

Reformation Series 2011

(Lecture Four: That Christ May Be Glorified: The Life and Ministry of Augustus Toplady)

- I. Introduction: We've been considering the Evangelical movement of the Eighteenth Century the Lord used to restore England.
 - A. We saw how the Lord brought Reformation to England in the 16th Century – through Luther, Tyndale, Wycliffe, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth I and the Puritans.
 - B. We saw how it declined at the end of the Seventeenth Century through the Restoration of the Monarchy, the Act of Uniformity and the Black Plague.
 - C. And we've seen how the Lord turned this about through a few men armed with the simple preaching of the Gospel.
 1. So far, we've looked at the lives of George Whitefield and John Wesley.
 2. This evening, we're going to consider a man who was not so much a great open-air evangelist as these men, but who promoted the work of the Gospel in England through his pulpit ministry, his writings and his hymns – Augustus Montague Toplady.
 - a. There was probably no book written on the Christian Religion in England in the Nineteenth Century that didn't have something about his life and work.
 - b. In some ways, none of his contemporaries surpassed him, and very few were his equal. Ryle writes, "He was a man of rare grace and gifts, and one who left his mark very deeply on his own generation."
- II. The Life and Ministry of Augustus Toplady.
 - A. A brief sketch of his life.
 1. Toplady was born at Farnham, in Surrey, November 4, 1740.
 - a. "He was the only son of Major Richard Toplady, who died at the siege of Carthage shortly after his birth, so that he never saw his father. His mother's maiden name was Catherine Bates, of whom nothing is known except that she had a brother who was rector of St. Paul's, Deptford."
 - b. Apart from this and the fact that both parents were originally from Ireland, we know nothing.
 2. Toplady was an only child, who died unmarried, who had no brother, sister, son or daughter.
 - a. He lived much of his life in his study with his books, spent much time with the Lord, and didn't venture much into society.
 - b. He had very few intimate friends, and was probably more feared and admired than loved.
 - c. All this is to say there is no good biography of Toplady – there was no one to gather together his works or write a biography after his death.
 - d. There was hardly anyone of his caliber in that century about whom so little is known.
 3. Early life.

- a. “He was brought up by his widowed mother with the utmost care and tenderness, and retained throughout his life a deep and grateful sense of his obligations to her.”
- b. After her husband died, she moved to Exeter. It was here that Toplady attended Westminster School, where his extraordinary ability was revealed at an early age.
- c. After Westminster, he entered Trinity College in Dublin and earned his Bachelor of Arts.
- d. After ordination in 1762, he was appointed first to Blagdon, in Somersetshire, then to Venn Ottery, in Devonshire, and finally to Broad Hembury, in Devonshire in 1768.
- e. In 1775 he moved to London for health reasons and for a short time was preacher at a Chapel in Orange Street, Leicester Square (pronounced Lester).
- f. The change of climate didn’t help, and he died in 1778, at the age of thirty-eight.

B. His conversion and ministry.

1. His conversion.

- a. The Lord began to work in his heart when he was only sixteen.
- b. He was then staying at Codymain, in Ireland, having been led there by God’s Providence to hear a layman by the name of Morris preach in a barn.
- c. The preacher’s text was Ephesians 2:13, “You who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”
 - (i) The Lord brought this sermon home to Toplady’s heart with such power that he became a new man and began to profess a living Christianity. It was then August of 1756.
 - (ii) He would afterwards often refer to the circumstances of his conversion with great thankfulness. He wrote in 1768, “Strange that I, who had so long sat under the means of grace in England, should be brought nigh to God in an obscure part of Ireland, amidst a handful of God’s people met together in a barn, and under the ministry of one who could hardly spell his name! Surely it was the Lord’s doing, and is marvellous! The excellency of such power must be of God, and cannot be of man. The regenerating Spirit breathes not only on whom, but likewise when, where, and as he listeth.”
 - (a) This stands as an encouragement that even though our children may not be converted under our ministry, there is still hope. The Lord will work when and where He wills, and under the means He wills.
 - (b) This experience, as well as his study of Scripture, showed Toplady that God is clearly sovereign in salvation.
- d. He didn’t seem to have a full knowledge of the Gospel until two years later.
 - (i) “Like most of God’s children, he had to fight his way into full light through many defective opinions, and was only by slow degrees brought to complete establishment in the faith. His experience in this matter, be it remembered, is only that of the vast majority of true Christians. Like infants, when they are born into the world, God’s children are not born again in the full possession of all their spiritual faculties; and it is well and wisely ordered that it is so. What we win easily, we seldom value sufficiently. The very fact that believers have to struggle and fight hard before they get hold of real soundness in the faith, helps to make

them prize it more when they have attained it. The truths that cost us a battle are precisely those which we grasp most firmly, and never let go.”

