

XVIII.VII. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE: An Advocate for Real Christianity - The Eighteenth Century (pt.7)

Two questions and answers:

QUESTION 1. What is Church History?

ANSWER. Church history is the story of how Jesus has built his church for his own glory and his peoples' good. **Matthew 16:18** "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

QUESTION 2. Why should we study Church History?

ANSWER. We should learn church history because it is the amazing story of Jesus conquering the nations through his Gospel. **Revelation 6:2** "[Christ] came out conquering, and to conquer."

Q. ARE YOU READY FOR CHURCH HISTORY?!

Today we are going to look at the Eighteenth Century for the 5th time. But before we do that let's remember what we learned last time.

Q. Who can tell me the name of the person I taught you about last time?

– **Everyone say, "John Newton."**

Q. Who can tell me something about John Newton?

RECAP

In the Eighteenth Century, God used John Newton to show His amazing grace in salvation.

Who can tell me

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (pt.6) MEMORY VERSE.

– "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. " **(1 Corinthians 15:10).**

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (pt.6) MEMORY QUOTE.

– "I am not what I ought to be, not what I wish to be, not what I hope to be; but, by the grace of God, I am not what I once was" **(John Newton).**

Now, today I am going to teach you about the Eighteenth Century PART 7 (1,700-1,800).

What happened in the Eighteenth Century (1,700-1,800) that shows us how Christ built His church as He continued to conquer the nations?

I. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE (1759-1833).

Everyone say, "William Wilberforce."

HISTORY

- **(i)** William Wilberforce was born on August 24, 1759, in Hull, Yorkshire, England, during a time of economic growth driven by Britain's expanding empire and transatlantic trade, including the slave trade, which shaped his early exposure to social issues. **WILBERFORCE GREW UP IN A WEALTHY MERCHANT FAMILY.**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce grew up in a wealthy family."**
- **(ii)** His father, Robert Wilberforce, was a prosperous merchant; his mother, Elizabeth, was a devout Anglican who instilled early religious values, though Wilberforce's faith wavered in his youth. After his father's death in 1768, he was sent to live with his evangelical aunt and uncle, Hannah and William Wilberforce, in Wimbledon. **WILBERFORCE'S EARLY FAITH WAS INFLUENCED BY HIS AUNT'S EVANGELICALISM.**
- **(iii)** As a young boy, Wilberforce was bright but undisciplined, enjoying music, dancing, and socializing over academic rigor; at St. John's College, Cambridge, he was known for his charm and wit but admitted to wasting time in **"idleness and pleasure"** (Wilberforce 2006, 12). **WILBERFORCE LATER REGRETTED HIS CARELESS YOUTH.**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce was a rebellious youth."**
- **(iv)** In 1780, at age 21, Wilberforce and his friend William Pitt decided to use their mass of wealth and enter politics, running for and winning seats as Members of Parliament (MP); his eloquence and wealth made him a rising star, though he initially focused on social status over reform. "I was full of ambition, but not yet of purpose" (Wilberforce 2006, 25). **WILBERFORCE JOINED PARLIAMENT AT A YOUNG AGE.**
 - His early political career aligned with the Pitt family, particularly William Pitt the Younger. William Pitt would go on to become Prime Minister of England by the age of 25!
 - ♦ **WILBERFORCE'S WEALTH FUNDED HIS EARLY CAMPAIGNS.**
- **(v)** In 1784–1785, Wilberforce underwent a profound spiritual awakening. He had been a Member of Parliament for about five years but still not a Christian. However, randomly, so it seems to us, he invited his old friend Isaac Milner on a vacation during one of the legislative breaks. On this holiday together, Milner gave Wilberforce a copy of Philip Doddridge's book *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and God used it to

save Wilberforce through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He called this his "Great Change" and it redirected his life toward faith and moral reform. **WILBERFORCE CALLED HIS CONVERSION "A REVOLUTION OF THE HEART."**

