

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON AND HOW IT IMPACTED HIS EVANGELISM

JERRY HARMON

Teaching Pastor
Grace Bible Baptist Church
Baltimore, MD

I. INTRODUCTION

The fact that one of the greatest preachers of the modern era was a five-point Calvinist is beyond question.¹ All one would have to do is read any one of Charles Spurgeon's sermons to be convinced that he loved and proclaimed boldly the doctrines of grace. Another indisputable fact about Spurgeon's ministry is that it was baptized with evangelistic fervor. So passionate was he that in a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1869 he proclaimed;

I am as firm a believer in the doctrines of grace as any man living, and a true Calvinist after the order of John Calvin himself; but if it be thought an evil thing to bid the sinner lay hold of eternal life, I will yet be more evil in this respect, and herein imitate my Lord and his apostles, who, though they taught that salvation is of grace, and grace alone, feared not to speak to men as rational beings and responsible agents...Beloved, cling to the great truth of electing love and divine sovereignty, but let not these bind you in fetters when, in the power of the Holy Ghost, you become fishers of men.²

¹ Editor's Note: Spurgeon was not a man whose theology neatly fit into any box. Though he called himself a Calvinist, he did not agree with all aspects of modern Calvinism, as this article clearly shows. Nor was he consistently what we call *Free Grace* in his preaching. While Spurgeon has views with which most *JOTGES* readers disagree, there is much in him with which we would be of the same mind.

² Eric Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon "Speaks for Himself"* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973) 73.

A. FAMILY INFLUENCES

Charles Spurgeon came from a godly heritage. His great grandfather Job Spurgeon was a godly minister who was thrown in prison in 1679 for refusing to conform to the Church of England. He spent fifteen weeks laying on a straw pallet in extremely severe winter weather without any fire.³ Spurgeon would later state of his great grandfather, "I cast my eye back through four generations and see that God had been pleased to hear the prayers of my grandfather who used to supplicate with God that his children might live before Him to the last generation."⁴ God did hear the prayers of Job Spurgeon at least for the next four generations. Following in his father's path, James Spurgeon, the grandfather of Charles, was a godly man and a fervent preacher of the gospel of grace. When he was a small child, little Charles was sent to live with his grandfather because of the financial hardships his family endured.⁵ This turned out to be providential in that Spurgeon's theology already had begun to be molded at this tender young age. James Spurgeon had a profound influence on his grandson. Charles Spurgeon, in an 1895 sermon at the Tabernacle, recollected listening to his grandfather's preaching, "Mark you, this dear old man was a Calvinist, an out-and-out preacher of free grace."⁶

The prayers and life of James Spurgeon had a lasting impact on little Charles as well, "I well remember hearing my grandfather's earnest prayers for all his household. It was always near his heart that his children and his children's children might fear the Lord, I have lively recollections of his devotions."⁷ Grandfather James was very attached to Charles. He kept the lad at his side always, even when counseling and praying with parishioners. When he gathered with ministers to discuss theological issues Charles listened intently.⁸ On Sunday mornings Charles would sit quietly in his grandfather's parlor as his grandfather would get ready for Sunday morning.⁹ The tie between grandfather and

³ R.B. Cook, *Gathered Jewels, From The Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon Together With A Sketch of His Life And Work* (Baltimore: International News & Book Co., 1896), 20.

⁴ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Chicago: Moody, 1984) 4.

⁵ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 5.

⁹ Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 30.

grandson was so close that Charles became one in heart with his grandfather's desire to see God's mighty work in the hearts of the church members. One incident revealed the strong moral courage of the tender young Spurgeon. Upon learning that his grandfather was grieved over the behavior of one of the church members, Charles confronted the man. He marched into the tavern and rebuked him. Thomas Roads later recalled the event.

To think an old man like me should be took to task...by a bit of a child like that! Well, he points at me, with his finger just so, and says, what doest thou here, Elijah? Sitting with the ungodly; and you a member of a church, and breaking your pastor's heart. I'm ashamed of you! I wouldn't break my pastor's heart, I'm sure." And then he walks away..."

I knew it was all true, and I was guilty; so I put down my pipe, and did not touch my beer, but hurried away to a lonely spot, and cast myself down before the Lord, confessing my sin and begging for forgiveness.¹⁰

When it came time for Charles to return to his father's home it was a very tearful departure. Although Spurgeon left his grandfather's house he did not leave the sphere and atmosphere of spiritual life. His father, John Spurgeon, was a godly man also, steeped in the Scriptures and earnest in prayer. He preached to a small congregation of Independent Congregationalists at Tollesbury. His preaching was "acceptable and beneficial."¹¹ More importantly to the theological influence of Charles, his father, like his father before him, was a Calvinist.¹²

B. PURITAN INFLUENCES

Because of the influences of both father and grandfather, Spurgeon was introduced to the writings of Puritan authors. At the home of his grandfather, the Manse at Stambourne, the young Charles discovered in the attic a large number of books. Among them was Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Spurgeon carried this book downstairs and read it. It opened up a new world to him. He claims to have read it a hundred

¹⁰ Iain Murray, ed., *The Early Years* (London: Banner of Truth, 1962), 85.