- (ii) Toplady gives us an account of his experience in his own words.
 - (a) “Though awakened in 1756, I was not led into a clear and full view of all the doctrines of grace till the year 1758, when, through the great goodness of God, my Arminian prejudices received an effectual shock in reading Dr. Manton’s sermons on the seventeenth chapter of St. John. I shall remember the years 1756 and 1758 with gratitude and joy in the heaven of heavens to all eternity.”
 - (b) He wrote in 1774, “It pleased God to deliver me from the Arminian snare before I was quite eighteen. Up to that period there was not (I confess it with abasement) a more haughty and violent free-willer within the compass of the four seas. One instance of my warm and ignorant zeal occurs now to my memory. About a year before divine goodness gave me eyes to discern and a heart to embrace the truth, I was haranguing one day in company on the universality of grace and the power of free agency. A good old gentleman, now with God, rose from his chair, and coming to me, held me by one of my coat-buttons, while he mildly said: – ‘My dear sir, there are marks of spirituality in your conversation, though tinged with an unhappy mixture of pride and self-righteousness. You have been speaking largely in favour of free-will; but from arguments let us come to experience. Do let me ask you one question, How was it with you when the Lord laid hold on you in effectual calling? Had you any hand in obtaining that grace? Nay, would you not have resisted and baffled it, if God’s Spirit had left you alone in the hand of your own counsel’ – I felt the conclusiveness of these simple but forcible interrogations more strongly than I was then willing to acknowledge. But, blessed be God, I have since been enabled to acknowledge the freeness of his grace, and to sing, what I trust will be my everlasting song, *‘Not unto me, Lord, not unto me; but unto thy name give the glory.’*”
 - (c) This was Toplady’s fundamental concern in this controversy: Who should receive glory for our salvation?
 - (i) If we have anything to do with it, then some of it belongs to us.
 - (ii) But if it is God’s work from beginning to end, to Him alone belongs the glory.
- (iii) From this time to the end of his life – which was about twenty years – Toplady seems to have held his course without swerving.
 - (a) He grew in his conviction of Calvinism, which made him look down on those who favored Arminianism.
 - (b) This was likely what gave him the reputation of being narrow-minded and sour, though no one doubted his devotion to the Lord or his holiness of life.

2. His ministry.

- a. We really don’t know what he did from his conversion in 1756 to his ordination in 1762.
 - (i) It’s likely that he continued to read and study, seeking better to understand the Bible to prepare for the Lord’s calling on his life.

- (ii) We do know that entered the ministry honestly, that “he subscribed the articles and liturgy from principle; and that he did not believe them merely because he subscribed them, but subscribed them because he believed them.”
- b. As to his preaching, nine sermons were preserved from special preaching engagements, but nothing of his regular pulpit ministry. We do, however, have some indication of what they were like from a letter he wrote to Lady Huntington in 1774.
- (i) He writes, “As to the doctrines of special and discriminating grace, I have thus much to observe. For the first four years after I was in orders, I dwelt chiefly on the general outlines of the gospel in this remote corner of my public ministry. I preached of little else but of justification by faith only, in the righteousness and atonement of Christ, and of that personal holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. My reasons for thus narrowing the truths of God were these two (I speak it with humiliation and repentance): – 1. I thought these points were sufficient to convey as clear an idea as was absolutely necessary of salvation; 2. And secondly, I was partly afraid to go any further.”
- (ii) “God himself (for none but he could do it) gradually freed me from that fear. And as he never at any time permitted me to deliver, or even to insinuate anything contradictory to his truth, so has he been graciously pleased, for seven or eight years past, to open my mouth to make known the entire mystery of the gospel, as far as his Spirit has enlightened me into it. The consequence of my first plan of operations was, that the generality of my hearers were pleased, but only few were converted. The result of my latter deliverance from worldly wisdom and worldly fear is, that multitudes have been very angry; but *the conversions which God has given me reason to hope he has wrought, have been at least three for one before.* Thus I can testify, so far as I have been concerned, the usefulness of preaching predestination; or, in other words, of tracing salvation and redemption to their first source.”
- (iii) As a side note, Jonathan Edwards also saw the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty as a powerful means to bring souls to Christ, not to turn them away.
- c. Here is another selection from Toplady written just prior to his ordination that shows us the condition of the clergy at that time: “I was buying some books in the spring of 1762, a month or two before I was ordained, from a very respectable London bookseller. After the business was over, he took me to the furthest end of his long shop, and said in a low voice, ‘Sir, you will soon be ordained, and I suppose you have not laid in a very great stock of sermons. I can supply you with as many sets as you please, all original, very excellent ones, and they will come for a trifle.’ My answer was: ‘I certainly shall never be a customer to you in that way; for I am of opinion that the man who cannot, or will not make his own sermons, is quite unfit to wear the gown. How could you think of my buying ready-made sermons? I would much sooner buy ready-made clothes.’ His answer shocked me. ‘Nay, young gentleman, do not be surprised at my offering you ready-made sermons, for I assure you I have sold readymade sermons to many a bishop in my time.’ My reply was: ‘My good sir, if you have any concern for the credit of the Church of England, never tell that news to anybody else henceforward forever.’”

