

A Lesson from Spurgeon
on Evangelism
THOMAS ASCOL

Charles H. Spurgeon:
The Prince of Preachers
STEVEN J. LAWSON

Charles H. Spurgeon:
The Pastor-Theologian
TOM J. NETTLES

EXPOSITOR

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Teaching on the
Holy Spirit

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Lessons from
Spurgeon on the
Christian Life

CHRISTIAN T. GEORGE

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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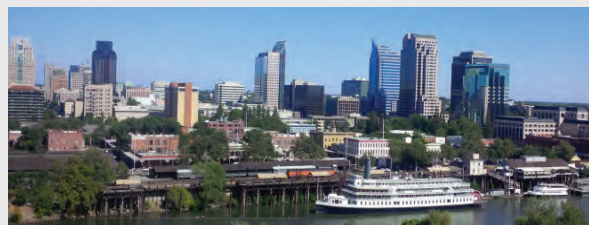
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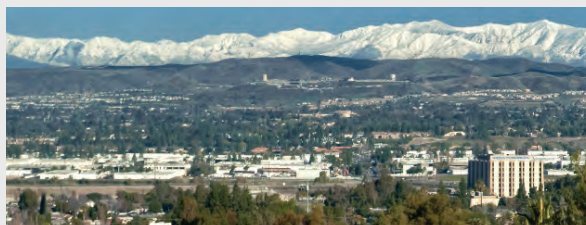
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THE EVANGELISTIC ZEAL OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY CALVINIST

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES

A few years ago, I preached the weeklong chapel services for a leading seminary in the United States. During the seminary's annual emphasis on expository preaching, it was my assignment to speak on biblical preaching, as well as to model it. Before my messages began, I was led to the campus bookstore, where I was asked to recommend books on preaching for the student body. Without hesitation, my immediate reply was that they should feature books with the printed sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I will never forget the response. The bookstore manager listed several contemporary preachers by whom the students were most influenced and shaped. In my opinion, these examples were more trendy than theological. Responding to my recommendation, he then said, "Most of our students have never read Spurgeon."

In my opinion, these examples were more trendy than theological. Responding to my recommendation, he then said, "Most of our students have never read Spurgeon."

"What?" I thought, "In a high-level theological institution they have never read 'the Prince of Preachers'?"

I will never forget when over forty years ago, as a young seminary student, I was first introduced to the preaching ministry of Mr. Spurgeon. In April 1976, I wrote a paper that set me on a journey to learn more about this remarkable figure. In the remaining years of my seminary training, I began purchasing individual volumes of Spurgeon's sermons. The entire sixty-three volume set seemed to be out of my reach until my mother-in-law began making annual acquisitions to serve as my birthday and Christmas presents. After many years, the body of his preaching material was complete on my shelf. I devoured these sermons and learned much about the art of preaching as well as the science of what it looks like and how it works.

Over the years, I have read more sermons by Spurgeon than by any other preacher. In my estimation, all preachers, especially men training for ministry, should read "the Prince of Preachers." The present dearth of strong, biblical preaching could be corrected in some measure by preachers being under the influence of his sermons.

My aim in this issue of *Expositor* is to give you a brief introduction to the preaching ministry of Charles Spurgeon. Many of you are already familiar with this extraordinary individual. I am sure that you will be encouraged to walk with this iconic expositor. But for others of you, this will be an initial introduction to his preaching. Maybe you know him by name, but not by his pulpit endeavors. If so, this will be a helpful orientation to this powerful voice for God. ♦





CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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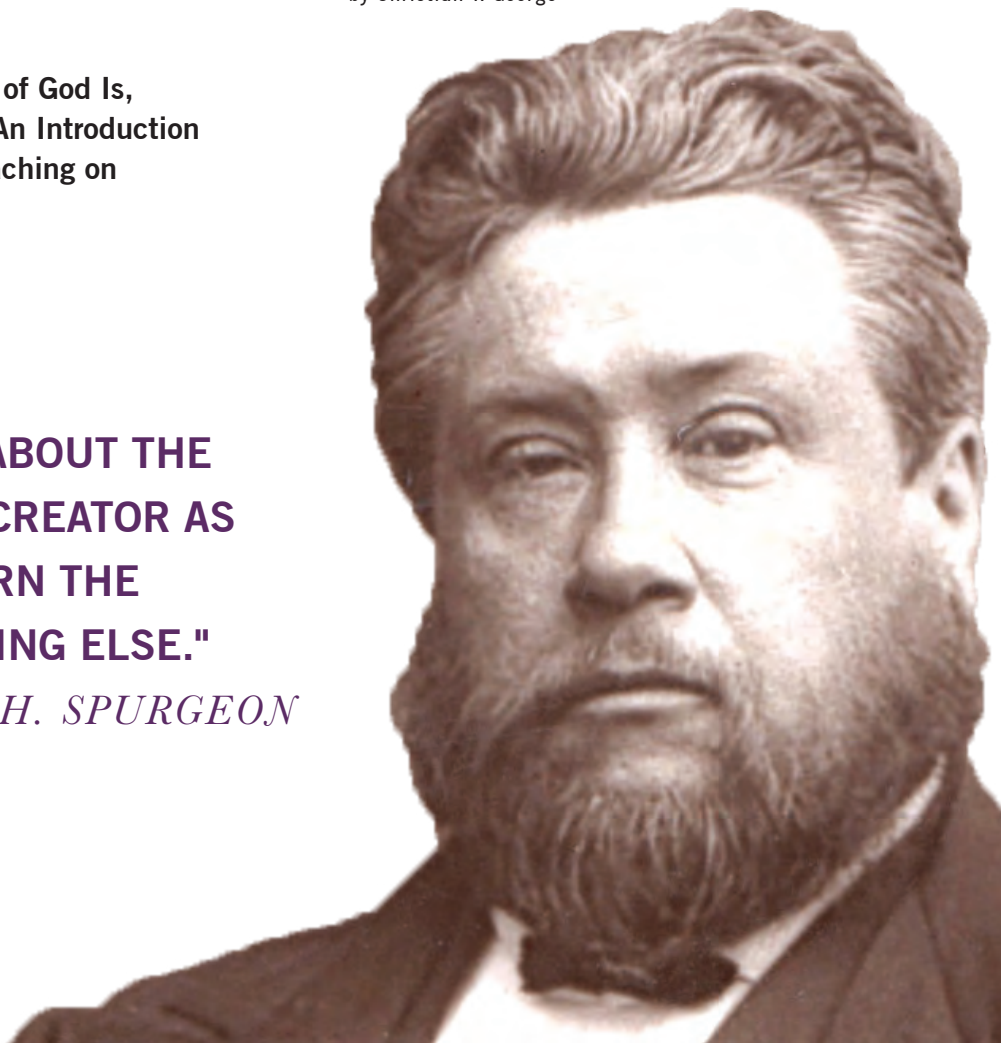
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PRECIOUSNESS OF THE CREATOR AS
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EMPTINESS OF EVERYTHING ELSE."

— CHARLES H. SPURGEON



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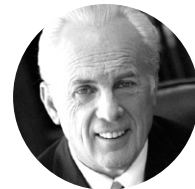
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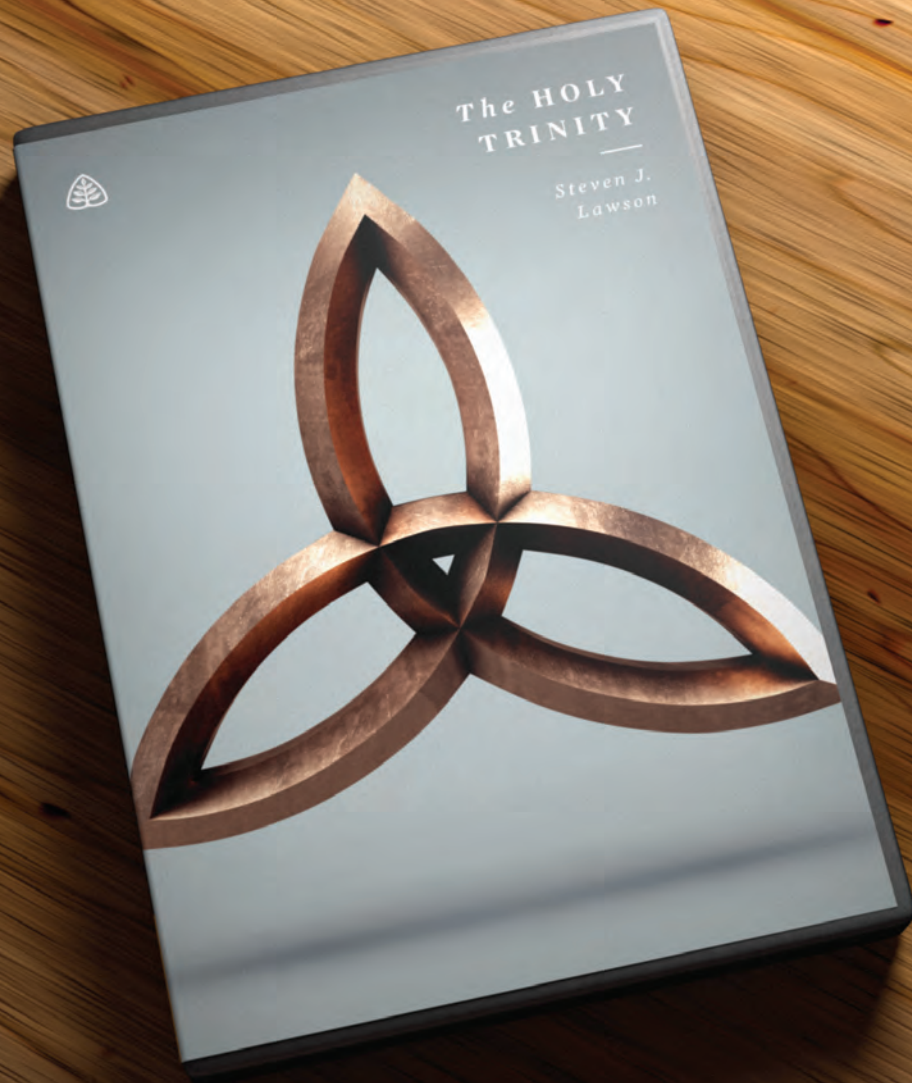


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CHARLES H.
SPURGEON:
THE
PRINCE
OF
PREACHERS

STEVEN J. LAWSOM

C. H. Spurgeon

A detailed portrait of Charles H. Spurgeon, a prominent English Baptist preacher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is styled in a wavy, side-parted manner. The portrait is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the purple title box.

The most popular preacher of nineteenth-century Victorian England was, unquestionably, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892). It can be argued that this pulpit giant was the greatest Baptist preacher who ever lived. It can also be defended that he was the most gifted preacher of the English language. Moreover, a convincing case can be made that Spurgeon was the most preeminent preacher since the days of the apostles. Consequently, this towering figure has rightly earned the title, “the Prince of Preachers.”

Over the centuries, Spurgeon certainly surpasses all other preachers as the most popular, most printed, and most quoted minister. If John Calvin (1509–1564) is the greatest theologian of the church, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) the greatest philosopher/thinker of the church, and George Whitefield (1714–1770) the greatest itinerate evangelist of the church, Spurgeon must then rank as the greatest gospel preacher to stand in one pulpit Sunday by Sunday. It is virtually impossible to overstate the expansive influence of Spurgeon as an expositor of the Word.

Destined to Preach

This prolific figure was destined for the pulpit from birth. Charles Spurgeon entered this world on June 19, 1834, in Kelvendon, Essex, England, into a family of preachers. His father and grandfather were preachers, and his younger brother, James, would be his pastoral associate. He was converted on January 6, 1850, at age fifteen, began preaching at age sixteen, and pastored his first church at Tevershawn, near Cambridge, at age seventeen. This little country church immediately began to grow, more than doubling in size in two years.

At age nineteen, Spurgeon was called to London to pastor the most famous Reformed Baptist church of the day, the New Park Street Chapel. The sanctuary held twelve hundred people, but was in serious decline, with only two hundred in regular attendance. Within months, however, some five hundred were gathering weekly to hear this young, gifted preacher. Within a year, the sanctuary was full, and the Chapel had to be enlarged to seventeen hundred seats. Yet even this expansion could not contain the swelling crowds.

Soon, tickets were distributed without charge in order to accommodate the masses. In addition to those who were seated, five hundred people sat in windowsills and aisles or stood around the walls. The bulging Chapel simply could not house the large numbers that were coming to hear this prodigy preach.

Electrifying London

At age twenty-one, the growing multitudes forced Spurgeon to move the congregation into Exeter Hall, which seated four

thousand people, with another thousand standing. But even this could not hold the enlarging crowd. Hundreds were turned away. At age twenty-two, he moved his flock into an even larger venue, the Music Hall at Royal Surrey Gardens, which held twelve thousand attendees. Every service was filled to overflowing, and traffic jams followed Spurgeon whenever he preached.

At age twenty-three, on a day of national humiliation and repentance, he preached in the Crystal Palace to over twenty-three thousand people without the aid of a microphone. That same year, he also started the Pastors’ College, remarkably, though he himself had never attended a Bible college.

Finally, in 1861, when Spurgeon was twenty-seven, the Metropolitan Tabernacle was built to house the rapidly growing church. Holding over six thousand people, this enormous structure was the largest Protestant house of worship in its day. From that point until his death, the sanctuary was filled every Sunday morning and evening service. When the Tabernacle was later closed for refurbishing, the church met for five Sundays in Agriculture Hall at Islington, where more than twenty thousand worshipers were in attendance for each service. Not since the days of George Whitefield had London witnessed such electrifying preaching.

After fighting many theological battles, this “Mr. Valiant for Truth” died on January 7, 1891, in Mentone, France. He was only fifty-seven years of age. Five funeral services would pay tribute to what the grace of God did in his remarkable life.

Given such an extraordinary preaching ministry, what are the characteristics that marked the pulpit power of Charles Spurgeon? The following distinctive aspects demand our attention and call for our emulation:

Word-Driven

First, the preaching of Spurgeon was always grounded in a specific passage of Scripture. In a day when the higher criticism of German scholarship was undermining belief in the Bible, this pulpit master held fast to the divine inspiration and supreme authority of the written Word of God. Simply put, Spurgeon was a Bible preacher. Every time he stepped into the pulpit, he proclaimed the infallible Scripture. Notice Spurgeon’s convictions in this regard:

I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God’s Word into our sermons.

Spurgeon was convinced that nothing in his message must originate within himself. Neither would he draw upon any human source of authority. Instead, everything he proclaimed came from the divinely-inspired Word. He asserted:

"I HAVE COME FORTH SUNDAY MORNINGS WITH THE BURDEN OF THE LORD TO MY HEART, TILL I HAVE BEEN BOWED DOWN WITH THE WEIGHT."

- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

I am content to live and die as the mere repeater of scriptural teaching, as a person who has thought out nothing and invented nothing, as one who never thought invention to be any part of his calling, but who concluded that he was simply to be a mouth for God to the people, mourning that anything of his own should come between.

With such unwavering beliefs, Spurgeon was convinced of the necessity of mastering the Scripture in order to preach. He maintained, "Saturate your sermons with Bibles, the essence of Bible truth, and you will always have something new to say." In other words, he said, "Be walking Bibles."

God-Fearing

Second, Spurgeon was a God-fearing man in life and in the pulpit. Simply put, he took God seriously and believed he would give a strict account to the Lord on the last day. In an hour when the entertainment of a Vaudeville-like atmosphere

crept into the church, Spurgeon revered God as he stood before an opened Bible. He was persuaded that he was fulfilling a sacred mission, with the eternal souls of men and women hanging in the balance. Spurgeon confided his inner trembling at the thought of speaking to men on behalf of God:

I have come forth Sunday mornings with the burden of the Lord to my heart, till I have been bowed down with the weight. And there is not a Sunday night, and has not been for many a day, when I do not come on this platform in such a state, both of body and soul, that I pity a dog who has to suffer what I have, under the terror and the weight of the awful responsibility of having to preach to such a crowd as this.

