

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century in England and probably the whole world. The pungent and passionate sermons of the Baptist pastor brought home the gospel message to the hearts of his numerous hearers and more numerous readers. Tom Nettles has retold Spurgeon's life as a warm admirer, but he is careful to rest his judgements on detailed evidence. In particular *The Sword and the Trowel*, the magazine Spurgeon edited as pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, is used as a quarry for an abundance of fresh material. Consequently this biography casts new light on Spurgeon's life, ministry and theology.

DAVID BEBBINGTON,  
Professor of History, University of Stirling, Stirling

With the publication of *Living by Revealed Truth*, Tom Nettles has provided his readers with the premier interpretive account of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Evidencing decades of serious engagement with this great Baptist leader of the nineteenth century, Nettles has given us an immense and monumental portrait of almost every aspect of the life of "the prince of preachers," including not only his numerous writings and multi-faceted ministry, but also his leadership practices and personal challenges. Educational, edifying, and enjoyable to read, this massive work is a masterful contribution to Baptist history and Christian biography.

DAVID S. DOCKERY,  
President, Union University, Jackson, Tennessee

Charles Spurgeon is a mountain – a massive figure on the evangelical landscape. Tom Nettles now helps us to understand Charles Haddon Spurgeon as a man, a theologian, and one of the most influential pastors in church history. Nettles takes us into the heart of Charles Spurgeon's conviction and his pastoral theology. This is a book that will encourage, educate, and bless its readers.

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.,  
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Eschewing hagiography and dispelling the synergistic revision of some who are unhampered by information, Dr. Nettles provides the evangelical community with another edifying work on the life and ministry of the "Prince of Preachers." Readers are inspired to holiness of life, faithfulness in Christ's service, and perseverance in godliness by the moving account of this great Victorian evangelist who held and maintained through his preaching and pastoral ministry endeavors the great truths generally known as "the doctrines of grace."

C. BERRY DRIVER, JR.,  
Professor of Systematic Theology, Senior Librarian, and Dean of Libraries,  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Fifteen years in the making, this is the first biography of Spurgeon to be written by a world-class historian who had access to the entirety of the *Sword & Trowel* magazine that Spurgeon edited monthly from 1865 to 1892. Because of the information and insights gleaned by Nettles from so much previously untapped and under-utilized material, *Living by Revealed Truth* is a massively important contribution to Spurgeon studies. Fresh and unique, this book will be enjoyable to laymen, profitable to pastors, and indispensable for scholars. Nettles' volume now takes an honored place among the most valuable of all resources pertaining to the Prince of Preachers.

DON WHITNEY,  
Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality, Senior Associate Dean for the School of Theology,  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

A magisterial biography of England's greatest pastor! Tom Nettles has given the Church, like no biographer of Charles Haddon Spurgeon before him, a deep look into the mind of the most influential minister that Baptists have ever produced. Nettles presents Spurgeon in his own words, examining and ordering his thoughts as revealed in the massive sermon collection, his extant letters but especially in his editorials and essays in the pages of *The Sword and Trowel*, the monthly journal Spurgeon edited through much of his London ministry. Nettles gives the reader insights into Spurgeon's views on theology, the ministry, and church life that will pay rich dividends to any

who will take the time to read this compelling story. If a minister reads only one biography of the great preacher, let it be this one!

JEFF STRAUB,  
Professor of Historical Theology, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minnesota

Dr. Thomas Nettles is widely regarded as one of the foremost Baptist historians in our day, and rightfully so. His research is scholarly, his theology is lofty, and his heart for the church is clear. In his new book, *Living by Revealed Truth – The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Nettles presents the ministerial brilliance of the “Prince of Preachers,” whose pastoral labors transcend generations down to this present hour. Revered by many as the greatest preacher since the apostle Paul, readers will be encouraged and edified by this engaging account of Spurgeon’s life and ministry. Whether a pastor or layman, this narrative of Spurgeon’s transcendent theology and enflamed passion for biblical truth will, most certainly, energize you in doing God’s work, God’s way, for God’s glory.