- d. The character of his short fifteen to sixteen year ministry can be gathered from a diary he began to write in 1768 and kept up for about a year. It tells us that he was a man of single purpose – his Master’s work – and that he didn’t spend much time with others, but much alone, and was always either preaching, visiting his people, reading, writing or praying.
- e. If he had kept journaling a bit longer, it certainly would have shed more light on his ministry. As it is, little is known of his last fifteen years.
- f. There are, however, several things we do know:
- (i) He was an ardent supporter of Calvinism and a leading opponent of Arminianism.
 - (ii) His letters show that he was closely acquainted with Lady Huntington, Sir R. Hill, Whitefield, Romaine, Berridge, Dr. Gill, Ambrose Serle, and other leading Christians of that time.
 - (iii) He continually defended the Gospel through his writings from 1768 onward.
 - (iv) No one among those we’ve considered, or among his contemporaries, seems to have read more or known more than he did of theology.
 - (a) Even his opponents could not deny that he was a scholar.
 - (b) It’s possible that his intense studies might have been a major factor in shortening his life. He writes in a letter dated March 19, 1775, “Though I cannot entirely agree with you in supposing that extreme study has been the cause of my late indisposition, I must yet confess that the hill of science, like that of virtue, is in some instances climbed with labour. But when we get a little way up, the lovely prospects which open to the eye make infinite amends for the steepness of the ascent. In short, I am wedded to these pursuits, as a man stipulates to take his wife; viz., for better, for worse, until death us do part. My thirst for knowledge is literally inextinguishable. And if I thus drink myself into a superior world, I cannot help it.”
 - (c) Here is another lesson from Toplady’s life: if you want to grow in your understanding, you must *hunger* for knowledge.
 - (v) With regard to his spirituality, Ryle remarks, “One feature in Toplady’s character, I may here remark, can hardly fail to strike an attentive reader of his remains. That feature is the eminent spirituality of the tone of his religion. There can be no greater mistake than to regard him as a mere student and deep reader, or as a hard and dry controversial divine. Such an estimate of him is thoroughly unjust. His letters and remains supply abundant evidence that he was one who lived in very close communion with God, and had very deep experience of divine things. Living much alone, seldom going into society, and possessing few friends, he was a man little understood by many, who only knew him by his controversial writings, and specially by his unflinching advocacy of Calvinism. Yet really, if the truth be spoken, I hardly find any man of the last century who seems to have soared so high and aimed so loftily, in his personal dealings with his Saviour, as Toplady. There is an unction and savour about some of his remains which few of his contemporaries equalled, and none surpassed. I grant freely that he left behind him many things which cannot be much commended. But he left behind him some things which will live, as long as English is spoken,

in the hearts of all true Christians. His writings contain ‘thoughts that breathe and words that burn,’ if any writings of his age. And it never ought to be forgotten, that the man who penned them was lying in his grave before he was thirty-nine!”