Far from relying upon his giftedness, Spurgeon was overwhelmed with the enormity of the task before him. He confessed his soul-gripping sobriety before God:

My deacons know well enough how, when I first preached in Exeter Hall, there was scarcely ever an occasion in which they left me alone for ten minutes before the service, but they would find me in a most fearful state of sickness, produced by that tremendous thought of my solemn responsibility. I am compelled to put my responsibilities where I put my sins, on the back of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Spurgeon stepped into the pulpit, he was consciously aware that he was stepping onto holy ground:

I have preached the gospel now these thirty years and more, and some of you will scarcely believe it, but before I come to address the congregation in this Tabernacle, I tremble like an aspen leaf. And often, in coming down to this pulpit, have I felt my knees knock together—not that I am afraid of any one of my hearers, but I am thinking of that account which I must render to God, whether I speak his Word faithfully or not. On this service may hang the eternal destinies of many. O God, grant that we may all realize that this is a matter of the most solemn concern.

Such is the sincere conviction of a man of God who fears the Lord and is burdened by the high calling of speaking the Word of God to men.

Christ-Centered

Third, Spurgeon continually preached the supremacy of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work. He relentlessly magnified the majesty of Christ. As all roads led to London, so he believed, all his sermons must lead to Christ.

Whatever the passage, he claimed, “The best sermons are the sermons which are fullest of Christ.” He stressed, “Preach Christ always and ever more. He is the whole Gospel. His person, offices, and works must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world still needs to be told of its Savior, and of the way to reach Him.” With mounting confidence, he believed, “The simple preaching of Jesus cannot fail under the hand of the Holy Spirit to produce the very best effects.”

Consequently, Spurgeon maintained that a sermon without Christ was a message without power:

A sermon without Christ, it is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well; it is a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead, plucked up by the roots. It is an abominable thing to give men stones for bread and scorpions for eggs, yet they do so who preach not Jesus. A sermon without Christ! As well talk of a loaf of bread without any flour in it. How can it feed the soul?

The absence of Christ from preaching, Spurgeon maintained, meant the absence of gospel truth:

If you leave out Christ you have left the sun out of the day and the moon out of the night. You have left the waters out of the sea and the floods out of the river. You have left the harvest out of the year, the soul out of the body, you have left joy out of heaven, you have robbed all of its all. There is no gospel worth thinking of, much less worth proclaiming, if Jesus be forgotten. We must have Jesus as Alpha and Omega in all our ministries.

The story has often been told of the time Spurgeon tested the acoustics of the deserted Crystal Palace. Standing alone in the hall, Spurgeon lifted his voice and instinctively spoke the words of the apostle John, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Although he thought he had no hearers, a man who was working in the rafters approached him. The man was startled, as if he had seen a ghost, and said, “I just heard the voice of God.” Spurgeon asked, “What did God say?” The worker then quoted the text Spurgeon spoke. Spurgeon affirmed, “You did hear the words of God,” and the man was converted.

Spurgeon said on another occasion: “Let this be to you the mark of true gospel preaching—where Christ is everything, and the creature is nothing: where it is salvation all of grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit applying to the soul the precious blood of Jesus.” Anecdotes and sermons may be easily added to these accounts to make it abundantly clear that Spurgeon was a Christ-centered preacher.

Spirit-Empowered

Fourth, Spurgeon believed in the necessity of being empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach supernaturally. Such power comes from on high by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scripture. It is the Spirit who anoints His servants to proclaim the inspired truths of the infallible Bible. Spurgeon testified, “It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit.” Moreover, “you might as well expect to raise the dead by whispering in their ears, as hope to save souls by preaching to them, if it were not for the agency of the Spirit.”

In the Metropolitan Tabernacle, a double spiral staircase led from the lower platform where Spurgeon stood during the congregational singing to a higher platform where the pul-

SPURGEON MAINTAINED THAT A SERMON WITHOUT CHRIST WAS A MESSAGE WITHOUT POWER.

pit was located. A double staircase allowed him to mount the pulpit, each side having fifteen steps. As Spurgeon ascended the stairs, he did so with the slow, methodical steps of a heavily-built man. With each step, he uttered to God, “I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Though graced with extraordinary abilities, he nevertheless remained dependent upon the Spirit.

It was this unwavering reliance upon the Holy Spirit that caused Spurgeon to declare:

The Spirit of God acts as an anointing oil, and this relates to the entire delivery—not to the utterance merely from the mouth, but to the whole delivery of the discourse. He can make you feel your subject till it thrills you, and you become depressed by it so as to be crushed into the earth, or elevated by it so as to be borne upon its eagle wings; making you feel, besides your subject, your object, till you yearn for the conversion of men, and for the uplifting of Christians to something nobler

than they have known as yet. At the same time, another feeling is with you, namely, an intense desire that God may be glorified through the truth which you are delivering. You are conscious of a deep sympathy with the people to whom you are speaking, making you mourn over some of them because they know so little, and over others because they have known much, but have rejected it.

Any review of the life of Spurgeon makes it clear that he was ever conscious of the work of the Holy Spirit to enable him to preach the Word with precision and power.

Gospel-Focused

Fifth, Spurgeon remains the greatest example of an evangelistic pastor who repeatedly preached the gospel for the salvation of souls. He confessed that he had but one mentor in his pulpit ministry, the great English evangelist, George Whitefield. The passion of Spurgeon for the salvation of souls came through loud and clear in his preaching. A review of his sermons gives ample proof of this fact. Spurgeon proclaimed, "Preach the gospel, the gates of hell shake. Preach the gospel, prodigals return. Preach the gospel to every creature, it is the Master's mandate and the Master's power to everyone who believes." Truly, he was a fisher of men who repeatedly cast the net and drew it in.

Spurgeon maintained that he must see the conversion of souls under his preaching in order to be a faithful minister:

The fact is, brethren, we *must* have conversion work here. We cannot go on as some churches do without converts. We cannot, we will not, we must not, we dare not. Souls must be converted here, and if there be not many born to Christ, may the Lord grant to me that I may sleep in the tomb and be heard of no more. Better indeed for us to die than to live, if souls be not saved. To this end, Spurgeon stated, "I would freely give my eyes if

you might but see Christ, and I would willingly give my hands if you might but lay hold on Him." Again, "I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpick all the mysteries of the divine Word, for salvation is the thing we are to live for." With myopic vision, he asserted, "My main business is the saving of souls. This one thing I do."

With all the strength of his soul, Spurgeon declared:

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- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.

A cursory examination of Spurgeon's sermons, writings, and life establish that for him to live was Christ, and for him to preach was to preach Christ.

Logically-Ordered

Sixth, Spurgeon understood that a sermon must be logically ordered. Spurgeon's dependence upon the Holy Spirit did not negate his responsibility before the Lord to be a workman who must labor in his sermon preparation and crafting. He worked hard to structure

his sermons to be clear and compelling with his listeners. He demonstrated a sequential train of thought in the unfolding of the message. To ensure this, he used a straightforward introduction, followed by structured headings, and supported by stated subheadings. When he opened up any text of Scripture, he explained its meaning and brought his knowledge of systematic theology to enrich and elevate it.

With vivid imagination, Spurgeon used a string of metaphors, analogies, and biblical allusions to convey the truth of his passage. His employment of these figures of speech vividly supported the meaning of his text. He drew upon nature to picture the thrust of his stated verse and added multiple cross

references to support his point. All this was logically arranged in his brilliant mind.

Sovereignty-Proclaimed

Seventh, Spurgeon was committed to the proclamation of the sovereign grace of God in salvation. Known as biblical Calvinism, these core truths, that teach the supreme power of God in His saving works, were a steady diet he served in the pulpit. He wholeheartedly believed that divine sovereignty is the ruling theology of the Bible in creation, providence, and redemption.

Ernest Bacon describes this theme in Spurgeon's preaching: "Spurgeon's preaching was thoroughly Calvinistic . . . The 'Doctrines of Grace'—the five points of Calvinism—were expounded at the opening services of the great new Tabernacle. They were consistently preached there by him all the days of his ministry." All who heard Spurgeon preach would agree.

In his own words, Spurgeon maintained:

There is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus.

Again, Spurgeon gloried in the saving grace of his sovereign God:

The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth, I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel; that which thundered through Scotland, must thunder through England again.

It is clear that Spurgeon understood that a person's understanding of the sovereignty of God had a direct impact on his understanding of the gospel. A man-centered gospel is a message that fails to completely save because salvation is a joint venture between God and man. However, a God-centered

gospel, he believed, magnifies saving grace as being entirely of God alone. As a result, Spurgeon was compelled by biblical theology to proclaim the sovereignty of God in salvation, to the glory of God.

Boldly-Delivered

Eighth, Spurgeon preached with the boldness of a lion. He roared, "My motto is, 'I yield to none. I preach what I like, when I like, and as I like.'" Courageous and outspoken, he responded to a critic who said, "Some truths ought to be kept back from the people, you will say, lest they should make an ill use thereof." Spurgeon responded, "That is Popish doctrine. It was upon that very theory that the priests kept back the Bible from the people." Such a withholding Spurgeon would not do. Rather than toning down his rhetoric, he retorted, "I have not softened down the Bible to suit the carnal tastes of men. I have said 'damn' where God said 'damn.' I have not sweetened it into 'condemn.'"

When challenged about the harm that such boldness in his preaching caused, Spurgeon replied that he agreed. Much damage had been done, he admitted, but it was inflicted upon the devil. He explained, "I am often charged with preaching doctrines that may do a great deal of hurt. I have my witnesses here present to prove that the things which I have preached have done a great deal of hurt, but they have not done hurt either to morality or to God's church. The hurt has been on the side of Satan."

Spurgeon believed that the truth must "wound before it can heal, kill before it can make alive." He warned, "Avoid a sugared gospel as you would shun sugar of lead. Seek that gospel which rips up and tears and cuts and wounds and hacks

**SPURGEON
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THE TRUTH MUST
"WOUND BEFORE
IT CAN HEAL, KILL
BEFORE IT CAN
MAKE ALIVE."**

and even kills, for that is the gospel that makes alive again. And when you have found it, give good heed to it. Let it enter into your inmost being. As the rain soaks into the ground, so pray the Lord, let his gospel soak into your soul.”

As the apostle Paul made clear that his preaching was not directed to please man, so Spurgeon was willing to boldly preach the truth and, if necessary, offend his hearers, for the sake of the truth.

Passion-Consumed

Ninth, one of the most enduring legacies of Spurgeon was his burning passion in preaching the Word of God. Someone once asked C. H. Spurgeon how he could communicate with the people and reach them as he did. “It is very simple,” he said. “Get on fire for God and the people will come to see you burn!” On another occasion, he affirmed, “No man who preaches the gospel without zeal is sent of God to preach at all.” In other words, if there is no passion, there is no true preaching. He further stressed, “An idler has no right in the pulpit. He is an instrument of Satan in damning the souls of men.”

Such fiery zeal, Spurgeon believed, must flow out of the depths of the preacher’s soul: “I like the idea of pouring our sermons out of our own hearts. They must come from our hearts, or they will not go to our hearers’ hearts.” To this point, “True preaching is artesian: it wells up from the great depths of the soul. If Christ has not made a well within us, there will be no outflow from us.” The pulpit is no place, he believed, for a performance. He warned, “We cannot play at preaching. We preach for eternity.” This requires passion in the preacher. If there is not passion, there is no preaching.

Consequently, Spurgeon insisted, “It will be our dull sermons that will haunt us on our dying beds, our tearless preaching . . . instead of saying to the people, ‘You are dying, escape for your life, and fly to Christ,’ preaching to them in red-hot, simple words, the wrath to come, and the love of Christ.” Clearly, he believed that passion in the preacher is like a fire that spreads to the listener and ignites his soul for Christ.

Burning Convictions

Such was the powerful preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He was the evangelical lion who roared in nineteenth-century London. His preaching was founded upon the authority of the Word of God. Moreover, this pulpit ministry was fueled by the glory of his sovereign God. And his gospel proclamation elevated the Son of God. He was a gospel preacher who heralded the Word with the unrestrained boldness of one who felt the burden of the Lord upon his shoulders.

May God give the twenty-first-century church preachers who embody these same fiery convictions for the truth. ♦

**"TRUE PREACHING
IS ARTESIAN:
IT WELLS UP
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- CHARLES H. SPURGEON



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**CHARLES H.
SPURGEON:
THE
PASTOR-
THEOLOGIAN**

TOM J. NETTLES

C. H. Spurgeon

A detailed portrait of Charles H. Spurgeon, a prominent English Baptist preacher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is styled in a wavy, side-parted manner. The portrait is positioned on the right side of the book cover, partially overlapping the purple title box.

Whatever else he was, Spurgeon was a Christian theologian, preeminently a “Pastor-Theologian.” He wanted to see the gospel preached and presented in light of a full grasp of the biblical revelation. Whether in apologetics or preaching, Spurgeon looked for fullness, proportion, symmetry, and uncompromised clarity as hallmarks of a faithful presentation of God’s gospel.

Don’t Stop Short

Spurgeon saw no halfway house to the gospel. For him, the only true theology was a fully Christian theology, and any attempt to gain a hearing by stopping short of a fully evangelical presentation of the gospel, even in apologetic situations, was a betrayal of the call of the Christian. “That department of polite literature called Natural Religion leads nowhere and profiteth nothing,” Spurgeon maintained.

An apologetic attempt by R. A. Redford in *The Christian’s Pleas against Modern Unbelief* failed in the lead task of making a truly Christian plea, Spurgeon pointed out. Redford made a noble attempt to create a neutral intellectual position by breaking down the citadel of objections in order to show that theism, the possibility of revelation, the existence of the miraculous, and other foundational issues were not irrational positions. “Our author imagines,” Spurgeon observed, “that *simple theism* may become an adytum to the inner sanctuary of more select evidences.” In his attempt to tear down the *negative*, Redford made a fundamental error by omitting an aggressive proposal of the *positive*. Spurgeon believed that such an approach mistakenly assumes that the philosophical argument for *possibilities* creates *receptivity*. Spurgeon was skeptical of the method and felt that best approach was always an insistence on the full package of the gospel.

Bare theism and natural theology were filling the air “with volatile sentiment, and express[ing] itself in lackadaisical phrases about ‘the benevolence of the Creator,’ ‘the beauty of his works,’ or ‘the traces of design that are scattered through the universe.’” Such affirmations are a “paltry subterfuge” when what such poor souls need is saving faith; no good comes from dalliance with their prejudices. Spurgeon, therefore, believing that it was preposterous for a Christian minister to plead with an infidel to become a theist, proposed a more robust and aggressive approach to dealing with “Modern Unbelief.” His first postulate was, “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” The second was, “He that believeth in God must accept Christ as a mediator.” The third continued, “He that accepteth the one mediator between God and men must receive the atonement.” Any method that encourages

less leaves a person with no reason to rejoice in God or sing praises to Him with spirit and understanding. The use of apologetic methods that focused on creating neutrality and failed to embrace the full presentation of the gospel would be like trying to solve a crime problem by “intreating burglars not to carry fire-arms.”

Spurgeon wanted no theology or apologetic that was not fully Christian and eschewed any method of presentation intended to bring unbelievers only halfway to truth. Such methods tended toward the opinion that openness to theism constituted right standing before God. The cure for limp and languid convictions on theology was a good soaking in the reality of one’s own sin, a perception of the “sovereignty of divine grace, a participation in the renewing work of the Holy Ghost, and an abundant entrance into that life which deals with spiritual and eternal verities.” Theology was not just a right head, much less a half-right head, but a healed heart. Without that, “savage orthodoxy usually begets a frivolous unbelief.”