STEVEN J. LAWSON,  
Senior Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama

*Living by Revealed Truth* is one of those rare gems of Christian biography: it places in your hands the life a great man, written by an outstanding historical theologian. The combination brings Charles Spurgeon’s life and thought to life. Tom Nettles’s portrait of Spurgeon is eminently personal, historically vivid and theologically rich. I recommend it to anyone interested in seeing how theology and ministry, gospel and life, can unite in a single narrative of a life lived for the glory of God.

ROBERT CALDWELL,  
Assistant Professor of Church History, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Forth Worth, Texas

Pastors and elders, especially those mentoring young men for gospel ministry, will find Tom Nettles’ *Living By Revealed Truth* to be a treasure of pastoral theology. Written winsomely and comprehensively, the book presents a remarkable picture of how C. H. Spurgeon embraced the whole of pastoral ministry, and how he continues to influence yet another generation of gospel workers through his legacy. Much more than a biography or a pastor’s manual, *Living By Revealed Truth* sets forth the details of a gospel-centered ministry in ways that give contemporary ministers motivation and direction for every stage of pastoral work.

PHILLIP NEWTON,  
Senior Pastor, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee

Charles Spurgeon was a once-a-century kind of preacher. He was a great gift to the church and through his writings and printed sermons, remains a great ally in the cause of Christ. That so many biographies about him have appeared since his death in 1892 is a testimony to his lasting influence. Like the other great Christian leaders in church history, Spurgeon was a pastor-theologian. As such, all of his ministry was shaped by biblical theology with pastoral sensitivity. Tom Nettles demonstrates how Spurgeon gave himself to the work of the ministry with this kind of self-conscious commitment to be a theologian of the Word. That commitment, Nettles shows, caused Spurgeon to preach, teach and minister with a confessional fidelity. He was not ashamed to embrace the evangelical, Christ-centered Calvinism of his Baptist and Puritan forebears. In fact, he regarded that system of truth to be imminently biblical and powerfully practical for all of his pastoral work. What Nettles makes plain is that for Spurgeon, all theology is pastoral theology. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It should be widely distributed by all who love the gospel of God’s grace that Spurgeon preached. Every pastor, ministerial student and those who work to train men for the ministry should carefully learn from the life and labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon as Tom Nettles elucidates them. Nearly everyone who knows of Spurgeon admires him for his great accomplishments. Nettles helps us understand the theological underpinnings of those accomplishments. In doing so, the author, like his subject, has served the church well.

TOM ASCOL,  
Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida

Despite his ongoing popularity, Charles Spurgeon has only recently begun to attract the serious attention he deserves. Tom Nettles' work now makes a major contribution to this growing appreciation of the man and his ministry. Mining neglected but important sources, he has given sharper definition to our picture of Spurgeon, and produced a highly stimulating and readable account.

MICHAEL REEVES,  
Head of Theology, UCCF; author, *The Good God* and *The Unquenchable Flame*

Charles Spurgeon was the most influential preacher in the English-speaking world during the latter half of the nineteenth century. But he was also an influential Baptist pastor-theologian who saw himself as continuing the best of the older Puritan theological tradition. While numerous biographies of Spurgeon have been published over the decades, Spurgeon's thought normally receives short shrift from his biographers. This is why this new biography is so important. By focusing on Spurgeon's memoirs and published articles, Tom Nettles has filled an important gap in scholarship related to Spurgeon with this exhaustive intellectual biography of the Prince of Preachers. Many pastors and other casual readers will be encouraged by Spurgeon's commitment to a high view of Scripture and historic Baptist orthodoxy from a Reformed perspective. Scholars will be forced to reckon with Spurgeon the theologian as they pursue their own studies of the famed Victorian pastor. Nettles has spent his entire career promoting the recovery of a Spurgeonic theological vision among his fellow Baptists and other evangelicals. This fine biography will almost certainly contribute to that theological recovery.

