



CHARLES SPURGEON

1834–1892

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Charles Haddon Spurgeon (19 June 1834 – 31 January 1892) was an English Particular Baptist preacher. Spurgeon remains highly influential among Christians of various denominations, among whom he is known as the "Prince of Preachers". He was a strong figure in the Reformed Baptist tradition, defending the Church in agreement with the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith understanding, and opposing the liberal and pragmatic theological tendencies in the Church of his day.

Spurgeon was the pastor of the congregation of the New Park Street Chapel (later the Metropolitan Tabernacle) in London for 38 years. He was part of several controversies with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and later he left the denomination over doctrinal convictions. In 1867, he started a charity organisation which is now called Spurgeon's and works globally. He also founded Spurgeon's College, which was named after him posthumously.

Spurgeon was a great author of many types of works including sermons, one autobiography, commentaries, and books on prayer, devotionals, magazines, poetry, hymns, and more. Many sermons were transcribed as he spoke and were translated into many languages during his lifetime. Spurgeon produced powerful sermons of penetrating thought and precise exposition. His oratory skills held his listeners spellbound in the Metropolitan Tabernacle and many Christians hold his writings in exceptionally high regard among devotional literature.



His ministry began in the year of his conversion as a young man.



Spurgeon was raised in a Christian home, but was converted in 1850 at fifteen years old. Caught in a snowstorm, he took refuge in a small Primitive Methodist chapel in Colchester. After about ten minutes, with only twelve to fifteen people present, the preacher fixed his eyes on Spurgeon and spoke to him directly:

“Young man, you look very miserable.” Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin’ to do but to look and live.” Spurgeon later wrote, ‘Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.’

The ‘Prince of Preachers’ was tricked into preaching his first sermon that same year. An older man had asked Spurgeon to go to the little village of Teversham the next evening, “for a young man was to preach there who was not much used to services, and very likely would be glad of company.” It was only the next day that he realized the ‘young man’ was himself.

He was a man of hard work and huge influence.

He went on to preach in person up to thirteen times per week, gathered the largest church of his day, and could make himself heard in a crowd of twenty-three thousand people (without amplification). In print he published some eighteen million words, selling over fifty-six million copies of his sermons in nearly forty languages in his own lifetime.

He was self-consciously a theological and doctrinal preacher.

While Spurgeon is not known as a theologian as such, he was nevertheless a deeply theological thinker and his sermons were rich in doctrine, and dripping with knowledge of historical theology – especially the Puritans.

Some preachers seem to be afraid lest their sermons should be too rich in doctrine, and so injure the spiritual digestions of their hearers. The fear is superfluous. . . . This is not a theological age, and therefore it rails at sound doctrinal teaching, on the principle that ignorance despises wisdom. The glorious giants of the Puritan age fed on something better than the whipped creams and pastries which are now so much in vogue.

He was pre-eminently a theologian and preacher of the cross.

Spurgeon’s was a cross-centred and cross-shaped theology, for the cross was “the hour” of Christ’s glorification (John 12:23–24), the place where Christ was and is exalted, the only message able to overturn the hearts of men and women otherwise enslaved to sin. Along with Isaiah 45:22, one of Spurgeon’s favourite Bible verses was John 12:32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

He insisted on celebrating the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, and often broke bread during the week as well. He believed his preaching of the crucified Christ was the only reason why such great crowds were drawn to his church for so many years.

Who can resist his charms? One look of his eyes overpowers us. See with your heart those eyes when they are full of tears for perishing sinners, and you are a willing subject. One look at his blessed person subjected to scourging and spitting for our sakes will give us more idea of his crown rights than anything besides. Look into his pierced heart as it pours out its life-flood for us, and all disputes about his sovereignty are ended in our hearts. We own him Lord because we see how he loved.

He aimed his ministry and preaching at new birth.



Regeneration was one of the “three Rs” (ruin, redemption, and regeneration) Spurgeon always sought to preach. And regeneration was something he always *expected* to see as he preached the gospel. A friend of his once came to him, depressed because for three months of ministry he had not seen a single conversion. Spurgeon slyly asked, “Do you expect the Lord to save souls every time you open your mouth?” Embarrassed, the man answered “Oh, no, sir!” “Then,” Spurgeon replied, “that is just the reason why you have not had conversions: ‘According to your faith be it unto you.’”

