



The Gospel Focus of

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# Charles Spurgeon

STEVEN J. LAWSON



A Long Line of Godly Men Profile

## ENDORSEMENTS

“Steve Lawson, a great preacher in his own right, has emerged as our generation’s finest biographer of great preachers. His works on John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards are both masterpieces. Steve has a knack for pointing out and explaining the outstanding traits that made each of these unique preachers truly important and influential. This work on Charles Spurgeon is likewise brilliant, highlighting Spurgeon’s Calvinistic convictions alongside his evangelistic zeal—showing why those two characteristics are perfectly harmonious and equally essential characteristics of any truly biblical ministry. A riveting work, this book will fuel your enthusiasm for both sound doctrine and earnest evangelism.”

—DR. JOHN MACARTHUR  
Pastor-teacher, Grace Community Church  
Sun Valley, California

“Charles Spurgeon was a model pastor-theologian. His theology came to life in his plea for sinners to be reconciled to God. Lawson points us to the necessity of a theology fueled by fervor for evangelism in this excellent primer on the prince of preachers.”

—DR. ED STETZER  
Vice president of research and ministry development  
LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, Tennessee

“I own at least three dozen different biographies of the prince of preachers, but Steve Lawson’s new book on Charles Spurgeon will from now on have a key place of prominence in my short list of favorites. Dr. Lawson understands what made the great preacher’s heart beat: it was the gospel, charged with a passion for the souls of lost people and kept steady by the doctrines of grace. The clear rhythm of that pulse reverberates through this book, and it’s a catchy beat. I’m profoundly glad for that, and I hope countless readers will be moved to get in step with the cadence.”

—PHIL JOHNSON  
Executive director, Grace to You  
Curator, The Spurgeon Archive ([www.spurgeon.org](http://www.spurgeon.org))

“Steve Lawson provides a succinct and captivating analysis of the heart of one of the greatest preachers of all time. Spurgeon’s ministry is legendary, but what

animated and motivated his life and ministry is often overlooked. With ample extracts from Spurgeon's own writings and sermons, this book reveals how the gospel of Jesus Christ provided both the power and content of his preaching. Far from being a distraction to the gospel, those doctrines that are historically known as Calvinism caused Spurgeon to understand the person and work of Jesus more clearly and preach Christ more passionately. While some who do not hold to Spurgeon's view of the doctrines of grace might wonder how he could be a Calvinist and *yet* be evangelistic, Lawson clearly demonstrates that the prince of preachers was a bold evangelist precisely *because* of his Calvinism. There is much wisdom in this book both for preachers and for those who value preaching."

—DR. THOMAS K. ASCOL

Lead pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida

"For more than thirty-six years, Steve Lawson has had an intense interest in the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. In April 1976, he wrote a paper on Spurgeon's theological controversies for a Baptist history class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In that paper, Lawson said about Spurgeon, 'He magnified God's grace and glorified God's Son.' Lawson has shown in this book how those traits of Spurgeon's ministry, plus his thorough commitment to the infallibility of Scripture, his fervent grace-centered evangelism, his utter dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit, and his personal courage, make Spurgeon transcend the ages as a model for church-centered gospel ministry. Every Christian will be encouraged by Lawson's description of Spurgeon's life and his analysis of Spurgeon's driving commitments to the whole counsel of God. Loaded with pungent quotes from Spurgeon and punctuated with helpful and pertinent exhortations from Lawson, this is a book for us all."

—DR. THOMAS J. NETTLES

Professor of historical theology

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Louisville, Kentucky

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by Steven J. Lawson



A Long Line of Godly Men Profile

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STEVEN J. LAWSON

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*The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*

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To Iain H. Murray,  
whose tireless efforts for  
more than a half century  
have introduced Reformed truth  
to a new generation,  
and whose book  
*The Forgotten Spurgeon*  
made a dramatic and lasting impact  
on my life for good

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## Followers Worthy to Be Followed

**D**own through the centuries, God has raised up a long line of godly men, those whom He has mightily used at critical junctures of church history. These valiant individuals have come from all walks of life—from the ivy-covered halls of elite schools to the dusty back rooms of tradesmen’s shops. They have arisen from all points of this world—from highly visible venues in densely populated cities to obscure hamlets in remote places. Yet despite their differences, these pivotal figures, trophies of God’s grace, have had much in common.

Certainly each man possessed stalwart faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but more can be said. Each of them held deep convictions concerning the God-exalting truths known as the doctrines of grace. Though they differed in secondary matters of theology, they stood shoulder to shoulder in championing the doctrines that magnify the sovereign grace of God in His saving purposes in the world. To a man, they upheld the essential truth that “salvation is of the Lord” (Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9).

How did these truths affect their lives? Far from paralyzing them, the doctrines of grace enflamed their hearts with reverential awe for God and humbled their souls before His throne. Moreover, the truths of sovereign grace emboldened these men to further the cause of Christ on the earth. This fact should not surprise us, as history reveals that those who embrace these truths are granted extraordinary confidence in their God. With an enlarged vision of Him, they step forward and accomplish the work of many men, leaving a godly influence on generations to come. They arise with wings like eagles and soar over their times in history. Experientially, the doctrines of grace renew their spirits and empower them to serve God in their divinely appointed hours.

The Long Line of Godly Men Profiles aim to highlight key figures from this procession of sovereign-grace men. It is the purpose of this series to explore how these figures used their God-given gifts and abilities to further the kingdom of heaven. Because they were stalwart followers of Christ, their examples are worthy of emulation today.

In this volume, I want to introduce you to the revered British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon’s voice thundered with the truth throughout England and beyond in a day when the church stood in great need of red-hot, straightforward, no-holds-barred gospel preaching—and that of a Calvinistic strand. Despite the theological and methodological declines of his day, Spurgeon was deeply devoted to preaching Christ and Him crucified. As the Lord empowered him, his pulpit became one of the most prolific sounding boards the kingdom of God has ever known. To this day, Spurgeon remains “the Prince of Preachers,” eminently worthy to be profiled in this series.

May the Lord use this book to greatly embolden you, so that, like Spurgeon, you will leave an indelible mark on this world. May you be strengthened with the gospel to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

—Steven J. Lawson  
Series editor

# Why Spurgeon?

**I**t was more than thirty years ago, as a young seminary student, when I was first confronted with the biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. To that point, I had viewed salvation as a joint venture between God and man. I assumed that God extends the offer of salvation, but man has the ability to accept or reject it. But unexpectedly, the sovereign grace of God toward those whom He chose in eternity past to save was made known to me. To my amazement, my eyes were opened to behold God as I had never seen Him before.

A thick fog lifted. Suddenly I could see those truths in the Bible known as the doctrines of grace. Astonishingly, they had been there all along. As my eyes raced through the Scriptures, I became absorbed with an endless number of verses teaching the predestining grace of God. For every one verse I saw, there were a hundred more virtually leaping from the pages of God's Word, screaming for my attention. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible was now declaring, "Salvation is of the Lord."

This discovery was, at first, devastating. I was shaken to the core of my being. My whole orientation to the Bible was in upheaval. This biblical teaching was pride-crushing. I was laid low in the dust, my soul desolate. But at the same time, these doctrines were God glorifying and Christ exalting. They lifted me up with a sense of awe toward God and filled me with excitement. Joy flooded my being. These glorious truths ignited a great awakening within me, one from which I have not recovered.

This deeper understanding of God's grace, however, created an enormous dilemma for me. How would the doctrines of sovereign grace affect my

preaching? If God is sovereign in salvation, *why* preach the gospel? If I am to do so, *how* do I preach the gospel? *Why* witness? *Why* pray for the lost? *Why* make sacrifices for the gospel? These questions haunted me, especially since I was called to preach. Perhaps they have challenged you.

As I wrestled through these issues, I walked into the seminary bookstore one day to browse among the books. On this occasion, I noticed several volumes of sermons by Charles Spurgeon. Curious, I pulled one off the shelf and began reading. Quite frankly, I was not prepared for what I found. As I pored over the pages, I found message after message dripping with the biblical truths of sovereign grace. But at the same time, each message was on fire with evangelistic fervor, as Spurgeon pleaded with sinners to be saved. Never had I read anything like this. These sermons were like an electric current running through my soul. They shocked my senses and enlightened my mind.

Here is what captivated me. This gifted preacher, perhaps the greatest since the Apostle Paul, was, by his own admission, a *Calvinist*—Reformed to the core, deeply committed to the doctrines of grace. But at the same time, he was an *evangelist*. How could these seemingly opposite realities fit together? How could one be both staunchly Calvinistic *and* passionately evangelistic?

Spurgeon showed me. In one hand, he firmly held the sovereignty of God in man's salvation. With the other hand, he extended the free offer of the gospel to all. He preached straightforward Calvinistic doctrine, then, in the same sermon, fervently urged lost sinners to call on the name of the Lord. Having expounded the truths of predestination, he then warned his listeners that if they refused Christ, their blood would be on their own hands. In sermon after sermon, this prolific preacher expounded God's sovereign grace with unmistakable precision. Yet, he did it with a genuine passion for the lost.

I concluded that this was what it must look like to be consumed with the glory of God in the salvation of His elect and, at the same time, be filled with flaming zeal in reaching sinners with the gospel. There was no cold, clinical Calvinism here—no dead orthodoxy, no “frozen chosen” religion, no empty rehearsing of Reformed doctrine for people to take or leave as they might choose. Neither was there any shallow evangelism that portrayed God as pacing in heaven, wringing His hands, desperate for someone to accept Him. Instead, here was what the Puritans described as a fire in the pulpit, yielding both the *light* of Calvinistic truth and the *heat* of evangelistic passion.

In Spurgeon, I saw a historical example of what God was calling me to be and do. I finally understood that my Reformed theology was not a hindrance but a launching pad for evangelism. Here was the best of both worlds. I already had come to see clearly how these twin truths meet in the Bible. Now I could see

how they come together in preaching.

Tragically, many pulpits today are pulled toward one of two extremes—the dead orthodoxy of Hyper-Calvinism or the shallow inconsistencies of Arminianism. In the former error, the doctrines of grace are upheld, but with little burden for the lost and no free offer of the gospel to all. In the latter error, there is soul-winning fervor, but the supreme authority of God in the salvation of men’s souls is denied. Between these polar opposites stands biblical Calvinism, claiming the high ground in both message and ministry.

In this short book, my intention is to introduce you to the remarkable Charles Spurgeon. My hope is that his example will revolutionize your approach to gospel ministry. May you be emboldened by the gospel focus of Spurgeon, who continues to cast his broad shadow across the landscape of the evangelical church.

Furthermore, I pray that this book will help you gain a proper understanding of the full counsel of God in Scripture. My desire is that you will appreciate the tension between divine sovereignty in man’s salvation and fiery passion in spreading the gospel. Only biblical Calvinism does both.

I want to thank the publishing team at Reformation Trust for their commitment to this Long Line of Godly Men Profiles series from church history. Greg Bailey, director of publications, has done an excellent job editing this manuscript and encouraging me along the way. Chris Larson was instrumental in envisioning this series and overseeing the beautiful graphic design of this book. I remain proud of my association with my former professor, Dr. R. C. Sproul, and Ligonier Ministries.

I further want to thank Christ Fellowship Baptist Church of Mobile, Alabama, which I serve as senior pastor. I am extremely grateful for the support of my fellow elders and the congregation, who encourage me in my extended ministry. I want to express my gratitude for my executive assistant, Kay Allen, who typed this document, and Keith Phillips, a fellow pastor at Christ Fellowship, who helped edit this manuscript.

Finally, you should know that my family remains a tower of encouragement in my personal life and ministry. My wife, Anne, and our four children, Andrew, James, Grace Anne, and John, stand as one with me in the message and mission of this book.

# Spurgeon's Life and Legacy

*There was no voice in the Victorian pulpit as resonant, no preacher as beloved by the people, no orator as prodigious as Charles Haddon Spurgeon.*<sup>1</sup>

—Hughes Oliphant Old

**H**ailed as the greatest preacher of nineteenth-century England, Charles Haddon Spurgeon is arguably the preeminent preacher of any century. Regarded as the most widely successful expositor of modern times,<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon heads virtually every list of renowned preachers. If John Calvin was the greatest theologian of the church, Jonathan Edwards the greatest philosopher, and George Whitefield the greatest evangelist, Spurgeon surely ranks as its greatest preacher.<sup>3</sup> Never has one man stood in one pulpit, week after week, year after year, for almost four decades, and preached the gospel with greater worldwide success and lasting impact than Spurgeon. To this day, he remains “the Prince of Preachers.”<sup>4</sup>

Through the centuries, expositors such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Calvin, and countless others have committed themselves to preaching in a verse-by-verse style through entire books of the Bible. But this was not Spurgeon’s approach. Though he was “an expository preacher *par excellence*,”<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon drew his message each week from a different book in the Bible. This free style distinguished Spurgeon from these other great preachers, positioning him, first and foremost, as an *evangelistic* expositor.

Throughout his prolific ministry, Spurgeon was consumed with a gospel zeal. He made it his practice to isolate one or a few verses as a springboard to proclaim the gospel. He asserted, “I take my text and make a beeline to the cross.”<sup>6</sup> Every time Spurgeon stepped into the pulpit, he set his gaze intently on



the salvation of sinners through the proclamation of the saving message of Jesus Christ. As Hughes Oliphant Old notes, Spurgeon was sent “at a particular time to a particular place to preach the eternal gospel for the salvation of souls and God’s everlasting glory.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps none can compare with Spurgeon as an evangelistic pastor.

Though he deeply loved theology, Spurgeon stated, “I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpick all the mysteries of the divine Word.”<sup>8</sup> He reveled in seeking the salvation of the lost. Here is how Spurgeon described the central importance of evangelism in his ministry:

I would rather be the means of saving a soul from death than be the greatest orator on earth. I would rather bring the poorest woman in the world to the feet of Jesus than I would be made Archbishop of Canterbury. I would sooner pluck one single brand from the burning than explain all mysteries. To win a soul from going down into the pit, is a more glorious achievement than to be crowned in the arena of theological controversy ... to have faithfully unveiled the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will be, in the final judgment, accounted worthier service than to have solved the problems of the religious Sphinx, or to have cut the Gordian knot of Apocalyptic difficulty. One of my happiest thoughts is that, when I die, it shall be my privilege to enter into rest in the bosom of Christ, and I know that I shall not enjoy my Heaven alone. Thousands have already entered there, who have been drawn to Christ under my ministry. Oh! what bliss it will be to fly to Heaven, and to have a multitude of converts before and behind.<sup>9</sup>

To understand this gospel focus is to feel the very pulse of Spurgeon’s heart. To grasp this evangelistic zeal is to touch the live nerve of his soul. Simply put, he was compelled to preach the gospel and gather in the lost. As an expositor, Spurgeon truly possessed the heart of a soul-winner.

Let us begin our assessment of Spurgeon’s gospel ministry with a consideration of his extraordinary life and legacy.

## **Born and Born Again**

A descendent of French Huguenot and Dutch Reformed stock, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was born on June 19, 1834, in a cottage at Kelvedon, Essex, England. Many of his Protestant ancestors had been driven out of their

native countries by persecution, taking refuge in England. Spurgeon would say, "I had far rather be descended from one who suffered for the faith than bear the blood of all the emperors within my veins."<sup>10</sup> Both his father, John, and grandfather, James, were Independent ministers who faithfully pastored congregations. Charles was the eldest of seventeen children. His younger brother James would later serve as his co-pastor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Charles' twin sons would likewise follow him in the ministry.

When his mother was to deliver her second child, young Spurgeon, age two, was sent to nearby Stambourne to live with his grandfather, where he would remain until age six. During this time and on subsequent visits, Spurgeon was exposed to many Puritan works, including John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, and Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*. Despite his exposure to these books and the spiritual influence of his family, Spurgeon remained unconverted. He recalled: "I had heard of the plan of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus from my youth up; but I did not know any more about it in my innermost soul than if I had been born and bred a Hottentot. The light was there, but I was blind."<sup>11</sup>

On Sunday morning, January 6, 1850, Charles, age fifteen, was walking to church in the little town of Colchester when a snowstorm drove him into a small Primitive Methodist church. Only a dozen people were in attendance, and even the minister could not arrive. A reluctant lay preacher stepped forward to expound Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." This unassuming figure exhorted the small congregation to look by faith to Jesus Christ alone. Fixing his eyes on young Spurgeon, he urged: "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but to look and live."<sup>12</sup>

Like an arrow from heaven's bow, the gospel hit its intended target. Spurgeon wrote: "I saw at once the way of salvation. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me."<sup>13</sup> Gazing by faith on Christ, he was dramatically converted. Consumed with joy, he could scarcely contain himself "even for five minutes without trying to do something for Christ."<sup>14</sup> Such boundless energy would mark his life from that point forward. On April 4, 1850, he was admitted to fellowship at St. Andrews Baptist Church, and soon after he was baptized and took his first Communion.

With growing zeal, Spurgeon, age sixteen, preached his first sermon in a small cottage at Teversham near Cambridge. His preaching gift was immediately recognized. When he was only seventeen years old, Spurgeon was made the minister of a rural Baptist church in a tiny village, Waterbeach. At the

Waterbeach Baptist Chapel, Charles preached the gospel with extraordinary power and noticeable results. Despite being in a small hamlet known for its debauchery, this humble Baptist chapel grew over the next two years from a mere forty to more than one hundred members.

## **New Park Street Chapel**

Reports of this preaching prodigy soon reached London. On December 18, 1853, Spurgeon was invited to preach at the largest and most famous Particular Baptist church in all of London, the New Park Street Chapel. This historic church, staunchly Calvinistic, had been pastored by such luminaries as Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), John Gill (1697–1771), and John Rippon (1750–1836), but it had fallen into serious decline. A mere two hundred people were meeting in a building that had been built to seat twelve hundred. After preaching there for three months, Spurgeon, age nineteen, was called to be its pastor. He would faithfully shepherd the New Park Street flock until his death thirty-eight years later.