- **(vi)** In 1785, Wilberforce considered leaving politics due to his newfound faith, believing it incompatible with public life; John Newton, a former slave trader turned pastor, urged him to remain in Parliament to serve God's purpose, shaping his lifelong mission. **NEWTON MENTORED WILBERFORCE IN HIS FAITH AND PURPOSE. WILLIAM FINALLY SAW WHAT REAL CHRISTIANITY REQUIRED—FAITH IN AND OBEDIENCE TO JESUS!**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce almost left parliament to become a pastor."**
- **(vii)** By 1787, Wilberforce committed to abolishing the British slave trade, inspired by his faith and meetings with abolitionists like Thomas Clarkson; he saw this as his divine calling, writing, "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of [morals]" (Wilberforce 2006, 56). **WILBERFORCE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO ABOLITION.**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce dedicated his life to abolition."**
- **(viii)** In 1789, Wilberforce introduced his first anti-slave trade bill in Parliament, delivering a powerful speech that detailed the horrors of the trade; though it failed, his persistence over decades earned him respect and enemies. "The miseries of the Africans demand our attention" (Wilberforce 2006, 45). **WILBERFORCE'S SPEECHES MOVED PARLIAMENT.**
- **(ix)** Wilberforce married Barbara Spooner in 1797 at age 37; their happy marriage produced six children, providing emotional stability despite his demanding public life. Barbara supported his work, though his frequent absences strained family time. **WILBERFORCE'S FAMILY ANCHORED HIS PERSONAL LIFE.**
- **(x)** Physically frail, Wilberforce suffered from chronic illnesses, including ulcerative colitis, and relied on small doses of opium for pain management, common for the era; yet he maintained a rigorous schedule of speeches, writing, and advocacy. **WILBERFORCE WORKED DESPITE POOR HEALTH.**
- **(xi)** In 1797, Wilberforce published *A Practical View of Christianity*, a book urging Christians to live out their faith practically; it became a bestseller, influencing the evangelical movement and societal reform. "Christianity must be a living principle, not a mere profession" (Wilberforce 1797, 89). **WILBERFORCE'S BOOK SHAPED EVANGELICAL THOUGHT.**

- **Everyone say, "Wilberforce wrote a famous book."**
- **(xii)** Wilberforce co-founded the Clapham Sect, a group of evangelical reformers including Hannah More and Henry Thornton, who lived near Clapham, London; they worked together on abolition, education, and moral reform, creating a powerful network. **THE CLAPHAM SECT DROVE SOCIAL CHANGE.**
- **(xiii)** Facing fierce opposition, Wilberforce was criticized by pro-slavery MPs and merchants who profited from the trade; he endured threats and slander but remained resolute, relying on his faith and allies like Pitt and Clarkson. **WILBERFORCE FACED HOSTILITY FOR HIS ABOLITIONISM.**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce received many death threats."**
- **(xiv)** In 1807, after 20 years of campaigning, Wilberforce saw the Slave Trade Act pass, abolishing the British transatlantic slave trade; he wept in Parliament upon its passage, though he continued advocating for total emancipation. **"I never felt so thankful to God"** (Wilberforce 2006, 134). **THE SLAVE TRADE ACT WAS WILBERFORCE'S GREATEST VICTORY.**
 - **Everyone say, "God abolished the slave trade through Wilberforce."**
- **(xv)** Wilberforce's advocacy extended beyond abolition; he supported education reform, prison reform, and missionary work, co-founding the Church Missionary Society (1799) and the Bible Society (1804) to spread Christianity globally. **WILBERFORCE PROMOTED BROAD SOCIAL REFORMS.**
- **(xvi)** Financially, Wilberforce was generous, often giving away much of his wealth to charity and reform causes; he lived modestly despite his inherited fortune, prioritizing his mission over personal gain. **WILBERFORCE FUNDED ABOLITIONIST EFFORTS.**
 - **Everyone say, "Wilberforce was generous with his wealth."**
- **(xvii)** In 1812, Wilberforce moved his family to London to focus on his parliamentary work; he continued introducing motions to strengthen anti-slavery laws, though full emancipation of slaves in British colonies came later. **WILBERFORCE RELOCATED TO INTENSIFY HIS CAMPAIGN.**
- **(xviii)** Wilberforce retired from Parliament in 1825 at age 65 due to declining health but remained active in abolitionist circles, mentoring younger reformers; his home became a hub for anti-slavery strategy. **WILBERFORCE RETIRED BUT NEVER ABANDONED ABOLITION.**
- **(xix)** In 1833, just days before his death, Wilberforce learned that the Slavery Abolition Act, which freed enslaved people in most British colonies, had passed its final reading; he saw this as the culmination of his life's work. **"Thank God that I have lived to witness this day"** (Wilberforce 2006, 201). **THE SLAVERY ABOLITION ACT FULFILLED WILBERFORCE'S MISSION.**

- **Everyone say, "God abolished slavery in England through Wilberforce."**
- **(xx)** On July 29, 1833, Wilberforce died in London at age 73; he was buried in Westminster Abbey, honored by thousands for his role in abolition and moral reform. His funeral drew diverse mourners, from MPs to former slaves. **WILBERFORCE WAS BURIED AS A NATIONAL HERO.**
 - His son, **Samuel Wilberforce**, later wrote: "My father's life was spent in the service of God and man" (Wilberforce 1838, 312).
 - ♦ **THOMAS MACAULAY** in Parliament: "Wilberforce's name will be forever linked with the cause of human liberty" (Macaulay 1833, 67).
- **(xxi)** Wilberforce's faith was the cornerstone of his life; he believed Christianity demanded active compassion and justice, shaping his tireless advocacy. **"My walk is a public one; my business is in the world"** (Wilberforce 1797, 102). **WILBERFORCE'S FAITH DROVE HIS REFORMS.**
- **(xxii)** Above all, Wilberforce valued perseverance in his calling; his transformation from a carefree youth to a relentless abolitionist inspired generations, leaving a legacy of abolition and moral courage. **"If I have done any good, it is by God's strength alone"** (Wilberforce 2006, 145). **WILBERFORCE'S LEGACY ENDURES IN HUMAN RIGHTS.**

