

Sarah Malone
The Academy
Theologian paper
May 17th, 2007

Biography

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the son of Thomas and Eliza Spurgeon, was born on June 19th, 1834. At the age of fourteen months, his parents sent him to live with his grandparents (Reverend James Spurgeon and his wife Sarah) who lived near Stambourne, Essex in England. His grandfather was the minister of Stambourne's Congregational Church, and was knowledgeable in the Word of God and had a great understanding of many puritan writings. By bringing Charles along with him, James Spurgeon prepared Charles well for his future in the ministry. By the age of six, Charles' love for reading had already become unquenchable. Two books that especially interested him were Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.¹ After five years under the supervision of his grandparents, Charles returned to his parents' home in Colchester, England. His parents loved their children very much and while seeking to provide well for them academically, they primarily sought to teach their children of the deeper importance of spiritual things. Charles' desires to understand life and have his questions pertaining to it answered were cultivated in the way his parents and grandparents chose to raise him.

The immense turning point of Charles Spurgeon's life was undoubtedly when he was, through Christ's work on the cross and resurrection from the dead, transferred from the kingdom

¹ Unless otherwise specified, details included in the biographical section were taken from Spurgeon A New Biography, written by Arnold Dallimore

of darkness to the kingdom of light. All lasting good that came from his life is a direct result of this powerful work of God in Spurgeon's heart. After studying the Word, Spurgeon began to follow the Baptist denomination, which included accepting their beliefs on baptism. So, four months after he was born again, Spurgeon was baptized by immersion.² At the age of seventeen, Spurgeon preached one of his first sermons at the Baptist church in the village of Waterbeach. He was received graciously by the people and within a couple of weeks had become their preacher. Although he was young, he displayed a maturity far beyond his years; specifically, through his deep understanding of and ability to express God's Word clearly and his ability to relate well with people. After two years at Waterbeach, the Lord opened a door for Spurgeon to become the pastor of the New Park Street Baptist Church in London in April of 1854. All the while, the Lord was drawing Spurgeon to a certain young woman. He soon was married to Susannah Thompson, who would faithfully minister alongside him until his death. Needing a new building and deciding to change the name of the church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle came into being in March of 1861. This is where Mr. Spurgeon would minister the remainder of his time on earth. Besides deeply treasuring the body of Christ, Spurgeon also sought to meet the needs of those who were not part of the kingdom. Seeing the weak and helpless, Spurgeon was unable to walk away without doing something to warm and feed them. He established a home for widows and an orphanage for girls and boys. He also saw need and acted upon it as he started the Pastor's College for men who had a passion for the Word of God, specifically in regards to teaching it. Spurgeon was known as the "prince of preachers" as he faithfully preached the Word of God in a manner full of grace and truth that few ever would.³ Spurgeon loved his people and faithfully shepherded them. Even though throughout his ministry Spurgeon

² Pilgrim publications- C.H. Spurgeon biography page <http://members.aol.com/pilgrimpub/spurgeon.htm>

³ Spurgeon Gold p. XV

frequently spoke to thousands of people at a time, as I have read about him and understood more of his character, I believe that he still would have spoken the same words to a congregation of fifty. He was a man seeking to base his life not on earthly wisdom, but on godly wisdom. Large numbers of people were regularly present in Spurgeon's ministry, but the reason the people came was not merely because he said what they wanted to hear. Rather, the Lord used Spurgeon to boldly declare even the difficult truths of His Word to many people. In regards to Spurgeon as an author, he readily admitted that it was to him "the work of a slave."⁴ However, his books, articles, and his published sermons are still being enjoyed today. Charles Haddon Spurgeon died at the age of 57 on January 31, 1892 having sought to walk in humility according to the Word of God and willingly been poured out for the glory of his King.

Theology

In seeking to portray certain aspects of Spurgeon's theology, it is important to note how essential he knew theology to be. When referring to Spurgeon's strong theological convictions, one author wrote, "Understanding that doctrinal base becomes essential in the attempt to grasp the insight that explains Spurgeon's powerful ministry."⁵ Because of the extent of his reading and his love for the Word of God, he searched and found out what was true as best as he could. While studying the life of Spurgeon and seeking to distinguish specific aspects of his theology that were foundational to his ministry, it is hard to choose only a few. He was such a well-rounded preacher and it seems that he has sermons on almost everything one could think of. However, we will look at certain ways that Spurgeon's Calvinistic beliefs affected the way he did things, see his view of man, and discern particular ways that Spurgeon stood up for truth in

⁴ Spurgeon A New Biography p. 191

⁵ Theologians of the Baptist Tradition, p. 120

the midst of certain social issues of his day. Had he not allowed himself to be engulfed by the Word of God and been given understanding by the Holy Spirit, surely this man's life would have been another ordinary one.