He was fully in favor, therefore, of apologetic works that aimed at disproving the validity of attacks, either direct or indirect, on the inspiration of Scripture. All parts of the Bible had been “vigorously assailed” at some time, but great powers of faith and ability had come to its defense and “left it more confirmed than before.” Luthardt’s defense of the Johannine authorship of the fourth gospel was worthy of the immense labor involved in its establishment of the authenticity of the history of that book. All biblical students should be grateful to such defenders of the faith for “an attack upon the outworks of inspiration is aimed in reality at the citadel itself.” Zeal for one must accompany zeal for the other.

Spurgeon advocated a pure biblicism for theological construction. He believed, confirming the position of Robert Rainey, that the Scripture contained a perfect system, “gradually developed in the Old Testament, and speedily completed in the New.” When Rainey, however, filled out this biblical system with doctrinal developments in church history and the discoveries of modern times, and pointed to the “corporate teaching capacity” of the church, Spurgeon resisted. He knew of no corporate church and thus of no such teaching capacity. We may gain assistance through others that interpret Scripture doctrines, but no addition to the doctrines themselves may be allowed. “Development of Christian doctrine in the Scriptures is one thing, and the development of those doctrines after the completion of the Scriptures is another.”

These things should not be confounded. Christian doctrine, to the degree that God wants us to know, has mature development in Scripture, and the church may not add to, diminish, amend, or dilute by false synthesis any assertion of the biblical text. We may find a way to give clear teaching on a variety of subjects and seek to show their mature biblical development and relations, and we may surely benefit from

the way Christians through the ages have formulated these biblical truths and their practical applications, but any effort to go beyond the biblical text and its own internal development perverts the truth.

The way Spurgeon related these ideas served as a foundation for his criticism of R. W. Dale's *Laws of Christ for Common Life*. Spurgeon questioned, if not the candor, at least the relevance of Dale's approach, as articulated in his statement, "A man may believe in the Nicene Creed, and in the Creed attributed to Athanasius, or in the confession of Augsburg, or the confession of the Westminster divines; but if he does not believe in the Sermon of the Mount—believe it seriously as containing the laws which must govern his own life—he has denied the faith, and is in revolt against Christ." Spurgeon considered such paragraphs to assert a "vicious irrelevancy," similar to asking if a person preferred Jotham's parable in the book of Judges to Calvin's *Institutes*. The inferences that underlie the comparison amount to a discrediting of the "choicest standards of orthodoxy." Spurgeon asked pointedly if Dale were revolting against all creeds, including those "ancient Catholic Creeds, which sound Protestants, with one consent, were willing to accept."

As for his own part, Spurgeon was jealous for such ancient landmarks, and believed that Dale's resistance to the imposition of any creed on the ministers or members of the Congregational churches could only lead to fragmentation and eventual decline as a force for truth and godliness. "What can you expect if you lack any element of cohesion?" How all of this confessional concern relates to biblical authority Spurgeon revealed when he put forward another inquiry that he felt equally pertinent to Dale's strange proposition. "Why put forward an early discourse of our blessed Redeemer before he had set forth the full purpose of Redemption," Spurgeon queried, "or ever he said, 'The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'—as if the Sermon on the Mount is to be accounted a complete body of divinity?"

Dale's failure at the confessional level extended from an interpretive method that pushed him into misapplication and disfigurement of biblical truth. If one does not see the moral teaching of Christ in light of His redemptive work and humanity's dependence on divine grace, then his supposed preference of the words of Christ to the words of a creed is not that at all—rather, it amounts to a preference of one's own narrow idiosyncratic creed to the confession of the church at large through the centuries. Which of these actually presents the greatest faithfulness to the Bible?

Find the Center

Spurgeon, therefore, looked at the meaning of all texts as expressive of one part of the larger biblical synthesis of meaning. The synthesis that satisfied Spurgeon's overall grasp of biblical teaching was covenant theology. "The subject is the

basis of all theology, and ought to be a chief point of study among believers," he contended. This idea he found perhaps the single most encouraging concept in the Bible. He began a sermon entitled "The Wondrous Covenant" with the words, "The doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology." A preacher who grasps and maintains clarity on the distinctions within the covenant is a master of divinity. "I am persuaded," he affirmed, "that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture are based

"THE DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINE COVENANT LIES AT THE ROOT OF ALL TRUE THEOLOGY."

- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and of grace." In "The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant," Spurgeon asserted that every relation we have with God has a covenant character and "that he will not deal with us except through a covenant, nor can we deal with him except in the same manner." He described the covenant of grace as "made before the foundation of the world between God the Father, and God the Son; or to put it in a yet more scriptural light, it was made mutually between the three divine persons of the adorable Trinity." In this covenant, "Christ stood as man's representative." Though individual men would benefit personally from this arrangement, no individual man stood as a party to the arrangement. "It was a covenant between God with Christ, and through Christ indirectly with all the blood-bought seed who were loved of Christ from the foundation of the world." The power of Spurgeon's theological conceptions and the joy of preaching consisted in grasping and conveying a clear vision of this divine initiative.

It is a noble and glorious thought, the very poetry of that old Calvinistic doctrine which we teach, that long ere the day-star knew its place, before God had spoken existence out

of nothing, before angel's wing had stirred the unnavigated ether, before a solitary song had distributed the solemnity of the silence in which God reigned supreme, He had entered into solemn council with Himself, with His Son, and with His Spirit, and had in that council decreed, determined, proposed, and predestinated the salvation of his people. He had, moreover, in the covenant, arranged the ways and means, and fixed and settled everything which should work together for the effecting of the purpose and the decree.

Within the framework of the covenant, Spurgeon found his only source for the encouragement of Christians; his understanding of the gospel was built on covenant theology; all of God's actions toward creation, sin, redemption, providence, and final consummation were built on the covenant; his own exhilarating spiritual experiences flowed from lengthy meditation on the eternal and sure provisions of the covenant. "My soul flies back now, winged by imagination and by faith, and looks into that mysterious council-chamber, and by faith I behold the Father pledging himself to the Son, and the Son pledging himself to the Father, while the Spirit gives his pledge to both, and thus that divine compact, long to be hidden in darkness, is completed and settled—the covenant which in these latter days has been read in the light of heaven, and has become the joy, and hope, and boast of all the saints."

The sweetest consolation for the despondent saint comes in reflection on the everlasting covenant, an understanding of "what God did for us in past times." Nothing can give joy to the spirit and steel to the soul like a song of "electing love and covenanted mercies." When you are low, Spurgeon advised, it is well to sing of "the fountain-head of mercy," the "blessed decree wherein thou wast ordained to eternal life, and of that glorious Man who undertook thy redemption." To see the "solemn covenant signed, and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well," reflecting that one is an object of eternal electing love, is a "charming means of giving thee songs in the night."

For the sake of planting the reality of the covenant firmly in the minds of his people, Spurgeon loved to set it forth as a discussion between the persons of the triune God, though he knew clearly that he could not tell it "in the glorious celestial tongue in which it was written," but would "bring it down to the speech which suiteth to the ear of flesh, and to the heart of a mortal." The substance was the same in each successive libretto, though the exact words differed in accordance with context. In "The Gracious Lips of Jesus," a sermon preached around 1857, Spurgeon said, "When God the Father originally made the covenant, it stood somewhat in this form."

My Son, thou desirest, and I agree with thee, to save a number, that no man can number, whom I have elected in thee. But in order to their salvation, that I may be

just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly, it is necessary that someone should be their representative, to stand responsible for their obedience to my laws and their substitute to suffer whatever penalties they incur. If thou, my Son, wilt stipulate to bear their punishment, and endure the penalty of their crimes, I on my part will stipulate that thou shalt see thy seed, shalt prolong thy days, and that the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in thy hands. If thou today art prepared to promise that thou wilt bear the exact punishment of all the people whom thou wouldst save, I on my part am prepared to swear by myself, because I can swear by no greater, that all for whom thou shalt atone shall infallibly be delivered from death and hell, and that all for whom thou bearest the punishment shall hence go free, nor shall my wrath rise against them, however great may be their sins.

The conversation continued with an appropriately worded response from the Son in scriptural language, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." On the basis of that covenantal arrangement, all the saints were justified in the mind of God prior to the shedding of one drop of the Redeemer's blood. "The surety's oath was quite enough; in the Father's ears there needed no other confirmation," for by His Son's oath, the Father's heart was satisfied. His Son had sworn to His own hurt and would not change.

Another of these dialogues constructed by Spurgeon included the stipulations made by the Spirit, as well as the agreement entered into by Father and Son. The Father and the Spirit carried one side of the covenant, and the Son the other. The Son carried the side that related to man, while the Father and Spirit, in ways appropriate to each, pledged to honor the work of the Son on behalf of man. Spurgeon imagined the Father speaking thus:

I, the Most High Jehovah, do hereby give unto my only begotten and well-beloved Son, a people, countless beyond the number of stars, who shall be by him washed from sin, by him preserved, and kept, and led, and by him, at last, presented before my throne, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. I covenant by oath, and swear by myself, because I can swear by no greater, that these whom I now give to Christ shall be forever the objects of my eternal love. Them I will forgive through the merit of the blood. To these will I give a perfect righteousness; these will I adopt and make my sons and daughters, and these shall reign with me through Christ eternally.

In the same vein, he envisioned the Spirit in viewing how the Father had given a people to the Son, joined in full harmony,

with the words,

I hereby covenant that all whom the Father giveth to the Son, I will in due time quicken. I will show them their need of redemption; I will cut off from them all groundless hope, and destroy their refuges of lies. I will bring them to the blood of sprinkling; I will give them faith whereby this blood shall be applied to them, I will work in them every grace; I will keep their faith alive; I will cleanse them and drive out all depravity from them, and they shall be presented at last spotless and faultless.

That pledge in the covenant presently is operative, being scrupulously kept. Christ Himself, then, took the other side as the representative of the people, and covenanted with His Father.

My Father, on my part I covenant that in the fullness of time I will become man. I will take upon myself the form and nature of the fallen race. I will live in their wretched world, and for my people I will keep the law perfectly. I will work out a spotless righteousness, which shall be acceptable to the demands of thy just and holy law. In due time I will bear the sins of all my people. Thou shalt exact their debts on me; the chastisement of their peace I will endure, and by my stripes they shall be healed. My Father, I covenant and promise that I will be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. I will magnify thy law, and

make it honorable. I will suffer all they ought to have suffered. I will endure the curse of thy law, and all the vials of thy wrath shall be emptied and spent upon my head. I will then rise again; I will ascend into heaven; I will intercede for them at thy right hand; and I will make myself responsible for every one of them, that not one of those whom thou hast given me shall ever be lost, but I will bring all my sheep of whom, by thy blood, thou hast constituted me the shepherd—I will bring every one safe to thee at last.

On the side of the Son, the covenant is perfectly fulfilled. Only now, He continues to intercede to bring all His blood-bought ones safely to glory.

Given the reality that all things are included in this covenant, should a sinner come to be sure of just one part of it, then he may assume that all of it is his. All parts of it stand or fall together, for the one true God, the triune Jehovah, has pledged as a manifestation of His own glory, faithfulness, and truth to accomplish every part of it—nothing of all events and things can be omitted from the provisions of this covenant for creation, providence, and redemption all serve its end. Thus, if the most lowly and meek of sinners can be assured of forgiveness, he can be denied nothing from the eternal bounties of divine mercies or the temporal goodness of his

providence. “When I know I am pardoned, then I can say all things are mine.” Spurgeon exuded an exhausting amount of spiritual energy on this point and stretched his gifts to the limit in emphasizing it.

"WHEN I SEE THAT COVENANT ROLL, I SAY, "IT IS MINE! AND ALL THE GREAT BOOKS OF ETERNAL PURPOSES AND INFINITE DECREES, ARE MINE! AND WHAT CHRIST DID UPON THE CROSS IS MINE!""

- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

I can look back to the dark past—all things are mine there! I can look at the present—all things are mine here! I can look into the deep future—all things are mine there! Back in eternity, I see God unrolling the mighty volume, and lo! In that volume I read my name. It must be there, for I am pardoned; for whom he calls, he had first predestinated, and whom he pardons, he had first elected. When I see that covenant roll, I say, “It is mine! And all the great books of eternal purposes and infinite decrees, are mine! And what Christ did upon the cross is mine!”

Spurgeon continued in an unrestrained accounting of all the things that the pardoned person could count as his on the basis of the unity and immutability of the covenant. On he went through the list, with some indication as to the purpose of each gift contained in the covenant of grace. All the wheels and circumstances of Providence, afflictions, prosperity, all the promises of the Bible, the future of the earth’s dissolving in a great conflagration, the great judgment, the river of death, the resurrection, and heaven—all belong to the pardoned sinner. “What though there be palaces there of crystal and of gold, that sparkle so as to dim mortal eyes; what though there be delights above even the dream of the voluptuary; what though there be pleasures which heart and flesh could not conceive, and which even spirit itself cannot fully enjoy the very intoxication of bliss; what though there be subtilities unlawful for us to utter, and wonders which mortal men cannot grasp; what though the Divinity hath spent itself in heaven, and doth unravel his glory to make his people blessed—all is mine!” The covenant not only served as the basis for coherent theological construction, but embraced every point of the shield of faith wherewith one could quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.

In Spurgeon’s devotional study *Morning and Evening*, the covenantal arrangements of the triune God consistently make their way into the text. For example, on December 26, for the morning, Spurgeon wrote:

Jesus is the federal head of his elect. As in Adam, every heir of flesh and blood has a personal interest, because he is the covenant head and representative of the race as considered under the law of works; so under the law of grace, every redeemed soul is one with the Lord from heaven, since he is the Second Adam, the Sponsor and Substitute of the elect in the new covenant of love. The apostle Paul declares that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek met him: it is a certain truth that the believer was in the loins of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, when in old eternity the covenant settlements of grace were decreed, ratified, and made

sure forever. Thus, whatever Christ hath done, he hath wrought for the whole body of his Church. We were crucified in him and buried with him, and to make it still more wonderful, we are risen with him and even ascended with him to the seats on high. It is thus that the Church has fulfilled the law, and is “accepted *in the beloved*.” It is thus that she is regarded with complacency by the just Jehovah, for he views her in Jesus, and does not look upon her as separate from her covenant head. As the Anointed Redeemer of Israel, Christ Jesus has nothing distinct from his Church, but all that he has he holds for her. Adam’s righteousness was ours so long as he maintained it, and his sin was ours the moment that he committed it; and in the same manner, all that the Second Adam is or does, is ours as well as his, seeing that he is our representative. Here is the foundation of the covenant of grace. This gracious system of representation and substitution, which moved Justin Martyr to cry out, “O blessed change, O sweet permutation!” this is the very groundwork of the gospel of our salvation, and is to be received with strong faith and rapturous joy.

The theme occupied his thoughts again on the morning of August 26, when he commented on Psalm 111:9, “He hath commanded his covenant forever.”

The Lord’s people delight in the covenant itself. It is an unailing source of consolation to them so often as the Holy Spirit leads them into its banqueting house and waves its banner of love. They delight to contemplate *the antiquity* of that covenant, remembering that before the day-star knew its place, or planets ran their round, the interests of the saints were made secure in Christ Jesus. It is peculiarly pleasing to them to remember *the sureness* of the covenant, while meditating upon “the sure mercies of David.” They delight to celebrate it as “signed, and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well.” It often makes their hearts dilate with joy to think of its *immutability*, as a covenant which neither time nor eternity, life nor death, shall ever be able to violate—a covenant as old as eternity and as everlasting as the Rock of ages. They rejoice also to feast upon *the fullness* of this covenant, for they see in it all things provided for them. God is their portion, Christ their companion, the Spirit their Comforter, earth their lodge, and heaven their home. They see in it an inheritance reserved and entailed to every soul possessing an interest in its ancient and eternal deed of gift. Their eyes sparkled when they saw it as a treasure-trove in the Bible; but oh! how their souls were gladdened when they saw in the last will and testa-

ment of their divine kinsman, that it was bequeathed to them! More especially it is the pleasure of God's people to contemplate *the graciousness* of this covenant. They see that the law was made void because it was a covenant of works and depended upon merit, but this they perceive to be enduring because grace is the basis, grace the condition, grace the strain, grace the bulwark, grace the foundation, grace the top-stone. The covenant is a treasury of wealth, a granary of food, a fountain of life, a storehouse of salvation, a charter of peace, and a haven of joy.