Regeneration, he saw, is a work of pure grace—and those the Lord regenerates, he will indwell. And “with such an indweller we need not fear, but that this poor heart of ours will yet become perfect as God is perfect; and our nature through his indwelling shall rise into complete meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

He knew how to enjoy life.

Spurgeon loved life and saw the creation as a blessing from God to be enjoyed. For tired ministers, he recommended:



A day’s breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours’ ramble in the beech woods’ umbrageous calm,’ which ‘would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind’s face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best.’

He couldn’t resist walking outside in thunderstorms (‘I like to hear my Heavenly Father’s voice in the thunder’), he is known for his cigar smoking, and he had a keen interest in botany. Like us all, Spurgeon was uniquely himself. Yet his big-heartedness and joy as he walked through his Father’s creation displays exactly the sort of life that will always grow from the theology he believed.

He was a mischievous, funny man.

‘What a bubbling fountain of humour Mr. Spurgeon had!’ wrote his friend William Williams. ‘I have laughed more, I verily believe, when in his company than during all the rest of my life besides.’ A whole chapter of Spurgeon’s ‘autobiography’ is entitled ‘Pure Fun,’ and he regularly surprised people who expected the zealous pastor to be dour and intense. Grandiosity, religiosity, and humbug could all expect to be pricked on his wit.

He was serious about joy.

Spurgeon’s humour and jollity were not trivial or frivolous. For him, joy was a theological matter and a manifestation of that happiness and cheer which is found in Christ alone. He refused to take himself—or

any other sinner—too seriously, believing that to be alive in Christ means to fight not only the habits and acts of sin but also sin’s temperamental sullenness, ingratitude, bitterness, and despair.

Christ wishes his people to be happy. When they are perfect, as he will make them in due time, they shall also be perfectly happy. As heaven is the place of pure holiness, so is it the place of unalloyed happiness; and in proportion as we get ready for heaven, we shall have some of the joy which belongs to heaven, and it is our Saviour’s will that even now his joy should remain in us, and that our joy should be full.

He suffered with depression.

Spurgeon was full of life and joy, but also suffered deeply with depression as a result of personal tragedies, illness, and stress. Today he would almost certainly be diagnosed as clinically depressed and treated with medication and therapy. His wife, Susannah, wrote, “My beloved’s anguish was so deep and violent, that reason seemed to totter in her throne, and we sometimes feared that he would never preach again.”

Spurgeon believed that Christian ministers should expect a special degree of suffering to be given to them as a way of forming them for Christ-like, compassionate ministry. Christ himself was made like his weak and tempted brothers in order that he might help those who are tempted (Heb. 2:16–18), and in the same manner, it is weak and suffering people that God has chosen to minister to the weak and suffering.



He was emphatically Christ-centred.

Spurgeon saw theology much like astronomy: as the solar system makes sense only when the sun is central, so systems of theological thought are coherent only when Christ is central. Every doctrine must find its place and meaning in its proper relation to Christ. “Be assured that we cannot be right in the rest, unless we think rightly of HIM. . . . Where is Christ in your theological system?”

Spurgeon’s view of the Bible, his Calvinism, and his view of the Christian life are all deeply Christocentric—and even that astronomical analogy may be too weak to capture quite how Christ-centred Spurgeon was in his thinking.

For him, Christ is not merely one component—however pivotal—in the bigger machinery of the gospel. Christ himself is the truth we know, the object and reward of our faith, and the light that illumines every part of a true theological system. He wrote, ‘He himself is Doctor and Doctrine, Revealer and Revelation, the Illuminator and the Light of Men. He is exalted in every word of truth, because he is its sum and substance. He sits above the gospel, like a prince on his own throne. Doctrine is most precious when we see it distilling from his lips and embodied in his person. Sermons are valuable in proportion as they speak of him and point to him.’