There is a specific accusation that Calvinists have been receiving for as long as there have been Calvinists. Those who disagree with them have claimed time and time again that by believing God to be a sovereign God who elects people, we then have no reason to obey passages of Scripture where we are commanded to pray or to preach, because we know that they will someday be saved somehow. It is true that there have been some who claim to be Calvinists who have taken it in this extreme direction. However, Spurgeon would have called himself a Calvinist and yet, in every way, he proved that it was actually the truth that God predestined people that drove him to faithful prayer and preaching instead of drove him away. Spurgeon was unashamed in his admission that he himself was a Calvinist. He was convinced it would be against the Word of God to adhere to anything besides these truths, which he believed were derived from the Word of God. In Spurgeon's sermon entitled "A Defense of Calvinism," he says, "If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, 'He is the one who says, Salvation is of the Lord.' I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this."⁶ While Spurgeon was a Calvinist and had reasons for it, one must keep in mind that this title never replaced the title of Christian that he humbly held and, in fact, he thought it very wrong for anyone to go so far as to say that simply because one is not a Calvinist means they are going to hell.⁷

Even though Spurgeon believed in every way that salvation is of the Lord, he himself was known for his preaching and for his beckoning of people to come and repent of their sin and find

⁶ The Spurgeon Archive. Sermon: A Defense of Calvinism. <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>

⁷ The Spurgeon Archive. Sermon: A Defense of Calvinism. <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>

in Christ the salvation of their souls. How can this be reconciled? While believing in the sovereignty of God and the Holy Spirit's work in drawing men to Himself, he also believed that man has some responsibility in his response to this grace. He balanced two seemingly contradictory messages of the Word very well in the way he taught his people. He states:

Now if I were to declare that man was so free to act that there was no control of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so over-rules all things that man is not free enough to be responsible, I should be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism.⁸

He realized that these two truths are hard to grasp and when referring to them in the same sermon, he said, "I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity." This hard balance that Spurgeon fights to clearly portray in this specific sermon, although difficult to grasp, not only affected the way he taught but also how he prayed and taught others to pray.

In regards to prayer for the lost, he was not hindered in his prayer by his Calvinistic tendencies, but rather encouraged. By believing God to be sovereign and the only one able to change the heart of man, there was nowhere else that Spurgeon could go. When referring to conversation concerning the lost, he says:

It is an empty wish, a mere formality, if you do not turn it into prayer...There must be travail before the birth, and there must be travail in prayer with God before we can expect that many will be born again into the church of God.⁹

He was a man who faithfully prayed. In public and in private both, all who knew him could count on his continual conversation with the Almighty. This reveals a deep dependence upon God and a clear understanding of his own inability to do anything good apart from Him. Spurgeon was concerned not with the teachings of men, but the teachings of God and since God

⁸ The Spurgeon Archive. Sermon: A Defense of Calvinism. <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>

⁹ Spurgeon Gold p. 8, 9

teaches us to pray in all things, he wholeheartedly sought for this to be true of his own life. By 1860, a spiritual awakening was taking place among the people of New Park Street Chapel. It is said that “through prayer, sound theology, and the preaching of Christ with loving invitation the revival flamed to life.”¹⁰

Besides the way that Spurgeon’s beliefs affected the way he ministered, it is important to note that his biblical view of man had affected how and why he did things as well. As he was a very personable and compassionate man, it is easy to think that maybe he would not have said the hard things in attempting to keep everyone temporarily comfortable or happy. However, he did approach the hard issues, and this is a deep reflection of how much he truly cared for people, in the way that he told them the truth. It was obvious that he believed what the Bible taught about the total depravity of man by the way that he not only referred to the people he was preaching to, but in the way he referred to himself. He said, “I am bound to the doctrine of the depravity of the human heart, because I find myself depraved in heart, and have daily proofs that in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing.”¹¹ As many preachers realize their position of authority over their people, they seem to think that they need not acknowledge their own imperfections. However, Spurgeon was the first to admit his sheer inability to please God apart from His grace. He unashamedly boasted in his weakness because he was confident in the power of God. When referring to the truth that no one is righteous before God in his book *All of Grace*, he writes, “...the Lord Jesus did not come into the world expecting to find goodness and righteousness, but to bestow them upon those who do not have them.”¹² He believed that men are completely and totally depraved, but he believed that Jesus is perfect and righteous—a sufficient sacrifice. In his sermons, he sought to convince men of the sin in their lives that separated them from a holy God.