Under Spurgeon's preaching, New Park Street Chapel instantly grew. Within months, five hundred people were in regular attendance. After the first year, the building could not contain the crowds that were coming to hear his preaching. The chapel was enlarged to seat fifteen hundred, with standing room for five hundred more. Still, the people were jammed along the walls and down the aisles, and crammed into windowsills. Soon, the church began issuing free tickets for admission to even the midweek services.<sup>15</sup> Streets became blocked with traffic in the neighborhood around the chapel. London had not witnessed such a meteoric rise since the electrifying preaching of George Whitefield.

In the midst of this prolific growth, Charles met Susannah Thompson, a member of his congregation. A friendship soon became an attraction, and the two were married on January 8, 1856, at New Park Street Chapel, filled to overflowing. Their affection for one another never waned. Sadly, Susannah became a semi-invalid after the birth of their twin sons later in 1856. She was confined to home for long periods of time throughout her adult life, unable to hear Charles preach. Despite this affliction, she remained a source of strong encouragement to him and oversaw a thriving ministry that provided her husband's books for pastors and missionaries.

The crowds soon forced the New Park Street church to move into Exeter Hall, an enormous public building with seating for four thousand people and standing room for another thousand. But even this large structure could not

contain the growing multitudes. Hundreds were turned away on a weekly basis. It became apparent that a new building would have to be erected for the fast-growing congregation. Plans were drafted for what would become the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle, the largest Protestant house of worship in the world.

Meanwhile, Spurgeon moved his bulging church into an even larger venue, the Music Hall at Royal Surrey Gardens. This vast edifice with three large balconies seated twelve thousand people. At the first service, on October 19, 1856, the massive structure was filled from floor to ceiling, and thousands were turned away. But then catastrophe struck. Someone in the gallery shouted, “Fire!” Panic ensued and, as people rushed to escape, several were trampled to death—a tragedy that devastated young Spurgeon.

Missing only one Sunday, Spurgeon resumed preaching to the large crowds. With countless unbelievers attending, every service proved to be an evangelistic occasion. Spurgeon and others interviewed converts each Tuesday afternoon. So many lost souls were saved that Spurgeon claimed he never preached a sermon in the Music Hall when God did not save someone. At a time when London was the most prominent metropolis in the world, the people embraced Spurgeon as no city had ever embraced a preacher.

## **Early Trials and Triumphs**

Yet all was not smooth sailing. With Spurgeon’s instant popularity came stiff opposition. The London press lampooned him as a religious huckster with self-serving motives. He was repeatedly mocked as “the Exeter Hall demagogue,” “the pulpit buffoon,” and “a nine days wonder.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, advocates of Arminian theology assailed him with what they regarded as the worst derision of all, calling him a dreaded Calvinist. Further, Hyper-Calvinists criticized him for being too open in his free offer of the gospel. Spurgeon admitted, “My name is kicked about the street as a football.”<sup>17</sup>

Providentially, this persecution attracted more allies to his side, especially young preachers. Though Spurgeon had no university degree and had not attended seminary, he founded the Pastors’ College when he was only twenty-two years old. Focusing on the training of preachers, not scholars, he admitted only those who were already filling pulpits. For the first fifteen years, Spurgeon personally underwrote the entire cost of the school through the sale of his weekly sermons. In addition, he lectured to the students every Friday afternoon on a particular aspect of gospel preaching. These messages became the text for

his beloved book *Lectures to My Students* During his lifetime, Spurgeon saw nearly one thousand men trained for the ministry in his college.<sup>18</sup>

In 1857, England suffered a tragic defeat in India, and a Day of National Humiliation was proclaimed. On October 7, Spurgeon, a mere twenty-three years old, preached in the famous Crystal Palace to a massive gathering of 23,654, the largest indoor crowd in its day. Trains ran throughout London, bringing people to hear Spurgeon's message from Micah 6:9, "Hear of the rod and of him who appointed it!" This national address was a strong declaration of the sovereignty of God over England. The defeat, Spurgeon proclaimed, was from God, intended to humble a proud nation.

Through his printed sermons, Spurgeon's influence spread across England and around the globe. On Monday morning, a transcript of Spurgeon's sermon was delivered for his editing, then was published on Thursday.<sup>19</sup> These sermons were sold on street corners for a penny each, so the messages were dubbed the "Penny Pulpit." More than twenty-five thousand copies were sold weekly. Moreover, these sermons were cabled across the Atlantic to America, where they were printed in large newspapers. Eventually, they were translated into forty languages around the globe. The sermons were sold by tract distributors, read in hospitals, taken into prisons, preached by laymen, cherished by sailors, and carried by missionaries.<sup>20</sup> Through the printed page, Spurgeon's congregation was estimated to be no less than a million people.<sup>21</sup>

## **A Swelling Tide of Revival**

The year 1859 proved to be the most extraordinary in Spurgeon's ministry. This was the last year his church gathered at the Surrey Music Hall. A season of fervent revival was felt under some of the most Calvinistic yet evangelistic sermons of his ministry. These Spirit-empowered messages included, "Predestination and Calling" (Rom. 8:30), "The Necessity of the Spirit's Word" (Ezek. 36:27), "The Story of God's Mighty Acts" (Ps. 44:1), and "The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

However, this remarkable season in Surrey Gardens ended abruptly. Spurgeon learned that the New Park Street church would be forced to share the facility on Sundays with amusement programs, which he considered a violation of the Sabbath. Spurgeon said he would move the services if such entertainment were allowed. But the owners of the Music Hall refused to yield. The young preacher countered: "My name would cease to be Spurgeon, if I yielded. I

neither can nor will give way in anything in which I know I am right; and in the defense of God's holy Sabbath, the cry of this day is, 'Arise, let us go hence'!"<sup>22</sup> Rather than compromise, Spurgeon moved his growing flock back into the smaller Exeter Hall, showing himself a man of principle, not pragmatism.

On December 11, 1859, in his last sermon at the Music Hall, he preached "The Minister's Farewell," an exposition of Acts 20:26–27, in which he announced that in that place he had declared the full counsel of God. One attendee wrote his impressions of Spurgeon's preaching that day:

How he reveled in preaching that morning! It was very hot, and he kept on wiping the perspiration from his forehead; but his discomfort did not affect his discourse, his words flowed on like a torrent of sacred eloquence.... Mr. Spurgeon preached an earnest sermon on declaring the whole counsel of God. There is always something sad about last things, and, as I came away, I felt that one of the happiest experiences of my youth belonged to the past. So also—in my opinion—passed away the most romantic stage even in Mr. Spurgeon's wonderful life.<sup>23</sup>

## **The Metropolitan Tabernacle**

That same year, construction of the Metropolitan Tabernacle began. On August 15, the cornerstone of the building was laid. At the ceremony, Spurgeon declared his unwavering allegiance to the doctrines of sovereign grace: "We believe in the five great points commonly known as Calvinism. We look upon them as being five great lamps which help to irradiate the cross."<sup>24</sup> As the massive facility was being constructed, Spurgeon traveled to the Continent in June and July 1860. When he came to Geneva, Switzerland, he was welcomed as a second Calvin. He was urged to preach in the pulpit of the great Reformer and given the chance to wear his gown, a rare honor he could not refuse.

On March 18, 1861, the Metropolitan Tabernacle officially opened. At this grand occasion, Spurgeon preached an overview of the doctrines of grace, then had five other men preach, each addressing one of the five points of Calvinism. This action revealed Spurgeon's firm belief that these God-exalting truths form the very heart of the gospel. Spurgeon believed the doctrines of sovereign grace, far from being a hindrance to evangelism, are a great harvester of souls. The truths of God's elective, redeeming love infused soul-saving power into his preaching and brought many to faith in Christ.

Unparalleled in size, the Tabernacle was the largest sanctuary in the history of the Protestant church. Seating six thousand people, it accommodated one of the largest flocks in regular attendance since the days of the Apostles.<sup>25</sup> Until his death thirty-one years later, the Tabernacle was filled each Sunday morning and evening. Spurgeon even requested that the members not attend services once a quarter so that the unconverted might find a seat. His congregation was comprised mainly of common people from everyday walks of life, but he drew the elite as well, including Prime Minister William Gladstone, members of the royal family, Parliament dignitaries, and such notables as John Ruskin, Florence Nightingale, and Gen. James Garfield, later president of the United States.

Throughout the week, Spurgeon preached as many as ten times around London and the surrounding areas, including as far as Scotland and Ireland. Spurgeon's presence in any pulpit emboldened local pastors and encouraged their flocks. With his growing fame, he was repeatedly invited to come to America to preach. Yet Spurgeon declined these trans-Atlantic invitations, choosing to keep the Tabernacle as the hub of his ministry.

People warned Spurgeon that he would break down physically and emotionally under the stress of such expansive preaching. Spurgeon replied: "If I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup> He added: "We find ourselves able to preach ten or twelve times a week, and we find we are the stronger for it... 'Oh,' said one of the members, 'our minister will kill himself.' ... That is the kind of work that will kill no man. It is preaching to sleepy congregations that kills good ministers."<sup>27</sup> Spurgeon found strength in preaching.

## **Adversities and Advances**

Further controversy soon embroiled Spurgeon. In 1864, he entered what became known as the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy, a confrontation with the Church of England over its claim that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins. Spurgeon saw this teaching as a corruption of the gospel and therefore spoke out against it. But when he did, he was condemned for intruding into the consciences of Anglican Church members. Spurgeon was forced to withdraw from the Evangelical Alliance, in which he was a prominent figure. Amid this conflict, Spurgeon launched a monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, aimed at refuting theological errors of the day and defending the purity of the

gospel.

Spurgeon was also busy spreading the gospel. In 1866, he founded the Metropolitan Colportage Association for the distribution of gospel literature. From March 24 to April 21, 1867, the Tabernacle underwent renovation, and Sunday services were moved into the Agricultural Hall at Islington. More than twenty thousand people attended each of these five memorable meetings, among the largest congregations that Spurgeon ever addressed. That same year, he broke ground for the Stockwell Orphanage for boys. In 1868, he founded almshouses for the poor. In 1879, Spurgeon began the Girls' Orphanage. In all, under Spurgeon's leadership, some one thousand energetic members were actively proclaiming the gospel throughout London in various ministries. In addition, 127 lay ministers were serving in twenty-three mission stations around London. At his fiftieth birthday, a list was read of sixty-six organizations he had founded for the purpose of advancing the gospel message.

Several years later, in 1887, Spurgeon entered yet another conflict, the greatest of his ministry, known as the Downgrade Controversy. He spoke out in defense of the gospel, confronting the doctrinal decline that was becoming prevalent in many pulpits. He compared the Baptist church to a train that had crested a high mountain pass and was barreling down the steep grade, gaining speed as it plummeted. The further it descended this slippery slope, he contended, the greater its destruction would be. He strongly warned against the undermining of the authority of Scripture, which was resulting in worldly entertainment, Vaudeville techniques, and a circus-like atmosphere in many churches in his day.

But Spurgeon's stern words fell on deaf ears. In a bold move, he resigned from the Baptist Union on October 26, 1887. Some called for him to start a new denomination, but he declined. At the annual meeting of the Baptist Union in April 1888, a motion to censure Spurgeon was passed. In a sad twist of history, it was seconded by his brother James, his co-pastor at the Tabernacle, who mistakenly believed the motion was calling for reconciliation. This controversy so grieved him that it contributed to his premature death just four years later.

## **The Final Days**

In his final years, Spurgeon suffered several physical ailments, including a kidney disease and gout. With his health declining, Spurgeon preached what would be his last sermon at the Tabernacle on June 7, 1891. In much distress, he withdrew to the city of Mentone on the French Riviera. He died there January



31, 1892. “The Prince of Preachers” was only fiftyseven years of age.

A funeral service was first conducted in France. Then Spurgeon’s body was taken back to London, where four funeral services were held on Wednesday, February 10—one for members of the Tabernacle, one for ministers and students, one for Christian workers, and still another for the general public. A sixth and final service was held the following day. In all, some sixty thousand mourners paid their respects to this colossal figure. A funeral parade two miles long followed his hearse from the Tabernacle to the cemetery at Norwood, with one hundred thousand people standing along the way. Flags flew at half-staff. Shops and pubs were closed. It seemed as though a member of the royal family had died.

Atop his coffin was placed a Bible, opened to Isaiah 45:22, the text that had brought him to saving faith in Christ as a teenager. By this, even in death, Spurgeon pointed people to Christ. With his passing, he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith.

During his thirty-eight-year London ministry, Spurgeon witnessed his congregation grow from two hundred to almost six thousand members. Over this time, he took 14,692 new members into the church, nearly eleven thousand of them by baptism. In all, it has been estimated that Spurgeon personally addressed nearly ten million people. Eventually, one of his twin sons, Thomas, succeeded him as pastor of the Tabernacle in 1894. His other son, Charles Jr., became the head of the orphanage he had founded.

By 1863, Spurgeon’s sermons had already sold more than eight million copies. At the time of his death in 1892, fifty million copies had been sold. By the end of the nineteenth century, more than a hundred million sermons had been sold in twenty-three languages, a figure unmatched by any preacher before or since.<sup>28</sup> Today, this number has reached well over three hundred million copies. A century after his death, there were more works in print by Spurgeon than by any other English-speaking author.<sup>29</sup> Spurgeon is history’s most widely read preacher.

To this day, Spurgeon continues to exert an enormous influence across evangelical Christianity. He authored 135 books, edited twenty-eight others, and wrote numerous pamphlets, tracts, and articles. This body of work remains unprecedented, the single largest publishing project by one author in the history of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> With more than thirty-eight hundred messages in print, his sermons comprise the largest bound collection of one man’s writings in the English language. These sermons are collected in sixty-three volumes<sup>31</sup> containing some twenty-five million words.

Given the monumental impact Spurgeon had in England and across the world, certain questions beg to be asked: What made his preaching so compelling? What enflamed him to proclaim the gospel as he did? What gave his evangelistic ministry such converting power? The answers are found in what is the central theme of this book, the gospel focus of Charles Spurgeon.

# Unshakable Foundations

*For Spurgeon, the Bible was just that, the very Word of God to break the heart and bring the soul before the throne of God, thus bringing them to a redemptive knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ Upon this foundation Spurgeon built his entire theology and ministry.<sup>1</sup>*

—Lewis A. Drummond

**T**hroughout his ministry, Charles Spurgeon’s preaching rested squarely on this impregnable rock—that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be, the inspired Word of the living God. As he stepped into the pulpit, he spoke with confidence in the infallible purity and saving power of God’s Word. For Spurgeon, when the Bible speaks, God speaks.

Spurgeon’s strong belief in the doctrines of grace was firmly rooted and grounded in this truth. He did not proclaim the doctrines of sovereign grace simply because the Reformers or Puritans affirmed them. Rather, he believed them because he found them clearly stated in the Bible. Though he considered himself a staunch Calvinist, Spurgeon asserted, “I believe nothing merely because [John] Calvin taught it, but because I have found his teaching in the Word of God.”<sup>2</sup> He further stated: “‘Calvinism’ did not spring from Calvin; we believe that it sprang from the great Founder of all truth. Perhaps Calvin derived it mainly from the writings of Augustine. Augustine obtained his views, without doubt, through the Spirit of God, from the diligent study of the writings of Paul, and Paul received them of the Holy Ghost, from Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Though he agreed, on the whole, with Calvin and other Reformed theologians, Spurgeon’s beliefs were founded exclusively on what he saw plainly taught in Scripture. He was, as it were, the embodiment of *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone.

Voicing his sole allegiance to the Bible, Spurgeon renounced any confidence in the traditions of men or in the authorities of the church *per se*. He maintained:

The Holy Ghost revealed much of precious truth and holy precept by the apostles, and to His teaching we would give earnest heed; but when men cite the authority of fathers, and councils, and bishops, we give place for subjection, no, not for an hour. They may quote Irenaeus or Cyprian, Augustine or Chrysostom; they may remind us of the dogmas of Luther or Calvin; they may find authority in Simeon, Wesley, or Gill—we will listen to the opinions of these great men with the respect which they deserve *as men*, but having done so, we deny that we have anything to do with these men as authorities in the church of God, for there nothing has any authority, but “Thus saith the Lord of hosts.” Yea, if you shall bring us the concurrent consent of all tradition—if you shall quote precedents venerable with fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen centuries of antiquity, we burn the whole as so much worthless lumber, unless you put your finger upon the passage of Holy Writ which warrants the matter to be of God.<sup>4</sup>

This fundamental commitment to the Bible was the cornerstone on which Spurgeon built his ministry. Those who stand in pulpits, he contended, must believe that the Bible is not the word of the men who recorded it. Rather, they must affirm that it is the written Word of the living God. Iain Murray explains: “They have a message to announce, that is not their own and they are sure of it. To entertain doubt over whether Scripture is all given by inspiration of God is instantly to lose the true authority that is required of a preacher and evangelist.” Murray then emphatically adds, “No man will preach the gospel aright who does not wholly believe it.”<sup>5</sup> In just this manner, Spurgeon was convinced that the Bible is divine revelation, the very Word of God.

Spurgeon was, as John Piper says, a “truth-driven ... Bible-believing preacher.”<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon testified: “The words of Scripture thrill my soul as nothing else ever can. They bear me aloft or dash me down. They tear me in pieces or build me up. The words of God have more power over me than ever David’s fingers had over his harp strings.”<sup>7</sup> Refusing to resort to worldly entertainment in order to attract a crowd or to employ gospel gimmicks to induce a spurious response, Spurgeon relied on God’s Word for the success of his ministry. He affirmed: “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.”<sup>8</sup> His gospel preaching was grounded in his commitment to biblical truth.