During the year, Spurgeon encouraged spiritual growth by meditation on the covenant in 72 different devotions. March contained only one that spoke of the covenant, while December had nine. The least amount, other than March, was four in June and August.

Sermons regularly employed the covenantal arrangement of salvation as a vital part of his proclamation. The covenant of works made with all mankind through Adam posited life, corporate life, on the basis of obedience, but death for the whole on the occurrence of disobedience. When he fell, we all fell and became inheritors of sin and heirs of wrath, bound to sin and subject to misery. Though the covenant of redemption was made before creation within the eternal will of God appropriate to the distinct operations of each person of the Trinity, Spurgeon viewed its effectuality as dependent most significantly on the Son. In "Christ in the Covenant," he dealt with the place of Christ in the "covenant of eternal salvation" under the assumption that "Christ is the *Sum and substance* of the covenant." He then summarized His attributes as eternal God and perfect man, His offices as prophet, priest and king both in His humiliation and His exaltation, all the works of Christ that He did in our stead, all the fullness of the godhead in bodily form put in motion for empty sinners, the life of Christ in whom His people are hid, and the very person of Christ in His glorious, ravishing, delightful, endearing presence that contains all these other gifts and transcends them by taking us into the depths of pleasure that only may be found at His feet. Consistent with but beyond all the offices and descriptions of attributes, "the person of Christ is the covenant conveyed to you."

Work for Symmetry

Such a lofty center of theology some would convert into an excuse for passivity and pessimism. Not Spurgeon. He saw reason for action and great hope. Scripture was filled with ideas, doctrines and motives to drive us to make our calling, and thus, our election, sure. The Covenant embodied all of divinity in its rich fullness and perfect symmetry—God and man, sin, judgment, and salvation, faith and action, heaven and hell. None need overstep the established boundaries

"SPURGEON AFFIRMED THAT NONE NEED FEAR THE "MOST HIGH AND SUBLIME DOCTRINES" OF DIVINE REVELATION.

of revelation or understate the things surely revealed. If we know that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more, we need not conclude that we magnify grace by pursuing sin. Spurgeon discovered as one of the treasures of divine revelation its power to halt the fallacious journeys of our sophomoric and sinful logic.

In a sermon on Deuteronomy 22:8, entitled "Battlements," Spurgeon expressed his view of the expositor's task in deriving theological ideas from Scripture. Battlements were placed around the roves of houses to protect children, or inattentive adults, from falling off the roof to their death. While this implies, from the practical side, our obligation to do what we can for the temporal safety and wellbeing of our fellow man, its more profound application is that we not overstep designated boundaries for the spiritual and eternal safety of our own souls and the souls of others.

Spurgeon affirmed that none need fear the "most high and sublime doctrines" of divine revelation, for God had "battlemented" it. No one need fear the doctrines of election, eternal and immutable love, or any point of revelation concerning the covenant of grace. It is a high and glorious truth, a truth of clear revelation, that "God hath from the beginning chosen his people unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth." Many simpletons, however, have perverted this doctrine, perhaps some purposefully, into antinomianism, leaping over the battlements God has placed around it. Not only does God have a chosen people, but those will be known by the fruits of holiness, and their zeal for

good works; not only will they be forgiven of sin, but purged from sin. The same holds true for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints—“A housetop doctrine indeed!”—in that while it holds great promise and comfort for the believer, yet battlements are in place to prevent its abuse. Spurgeon quoted Hebrews 6 and other warnings as applicable to Christians in order to show that “if the first salvation could have spent itself unavailingly, there would be no alternative, but a certain looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation.” Even so, in the doctrine of justification, the free, unmerited declaration of righteousness by which God pronounces the ungodly forgiven and esteemed as law-keepers, if no sanctification follows, then the presence of justifying faith is dubious. “Where faith is genuine, through the Holy Spirit’s power, it works a cleansing from sin, a hatred of evil, an anxious desire after holiness, and it leads the soul to aspire after the image of God.” Paul and James cooperate in making sure both tower and battlement are in place. “Thus is each doctrine balanced, bulwarked, and guarded.”

He explained the necessity of seeking such biblically integrated doctrinal fullness as a special stewardship for the preacher. Expounding the subject of faith and regeneration in 1871, Spurgeon gave insight into the dangers and difficulties involved in this pastoral delicacy. In making “full proof of his ministry” a pastor requires much divine teaching, not only in the manner and spirit of his ministry, but also much in the matter of his ministry. “One point of difficulty,” Spurgeon advised, “will be to preach the whole truth in fair proportion, never exaggerating one doctrine, never enforcing one point, at the expense of another, never keeping back any part, nor yet allowing it undue prominence.” Practical result depends on an equal balance (symmetry and proportion as Jonathan Edwards would say) and a right dividing of the Word.

One vital doctrinal area where much depends on such proper relationship is in the positioning of the work of Christ for us, and outside of us, and the operations of the Spirit within us. “Justification by faith is a matter about which there must be no obscurity, much less equivocation; and at the same time we must distinctly and determinately insist upon it that regeneration is necessary to every soul that shall enter heaven,” for Christ Himself has made it essential. Spurgeon feared that “some zealous brethren have preached the doctrine of justification by faith not only so boldly and so plainly, but also so baldly and so out of all connection with other truth, that they have led men into presumptuous confidences, and have appeared to lend their countenance to a species of Antinomianism.” A dead, inoperative faith should be dreaded, and special attention must be given to avoiding it. To stand and proclaim “believe, believe, believe,” without explanation as to the nature of faith, “to lay the whole stress of salvation upon faith without explaining what salvation is, and showing that it means deliverance from the power as well as from the

guilt of sin, may seem to a fervent revivalist to be the proper thing for the occasion, but those who have watched the result of such teaching have had grave cause to question whether as much hurt may not be done by it as good.”

At the same time, Spurgeon saw an equal danger in the other extreme. While the emphasis on the new creature as necessary to salvation is clearly biblical, “some have seen so clearly the importance of this truth that they are forever and always dwelling upon the great change of conversion, and its fruits, and its consequences, and they hardly appear to remember the glad tidings that whosoever believeth on Christ Jesus hath everlasting life. Some have set so high a standard of experience and have been so “exacting as to the marks and signs of a true born child of God, that they greatly discourage sincere seekers, and fall into a species of legality” that is just as necessary to be avoided as antinomian fideism. The sinner, deeply aware of his damnable failings, must never receive the impression that he is to look within for the ground of his acceptance before God, but must see clearly “the undoubted truth that true faith in Jesus Christ saves the soul, for if we do not we shall hold in legal bondage many who ought long ago to have enjoyed peace, and to have entered into the liberty of the children of God.”

Spurgeon proposed that the perfect balance in the connection of these doctrines appears in the third chapter of John, where both the necessity and secret sovereignty of the Spirit are taught, along with the powers of simple faith in Christ. “So, too, in the chapter before us,” Spurgeon said in calling

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BE GIVEN TO
AVOIDING IT.**

his congregation's attention to John 3, "he insists upon a man's being born of God; he brings that up again and again, but evermore does he ascribe wondrous efficacy to faith; he mentions faith as the index of our being born again, faith as overcoming the world, faith as possessing the inward witness, faith as having eternal life—indeed, he seems as if he could not heap honor enough upon believing, while at the same time he insists upon the grave importance of the inward experience connected with the new birth." As a true Pastor-Theologian, Spurgeon insisted, "I earnestly long that these two doctrines may be well balanced in your souls."

Conclusion

Like Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon saw a coherent, biblically induced, systematically arranged theology as foundational, not only to the Christian ministry, but to a healthy

Christian life. The theme that most naturally embraced all the doctrines of Scripture and from which they radiate in perfect symmetry is the eternal covenant of redemption. In explicating this covenant faithfully, giving due attention to all its truths in their proper relation to each other and to the central purpose of the covenant, the minister will give opportunity for the right integration of truth in the spiritual formation of Christ's sheep—repentance and faith, fear and hope, examination and confidence, justification by imputation and sanctification by the renewing of the mind, rest in Christ's perfect work and pursuit of Christ-likeness. Pastors, arise! Be theologians that our churches may be inhabited by Christians indeed that know the hope of their calling and desire to walk worthy of that calling. ♦

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*“WHERE THE SPIRIT
OF GOD IS, THERE
IS POWER”:*

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO SPURGEON'S
TEACHING ON THE
HOLY SPIRIT**

MICHEAL A. G. HAYKIN

C. H. Spurgeon

A detailed portrait of Charles H. Spurgeon, a prominent English Baptist preacher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is styled in a wavy, side-parted manner. The portrait is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the purple text box.

The love of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) for the Puritans and their writings is well known. As a very young boy, he had the privilege of spending a number of years in the manse occupied by his grandfather, James Spurgeon, pastor of the Congregational church in the village of Stambourne in the heart of rural Essex. Here he discovered a library of Puritan folios, collected by Henry Havers (1620–ca. 1712), who had pastored the Stambourne church after his ejection from the Church of England in 1662 when he refused to comply with the Act of Uniformity. Despite Spurgeon’s tender years and the fact that as a young child he found it very difficult to lift these large and weighty Puritan volumes, he would later write that, as a boy, he was never happier than when in the company of these Puritan authors.

After his conversion in January of 1850 at a small Primitive Methodist chapel, Spurgeon collected original Puritan editions with zest and fervor. Not content with reading the works of these seventeenth-century authors himself, he never ceased to recommend them to his fellow believers. For instance, in a sermon entitled “Paul—His Cloak and His Books,” which Spurgeon preached in November of 1863, he urged his hearers to follow the Apostle Paul’s example and to read good books.

Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying.

Spurgeon was especially convinced that wide exposure to the Puritans was a vital part of ministerial training. Thus, at his Pastors College, which was founded in 1856, the theology that was taught was rooted in the Puritans. In defense of this methodology, Spurgeon said:

We are old-fashioned enough to prefer Manton to Maurice, Charnock to Robertson, and Owen to Voysey. Both our experience and our reading of the Scriptures confirm us in the belief of the unfashionable doctrines of grace; and among us, upon those grand fundamentals, there is no uncertain sound.

Indeed, Spurgeon was rightly convinced that it was commitment to these doctrines that had preserved the Baptist denomination over the centuries.

One of the distinctive marks of Puritan theology is its emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Numerous

authors over the years have commented on this particular characteristic. B. B. Warfield, Spurgeon’s younger contemporary, noted eight years after Spurgeon’s death:

The developed doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine.... Puritan thought was almost entirely occupied with loving study of the work of the Holy Spirit, and found its highest expression in dogmatico-practical expositions of the several aspects of it.

More recently, Richard F. Lovelace has reiterated Warfield’s judgment and maintained that “the English Puritans (particularly John Owen and Richard Sibbes) have given us the most profound and extensive biblical-theological studies of the ministry of the Holy Spirit which exist in any language.” Given Spurgeon’s love for and constant study of the Puritans, it is not at all surprising that this leading characteristic of Puritanism is also reproduced in Spurgeon’s sermons and writings. In fact, so extensive is the material by Spurgeon on the person and work of the Spirit that it would take a monograph devoted to the subject to do real justice to his teaching on the Holy Spirit. The following study has a much more modest goal, namely, to provide an introduction to the Baptist preacher’s doctrine of the Spirit by focusing on his conviction that “where the Spirit of God is, there is power.”

During 1859, when a powerful revival swept through much of Great Britain, Spurgeon preached a series of sermons on what are sometimes referred to as “the five points of Calvinism.” He was firmly convinced that the proclamation of these doctrines would help further the revival that was then underway. One of these sermons, entitled “The Necessity of the Spirit’s Work,” begins by sketching the biblical teaching on men and women outside of Christ: they are dead in sin, “utterly and entirely averse to everything that is good and right,” totally unwilling to come to Christ. Only the Spirit, Spurgeon avers, can remedy this situation; He alone can change the will, “correct the bias of the heart,” set men and women on the right road, and “give [them] strength to run in it.” When Spurgeon turns to examine the means by which the Spirit brings men and women to Christ—for instance, the preaching of the Word—and the means by which He takes them on to maturity—for example, baptism and the Lord’s Supper—he finds that all of these means are completely inadequate unless the Spirit deigns to use them. Indeed, Spurgeon stresses, until the Spirit calls the unbeliever out of the darkness into the light of God’s kingdom, his or her “election is a dead letter.” Likewise, the redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus is of no avail, until the Spirit applies Christ’s redemptive work to the soul:

"IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR US TO PROMOTE THE GLORY OF GOD OR TO BLESS THE SOULS OF MEN, UNLESS THE HOLY GHOST SHALL BE IN US AND WITH US."

- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

Christ's blood and righteousness are like wine stored in the wine-vat; but we cannot get thereat. The Holy Spirit dips our vessel into this precious wine, and then we drink; but without the Spirit we must die and perish just as much, though the Father elect and the Son redeem, as though the Father had never elected, and though the Son had never bought us with his blood. The Spirit is absolutely necessary. Without him neither the works of the Father, nor of the Son, are of any avail to us.

Spurgeon concludes this sermon by stressing that the vital necessity of the Spirit's work in the believer does not come to an end at conversion; for "the acceptable acts of the Christian's life, cannot be performed without the Spirit."

Four years later, preaching on Acts 2:1-4, Spurgeon again emphasizes "how absolutely necessary is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit":

It is not possible for us to promote the glory of God

or to bless the souls of men, unless the Holy Ghost shall be in us and with us. Those who were assembled on that memorable day of Pentecost, were all men of prayer and faith; but even these precious gifts are only available when the celestial fire sets them on a blaze . . . [E]ven these favoured and honoured saints can do nothing without the breath of God the Holy Ghost . . . [I]f so it was with them, much more must it be the case with us. Let us beware of trusting to our well-adjusted machineries of committees and schemes; let us be jealous of all reliance upon our own mental faculties or religious vigour; let us be careful that we do not look too much to our leading preachers and evangelists, for if we put any of these in the place of the Divine Spirit, we shall err most fatally.

This absolute need of the Spirit on the part of the church and of the individual believer is a constant refrain in Spurgeon's sermons and writings over the next twenty-nine years until his death in 1892. For instance, in a sermon preached in 1864 entitled "The Superlative Excellence of the Holy Spirit," he challenges his hearers:

Do not say that we want money; we shall have it soon enough when the Spirit touches men's hearts. Do not say that we want buildings, churches, edifices; all these may be very well in subserviency, but the main want of the Church is the Spirit, and men into whom the Spirit may be poured.

Thus, Spurgeon was constrained to pray in the middle of the sermon: "Come, Holy Spirit, come, we can do nothing without thee; but if we have thy wind, we spread our sail, and speed onward towards glory."

The church's need of the Spirit carries with it certain responsibilities, and Spurgeon, like his beloved Puritans, was not slow to point these out. In "The Superlative Excellence of the Holy Spirit," Spurgeon emphasizes that the Spirit must be treated with "deep awe and reverence." Believers must be careful not to grieve Him or provoke Him to anger through sin. Moreover:

If the Holy Spirit be indeed so mighty, let us do nothing without him; let us begin no project, and carry on no enterprise, and conclude no transaction, without imploring his blessing.

In a later sermon, entitled "The Paraclete," which was preached in 1872, Spurgeon reminded his audience that if they truly considered the Spirit to be their "sole force," then they ought to:

Love the Spirit, worship the Spirit, trust the Spirit, obey the Spirit, and, as a church, cry mightily to the Spirit. Beseech him to let his mighty power be known and felt among you.

And, putting his own advice into practice, Spurgeon went on to cry: “Come, Holy Spirit now! Thou art with us, but come with power and let us feel thy sacred might!”