NATHAN A. FINN,  
Associate Professor of Historical Theology and Baptist Studies,  
The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

It has long been my conviction that, despite the goodly number of Spurgeon biographies that have been written since the Baptist preacher's death in 1892, there really is lacking a definitive study that not only takes account of his remarkable ministry and the inspiring details of his life, but also adequately deals with the theology of the man. Finally, in this work by my dear colleague Tom Nettles, a sort of magnum opus upon which he has labored for many years, is justice done to not only Spurgeon the man and preacher, but also to Spurgeon the theologian. Here is an "all-round" study of Spurgeon that provides us with a fully reliable, substantial examination of an extremely important figure in the life of Victorian Evangelicalism and the world of that era. In the words of a command given to Augustine, whom Spurgeon rightly regarded as an ancient forebear of key aspects of his theology, *Tolle lege* ("Take it up and read!")—and you will be blessed.

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN,  
Professor of Church History & Biblical Spirituality,  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Tom Nettles writes that his aim in compiling this biography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon was to probe deeply the great preacher's pastoral theology. However, may I may be so bold as to suggest that, as a result of his painstaking years of exhaustive research, Dr. Nettles has given the church a treasure even greater than that? This biography chronicles in well-documented detail Spurgeon's unwavering commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, his passionate exposition of the gospel doctrines of grace, his unquenchable zeal for the salvation of the lost, his undying desire to relieve the suffering of the poor, and his amazing perseverance through immense personal suffering of many kinds. While few figures in church history have enjoyed gracious spiritual gifts from the Lord in the same abounding measure as Spurgeon, Dr. Nettles reveals to us a man who nevertheless can be for all Christians – not just pastors – a marvellous example of Christian faithfulness we all might pray God would enable us to emulate. May it please the Lord, through the widespread reading of this biography, to inspire thousands of Christian men and women to seek from God's grace the sort of white-hot evangelistic zeal and unshakeable biblical commitments that were so characteristic of the pastoral ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon!

STEPHEN E. FARISH,  
Pastor





LIVING BY REVEALED TRUTH

THE LIFE AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF  
CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

TOM NETTLES

**MENTOR**

Scripture quotations taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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## PREFACE

When volume XX of *The Sword and the Trowel* came from the binders, Spurgeon wrote, “We little thought when we commenced this serial that we should attain to Volume XX.” It grew, however, in his mind to be not only a chronicle of the work of the Tabernacle but also “in some sense our autobiography.”<sup>1</sup> This proved to be the case, because much of the material collected by his wife and his assistant J. W. Harrald for Spurgeon’s posthumous *Autobiography* first appeared in this monthly pastoral missive. While mounds of valuable sermons and addresses from Spurgeon and others appear as the main body of the monthly fascicle, the sections of book reviews and monthly “notes” provide rich sources for understanding Spurgeon’s life, opinions, theology, and view of pastoral ministry. It provides an ongoing commentary on the literature of the day, his views on the life of the church, reports on the multitudinous benevolences that he sponsored and supported directly as well as many others with which he had sympathy and sought to encourage others to support. Much of his personal life—joys, conflicts, and suffering—shows up in the notes included in a section noted as “personal.” My focus, therefore, in seeking to understand his theology of pastoral ministry, has been on this large body of material, approximately fifty pages of material appearing every month from 1865 through 1892, always with Spurgeon as the editor.

Letters collected by his son Charles move through Spurgeon’s life with the personal touch at which he was so transparent, playful, and adept. They are filled with his fears, his earnestness for Christlikeness, his love for family and friends, his

intensity about gospel ministry, his candor about pain, and his perplexity with opposition. The soul of Spurgeon was spilled out into his letters.