¹¹ Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 22.

¹² Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 19.

times.¹³ Spurgeon remarked about the impact the book had upon him as a lad, “When I first saw in it the woodcut of Christian carrying the burden on his back I felt so interested in the poor fellow that I thought I should jump for joy when after he had carried it so long he at last got rid of it.”¹⁴ Spurgeon was introduced to the Puritans.

Ernest W. Bacon said concerning the influence of Puritan writings, “Spurgeon was so steeped in and fashioned by the writings and principles of the Puritans and can only be understood in their light...Both in his preaching of Christ, in his controversies, and in his personal life, he would not have been what he was without them.”¹⁵

Although introduced to the writings of the Puritans in his early years, his interest did not wane when he grew older. He read such writings all the rest of his days. He delved into them as one that finds great spoil. He stored their deep truths in his mind and quoted them in his sermons. He always carried a Puritan book with him on his walks and Mentone retirements. Their emphasis and outlooks became his at all points.¹⁶ Spurgeon would later publish a book titled, *Commenting on Commentaries*, which is basically a book commenting on Puritan writings. Murray wrote:

The slender work contains a mine of literary information on 17th century writings which might otherwise have been lost to modern times...he wanted more searching of the Scriptures and he believed Puritan writings were one of the finest inducements to obtain that result.¹⁷

Of course the works of the Puritans were not the only readings he applied. He also read the Bible voraciously. By the time he was converted he could say, “I had read the Bible; there was no part of it with which I was not acquainted.”¹⁸

¹³ Earnest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir Of The Puritans* (London: Allen & Unwin LTD, 1967), 13.

¹⁴ Murray, *The Early Years*, 85.

¹⁵ Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir Of The Puritans* (London: Allen & Unwin LTD, 1967), 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁷ Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: Banner of Truth, 1973), 2.

¹⁸ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 31.

Spurgeon never went to college. He was encouraged by his father and grandfather to enroll. He himself thought it was a good idea. But a strange providence hindered him from enrolling. He was given an appointment with the president of the Regent's Park college, Dr. Angus. He was to meet with him at the MacMillian house. The servant girl placed Spurgeon and Dr. Angus in two different rooms and neither of them knew the other was waiting in the room next door and the foolish servant girl neglected to inform either of them. After two hours Dr. Angus left thinking the young Spurgeon did not bother to come. Spurgeon was greatly disappointed but came to regard this as a strange providence.¹⁹ Later he declined to go to college and stayed with his flock at Waterbeach. This prevented him from being influenced by the English Baptist who were primarily Hyper-Calvinists.

Although he never again pursued formal education he was by no means uneducated. He read a great number of books and his gigantic intellect never forgot what he read. During his first pastorate at Waterbeach he continued forming the theology that would become the foundation of his ministry in London. He wrote:

I read all Dr. Gill's *Body of Divinity* and Calvin's *Institutes*; and when I had done that, I thought, 'Now I have got hold of the truth, I am certain I have; and I can meet all opponents, and if they are not conformed to the views of that most learned man, Dr. Gill, and that excellent confessor, John Calvin, I will soon cut them up root and branch.' However, I soon began to find out that there was a good deal to be said, after all, concerning some matter's that Dr. Gill and John Calvin did not mention,²⁰

Spurgeon read also the works of Wesley and would later confess:

I love the name Calvin, but always regard him as sitting on one side of the room; and I love the name of Wesley, but I regard him as occupying another side place in the assembly...I am myself persuaded that the points of the Calvinist alone is right upon some points, and the Arminian alone is right upon others. There is a great deal of truth in the positive side of both systems, and a great deal of error in the negative side of both systems. If I were asked, 'Why is a man damned?' I should

¹⁹ Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 47.

²⁰ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 74.

answer as an Arminian answers, 'He destroys himself'. I should not dare to lay man's ruin at the door of divine sovereignty. On the other hand, if I were asked, 'Why is a man saved?' I could only give the Calvinist answer, 'He is saved through the sovereign grace of God, and not at all of himself. [*sic*]',²¹

One can see the influences of Spurgeon's early years played a major role in shaping his theology and practice. His education, though informal, was thorough in the works of brilliant theologians guided by the tutelage of his grandfather and father. The balanced approach of Spurgeon began to take shape.