Spurgeon was all too well aware of the consequences of failing to heed such advice. In a sermon preached two years before “The Paraclete,” the Baptist preacher laid before the congregation of the Metropolitan Tabernacle what he called “A Most Needful Prayer Concerning the Holy Spirit.” His text was the prayer of David in Psalm 51:11: “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” After a personal confession, in which Spurgeon declared that he “would sooner die a thousand times, than lose the helpful presence of the Holy Ghost,” he used a vivid illustration, fresh in the minds of his hearers, to depict the church from which the Spirit has departed. On the other side of the English Channel, the Franco-Prussian War was raging, and, as Spurgeon preached, the war was going badly for the French, who would suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians at the end of that year. “Any church from which the Spirit has departed,” Spurgeon declared,

becomes very like that great empire with whose military glory the world was dazzled, and whose strength made the nations tremble. France, mistress of arms, queen of beauty, arbiter of politics, how soon has she fallen! . . . The nation once so great now lies bleeding at her victor’s feet, pitied of us all none the less because her folly continues the useless fight. Just so have we seen it in churches; may we never so see it here.

Spurgeon turns to the geography of Egypt to drive his point home even further. Areas of land in Egypt that were once fertile because of life-giving irrigation canals drawn from the Nile River are now desert simply because these canals have been allowed to lapse into disuse. So it is with churches, Spurgeon emphasizes:

[C]hurches irrigated by the Spirit once produced rich harvests of souls; left of the Spirit the sand of the world has covered them, and where once all was green and beautiful there is nothing but the former howling wilderness.

Sticking with Egypt for a further illustration, Spurgeon takes up an aspect of the history of that land. The nineteenth century witnessed the systematic ransacking of the Egyptian pyramids by European archaeologists and explorers. Prominent amongst the treasures found in these pyramids were the

mummified bodies of the Pharaohs. Spurgeon clearly has little sympathy with the removal of these bodies of the ancient Egyptian kings. Their discovery and exposure to “every vulgar eye” awakens in Spurgeon “melancholy reflections.” These poor mummies, “once a Pharaoh whose voice could shake a nation and devastate continents,” are now mere objects for a museum. And now Spurgeon draws the comparison with the local church:

[A]live by the divine indwelling, God gives it royalty, and makes it a king and priest unto himself among the sons of men; its influence is felt further than it dreams; the world trembles at it, for it is fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners; but when the Spirit of God is departed, what remains but its old records, ancient creeds, title-deeds, traditions, histories and memories? it is in fact a mummy of a church rather than a church of God, and it is better fitted to be looked at by antiquarians than to be treated as an existent agency.

Spurgeon was also insistent that those who pastor and preach be continually conscious of their deep need of the Spirit of God. At his Pastors’ College he particularly sought to inculcate in the mind and hearts of the students such a consciousness. The College had begun in 1856 with one student, Thomas W. Medhurst (1834–1917). By 1877, there were a hundred and ten attending the college full-time. That same year, Spurgeon published his *Second Series of Lectures to My Students*, a series of addresses that he had regularly given at the college on Friday afternoons. In the first volume of lectures, which he admitted were more akin to sermons than lectures, Spurgeon had explored the pastor’s life as it relates to his walk with God, his preaching, and his health. In this second book Spurgeon treated, amongst other things, the pastor’s relationship to the Holy Spirit. After initial remarks on the reality of the Spirit’s existence, Spurgeon comes to what he describes in no uncertain terms as “the core of our subject.” For those who are ministers, he solemnly declares:

[T]he Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Without Him our office is a mere name. We claim no priesthood over and above that which belongs to every child of God; but we are the successors of those who, in olden times, were moved of God to declare His word, to testify against transgression, and to lead His cause. Unless we have the spirit of the prophets resting upon us, the mantle which we wear is nothing but a rough garment to deceive. We ought to be driven forth with abhorrence from the society of honest men for daring to speak in the name of the Lord if the Spirit of God rests not upon us.

In what areas, Spurgeon goes on to ask, should those in pastoral ministry especially seek the help of the Spirit? Spurgeon proceeds to answer this question with a list of eight areas in which the Spirit's aid is vital. Quoting John 16:13, a favorite passage of his when it came to discussing the work of the Spirit, Spurgeon states that the Spirit is the "Spirit of knowledge." He opens up the Scriptures and takes especial delight in focusing the pastor's attention on "the centre of our testimony," the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit is also the "Spirit of wisdom," the one who gives the ability rightly to apply the knowledge obtained from the study of Scripture and to preach with balance. For instance, Spurgeon is convinced that

many brethren who preach human responsibility deliver themselves in so legal a manner as to disgust all those who love the doctrines of grace. On the other hand, I fear that many have preached the sovereignty of God in such a way as to drive all persons who believe in man's free agency entirely away from the Calvinistic side. We should not hide the truth for a moment, but we should have wisdom so to preach it that there shall be no needless jarring or offending.

Then the Spirit is needed to give fluency of speech and freedom in preaching. Comparing the Spirit to the live coal from the altar in the vision of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 6:6), Spurgeon states:

Oh, how gloriously a man speaks when his lips are blistered with the live coal from the altar—feeling the burning power of the truth, not only in his inmost soul, but on the very lip with which he is speaking!

The Spirit's fourth aid in preaching is as "an anointing oil" on the preacher as he preaches, that is, enabling his mind and heart to be wrapped up in the subject of the sermon. A final way in which the Spirit helps in preaching is to produce effects in those who listen.

Miracles of grace must be the seals of our ministry; who can bestow them but the Spirit of God? Convert a soul without the Spirit of God! Why, you cannot even make a fly, much less create a new heart and a right spirit . . . Therefore, with strong crying and tears, wait upon him from day to day.

Little wonder, Spurgeon comments, that the root cause of many useless ministries lies in the "lack of distinctly recognizing the power of the Holy Ghost."

A remarkable illustration of Spurgeon's own dependence upon the Spirit in the pulpit occurs in his *Autobiography*. Discussing instances of striking conversions under his preach-

ing ministry, he relates that on one occasion he deliberately pointed to a man in the congregation and said:

There is a man sitting there, who is a shoemaker; he keeps his shop open on Sundays, it was open last Sabbath morning, he took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit out of it; his soul is sold to Satan for fourpence!" A city missionary, when going his rounds met with this man, and seeing that he was reading one of my sermons, he asked the question, "Do you know Mr. Spurgeon?" "Yes," replied the man, "I have every reason to know him, I have been to hear him; and, under his preaching, by God's grace I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Shall I tell you how it happened? I went to the Music Hall, and took my seat in the middle of the place; Mr. Spurgeon looked at me as if he knew me, and in his sermon he pointed to me, and told the congregation that I was a shoemaker, and that I kept my shop open on Sundays; and I did, sir. I should not have minded that; but he also said that I took ninepence the Sunday before, and there was fourpence profit out of it. I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was just the profit; but how he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me; but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me, and saved my soul.

Spurgeon went on to say that there were as "many as a dozen similar cases" in which he

pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly."

The work of the ministry, though, contains more than preaching and its preparation in the study. There is also the important matter of prayer. Central to the minister's life is "praying in the Holy Spirit," and, Spurgeon rightly advises, "that minister who does not think so had better escape from his ministry." But, to maintain this life of communion with God, the minister needs "secret oil to be poured upon the sacred fire of [his] heart's devotion"; he wants "again and again [to be] visited by the Spirit of grace and supplications" (cf

Zech 12:10). Then, the minister also needs the Spirit to walk in holiness in every area of his life and to keep himself “unspotted from the world.” Finally, those in pastoral ministry have much need of discernment in their dealings with men and women, and here again the Spirit is absolutely necessary, “for He knows the minds of men as He knows the mind of God.”

Spurgeon is well aware that this list of ways in which the pastor needs the Spirit’s help is far from complete, but evidently his time was running out, and he wanted to remind his listeners (and later, his readers) that the Spirit’s necessary assistance may be lost.

[I]t is certain that ministers may lose the aid of the Holy Ghost . . . You shall not perish as believers, for everlasting life is in you; but you may perish as ministers, and be no more heard of as witnesses for the Lord.

If this happens, there is surely a reason. Spurgeon gives a list of reasons, ranging from disobedience to the Spirit’s promptings to neglect of private prayer. A gallery of individuals from Scripture who experienced the withdrawal of the Spirit’s power then follows: some, like Balaam, were sons of perdition; others, like Samson, were children of God. In the light of these examples, Spurgeon can only pray for himself, his hearers, and his readers: “O for the Spirit of God to make and keep us alive unto God, faithful to our office, and useful to our generation, and clear of the blood of men’s souls.”

"MIRACLES OF GRACE MUST BE SEALS OF OUR MINISTRY; WHO CAN BESTOW THEM BUT THE SPIRIT OF GOD?"

- CHARLES H. SPURGEON

One of the main ways that Spurgeon kept in touch with graduates of the College was through the College Conference. First held for five days in March of 1865, it was soon shifted to the month of September. An eagerly anticipated occasion, the annual conference helped to revive the flagging spirits of many of the graduates who labored in difficult circumstances in remote areas of the country or in urban areas hardened against the gospel and dangerous to health. The late 1880s, however, saw the disruption of this Conference as Spurgeon sought to repel what he rightly saw as the encroachment of liberal theology on English Baptist churches. A good number of the graduates of his College, though, failed to take his side in what came to be called the “Down-Grade Controversy.” The annual Conference was consequently re-formed, and from 1888 on, this re-formed Conference met in the month of April.

The theme of the Conference in 1891, the last one that Spurgeon ever attended, was the work of the Spirit. As the President of the Pastors’ College, Spurgeon gave what was his customary Presidential Address on the morning of Tuesday, April 21. This address, which took close to an hour and a half to deliver, was later published as *The Greatest Fight in the World* and was considered by Spurgeon as a concise declaration of his position vis-à-vis the Down-Grade Controversy. The address is divided into three parts: our armory, namely, the Word of God; our army, namely, the church of God; and our strength, namely, the Spirit of God. Nearly half of the talk is devoted to a defense of God’s Word as infallible and perfect, a reflection of the fact that among the central issues of the Down-Grade Controversy was the nature of Scripture.

When Spurgeon comes to the final part of the address, he begins by highlighting the fact that the pastor’s dependence upon the Spirit must be a practical reality, and not merely something theoretical. For instance, having read the *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* by the Calvinistic Baptist Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) or *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* by the Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683) does not mean that one knows the truths discussed in these books; “we know nothing till we are taught by the Holy Ghost, who speaks to the heart.” Spurgeon then details a few areas in which the pastor must depend upon the Spirit, all of which would have been familiar territory to graduates of the Pastors’ College who had heard Spurgeon’s Friday afternoon lectures.

From the work of the Spirit, Spurgeon turns to the pastor’s experience of the Spirit, and he gives his audience the timeless reminder that “when the Spirit of God is gone, even truth itself becomes an iceberg.” A few remarks on how best to secure the Spirit’s help then follow. In this regard, Spurgeon especially urges his hearers never to consider the Holy Spirit as anything less than a fully divine person.

Worship him [that is, the Spirit] as the adorable Lord

God. Never call the Holy Spirit "it"; nor speak of him as if he were a doctrine, or an influence, or an orthodox myth. Reverence him, love him, and trust him with familiar yet reverent confidence. He is God, let him be God to you.

Behind this statement is Spurgeon's concern that there was a slippage in English Baptist circles regarding the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Four years earlier, at the beginning of the Down-Grade Controversy, Spurgeon had outlined a number of areas that he considered to be threatened by the inroads of liberal theology:

The Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Spirit is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin is turned into fiction, and the resurrection into a myth.

While controversy over the personhood of the Spirit was not a prominent aspect of the Down-Grade Controversy, Spurgeon was well aware that acceptance of the other key tenets of liberal theology invariably led to a rejection of this

THE MINISTER NEEDS THE SPIRIT TO WALK IN HOLINESS IN EVERY AREA OF HIS LIFE AND TO KEEP HIMSELF "UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD."

precious biblical truth. He would no doubt have appreciated the recent warning of Peter Berger, a Christian social scientist: "He who supps with the devil of modernity had better have a long spoon." Firmly attached to the personhood of the Spirit from the earliest days of his ministry, Spurgeon was convinced that

A gospel without the Trinity!—it is a rope of sand that cannot hold together . . . Get the thought of the three persons, and you have the marrow of all divinity. Only know the Father, and know the Son, and know the Holy Ghost to be one, and all things will be clear.

In other words, the doctrine of three persons in one Godhead is an essential foundation of both the proclamation of the gospel and the study of theology.

Spurgeon concludes this address with a lengthy reminder of some things that the Spirit will never do. For instance, the Spirit will never bless compromises with doctrinal error or sin—a truth burned afresh into Spurgeon's heart and soul during the Down-Grade Controversy. Neither will the Spirit sanction laziness; He is no "friend of loiterers." Nor will He have anything to do with those who preach not Christ.

If we do not make the Lord Jesus glorious; if we do not lift him high in the esteem of men, if we do not labour to make him King of kings, and Lord of lords; we shall not have the Holy Spirit with us. Vain will be rhetoric, music, architecture, energy, and social status; if our one design be not to magnify the Lord Jesus, we shall work alone and work in vain.

Or, as Spurgeon quaintly puts it in "Receiving the Holy Ghost," preached in July of 1884: "the Holy Spirit always keeps sweet company with Jesus Christ."

Many years before, when Spurgeon was in his first pastorate in the hamlet of Waterbeach, he penned a letter to his uncle in which he expressed the wish to be employed not only in Waterbeach but wherever he might be able to serve Christ. "I often wish," he wrote:

I were in China, India, or Africa, so that I might preach, preach, preach all day long. It would be sweet to die preaching. But I want more of the Holy Spirit; I do not feel enough—no, not half enough,—of His Divine energy. "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" Then men must be converted; then the wicked would repent, and the just grow in grace.

Quite evident in this letter, written when Spurgeon was but nineteen years of age, is Spurgeon's tremendous sensitivity to the absolute necessity of the help of the Holy Spirit in his

preaching and ministry. It was a sensitivity which would stay with him throughout his life, as we have seen. It is a sensitivity that explains much about his remarkable ministry. Yet, it is also a sensitivity that serves as an encouragement and a chal-

lenge to us in our godless and needy age. Yes, indeed, "where the Spirit of God, there is power": power to live for Christ and power to bring glory to His person.



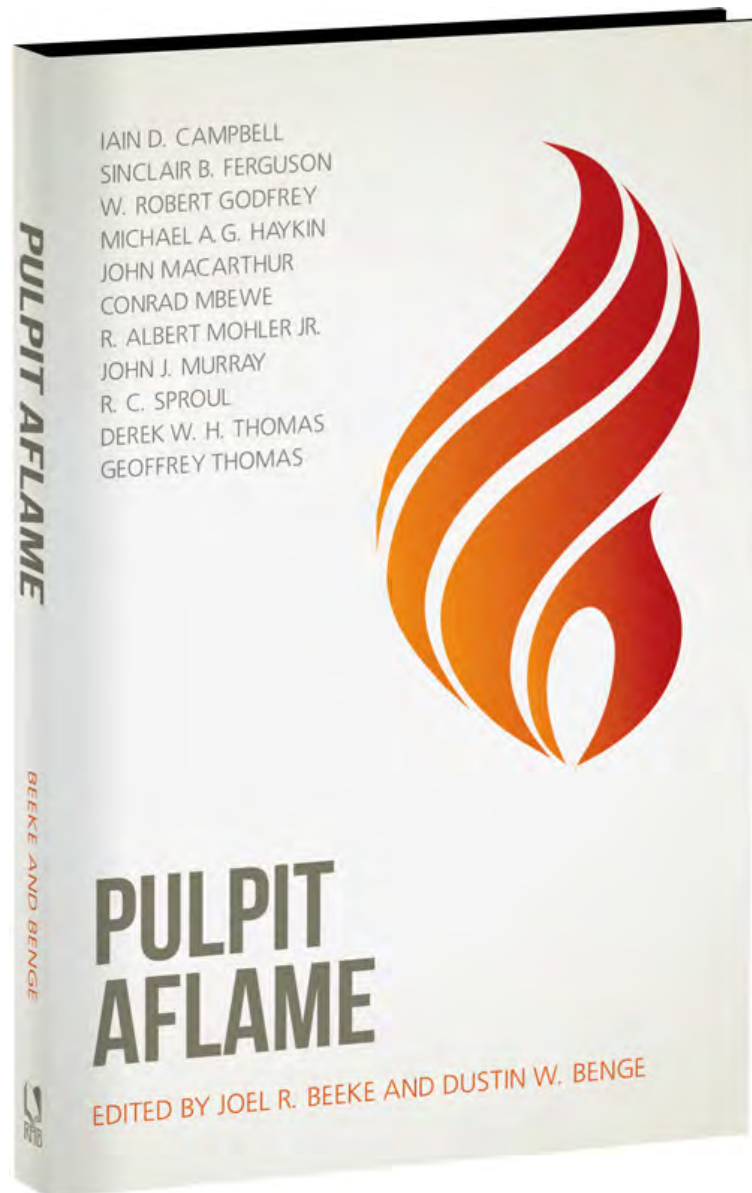
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Pulpit Aflame was presented to Dr. Lawson at the Ligonier West Coast Conference in Seattle, WA on Friday, June 3.

The apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “preach the word! . . . Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). This instruction is in keeping with the principle reflected in the book of Acts that the proclamation of God’s Word is the heart of corporate worship. Yet in many churches, preaching is in decline under the influence of a culture that prefers entertainment to exposition. In this volume, fourteen experienced preachers reaffirm the centrality of preaching in the life of the church as they explore what the Scriptures have to say about the mandate, meaning, motivation, and method of preaching. With wisdom and conviction, the authors remind the church that God works through the faithful preaching of His Word, no less in the twenty-first century than in the first.

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THE
PULPIT

with JOHN MACARTHUR

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS OWN

Through Jesus Christ, every believer has been granted direct access to the very throne room of God. Each can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace [and] receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Though formerly His enemies, they have been reconciled to God, having been adopted into His family “through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:26). Because they are His children, the glorious God of the universe graciously, willingly, and lovingly responds to their prayers, no matter how small or feeble they may seem.

In addition to personal prayers, believers also have the prayers of others, who intercede on their behalf. The apostle Paul emphasized the need for that kind of intercession in the closing paragraphs of his epistle to the Ephesians:

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Eph. 6:18–20)

Having just warned his readers about the reality of spiritual warfare, Paul stressed the critical importance of making supplication “for all the saints” (v. 18). “Pray for us” is a recurring theme throughout his letters.

The intercession of Christians for each other is an essential element of the church’s spiritual life, and the New Testament contains numerous examples of it.

But other Christians are not the only ones who intercede on behalf of the believer. The Holy “Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26).

The skewed perspectives, human imperfections, and spiritual limitations that plague Christians in this life keep them from praying as they ought to pray—in absolute consistency with God’s will. But the indwelling Spirit intercedes on behalf of each Christian, faithfully bringing his needs before God even when he is confused as to what those needs truly are.

The Spirit’s prayers are always answered “because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (v. 27). Yet, beyond all of that there is another who prays for believers—none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “seated at the right

hand of God” (Col. 3:1) and “always lives to make intercession for [His people]” (Heb. 7:25). Like the Spirit, the blessed Christ intercedes continually for His own, often in response to the accusations of Satan, and always in accord with the will of God. His mediatorial work of intercession is as real and indispensable as His work of atonement.

It was the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that gave believers eternal life; it is His intercessory work for them that sustains that life, bringing them from justification, through sanctification, to glorification. His intercession is the guarantee that undergirds Christ’s promise,

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. . . . For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:37, 40).

Christ’s prayer in John 17 provides a priceless preview of His current intercessory work, which did not formally begin until after His ascension. In entrusting His followers to His Father, interceding on their behalf just a few hours before the cross, Jesus vividly displayed the profound depths of both His communion with God and His compassion for His own.

This petition marks the transition from His earthly to His heavenly ministry. After completing His work of redemption on the cross and triumphing over sin, death, and the forces of hell, Jesus ascended to heaven. There, He continually “intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:34) while seated “at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).

The prayer itself has been divided into three sections. In the first section (vv. 1–5) Jesus prayed for His glory; in the last section (vv. 20–26) He prayed for all believers. But between those first and last sections, the Lord prayed specifically for the eleven disciples—as those whom the Father had given Him (vv. 6–10), and as those whom He was about to leave (vv. 11–19).

All twelve disciples had been present in the upper room when Jesus humbly washed their feet (13:5), and when they ate a final meal together (13:12). But not all twelve were true disciples. One of them, Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, was a traitor (13:21)—a characteristic that he had hidden from everyone else except Christ (13:11). In fact, when Jesus mentioned that someone would betray Him, none of the other disciples even suspected Judas (13:22).

After exposing Judas as the betrayer, He said to him, “What you do, do quickly” (13:27). But even then, the other disciples did not know “for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, ‘Buy the things we have need of for the feast’; or else, that he should give something to the poor” (13:28–29).

With Judas gone, only the eleven remained. (After the events of the resurrection and ascension, Matthias would be chosen as Judas’s replacement [Acts 1:26].) It was to them that

THEY WERE ORDINARY MEN, WITH ORDINARY WEAKNESSES.

Jesus spoke the profound words of the upper room discourse (in chapters 14–16). And it was for them that Jesus specifically prayed in verses 6–19. A quick survey of the behavior of those eleven men underscores the necessity of Jesus’ prayer on their behalf.

First among the apostles was Peter, whose characteristic outspokenness had earned him a dire rebuke from the Lord earlier that evening. After impetuously promising that he would die for Jesus, he heard this chilling reply: “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times” (John 13:38). Peter, who had been concerned about who would betray his Master (13:24), must have been profoundly distraught by the Lord’s prediction about him. This, compounded by the realization that Jesus was going away, surely weighed heavy on his heart as he heard the Lord’s intercession on his behalf.

The other disciples were similarly distraught at the thought of Christ’s absence. Their own weakness and seeming lack of readiness would have been an inescapable concern. None of them appear particularly savvy or resourceful. They were not highly educated (Acts 4:13), nor did they have much in the way of material resources, since they had given up everything to follow Jesus

Others came from even less prestigious backgrounds. Matthew had been a tax collector (Matt. 9:9) and was thereby despised by the Jews; while Simon had been a political revolutionary and was thereby despised by the Romans.

They were ordinary men, with ordinary weaknesses. Peter was impetuous; Thomas was a skeptic (John 20:25); and James and John were hotheaded “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Like Philip (John 6:5–7; 14:8), the rest lacked spiritual perception. Like Thaddeus (John 14:22), they all failed to understand Christ’s role in His first coming (as the Suffering Servant). Like the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:21–22), they all evidenced pride and a desire to hold a preeminent position (Matt. 20:24).

And like Peter (John 13:38), whose name meant “rock” (Matt. 16:18), they all became cowards when the Lord was arrested (John 16:32). In fact, their spiritual resolve was such that when they were supposed to be praying, at the moment of

Christ’s supreme agony (Luke 22:44), Jesus found them sleeping (v. 46).

From a human perspective, this ragamuffin group of followers was anything but extraordinary or impressive. Yet they were called to continue Jesus’ work in the world after He was gone—having been given the responsibility of taking the gospel throughout the world (Matt. 28:18–20), and shepherding the church through their teaching and oversight.

They played a vital role in the future of the Christian faith, because God had chosen them to tell the world of redemption through His Son. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus interceded for them, and that the bulk of His prayer concentrates on these eleven men. His confidence was not in their resolve or resourcefulness (of which they had little), but in the power and love of His Father.

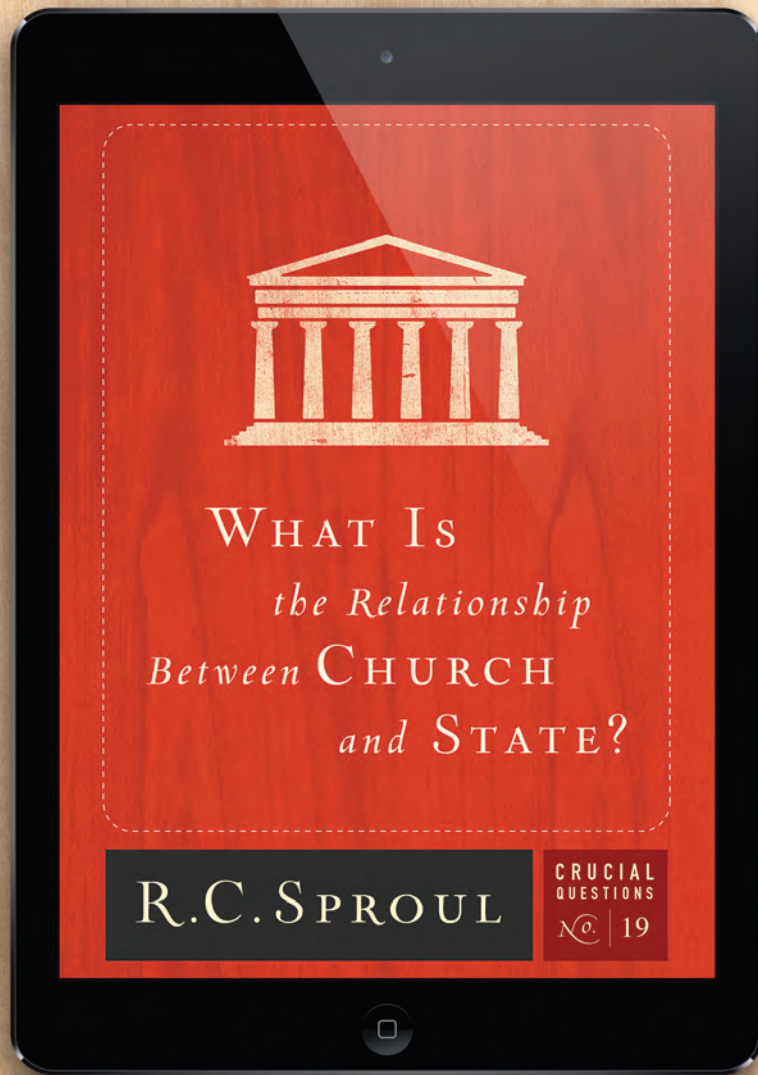
Jesus knew that the Father would hear and answer His prayers, not because the eleven were inherently capable, but because they were part of those whom the Father had promised Him from before the foundation of the world. The striking reality of prayer is that it is not designed to change God’s will, but to call for its fulfillment.

Furthermore, the Lord purposely prayed aloud so that His disciples could hear Him and be strengthened and encouraged. Soon Jesus would no longer be in the world to protect and care for His disciples, although they themselves would remain in the world. His use of the present tense is indicative of the fact that, after the events of the next few hours transpired, His earthly mission would be completed.

The time was no longer future, it had arrived. He was going away but they were staying behind. Though they surely wished to go with Him, it was critical that, for the time being, they remain and take the gospel to the world. Since in the plan of God there would have been no church, and no subsequent generations of believers, if the disciples had not been left as witnesses to the gospel, this intercession on their behalf is weighty. It is a means God used for activating His will.

And the world, where the disciples would remain, was certain to be hostile to them. It was, after all, a place of hateful rebellion against God and against His Son. Once Jesus left, antagonism toward Him would be redirected toward the disciples.

They were therefore in desperate need of the Father’s protection from the world around them. The world, in spiritual darkness and confusion, gave residence to sins and temptations of every kind. Thus, as they went forth to proclaim the gospel, the disciples also needed the Father’s sanctifying, purifying power and grace. Having established the reasons why He knew the Father would answer His prayer (in vv. 6–10), Jesus now made those two requests on behalf of His disciples: that they would receive spiritual protection (in vv. 11b–16) and sanctifying purity (in vv. 17–19) from the Father. ♦



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A
LESSON
FROM
SPURGEON
ON
EVANGELISM

TOM ASCOL

C. H. Spurgeon

A detailed portrait of Charles H. Spurgeon, a prominent English Baptist preacher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is styled in a wavy, side-parted manner. The portrait is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the purple title box.

Charles Spurgeon has been aptly described as one of those “once-a-century” type of preachers in whom all of the powerful gifts which are useful in ministry are deposited. His life and labors stand today, more than one hundred years after his death, encouraging and challenging ministers of the gospel who face the third millennium.

Any study of his ministry immediately reveals a man obsessed with evangelism. From the moment of his conversion to his dying day, Spurgeon maintained a deep burden for souls. He was a fanatic about it—in all of the right ways. As a pastor, he took to heart the apostolic injunction to “do the work of an evangelist.” And he diligently tried to stir up evangelistic concern among his church and fellow preachers.

This fact confounds some students of Spurgeon’s life. For, along with his evangelistic fervor (and, we might add, despite modern claims to the contrary), he never wavered from a strong commitment to the doctrines of grace. He clearly understood, personally believed, and powerfully proclaimed what is popularly called “Calvinism.” And he did so not out of any kind of devotion to a man or philosophical system, but because he was convinced that the body of truth which historically flew under that banner was nothing other than biblical Christianity. It was this understanding that enabled him to preach Christ so simply and persuasively.

Some who disagree with Spurgeon’s theology but appreciate his evangelism have difficulty reconciling his beliefs with his practice. Their reasoning typically goes like this: “Yes, Spurgeon was a Calvinist, but despite that fact, he was evangelistic.” Such an analysis, however, completely misses the mark. It would be far more accurate to say, “Of course Spurgeon was a Calvinist, and *therefore* he was evangelistic.” His devotion grew out of his doctrine, and his belief gave direction to his practice.

It is here, perhaps more than anywhere else, that the “Prince of Preachers” has much to teach modern Baptists. There has been a return to Spurgeon’s theology by many Baptists over the last twenty-five years. This theological renewal is growing exponentially. But what has not been seen is a commensurate growth in Spurgeon’s kind of evangelism. And this ought to alarm all who want to see real, biblical renewal sweep across our churches.

There is a generation of Baptist ministers who grew up with evangelism that was modeled on salesmanship. Some modern evangelism workbooks are little different from Donald Trump’s *The Art of the Deal*. This kind of evangelism has wreaked havoc on churches, filling membership rolls with unconverted people and utterly confusing believers about the nature of real Christianity. Such evangelism is deadly and must be rejected out of hand. But, as Jesus warned, when an

unclean spirit goes out of a man, if it is not replaced, then it will return and bring with it “seven other spirits more wicked than itself, . . . and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first” (Matt 12:45). False evangelism must be replaced by the true. Spurgeon can point the way, particularly in terms of inward attitudes and desires.

Spurgeon was a capital “C” Calvinist and a capital “B” Baptist, but his CHRISTIANITY was written in all capitals. In an address to the students at the Pastors’ College, he acknowledged the propriety of trying to make a paedobaptist a Baptist and of trying to help Arminians see that salvation is all of grace. “But,” he said, “Our grand object is not the revision of opinions, but the regeneration of natures. We would bring men *to Christ*, and not to our own peculiar views of Christianity. . . . To make proselytes, is a suitable labor for Pharisees: to beget men unto God, is the honorable aim of ministers of Christ.”

It is almost impossible to find a printed sermon of Spurgeon’s that does not have some kind of appeal to the unconverted. They are filled with pleadings, arguments, warnings, and instructions to sinners, calling and inviting them to come to Christ. His own attitude is reflected in Bunyan’s portrait of a true gospel minister in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In his first sermon at New Park Street, Spurgeon used this scene to describe how a gospel minister ought to regard the souls of men and women.