Obviously Spurgeon’s sermons published week by week from 1855 until far beyond his death provide not only insight into his homiletics, exegesis, and theological convictions, but also reflect his mind on the controversies, ecclesiastical relationships, and contemporary events. I confess that I have not read every sermon but have sought to delve into each volume, to some degree, of the *New Park Street Pulpit*, the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, a sizable number of sermon books that Spurgeon published on discreet subjects, *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, a twenty-volume American edition of *Spurgeon’s Sermons* (which contains many sermons that did not appear in either the *NPSP* or the *MTP*), based on sermons that were wired across the Atlantic and appeared in American newspapers.

From the biographies that appeared virtually immediately on the death of Spurgeon the one volume by G. Holden Pike, followed by his six-volume *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, is most important as it contains a large amount of primary sources to which only Pike, as a co-editor of *The Sword and the Trowel*, had access. Pike also wrote *From the Pulpit to the Palm Branch*, a narrative of the last eight months of Spurgeon’s life and the many events and services surrounding his death and funeral.

Another valuable biography that appeared immediately (1892) was Robert Shindler’s *From the Usher’s Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit*, which was a prequel to Pike’s funeral volume. Shindler wrote frequently for *The Sword and the Trowel* and was, in fact, the author of the first series of

1. *Sword & Trowel*, January 1885, 25.



PREFACE

articles on the Downgrade, the controversy that so altered Spurgeon's final five years and changed the face of Baptist life in England. He spent much time with Spurgeon and had access to many events and personal conversations that help fill in personal details and make his narrative boil with life.

In 1920 W. Y. Fullerton, whose name will appear frequently in this volume, wrote a biography that is valuable. Fullerton, who was the most prominent evangelist sent out by Spurgeon himself, and a trusted friend during some very troubling years, provides some anecdotes that would otherwise have been lost and some personal insight and impressions that are valuable as the careful judgments of a close and admiring friend. Such judgments should not be dismissed as uncritical hagiography, for the evaluations of discerning men that have spent time in tense and distressing situations with prominent personalities should be taken seriously. They perhaps know more of what drives a person than others that are limited simply to written documents.

Russell Conwell, believed at the time to be the closest parallel to Spurgeon in America, wrote in 1892 a book called *Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon: The World's Greatest Preacher*. It combines his personal contemplations on certain aspects of Spurgeon's ministry that had attained somewhat legendary status with a sane corrective to ideas that had grown out of proportion to reality. His personal acquaintance with Spurgeon again evoked descriptions of him and his ministry superlative in their tendency.

In 1933, J. C. Carlile, another of Spurgeon's students, wrote an intriguing volume with the title *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography*. Carlile never fails to surprise with his tremendous affection for Spurgeon on the one hand and his attempt to place him in a favorable light for a declining Baptist Union that still smarted from his resignation

and his torrent of doctrinal criticism. Spurgeon raged against what he perceived as the Union's toleration of an intrusive and parasitic, cankerous, heterodox modern thought. Carlile does not say it flatly, but he probably was dissatisfied with Fullerton's approach to Spurgeon. At virtually the same time as Carlile wrote and published, an American Richard Ellsworth Day published his biography of Spurgeon called *The Shadow of the Broad Brim*, and it was a citadel of admiration.

Books and chapters in books of reminiscences about Spurgeon offer valuable anecdotal information and often illustrate what was clearly a consistent aspect of Spurgeon's personality and spirituality. Peter Mordern, Arnold Dallimore, Lewis Drummond, and Patricia S. Kruppa have also written biographies of Spurgeon. Each of these was helpful in both factual content and historical perspective. Iain Murray has written insightfully on Spurgeon as a controversialist.