II. SOTERIOLOGY

Spurgeon openly confessed his utter commitment to the Bible. He preached God's Word as he found it. He built his soteriology on the Word of God. At times, when his theology seemed to be paradoxical, he rested on revelation rather than reason. Drummond wrote:

But in this sense, he ministered much in the tradition of Calvin himself. Calvin preached the Bible as he found it. For Spurgeon authority rested in sola scriptura, although from time to time he would attempt to corroborate his position by tradition, experience, reason, even the creeds. Still, primarily, as an absolute believer in the infallible Word of God, he built his theology on the Bible as he understood it.²²

Spurgeon depended completely upon the Scriptures to do the work of revealing Christ to the sinner. He viewed the Scripture as the "wonderful library about God." He held to verbal inspiration all his days and every sermon was based on Scripture.²³

Spurgeon's theology also revolved around the Lord Jesus Christ and rested on His life, death, and resurrection. This naturally resulted in a God-centered theology rather than a man-centered approach to truth.²⁴ He said:

²¹ Ibid., 72-73.

²² Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 659.

²³ Ibid., 619.

²⁴ Ibid., 659.

The great system of Calvinism known as the ‘doctrines of grace,’ brings before the mind of the man who truly receives it God and not man. The whole scheme of that doctrine looks Godward, and regards God as the first, and the plan of salvation is chiefly arranged for the glory of the most high.²⁵

It must be emphasized once more that the theology of Spurgeon had an inherent tension because of this approach. He did not try to resolve those major conflicts between divine sovereignty and human responsibility he simply embraced them as being equally true:

The system of truth is not one straight line but two. No man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once...Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there is no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free to be responsible, I am driven at once to Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestinates, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see.²⁶

Some may see this reasoning as weakness. When Spurgeon was asked to explain such a mystery he simply stated that it was not his business to do so and that “faith was reason at rest in God.”²⁷ This kind of response has not been without criticism. Although he was criticized for his approach, he held to his principles unto the end. He responded to criticism by appealing to the Bible:

There are some who read the Bible, and try to systematize it according to rigid logical creeds; but I dare not follow their method, and I feel content to let people say, ‘How inconsistent he is with himself!’ The only thing that would grieve me would be inconsistency with the Word of God. As far as I know this Book, I have endeavored, in my ministry, to preach

²⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 364. Here after referred to as MTP with volume number, year, and page.

²⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 4 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856-1861 reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 337. Hereafter NPSP.

²⁷ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: Banner of Truth, 1973) 9.

to you, not as a part of the truth, but the whole counsel of God; but I cannot harmonize it, nor am I anxious to do so. I am sure the truth is harmonious, and to my ear the harmony is clear enough; but I cannot give you a complete score of the music, or mark the harmonies on the gamut, I must leave the chief musician to do that.²⁸

Spurgeon remained loyal to the “doctrines of grace” throughout all of his ministry. They were the core of his theology and he was fully committed to all five points. When the new Metropolitan Tabernacle opened on Thursday, April 11, 1861 five different preachers preached on the five themes of grace.²⁹ He once said in a letter, “Those doctrines are dear to us epitomizing and concentrating the theology of the Bible...”³⁰

III. CALVINISM VERSUS HYPER-CALVINISM

Many English Baptists of Spurgeon’s day made the same mistake that many make today. They make no distinction between a Calvinist and a Hyper-Calvinist. Spurgeon saw a distinct difference and considered Hyper-Calvinism an error and a doctrine which caused great damage. He called it a “soul destroying system which takes manhood from man and makes him no more responsible than an ox.”³¹ From the outset of his ministry in London, Spurgeon knew there was a type of Calvinism popular in Baptist chapels different from his own. He wrote to his father in December 1853:

The London people are rather higher in Calvinism than I am; but I have succeeded in bringing one church to my own views, and will trust, with Divine assistance to do the same with another. I am a Calvinist; I love what someone called ‘glorious Calvinism’ but ‘Hyperism’ is too hot for my palate.³²

Spurgeon became the pastor of New Park Street Baptist in London. This was the church where the famous John Gill pastored, who according

²⁸ Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 52, 101.

²⁹ Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 635.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Iain Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (London: Banner of Truth, 1995), 155.