John Bunyan gives a portrait of a man whom God intended to be a guide to Heaven; have you ever noticed how beautiful that portrait is? He has a crown of life over his head, he has earth beneath his feet, he stands as if he pleaded with men, and he had the Best of Books in his hand. Oh! I would that I were, for one moment, like that pattern preacher; that I could plead with men as John Bunyan describes. We are all of us ambassadors for Christ, and we are told that, as ambassadors, we are to beseech men as though God besought them by us. How I do love to see a tearful preacher! How I love to see the man who can weep over sinners; whose soul yearns over the ungodly, as if he would, by any means and by all means, bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ! I cannot understand a man who stands up and delivers a discourse in a cold and indifferent manner, as if he cared not for the souls of his hearers. I think the true gospel minister will have a real yearning over souls something like Rachel when she cried, “Give me children, or else I die”; so will he cry to God, that he may have his elect born, and brought home to him. And, methinks, every true Christian should be exceedingly earnest in prayer concerning the souls of the ungodly; and when they are so, how abundantly God blesses them, and how the church prospers! But, beloved,

souls may be damned, yet how few of you care about them! Sinners may sink into the gulf of perdition, yet how few tears are shed over them! The whole world may be swept away by a torrent down the precipice of woe, yet how few really cry to God on its behalf! How few men say, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" We do not lament before God the loss of men's souls, as it well becomes Christians to do.

Spurgeon argued that it is not just certain kinds of preachers who can be soul-winners. Rather, every preacher should work hard to see his hearers saved.

From all our congregations a bitter cry should go up unto God, unless conversions are continually seen. If our preaching never saves a soul, and is not likely to do so, should we not better glorify God as peasants, or as tradesmen? What honor can the Lord receive from useless ministers? The Holy Ghost is not with us, we are not used of God for his gracious purposes unless souls are quickened into heavenly life. Brethren, can we bear to be useless? Can we be barren, and yet content?

This passion, for Spurgeon, was unquenchable. He saw, quite rightly, that the manifested glory of God was at stake.

Once more, if we are to be robbed in the power of the Lord, *we must feel an intense longing for the glory of God, and the salvation of the sons of men.* Even when we are most successful, we must long for more success. If God has given us many souls, we must pine for a thousand times as many. Satisfaction with results will

be the [death-] knell of progress. No man is good who thinks that he cannot be better. He has no holiness who thinks that he is useful enough. (emphasis added)

This consuming passion will inevitably determine how a man preaches. For one thing, it will cause him to work hard to be plain in speech. "We shall say to ourselves, 'No; I must not use that hard word, for that poor woman in the aisle would not understand me. I must not point out that recondite difficulty, for yonder trembling soul might be staggered by it, and might

not be relieved by my explanation.' . . . If you love men better, you will love phrases less." The goal to see souls won to Christ through preaching will also cause a minister to work hard to be interesting. "How, in the name of reason, can souls be converted by sermons that lull people to sleep?" Humor can play a legitimate role in preaching for this very reason. Spurgeon reasoned that it is "less a crime to cause a momentary laughter than a half-hour's profound slumber."

He is so strong on this that it is easy to misunderstand him. He is not arguing that the preacher is responsible for the evangelistic success of his ministry. What he is responsible for is faithfulness to the evangelistic task. God in His sovereignty will

save whom He will when and where He will. Spurgeon never doubted that. But, what he refuses to let us forget is that at the heart of a faithful ministry is a deep passion for the souls of men and women. He said,

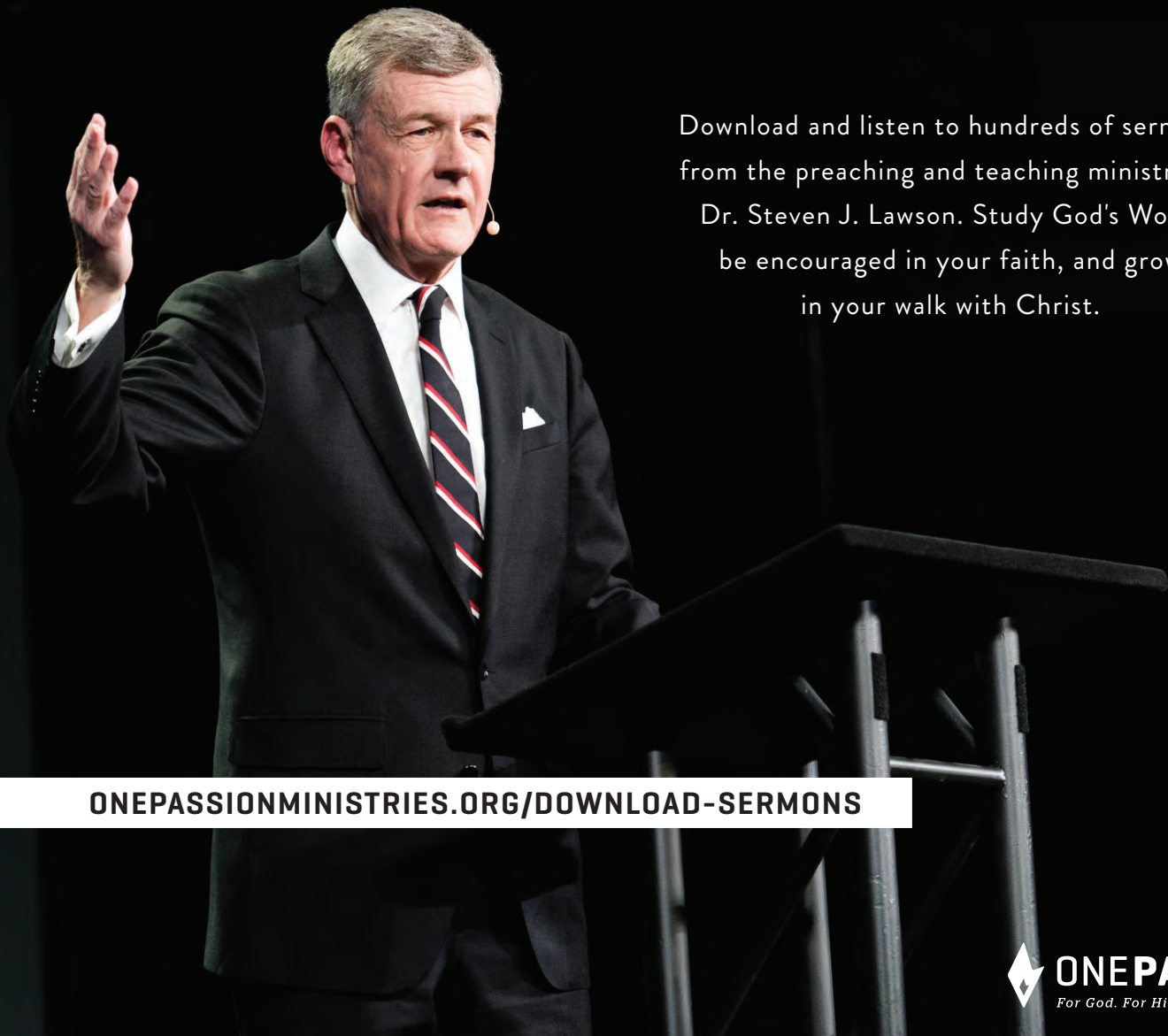
If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.

SPURGEON ARGUED THAT IT IS NOT JUST CERTAIN KINDS OF PREACHERS WHO CAN BE SOUL-WINNERS. RATHER, EVERY PREACHER SHOULD WORK HARD TO SEE HIS HEARERS SAVED.

If our doctrine does not lead to devotion, then something is seriously wrong. We have not finished with our task until head, heart, and hand all agree. Such sanctified integration of our personalities will not be perfectly attained until we see our Lord face to face. But we must strive to that end here

and now. Having received the evangel, we must be engaged in evangelism. The more clearly we have grasped the former, the more passionately we should give ourselves to the latter. 🔥

LISTEN TO SERMONS

A photograph of Dr. Steven J. Lawson, a man with short grey hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a striped tie. He is standing at a black podium, gesturing with his right hand raised. The background is dark.

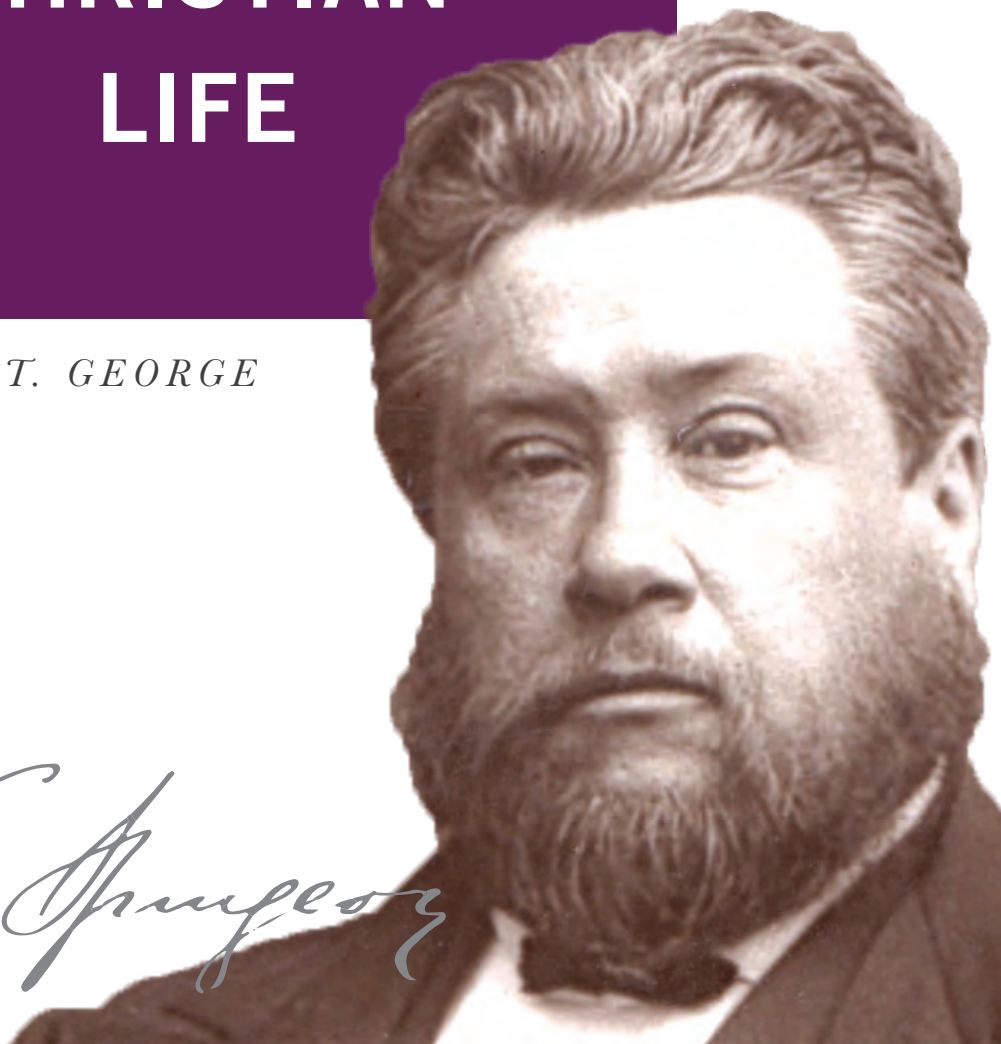
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LESSONS *FROM*
SPURGEON
ON THE
CHRISTIAN
LIFE

CHRISTIAN T. GEORGE

C. Spurgeon



On the evening of New Year's Eve, 1891, Charles Spurgeon delivered a brief speech to a small group of friends in Mentone, France. "We have come so far on the journey of life," he said, "and, standing at the boundary of another year, we look back."

For the 57-year old London pastor, there was much to look back upon. In less than four decades, Spurgeon had preached in person to an estimated ten million people. He had published more words in the English language than any Christian author in history. Fifty-six million copies of his sermons were in circulation, many having been translated into more than forty languages.

His magnum opus—a commentary on the Psalms that took twenty years to complete—had been published and widely applauded. The Metropolitan Tabernacle saw a weekly attendance of 6,000 members, and 14,654 people had been baptized over the years. Sixty-six ministries had spawned under Spurgeon's guidance: a theological college, two orphanages, a book fund, a retirement home, a clothing drive, a Sunday school for the blind, a ministry to policemen, and dozens more.

Few pastors in the history of Protestant Christianity—Baptist or not—could lay claim to the sheer number of ministerial endeavors and successes as could the "Prince of Preachers," Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

And yet, only four weeks before his death, Spurgeon's words were flavored not with self-adulation, but with confession. "I look back, and remember what I might have done and have not done; what opportunities of usefulness I have not seized; what sins I have allowed to pass unrebuked; what struggling beginners in grace I have failed to help." For Spurgeon, humility was not occasional; it was continual—and essential!

From the beginnings of his ministry as a young "Essex bumpkin" to its crescendo in the New Park Street Chapel and its grand finale in the Down Grade Controversy, the "Lion of London," whom God had brought into this world only ten days after the great Baptist missionary William Carey died, tempered his achievements with a profound and proportional sense of unworthiness.

"Though I have preached Christ crucified for more than forty years, and have led many to my Master's feet," he said, "I have at this moment no ray of hope but that which comes from what my Lord Jesus has done for guilty men." The lessons that Spurgeon offered his friends in the Hôtel Beau Rivage on the coast of the French Riviera in 1891 are as applicable to our own day as they were to those living in the late Victorian era.

1. Decrease in self. Increase in Christ.

The Victorians were people of progress. Electric bulbs replaced oil lamps; engines instead of animals drove carriages.

The Industrial Revolution had generated advances in technology, science, and medicine that had previously been unthinkable. Over the course of Spurgeon's ministry, the population of England migrated to the cities. For many, factory life replaced the farming life. In fact, five years after Spurgeon moved to London, one half of London's under-twenty population had not been born in the city.

Anything was attainable for those who could work hard enough to grasp it. The expansion of railways and steam locomotion allowed for transportation to places only read about in novels. Progress was the age's greatest virtue; apathy, its greatest vice.

Few pastors in London worked harder on a weekly basis than Spurgeon did. In addition to raising twin sons, each week Spurgeon preached up to ten times, wrote nearly 500 letters, digested six meaty books, and was constantly changing hats as pastor, president, editor, author, and itinerate evangelist.

In his lecture "The Necessity of Ministerial Progress," Spurgeon challenged his students to improve their God-given abilities to read, study, think, and expand their breadth of knowledge. "Serve God with such education as you have, and thank him for blowing through you if you are a ram's horn, but if there is a possibility of you becoming a silver trumpet, choose it rather." Spurgeon believed that the Christian attitude of decrease did not prevent ministerial productivity—it should generate it.

However, an increase in accomplishment must always be accompanied by a decrease in self. Spurgeon was always careful to guard against the proliferation of pride. "In the true Church of Christ, the way to the top is downstairs; sink yourself into the highest place." To his friends in France, he asked, "Have we been taught to go down that Jesus may rise, after the manner of John the Baptist, who cried, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'?"

Even in his pre-London ministry as the pastor of Waterbeach Chapel, Spurgeon's wholehearted dependence on God is evidenced. In the front flap of his first notebook of sermon skeletons, Charles wrote, "... and only skeletons without the Holy Ghost." His brief prayers in these sermons for God's help are also illuminating: "Help, Jesus"; "Lord, keep me from idols"; "Lord, help me again"; "Oh God, help"; "Lord, revive my stupid soul!"

From the beginning of his ministry to its conclusion, Spurgeon was careful not to rob God of His glory. Even before he left for France, suspecting he may not return, Spurgeon whispered to his secretary, "Remember, a plain stone, C.H.S. and no more; no fuss."

"If we realize our chief end," Spurgeon told his friends, "we reach our highest enjoyment." Throughout his ministry, he often quoted the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever." In one sermon, he said, "The answer is exceedingly correct, but it might have been equally truthful

if it had been shorter. The chief end of man is 'to please God,' for in so doing ... he will please himself."

Spurgeon's desire to please God was the underlying mechanism that propelled his energetic endeavors. It was God's name, he insisted, and not his own that must receive elevation and exaltation. Nowhere is this characteristic more clearly seen than when a denomination called "Spurgeonism" began to form around him. Wherever it reared its head, Spurgeon emphatically and consistently denounced the movement, not wanting to leave a legacy that championed his identity over the identity of Christ. "The grand object of the Christian ministry is the glory of God," he said, and God will not have His glory pirated.