Archival sources at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and at Spurgeon's College I have not been able to access personally. Others that have written special pieces in a variety of journals from their knowledge of those sources have benefited me. While those sources would obviously provide an opportunity for valuable insight, the amount of primary source material available along with the ongoing labors of others have given me sufficient material for evaluation on the main object of my study—a presentation of the pastoral theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

My special thanks to my publisher, Christian Focus Publications, for their patience of over a decade and a half in waiting for this manuscript. My wife, Margaret, also has proven her love through the patient endurance of those same years and has sacrificed thousands of hours that I might seek to present a fair and accurate picture of this strikingly human Baptist Demosthenes.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

## INTRODUCTION

*I would have every Christian wish to know all that he can know of revealed truth. Somebody whispers that the secret things belong not to us. You may be sure you will never know them if they are secret; but all that is revealed you ought to know, for these things belong to you and to your children. Take care you know what the Holy Ghost teaches. Do not give way to a faint-hearted ignorance, lest you be great losers thereby.<sup>1</sup>*

On February 11, 1892, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was carried in a five-mile-long funeral procession. Bells rang from St. Mary's in Newington and St. Mark's in Kennington. Even public houses were closed and flags hung as half staff. Thousands of people in black lined the street and curved in a graceful line all the way to the grave site in Norwood Cemetery. Blue sky appeared above as the casket was lowered amidst palms and lilies, and a dove flew from the Metropolitan Tabernacle to Norwood and paused briefly over the crowd. A William Cowper hymn was sung, Archibald Brown spoke, A. T. Pierson prayed, and the Bishop of Rochester pronounced the benediction.

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1. MTP, 1891:318. This is from the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, sermons published by Spurgeon in yearly volumes from 1861 and continued year by year through 1917 by Passmore & Alabaster, Spurgeon's London publishers. The first six volumes of this series are entitled *The New Park Street Pulpit*. These will be referred to respectively as NPS and MTP with the year and page number. The volumes used are those reprinted by Pilgrim Publications, in Pasadena, Texas from 1975 to 1980.

An open Bible pointing to his conversion text was removed before the burial, for the Word of God was not dead. The text read, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: For I am God and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22).

At the same time, a memorial was held in Mentone<sup>2</sup> in France, where Spurgeon had died twelve days before. Austin Phelps related to those gathered at Mentone that he had been asked the previous day what he thought was the secret of Spurgeon's power. He answered: "Two things; first, he had one single object before him always, 'to win souls for God by preaching Christ, and Him crucified and risen'; second, his own personal faith in Christ was always feeding on Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture." Phelps continued to emphasize the centrality of Christ in Spurgeon's

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2. This is the English spelling of the town in Southern France that became the favorite respite of Spurgeon. The French spelling is Menton. The English spelling will be used except in direct quotations where the French spelling is used.

life and message but never disconnected from “As the Scripture speaks of Christ.” Again he insisted, “His subject was always one—Christ; but it was Christ afresh from his view of him in God’s written Word. Ever the same sun, but the sunshine is fresh every day.”<sup>3</sup>

Phelps had caught the driving force of Spurgeon’s life as succinctly as any. Spurgeon lived with all his might, while he did live, in the felt presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ, gaining each day and in each message fresh floods of spiritual nourishment as the Spirit witnessed to Christ’s completed work, while, at the same time, none of his views of experience or his statements about Christ were other than that which is communicated in revealed truth, the written word of God. There have been others in the history of the church for whom the richness of relationship and the settledness of proposition meshed in perfect harmony to support a life of richly experiential and inviolably prescribed worship. One may find this beauty of Spirit and truth in Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, Bunyan, and Edwards; but I would not fear successful contradiction in saying that none of these surpassed Spurgeon in the pursuit and natural expression of that synthesis.

The approach here involves an effort to suggest that Spurgeon, in every aspect of his ministry, was driven by a well-developed, clearly artic-

ulated systematic theology and by a commitment to a conversion ministry, both of which were conceived as consistent with revealed truth. A challenge to his viewpoint at the first dawning of the Downgrade Controversy elicited the response from Spurgeon that he only asked to be “clear of complicity in this boastful progress beyond what is plainly revealed.” His theology was not regulated by the clock or calendar but “by eternal truth.”<sup>4</sup> His preaching, the development of institutions and services, his publications, his perception of church life, his evangelism, his suffering, and the controversies in which he played a part all reflect a commitment to a system of truth developed from the Bible and expressed most clearly in Puritans and evangelicals such as Owen, Charnock, Bunyan, Newton, Whitfield, Romaine, Brooks, Manton, and Sibbes. Both denominationally and theologically Spurgeon saw himself as a devotee of the Particular Baptists as defined by the Confession of 1689. Every enterprise that claimed his energies emerged as a self-conscious commitment to a particular outworking of some part of this theology.