³² *Ibid.*, 49.

to some was the originator of Hyper-Calvinism.³³ Spurgeon saw this system as having a destructive influence on missions and evangelism. He noted, "During the pastorate of my venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill, this Church, instead of increasing, gradually decreased... But mark this, from the day when Fuller, Carey, Sutcliffe, and others, met together to send out missionaries to India, the sun began to dawn of a gracious revival which is not over yet."³⁴ Of Gill Spurgeon added bluntly, "*The system of theology with which many identify his [Gill's] name has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has lead them to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus.*"³⁵

Spurgeon found himself excluded from fellowship with many Baptist ministers during his first year in south London because he, "was too low in doctrine for the Hyper-Calvinism friends."³⁶ The first serious attack on Spurgeon's preaching came from those who were Hyper-Calvinists. The controversy came as a result of comments made by the older and esteemed Baptist pastor James Wells. *Wells contended that the idea of all being called to faith in Christ as Spurgeon preached was "Fullerism,"* which was the "error" introduced among Baptists by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815).³⁷ *Although being called a Fullerite was intended to be negative, Spurgeon took it as a compliment.* Spurgeon referred to Fuller as "that man of God."³⁸ *Spurgeon believed Fuller was correct when he asserted, "no writer of eminence can be named before the present century, who denied it to be the duty of men in general to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls."*³⁹

Spurgeon was convinced from his own early readings of the Puritans that they were not supporters of the beliefs of Hyper-Calvinism. Spurgeon claimed, "I have all the Puritans with me—the whole of them

³³ Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1999), 136.

³⁴ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48

³⁸ Spurgeon, *MTP*, Vol. 13, 719.

³⁹ Andrew Fuller, *Defense of a Treatise Entitled the Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, quoted by J.W. Morris in *Memoirs of Andrew Fuller* (London, 1816), 263.

without a single exception.”⁴⁰ He called Hyper-Calvinism a false Calvinism saying, “*The Calvinism of some men is not the Calvinism of John Calvin, nor the Calvinism of the Puritans, much less the Christianity of God.*”⁴¹ The English Baptists, however, were not convinced. A.C. Underwood said the controversy was due to Spurgeon’s “departure from unadulterated Calvinism.” He wrote:

The truth seems to be that old Calvinistic phrases were often on Spurgeon’s lips but the genuine Calvinistic meaning had gone out of them. This explains the attacks made upon him, as soon as he began his ministry in London by those who had never departed from an unadulterated Calvinism.⁴²

The truth is Spurgeon learned the doctrines of grace from the Congregational roots of his father and grandfather. He was unaffected by the rise of Hyper-Calvinists from among English Baptists in the Eighteenth century. His preaching was an awakening of true Calvinism with the fires of evangelism. He was God’s tool to recapture the long lost passion of missions that Hyperism had buried. Spurgeon fought against this error and many of its foolish teachings. One example is a letter where he renounced the assertion that infants would not go to heaven as some Hyper-Calvinists taught and still teach.

I have never, at any time in my life, said, believed, or imagined that any infant, under any circumstances, would be cast into hell. I have always believed in the salvation of all infants, and I intensely detest the opinions which your opponent dared attribute to me. I do not believe that on this earth, there is a single professing Christian holding the damnation of infants; or if there be, he must be insane, or utterly ignorant of Christianity.⁴³

Another reason Spurgeon rejected Hyper-Calvinism was that it rejected universal invitations and contended that the gospel addresses invitations to specific people (heavy laden, penitent). They made subjective experience a preliminary qualification in place of the objective com-

⁴⁰ Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 7, 148.

⁴¹ Spurgeon, *NPSP*, vol. 5, 367-8.

⁴² A.C. Underwood, *A History of The English Baptist* (London: Baptist Union Publications, 1947), 204.

⁴³ Ian H. Murray, *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Selected with Notes by Iain H. Murray* (London: Banner of Truth, 1992), 150.

mands and invitations of Scripture.⁴⁴ Spurgeon responded to this by saying, “*The message is not ‘wait for feelings’, it is ‘believe and live.’ I find Jesus Christ says nothing to sinners about waiting, but very much about coming.*”⁴⁵ Hyper-Calvinists contend that the ability to believe belongs only to the elect and that at the time determined by the Spirit of God. For a preacher to call all his hearers to immediate response of repentance and faith is to deny human depravity and sovereign grace. Spurgeon responded by going to the very heart of the debate, the issue of human responsibility. Spurgeon affirmed the truth that man is responsible. He believed in free agency which is not to be confused with free will. Although the Fall forfeited man’s ability to believe he did not lose his responsibility to obey.⁴⁶ *Spurgeon regarded an emphasis on man’s free agency as absolutely essential to true evangelism.* In a sermon titled “*The Sin of Unbelief*” he said:

I hold as firmly as any man living, that repentance and conversion are the work of the Holy Spirit, but I would sooner lose this hand, and both, than I would give up preaching that *it is the duty of men to repent and believe and that it is the duty of Christian ministers to say to them, ‘Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.’*⁴⁷

Hyper-Calvinists asked him, “How can sinners be offered a salvation which Christ did not fulfill on their behalf?” Spurgeon set that question aside as something that God has chosen not to explain. It was enough for him that Christ offered himself to all and the Gospel is for “every creature.”⁴⁸ He believed the principle Moses gave very long ago in Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” The secret things are those mysteries which God has not required of any minister to explain. The things revealed are the clear invitations and commands given in Scripture. These commands are man’s responsibility. He resisted the fatalism taught by Hyper-Calvinists. In a sermon at the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861 he said, “*If he be lost damnation is all*

⁴⁴ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 72.