As Spurgeon opened the Bible, he beheld the clear teaching of the sovereignty of God in man’s salvation. He believed he had no choice but to preach these truths because these are the teachings of God Himself. He simply would not be moved from these doctrines of grace. However, Spurgeon also found that God’s Word teaches the necessity of gospel preaching and evangelism, and that it is the responsibility of every person to believe on Jesus Christ. Spurgeon held these twin truths—divine sovereignty and human responsibility—because *both* are unmistakably taught in the Bible.

In this chapter, I want to examine Spurgeon’s convictions regarding the Scriptures. What did he believe about the infallibility and authority of God’s Word? What was his attitude toward the study of Scripture? How did he understand the proclamation of the gospel? In these pages, we will explore Spurgeon’s commitment to God’s Word, in which he found the gospel message that he proclaimed so passionately.

## **Divine Authorship**

First, Spurgeon believed in the divine authorship of the Bible. In nineteenth-century England, the Bible was under fierce attack from liberals and apostates. Yet, Spurgeon stood his ground and held fast to his conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He believed that those who question the Bible or entertain low views of its inspiration and authority are, in essence, without a guide to direct them and an anchor to hold them. Spurgeon understood that if any preacher gives up the high ground of the divine inspiration of Scripture, he has no gospel to preach. By such a departure, he removes himself from the true source of power in evangelism.

Though the Bible was written by human authors, Spurgeon believed that behind the Scriptures stands one divine Author, God Himself. In other words, there were many secondary authors but one primary Author. He believed that the inaudible voice of God is heard through His Word. In a sermon titled “The Bible,” preached on March 18, 1855, Spurgeon maintained:

Here lies my Bible—who wrote it? I open it, and find it consists of a series of tracts. The first five tracts were written by a man called Moses; I turn on, and I find others. Sometimes I see David is the penman, at other times

Solomon. Here I read Micah, then Amos, then Hosea. As I turn further on, to the more luminous pages of the New Testament, I see Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Paul, Peter, James, and others; but when I shut up the book, I ask myself, who is the author of it? Do these men jointly claim the authorship? Are they the compositors of this massive volume? Do they between themselves divide the honor? No!<sup>9</sup>

Here, Spurgeon declared that while human authors were the instruments who recorded the Scriptures, they were not the true Author. He then asserted:

This volume is the writing of the living God; each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Albeit, that Moses was employed to write his histories with fiery pen, God guided that pen. It may be that David touched his harp, and let sweet Psalms of melody drop from his fingers; but God moved his hands over the living strings of his golden harp. It may be that Solomon sang canticles of love, or gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips, and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum, when his horses plough the waters, or Habakkuk, when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi, when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John, who tells of love, or the rugged, fiery chapters of Peter, who speaks of fire devouring God's enemies; if I turn to Jude, who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God, everywhere I find God speaking; it is God's voice, not man's.<sup>10</sup>

With certainty, Spurgeon concluded that each word of the Bible is from God Himself: "The words are God's words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of this earth. This Bible is God's Bible, and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying, 'I am the Book of God; man, read me. I am God's writing; open my leaf, for I was penned by God; read it, for He is my Author.'"<sup>11</sup> Spurgeon was thoroughly convinced that in every page of Scripture is found the absolute truth of God. When the Bible speaks, Spurgeon believed, God speaks.

Spurgeon further avowed, "We believe in plenary, verbal inspiration."<sup>12</sup> This is to say, he held that the entire Bible is inspired and true. He affirmed, "I accept the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact."<sup>13</sup> He was convinced that "The sacred Scriptures are the record of what God hath spoken."<sup>14</sup> Throughout his

ministry, Spurgeon stood on the divine authorship of Scripture.

## **Divine Inerrancy**

Second, Spurgeon believed in the divine inerrancy of the Bible, seeing it as absolutely pure and infallibly true. He stated, “To us, every word of God is pure.”<sup>15</sup> In Spurgeon’s mind, there could be no room for uncertainty: “We must settle in our minds that the Word of God must certainly be true, absolutely infallible, and beyond all question.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, he believed that every doctrine is true, every teaching is right, every promise is sure. Spurgeon wrote:

This is the Word of God; come, search, ye critics, and find a flaw; examine it, from its Genesis to its Revelation, and find an error. This is a vein of pure gold, unalloyed by quartz, or any earthly substance. This is a star without a speck; a sun without a blot; a light without darkness; a moon without its paleness; a glory without a dimness. O Bible! It cannot be said of any other book, that it is perfect and pure; but of thee we can declare all wisdom is gathered up in thee, without a particle of folly. This is the judge that ends the strife, where wit and reason fail. This is the Book untainted by any error; but is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth.<sup>17</sup>

A firm belief in the infallibility of God’s Word emboldened Spurgeon as he preached. He declared, “If I did not believe in the infallibility of Scripture—the absolute infallibility of it from cover to cover, I would never enter this pulpit again!”<sup>18</sup> If the Bible cannot be trusted, he understood that he had no truth to preach. He said, “If I did not believe in the infallibility of the Book, I would rather be without it.”<sup>19</sup> A fallible book, Spurgeon reasoned, is not worth preaching. Only a pure book, he believed, contains the perfect message of salvation.

Spurgeon clearly understood that the power of the gospel is built on the inerrancy of Scripture: “Everything in the railway service depends upon the accuracy of the signals. When these are wrong, life will be sacrificed. On the road to heaven we need unerring signals, or the catastrophes will be far more terrible.”<sup>20</sup> If the Bible is to rightly direct men to God, Spurgeon contended, it must be entirely trustworthy. Therefore, no preacher is free to alter the biblical message, change its words, soften its doctrines, or withhold any truth. He affirmed:

I have heard men in prayer instead of saying, “Make your calling and *election* sure,” say “Make your calling and *salvation* sure.” Pity they were not born when God lived far—far back that they might have taught God how to write. Oh, impudence beyond all bounds! Oh full-blown self-conceit! To attempt to dictate to the All-wise—to teach the Omniscient and instruct the Eternal. Strange that there should be men so vile as to use the penknife of Jehoiakim to cut passages out of the word, because they are unpalatable. O ye who dislike certain portions of Holy Writ, rest assured that your taste is corrupt, and that God will not stay for your little opinion. Your dislike is the very reason why God wrote it, because you ought not to be suited; you have no right to be pleased. God wrote what you do not like; He wrote the truth. Oh! Let us bend in reverence before it, for God inspired it. It is pure truth. Here from this fountain gushes *aqua vitae*—the water of life—without a single particle of earth; here from this sun cometh forth rays of radiance, without the mixture of darkness. Blessed Bible! Thou art all truth.<sup>21</sup>

Because Spurgeon believed that the Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant, he saw himself merely as a channel through which the message of God must flow. He knew, therefore, that he must be careful not to contaminate its stream with the pollutants of human opinion, redirect its course, or stop its running. He must simply be the deliveryman, not the editor. The gospel truth must be delivered to all exactly as God wrote it. For Spurgeon, this included the truths of sovereign grace. He believed he must faithfully proclaim that God is Lord in all things, including the salvation of men.

## **Divine Authority**

Third, Spurgeon held strongly to the divine authority of the Bible. He asserted: “‘Thus saith the Lord’—this is the motto of our standard ... the only authority in God’s Church.”<sup>22</sup> He believed that the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life is God’s written Word. He wrote: “Oh, Book of books! And wast thou written by my God? Then will I bow before Thee. Thou Book of vast authority! Thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee.”<sup>23</sup> He believed deeply that all the religious speculations of men and their vain imaginations must submit to the doctrines taught in the Bible. In other words, the fallible minds of men must



surrender to the infallible mind of God. He stated:

Reason, thy place is to stand and find out what this Volume means, not to tell what this Book ought to say. Come thou, my reason, my intellect, sit thou down and listen, for these words are the words of God. I do not know how to enlarge on this thought. Oh! If you could ever remember that this Bible was actually and really written by God. Oh! If ye had been let into the secret chambers of heaven, if ye had beheld God grasping His pen and writing down these letters—then surely ye would respect them; but they are just as much God’s handwriting as if you had seen God write them. This Bible is a Book of authority; it is an authorized Book, for God has written it. Oh! Tremble, lest any of you despise it; mark its authority, for it is the Word of God.<sup>24</sup>

Spurgeon believed the only authority of any preacher lies in the supreme authority of the Bible: “I hold one single sentence out of God’s Word to be of more certainty and of more power than all the discoveries of all the learned men of all the ages.”<sup>25</sup> He was convinced that he must speak precisely what Scripture speaks: “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.”<sup>26</sup> In short, Spurgeon believed that his role was to echo the truth found in the Bible. Any withholding of this message would forfeit his authority.

Spurgeon was convinced that the best sermons are those in which the preacher possesses powerful trust in the Word: “You must have great faith in the Word of God if you are to be winners of souls to those who hear it.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, his gospel preaching was undergirded by his reliance on the authority of Scripture. Hear Spurgeon extend his gospel invitation: “Have you any hope of heaven which will not stand the test of ‘Thus saith the Lord?’ What are you resting upon? ... Are you building upon your works? Are you depending upon your own feelings? Do you rely upon sacraments? Are you placing your trust upon the word of man? ... Build upon the Word of my Lord and Master; trust your soul with Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> For Spurgeon, biblical authority is the sturdy foundation on which the work of evangelism must be built.

## **Divine Truth**

Fourth, Spurgeon believed that if he was to be used effectively in evangelism, he must have a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Consequently, his sermon preparation was marked by thorough study of the biblical text. He declared to his students: “Be masters of your Bibles, brethren. Whatever other works you have not searched, be at home with the writings of the prophets and apostles. ‘Let the Word of God dwell in you richly.’”<sup>29</sup> As Spurgeon saw it, a minister’s depth in the Word would ultimately determine the breadth of his ministry.

To gain such profundity, Spurgeon made it his goal to plumb the depths of the Bible. He wrote, “To understand the Bible should be our ambition; we should be familiar with it, as familiar as the housewife with her needle, the merchant with his ledger, the mariner with his ship.”<sup>30</sup> He added, “It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, your blood is *Bibline* and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.”<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon followed his own advice and pursued an extensive understanding of the Scriptures.

Of course, a strong grasp of Scripture did not come automatically. Spurgeon said: “The ministry demands brain labor. The preacher must throw his thought into his teaching, and read and study to keep his mind in good trim.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, power in gospel preaching demands arduous study. He admitted: “I scarcely ever prepare for my pulpit with pleasure. Study for the pulpit is to me the most irksome work in the world.”<sup>33</sup> But he understood that if he refused to pay this high price, he would have no business in the ministry: “An idler has no right in the pulpit. He is an instrument of Satan in damning the souls of men.”<sup>34</sup> Again, he warned: “He who has ceased to learn has ceased to teach. He who no longer sows in the study will no more reap in the pulpit.”<sup>35</sup> Even for a genius like Spurgeon, Bible study was hard work. But depth in the Word is absolutely necessary if there is to be depth of conviction and soundness of conversions.

Despite lacking any formal education, Spurgeon was remarkably well read and exceedingly learned in “a Puritan sort of way.”<sup>36</sup> His personal library in his Westwood home boasted an estimated twelve thousand volumes of Bible commentaries, systematic theologies, linguistic aids, church histories, and Christian biographies. So familiar was Spurgeon with his books that it was said he could walk into his study in the dark and put his hand on any desired work. Lewis A. Drummond states, “He could classify all he read and possessed the unusual gift of instant recall.”<sup>37</sup> This retention enabled him to be a capable thinker and adept scholar.<sup>38</sup>

Hughes Oliphant Old notes that Spurgeon was “a rapid reader who read the English Puritans widely and perceptively. The Puritans produced an amazing

amount of literature of different types, and Spurgeon read and reread this literature.”<sup>39</sup> Through this vast reading, Spurgeon acquired a “rare combination of biblical clarity, theological coherence, rhetorical zest, perspicuity of diction, universality of appeal and urgency of application.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, he was well prepared to preach the full counsel of God with extraordinary powers of communication.

Only one so full of Scripture could prepare to preach as Spurgeon did. His voracious reading throughout the week allowed him to enter his study on Saturday evening, select his text for Sunday morning, and prepare to preach. He would draft a rough outline, the only aid he would carry into the pulpit. He repeated the same practice on Sunday afternoon for the Sunday evening sermon. Because he was so saturated with biblical truth, he said that whenever he sat down at his desk, it was as if he was preparing to preach multiple sermons. He confessed, “I believe that, almost any Saturday in my life, I prepare enough outlines of sermons, if I felt at liberty to preach them, to last me for a month, but I no more dare to use them than an honest mariner would run to shore a cargo of contraband goods.”<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon guarded his Saturday evening sermon preparation time, allowing no intrusion. Once, an uninvited guest came to his home to see him while he was preparing for Sunday. When the maid answered the door, this person sent her to Spurgeon, requesting an audience with him. Spurgeon directed her to say that it was his rule to see no one at that time. The visitor replied, “Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see him immediately.” The frightened maid brought the message, but Spurgeon answered, “Tell him I am busy with his Master, and cannot see servants now.”<sup>42</sup> This commitment to Scripture was the standard by which Spurgeon believed all preachers should be judged: “May I beg you carefully to judge every preacher, not by his gifts, not by his elocutionary powers, not by his status in society, not by the respectability of his congregation, not by the prettiness of his church, but by this—does he preach the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation?”<sup>43</sup> A deep commitment to the Scriptures was the secret to Spurgeon’s evangelistic ministry. Apart from God’s Word, he had absolutely nothing to say.

## **Committed to the Word**

Spurgeon’s commitment to the Bible led him to be strictly Calvinistic yet thoroughly evangelistic. He resolutely believed that the sovereign purposes of

God in salvation are clearly taught in Scripture. Likewise, he wholeheartedly affirmed that the gospel message is to be preached to every creature because it is commanded in God's Word. Moreover, he asserted that it is the responsibility of every person to place his or her trust in Christ because it is commanded in Scripture. Spurgeon's belief in the divine origin of Scripture made him that most potent weapon, a Calvinistic evangelist. He could not discard one truth in favor of the other any more than he could cut one page out of the Bible out of preference for another.

Near the end of his ministry, Spurgeon witnessed churches resorting to carnal means to attract crowds for evangelism. The pulpit was replaced with a stage and the sermon with amusement. With this worldly infiltration, biblical truth was diluted, and there was a severe loss of power in evangelistic preaching. Sensing the urgency, Spurgeon declared: "Everywhere there is apathy. Nobody cares whether that which is preached is true or false. A sermon is a sermon whatever the subject; only, the shorter it is the better."<sup>44</sup> But Spurgeon refused to cave in or compromise. He remained consumed with a singular passion for biblical truth.

Though the day clamored for soothing thoughts, Spurgeon called for sharp-edged truths: "God is my witness—I have eschewed every idea of trying to be eloquent or oratorical in my preaching. I care nothing whatever about the gaudy show of speechmaking. I only want just to tell you these truths in unvarnished speech."<sup>45</sup> Though the gospel itself was being subverted, threatening the genuineness of conversions, Spurgeon held fast to the simple preaching of divine truth and witnessed countless new births.

Spurgeon had drunk deeply from the wells of Scripture. He had virtually become a fountainhead for its truth to gush forth. He had tapped into the deep reservoirs of sovereign grace, and they flowed freely from his biblical expositions. He spoke the language of Scripture itself, declaring that salvation is of the Lord. He devoted himself to this God-centered thrust as he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon represents the dedication to the Scriptures that every preacher—yes, every believer—must possess. If we are to be gospel focused, we, too, must be confident in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. We must yield to its authority and be diligent in our study of the Word. If we are to see souls converted by the gospel, we must be mighty *in* the gospel itself.

# Sovereign Grace

*Spurgeon was one of the greatest evangelists England has ever seen, as well as one of the country's staunchest defenders of the doctrines of grace.*<sup>1</sup>

—James Montgomery Boice

**W**hen Charles Spurgeon burst onto the scene in the mid-nineteenth century, he appeared heralding the doctrines of sovereign grace. At that time, Calvinism was no longer the dominant theology in England, as it had been in Puritan times. Instead, the doctrines of grace were becoming obscured from public view, cast aside as dusty and archaic relics of primitive sixteenth-century Europe. Victorian England had come of age, it was supposed, and its philosophers championed the autonomy of man, not the sovereignty of God. The teaching of the Reformation had all but faded from the evangelical scene.

But rather than becoming infatuated with the current theological fads, Spurgeon chose to stay true to the old paths, those laid out in Scripture long ago, including the teachings of sovereign grace. He said: “It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching; no new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, that are called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> For Spurgeon, preaching the Bible meant preaching Calvinism. As he saw it, a robust Calvinism was the need of the hour.

These transcendent truths—total depravity, unconditional election, definite atonement, irresistible grace, and preserving grace—sharpened Spurgeon’s gospel focus. He declared:

There is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified unless we

preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the Gospel and nothing else. I do not believe that we preach the Gospel 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 the Gospel which allows saints to fall away after they are called.<sup>3</sup>

Spurgeon never whispered anything, and certainly not his allegiance to the doctrines of grace. Ernest Bacon writes: “Spurgeon’s preaching was thoroughly Calvinistic. He was deeply imbued with the ruling principle of Calvin’s theology—the sovereignty of God in creation, providence, and redemption. He wholeheartedly believed that Calvinism is the theology of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Spurgeon knew that the great Reformer of Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin, was not the author of these truths, but that they had come down from above. Spurgeon explained, “We hold and assert again and again that the truth which Calvin preached was the very truth which the apostle Paul had long before written in his inspired epistles and which is most clearly revealed in the discourses of our blessed Lord Himself.”<sup>5</sup> For Spurgeon, the doctrines of grace were not the teachings of any man but the very truths of God Himself.