¹⁰ Theologians of the Baptist Tradition, p. 129

¹¹ The Spurgeon Archive. Sermon: A Defense of Calvinism. <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>

¹² All of Grace, written by Charles Spurgeon, p. 15

In fact, on many occasions he used the law to do this. In showing our inability to keep the law, he says “The law of God takes cognizance of the entire nature, and reveals the evil, which lurks into every faculty.”¹³ While honestly bringing the news of who we are in our fallen state, he did not do this without also offering the hope of Christ. He was faithful to proclaim the whole message.

Besides the way that Spurgeon’s beliefs about God affected the way he preached, prayed, and the way he viewed man, it is good to see how he fought hard for the truth to prevail in the midst of important social issues of his day. There are certain problems that have endlessly been serious social issues. For example, orphans having no place to stay, widows with no one to take care of them, and men in need of good biblical education without the finances to fulfill this desire. Spurgeon sought to be obedient to the obvious truths of Scripture in all of these things as he saw the importance of God’s children being the ones to meet the needs of the community around them. As mentioned earlier, he did help establish an orphanage, a place for widows to live, and a school for men who longed to learn but did not have many opportunities for it. However, along with these continual things it seems as though there are specific problems (which will follow) that must be fought within certain cultures at certain points.

In an evaluation of Spurgeon’s life and ministry, one author refers to the fact that “...he was culturally a man of his day, he knew how to communicate to [the culture].”¹⁴ While this statement is being flippantly thrown around in our day and age about people who are sacrificing the truth of God for something cheap in order not to step on any toes, this is not the way in which Spurgeon is being referred to. If a preacher is holding fast to the truth of God and walking in

¹³ Spurgeon Gold, p. 27

¹⁴ Theologians of the Baptist Tradition, p. 136

holiness and teaching others to do the same, there is something to be said about one's ability to know how to communicate with the culture that one is a part of.

Two specific ways that God used Spurgeon's stand against problematic ways of thinking that had infiltrated the church were (a) through his involvement in denying evolution (which was becoming especially popular in his time) and (b) by standing firmly upon the truth of the infallibility of Scripture. In a moment of time when many people were leaving what they knew of God's work in creating the world to believe in evolution, Spurgeon incorporated his view on science freely in his sermons and books. In a certain sermon on the Bible, Spurgeon included a few paragraphs regarding science and whether or not it has to do with the Bible. He said, "But the science of Jesus Christ is the most excellent of sciences. Let no one turn away from the Bible because it is not a book of learning and wisdom. It is."¹⁵

Another way that Spurgeon's firm beliefs caused him to look different from the world was in the way he would not forsake the idea of God's word, in its entirety, being true. By the late 1880's, there were many Baptist preachers teaching against the infallibility of the Word of God. In response to this wrong way of thinking, Spurgeon and his church removed themselves from the Baptist Union for reasons including that "The infallibility of Scripture from God was denied."¹⁶ By the way that we see Spurgeon proactively regarding these social issues along with others reveals to us in a deeper way the fact that Spurgeon was not content with merely talking about the things of God, but rather seeing His Word obeyed in everything.

¹⁵ Spurgeon Gold, p. 23

¹⁶ Spurgeon Gold, p. 200

Importance

There are many different reasons why Spurgeon's life and ministry are still important to us here today. Because of the fact that his sermons and books are based upon the Word of God, which does not fail, they have been and are being used by God to impact many people still today. Even though Spurgeon died over a hundred years ago, there have been many books written about him since then and references to him throughout other books. Besides his books and sermons, the fruit of his ministry is still being born today as the first generation of converts under his teaching (numbering in the thousands) have shared with others and the ones they shared with have, in turn, spread the gospel. Spurgeon's life also put to shame those who would be accused of taking Calvinism to an extreme point of it being unbiblical. In the same way that Spurgeon sought to know the Lord through His Word as best as he could (whether or not that fell under a certain popular theory), we see the need to walk not in accordance with the changing ways of the world but rather according to the unchangeable truth of God. As Spurgeon viewed sin biblically, we are reminded that we are completely lost apart from the grace of God being poured upon us through repentance and faith in Christ. Then, through Spurgeon's willing stand for truth in the midst of sinful people who were trying desperately to stray from the truth of God, we are encouraged to stand up for what is right. This is a characteristic in preachers that has been largely lost in our day as men who claim to be set apart from the world are doing a poor job of drawing the line between holiness and worldliness. Spurgeon handled this dividing line well. Spurgeon was a faithful man of God and his life is one well worth learning about.