⁴⁵ Spurgeon, *MTP*, Vol. 13, 196.

⁴⁶ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 80.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, *NPSP*, Vol. 1, 19.

⁴⁸ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 75.

of man; but if he be saved, still salvation is all of God. Divine sovereignty is a great and indisputable fact, but human responsibility is quite as indisputable.”

Spurgeon frequently showed the foolishness of a fatalistic approach. In a sermon on the Good Samaritan, he compared the priest who passed on the other side to a Hyper-Calvinist, “*they see the poor sinner, and they say, ‘he is not conscious of his need, we cannot invite him to Christ.’ ‘He is dead,’ they say, ‘it is of no use to preach to dead souls’ so they pass by on the other side.*”⁴⁹ In another sermon preached on Sunday Morning February 7, 1864, titled, “*Election No Discouragement to Seeking Souls*” he argued that the doctrine of election does not oppose the free invitations of the gospel.⁵⁰

When a sinner is anxiously disturbed about his soul’s affairs, his chief and main thought should not be upon this subject [am I one of the elect?]; when a man would escape from wrath and attain to heaven, his first, his last, his middle thought should be the cross of Christ. As an awakened sinner, I have vastly less to do with the secret purpose of God, than with his revealed commands. For a man to say, ‘Thou commandest all men to repent, yet I will not repent, because I do not know that I am chosen to eternal life,’ is not only unreasonable, but exceedingly wicked...Do I therefore, when I am hungry, thrust my hands into my pockets and stand still, and refuse to help myself with the well loaded table, because I do not know whether God has decreed that the bread should nourish me or not? If I did, I should be an idiot or madman; or, if in my senses I should starve myself on such a pretense, I should deserve the burial of a suicide.⁵¹

Once upon an early occasion in his ministry at Tring, he had proclaimed that God answered his prayers before he was converted. Some Hyper-Calvinists in the audience took exception to the statement and quoted a text which they claimed was biblical, “The prayer of a sinner is an abomination to the Lord.” “How can a dead man pray?” they asked. A large group of interrogators surrounded him. Just then help arrived from an unexpected source.

⁴⁹ Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 48.

⁵⁰ Charles Spurgeon, *Election* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1978), 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

A very old women in a red cloak managed to squeeze herself into the aisle, and turning to his accusers said: "What are you battling about with this young man? You said that God does not hear the prayers of unconverted people, that He hears no cry but that of his own children. What do you know about the Scriptures: Your precious passage is not in the Bible at all, but the Psalmist did say, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and the young ravens which cry.' Is there any grace in them? If God hears the cry of the ravens, don't you think He will hear the prayer of those who are made in His own image? You don't know anything at all about the matter, so leave the man alone, and let him go on with his Master's work."⁵²

In a sermon on the text 1 Tim 2:3-4, Spurgeon disagreed with one notable expositor who explained away "all" to mean "all kinds." Spurgeon said he "applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it." Spurgeon contended that the Holy Spirit said "all" not "all kinds" and he meant it!⁵³ How then does Spurgeon explain the text, "who will have all men to be saved...?"

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word 'wish' gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus- 'whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.'⁵⁴

How then does Spurgeon answer the question, "If God wishes all men to be saved, why doesn't he make it so?" Spurgeon replied that this is the great debate of all the ages. "I have never set up to be an explainer of all difficulties and have no desire to do so." He continued, "This is one of those things which we do not need to know."⁵⁵

One can see then that Charles Spurgeon felt the Scriptures eminently trustworthy and he never placed reason above revelation. He felt himself in line with Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin in the doctrines of grace. On his first visit to Geneva he wore Calvin's robe and preached in Cal-

⁵² W.Y. Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1920), 103.

⁵³ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 151.