One sees it in the manner of his conversion and the way he related it throughout his life. One finds it again in the quiet conviction that he must be baptized as a believer though he had been sprinkled in his infancy. The immediate entrance into an evangelistic lay ministry blended the same rich ingredients of truth and life, while his call to preach embraced a desire to glorify the ever-present living Christ through the proclamation of the faith once delivered to the saints in the inspired Scriptures. In the founding of the orphanage and alms houses and other benevolent ministries his deep compassion was initiated and fueled by his thorough biblical knowledge and

3. S&T, April 1892, 154. Charles Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*, London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1865-1892. This monthly periodical edited by Spurgeon was bound yearly and continued its publication for years beyond Spurgeon’s death. It contained sermons and expositions (often not found in the yearly bound volumes of Spurgeon’s sermons), articles by other people, news about missions and evangelism, doctrinal articles and featured notices about monthly church life at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Also the book review section contained around fifty reviews each month, most of these done by Spurgeon. This volume has used these bound volumes, heavily emphasizing the notices and reviews, for information about Spurgeon’s life and ideas on a large variety of subjects. It will be noted as S&T with month, year, and page.

4. S&T, December 1883, 650.

## INTRODUCTION

complete commitment to the enactment of doctrinal principles. The Pastors' College developed from his loving concern about one individual combined with his theological commitment to the necessity for a thorough grounding in biblically based systematic theology, sound exegesis, expository preaching, and scripturally mandated pastoral theology. In reviewing *Systematic Theology* by A. H. Strong in 1886, Spurgeon gave vent to his weighty opinion on the value of theology when it is perceived as a tool serving the clarity of the Bible and produced in the confidence of the unerring coherence of revealed truth: "If our young ministers knew more of theology," Spurgeon urged, "that is to say of *the word of God*—they would not be so easily duped by pretenders to knowledge, who endeavour to protect their own ignorance by crying down a thorough and systematic study of revealed truth."<sup>5</sup>

The seamlessness of Spurgeon's mental movements within parameters that included both policy and ideal became more evident through his life. He did not fear to speak his mind on political issues and policies of the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament while relating his analysis to biblical issues and gospel issues that, to him, seemed self-evidently true and thus irrational, Byzantine, and counter-intuitive to deny. His exuberant enjoyment of nature, as well as his keen observation of human nature, provided an overflowing stream of theological, evangelistic, and moral application. He did not seem to mind at all, or feel it a burden or a curse, that his thoughts ran constantly in paths of theological reflection on every natural observation, human encounter, or personal conversation.

The God who created the world, cursed it at the fall, having already established the covenant

of redemption in eternity, also revealed all this in increasingly clear increments in Holy Scripture until all was spoken at the close of the New Testament. The fullness of Scripture and the finality of redemption through Jesus Christ governed Spurgeon's understanding of all things and, in his view, should be the determining truth for all human thought and action. A challenge to Scripture or the gospel of sovereign grace made a crack in reality and introduced a magnetic pull into an abyss of unknowing, fragmentation, irrationality, self-destruction, death and, finally, the infinite horror of eternal divine wrath.

