

## Foreword

WHO WAS THOMAS CHALMERS (1780–1847)? Converted to Christ while already in the pastorate (1810) in Kilmany, Scotland, Chalmers eventually became professor of moral philosophy in the University of St. Andrews, and then professor of theology in the University of Edinburgh.

His influence in the church and politics in Scotland was so extensive that according to geologist Hugh Miller, Chalmers “may be said rather to have created than to have belonged to an era.”<sup>1</sup> And

1 Cited in Stuart C. Weir and John C. McDowell, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation: The Efficacy of the Holy Spirit’s Empowering for Ordinary Work* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), xxix.

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William Gladstone, Britain's foremost political leader of the nineteenth century, called him "a man greatly lifted out of the region of mere flesh and blood."<sup>2</sup> On Chalmers's death, one estimate was that half the population of Edinburgh attended his funeral (p. 764).

During his professorship at St. Andrews, his passion for global missions was so inspiring that six of his best students dedicated themselves to missions, resulting in 141 years of combined missionary service.<sup>3</sup>

Though he was influential in geology and astronomy, Christian apologetics, relief for the poor, economics, Calvinistic orthodoxy, and ecclesias-

- 2 Mark Noll, "Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) in North America (ca. 1830–1917)," in *Church History* 66, no. 4 (December 1997): 763. Emphasis added. All the page numbers in parentheses are from this article.
- 3 Stuart Piggin and John Foxborough, *The St. Andrews Seven* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 111.

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tical leadership (helping create the Free Church of Scotland), nevertheless, it was the force of his words that gave effect to all of these engagements. According to A. C. Cheyne, his oratorical power “bordered on wizardry” (p. 764). William Wilberforce wrote in his diary in 1817, “All the world wild about Dr. Chalmers” (p. 762). But why? Princeton’s James Alexander asked John Mason on his return from Scotland why Chalmers was so effective, and Mason replied, “It is his blood-earnestness.”<sup>4</sup>

As you read this most famous sermon of Chalmers, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” I suggest you let that tone—blood-earnestness—shape the way you read. That is, don’t think he is trifling. He is very serious. Joyfully serious.

I recall once being asked the trick question, If you had access to all the latest machinery in a

4 James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 264.

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sophisticated science lab, what would be the most effective way to get all the air out of a glass beaker? One ponders the possible ways to force the air out. Then the answer is given: fill it with water.

That is the point of this sermon. It is intended as an illumination of 1 John 2:15, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Chalmers poses for himself the question, How shall the human heart be freed from its love for the world? (How shall the air be removed from the beaker?) This “love” is not a duty one performs. It is a delight one prefers. It is an affection before it is a commitment.

He says there are two ways one might seek to remove this controlling affection from the heart. One is to show that the world is not worthy of our affection and will let us down in the end. (This

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argument corresponds to using a pump to suck the air out of the beaker.) The other is to show that God is vastly more worthy of the heart's attachment, thus awakening a new and stronger affection that displaces the former affection for the world. (This corresponds to pouring water into the beaker to displace the air.) Hence, "the expulsive power of a new affection."

Here's how Chalmers states his purpose:

My purpose is to show, that from the constitution of our nature, the former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual and that the latter method will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it.

Don't miss the words "from the constitution of our nature." He's going to make his point by arguing "from the constitution of our nature,"

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not from an exposition of the biblical text. This is why I said above that this sermon (Or was it a lecture? We have lost the historical setting when it was delivered.) is intended as an *illumination* (not an exposition) of 1 John 2:15.

Chalmers could do biblical exposition. But he was a scientist and a philosopher, as well as a preacher of biblical texts. His apologetical contribution, which made him so popular in his day, was to show that biblical morality is rooted not just in religious authority, but in the profound realities of the way things really are in the world. This is what he means by saying that he is going to argue “from the constitution of our nature.” In other words, he will appeal to what ordinary unbelievers can actually see about the way their heart works.

Without taking away the excitement of your own discovery of how Chalmers argues from

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the nature of our souls to the biblical reality of 1 John 2:15, I will give one enticement to ponder as you read. One of his central insights about the “constitution” of our nature is that nature hates a vacuum. This is why we can’t displace the air in the beaker with a pump as easily as we can by pouring water in. The empty beaker fights back. It hates being empty. It demands content.

So it is with the human heart, Chalmers argues:

Such is the grasping tendency of the human heart, that it must have a something to lay hold of—and which, if wrested away without the substitution of another something in its place, would leave a void and a vacancy as painful to the mind, as hunger is to the natural system.

This is why Chalmers thinks it is futile to try to suck sinful pleasures out of the human heart with

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the pump of fear, if we do not put a better pleasure in their place. One might think that humans have the capacity to use willpower and resolve to stop loving the world. But according to Chalmers, “The habit cannot so be displaced as to leave nothing but a negative and cheerless vacancy behind it.” That, he argues, is “the constitution of our nature.”

There is more, much more, as Chalmers penetrates into the nature of the human soul and the nature of regenerating grace. But if I keep on, I will spoil the quest. Perhaps you will decide, by the time you are done reading, that he has shed so much light on the workings of your own heart in relation to 1 John 2:15 that his illumination is, in fact, a very powerful exposition of God’s meaning.