Herein was the power of Spurgeon’s gospel message. Iain Murray writes: “The strength of Spurgeon’s ministry lay in his theology. He rediscovered what the church had largely forgotten—the evangelistic power of so-called ‘Calvinistic’ doctrine. ... Spurgeon looked upon these truths as the driving force of a Gospel ministry.”<sup>6</sup> It was Spurgeon’s conviction that the purest evangelism springs from Calvinistic truths. For Spurgeon, the gospel never shines brighter than through the lens of the doctrines of grace.

In examining Spurgeon’s gospel focus, we must recognize his commitment to the doctrines of grace. What did Spurgeon believe about these truths? How did he see the five points of Calvinism as constituting the heart of the gospel? How did these truths embolden his preaching of the gospel? I want to begin to answer these questions by looking at Spurgeon’s thoughts on each of the five truths that constitute the doctrines of grace.

## **Total Depravity**

First, Spurgeon affirmed the foundational doctrine of total depravity, sometimes called radical corruption. He clearly understood that before an evangelist can communicate the good news of salvation, he first must convey the bad news of condemnation. The black velvet backdrop of man's sin must be laid out before the sparkling diamond of God's sovereign grace can be seen in its dazzling luster. This begins with the Bible's teaching on Adam's sin, which brought about death. Spurgeon asserted:

In the day that Adam did eat that fruit his soul died; his imagination lost its mighty power to climb into celestial things and see heaven, his will lost its power always to choose that which is good, his judgment lost all ability to judge between right and wrong decidedly and infallibly, though something was retained in conscience; his memory became tainted, liable to hold evil things, and let righteous things glide away; every power of him ceased as to its moral vitality. Goodness was the vitality of his powers—that departed. Virtue, holiness, integrity, these were the life of man; but when these departed man became dead.<sup>7</sup>

But Adam's sin did not affect only himself. His fallen nature spread to the entire human race, and every part of every person is fatally plagued by spiritual death. Spurgeon wrote: "As the salt flavors every drop in the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature. It is so sadly there, so abundantly there, that if you cannot detect it, you are deceived."<sup>8</sup> He added: "The venom of sin is in the very fountain of our being; it has poisoned our heart. It is in the very marrow of our bones and is as natural to us as anything that belongs to us."<sup>9</sup> He believed that the entire person—mind, affections, and will—is polluted and poisoned by original sin.

The result, he said, is that "a very hell of corruption lies within the best saint."<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon recognized that sin lies deep within the souls of even the best of men. This inward corruption makes every man a savage beast: "There is no beast in wolf or lion or serpent that is so brutish as the beast in man."<sup>11</sup> All people are spiritually dead, unable to see, desire, or respond to the gospel message.

Regarding the will, Spurgeon said, "We declare on scriptural authority that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will will ever be constrained toward Christ."<sup>12</sup> By this statement, Spurgeon

affirmed that the volitional capacity of sinful man is paralyzed, leaving him incapable of responding to the free offer of Christ.

Consequently, Spurgeon resisted the notion of human free will. He contended that such an idea elevates man to the place reserved for God alone: “Free-will doctrine—what does it? It magnifies man into God. It declares God’s purposes a nullity, since they cannot be carried out unless men are willing. It makes God’s will a waiting servant to the will of man.”<sup>13</sup> Further, Spurgeon affirmed, “If God requires of the sinner, dead in sin, that he should take the first step, then he requires just that which renders salvation as impossible under the gospel as it was under the law, since man is as unable to believe as he is to obey.”<sup>14</sup> Simply put, Spurgeon believed that no human will is entirely free. It is either a slave of sin or a slave of Christ, but never free.

For Spurgeon, this was where the message of the gospel begins. The saving message of grace starts with total depravity. Man is entirely corrupted by sin. He is spiritually dead and unable to save himself. He could not be more hopeless and helpless.

## **Unconditional Election**

Second, Spurgeon tenaciously held to the doctrine of unconditional election. By necessity, this biblical truth flows from belief in human depravity. Because the will of man is utterly dead and cannot choose God, God *must* exercise His sovereign will to save. Out of the mass of fallen humanity, God made an eternal, distinguishing choice. Before the foundation of the world, He determined whom He would save. Spurgeon contended that were it not for God’s choice of His elect, none would be saved.

Like all the doctrines that Spurgeon held, he believed this truth because he was convinced it is rooted and grounded in the Bible: “Whatever may be said about the doctrine of election, it is written in the Word of God as with an iron pen, and there is no getting rid of it.”<sup>15</sup> In his sermon titled “Election,” preached on September 2, 1855, Spurgeon read many passages that unmistakably teach this doctrinal truth. Among the texts he cited and explained were Luke 18:7; John 15:16; 17:8–9; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29, 33; 9:11–13; 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:26–29; Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1–2; and 2 John 1. In this exposition, Spurgeon stated:



In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being—when the ether was not fanned by an angel’s wing, when space itself had not an existence, when there was nothing save God alone—even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul.<sup>16</sup>

Spurgeon further asserted, “God from the beginning chose His people; when the unnavigated ether was yet unfanned by the wing of a single angel, when space was shoreless, or else unborn, when universal silence reigned, and not a voice or whisper shocked the solemnity of silence, when there was no being, and no motion, no time, and naught but God Himself, alone in His eternity.”<sup>17</sup> In eternity past, God sovereignly set His affections on a particular people and predestined their salvation. Moreover, sovereign election, Spurgeon affirmed, was based not on divine foresight but on divine foreordination: “‘But,’ say others, ‘God elected them on the foresight of their faith.’ Now, God gives faith, therefore He could not have elected them on account of faith which He foresaw.”<sup>18</sup>

Spurgeon further denied that election can be dismissed as the choice of nations rather than individuals. He declared:

It is the most miserable shift on earth to make out that God hath not chosen persons but nations.... If it were not just to choose a person, it would be far more unjust to choose a nation, since nations are but the union of multitudes of persons, and to chose a nation seems to be a more gigantic crime—if election be a crime—than to chose one person. Surely, to choose ten thousand would be considered to be worse than choosing one; to distinguish a whole nation from the rest of mankind, does seem to be a greater extravaganza in the acts of divine sovereignty than the election of one poor mortal, and leaving out another.<sup>19</sup>

Because God’s sovereign election of individual sinners is clearly taught by Scripture, Spurgeon insisted that it must be preached: “God gave me this great book to preach from, and if He has put anything in it you think is not fit, go and complain to Him, not to me. I am simply His servant, and if His errand that I am to tell is objectionable, I cannot help it. Let me tell you, the reason why many of

our churches are declining is just because this doctrine has not been preached.”<sup>20</sup> Spurgeon recognized that a refusal to preach the truth of sovereign election is a hindrance to the growth of the church. Such preaching is necessary if sinful men are to receive the seed of the gospel.

Moreover, Spurgeon maintained that withholding this great truth is a grievous offense against God:

Some of you have never preached on election since you were ordained. “These things,” you say, “are offensive.” And so you would rather offend God than offend man. But you reply, “These things will not be practical.” I do think that the climax of all man’s blasphemy is centered in that utterance. Tell me that God put a thing in the Bible that I am not to preach! You are finding fault with my God. But you say, “It will be dangerous.” What! God’s truth dangerous? I should not like to stand in your shoes when you have to face your Maker on the day of judgment after such an utterance as that.<sup>21</sup>

From a positive perspective, Spurgeon boldly declared that preaching unconditional election is evangelistic. He said, “I have never preached this doctrine without seeing conversions, and I believe I never shall.”<sup>22</sup> When people asked him how he reconciled preaching election with extending the gospel, he asserted, “There is no need to reconcile them, for they have never yet quarreled with one another.”<sup>23</sup> He was right. Divine sovereignty and gospel evangelism go hand in hand, the former preparing the way for and ensuring the success of the latter.

While all in heaven are there by God’s choice, Spurgeon said, those in hell are there by their own choice. He testified: “From the Word of God I gather that damnation is all of man, from top to bottom, and salvation is all of grace, from first to last. He that perishes chooses to perish; but he that is saved is saved because God has chosen to save him.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, salvation is possible only when God’s will liberates the human will from its bondage.

## **Definite Atonement**

Third, Spurgeon strongly affirmed the doctrine of definite atonement. This truth teaches that Christ died exclusively for those chosen by the Father and, thus, actually secured the salvation of all those for whom He died. Such a definite

redemption stands in contrast to the Arminian view, which claims that Christ did not *actually* save anyone in particular by His death, but merely made salvation *possible* for everyone. Spurgeon adamantly rejected this vague position: “A redemption which pays a price, but does not ensure that which is purchased—a redemption which calls Christ a substitute for the sinner, but yet which allows the person to suffer—is altogether unworthy of our apprehensions of Almighty God.”<sup>25</sup> Such a nebulous belief, he insisted, grossly dishonors God, especially His justice, and distorts the saving purpose of Christ in His substitutionary death.

With clear thinking, Spurgeon summarized the unbiblical, illogical Arminian position with these words:

The Arminian holds that Christ, when He died, did not die with an intent to save any particular person. And they teach that Christ’s death does not in itself secure beyond doubt the salvation of any one man living. They believe that Christ died to make the salvation of all men possible; and that by the doing of something else, any man who pleases may attain unto eternal life. Consequently, they are obliged to hold that if man’s will would not give way and voluntarily surrender to grace, then Christ’s atonement would be unavailing. They hold that there was no secure particularity and specialty in the death of Christ. Christ died, according to them, as much for Judas in hell as for Peter who mounted to heaven. They believe that for those who were consigned to eternal fire, there was as true and real a redemption made as for those who now stand before the throne of the Most High.<sup>26</sup>

Spurgeon strongly denied the idea that Christ died for all men: “If it were Christ’s intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed!”<sup>27</sup> He added: “Some insist that Christ died for everybody. Why, then, are not all men saved? Because all men will not believe? That is to say that believing is necessary in order to make the blood of Christ efficacious for redemption. We hold that to be a great lie.”<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote: “Some say that all men are Christ’s by purchase. But, beloved, you and I do not believe in a sham redemption which does not redeem. We do not believe in a universal redemption which extends even to those who were in hell before the Savior died, and which includes the fallen angels as well as unrepentant men.”<sup>29</sup> Such a defeatist view of Christ’s death had no part in Spurgeon’s gospel preaching.

To the contrary, Spurgeon held that Christ accomplished the saving mission for which He came into the world. He believed that Jesus came to save a definite

number of sinners, namely, those the Father chose and gave to Him before time began. Spurgeon insisted that Jesus was not frustrated at the cross. In other words, Christ did not die in vain for any who die in unbelief. Rather, Spurgeon said, Jesus died triumphantly for all whom the Father had given Him:

We hold that Christ, when He died, had an object in view; and that object will most assuredly and beyond a doubt be accomplished. We measure the design of Christ's death by the effect of it. If anyone asks us, "What did Christ design to do by His death?" we answer that question by asking him another—"What has Christ done?" or, "What will Christ do by His death?" For we declare that the measure of the effect of Christ's love is the measure of the design of the cross. We cannot so belie our reason as to think that the intention of Almighty God could be frustrated, or that the design of so great a thing as the atonement, can by any way whatever, be missed.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear that Spurgeon understood that the *intent* of Christ's death defined its *extent*. He explained: "Christ came into this world with the intention of saving 'a multitude which no man can number;' and we believe that as the result of this, every person for whom He died must, beyond a shadow of a doubt, be cleansed from sin, and stand, washed in the blood, before the Father's throne."<sup>31</sup> He added: "What! Did Christ at one tremendous draft of love drink my damnation dry, and shall I be damned after that? God forbid! What! Shall God be unrighteous to forget the Redeemer's work for us and let the Savior's blood be shed in vain?"<sup>32</sup> Jesus did not die in vain, for none for whom Christ died will ever perish in hell.

Though some call this doctrine "limited atonement," Spurgeon insisted that both Arminians and Calvinists limit the atonement. Those who teach that Christ's death made salvation possible limit its *effect*, while those who believe in a definite atonement limit its *extent*. Put another way, the former see an unlimited extent but a limited effect. The latter see a limited extent but an unlimited effect. Spurgeon explained it this way:

We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer "No."

They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say “No; Christ has died that any man may be saved if ”— and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as to infallibly secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ’s death; we say, “No, my dear sir, it is you that do it.” We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ’s death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved, and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.<sup>33</sup>

Summing up his reasons for holding to definite atonement, Spurgeon said, “I would rather believe a limited atonement that is efficacious for all men for whom it was intended, than a universal atonement that is not efficacious for anybody, except the will of men be joined with it.”<sup>34</sup> Simply put, he held “that Christ came into the world not to put men into a *salvable* state, but into a *saved* state.”<sup>35</sup> Spurgeon believed that the atonement was accomplished by an utterly triumphant death.

## Irresistible Grace

Fourth, Spurgeon affirmed the doctrine of irresistible grace. This is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts, calls, draws, and regenerates elect sinners. This work unfailingly results in the faith of all those chosen. All whom the Father chose in eternity past and all those for whom the Son died are those whom the Spirit brings to faith in Jesus Christ. None whom the Father elected and for whom Christ died fail to believe. The Holy Spirit grants repentance and faith to these elect sinners and ensures their conversion.

This irresistible call is distinct from the general call of the gospel. The former is extended only to the elect and cannot be resisted. The latter is extended to all who hear the gospel and is resisted apart from the Spirit’s effectual call. Spurgeon explained: “The general call of the gospel is like the common ‘cluck’ of the hen which she is always giving when her chickens are around her. But if there is any danger impending, then she gives a very peculiar call, quite different from the ordinary one, and the little chicks come running as fast as they can, and hide for safety under her wings. That is the call we want, God’s peculiar and

effectual call to his own.”<sup>36</sup> This effectual call always secures its desired effect—the salvation of God’s own.

God’s sovereign call, Spurgeon affirmed, is far more powerful than any man’s resistance: “A man is not saved against his will, but he is made willing by the operation of the Holy Ghost. A mighty grace which he does not wish to resist enters into the man, disarms him, makes a new creature of him, and he is saved.”<sup>37</sup> This means no one is beyond the saving power of God: “*Difficulty* is not a word to be found in the dictionary of heaven. Nothing can be impossible with God. The swearing reprobate, whose mouth is blackened with profanity, whose heart is a very hell, and his life like the reeking flames of the bottomless pit—such a man, if the Lord but looks on him and makes bare His arm of irresistible grace, shall yet praise God and bless His name and live to His honor.”<sup>38</sup> In short, no human heart is so obstinate that the Spirit cannot conquer and convert it.

Spurgeon described how the Spirit had conquered his own stubborn heart: “When He first came to me, did I not spurn Him? When He knocked at the door, and asked for entrance, did I not drive Him away, and do despite to His grace? Ah! I can remember that I full often did so until, at last, by the power of His effectual grace, He said, ‘I must, I will come in;’ and then He turned my heart, and made me love Him.”<sup>39</sup> Just as the Holy Spirit turned Spurgeon’s heart, so He does in all those chosen by the Father, causing them to believe in the Son.

Spurgeon gloried in this triumph of God’s sovereign grace. God’s immutable will, he proclaimed, is far greater than man’s stubborn will:

Oh! I love God’s “shalls” and “wills.” There is nothing comparable to them. Let a man say “shall,” what is it good for? “I will,” says man, and he never performs; “I shall,” says he, and he breaks his promise. But it is never so with God’s “shalls.” If He says “shall,” it shall be; when He says “will,” it will be. Now He has said here, “many *shall* come.” The devil says, “they shall not come;” but “they shall come.” You yourselves say, “we won’t come;” God says, “You *shall* come.” Yes! There are some here who are laughing at salvation, who can scoff at Christ, and mock at the gospel; but I tell you some of you shall come yet. “What!” you say, “can God make me become a Christian?” I tell you yes, for herein rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask your consent; but it gets it. It does not say, will you have it? But it makes you willing in the day of God’s power.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, Spurgeon declared that irresistible grace makes even the most

resistant hearts receptive to the offer of salvation. Listen to the enormous confidence in his preaching of the gospel:

If Jesus Christ were to stand on this platform tonight, what would many people do with Him? If He were to come and say, “Here I am, I love you, will you be saved by Me?” not one of you would consent if you were left to your will. He Himself said, “No man can come to Me except the Father who hath sent Me draw him.” Ah! We want that; and here we have it. They *shall* come! They *shall* come! Ye may laugh, ye may despise us; but Jesus Christ shall not die for nothing. If some of you reject Him there are some that will not. If there are some that are not saved, others *shall* be. Christ *shall* see His seed, He *shall* prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord *shall* prosper in His hands. They *shall* come! And nought in heaven, nor on earth, nor in hell, can stop them from coming.<sup>41</sup>

Spurgeon was as courageous as a lion in proclaiming the saving message of Christ. He drew that courage from his belief that the Holy Spirit will turn the hearts of those chosen to believe on Christ. Simply put, Spurgeon knew that the Spirit guarantees that God’s Word will not return to Him void. Irresistible grace is triumphant grace.

## Preserving Grace

Fifth, Spurgeon affirmed the doctrine of the preserving grace of God, sometimes known as the perseverance of the saints. This biblical truth teaches that no believers in Christ will ever fall from grace, for God upholds their faith. Spurgeon affirmed, “I think few doctrines more vital than that of the perseverance of the saints, for if ever one child of God did perish, or if I knew it were possible that one could, I should conclude at once that I must, and I suppose each of you would do the same.”<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon saw the preserving grace of God as a primary component of the gospel.

The truth of preserving grace, Spurgeon testified, was the enticing bait that drew him to Christ. Before he was saved, Spurgeon observed others who appeared to fall away from their profession. These apparent examples of apostasy made him hesitant to commit his life to Christ. He said: “Whatever good resolutions I might make, the possibilities were that they would be good for nothing when temptation assailed me. I might be like those of whom it has been said, ‘They see the devil’s hook and yet cannot help nibbling at his bait.’ But,

that I should morally disgrace myself, as some had done whom I had known and heard of, was a hazard from the very thought of which I shrunk with horror.”<sup>43</sup> The thought that he might start the journey to heaven but fail to complete it terrified Spurgeon. As a result, he remained paralyzed in unbelief.

