes to discuss the manner in which that work should be done, it is well to pause here and there, as for instance on the matter of preaching.

We must throughout our ministry insist chiefly upon the greatest, most certain and most necessary truths, and be more seldom and sparing upon the rest. The great truths are those that men must live upon, which are the instruments of destroying men's sins and raising the heart to God. If we can but teach Christ to our people, we shall teach them all. And all our teaching must be plain and simple, suited to the capacity of our hearers. If you would not teach men, what do you in the pulpit? If you would, why do you not speak so as to be understood? It is commonly simple, ignorant men that are over curious and solicitous about words and ornaments. As Aristotle makes it the reason why women are more addicted to pride in apparel than men, that being conscious of little individual worth, they seek to make it up with outward borrowed ornaments, so it is with empty worthless preachers.

And moreover our work must be done with great humility. We must so teach others as to be ready to learn; and not proudly venting our own conceits as if we had attained to the height of knowledge. Pride is a vice that ill beseems them that lead others in a humble way to heaven. Let us take heed lest when we have brought others thither, the gate should prove too strait for ourselves. We must also work in a reverent spirit, as in the presence of God, not using holy things as common. Especially ought we to keep up earnest desires and expectations of success. All who preach for Christ and men's salvation should be unsatisfied till they have the thing they preach for. He is never a true preacher who is indifferent whether he obtaineth the ends of preaching and is not grieved when he misseth them. I know that a faithful minister may have comfort when he wants success, and our acceptance is not according to our fruit but to our labour, but he that longeth not for success can have no comfort, because he is not a faithful labourer. Therefore must we cherish a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and our entire dependence on Christ and His Spirit.

In the third section, which contains the Application of the whole subject, the most interesting part is that in which he deals with the uses of Humiliation, and this he does in the most incisive manner. He first deals at considerable length with the sin of pride and points out how subtly it may enter into the character and work of a minister. It may arise from the office he holds, from the desire of winning vain applause for mere oratory, from the possession of superior knowledge, even from the fame of godliness.

Then he turns to the sin of negligence, which may show itself in the neglect of study, in slipshod preparation for the pulpit, in trusting to mere promptitude of speech in delivery; or it may show itself in drowsy preaching, which neither awakens conscience nor moves the heart. Then there is the sin of a worldly, temporising policy which makes the preacher afraid to speak out his mind.

It is unnecessary to enter into the chapter upon the duty of personal instruction of the flock. Much of it is obvious, much of it is irrelevant to the custom of our churches and, indeed, would not be submitted to by our people. I will conclude with one paragraph of a general character. "What have we our time and strength for, but to lay them out for God? What is a candle made for but to burn? Burned and wasted we must be, and is it not fitter it should be in lighting men to heaven and in working for God than in living to the flesh? How little difference is there between the pleasures of a long and of a short life when they are both at the end? What comfort will it

be to you at death that you lengthened your life by shortening your work? He that worketh much, liveth much."

T. H. MARTIN.

JOSEPH BUNYAN was christened at St. Cuthbert's, Bedford, on November 16th, 1672. He was apparently son of John, the eldest son of the great John, who had been released from the County Jail in May: the evidence was given in our *Transactions*, II., 255. He married in St. Paul's, 1694, and buried his second child two years later. Dr. Brown could find nothing further about him.

It is a reasonable guess that the following entries refer to him, or to his son. The fourth Duke of Bedford decided to rebuild Woburn Abbey. Stone was quarried at Ketton, carted to Wansford, barged to Bedford. "February 14, 1748/9, to April 29, 1749. Joseph Bunyon's bill of stone carriage from Bedford for Woburn Abbey for His Grace the Duke of Bedford, £20 14. 0." The estate accounts, published by the British Archaeological Society, vol. III., page 158, show also the final deal: "His Grace John Duke of Bedford, Debtor to John Tuffnail for loading beer for twenty load of stone and lead and reeds, the last load carried by Joseph Bunnion the 20th of January, 1749 [i.e. 1749/50] . . . Joseph Bunnion 4 quarts, 1s. 4d."

W. T. W.