3. His death.
 - a. As we saw earlier, Toplady moved to London in 1775 on medical advice.
 - b. The change of climate didn’t do him any good. Little by little his illness – apparently a chest condition, or, as it was known in those days, consumption – continued to progress.
 - c. He was able to preach at Orange Street Chapel in the years 1776 and 1777, but it was clear that he was drawing near to the end of his life.
 - d. He was never more appreciated than during his last three years.
 - (i) The London congregation was better able to value his gifts and his stores of theological knowledge that had been completely thrown away on his rural parish in Devonshire.
 - (ii) If he had lived longer, humanly speaking, he might have done a mighty work in London, but the Lord had other plans.
 - (iii) He appears to have come to London only to become known and valued before he died.
 - e. His death was characteristic of his life.
 - (i) He died, as he had lived, in the full hope, peace and assurance of the Gospel, with an unwavering confidence in the truth he had proclaimed from the pulpit and his writings for fifteen years.
 - (ii) Two months before he died, he was alarmed by reports that he had recanted of his Calvinism and that he wanted to confess this to John Wesley.
 - (a) To dispel this rumor, he decided to appear publicly, before his congregation, one more time to deny this allegation.
 - (b) His doctor tried to persuade him otherwise, telling him that he might die in the attempt, but he could not be swayed, telling his physician, “he would rather die in the harness than die in the stall.”
 - (c) On Sunday, June 14, in the last stages of his consumption, two months before he died, Ryle writes, “he ascended his pulpit in Orange Street Chapel, after his assistant had preached, to the astonishment of his people, and gave a short but affecting exhortation founded on 2 Pet. i. 13, 14: ‘I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.’ He then closed his address with the following remarkable declaration: ‘It having been industriously circulated by some malicious and unprincipled persons that during my present long and severe illness I expressed a strong desire of seeing Mr. John Wesley before I die, and revoking some particulars relative to him which occur in my writings, – Now I do publicly and most solemnly aver that I have not nor ever had any such intention or desire; and that I most sincerely hope my last hours will be much better employed than in communing with such a man. So certain and so satisfied am I of the truth of all that I have ever written, that were I now sitting up in my dying bed with a pen and ink in my hand, and all the religious and controversial writings I ever published,

especially those relating to Mr. John Wesley and the Arminian controversy, whether respecting fact or doctrine, could be at once displayed to my view, I should not strike out a single line relative to him or them.”

- (iii) His last days were spent in peace and his death was full of consolation.
 - (a) The Lord enabled him to say many things to comfort and edify his friends.
 - (b) One friend wrote, “A remarkable jealousy was apparent in his whole conduct as he drew near his end, for fear of receiving any part of that honour which is due to Christ alone. He desired to be nothing, and that Jesus might be all and in all. His feelings were so very tender upon this subject, that I once undesignedly put him almost in an agony by remarking the great loss which the Church of Christ would sustain by his death at this particular juncture. The utmost distress was immediately visible in his countenance, and he exclaimed, ‘What! by my death? No, no! Jesus Christ is able, and will, by proper instruments, defend his own truths. And with regard to what little I have been enabled to do in this way, not to me, not to me, but to his own name, and to that only, be the glory.’”
 - (c) “The more his bodily strength was impaired the more vigorous, lively, and rejoicing his mind seemed to be. From the whole turn of his conversation during our interview, he appeared not merely placid and serene, but he evidently possessed the fullest assurance of the most triumphant faith. He repeatedly told me that he had not had the least shadow of a doubt respecting his eternal salvation for near two years past. It is no wonder, therefore, that he so earnestly longed to be dissolved and to be with Christ. His soul seemed to be constantly panting heavenward, and his desire increased the nearer his dissolution approached. A short time before his death, at his request, I felt his pulse, and he desired to know what I thought of it. I told him that his heart and arteries evidently beat almost every day weaker and weaker. He replied immediately, with the sweetest smile on his countenance, ‘Why, that is a good sign that my death is fast approaching; and, blessed be God, I can add that my heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory.’
 - (d) “A few days before his dissolution I found him sitting up in his arm-chair, but scarcely able to move or speak. I addressed him very softly, and asked if his consolations continued to abound as they had hitherto done. He quickly replied, ‘O my dear sir, it is impossible to describe how good God is to me. Since I have been sitting in this chair this afternoon I have enjoyed such a season, such sweet communion with God, and such delightful manifestation of his presence with and love to my soul, that it is impossible for words or any language to express them. I have had peace and joy unutterable, and I fear not but that God’s consolation and support will continue.’ But he immediately recollected himself, and added, ‘What have I said? God may, to be sure, as a sovereign, hide his face and his smiles from me; however, I believe he will not; and if he should, yet will I trust him. I know I am safe and secure, for his love and his covenant are everlasting!’”
 - (e) “To another friend, speaking about his dying avowal in the pulpit of his church in Orange Street, he said: ‘My dear friend, these great and glorious