2. Expect More of God.

On August 19, 1861, on the centennial of William Carey's birth, Spurgeon held a special service at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. In large letters above the platform, Carey's famous motto was written: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." Spurgeon believed that preaching without expectation was "foreboding defeat."

A younger brother in Christ once said to him, "I have preached in the streets, and I have seen no converts." Spurgeon replied, "Do you expect people to be converted every time you preach?" "No, sir." "That is the reason you do not succeed, because you do not expect to do so.

According to your faith so be it unto you" (Matt 9:22). To his friend in Mentone, he asked, "Have we not learned to expect more of God?"

Spurgeon believed that a Christian's expectation of God's activities in the future must draw confidence from a recollection of God's faithfulness in the past. "If you are familiar with the Lord of love ... you will join me in abundantly uttering the memory of his great goodness." For Spurgeon, God does not call those He will not equip. Nor does He equip those He

will not preserve. The God who ordains the path also sustains the journey. Why? Because "all the events of life are arranged and appointed. Not only is every turn in the road marked in the divine map, but every stone on the road . . . We are not to cross a trackless desert."

Christians can expect more of God because He has delivered on His Old Testament promise to send a Savior. "The infinite," as Spurgeon once said, became "the infant" (John 1:14).

In other words, God has walked a mile not only in our shoes, but also in our feet. The Word became skin and bones and blood. Our temptations were His temptations (Heb 4:15); our sufferings were His suffering.

Christians can *expect* more of God because Christ met, on our behalf, the expectations of the Father. Christians can *attempt* more for God because Christ succeeded in His attempt to save the world. "We are not left to pass through life as though it were a lone wilderness," for Christ has traveled behind, before, and beside His pilgrim people.

3. Find Joy in God Alone.

At the age of twenty-two, Charles Spurgeon almost quit the ministry. He and Susannah had been married less than one year. Their sons, Charles and Thomas, were infants. After three years in the big city, Spurgeon's ministry had solicited envy from his opponents, admiration from the evangelicals, and criticism from

the press. Susannah often hid the morning newspaper to prevent Charles from reading its headlines.

The evening of October 19, 1856, commenced a season of unusual suffering for Spurgeon. His popularity had forced the rental of the Surrey Garden Music Hall to hold the 12,000 people congregated inside. Ten thousand eager listeners stood outside the building, scrambling to hear his sermon. The event constituted one of the largest crowds gathered to hear a nonconformist preacher—a throwback to the days of George Whitefield.

A CHRISTIAN'S EXPECTATION OF GOD'S ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE MUST DRAW CONFIDENCE FROM A RECOLLECTION OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE PAST.

A few minutes after 6 o'clock, someone in the audience shouted, "Fire! The galleries are giving way! The place is falling!" Pandemonium ensued as a balcony collapsed. Those trying to get into the building blocked the exit of those fighting to escape. Spurgeon attempted to quell the commotion, but to no avail. His text for the day was Proverbs 3:33, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked"—a verse he would never preach again.

An eyewitness recorded, "The cries and shrieks at this period were truly terrific. . . . They pressed on, treading furiously over the dead and dying, tearing frantically at each other." Spurgeon nearly lost consciousness. He was rushed from the platform and "taken home more dead than alive." After the crowds dissipated, seven corpses were lying in the grass. Twenty-eight people were seriously injured.

The depression that resulted from this disaster left Spurgeon prostrate for days. "Even the sight of the Bible brought from me a flood of tears and utter distraction of mind." The newspapers added to his emotional deterioration. "Mr. Spurgeon is a preacher who hurls damnation at the heads of his sinful hearers. . . . a ranting charlatan." By all accounts, it looked as if his ministry was over. "It might well seem that the ministry which promised to be so largely influential," Spurgeon said, "was silenced for ever."

When Spurgeon ascended the pulpit on November 2, two weeks later, he opened with a prayer. "We are assembled here, O Lord, this day, with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow. . . . Thy servant feared that he should never be able to meet this congregation again."

Although he would never fully recover from this disaster, Spurgeon's ministry did not end on October 19, 1856. He later said, "I have gone to the very bottoms of the mountains, as some of you know, in a night that never can be erased from my memory. . . . but, as far as my witness goes, I can say that the Lord is able to save unto the uttermost and in the last extremity, and He has been a good God to me."

Spurgeon's joy was based not only his own ability to recover, but on God's ability to replenish. It was a joy that would balm Spurgeon in future controversies when he felt beleaguered and bewildered. The joy Spurgeon had after 1856 was a radical joy—a joy deeply rooted in the soil of the supremacy of the God who was great and grand enough to make good things come out of evil. As Joseph told his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:20).

The same God who called Spurgeon to London would not abandon him on the banks of the Thames River. On the contrary, God used this horrible event in his life to save the lives of countless others, for the widely circulated negative press put the young pastor's preaching on England's radar—and eventually on the world's.

At 11:05 p.m. on January 31, 1892, Spurgeon fell into a coma from which he did not awake. During the final year of his life, he had been brought much encouragement by the unity that he saw demonstrated in the various expressions of the church. "During the past year I have been made to see that there is more love and unity among God's people than is generally believed."

His earliest sermons were filled with a passion for Christian unity and cooperation, but in the last month of his life, those seeds had fully blossomed. "When our Lord prayed that his church might be one, his prayer was answered, and his true people are even now, in spirit and in truth, one in him. Their different modes of external worship are as the furrows of a field; the field is none the less one because of the marks of the plough."

After his death, a telegraph alerted the world to Spurgeon's passing. Evangelicals from differing theological tribes and traditions sent their condolences to Susannah. One scholar has noted, "If every crowned head in Europe had died that night, the event would not be so momentous as the death of this one man." Over 100,000 people passed by Spurgeon's coffin at the Norwood Cemetery.

The same newspapers that had once inflicted so much damage upon the young preacher's ministry now offered recognition of a life well lived for others. In the year following Spurgeon's death, a new biography of Spurgeon surfaced every month. Some were filled with unpublished conversation with the preacher; others contained letters and recollections of personal encounters and episodes. And yet, for the small group of friends to whom Spurgeon spoke on New Year's Day Eve, 1891, their pastor's departing words must have undoubtedly followed them the rest of their lives:

We would have it so happen that, when our life's history is written, whoever reads it will not think of us as "self-made men," but as the handiwork of God, in whom his grace is magnified. Not in us may men see the clay, but the Potter's hand. They said of one, "He is a fine preacher;" but of another they said, "We never notice how he preaches, *but we feel that God is great.*" We wish our whole life to be a sacrifice; an altar of incense continually smoking with sweet perfume unto the Most High. Oh, to be borne through the year on the wings of praise to God to mount from year to year, and raise at each ascent a loftier and yet lowlier song unto the God of our Life! The vista of a praiseful life will never close, but continue throughout eternity. From psalm to psalm, from hallelujah to hallelujah, we will ascend the hill of the Lord; until we come into the Holiest of all, where, with veiled faces, we will bow before the Divine Majesty in the bliss of endless adoration." ♦



WHEN TEMPTATION SURPRISES YOU

DUSTIN W. BENGE

Charles Spurgeon preached many sermons dealing with the subject of temptation. He constantly warned his congregation of the danger of temptation and its ability to surprise you. He said, “Watch constantly against those things which are thought to be no temptations. The most poisonous serpents are found where the sweetest flowers grow.”

The subject of temptation and how to deal with it as a Christian is a theme that Spurgeon would have encountered often in his reading of the Puritans. The Puritan divine that stands out the greatest in his exposition of the subject of temptation is John Owen (1616–1683). According to Spurgeon, Owen was, “perhaps, the most profound divine who ever lived.”

In his timeless book, *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*, Owen amazes the reader with his use of words, biblical analogies, and practical advice. The Scripture and our own life experience attests to the fact that each believer faces temptation on a daily basis. My individual temptations may not be the same as yours, and yours are not the same as mine, but we all have one thing in common: we are all tempted (James 1:14). Owen gives some practical advice when you find yourself caught off guard and suddenly wrapped in the tentacles of temptation.

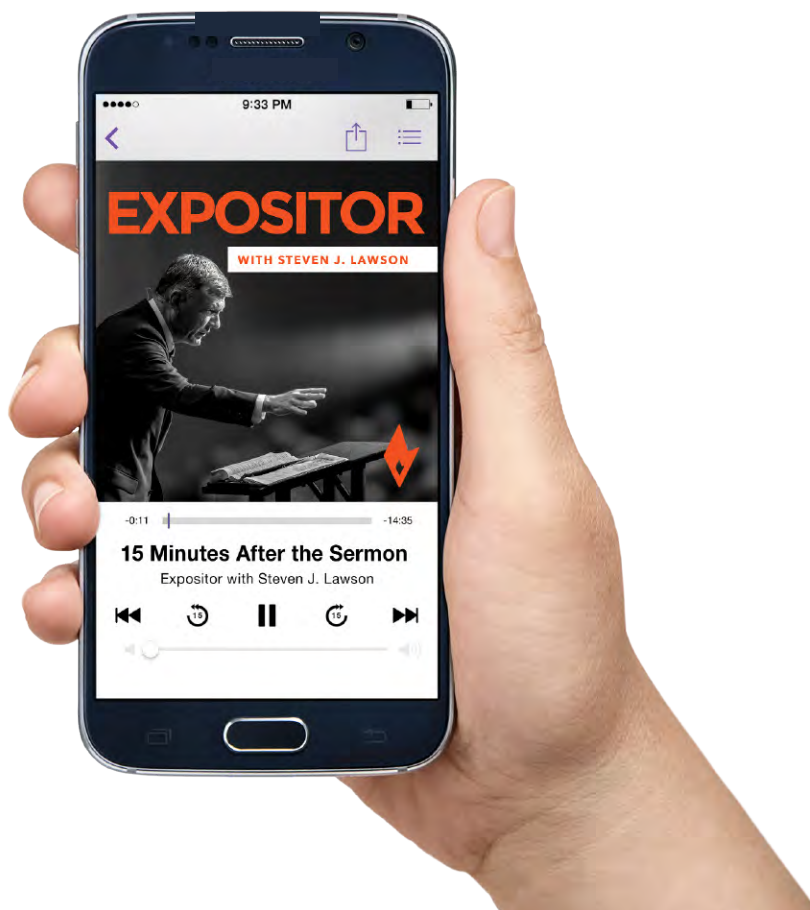
1. Do as the Apostle Paul did: beseech God again and again that it may “depart from you” (2 Cor 12.8). Owen says that if you abide in this particular place, “you shall certainly either be speedily delivered out of it, or receive a sufficiency of grace [so as] not to be foiled utterly by it. When temptations come, don’t set your mind in the individual temptation or give a moment’s consideration, but instead set yourself against the temptation. Pray against the temptation that it may depart; and when that is taken away, the things themselves may be more calmly considered.”

2. Owen reminds us to “fly to Christ, because He too was tempted, and beg of Him to give you help in this needful time of trouble.” The apostle instructs us, “Therefore let us draw

near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). Owen says, “When you are tempted and are ready to faint, when you want help—you must have it or you die—act faith peculiarly on Christ as He was tempted; that is, consider that He was tempted Himself—that He suffered thereby—that He conquered all temptations, and that not merely on His own account, seeing for our sakes He submitted to be tempted, but for us.” When temptation comes, lie down at the feet of your Master, make your complaint known to Him, beg His assistance, and it will not be in vain.

3. Look to Him who has promised deliverance. Owen says, “Consider that He is faithful and will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able. Consider that He has promised a comfortable issue of these trails and temptations. Call all the promises to mind of assistance and deliverance that He has made; ponder them in your heart. And rest upon it, that God has innumerable ways that you know not of to give you in deliverance.” Step back and examine the whole of your life and how His faithfulness runs like a thread through every moment; trust Him to do the same in your current affliction.

4. Owen reminds us, “Consider where the temptation, wherewith you are surprised, has made its entrance, and by what means and with all speed make up the breach.” Owen advises us to put a stop to the passage where waters are entering in. In other words, cut off that which is feeding the temptation and leading to sin—turn off the television, put the book down, throw away the magazine, turn off the computer, end the conversation. Owen says, “Deal with your soul like a wise physician. Inquire, how, by what means, you feel into this distemper; and if you find negligence, carelessness, want of keeping watch over yourself, to have lain at the bottom of it, fix your soul there—bewail that before the Lord—make up that breach—and then proceed to the work that lies before you.” ♦



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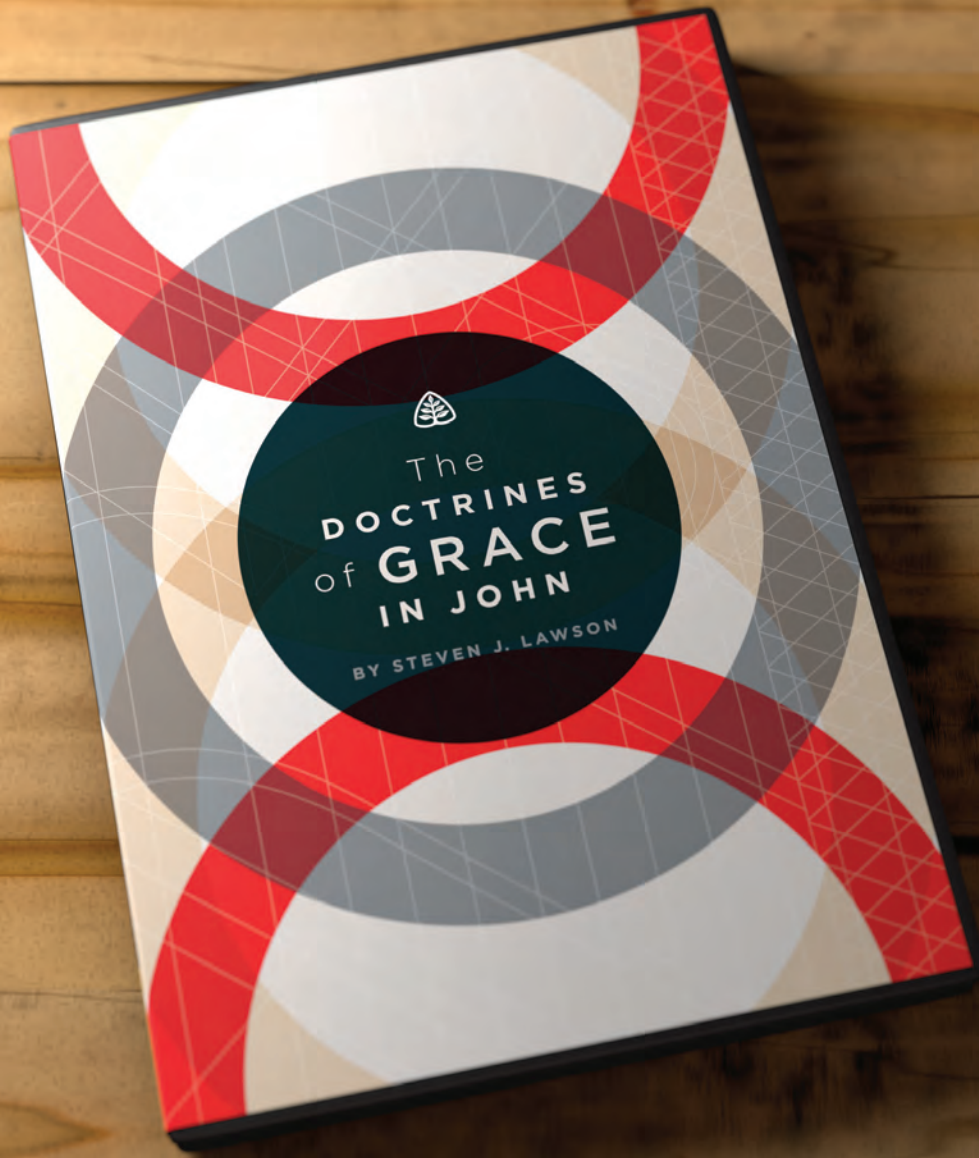


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