But then Spurgeon heard the marvelous truth that all who truly start the Christian life surely complete it. At that point, he could not resist entrusting his life to Christ: “When I heard and read with wondering eyes that whosoever believed in Christ Jesus should be saved, the truth came to my heart with a welcome I cannot describe to you. The doctrine that He would keep the feet of His saints had a charm indeed for me.”<sup>44</sup> He testified elsewhere:

I must confess that the doctrine of the final preservation of the saints was a bait that my soul could not resist. I thought it was a sort of life insurance—an insurance of my character, an insurance of my soul, an insurance of my eternal destiny. I knew that I could not keep myself, but if Christ promised to keep me, then I should be safe for ever; and I longed and prayed to find Christ, because I knew that, if I found Him, He would not give me a temporary and trumpery salvation, such as some preach, but eternal life which could never be lost.<sup>45</sup>

This important doctrine became a key component of Spurgeon’s gospel focus. Without it, he claimed, he would not be able to preach: “If anybody could possibly convince me that final perseverance is not a truth of the Bible, I should never preach again, for I feel I should have nothing worth preaching.”<sup>46</sup> Simply put, the perseverance of the saints was a necessary link in the unbreakable golden chain of salvation that he preached.

Spurgeon saw this doctrine as inseparably bound with justification by faith: “That doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints is, I believe, as thoroughly bound up with the standing or falling of the gospel as is the article of justification by faith. Give that up, and I see no gospel left.”<sup>47</sup> Spurgeon was so convinced of this that he stated elsewhere: “The doctrine of the final perseverance of believers seems to me to be written as with a beam of sunlight throughout the whole of Scripture. If that is not true, there is nothing at all in the Bible that is true. It is impossible to understand the Bible at all if it is not so.”<sup>48</sup> He added: “If there is anything taught in Scripture for certain, it is the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. I am as sure that doctrine is as plainly taught as the doctrine of the deity of Christ.”<sup>49</sup>

This is not a secondary doctrine, sitting on the periphery of Scripture, but a



primary truth, embedded in the core of the Bible and found throughout its pages. Thus, found it impossible not to preach it.

## Amazing Grace

The good news of the Bible is that God saves sinners. God the Father chose His elect, gave them to the Son, commissioned the Son to redeem them, and sends the Spirit to regenerate them. God the Son laid down His life for the sheep, securing their salvation. God the Spirit gives repentance, faith, and eternal life to these chosen ones. Salvation is a great work of the triune God's amazing grace.

Without question, the doctrines of sovereign grace were the foundation stones of Spurgeon's gospel ministry, was the high-octane fuel that powered his fiery preaching of the gospel. The marvelous truths of God's supreme authority in man's salvation kindled the fires of his heart and stoked the flames in his pulpit.

In proclaiming these doctrines, Spurgeon saw himself standing in a long succession of men who also had preached them. He said: "By this truth I make a pilgrimage into the past, and as I go, I see father after father, confessor after confessor, martyr after martyr, standing up to shake hands with me.... Taking these things to be the standard of my faith, I see the land of the ancients peopled with my brethren—I behold multitudes who confess the same as I do, and acknowledge that this is the religion of God's own church."<sup>50</sup> Spurgeon saw himself as merely one more servant who had carefully read the Bible, believed its teaching, and proclaimed its truth.

When Christianity had drifted far from these bedrock truths, Spurgeon could do nothing but stand on Scripture and, thus, stand with the great Bible teachers of the past. He affirmed: "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."<sup>51</sup> Through Spurgeon, the gospel of sovereign grace did indeed reverberate once again in the halls of Christendom. Herein lies the power of his gospel focus.

As in Spurgeon's day, a robust Calvinism remains the dire need of this present hour. May we proclaim that salvation is entirely of the Lord, all of grace, beginning and ending with God. May we be emboldened as Spurgeon was in our

own gospel ministry.

## Evangelistic Fervor

*Almost every sermon contained, especially toward its close, an entreaty of this nature—warning, begging, pleading, urging the sinner to come to Christ. He did not ask people to walk to the front of the auditorium, raise a hand, sign a card, or perform any outward action. But throughout each sermon and especially as he drew it to its close, he pleaded with unsaved hearers to believe on Christ, and he expected them to do so then and there.<sup>1</sup>*

—Arnold Dallimore

**T**hroughout his prolific ministry, Charles Spurgeon sought to maintain the important balance the Scriptures give to divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Perhaps no preacher ever held these two truths more carefully in balance. Being committed to the full counsel of God, Spurgeon embraced both truths with equal allegiance. He clung tenaciously to God’s sovereignty in the salvation of His elect, but he was equally convinced of the mandate to extend the offer of the gospel to every person. Emphasizing one of these truths to the exclusion of the other, he believed, would result in an unbalanced ministry.

Spurgeon was once asked how he could reconcile the apparent contradiction between these two truths. He replied: “I never have to reconcile friends. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility have never had a falling out with each other. I do not need to reconcile what God has joined together.”<sup>2</sup> He confessed: “Where these two truths meet I do not know, nor do I want to know. They do not puzzle me, since I have given up my mind to believing them both.”<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon simply embraced both divine sovereignty and human responsibility as clearly taught in the pages of Scripture.

By maintaining this balance, Spurgeon avoided a grave danger to evangelism known as Hyper-Calvinism. This teaching holds firmly to the doctrines of grace, but it neglects any urgent appeal to lost sinners to be converted. Iain Murray explains: “Gospel preaching for Hyper-Calvinists means a declaration of the facts of the gospel but nothing should be said by way of encouraging individuals to believe that the promises of Christ are made to them particularly until there is evidence that the Spirit of God has begun a saving work in their hearts convicting them and making them ‘sensible’ of their need.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Hyper-Calvinism rejects a universal invitation for sinners to believe, but argues that the gospel is to be preached only to the elect. Only those who feel the full burden of their sin, Hyper-Calvinists suppose, should be encouraged to seek relief in the Lord.

Spurgeon strongly rejected this error and adamantly declared that the gospel is good news for every person. Though he believed in divine election, he nevertheless urged the preaching of Christ to all: “We believe in predestination; we believe in election and non-election: but, notwithstanding that, we believe that we must preach to men, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall be saved,’ but believe not on him and ye are damned.”<sup>5</sup> He was persuaded that it is the duty of all preachers to proclaim the free gift of salvation to all men.

Therefore, evangelism was at the heart of all that Spurgeon did. He said, “Soul-winning is the chief business of the Christian minister; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer.”<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon gloried in pursuing conversions in his ministry: “God has sent us to preach in order that through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the sons of men may be reconciled to Him.... The glory of God being our chief object, we aim at it by seeking ... the salvation of sinners.”<sup>7</sup> So focused was Spurgeon on this endeavor that he affirmed, “I would rather be the means of saving a soul from death than be the greatest orator on earth.”<sup>8</sup> As Geoff Thomas writes, “Holding consistently to the tension of divine sovereignty and human responsibility meant that Spurgeon, wholeheartedly and without restriction of any kind, exhorted unconverted persons to repent and believe and to come to Christ as the Son of God and receive Him immediately as Lord and Savior.”<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon was, first and foremost, an evangelist.

In what ways did Spurgeon seek to reach sinners in his preaching of Christ? Did he do more than merely present the gospel? How did he urge the lost to be saved? This chapter will show the manner in which Spurgeon called on sinners to believe on Christ.

## Bold Proclamations

First, Spurgeon relentlessly preached the gospel with bold proclamations. He never murmured the message of salvation but declared it forcefully. He said, “I always feel that I have not done my duty as a preacher of the gospel if I go out of this pulpit without having clearly set before sinners the way of salvation.”<sup>10</sup> No matter what his text, he felt that his sermon must include a proclamation of the gospel.

Spurgeon believed he was required to proclaim the whole truth: “Men may preach a part of the gospel; they may only preach one single doctrine of it; and I would not say that a man did not preach the gospel at all if he did but maintain the doctrine of justification by faith—‘By grace are ye saved through faith.’ I should put him down for a gospel minister, but not one who preached the whole gospel. No man can be said to preach the whole gospel of God if he leaves out, knowingly and intentionally, one single truth of the blessed God.”<sup>11</sup> Preaching the gospel, Spurgeon believed, requires announcing all the truths of the Bible—both law and grace, repentance and faith, Christ’s lordship and His saviorhood, self-denial and sin’s forgiveness, even heaven and hell.

Sensing that many preachers in his day were attempting to make the gospel more palatable to unconverted men, Spurgeon warned against softening its truths: “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 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.”<sup>12</sup> He knew that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and therefore it needs no help from preachers in order to accomplish its work. He declared: “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.”<sup>13</sup> He believed the gospel ought to be preached boldly and clearly.

Spurgeon acted on this belief. A soft-spoken Calvinist, he believed, is a contradiction. A shy, reserved preacher of the gospel is an oxymoron. Such a mild-mannered man betrays his own convictions. Spurgeon maintained that the way of salvation through Jesus Christ must be daringly proclaimed to all men, and this requires a strong presentation of gospel truth in a straightforward manner.

## Open Invitations

Second, Spurgeon gave open invitation to unbelievers, asking them to believe on Christ. He recognized preachers must do more than give statements of the facts of the gospel. They must extend a summons to those outside the kingdom of heaven to come to the Lord Jesus.

An example of such a summons is found in his sermon “Compel Them to Come In,” from Luke 23, delivered on December 5, 1858, at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. Spurgeon said: “The King of heaven this morning sends a gracious invitation to you. He says, ‘As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live:’ ‘Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow.’”<sup>14</sup> Here Spurgeon used the very word of God, “Come,” to invite lost sinners to embrace Christ.

In his sermon “Come and Welcome,” on Revelation 22:17 Spurgeon declared: “The cry of the Christian religion is the simple word, ‘Come.’ ... ‘Come,’ is the very motto word of the gospel.”<sup>15</sup> In yet another sermon, “An Earnest Invitation,” on Psalm 2:12, preached on July 3, 1859, Spurgeon powerfully employed this same word:

Sinner, you are bidden to trust in Christ this morning. Come, this is your *only* hope ... this is an open salvation. Every soul in the world that feels its need of a Savior, and that longs to be saved, may come to Christ ... come, come away; come, come away! Come now; trust now in Christ, and thou shalt now find that blessed are all they that trust in him. The door of mercy does not stand on the jar, it is wide open. The gates of heaven are not merely hanging on the latch, but they are wide open both night and day. Come.<sup>16</sup>

Resisting the Hyper-Calvinism of his day, Spurgeon tenaciously held that the gospel is always an open door, never a closed one. It is clear that he did not wait to issue the invitation until his listeners sensed their need. Rather, he gave the invitation to all. Regardless of what unbelievers feel or do not feel, no matter where they are in life, they should be urged to come into the kingdom.

Spurgeon believed many ministers of his time were too timid in their invitations. He said: “How wide is this invitation! There are some ministers who are afraid to invite sinners, then why are they ministers! For they are afraid to

perform the most important part of the sacred office.... I preach Calvinism as high, as stern, and as sound as ever; but I do feel, and always did feel an anxiety to bring sinners to Christ.”<sup>17</sup> He saw “anxiety” for sinners as a key trait of preachers.

Spurgeon also felt that too many preachers in his day stressed the demands of the law at the expense of the gospel invitation. Though both must be proclaimed, he believed that preachers are primarily merchants of good news, not bad news: “The law repels; the gospel attracts. The law shows the distance between God and man; the gospel bridges that distance, and brings the sinner across that great fixed gulf which Moses could never bridge.”<sup>18</sup> Though he was an admirer of the Puritans, Spurgeon noted that many of them so emphasized the law in order to bring about conviction of sin that they neglected gospel invitations. By contrast, Spurgeon continually stressed that the gates of paradise are wide open. All sinners are invited to enter.

## **Tender Appeals**

Third, Spurgeon presented the gospel with tender, compassionate appeals to the lost. He maintained that the saving message of Christ is good news that should come through the preacher in loving tones. Spurgeon was filled with love for the souls of those without Christ. He stated: “My whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained, and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes, and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls. On such occasions, how we preach! As if we had men before us personally, and were clutching them, and begging them to come to Christ!”<sup>19</sup> Such tenderheartedness, he believed, is necessary to win hearts.

It is virtually impossible to find any Spurgeon sermon that does not have some loving appeal to the unconverted. Spurgeon’s affection toward unbelievers is, arguably, best reflected in the sermon from his very first Sunday evening at New Park Street Chapel, December 18, 1853. In that message, “The Faultless Assembly,” from Revelation 14:5, young Spurgeon described how a gospel minister must regard the souls of men and women:

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.... 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.<sup>20</sup>

In another sermon, “Christ’s Word with You,” preached from Matthew 11:28 on June 12, 1881, Spurgeon winsomely called sinners to faith:

Christ courts the company of the sorrowful, and invites those who are ill at ease to approach Him. What a heart of love He must have.... The Saviour has such a large heart that He does not forbid the sorrowing ones to come, all of them. “Come one,” says He, “come all. All of you that labour and are heavy laden may at this hour come to me.” The love of my Master’s heart is so great, and the sympathy of His nature with man is so deep, that if all should come that ever labored or ever sorrowed, He would not be exhausted by the sympathy, but would still be able to give them rest in Himself. But what a large heart Jesus has that He comes only to do men good, and begins by doing good first to those that want it most.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere Spurgeon said: “You must have a real desire for the good of the people if you are to have much influence over them. Why, even dogs and cats love the people who love them.”<sup>22</sup> When Spurgeon ascended into the pulpit, he never failed to make loving pleas for lost sinners to believe on Christ.

## **Sound Reasonings**

Fourth, Spurgeon presented the gospel with compelling reasons for sinners to believe on Christ. He believed that he should convince sinners to commit their lives to Christ by use of rational arguments. He felt such arguments were necessary to remove the excuses of unbelievers. Therefore, he often explained the unreasonableness of unbelief.

In what is arguably his most evangelistically successful sermon, “Compel



Them to Come In,” Spurgeon began his appeal with these words:

I know not what arguments to use with you. I appeal to your own self-interests. Oh my poor friend, would it not be better for you to be reconciled to the God of heaven, than to be his enemy? What are you getting by opposing God? Are you the happier for being his enemy? Answer, pleasure-seeker; hast thou found delights in that cup? Answer me, self-righteous man: hast thou found rest for the sole of thy foot in all thy works? Oh thou that goest about to establish thine own righteousness, I charge thee let conscience speak. Hast thou found it to be a happy path? Ah, my friend, “Wherefore dost thou spend thy money for that which is not bread, and thy labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”<sup>23</sup>

Then, anticipating the objections his hearers would raise, Spurgeon showed the foolishness, even insanity, of not coming to Christ. His logic is airtight:

Tell me what it is, my brother, that keeps you from Christ. I hear one say, “Oh, sir, it is because I feel myself too guilty.” That cannot be, my friend, that cannot be. “But, sir, I am the chief of sinners.” Friend, you are not. The chief of sinners died and went to heaven many years ago; his name was Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul the apostle. He was the chief of sinners, I know he spoke the truth. “No,” but you say still, “I am too vile.” You cannot be viler than the *chief* of sinners. You must, at least, be second worst. Even supposing you are the worst now alive, you are second worst, for he was chief. But suppose you are the worst, is not that the very reason why you should come to Christ. The worse a man is, the more reason he should go to the hospital or physician. The more poor you are, the more reason you should accept the charity of another. Now, Christ does not want any merits of yours. He gives freely. The worse you are, the more welcome you are.<sup>24</sup>

Spurgeon also sought to overcome the objection of those who said they could not come to Christ until their lives were better. He reasoned: “But let me ask you a question: Do you think you will ever get better by stopping away from Christ? If so, you know very little as yet of the way of salvation at all. No, sir, the longer you stay, the worse you will grow; your hope will grow weaker, your despair will become stronger; the nail with which Satan has fastened you down will be more firmly clenched, and you will be less hopeful than ever. Come, I

beseech you, recollect there is nothing to be gained by delay, but by delay everything may be lost.”<sup>25</sup> Spurgeon showed that no sinner can so improve himself as to become acceptable to God.

Spurgeon anticipated other objections: “‘But,’ cries another, ‘I feel I cannot believe.’ No, my friend, and you never will believe if you look first at your believing. Remember, I am not come to invite you to faith, but am come to invite you to Christ.... Our first business has not to do with faith, but with Christ. Come, I beseech you, on Calvary’s mount, and see the cross. Behold the Son of God, He who made the heavens and the earth, dying for your sins. Look to Him, is there not power in Him to save?”<sup>26</sup> He urged sinners to look away from themselves to Christ.

Then Spurgeon addressed the objection of those who clung to the inconvenience of the moment: “But did I hear you whisper that this was not a convenient time? Then what must I say to you? When will that convenient time come? Shall it come when you are in hell? Will that time be convenient? Shall it come when you are on your dying bed, and the death throttle is in your throat—shall it come then? Or when the burning sweat is scalding your brow; and then again, when the cold clammy sweat is there, shall those be convenient times? When pains are racking you, and you are on the borders of the tomb? No, sir, this morning is the convenient time.”<sup>27</sup> He sought to help his hearers see that there was no better time to place one’s faith in Christ.