truths which the Lord in rich mercy has given me to believe, and which he has enabled me (though very feebly) to defend, are not, as those who oppose them say, dry doctrines or mere speculative points. No! being brought into practical and heartfelt experience, they are the very joy and support of my soul; and the consolations flowing from them carry me far above the things of time and sense. So far as I know my own heart, I have no desire but to be entirely passive, to live, to die, to be, to do, to suffer whatever is God's blessed will concerning me, being perfectly satisfied that as he ever has, so he ever will do that which is best concerning me, and that he deals out in number, weight, and measure, whatever will conduce most to his own glory and to the good of his people.”

- (f) “Another of his friends mentioning the report that was spread abroad of his recanting his former principles, he said with some vehemence and emotion, ‘I recant my former principles! God forbid that I should be so vile an apostate!’ To which he presently added, with great apparent humility, ‘And yet that apostate I should soon be, if I were left to myself.’
 - (g) “Within an hour of his death, he called his friends and his servant to him, and asked them if they could give him up. Upon their answering that they could, since it pleased the Lord to be so gracious to him, he replied: ‘Oh, what a blessing it is that you are made willing to give me up into the hands of my dear Redeemer, and to part with me! It will not be long before God takes me; for no mortal man can live, after the glories which God has manifested to my soul.’ Soon after this he closed his eyes, and quietly fell asleep in Christ on Tuesday, August 11, 1778, in the thirty-eighth year of his age.”
 - (h) As we’ve seen with Whitefield and Wesley, if you want to have this comfort in death, you must live for the Lord *alone* in life.
- (iv) Ryle writes, “He was buried in Tottenham Court Chapel (pronounced Totenam), under the gallery, opposite the pulpit, in the presence of thousands of people, who came together from all parts of London to do him honour. His high reputation as a champion of truth, the unjust misrepresentations circulated about his change of opinion, his effectiveness as a preacher, and his comparative youthfulness, combined to draw forth a more than ordinary expression of sympathy. ‘Devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.’ Foremost among the mourners was one at that time young in the ministry, who lived long enough to be a connecting link between the last century and the present – the well-known and eccentric Rowland Hill. Before the burial-service commenced, he could not refrain from transgressing one of Toplady’s last requests, that no funeral sermon should be preached for him, and affectionately declared to the vast assembly the love and veneration he felt for the deceased, and the high sense he entertained of his graces, gifts, and usefulness. And thus, amidst the tears and thanksgivings of true-hearted mourners, the much-abused vicar of Broad Hembury was gathered to his people.”
- (iv) His will shows further his absolute resolution to give all glory to the Lord for His eternal mercies. “I most humbly commit my soul to Almighty God, whom I honour, and have long experienced to be my ever gracious and infinitely merciful

Father. Nor have I the least doubt of my election, justification, and eternal happiness, through the riches of his everlasting and unchangeable kindness to me in Christ Jesus, his co-equal Son, my only, my assured, and my all-sufficient Saviour; washed in whose propitiatory blood, and clothed with whose imputed righteousness, I trust to stand perfect, sinless, and complete; and do verily believe that I most certainly shall so stand, in the hour of death, and in the kingdom of heaven, and at the last judgment, and in the ultimate state of endless glory. Neither can I write this my last will without rendering the deepest, the most solemn, and the most ardent thanks to the adorable Trinity in Unity, for their eternal, unmerited, irreversible, and inexhaustible love to me a sinner. I bless God the Father for having written from everlasting my unworthy name in the book of life – even for appointing me to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ my Lord. I adore God the Son for having vouchsafed to redeem me by his own most precious death, and for having obeyed the whole law for my justification. I admire and revere the gracious benignity of God the Holy Ghost, who converted me to the saving knowledge of Christ more than twenty-two years ago, and whose enlightening, supporting, comforting, and sanctifying agency is, and (I doubt not) will be my strength and song in the hours of my earthly pilgrimage.”