References

- Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *Speeches on Politics and Literature*. London: J.M. Dent, 1833.
- Wilberforce, Samuel. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London: John Murray, 1838.
- Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell, 1797.
- Wilberforce, William. *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*. Edited by Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce. London: John Murray, 2006.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

1. **Wilberforce was a talented singer and dancer, often being entertainment for parties in his youth.**

Before his spiritual awakening, Wilberforce was a lively socialite at

Cambridge, known for his love of music, dancing, and card games. He had a fine singing voice and often entertained friends with ballads and impromptu performances. This charisma helped him build political connections early on, though he later redirected his charm toward reform. ["I was the life of every party, yet empty within" \(Wilberforce 2006, 15\).](#)

2. **Wilberforce was short but had a booming voice.**

Despite his frail health and diminutive stature (standing barely over five feet tall), Wilberforce was renowned for his powerful oratory in Parliament. His commanding voice and eloquent speeches, often described as ["melodious"](#) and ["persuasive,"](#) captivated audiences, earning him the nickname ["the Nightingale of the House of Commons."](#) He used this gift to sway MPs during marathon debates on abolition. ["His voice seemed to carry the weight of his conviction" \(Pollock 1977, 89\).](#)

3. **Wilberforce had a deep friendship with William Pitt the younger.**

They ran for Parliament at the same time, on a whim.

Wilberforce's close friend, William Pitt, ran for parliament at the same time and later became the Prime Minister of England. Pitt supported Wilberforce's abolitionist efforts, though their friendship was tested by political differences. They met at Cambridge and shared a love of debate and wit, but Wilberforce prioritized his faith over Pitt's secular ambitions [\(Hague 2007, 98\).](#)

4. **Wilberforce battled chronic pain with prescribed Opium.**

Wilberforce suffered from ulcerative colitis and other ailments, which caused severe pain and weakness throughout his life. To manage this, he took prescribed opium, a common medical practice in the 18th century, in small doses to maintain his grueling schedule. Despite this, he never became addicted, a testament to his discipline. His health issues forced him to wear a steel brace to support his spine later in life [\(Hague 2007, 234\).](#)

5. **When Wilberforce got saved, he nearly abandoned parliament for the Church.**

Jesus saved Wilberforce in 1785 after using Philip Doddridge's book *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, which William read on a trip to the country for vacation. After his conversion, he seriously considered leaving Parliament to become a pastor, believing politics was too corrupt for a devout Christian. John Newton, the former slave trader and author of that famous hymn *Amazing Grace*, convinced him to stay, arguing that God could use him in public life. This decision shaped his abolitionist career. ["Newton's counsel was my anchor" \(Wilberforce 2006, 62\).](#)

6. **Wilberforce's book *Real Christianity* became a bestseller.**

In 1797, Wilberforce published *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, urging Christians to live out their faith through action, not just profession. Written after his spiritual awakening, it critiqued nominal Christianity and became a bestseller, going through multiple editions and influencing the evangelical movement. ["Christianity must be a living principle, not a mere profession" \(Wilberforce 1797, 89\).](#)

7. Wilberforce's home became a meeting place for Abolitionist strategy.

Wilberforce's Clapham home, shared with members of the Clapham Sect, was nicknamed ["the Cabinet of the Saints."](#) It served as a meeting place for reformers like Thomas Clarkson and Hannah More, where they planned campaigns, drafted pamphlets, and strategized against the slave trade. The home was filled with books, maps, and testimonies from former slaves [\(Pollock 1977, 145\).](#)

8. '[Wilberforce received multiple death threats for his abolition work.