Spurgeon knew that other listeners were procrastinators, always putting off committing themselves to the gospel. Spurgeon took seriously the scriptural injunction, “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2), so he strongly counseled his hearers not to wait:

Remember I have no authority to ask you to come to Christ tomorrow. The Master has given you no invitation to come to him next Tuesday. The invitation is, “*To-day* if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation,” for the Spirit saith “*to-day*.” “Come *now* and let us reason together;” why should you put it off? It may be the last warning you shall ever have. Put it off, and you may never weep again in chapel. You may never have so earnest a discourse addressed to you. You may not be pleaded with as I would plead with you now. You may go away, and God may say, “He is given unto idols, let him alone.”<sup>28</sup>

Spurgeon also spoke to those who already had declined repeated invitations to come to Christ, and who therefore were convinced they could not now accept

Him: “But I hear another cry, ‘Oh sir, you do not know how often I have been invited, how long I have rejected the Lord.’ I do not know, and I do not want to know; all I know is that my Master has sent me, to compel you to come in; so come along with you now. You may have rejected a thousand invitations; don’t make this the thousandth-and-one.”<sup>29</sup> Spurgeon pleaded in prayer: “O, Spirit of the living God, come and melt this heart for it has never been melted, and compel him to come in! I cannot let you go on such idle excuses as that.”<sup>30</sup> He refused to abandon those who had repeatedly rejected the gospel.

Finally, Spurgeon addressed others who were falsely convinced they were converted: “There are some of you here members of Christian churches, who make a profession of religion, but unless I be mistaken in you—and I shall be happy if I am—your profession is a lie. You do not live up to it, you dishonour it; you can live in the perpetual practice of absenting yourselves from God’s house, if not in sins worse than that.”<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon tried to arouse these sleepers from their spiritual slumber, aiming to remove any false hopes they held.

## **Compelling Persuasions**

Fifth, Spurgeon carried the proclamation of the gospel beyond the level of reasoning to that of persuasion. Having appealed to his hearers’ minds, he made pressing appeals to their hearts, more forcefully urging them to believe. He was convinced that he must exhort unbelievers to receive the gospel right away.

Spurgeon earnestly declared: “Preaching the gospel is to us a matter of life and death; we throw our whole soul into it. We live and are happy if you believe in Jesus and are saved. But we are almost ready to die if you refuse the gospel of Christ.”<sup>32</sup> He added: “I was not told merely to tell you and then go about my business. No; I am told to compel you to come in.... My inmost soul is speaking out to you, my poor brother, when I beseech you by Him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, consider my Master’s message which He bids me now address to you.”<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon saw it as his calling to implore his listeners to believe on Christ.

He believed that the great danger sinners face required him to strive for their attention:

I should be destitute of all humanity if I should see a person about to poison himself, and did not dash away the cup; or if I saw another about to plunge from London Bridge, if I did not assist in preventing him from doing so;

and I should be worse than a fiend if I did not now, with all love, and kindness, and earnestness, beseech you to lay hold on eternal life.... As I must stand before my Judge at last, I feel that I shall not make full proof of my ministry unless I entreat with many tears that ye would be saved, that ye would look unto Jesus Christ and receive His glorious salvation. But does not this avail? are all our entreaties lost upon you; do you turn a deaf ear?<sup>34</sup>

Spurgeon refused to be rebuffed in his presentation of the gospel: “Come, I am not to be put off by your rebuffs; if my exhortation fails, I must come to something else. My brother, I *entreat* you, I entreat you stop and consider. Do you know what it is you are rejecting this morning? You are rejecting Christ, your only Saviour.... I cannot bear that ye should do this, for I remember what you are forgetting: the day is coming when you will want a Saviour.... Deathbeds are stony things without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an awful thing to die anyhow.”<sup>35</sup> Spurgeon clearly cared for the souls of those to whom he preached.

He was determined to be as persistent in his gospel persuasions as sinners were in their unbelief. He said: “I exhort you by everything that is sacred and solemn, everything that is important and eternal, flee for your lives.... Are you still cold and indifferent? Will not the blind man permit me to lead him to the feast? Will not my maimed brother put his hand upon my shoulder and permit me to assist him to the banquet? Will not the poor man allow me to walk side-by-side with him? Must I use some stronger words? Must I use some other compulsion to compel you to come in?”<sup>36</sup> He sought to touch the hearts and stir the emotions of unbelievers.

Spurgeon was incapable of making a stoic presentation of the gospel, a cold statement of truths. He was deeply aware that he was not lecturing to students but preaching to sinners. There is a place for both forms of communication, but not in the pulpit. The gospel, Spurgeon believed, must be voiced with red-hot persuasions.

## **Authoritative Commands**

Sixth, Spurgeon delivered the gospel as a divine command, one that must be obeyed. The gospel is an imperative, not simply an indicative. In a sermon on 1 John 3:23—“And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ”—Spurgeon declared, “The sole and only warrant for a sinner to believe in Jesus is found in the gospel itself and in the command which accompanies that gospel, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, for Spurgeon, preaching the gospel necessitated that he command lost sinners to submit their wills to God.

On one occasion, Spurgeon asserted: “Do you spurn it? Do you still refuse it? Then I must change my tone a minute. I will not merely tell you the message, and invite you as I do with all earnestness, and sincere affection—I will go further. Sinner, in God’s name I *command* you to repent and believe.”<sup>38</sup> Spurgeon often gave similar commands to sinners. In another sermon, he said: “This is His commandment: He does not command thee to feel anything, or be anything, to prepare thyself for this.... Thou canst not say, ‘I have no right:’ you have a perfect right to do what God tells you to do. You cannot tell me you are not fit; there is no fitness wanted, the command is given and it is yours to obey, not to dispute.”<sup>39</sup> Spurgeon did not merely invite sinners to come to Christ. Rather, he commanded them to come.

One of Spurgeon’s reasons for preaching this way was that he understood that sinful man, because of his fallen nature, always postpones obedience to God. This unbelief toward the gospel is rebellion against God. Therefore, Spurgeon declared: “You say ... ‘But, sir, I do not think such things should be done in a hurry.’ A hurry! What does David say? ‘I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.’ A hurry! When a man is on the edge of damnation and on the borders of the grave! Do not talk of hurry, sir; when it is a case of life and death, let us fly swift as a flash of lightning.”<sup>40</sup> For Spurgeon, the only proper response to the gospel was instant belief on Christ.

Spurgeon even anticipated an unbeliever’s request for more time to pray about being saved, declaring it to be a step of disobedience toward God: “You say ... ‘Yes, but I should like to get home and pray.’ My text does not say it will be the accepted time when you get home and pray; it says, ‘Now,’ and as I find you are ‘now’ in this pew, ‘now is the accepted time.’ If you trust Christ *now*, you will be accepted: if now you are enabled to throw yourself simply into the hands of Christ, now is the accepted time between God and you.”<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon maintained that sinners must obey every command to believe on Christ.

## Severe Warnings

Seventh, Spurgeon presented the gospel with severe warnings to lost sinners. If tender appeals, sound reasonings, compelling persuasions, and authoritative commands do not reach the unbeliever’s heart, he believed, then stronger words are required. Spurgeon openly told those who persisted in unbelief of their

impending danger of eternal condemnation. If they did not repent, he warned, they would certainly perish forever.

Spurgeon often stressed the tenuous nature of life. For instance, he once asserted: “Are you sure that heart of yours is quite sound? Is the blood circulating with all accuracy? Are you quite sure of that? And if it be so, how long shall it be? O, perhaps there are some of you here that shall never see Christmas-day; it may be the mandate has gone forth already, ‘Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.’”<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon was quick to point out that tomorrow is not guaranteed for anyone.

He also tried to help his hearers imagine themselves dying or even dead. Spurgeon warned: “I picture myself standing at your bedside and hearing your cries, and knowing that you are dying without hope. I cannot bear that. I think I am standing by your coffin now, and looking into your clay-cold face, and saying, ‘This man despised Christ and neglected the great salvation.’”<sup>43</sup> But he went further, sternly warning that at death some of his hearers would find themselves condemned to hell:

There are some in this place, who if they were labeled this morning as to where they are going, would have to be directed “to hell.” You know that this is the case. And when will you get to your journey’s end? Some here may live another fifty years. I pray God that that question of mine may haunt you, and if it be never blessed to you before, may it be then, “*When will you yet to your journey’s end? When will you arrive in hell?*” This morning may some of you in your hearts say, “I am journeying thither, but, by the grace of God, I have come to a dead halt, and not another inch will I go. Lord, make me ready to go to heaven, give me now to trust the Savior that I may live.”<sup>44</sup>

Spurgeon also frankly told unbelievers that a day would come when they would hear no such warning again. Then, it would be too late to respond to the free offer of the gospel:

I must threaten you. You shall not always have such warnings as these. A day is coming, when hushed shall be the voice of every gospel minister, at least for you; for your ear shall be cold in death. It shall not be any more threatening; it shall be the fulfillment of the threatening. There shall be no promise, no proclamations of pardon and of mercy; no peacespeaking blood, but you shall be in the land where the Sabbath is all swallowed up in everlasting nights of misery, and where the preachings of the gospel are

forbidden because they would be unavailing. I charge you then, listen to this voice that now addresses your conscience; for if not, God shall speak to you in His wrath, and say unto you in His hot displeasure, “I called and ye refused; I stretched out My hand and no man regarded; therefore will I mock at your calamity; I will laugh when your fear cometh.” Sinner, I threaten you again. Remember, it is but a short time you may have to hear these warnings.<sup>45</sup>

This time might come, Spurgeon cautioned, sooner than his listeners thought. In fact, some who had heard his voice in the recent past had already gone beyond hope of salvation: “Some of my hearers who listened to me last year, and in the years that are past, are now—*now*—in hell! *Now*, where no hope can come; *now*, where no gospel shall ever be preached; *now*, where they bitterly regret their wasted Sabbaths and despised opportunities; *now*, where memory holds a dreadful reign, reminding them of all their sins; *now*, ‘Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;’ where they gnaw their fire-tormented tongues in vain; *now*, where God’s fury is manifested to the full in Tophet’s hideous fire.”<sup>46</sup> By stressing the damnation of others, Spurgeon hoped to awaken the hearts of some who heard his voice.

Of course, these severe warnings were given with a loving purpose. Spurgeon spoke with compassion, hoping that unbelieving sinners would flee to Christ for salvation: “Come, then, let the threatening have power with you. I do not threaten because I would alarm without cause, but in hopes that a brother’s threatening may drive you to the place where God hath prepared the feast of the gospel.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, this compassion drove him to declare the sinner’s danger in plain terms: “If you be not saved ye shall be without excuse. Ye, from the grey-headed down to the tender age of childhood, if ye this day lay not hold on Christ, your blood shall be on your own head.”<sup>48</sup> By preaching so boldly, Spurgeon saw many saved from the wrath to come.

## **A Passion for Lost Souls**

It is clear that Spurgeon believed the gospel must not be calmly presented as a mere set of facts. To the contrary, it must come as a bold proclamation with open invitations, tender appeals, sound reasonings, and compelling persuasions. Such presentations should include even authoritative commands and severe warnings to obstinate hearts and minds. Spurgeon did not shrink from this task but gloried

in it. He declared: “I do not envy Gabriel his crown when God gives me souls. I have thought that I would rather be here to talk with you and point you to my Master’s cross than be up there and cast my crown at His feet. For surely there can be no joy in heaven greater than the joy of doing the Master’s will in winning souls for Him.”<sup>49</sup> Spurgeon delighted in earnestly pursuing the salvation of lost sinners.

A sermon that does not win souls, Spurgeon felt, is a waste of a preacher’s energy: “When that which comes of his sowing is unfruitful, the sower’s work is wasted; he has spent his strength for nought. Preaching is the idlest of occupations if the Word be not adapted to enter the heart and produce good results. O my hearers, if you are not converted, I waste time and energy in standing here!”<sup>50</sup> Simply put, Spurgeon felt that preaching that did not lead to conversions was pointless.

It is not merely that Spurgeon desired to see people come to faith in Christ. Rather, he *had* to see lost sinners saved. He affirmed: “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.”<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere Spurgeon emphatically 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.”<sup>52</sup> For Spurgeon, no exertion was too excessive for the rescue of a soul from damnation.

In his evangelism, Spurgeon’s supreme motivation was sovereign grace: “That is why we preach! If there are so many fish to be taken in the net, I will go and catch some of them. Because many are ordained to be caught, I spread my nets with eager expectation. I never could see why that should repress our zealous efforts. It seems to me to be the very thing that should awaken us to energy—that God has a people, and that these people shall be brought in.”<sup>53</sup> Knowing that God had elected some to eternal life, Spurgeon was confident and passionate in his gospel appeals.

Spurgeon believed strongly in this evangelistic thrust. He saw it as his chief purpose in preaching: “If I was saved by a simple gospel, then I am bound to preach that same simple gospel till I die, so that others may be saved by it. When I cease to preach salvation by faith in Jesus, put me into a lunatic asylum, for



you may be sure that my mind is gone.”<sup>54</sup> He remained faithful to this mission throughout his ministry.

## The Heart of the Gospel

*He loved to proclaim “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ” Christ—He was the glorious, all-absorbing topic of Spurgeon’s ministry and that Name turned his pulpit labor into “a bath in the waters of Paradise.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Iain H. Murray

**O**n Monday, March 25, 1861, Charles Spurgeon, only twenty-six years old, ascended the pulpit of the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle for the first time. He was about to preach the inaugural sermon in what was then the largest Protestant house of worship in the world. For this historic occasion, Spurgeon had chosen for his subject the grand theme of his entire ministry. But this message would be more than a sermon—it would be a statement of what he believed to be the very heart of the gospel.

After mounting the pulpit, Spurgeon announced that his text would be Acts 5:42: “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Perfectly suited for this occasion, this passage highlighted the central thrust of the Apostles’ ministry and likewise served to define Spurgeon’s life and ministry. “In one sense,” Iain Murray writes, “the text he first preached on when the Metropolitan Tabernacle was opened in 1861 was always his text.”<sup>2</sup> Simply put, Spurgeon was *always* preaching the crucified Christ.

With Spurgeon’s gospel ministry resting squarely on the written Word, it was only right that he proclaimed the excellencies of the Living Word. Appropriately, the centerpiece of that first sermon in the Tabernacle was the person and work of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon declared:

I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist.... I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist.... But if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply—"It is Jesus Christ." ... The body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is ... Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>3</sup>

These poignant words succinctly defined Spurgeon's understanding of the gospel. He believed that the heart of the gospel is Christ. Spurgeon asserted: "The less you make of Christ, the less gospel you have to trust in.... The more gospel we would preach, the more of Christ we must proclaim."<sup>4</sup> For Spurgeon, no subject was more captivating, no truth more satisfying, and no name more powerful than Jesus'. He declared: "Preach Christ, that is the magnet; He will draw His own to Himself.... If we want to see conversions there must be ... more constant preaching of Christ; Christ must be in every sermon and He must be top and bottom of all the theology that is preached."<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere he said, "Make Christ the diamond setting of every ... sermon."<sup>6</sup> No matter what the preacher's text, Spurgeon believed, he must preach Christ.

Apart from Christ, Spurgeon maintained, he had nothing to preach: "I sometimes wonder that you do not get tired of my preaching, because I do nothing but hammer away on this one nail. With me it is, year after year, 'None but Jesus! None but Jesus!'"<sup>7</sup> He was so consumed with Christ in his preaching that he once remarked: "I know one who said I was always on the old string, and he would come and hear me no more. But if I preached a sermon without Christ in it, he would come. Ah, he will never come while this tongue moves."<sup>8</sup> He simply refused to preach without preaching Christ.

Spurgeon saw that a sermon without Christ is a message without the gospel, for Christ is the mark of all true gospel preaching. He declared: "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?"<sup>9</sup> He then empathically stated, "Men die and perish because Christ is not there."<sup>10</sup> For Spurgeon, a sermon

without Christ is devoid of saving power.

Consumed by sovereign grace and evangelistic fervor, Spurgeon was intent on preaching Christ. In what ways was Christ everything in his gospel presentations? How did he magnify the Lord Jesus in his preaching? In what major ways did he proclaim the person and work of Christ? We will seek out answers to these and other questions as we consider Spurgeon's singular focus on Christ.

## The Person of Christ

First, Spurgeon declared the glorious person of Christ. He believed that the gospel begins by announcing the true identity of Jesus—the God-man. Thus, Spurgeon presented Him as possessing all the divine attributes, as co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Christ, Spurgeon declared, is “the Alpha, the first, the chief, the foremost, the first-born of every creature, the Eternal God.”<sup>11</sup> But he never overlooked the fact that Jesus was also a man. “He is not humanity deified. He is not Godhead humanized. He is God. He is man. He is all that God is, and all that man is as God created him.”<sup>12</sup> Spurgeon affirmed that proclaiming the gospel necessitates making known both the absolute deity and sinless humanity of Christ.

Regarding the deity of Christ, Spurgeon boldly stated: “It is not possible that the man who denies the deity of Christ can be a Christian. He deliberately refuses the only way of escape from the wrath to come.... I cannot understand, nor do I believe, that any man will ever enter those pearly gates who, in doubting or discrediting the deity of our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, renounces the sheet anchor of our most holy faith.”<sup>13</sup> Putting it simply, he argued, “If Christ was not God, we are not Christians.”<sup>14</sup> He further stated: “That faith which saves the soul is believing on a person, depending upon Jesus for eternal life.... We must believe Him to be God's Son. We must grasp with strong confidence the great fact that He is God; for nothing short of a divine Saviour can ever deliver us from the infinite wrath of God. He who rejects the true and proper Godhead of Jesus of Nazareth, is not saved.”<sup>15</sup> Spurgeon clearly understood that Jesus is fully God and why this truth is essential to a proper understanding of the atonement.

Concerning Jesus' humanity, Spurgeon declared that the eternal Son of God became man, yet without sin. He maintained that Christ lived His earthly days in perfect obedience to the law of God:

Throughout the whole of His life He never committed an offence against the great law of truth and right. The law was in His heart; it was His nature to be holy. He could say to all the world, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” Even His vacillating judge enquired, “Why, what evil hath He done?” ... He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot. As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission.... Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced an evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for any evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame which was involved in His service.<sup>16</sup>

Further affirming the holiness of Christ, Spurgeon declared: “Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes; never did His lips let drop a hasty word; never did those feet go on an ill errand, nor those hands move towards a sinful deed; because His heart was filled with holiness and love. Within as well as without our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as His actions.”<sup>17</sup> With these words, Spurgeon powerfully declared that no moral imperfection existed in Christ.