C. Assessment of his work:

1. As a preacher, Toplady ranks at the top among the second class men of the Eighteenth Century.
 - a. Because of his weak constitution, it was impossible for him to do what Whitefield, Wesley and others had done, preaching constantly in the open-air to thousands of hearers.
 - b. Yet in the pulpit, he did very well. The fact that Lady Huntington had him preach from time to time in her chapels at Bath and Brighton says quite a bit, as well as the fact that he was chosen to speak at one of the great Calvinistic Methodist gatherings at Trevecca.
 - c. The notes he recorded in his diary from an old friend gives us further insight into his pulpit ministry: “(1.) Preach Christ crucified, and dwell chiefly on the blessings resulting from his righteousness, atonement, and intercession. (2.) Avoid all needless controversies in the pulpit; except it be when your subject necessarily requires it, or when the truths of God are likely to suffer by your silence. (3.) When you ascend the pulpit, leave your learning behind you: endeavour to preach more to the hearts of your people than to their heads. (4.) Do not affect much oratory. Seek rather to profit than to be admired.”
 - d. Here are a few excerpts from his remaining sermons.
 - (i) “I know it is growing very fashionable to talk against spiritual feelings. But I dare not join the cry. On the contrary, I adopt the apostle’s prayer that our love to God and the manifestation of his love to us may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all feeling. And it is no enthusiastic wish in behalf of you and myself, that we may be of the number of those godly persons who, as our Church justly expresses it, ‘feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things.’ Indeed, the great business of God’s Spirit is to draw up and to

bring down – to draw up our affections to Christ, and to bring down the unsearchable riches of grace into our hearts. The knowledge of this, and earnest desire for it, are all the feelings I plead for: and for these feelings I wish ever to plead, satisfied as I am that without some experience and enjoyment of them we cannot be happy living or dying.”

- (ii) “Let me ask you, as it were one by one, has the Holy Spirit begun to reveal these deep things of God in your soul? If so, give him the glory of it. And as you prize communion with him, as ever you value the comforts of the Holy Ghost, endeavour to be found in God’s way, even the highway of humble faith and obedient love, sitting at the feet of Christ, and imbibing those sweet sanctifying communications of grace which are at once an earnest of and a preparation for complete heaven when you die. God forbid that we should ever think lightly of religious feelings. If we do not in some measure feel ourselves sinners, and feel that Christ is precious, I doubt the Spirit of God has never been savingly at work upon our souls.”
- (iii) “Faith is the eye of the soul, and the eye is said to see almost every object but itself; so that you may have real faith without being able to discern it. God will not despise the day of small things. Little faith goes to heaven no less than great faith; though not so comfortably, yet altogether as surely. If you come merely as a sinner to Jesus, and throw yourself, at all events, for salvation on his alone blood and righteousness, and the grace and promise of God in him, thou art as truly a believer as the most triumphant saint that ever lived. Amidst all your weakness, distresses, and temptations, remember that God will not cast out nor cast off the meanest and unworthiest soul that seeks salvation only in the name of Jesus Christ the righteous. When you cannot follow the Rock, the Rock shall follow you, nor ever leave you for a single moment on this side the heavenly Canaan. If you feel your absolute want of Christ, you may on all occasions and in every exigence betake yourself to the covenant-love and faithfulness of God for pardon, sanctification, and safety, and with the same fulness of right and title as a traveller leans upon his own staff, or as a weary labourer throws himself upon his own bed, or as an opulent nobleman draws upon his own banker for whatsoever sum he wants.”
- (iv) Ryle comments, “I am bold to say that the Church of the nineteenth century would be in a far more healthy condition if it had more preaching like Toplady’s.”

2. Toplady also excelled as a writer: In his short life, he wrote:
 - a. Useful essays on various subjects, besides the Calvinistic controversy.
 - b. Short biographies on various bishops in the English Church, John Knox, John Fox, Witsius, Isaac Watts, and others.
 - c. He gathered extracts from the works of well-known Christians, and anecdotes, incidents and biographical materials.
 - d. He sketched natural history, made various observations on birds, meteors, animals and the solar system, all of which showing that he had a very active and curious mind.
 - e. He also wrote “Family Prayers,” which includes a prayer for each day of the week, both morning and evening.

- f. His works also contain eighty seven letters to friends, which are “sensible, well composed, full of thought and matter, and supplying abundant proof that their writer was a Christian, a scholar, and a gentleman.”
- g. Here is another example of using what you have to the full for God’s glory.