As a leading abolitionist, Wilberforce received threats from pro-slavery merchants and plantation owners who feared financial ruin. He was once warned of a plot to attack him in London, yet he refused bodyguards, trusting in his faith. ["I am in God's hands, not theirs" \(Wilberforce 2006, 112\).](#)

9. Wilberforce's friendship with John Newton shaped his Abolitionist zeal.

Wilberforce maintained a lifelong friendship with John Newton, the former slave trader turned pastor, who became a spiritual mentor. Newton's vivid accounts of the slave trade's horrors, drawn from his own past, fueled Wilberforce's resolve to fight it in Parliament. They corresponded regularly, and Newton's encouragement during Wilberforce's moments of doubt strengthened his commitment. ["Newton's testimony was a fire in my soul" \(Wilberforce 2006, 65\).](#)

10. Wilberforce's final days were marked by joyful triumph.

Just three days before his death on July 29, 1833, Wilberforce learned that the *Slavery Abolition Act*, which freed enslaved people in most British colonies, was assured passage. Too weak to attend Parliament, he celebrated quietly with family, saying, ["I can die content now" \(Wilberforce 2006, 201\).](#)

References

- Hague, William. *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*.

- London: HarperPress, 2007.
- Pollock, John. *Wilberforce*. London: Constable, 1977.
 - Wilberforce, William. *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*. Edited by Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce. London: John Murray, 2006.

In the Eighteenth Century, God used William Wilberforce to show forth what real Christianity looks like in action.

THEOLOGY

I) God used William Wilberforce to show the world that real Christianity follows Christ, not merely professes to.

- **Everyone say, "Wilberforce wanted real Christianity"**
 - **Matthew 16:24** "Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would [follow] me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"
 - **WILBERFORCE.** "True Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude." — **Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 112.**
 - **WILBERFORCE.** "May God enable me to have a single eye and a simple heart, desiring to please God, to do good to my fellow creatures, and testify my gratitude to my adorable Redeemer." — **Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London: John Murray, 1839, 256.**

II) God used William Wilberforce to show the world that real Christianity labors to expose and abolish great evils.

- **Everyone say, "Wilberforce labored to abolish the slave trade."**
 - **Isaiah 1:17** "Seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."
 - **WILBERFORCE.** "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners." — **Strom, Kay Marshall. *Once Blind: The Life of John Newton*. Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2008, 225.**

RECAP

In the Eighteenth Century, God used William Wilberforce to show forth what real Christianity looks like in action.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (pt.7) MEMORY VERSE.

- “Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would [follow] me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” (**Matthew 16:24**).

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (pt.7) MEMORY QUOTE.

- “True Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude.” (**William Wilberforce**).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **William Wilberforce Biography** by John Piper (message) - <https://youtu.be/SdOi5i-dtwA?si=OgHNTWB0JFPi9SCe>
- **William Wilberforce Against the Gradual Abolitionists** by T. Russell Hunter (message) - https://youtu.be/VEiqVWIYfkl?si=w2IRrsqoflxZu_99
- **Amazing Grace** by Michael Apted (movie) - https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454776/?ref_=fn_all_ttl_1
- **Amazing Grace in the Life of William Wilberforce** by John Piper (book) - <https://a.co/d/cIVqq6w>
- **The Roots of Endurance** (John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce) by John Piper (book) - <https://a.co/d/3ilHZPw>

QUOTES ABOUT WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

- “The pure and saintly character, and the noble career, of Mr. Wilberforce.”
 - – Gladstone, William Ewart. *The Evangelical Movement; Its Present Age, Progress, and Issue*. In *British Quarterly Review*, July 1879. Quoted in W. E. Gladstone, *Gladstone’s Speeches: Descriptive Index and Bibliography*, edited by Arthur Tilney Bassett, 617. London: Methuen & Co., 1916.
- “Wilberforce had been brave.”
 - – Douglass, Frederick. *The Constitution of the United States: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-slavery?* Speech delivered March 26, 1860. In *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, edited by Philip S. Foner, 2:483. New York: International Publishers, 1950.
- “The funeral of that most excellent man Mr. Wilberforce, eminent through the course of his long life for his public and private virtues, for his sterling

patriotism, his Christian piety, and his universal feeling of philanthropy, took place on Saturday... thus conferring the highest possible honour on the memory of Mr. Wilberforce, and giving to the world (for of Mr. Wilberforce it may be said, that he was not the property of a nook, but of the world) an exalted testimony of the esteem in which he was held by the rank, talent, and virtue of the country, and of the friendship which his mild manners and noble qualities had won him."