⁵⁴ Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 26, 46-50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

vin's pulpit in St. Pierre.⁵⁶ He embraced, however, what he called free agency or human responsibility as Day illustrated:

Once, in Leeds, he read and commented on Romans 9 and 10. Reaching verse 10:13, he said: "Dear me, how wonderfully like John Wesley the apostle talked! 'Whosoever?' Why, that is a Methodist word, is it not?" (Amens from the Methodist; frowns from Hypers!) "But (he proceeded) read verse 9:11 and see how wonderfully like John Calvin he (Paul) talked—'That the purpose of God according to the elect might stand.' (Amens and frowns change faces!) The fact is that the whole system of truth is neither here nor there. Be it ours to know what is scriptural in all systems, and accept it."⁵⁷

IV. SPURGEON'S EVANGELISTIC PRACTICE

Spurgeon clearly recognized the vital relationship between theology and Christian ministry. He firmly believed that practical ministry should emerge out of basic theology. It comes then as no surprise that Spurgeon's ministry was one marked by fervent evangelism. The congregation of New Park Street Church was a small group of just over a hundred souls and basically people of lower middle class. They met in an auditorium that seated 1,200. David S. Smith wrote, "There is no doubt that Spurgeon had decided that evangelism was the order of the day."⁵⁸ At that time and at that place Spurgeon determined what course of action he was going to take: "The glory of God being our chief object we aim at it by seeking edification of saints and the salvation of sinners."⁵⁹ In just a few months the old church was too small to handle the crowds. The church rented Exeter Hall which seated 4,500; soon it was also too small. The church then rented the Surrey Music Hall, the largest auditorium in London. Soon 10,000 filled the Hall inside and another 10,000 waited outside. On October 7, 1857 Spurgeon preached in the Crystal Palace to

⁵⁶ William R. Estep, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Baptist History and Heritage* 4 (October 1984): 6.

⁵⁷ Richard Ellisworth Day, *The Shadow of the Brim* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1934), 144.

⁵⁸ David S. Smith, "Luther and Spurgeon: Purposeful Preachers," *Concordia Journal* 22 (January 1996): 40-41.

⁵⁹ Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1964), 49.

a congregation of 23,654 people.⁶⁰ Thousands were saved under the preaching of London's new Puritan preacher. The ministry of Spurgeon was marked by several evangelistic attributes.

A. EVANGELISTIC PASSION

Spurgeon believed like G. Campbell Morgan after him that a Pastor and a Bible teacher should have an evangelistic emphasis in their ministry.⁶¹ No other preacher surpassed Spurgeon in a passion to see lost sinners repent. In this respect he has been compared to the evangelist George Whitefield. His heart yearned for conversions.

I remember when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that 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.⁶²

Spurgeon took the task of preaching the gospel to the multitudes seriously. "Often, in coming down to this pulpit, have I felt my knees knock together, not that I am afraid of anyone of my learners, but I am thinking of that account which I must render to God whether I speak his Word faithfully or not."⁶³

Spurgeon preached the gospel not only in the pulpit but also in personal, one-on-one encounters with the people of London. He commended the use of tracts.⁶⁴ He encouraged his people to be carrying the Gospel on Sundays. During his career he frequently arranged to have a group of members leave the Tabernacle to start a new church and often one of the prominent men of the Tabernacle went with them to provide leadership.⁶⁵ In one letter he encouraged the Men's Bible Class to win souls:

⁶⁰ Estep, "The Making of a Prophet," 9-10.

⁶¹ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 127.

⁶² Spurgeon, *MTP* 1898, 55.

⁶³ Darrell Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," *Christian History* (April 1991):23.

⁶⁴ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 127-29. Hayden gives great illustrations of Spurgeon's personal witnessing encounters and his encouragement for the members of the Tabernacle to do likewise.

⁶⁵ Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 137.

The more I suffer the more I cling to the gospel. It is true, and the fires only burn it into clearer certainty to my soul. I have lived on the gospel, and I can die on it. Never question it. Go on to win other souls. It is the only thing worth living for. God is much glorified by conversions, and therefore this should be the great object of life.⁶⁶

Spurgeon would preach for conversions in his own pulpit. His sermons illustrated how to aim for salvation decisions. Albert Mohler wrote of his preaching, “But whatever the text—Old Testament or New Testament—Spurgeon would find his way to the gospel of the Savior on the cross. And that gospel was put forth with the full force of substitutionary atonement and with warnings of eternal punishment.”⁶⁷ On one occasion he challenged a discouraged preacher who was not seeing conversions, “Do you expect to have conversions every time you preach?” Spurgeon asked. “Of course not” the discouraged preacher responded. Spurgeon snapped back, “That’s why you don’t.”⁶⁸ Clearly, he had such confidence that the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation and would not fail. This seemed to be the fuel that ignited his fire. While some may get discouraged by assuming upon themselves the responsibility of salvation decisions, Spurgeon rested confidently in the purposes and power of God. That was his secret.