3. As a controversialist.

- a. This, apparently, was an area where Toplady was lacking, not in orthodoxy, but in charity.
- b. Ryle writes, “I begin by saying that, on the whole, Toplady’s controversial writings appear to me to be in principle scriptural, sound, and true. I do not, for a moment, mean that I can endorse all he says. I consider that his statements are often extreme, and that he is frequently more systematic and narrow than the Bible. He often seems to me, in fact, to go further than Scripture, and to draw conclusions which Scripture has not drawn, and to settle points which for some wise reason Scripture has not settled. Still, for all this, I will never shrink from saying that the cause for which Toplady contended all his life was decidedly the cause of God’s truth. He was a bold defender of Calvinistic views about election, predestination, perseverance, human impotency, and irresistible grace. On all these subjects I hold firmly that Calvin’s theology is much more scriptural than the theology of Arminius. In a word, I believe that Calvinistic divinity is the divinity of the Bible, of Augustine, and of the Thirty-nine Articles of my own Church, and of the Scotch Confession of Faith. While, therefore, I repeat that I cannot endorse all the sentiments of Toplady’s controversial writings, I do claim for them the merit of being in principle scriptural, sound, and true. Well would it be for the Churches, if we had a good deal more of clear, distinct, sharply-cut doctrine in the present day! Vagueness and indistinctness are marks of our degenerate condition.”
- c. “While, however, I claim for Toplady’s controversial writings the merit of soundness and ability, I must with sorrow admit that I cannot praise his spirit and language when speaking of his opponents. I am obliged to confess that he often uses expressions about them so violent and so bitter, that one feels perfectly ashamed. Never, I regret to say, did an advocate of truth appear to me so entirely to forget the text, ‘In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves,’ as the vicar of Broad Hembury. Arminianism seems to have precisely the same effect on him that a scarlet cloak has on a bull. He appears to think it impossible that an Arminian can be saved, and never shrinks with classing Arminians with Pelagians, Socinians, Papists, and heretics. He says things about Wesley and Sellon which never ought to have been said. All this is melancholy work indeed! But those who are familiar with Toplady’s controversial writings know well that I am stating simple truths.”
- d. Here is one sample of his writings in a letter addressed to John Wesley.
 - (i) The situation has to do with Wesley’s editing of a work Toplady had translated of Jerome Zanchius, the Italian Reformer, entitled, “The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination.” An abridgement generally seeks to preserve the meaning of the author. Wesley edited from his abridgements everything he didn’t personally agree with and republished it with Toplady’s name as the author. This will help you to understand Toplady’s comments.

- (iv) “Hitherto your treatment of Zanchius resembles that of some clumsy, bungling anatomist: who in the dissection of an animal dwells much on the larger and more obvious particulars; but quite omits the nerves, the lymphatics, the muscles, and the most interesting parts of the complicate machine. Thus, in your piddling extract from the pamphlet, you have thought proper to curtail, you only give a few of the larger outlines; without at all entering into the spirit of the subject, or so much as producing (so far from attempting to refute) any of the turning points, on which the argument depends. Wrench the finest eye that ever shone in a lady’s head from its socket, and it will appear frightful and deformed: whereas, in its natural connection, the symmetry and brilliancy, the expressiveness and the beauty, are conspicuous. So it often fares with authors. A detached sentence, artfully misplaced, or unseasonably introduced, maliciously applied, or unfairly cited, may appear to carry an idea the very reverse of its real meaning. But replace the dislocated passage, and its propriety and importance are restored. I would wish every unprejudiced person, into whose hands your abridgement of my translation has fallen, to suspend his judgment concerning it until he sees the translation itself. On comparing the two together, he will at once perceive how candid and honest you are; and what quantity of confidence may be reposed on your integrity as a citer” (Works, 723).
- e. Ryle writes, “It must in fairness be remembered that the language of his opponents was exceedingly violent, and was enough to provoke any man. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that a hundred years ago men said things in controversy that were not considered so bad as they are now, from the different standard of taste that prevailed. Men were perhaps more honest and outspoken than they are now, and their bark was worse than their bite.”
- f. “I leave this painful subject with the general remark, that Toplady is a standing beacon to the Church, to show us the evils of controversy. ‘The beginning of strife is like letting out water.’ ‘In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.’ We must never shrink from controversy, if need be, in defence of Christ’s gospel, but we must never take it up without jealous watchfulness over our own hearts, and over the manner in which we carry it on. Above all, we must strive to think as charitably as possible of our opponent. It was Calvin himself who said of Luther, ‘He may call me a devil if he will; but I shall always call him a good servant of Jesus Christ.’ Well would it have been for Toplady’s reputation, if he had been more like Calvin! Perhaps when we open our eyes in heaven we shall be amazed to find how many things there were which both Calvinists and Arminians did not thoroughly understand.”
- g. Here is another lesson from Toplady’s life: Remember to be charitable in what you say and how you say it to others.
4. It was as a hymn writer where Toplady most excelled.
- a. Ryle writes, “Good hymns are an immense blessing to the Church of Christ. I believe the last day alone will show the world the real amount of good they have done. They suit all, both rich and poor. There is an elevating, stirring, soothing, spiritualizing, effect about a thoroughly good hymn, which nothing else can produce.