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## Series Preface

JOHN PIPER ONCE WROTE that books do not change people, but paragraphs do. This pithy statement gets close to the idea at the heart of the Crossway Short Classics series: some of the greatest and most powerful Christian messages are also some of the shortest and most accessible. The broad stream of confessional Christianity contains an astonishing wealth of timeless sermons, essays, lectures, and other short pieces of writing. These pieces have challenged, inspired, and borne fruit in the lives of millions of believers across church history and around the globe.

## *Series Preface*

The Crossway Short Classics series seeks to serve two purposes. First, it aims to beautifully preserve these short historic pieces of writing through new high-quality physical editions. Second, it aims to transmit them to a new generation of readers, especially readers who may not be inclined or able to access a larger volume. Short-form content is especially valuable today, as the challenge of focusing in a distracting, constantly moving world becomes more intense. The volumes in the Short Classics series present incisive, gospel-centered grace and truth through a concise, memorable medium. By connecting readers with these accessible works, the Short Classics series hopes to introduce Christians to those great heroes of the faith who wrote them, providing readers with representative works that both nourish the soul and inspire further study.

## *Series Preface*

Readers should note that the spelling and punctuation of these works have been lightly updated where applicable. Scripture references and other citations have also been added where appropriate. Language that reflects a work's origin as a sermon or public address has been retained. Our goal is to preserve as much as possible the authentic text of these classic works.

Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use these short works to arrest your attention, preach the gospel to your soul, and motivate you to continue exploring the treasure chest of church history, to the praise and glory of God in Christ.



# Biography of Thomas Chalmers

THOMAS CHALMERS (1780–1847) was born in Fife, Scotland. He desired the call of a minister early in life, becoming an ordained Presbyterian pastor before his twentieth birthday. Chalmers's intellectual gifts and rhetorical talent immediately gave him a reputation in his home parish as a powerful preacher.

However, it was not until reading the work of English evangelical and slavery abolitionist William Wilberforce that Chalmers was deeply convicted of his need for personal gospel faith

and transformation. He was already serving as a pastor when he underwent this radical change in his theology, preaching, and life.

In 1843, Chalmers and several hundred other pastors in the Church of Scotland broke with the church over issues of ecclesiology. They formed the Free Church of Scotland, with Chalmers serving as its first moderator, a position he held until his death.

Though Chalmers was a brilliant scholar—he was the chair of moral philosophy at the University of St. Andrews for five years and was eventually named a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh—his writing and preaching reflect most deeply an urgent desire for Christians to experience Christ’s transformative power in all of life. He adamantly rejected the formalistic, un-supernatural theology of modernism that held sway with many in his time. He was a champion

*Biography of Thomas Chalmers*

of the poor and actively engaged politics in the cause of poverty relief.

Much like his contemporaries Wilberforce and John Newton, Chalmers embraced a holistic view of the Christian life, exhorting believers to joyfully and sacrificially live out the life-changing implications of the gospel.





THE EXPULSIVE  
POWER OF A  
NEW AFFECTION

*“Love not the world, neither the things  
that are in the world. If any man love the  
world, the love of the Father is not in him.”*

*1 John 2:15*



## I

THERE ARE TWO WAYS in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of the world—either by a demonstration of the world’s vanity, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon simply to withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or by setting forth another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon not to resign an old affection, which shall have nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old affection for a new one.

My purpose is to show that from the constitution of our nature, the former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual, and

that the latter method will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it. After having accomplished this purpose, I shall attempt a few practical observations.

Love may be regarded in two different conditions. The first is when its object is at a distance, and then it becomes love in a state of desire. The second is when its object is in possession, and then it becomes love in a state of indulgence.

Under the impulse of desire, man feels himself urged onward in some path or pursuit of activity for its gratification. The faculties of his mind are put into busy exercise. In the steady direction of one great and engrossing interest, his attention is recalled from the many reveries into which it might otherwise have wandered; and the powers of his body are forced away from an indolence in which it else might have languished; and that

*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*

time is crowded with occupation, which, but for some object of keen and devoted ambition, might have drivelled along in successive hours of weariness and distaste—and though hope does not always enliven, and success does not always crown this career of exertion, yet in the midst of this very variety, and with the alternations of occasional disappointment, is the machinery of the whole man kept in a sort of congenial play and upholden in that tone and temper that are most agreeable to it.

Insomuch that if, through the extirpation<sup>1</sup> of that desire that forms the originating principle of all this movement, the machinery were to stop and to receive no impulse from another desire substituted in its place, the man would be left with all his propensities to action in a state of most painful and unnatural abandonment. A

1 Elimination

sensitive being suffers and is in violence if, after having thoroughly rested from his fatigue or been relieved from his pain, he continues in possession of powers without any excitement to these powers; if he possesses a capacity of desire without having an object of desire; or if he has a spare energy upon his person without a counterpart and without a stimulus to call it into operation.

The misery of such a condition is often realized by him who is retired from business, retired from law, or even retired from the occupations of the chase and of the gaming table. Such is the demand of our nature for an object in pursuit that no accumulation of previous success can extinguish it—and thus it is that the most prosperous merchant and the most victorious general and the most fortunate gamester, when the labor of their respective vocations has come to a close, are often found to languish in the midst of all