- - *The Times*. "Funeral of the Late Mr. Wilberforce." August 5, 1833. Quoted in *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1833*, 245. London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1834.
- "Abt. a quarter before 10 oClock, the family assembled to prayers, which were read by Wilberforce in the dining room. As we passed from the drawing room I saw all the servants standing in regular order, the women ranged in a line against the wall & the men the same. There were 7 women & 6 men.—When the whole were collected in the dining room, all knelt down each against a chair or Sopha, and Wilberforce knelt at a table in the middle of the room, and after a little pause began to read a prayer, which He did very slowly in a low, solemnly awful voice. This was followed by 2 other prayers & the grace. It occupied abt. 10 minutes, and had the best effect as to the manner of it."
 - - Farington, Joseph. Diary entry, July 19, 1806. In *The Farington Diary*, edited by James Greig, 3:285. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924.
- "Mr. Wilberforce's speech was distinguished by its calm and temperate tone, by its Christian candour and charity, and by the forcible and manly style of its eloquence."
 - - Burke, Edmund. Speech in the House of Commons on Wilberforce's speech against the slave trade, May 12, 1789. In *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 28:68. London: T. C. Hansard, 1816.
- "William Wilberforce was a man who changed the world by the sheer force of his own moral conviction and tireless effort."
 - - Metaxas, Eric. *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, 259.
- "Wilberforce was a man of deep religious conviction, whose faith informed his every action, particularly his relentless pursuit of justice for the enslaved."
 - - Hague, William. *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*. London: HarperPress, 2007, 512.
- "He was the conscience of a nation, a man whose moral clarity and perseverance awakened England to the horrors of the slave trade."

- - Pollock, John. **Wilberforce**. London: Constable, 1977, 306.
- "Wilberforce's life was a testament to the power of a single individual, guided by faith, to effect monumental change against overwhelming odds."
 - - Tomkins, Stephen. **William Wilberforce: A Biography**. Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2007, 232.
- "His eloquence in Parliament was matched only by his unyielding commitment to the cause of humanity, making him a figure of enduring inspiration."
 - - Leaney, A. R. **The Clapham Sect and the Social Order**. London: SPCK, 1964, 89.

QUOTES **BY** WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

- "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 405.
- "If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 406.
- "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners."
 - Strom, Kay Marshall. *Once Blind: The Life of John Newton*. Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2008, 225.
- "We are too young to realize that certain things are impossible... So we will do them anyway."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 424.
- "Selfishness is one of the principal fruits of the corruption of human nature; and it is obvious that selfishness disposes us to over-rate our good qualities, and to overlook or extenuate our defects."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with*

Real Christianity. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 87.

- "True Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 112.
- "Accustom yourself to look first to the dreadful consequences of failure; then fix your eye on the glorious prize which is before you; and when your strength begins to fail, and your spirits are well-nigh exhausted, let the animating view rekindle your resolution, and call forth in renewed vigour the fainting energies of your soul."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 425.
- "Let him then, who would be indeed a Christian, watch over his ways and over his heart with unceasing circumspection."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 424.
- "No one expects to attain to the height of learning, or arts, or power, or wealth, or military glory, without vigorous resolution, strenuous diligence, and steady perseverance. Yet we expect to be Christians without labour, study, or inquiry."
 - Belmonte, Kevin, ed. *365 Days with Wilberforce: A Collection of Daily Readings from the Writings of William Wilberforce*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006, 17.
- "Of all things, guard against neglecting God in the secret place of prayer."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 432.
- "Life as we know it, with all its ups and downs, will soon be over. We all will give an accounting to God of how we have lived."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 134.

- "It makes no sense to take the name of Christian and not cling to Christ."
 - Belmonte, Kevin, ed. *365 Days with Wilberforce: A Collection of Daily Readings from the Writings of William Wilberforce*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006, 23.
- "The gospel freely admitted makes a man happy. It gives him peace with God, and makes him happy in God."
 - MacFarlane, Charles, and Thomas Thomson. *The Comprehensive History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Suppression of the Sepoy Revolt*. London: Blackie and Son, 1792, 752.
- "Thank God that I should have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give twenty millions sterling for the abolition of slavery."
 - *The English Cyclopaedia: A New Dictionary of Universal Knowledge*. Edited by Charles Knight. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1861, 693.
- "Can you tell a plain man the road to heaven? Certainly, turn at once to the right, then go straight forward."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 431.
- "It is the true duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow creatures to the utmost of his power."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 406.
- "My walk is a public one. My business is in the world, and I must mix in the assemblies of men or quit the post which Providence seems to have assigned me."
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London: John Murray, 1839, 256.
- "If there is no passionate love for Christ at the center of everything, we will only jingle and jangle our way across the world, merely making a noise as we go."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 98.
- "We can scarcely indeed look into any part of the sacred volume without meeting abundant proofs, that it is the religion of the Affections which God particularly requires."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious*

System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 423.