- It sticks in men's memories when texts are forgotten. It trains men for heaven, where praise is one of the principal occupations. Preaching and praying shall one day cease for ever; but praise shall never die. The makers of good ballads are said to sway national opinion. The writers of good hymns, in like manner, are those who leave the deepest marks on the face of the Church. Thousands of Christians rejoice in the 'Te Deum,' and 'Just as I am,' who neither prize the Thirty-nine Articles, nor know anything about the first four councils, nor understand the Athanasian Creed."
- b. "But really good hymns are exceedingly rare. There are only a few men in any age who can write them. You may name hundreds of first-rate preachers for one first-rate writer of hymns. Hundreds of so-called hymns fill up our collections of congregational psalmody, which are really not hymns at all. They are very sound, very scriptural, very proper, very correct, very tolerably rhymed; but they are not real, live, genuine hymns. There is no life about them. At best they are tame, pointless, weak, and milk-and-watery. In many cases, if written out straight, without respect of lines, they would make excellent prose. But poetry they are not. It may be a startling assertion to some ears to say that there are not more than two hundred first-rate hymns in the English language; but startling as it may sound, I believe it is true."
- c. "Of all English hymn-writers, none, perhaps, have succeeded so thoroughly in combining truth, poetry, life, warmth, fire, depth, solemnity, and unction, as Toplady has. I pity the man who does not know, or, knowing, does not admire those glorious hymns of his beginning, 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me;' or, 'Holy Ghost, dispel our sadness;' or, 'A debtor to mercy alone;' or, 'Your harps, ye trembling saints;' or, 'Christ, whose glory fills the skies;' or, 'When languor and disease invade ;' or, 'Deathless principle, arise.' The writer of these seven hymns alone has laid the Church under perpetual obligations to him. Heretics have been heard in absent moments whispering over 'Rock of Ages,' as if they clung to it when they had let slip all things beside. Great statesmen have been known to turn it into Latin, as if to perpetuate its fame. The only matter of regret is, that the writer of such excellent hymns should have written so few. If he had lived longer, written more hymns, and handled fewer controversies, his memory would have been had in greater honour, and men would have been better pleased."
- d. "That hymns of such singular beauty and pathos should have come from the same pen which indicted such bitter controversial writings, is certainly a strange anomaly. I do not pretend to explain it, or to offer any solution. I only lay it before my readers as a naked fact. To say the least, it should teach us not to be hasty in censuring a man before we know all sides of his character. The best saints of God are neither so very good, nor the faultiest so very faulty, as they appear. He that only reads Toplady's hymns will find it hard to believe that he could compose his controversial writings. He that only reads his controversial writings will hardly believe that he composed his hymns. Yet the fact remains, that the same man composed both. Alas! the holiest among us all is a very poor mixed creature!"
- e. "I now leave the subject of this chapter here. I ask my readers to put a favourable construction on Toplady's life, and to judge him with righteous judgment. I fear he is a man who has never been fairly estimated, and has never had many friends. Ministers of his decided, sharply-cut, doctrinal opinions are never very popular. But

I plead strongly that Toplady's undeniable faults should never make us forget his equally undeniable excellencies. With all his infirmities, I firmly believe that he was a good man and a great man, and did a work for Christ a hundred years ago, which will never be overthrown. He will stand in his lot at the last day in a high place, when many, perhaps, whom the world liked better, shall be put to shame."

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