B. EVANGELISTIC INVITATIONS

Spurgeon believed that gospel invitations were to be universal. The Hyper-Calvinists of his day believed the gospel was a means for the ingathering of God’s elect. Nothing should be said by way of encouraging individuals to believe that the promises of God are to them particularly. Spurgeon rejected such restrictions quoting Rev 22:17, “Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”⁶⁹ He would preach and give gospel appeals like a fervent Arminian Methodist.⁷⁰ Frequently, Spurgeon was heard to say, “I fear I am not a very good Calvinist be-

⁶⁶ Murray, *Letters of Spurgeon*, 136.

⁶⁷ Albert Mohler, “A Bee-line to the Cross: The Preaching of Charles H. Spurgeon,” *Preaching* 8 (Nov-Dec 1992): 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 69-70.

⁷⁰ Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 618.

cause I pray that the Lord will save all of the elect and then elect some more.”⁷¹ He proclaimed in a sermon:

I have preached here, you know it, invitations as free as those which proceeded from the lips of Master John Wesley. Van Armin himself, the founder of the Arminian school, could not more honestly have pleaded with the very vilest of the vile to come to Jesus than I have done. Have I therefore felt in my mind that there was a contradiction here? No, nothing of the kind;⁷²

There have been those who contend that Spurgeon never gave a public invitation to come forward like most Baptist churches do today. Eric Hayden disagreed and provided ample evidence to the contrary. Hayden was a former pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle and his family attended there since the days of Spurgeon. Hayden argued that those who make such assertions argue from silence because there was never any indication from a printed sermon. He recalled, however, the stories told to him by his grandfather. Spurgeon would often request inquirers to go below to one of the basement lecture halls to be counseled by his elders. The very architecture of the Tabernacle having all the available floor space being taken by pews did not lend itself to hundreds coming forward.⁷³ Drummond wrote that Spurgeon did give invitations at times to come forward publicly like the Arminians did. In *The Sword and The Trowel* of 1865, it stated, “C.H. Spurgeon earnestly exhorted those who had accepted Christ as their Savior to come forward amongst his people and avow their attachment to his person and name...”⁷⁴ In another edition of *The Sword and The Trowel*, Spurgeon published a paper by a former student of his Pastor’s College entitled, “*How To Get at Enquirers.*” One method suggested was, “Request the anxious to remain in their seats while the rest leave...as there is often a reluctance to be seen walking up the aisle.” Spurgeon frequently did this urging his twenty or so elders to be “on watch for souls.” There was also an account of Spurgeon kneeling and praying with an inquirer in front of the Lecture Hall.⁷⁵ Spurgeon loved to quote John Bunyan’s invitation appeal:

⁷¹ Estep, “The Making of a Prophet,” 6.

⁷² Spurgeon, *Election*, 80.

⁷³ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 7.

⁷⁴ Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 658.

⁷⁵ Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 8.

‘Repent and be baptized every one of you,’ said Peter, -- one man might have stood up in the crowd and said, ‘But I helped to hound him to the cross!’ ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you.’ ‘But I drove the nails into his hands!’ saith one, ‘Every one of you,’ says Peter. ‘But I pierced his side.’ ‘Every one of you’ said Peter. ‘And I put my tongue into my cheek and stared at his nakedness and said, ‘If he be the Son of God let him come down from the cross!’ ‘Every one of you’ said Peter.⁷⁶

It must be stated in fairness, however, Spurgeon did not use a public invitation and inquiry-room as a regular practice. Although he regarded these and other methods as valid ways of appealing to troubled souls, he did not want it to appear that it was a *necessary* part of evangelism. He believed strongly that sinners must deal *directly* with God once a preacher preached a clear gospel. “You have not very far to go to find him. Cover your eyes and breathe a prayer to him. Stand behind one of the columns outside or, get into the street and let your heart say, “Saviour, I want peace and peace I can never have till I have found thee.”⁷⁷

Spurgeon’s Tabernacle did not have musical instruments and had no “song service” like churches practice today. The service included a simple order; Silent Meditation, Pastoral prayer, Hymn, Bible Reading, Long Prayer, Hymn, Sermon, and Benediction.⁷⁸ The spirit and vitality of the services were deeply impressive. Under the ministry of A.C. Dixon, the Arminian pastor, the song service with musical instruments and invitations as a regular practice was added.⁷⁹ Spurgeon feared the dangers of making such innovations a regular part of the services. He spoke to the students of his Pastor’s College Society of Evangelists about this trend; “In our revival services, it might be as well to vary our procedure. Sometimes shut up that inquiry-room. I have my fears about that

⁷⁶ Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 75-6.