- "The objects of the present life fill the human eye with a false magnification because of their immediacy."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 429.
- "How can you measure the value of the good news of Christ? It is spoken of in the Bible as light in the darkness, freedom from slavery and life from death."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 115.
- "Christianity has been successfully attacked and marginalized... because those who professed belief were unable to defend the faith from attack, even though its attackers' arguments were deeply flawed."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 428.
- "The true way to virtue is by withdrawing from temptation; let us then withdraw from these...Africans those temptations to fraud, violence, cruelty, and injustice, which the slave trade furnishes."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807, 294.
- "What should we suppose must naturally be the consequence of our carrying on a slave trade with Africa? With a country, vast in its extent, not utterly barbarous, but civilized in a very small degree? Does any one suppose a slave trade would help their civilization?"
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807, 297.
- "Read the Bible, read the Bible! Let no religious book take its place. Through all my perplexities and distresses, I seldom read any other book, and I as rarely felt the want of any other."
 - Belmonte, Kevin, ed. *365 Days with Wilberforce: A Collection of Daily Readings from the Writings of William Wilberforce*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006, 45.
- "It is the distinguishing glory of Christianity not to rest satisfied with

superficial appearances, but to rectify the motives, and purify the heart."

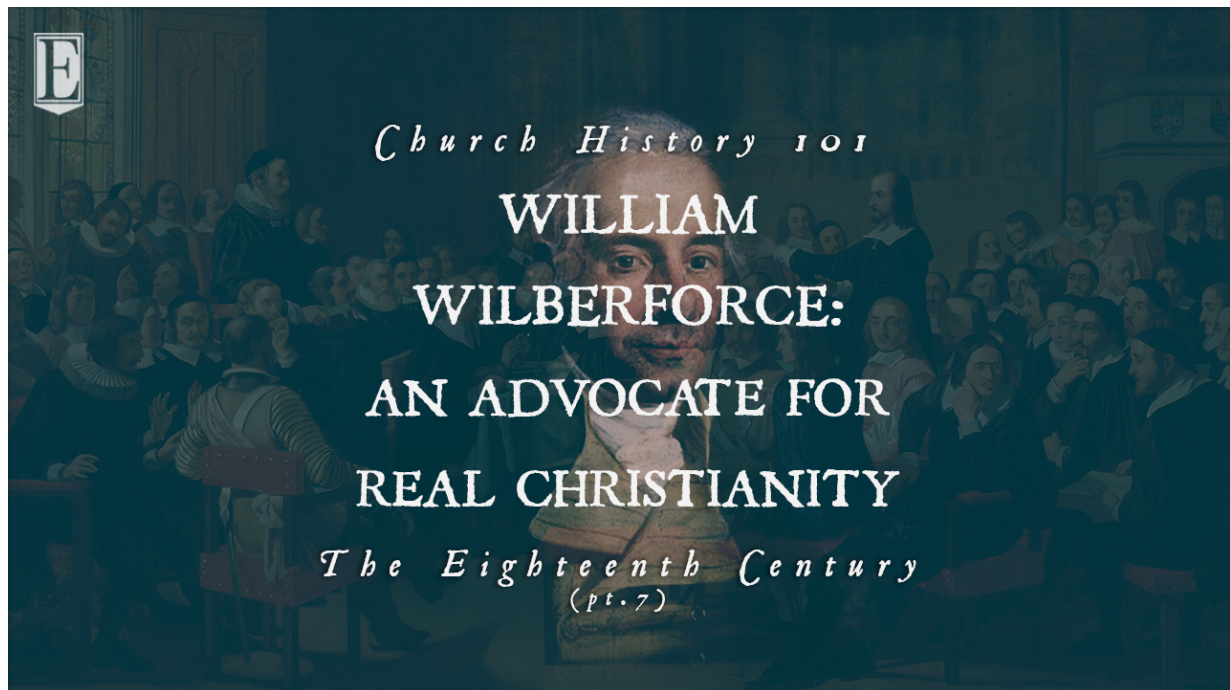
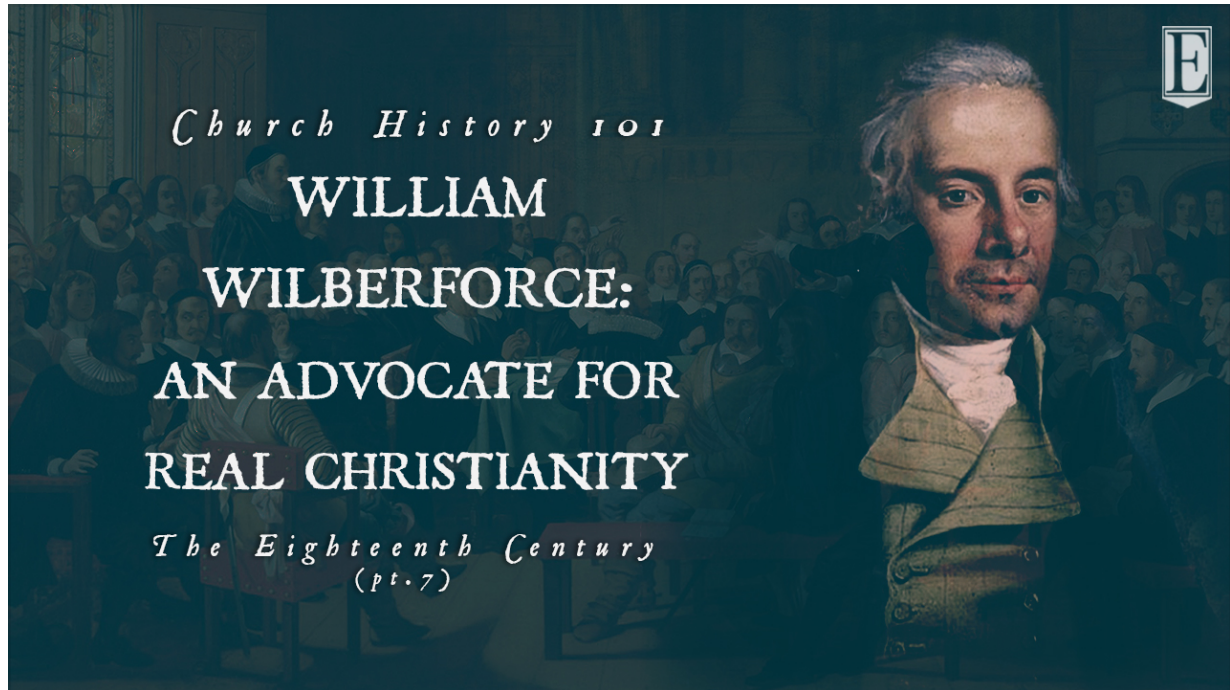
- Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 426.
- "Is it not the great end of religion, and, in particular, the glory of Christianity, to extinguish the malignant passions; to curb the violence ... to make us compassionate and kind ... and to render us active and useful in the discharge of the relative social and civil duties?"
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 420.
- "We are all guilty... [But the opportunity to make money] can draw a film across the eyes, so thick, that total blindness could do no more... A trade founded in iniquity must be abolished... let the consequences be what they will."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807, 292.
- "This perpetual hurry of business and company ruins me in soul if not in body. More solitude and earlier hours!"
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London: John Murray, 1839, 258.
- "I am disturbed when I see the majority of so-called Christians having such little understanding of the real nature of the faith they profess."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 427.
- "No man, ever indulged more freely or happily in that playful facetiousness which gratifies all without wounding any."
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London: John Murray, 1839, 260.
- "There is no shortcut to holiness; it must be the business of our whole lives."
 - Belmonte, Kevin, ed. *365 Days with Wilberforce: A Collection of Daily Readings from the Writings of William Wilberforce*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006, 19.
- "The problem with this way of thinking is that authentic faith cannot be inherited."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the*

Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity. Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 92.

- "How can we refuse an offer like this?"
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity.* Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 120.
- "The result is that in the Christian world in the West, we settle for a cultural version of Christianity that is far from the real thing."
 - Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, Contrasted with Real Christianity.* Edited by James Houston. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005, 89.
- "Christianity itself has been too often disgraced. It has been turned into an engine of cruelty, and amidst the bitterness of persecution, every trace has disappeared of the mild and beneficent spirit of the religion of Jesus."
 - Wilberforce, William. *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity.* London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797, 422.
- "May God enable me to have a single eye and a simple heart, desiring to please God, to do good to my fellow creatures, and testify my gratitude to my adorable Redeemer."
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce.* London: John Murray, 1839, 256.
- "We have different forms assigned to us in the school of life, different gifts imparted. All is not attractive that is good."
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce.* London: John Murray, 1839, 256.
- "How can we judge fairly of the characters and merits of men, of the wisdom or folly of actions, unless we have . . . an accurate knowledge of all particulars, so that we may live as it were in the times, and among the persons, of whom we read, see with their eyes, and reason and decide on their premises?"
 - Wilberforce, Robert Isaac, and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce.* London: John Murray, 1839, 259.
- "Some might say that one's faith is a private matter and should not be spoken of so publicly. They might assert this in public, but what do they really think in their hearts?"

- Belmonte, Kevin, ed. *365 Days with Wilberforce: A Collection of Daily Readings from the Writings of William Wilberforce*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006, 47.

IMAGE



William Wilberforce - An Advocate for Real Christianity

During the eighteenth century, amidst Britain's economic prosperity and moral challenges, Christ raised up William Wilberforce, a man transformed from a carefree socialite to a tireless advocate for real Christianity. Through Wilberforce's faith-driven fight against the slave trade and his call for moral reform, Christ advanced His kingdom.