Bringing Jesus’ deity and humanity together, Spurgeon asserted: “We must accept this Son of God as ‘Jesus,’ the Saviour. We must believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God, became man out of infinite love to man, that He might save His people from their sins.... We must look upon Jesus as ‘Christ,’ the anointed of the Father, sent into this world on salvation’s errand, not that sinners might save themselves, but that He, being mighty to save, might bring many sons unto glory.”<sup>18</sup> The gospel begins and ends, Spurgeon affirmed, with the eternal deity of Christ united to sinless humanity.

## **The Death of Christ**

Second, Spurgeon strongly proclaimed the saving death of Christ. Putting his finger on the vital nerve of the gospel message, he affirmed, “The heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Jesus Christ died a vicarious death in the place of sinners, the just for the unjust. Spurgeon believed that every doctrine must be brought into alignment with this truth.

In His sin-bearing death on the cross, Spurgeon declared, Jesus became “the

iniquity of all His people, remaining still Himself innocent; having no personal sin, being incapable of any, but yet taking the sin of others upon Himself.”<sup>20</sup> He added: “Christ did really, literally, and truly, take the sins that belonged to all who do believe on Him, and those sins did actually and in very deed become His sins; not that He had committed them, nor that He had any part or lot in them, except through the imputation to which He had consented, and for which He came into the world, and there lay the sins of all His people upon Christ’s shoulders.”<sup>21</sup> To Spurgeon, the transfer of our sins to Christ is the glory of the gospel.

Moreover, Spurgeon proclaimed that Christ’s death fulfilled what the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed: “Jesus is the chief of all sacrifices, the first of all offerings by which atonement is made to God for sin.... All other sacrifices of God’s ordaining were but pictures, representations, symbols, and shadows of Himself. There is only one sacrifice for sin, there never was another and there never can be.”<sup>22</sup> Further affirming that the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed ahead to the death of Christ, He said: “Jesus is the Lamb of the morning slain from before the foundation of the world, and the Lamb of the evening offered up in these last days for His people.... Atonement for sin is truly and in very deed to be found in the Son of God. In Him alone is there remission, for in His blood alone is there efficacy to satisfy the law.”<sup>23</sup> In the gospel, Spurgeon believed, the center of gravity is the substitutionary death of Christ.

By this work, Spurgeon contended, the Son of God made the perfect atonement for sin: “There is nothing for God to do. ‘It is finished.’ There is nothing for you to do. ‘It is finished.’ Christ need not bleed. ‘It is finished.’ You need not weep. ‘It is finished.’ God the Holy Spirit need not delay because of your unworthiness, nor need you delay because of your helplessness. ‘It is finished.’”<sup>24</sup>

This triumphant death was the chief doctrine of Spurgeon’s theology: “All other topics in Holy Scripture are important, and none of them are to be cast into the shade. But the death of the Son of God is the central sun of all these minor luminaries. It is the great Alpha and Omega. It is not only eminent, it is preeminent with us.”<sup>25</sup> The pinnacle truth of Scripture, he affirmed, is Christ’s death for the sins of His people: “The great doctrine, the greatest of all, is this, that God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon His only begotten Son, making Him to be sin for us, even Him who knew no sin; and that in consequence of this transference of sin he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous.”<sup>26</sup> Spurgeon revelled in the proclamation of the death of Christ.

For Spurgeon, proclaiming the atonement of Christ is the primary business of the church: “Our only business here below is to cry, ‘Behold the Lamb.’ Are any of you sent of God with any other message? It cannot be. The one message which God has given to His people to proclaim is salvation through the Lamb—salvation by the blood of Jesus.... To tell of Jesus is our occupation, we have nothing to say which is not comprised in the revelation made to us by God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Spurgeon practiced what he preached—Christ’s death was the core truth of his pulpit ministry.

In this sacred duty, Spurgeon envisioned himself as a loyal soldier manning his post: “I received some years ago orders from my Master to stand at the foot of the cross until He came. He has not come yet, but I mean to stand there till He does.”<sup>28</sup> Using similar imagery, Spurgeon declared elsewhere: “As the Roman sentinel in Pompeii stood to his post even when the city was destroyed, so do I stand to the truth of the atonement though the church is being buried beneath the boiling mud-showers of modern heresy. Everything else can wait, but this one truth of God must be proclaimed with a voice of thunder.”<sup>29</sup> Spurgeon clearly saw it as his chief assignment to point sinners to the atoning death of Christ.

## **The Resurrection of Christ**

Third, Spurgeon affirmed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ, he believed, is powerless to save without the empty tomb. The Savior’s triumph over death is the foundation on which the saving cross rests. He asserted that the resurrection of Christ is “the cornerstone of Christian doctrine”<sup>30</sup> and “the keystone of the arch of Christianity.”<sup>31</sup> Without it, he said, “the whole fabric of the gospel would fall to the ground.”<sup>32</sup> For Spurgeon, the resurrection of Christ is essential to gospel proclamation. There is no gospel apart from the risen Christ.

The resurrection is an essential doctrine, Spurgeon maintained, because of what it tells us about Christ: “The divinity of Christ finds its surest proof in His resurrection. Christ’s sovereignty also depends on His resurrection. Again, our justification hangs on Christ’s resurrection. Our very regeneration depends on His resurrection. And most certainly, our ultimate resurrection rests here. The silver thread of resurrection runs through all the blessings, from regeneration onward to our eternal glory, and binds them together.”<sup>33</sup> Without question, Spurgeon believed the resurrection to be the key element of the gospel.

Spurgeon saw the theological significance of Christ’s resurrection as

inseparably connected to the cross. The resurrection of Christ vindicated His crucifixion. Spurgeon stated:

He died for our sins, and ... He was raised again for our justification; that is, for our clearance. As the cross paid the debt, resurrection took the bond, and rent it in pieces; and now there is nothing standing in the records of eternity against any soul that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. His rising from the dead has made us clear from every charge. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again." That rising again has cleared us from all the sins that can ever be laid to our charge.<sup>34</sup>

Spurgeon reveled in presenting the resurrection as the guarantee that Christ's atonement has been accepted by the Father as the full and perfect payment for the sins of His people. He vividly depicted the resurrection as the glorious triumph of Christ over the powers of death and the forces of hell:

There He lay, sleeping that grand sleep of death for us. When He woke, He unwound the napkin and the grave-clothes, and laid the napkin in one place and the grave-clothes in another, for He was in no hurry. He folded them up, and laid each in its proper place; and then, when all was quite finished, He, in the splendor of His resurrection life, went to the open doorway where stood His servant who had opened the gate for his Lord, and out He came in the majesty of His resurrection body. He was risen from the dead; and in that moment God set His seal to the clearance of every soul for whom Christ was the Substitute.<sup>35</sup>

In his sermons, Spurgeon heralded the message of the empty tomb. He stated: "The Lord Christ, whom you and I slew by our sins, is risen from the dead. He is not on the cross, He is not in the grave."<sup>36</sup> He also declared, "Inasmuch as Christ rose from the dead, all the sins of those who trust Him are put away."<sup>37</sup> Only a living Savior is mighty to save. A dead Savior is lifeless and cannot save. Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon proclaimed that Christ is the risen Lord, mighty to save.

## **The Exaltation of Christ**



Fourth, Spurgeon declared the sovereign lordship of Christ. Following His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, the position of supreme honor and authority. Spurgeon rejoiced to proclaim this truth in his preaching, for the gospel requires that sinners call on this enthroned Christ for salvation. He declared: “God thinks so much of His Son that He cannot set Him too high; He has placed Him at His own right hand.... The great God thinks heaven and earth too little for Him, and magnifies Him exceedingly above all, as King of kings, and Lord of lords.”<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere he affirmed: “The place at the right hand of God, to which He is now exalted, is the place of power. There sits the Mediator, the Son of God, the man Christ Jesus, while His enemies are being subdued under Him.... He overrules all mortal things; He directs the movements of the stars; He rules the armies of heaven.”<sup>39</sup> Spurgeon faithfully directed his hearers to call on this reigning Lord.

Spurgeon believed that the gospel demands that sinners humble themselves before the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from such submission, he believed, there is no salvation: “I cannot conceive it possible for anyone truly to receive Christ as Savior and yet not to receive Him as Lord.”<sup>40</sup> On another occasion, he declared: “If Christ is to be yours to-day you must let Him have dominion over you. ‘He must reign.’ He claims to be Master and Lord to those who ask salvation at His hands.... It must be so, or salvation is impossible; those who serve sin are not saved, nor can they be except by being brought to serve the Christ of God.”<sup>41</sup> Those who would be saved, Spurgeon insisted, must bend the knee and confess that Jesus is Lord.

Expanding on this point, Spurgeon asserted: “You must accept Jesus to be a leader and a commander to you.... You must yield Him loving obedience, or He will not be married to your souls.... There must be obedience to Jesus if there be faith in Him.”<sup>42</sup> Simply put, “You cannot have Christ for your Savior unless you also have Him as your Lord.”<sup>43</sup> He maintained that true faith necessitates full submission to Christ.

Spurgeon insisted that in the gospel, there is no room for easy-believism: “A man who is really saved by grace does not need to be told that he is under solemn obligations to serve Christ. The new life within him tells him that. Instead of regarding it as a burden, he gladly surrenders himself—body, soul, and spirit—to the Lord.”<sup>44</sup> The demands of the lordship of Christ are a non-negotiable part of the gospel message.

Thus, Spurgeon understood that the gospel should be proclaimed as a royal decree from the exalted Christ. As the gospel is presented, men must be commanded to believe on Christ or suffer eternal destruction. He stated:

He is such a Lord that He can save or destroy. The Christ that died upon the cross hath all things committed into His hands. He can this morning send forth salvation to the ends of the earth, so that multitudes shall believe and live; for Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. Or, He can turn the key the other way, and shut the door against this untoward generation; for He openeth, and no man shutteth; and He shutteth, and no man openeth.<sup>45</sup>

Spurgeon affirmed that sinners may be saved from God's just wrath, but only by yielding in humble submission to Jesus Christ. Though salvation is offered freely, it requires a decisive surrender to the sovereign Lord.

## **Christ Is the Gospel**

Christ—crucified, raised, and exalted—was the focus of Spurgeon's gospel ministry. He declared: "This is the sum; my brethren, preach Christ, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great all-comprehending theme."<sup>46</sup> For Spurgeon, preaching the gospel meant preaching the person and work of Christ. As he said, "The more gospel we would preach, the more of Christ we must proclaim."<sup>47</sup>

A sermon saturated with Christ, Spurgeon maintained, possesses divine power: "The preaching of Christ is the whip that flogs the devil. The preaching of Christ is the thunderbolt, the sound of which makes all hell shake."<sup>48</sup> But hell merely laughs at preaching in which Christ is not preeminent: "The sermon which does not lead to Christ, or of which Jesus Christ is not the top and the bottom, is a sort of sermon that will make the devils in hell laugh, but might make the angels of God weep."<sup>49</sup> To be sure, Spurgeon's gospel preaching made the devils weep and angels rejoice.

In 1862, when he was only twenty-eight years old, Spurgeon boldly announced: "If I had only one more sermon to preach before I died, it would be about my Lord Jesus Christ. And I think that when we get to the end of our ministry, one of our regrets will be that we did not preach more of Him. I am sure no minister will ever repent of having preached Him too much."<sup>50</sup> Jesus Christ was indeed the central theme of his last sermon. On June 7, 1891, Spurgeon preached his farewell message, and as he had throughout his ministry, he magnified the Lord Jesus Christ:

It is heaven to serve Jesus.... He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was His like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold He always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on His shoulders. If He bids us carry a burden, He carries it also. If there is anything gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in Him. These forty years and more have I served Him, blessed be His name! and I have had nothing but love from Him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased Him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen.<sup>51</sup>

This gifted preacher spent his life and ministry proclaiming Christ. Appropriately, his preaching ministry concluded on this triumphant note. To the end, Spurgeon's gospel focus was unaltered.

# Spirit-Empowered Witness

*The true explanation of Spurgeon's ministry, then, is to be found in the person and power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>*

—Iain H. Murray

**I**n the Metropolitan Tabernacle, two curving staircases, one on either side, led from the lower platform to the elevated pulpit, where Charles Spurgeon stood to preach. When the congregational singing was completed, the great preacher began his ascent to the pulpit. As Spurgeon climbed the stairs, he did so with the slow, methodical steps of a heavy-set man. Far heavier, though, was the enormous responsibility that he felt. Knowing that he was about to preach to the thousands gathered and to multiplied thousands through the printed page, the gravity of the moment weighed greatly on him.

Therefore, on each of the fifteen steps, Spurgeon silently declared to himself a personal confession of faith: “*I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>2</sup> We can be sure that after these affirmations, Spurgeon entered the pulpit trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to enable him to preach the gospel. Gripped by this momentous duty, Spurgeon preached with a keen awareness of his desperate need for the all-sufficient power of the Holy Spirit.

Lecturing to his students in the Pastors' College, Spurgeon reiterated the need for all preachers to have such an awareness of the Spirit's empowering in the gospel ministry:

“I believe in the Holy Ghost.” Having pronounced that sentence as a matter

of creed, I hope we can also repeat it as a devout soliloquy forced to our lips by personal experience. To us the presence and work of the Holy Spirit are the ground of our confidence. If we had not believed in the Holy Ghost we should have laid down our ministry long ere this, for “who is sufficient for these things?” Our hope of success, and our strength for continuing the service, lie in our belief that the Spirit of the Lord resteth upon us.”<sup>3</sup>

Spurgeon believed that the gospel would advance only as the Spirit enabled him and other ministers to proclaim it. He said: “Unless the Holy Ghost blesses the Word, we who preach the gospel are of all men most miserable, for we have attempted a task that is impossible. We have entered on a sphere where nothing but the supernatural will ever avail. If the Holy Spirit does not renew the hearts of our hearers, we cannot do it. If the Holy Ghost does not regenerate them, we cannot. If He does not send the truth home into their souls, we might as well speak into the ear of a corpse.”<sup>4</sup> He further stated: “To us, as ministers, the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Without Him our office is a mere name.”<sup>5</sup> Again Spurgeon confessed, “If we have not the Spirit which Jesus promised, we cannot perform the commission which Jesus gave.”<sup>6</sup> He believed that no human ability is sufficient to successfully spread the gospel.

Consequently, Spurgeon was clear as to what preachers must do: “Since conversion is a divine work, we must take care that we depend entirely upon the Spirit of God, and look to Him for power over men’s minds.... Should we not pray more importunately to be anointed with His sacred unction? Should we not in preaching give more scope for His operation? Do we not fail in many of our efforts, because we practically, though not doctrinally, ignore the Holy Ghost?”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, “I believe in the Holy Spirit” was more than just a creed for Spurgeon. It was a confession of his desperate need and deep trust.

This chapter will focus on Spurgeon’s understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in gospel ministry. How must the Spirit work in promoting the gospel? How does the Spirit direct a believer’s words in the presentation of the gospel? What is the Spirit’s effect on one who hears the gospel? Spurgeon addressed these matters frequently as he affirmed the empowering ministry of the Spirit.

## **Supernatural Enlightenment**

First, Spurgeon believed that the Holy Spirit must instruct his mind, giving him a clear understanding of the gospel. This enlightenment began when he opened the

Bible in the solitude of his study. Spurgeon remarked: “It is in our study-work, in that blessed labour when we are alone with the Book before us, that we need the help of the Holy Spirit.... He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.... By His light all things are rightly seen.”<sup>8</sup> He understood that it was only as the Holy Spirit gave divine enlightenment that he could rightly understand the gospel.

This illuminating work, Spurgeon stressed, is one of the Spirit’s primary ministries, not just for the preacher but also for his hearers: “It is one of the peculiar offices of the Holy Spirit to enlighten His people. He has done so by giving us His inspired Word, but the Book is never spiritually understood by anyone apart from the personal teaching of its great Author.”<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon was persuaded that the same Spirit who infallibly inspired the Scriptures must inwardly reveal their truths. Without the divine light of the Spirit, the Bible remains a closed book.

However, Spurgeon believed that the Spirit’s illuminating work did not negate his responsibility to study the Bible diligently. Neither did it take away his need to read the works of gifted theologians and biblical teachers. Instead, the Spirit’s teaching ministry actually required that he give maximum effort in his studies. He said, “I am bound to give myself unto reading and not tempt the Spirit by unthought-of effusions.”<sup>10</sup> A failure to study, he believed, would leave him superficial in his handling of Scripture.

Spurgeon possessed more than ten thousand books. With his brilliant intellect, he read the vast majority of these volumes, and he never preached without diligently consulting them. For this reason, many of his gospel sermons read like veritable systematic theologies. Nevertheless, Spurgeon never forgot that as he studied, he was entirely dependent on the Spirit to lead him into the truth. He asserted:

Commentators are good in their way, but give me the teaching of the Holy Ghost. He makes the passage clear. How often we have found our utter inability to understand some part of divine truth. We asked some of God’s people, and they helped us a little. But after all, we were not satisfied till we took it to the throne of heavenly grace and implored the teachings of the blessed Spirit. Then how sweetly it was opened to us; we could eat of it spiritually. It was no longer husk and shell, hard to be understood. It was as bread to us, and we could eat to the full.<sup>11</sup>

Spurgeon was persuaded that the Holy Spirit must be the preacher’s

primary Teacher, giving him a true understanding of God's Word. He believed that if a gospel preacher is not Spirit-taught, he ultimately will fail as a mouthpiece for the gospel.

## Divine Wisdom

Second, Spurgeon maintained that the Holy Spirit must give him godly wisdom to make a balanced presentation of the gospel. Only by the Spirit's aid, Spurgeon affirmed, could he communicate the gospel with a proper balance and appropriate emphasis.