⁷⁷ Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 226-27. In the chapter *The Aftermath of the Metropolitan Tabernacle*, Murray describes the unfortunate innovations that were used in the Tabernacle after Spurgeon’s death. This was partly due to the influence that men like Finney (whom Spurgeon did not particularly admire) and Moody had on evangelicalism in that day. The chapter describes the men who followed Spurgeon and how these new “methods” crept into the services of the Tabernacle, mostly under the American A.C. Dixon.

⁷⁸ Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 372.

⁷⁹ Murray, *Forgotten Spurgeon*, 230-33.

institution if it be used in permanence, and as an inevitable part of the service.”⁸⁰ It is very doubtful that Spurgeon would approve of the innovations that one sees in the churches today. He spoke of this toward the end of his ministry. His words ring like that of a prophet.

Why is this? Whence this distaste for the ordinary services of the sanctuary? I believe that the answer, in some measure, lies in a direction little suspected. There has been a growing pandering to sensationalism; and, as this wretched appetite increases in fury the more it is gratified, it is at last found to be impossible to meet its demands. Those who have introduced all sorts of attractions into their services have themselves to blame if people forsake their more sober teachings, and demand more and more of the noisy and the singular. Like dram-drinking, the thirst for excitement grows. At first, the fiery spirit may be watered down; but the next draught of it must be stronger, and soon it is required to be overproof. The customary gin-drinker wants something stronger than the pure spirit, deadly though the draught may be. One said, as she tossed off her glass, ‘Do you call that gin? Why, I know a place where, for threepence, I can get a drink that will burn your very soul out!’ Yes, gin leads on to vitriol; and the sensational leads to the outrageous, if not to the blasphemous. I would condemn no one, but I confess that I feel deeply grieved at some of the inventions of modern mission work.⁸¹

C. WINNING SOULS

Spurgeon clearly defined what it is to win a soul to Christ and what it is not. In his College Lectures to Sunday School teachers and students he preached a series of lectures on the business of soulwinning. According to Spurgeon soulwinning was not; stealing members out of another church, hurriedly inscribing more names upon our church rolls in order to show increase, nor merely to create excitement.⁸² Soulwinning according to Spurgeon involved three key elements; the mind, the heart, and the will. Soulwinning is to instruct a man that he may know the truth of God, to impress him so that he may feel it, and they must be quick-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 228.

⁸² Charles Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 15-20. These were the major points of Spurgeon’s sermon, *What Is It To Win A Soul?*

ened by the Holy Ghost so they may act upon the truth. The Holy Ghost must do the work of regeneration.⁸³ *What are the marks that a person has truly been regenerated? Spurgeon gives six—conviction of sin, a simple faith in Jesus Christ, unfeigned repentance of sin, a real changed life, true prayer, a willingness to obey the Lord in all His commands.*⁸⁴ It was a serious matter to Spurgeon to baptize and accept into the church someone who did not show good evidence of being saved.⁸⁵ In a letter Spurgeon wrote to a new convert, one sees how he viewed the matter:

My Dear Sir,

Your letters have given me great joy. I trust I see in you the marks of a son of God, and I earnestly pray that you may have the evidence within that you are born of God.

There is no reason why you should not be baptized. ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ Think very seriously of it, for it is a solemn matter. Count the cost. You are now about to be buried to the world, and you may well say, ‘What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.’

The friends who were with you in the days of your carnal pleasure will strive to entice you from Christ.; but I pray that the grace of God may be mightily manifest in you, keeping you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. I should like to see you on Thursday evening, after six o’clock, in the vestry.

I am,

Yours faithfully,
C.H. Spurgeon⁸⁶

V. CONCLUSION

The evangelistic fire of Spurgeon was not in spite of his Reformed soteriology; it was the result of it.⁸⁷ Spurgeon saw that the Gospel could

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁶ Murray, *Letters of Spurgeon*, 70-71.

⁸⁷ Editor’s note: Clearly the author is speaking in light of Spurgeon’s brand of Calvinism, which is distinct from the hyper-Calvinism that is popular today.

not fail. It would accomplish the purpose God had intended from the foundation of the world. The Calvinism of Spurgeon was not “new” or “unique.” It was the correct application of revealed truth. There have been some who have taken an extreme approach to the doctrines of grace. That unbiblical, fatalistic attitude does do great damage to evangelism and missions, but that is not the correct application of the truth of the doctrines of grace. That was not the approach of Calvin, early Puritans, Andrew Fuller, William Carey and others who hold a biblical approach. Spurgeon believed the doctrine of Divine sovereignty but he also taught equally the truth of human responsibility. Salvation is all of the Lord, God does have an “elect” but believers are given a command to take the gospel to “every creature.” It is not the believer’s responsibility to know who will respond, the secret things belong to the Lord. It is the believer’s responsibility to obey the Great Commission, the thing which are revealed belong to us, that we might obey his laws and commands.