William Wilberforce: A Life Transformed for Christ's Cause

Born on August 24, 1759, in Hull, Yorkshire, William Wilberforce grew up in a wealthy merchant family during Britain's imperial expansion, which included the transatlantic slave trade (Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 1977, p. 3). His father, Robert, was a prosperous merchant, and his mother, Elizabeth, instilled Anglican values, though Wilberforce's faith faltered in youth. After his father's death in 1768, he lived with his evangelical aunt and uncle in Wimbleton, where he was exposed to fervent Christianity (Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*, 2007, p. 15). As a student at St. John's College, Cambridge, he admitted to a youth of "idleness and pleasure," prioritizing socializing over study (Wilberforce, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, 2006, p. 12).

In 1780, at age twenty-one, Wilberforce entered Parliament alongside his friend William Pitt the Younger, leveraging his wealth and eloquence to gain prominence. He later reflected, "I was full of ambition, but not yet of purpose" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 25). His life changed in 1784–1785 during a vacation with Isaac Milner, who shared Philip Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This book led to Wilberforce's "Great Change," a conversion to faith in Christ, which he described as "a revolution of the heart" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 62). Considering leaving politics, he was counseled by John Newton, a former slave trader turned pastor, to remain in Parliament, shaping his mission (Hague, 2007, p. 98).

By 1787, Wilberforce committed to abolishing the slave trade, declaring, "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of [morals]" (Wilberforce, as cited in Strom, *Once Blind: The Life of John Newton*, 2008, p. 225). His 1789 anti-slave trade bill, though unsuccessful, exposed the trade's horrors, as he proclaimed, "The miseries of the Africans demand our attention" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 45). Married to Barbara Spooner in 1797, Wilberforce fathered six children, finding stability despite his demanding career (Pollock, 1977, p. 145). Physically frail, he battled ulcerative colitis, using prescribed opium yet maintaining a rigorous schedule (Hague, 2007, p. 234).

In 1797, Wilberforce published *A Practical View of Christianity*, urging authentic

faith, which became a bestseller and influenced evangelicalism (Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, 1797, p. 89). He co-founded the Clapham Sect, a group of reformers driving social change (Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 2006, p. 56). Facing threats from pro-slavery factions, he trusted God's protection, stating, "I am in God's hands, not theirs" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 112). In 1807, the Slave Trade Act passed, a triumph he celebrated with tears: "I never felt so thankful to God" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 134). Wilberforce also supported education, prison reform, and missions, co-founding the Church Missionary Society and Bible Society (Hague, 2007, p. 201).

Retiring from Parliament in 1825, Wilberforce continued mentoring reformers. In 1833, days before his death, he rejoiced at the Slavery Abolition Act's passage, saying, "I can die content now" (Wilberforce, 2006, p. 201). He died on July 29, 1833, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, mourned as a national hero (Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 1838, p. 312). His son Samuel wrote, "My father's life was spent in the service of God and man" (Wilberforce, 1838, p. 312).

Theological Lessons from Wilberforce

Wilberforce's life teaches two profound lessons about real Christianity, grounded in Reformed theology.

First, God used Wilberforce to show that real Christianity follows Christ, not merely professes Him. Jesus calls disciples to deny themselves and take up their cross. Wilberforce embodied this, writing, "True Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude" (*A Practical View*, 2005, p. 112). Reformed theologian John Owen emphasized, "True faith is active obedience, not empty profession, for it transforms the heart to follow Christ's commands" (*The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 1677, edited by William H. Goold, 1850). Wilberforce's prayer, "May God enable me to have a single eye and a simple heart, desiring to please God, to do good to my fellow creatures, and testify my gratitude to my adorable Redeemer" (Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 1839, p. 256), reflects this commitment. His life challenges us to live authentically for Christ.

Second, God used Wilberforce to show that real Christianity labors to expose and abolish great evils. The prophet Isaiah calls believers to seek justice and correct oppression. Wilberforce's fight against the slave trade fulfilled this, as he declared, "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners" (Strom, 2008, p. 225). Jonathan Edwards, a Reformed preacher, taught, "The Christian is called to oppose sin in the world, using his influence to advance God's justice and mercy" (*Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, edited by M.X. Lesser, 2001). Wilberforce's perseverance, despite threats, inspires us to confront injustice with courage.

Conclusion: Christ's Victory in the Eighteenth Century

In the eighteenth century, Jesus Christ built His church through William Wilberforce, whose transformed life exemplified real Christianity in action. Through his abolitionist campaigns, bestselling book, and broader reforms, Wilberforce advanced Christ's kingdom, impacting millions. As Philip Schaff reflects, "Wilberforce's faith-driven labors demonstrated the gospel's power to reform nations, glorifying Christ" (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, 1892, p. 148). His legacy, from ending the slave trade to inspiring evangelical reform, underscores Christ's triumph.

Let us learn from Wilberforce, living out our faith with obedience and courage, laboring to abolish evil and promote justice. May we trust that Christ continues to conquer the nations, building His church for His glory. Let us live boldly, knowing His kingdom advances, unstoppable, until it fills the earth. Amen.

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