Noting the shallow teaching of his day, Spurgeon said, "Some who have evidently understood a part of the gospel have given undue prominence to that one portion of it, and have therefore exhibited a distorted Christianity."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he declared, "Certain important doctrines of the gospel can be so proclaimed in excess as to throw the rest of truth into the shade."<sup>13</sup> In other words, Spurgeon believed some were failing to set forth the whole truth, even deemphasizing certain doctrines because of apparent contradictions.

This was particularly true in the handling of the biblical truths surrounding God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. For example, Hyper-Calvinism stressed the sovereignty of God over the free offer of the gospel, while Arminianism emphasized the latter over the former. Spurgeon affirmed, "Faithfulness requires us to give [our hearers] a four-square gospel from which nothing is omitted, and in which nothing is exaggerated."<sup>14</sup> He recognized his need for divine wisdom in presenting the various facets of the gospel message without letting one truth distort another.

Every messenger of the gospel, Spurgeon contended, must have God-given wisdom in order to select the right text at the right time for the right people: "We want wisdom in the selection of the particular part of truth which is most applicable to the season and to the people assembled; and equal discretion in the tone and manner in which the doctrine shall be presented."<sup>15</sup> As one who did not preach verse by verse through books of the Bible, Spurgeon was especially mindful of his need for such wisdom. Moreover, he contended, "We also need wisdom in the way of putting things to different people."<sup>16</sup> Spurgeon recognized his need for divine insight as to what to say and how to say it.

Only the Spirit, Spurgeon emphasized, can give such practical wisdom. He stated, "The Spirit is called *the Spirit of wisdom*, and we greatly need him in that capacity; for knowledge may be dangerous if unaccompanied with wisdom,

which is the art of rightly using what we know.”<sup>17</sup> He further stressed, “The Spirit of God will teach you the use of the sacrificial knife to divide the offerings; and he will show you how to use the balances of the sanctuary so as to weigh out and mix the precious spices in their proper quantities.”<sup>18</sup> He added: “Wisdom is profitable to direct, and he who hath it brings forth each truth in its season, dressed in its most appropriate garments. Who can give us this wisdom but the blessed Spirit?”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he declared, “To be wise stewards and bring forth the right portions of meat for our Master’s household we need thy teaching, O Spirit of the Lord!”<sup>20</sup>

A survey of Spurgeon’s sermons reveals that he maintained a proper balance in his preaching between the Old and New Testaments, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, law and grace, and many other areas of theology. In order to give a full disclosure of the gospel, he sought spiritual wisdom, and the Spirit granted him such insight in great measure.

## **Fiery Passion**

Third, Spurgeon maintained that the Holy Spirit must ignite a holy passion within him for the proclamation of the gospel. He was keenly aware that it is one thing to know the plan of salvation, but something else to feel its truths deeply. Spurgeon was firmly convinced that the Spirit would cause the gospel to burn like a fire within his bones as he preached, giving him a passion for God, His truth, and those to whom he spoke:

The Spirit of God ... 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.<sup>21</sup>

While proclaiming the gospel, Spurgeon trusted the Spirit to keep him in a “devotional” state: “Especially is it the Holy Spirit’s work to maintain in us a



devotional frame of mind whilst we are discoursing. This is a condition greatly to be coveted—to continue praying while you are occupied with preaching.”<sup>22</sup> He recognized that the Spirit must burn the truth in the heart of the messenger: “What can be worse than to speak under the influence of a proud or angry spirit? ... But, oh, to burn in our secret heart while we blaze before the eyes of others! This is the work of the Spirit of God.”<sup>23</sup> He further stated: “In our pulpits we need the spirit of dependence to be mixed with that of devotion, so that all along, from the first word to the last syllable, we may be looking up to the strong for strength. It is well to feel that though you have continued up to the present point, yet if the Holy Spirit were to leave you, you would play the fool ere the sermon closed.”<sup>24</sup> If he were to effectively communicate the gospel, Spurgeon realized that his affections must be supernaturally enflamed for the truth.

Apart from this sacred flame, Spurgeon knew that his gospel proclamation would be delivered in a rote, mechanical fashion, lacking zeal. Such a delivery would betray the message he preached. Only by the Spirit’s aid could he stand in the pulpit “adoring the majestic and consciously present God, every faculty aroused and joyously excited to its utmost capability, all the thoughts and powers of the soul joyously occupied in contemplating the glory of the Lord, and extolling to listening crowds the Beloved of our soul.”<sup>25</sup> This was the soul-igniting passion he sought through the power of the Spirit.

Spurgeon believed that the Spirit must set his heart ablaze before the gospel could spread to the hearts of his listeners: “The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest, too. But if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy, too.”<sup>26</sup> This is to say, a fire in the pulpit soon spreads to the pews. Spurgeon knew he could not preach without this Spirit-ignited fire.

## **Compelling Delivery**

Fourth, Spurgeon believed that the Holy Spirit must make his delivery of the gospel compelling. Despite his extreme giftedness, he remained dependent on the Spirit to proclaim the truth effectively. Of this reliance, Spurgeon stated, “We need the Spirit of God to open our mouths that we may show forth the praises of the Lord, or else we shall not speak with power.”<sup>27</sup> He understood that the Spirit must lead him in everything from the choice of his words to the tone of his gospel presentation: “We require the Holy Spirit also to incite us in our

utterance.”<sup>28</sup> He added, “It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> By the power of the Spirit, the good news went forth from Spurgeon with life-changing authority.

In the pulpit, Spurgeon believed that the Holy Spirit must cause the gospel to cut deeply into the souls of his listeners:

To preach the gospel is not to preach certain truths *about* the gospel, not to preach *about* the people, but to preach *to* the people. To preach the gospel is not to talk about what the gospel is, but to preach it into the heart, not by your own might, but by the influence of the Holy Ghost—not to stand and talk as if we were speaking to the angel Gabriel, and telling him certain things, but to speak as man to man and pour our heart in to our fellow’s heart. This I take it, is to preach the gospel, and not to mumble some dry manuscript.... To preach the gospel is to proclaim with trumpet tongue and flaming zeal the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus, so that men may hear, and understanding, may turn to God with full purpose of heart.<sup>30</sup>

By this statement, Spurgeon explained that the Spirit made him like a trumpet blast, arresting the hearts of the congregation with the gospel. He declared: “A preacher ought to know that he really possesses the Spirit of God, and that when he speaks there is an influence upon him that enables him to speak as God would have him, otherwise out of the pulpit he should go directly; he has no right to be there. He has not been called to preach God’s truth.”<sup>31</sup> Simply put, Spurgeon was convinced that the Spirit must direct his preaching into the souls of his listeners.

In presenting the truth, Spurgeon believed that nothing must disturb his concentration, including an unhealthy attachment to his notes. Consequently, he carried only a thin sentence outline into the pulpit: “It seems very odd to me when a brother prays that the Holy Ghost may help him in preaching, and then I see him put his hand behind him and draw a manuscript out of his pocket, so fashioned that he can place it in the middle of his Bible, and read from it without being suspected of doing so.... How can He help him when he reads out of a paper from which anyone else might read without the Spirit’s aid?”<sup>32</sup> He further stated: “If the Holy Ghost should have anything to say to the people that is not in the paper, how can He say it by us? He seems to me to be very effectually blocked as to freshness of utterance by that method of ministry.”<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon trusted that the Spirit would guide his thoughts in preaching, driving home his

words in convincing fashion.

Spurgeon contended that the Spirit gives the minister freedom of expression in his preaching: “Immersed into the Holy Spirit, the preacher will think rightly, and speak wisely; his word will be with power to those who hear.”<sup>34</sup> However, the Spirit’s activity is not to be presumed upon. There were times, he believed, when the Spirit mysteriously withdrew His power. In such cases, he felt restrained in presenting the gospel. Spurgeon recounted a dreadful experience while preaching in Scotland: “The Spirit of God was pleased to desert me, I could not speak as I usually did. I was obliged to tell the people that the chariot wheels were taken off; and that the chariot dragged heavily along.”<sup>35</sup> Reflecting on this powerlessness, he remarked: “It humbled me bitterly; and if I could I would have hidden myself in any obscure corner of the earth. I felt as if I should speak no more in the Name of the Lord.”<sup>36</sup> In the end, this experience served a positive purpose, causing Spurgeon to trust in the Spirit’s power even more.

## **Intense Focus**

Fifth, Spurgeon believed that the Holy Spirit gave him unusual powers of focus when presenting the gospel. He affirmed: “The divine Spirit will sometimes work upon us so as to bear us completely out of ourselves.... Everything has been forgotten but the one all-engrossing subject in hand ... the mind shut out from all disturbing influences.”<sup>37</sup> He was convinced the Spirit restrained superfluous thoughts from entering his mind so that he could proclaim what was primary.

Spurgeon also believed that the Spirit restricted him from declaring peripheral truths. He stated: “We need the divine influence to keep us back from saying many things which, if they actually left our tongue, would mar our message.... We need the Spirit of God to put bit and bridle upon us to keep us from saying that which would take the minds of our hearers away from Christ and eternal realities, and set them thinking upon the groveling things of earth.”<sup>38</sup> Such divine restraint kept him focused on the centrality of the gospel.

Even while the Spirit was restraining certain thoughts, Spurgeon believed, He was bringing others to his mind. So strong was the Spirit’s activity in Spurgeon’s mind that he claimed he could entertain up to eight separate thoughts as he proclaimed the Word. He explained:

I once counted eight sets of thoughts, which were going on in my brain

simultaneously, or at least within the space of the same second. I was preaching the gospel with all my might, but could not help feeling for a lady who was evidently about to faint, and also looking out for our brother who opens the windows that he might give us more air. I was thinking of that illustration which I had omitted under the first head, casting the form of the second division, wondering if A felt my rebuke, and praying that B might get comfort from the consoling observation, and at the same time praising God for my own personal enjoyment of the truth I was proclaiming.<sup>39</sup>

In short, Spurgeon was aware that the Holy Spirit must give him an intense focus on the gospel. The Spirit must heighten his powers of concentration, helping him focus clearly on Christ while enabling him to overcome any distractions. Moreover, Spurgeon was reliant on the Spirit to arrest the minds of his listeners and capture their every thought to Christ.

## **Deep Conviction**

Sixth, Spurgeon believed that the Spirit must bring about conviction and illumination in the hearts of the unconverted. Without this internal work, there could be no positive response to the gospel. Iain Murray writes: “Spurgeon came to London conscious that God had been hiding His face from His people. His knowledge of the Bible and of Church history convinced him that, compared with what the Church had a warrant to expect, the Spirit of God was in great measure withdrawn, and if God continued to withhold His face, he declared to his people, nothing could be done to extend His Kingdom.”<sup>40</sup> Spurgeon understood that only the Holy Spirit could overcome the resistance of sinful hearts and cause people to turn to the saving message of the gospel.

Seeking the Spirit’s power, Spurgeon remarked: “Oh, if the Spirit of God should come upon those assembled tonight, and upon all the assemblies of the saints, what an effect would be produced! We seek not for extraordinary excitements, those spurious attendants of genuine revivals, but we do seek for the pouring out of the Spirit of God.”<sup>41</sup> He often urged his congregation to pray for the Spirit’s power: “All we want is the Spirit of God. Dear Christian friends, go home and pray for it; give yourselves no rest till God reveals Himself.”<sup>42</sup> Such intercessory prayer, he believed, was heard and answered by the Lord in his ministry.

Simply put, Spurgeon realized that only the Holy Spirit causes the gospel to triumph in men's hearts: "All your affection and your tears and earnest description of the love of Jesus will be powerless against human hearts, unless the eternal Spirit shall drive home your appeals."<sup>43</sup> He believed that he could present the gospel only to the ears of his listeners, but the Spirit must take it from the ear to the heart. The Spirit must sovereignly cause the seed of the gospel to germinate and take root in souls. Expressing this reliance on the Spirit, Spurgeon asserted: "There is not a minister breathing that can win man's heart himself. He can win his ears and make them listen; he can win his eyes, and fix those eyes upon him; he can win the attention, but the heart is very slippery.... The Spirit alone has power over man's heart.... We cannot reach the soul, but the Holy Spirit can."<sup>44</sup> He further stated, "All the heavenly result of preaching is owing to the Divine Spirit sent from above."<sup>45</sup> Spurgeon knew that, ultimately, only the Holy Spirit could give success to his gospel ministry.

## **Gospel Triumph**

Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon remained conscious of the Spirit's power. When moving into the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he urged his flock to pray for the power of the Spirit to be on his ministry: "Let God send the fire of His Spirit here, and the minister will be more and more lost in his Master. You will come to think less of the speaker and more of the truth spoken."<sup>46</sup> God answered these prayers as Christ was magnified and countless sinners were saved under Spurgeon's ministry. On that inaugural occasion, Spurgeon also prayed, "Let God but send down the fire, and the biggest sinners in the neighbourhood will be converted; those who live in dens of infamy will be changed; the drunkard will forsake his cups, the swearer will repent of his blasphemy, the debauched will leave their lusts."<sup>47</sup> He surely witnessed the coming of the power of the Spirit, for there can be no other explanation for the success that followed.

Spurgeon understood that the conversion of sinners is exclusively due to the Holy Spirit: "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."<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere he said, "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."<sup>49</sup> Only the Spirit can raise spiritually dead hearts to believe the gospel.

Furthermore, Spurgeon believed that churches grow and prosper by the Spirit's power. He maintained, "Where the gospel is fully and powerfully preached, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, our churches do not only hold their own, but win converts."<sup>50</sup> Such results, he was convinced, should even be expected: "The simple preaching of Jesus cannot fail under the hand of the Holy Spirit to produce the very best effects."<sup>51</sup> He further stated: "He maketh the unwilling sinner so willing that he is impetuous after the gospel; he who was obstinate now hurries to the cross. He who laughed at Jesus now hangs on His mercy; and he who would not believe is now made by the Holy Spirit to do it, not only willingly, but eagerly; he is happy, is glad to do it, rejoices in the sound of Jesus' name, and delights to run in the way of God's commandments. The Holy Spirit has power over the will."<sup>52</sup> Spurgeon's belief in the sovereignty of God's grace gave him confidence for a successful harvest of souls.

In short, Spurgeon believed that his entire ministry was subject to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Every conversion was due to the Spirit's power, every success to His grace: "The wind bloweth where it listeth; and sometimes the winds themselves are still. Therefore if I rest on the Spirit I cannot expect that I should always feel His power alike. What could I do without His celestial influence? To that I owe everything."<sup>53</sup> He rejoiced to credit the Spirit for the successes he experienced in his gospel ministry.

For almost four decades, Spurgeon witnessed this triumphant work of the Spirit in men's hearts, but he remained aware that there was more that the Spirit must do in the ministry of the gospel: "The Spirit is blowing upon our churches now with His genial breath, but it is as a soft evening gale. Oh, that there would come a rushing mighty wind that should carry everything before it! This is the lack of the times, the great want of our country. May this come as a blessing from the Most High!"<sup>54</sup> Though God had given him global success, he nevertheless longed for a greater work of the Spirit in the church and in the world.

Like Spurgeon, we, too, must rely on the Holy Spirit's empowerment in our gospel ministry. May He supernaturally enlighten our minds and grant to us wisdom from on high. May He ignite our hearts with a fiery passion for lost souls and empower us to proclaim the gospel with flaming zeal. And may the Spirit give to us a singular, gospel focus like that of Charles Spurgeon.

## We Want Again Spurgeons

**A**t the outset of this book, I recalled my first encounter with Charles Spurgeon more than thirty years ago. As a result of reading his sermons, my life and ministry were set on a course from which I have not veered. From Spurgeon, arguably the preeminent preacher in the history of the church, I learned how the doctrines of grace and evangelistic passion intersect in preaching and ministry. Like the convergence of two mighty rivers, these twin truths become one powerful force in reaching lost sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As you reflect on these twin truths, I urge you to seriously consider Spurgeon. Here was a man, known as “the Prince of Preachers,” who held an extraordinarily high view of God and His Word. Because of this commitment, he embraced the sovereignty of God in man’s salvation, which guarantees the success of the gospel enterprise. Like David going forth to confront Goliath, Spurgeon became a mighty champion of the truths of sovereign grace—total depravity, unconditional election, definite atonement, irresistible grace, and preserving grace. In Spurgeon, these distinctive doctrines found a clarion voice like no other.

Furthermore, Spurgeon was enflamed with a passion to implore the unregenerate to look to Christ. He took seriously the biblical mandate to proclaim the gospel and compel lost sheep to come into the fold. Not only did he preach the gospel, he actually pleaded with the unconverted to be saved. He was not a stuffy, elite Calvinist, as if speaking from an ivory tower. Rather, he was consumed with power from on high that energized him to win the lost with many Spirit-enabled persuasions and pressing appeals for sinners to believe the gospel.

Spurgeon certainly was not the only man to uphold divine sovereignty with

an impassioned evangelism. But among pastors who have labored in one pulpit, he certainly stands out as the most visible evangelistic preacher of any generation. For this reason, his thundering voice demands our attention in this dire.

May the Lord raise up a new generation of Reformed pastors who will never lose sight of the need to preach the gospel with urgency and passion. May the Lord grant to preachers in this present generation the mind, heart, and passion of Charles Spurgeon—a mind for the truth, a heart for the world, and a passion for the glory of God. Truly, we want again Spurgeons.<sup>1</sup>



# NOTES

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- [13.](#) *Ibid.*
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## **Conclusion**

[1.](#) This phrase, which I have used as the title of this conclusion, is adapted from Spurgeon's comment that "We want again Luthers, Calvins, Bunyans, Whitefields, men fit to mark eras, whose names breathe terror in our foemen's ears. We have dire need of such." (Charles H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Vol 2: The Full Harvest, 1860–1892*, compiled by Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald [Carlisle, Pa., and Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1897–1900, 1987], 29).

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