He expressed in many venues this ultimate confidence in Scripture as a superior form of knowledge. Frequently he was called upon to review books concerning the burgeoning scientific enterprise of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Upon examination of a book entitled *A Catechism of Geology and Sacred History for Young People*, Spurgeon reckoned the attempt to explain Scripture statements by the "infant science of geology" as "moderately successful." Yet, when science has done her fullest and best work, Spurgeon contended, "There will still be mysteries in the word of God that must be accepted as revelations rather than understood as the results of reasoning." Spurgeon was not afraid to exercise faith in "receiving the statements of the Scriptures." No independent confirmation of scriptural assertion was needed, for its authority was independent of human reason and research; its evidence was in itself and in its witness to the needs of the human soul, as interpreted through the entire fabric of redemptive truth, served as sufficient ground for receiving it as a revelation. "What we fear," Spurgeon observed, "is the attempt to reduce everything to the dead level of judgment by carnal reasoning." "Christian rationalism," he recognized, was very much the fashion, but also very

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5. S&T, November 1886, 598.

dangerous to the doctrinal necessity of receiving the Bible on the basis of its own claims, its intrinsic excellence, and the witness of the Spirit to Christ.<sup>6</sup>

In his early ministry Spurgeon worked with virtually exhaustless energy. The schedule of speaking and writing occupied every waking hour. Mind and body aged exponentially after October 19, 1856, when the Surrey Music Hall disaster fixed a depression upon his spirit from which he never fully recovered. Derision, ridicule, and jealousy, from secular pundits and clergy alike, kept pace almost stride for stride with his rapidly increasing popularity. As the network of benevolent institutions developed, beginning with the Pastors' College, and the responsibility for the regular maintenance of them debt-free pressed on him, his physical and mental strength began to show signs of wear. He needed scheduled times to be away from the weekly pressures of the preparation and delivery of sermons, the oppressive weather and the thick floating muck called air in London, and the depressingly gray surroundings in earth and sky piled on top of the thick grime of the densely poor population of Southwark. Though some of his theologically offended contemporaries took advantage of Spurgeon's public admissions of physical malady and depression of spirit to dismiss the seriousness of his theological confrontations, there is no evidence that his mental acuteness or perfect sanity were ever threatened by his debilities. He had come to realize that he needed "Net Mending." "Our mind grows jaded, and our spirit depressed, our heart beats with diminished vigour, and our eyes lose their brightness, if we continue, month after month, and year after year, without a rest." Mental work, he believed, will as surely wear out

the brain "as friction will destroy the iron wheel." "It is bad policy to forego the regular vacation."<sup>7</sup> That was twenty-two years before he finally succumbed to the weakness of this present flesh.

Spurgeon loved and hated. Virtually without exception he loved people of all sorts. At the same time he truly hated the systems of religion and politics that blinded them to the clarity and purity and power of the gospel. "To hate error with perfect hatred, and yet to love the errorist, may seem a hard task; but the Holy Spirit can help us to perform it."<sup>8</sup> He felt no bitterness toward those that erred, for he knew that sovereign grace had opened his mind and heart to the light of truth. Bishops he loved, Episcopacy he hated; Arminians he embraced, while the peculiarities of Arminianism he found destructive; for Tories he had affection, but oppressive power and privilege gained by the mere fact of birth he not only opposed, but ridiculed; the poor he regarded highly, poverty and the indiscretions that created it he despised; those talented for business and thrift he celebrated, the quest for worldly splendor he resisted. The range of eleemosynary projects that he sponsored and supported could not have been sustained did he not have a marvelous capacity for love of all sorts of people and winsomeness with the rich that gained their full approval of his vision. The Earl of Shaftesbury expressed well the esteem won by Spurgeon for his benevolent ministries from many in places of influence. Shaftesbury expressed his regret that he could not attend at the Tabernacle a meeting of ragged school workers. "There is no man in the country, whose opinion and support in such matters I prize more highly than those of my friend, Mr. Spurgeon." He continued:

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6. S&T, February 1881, 84.

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7. S&T, August 1869, 358.

8. S&T, January 1883, 28.

## INTRODUCTION

It would give me singular pleasure after nearly forty years of work in the Ragged-school cause, to have the testimony and counsel of so valuable a man. Few men have preached so much, and so well; and few ever have combined so practically their words and their actions. I deeply admire and love him, because I do not believe that there lives anywhere a more sincere and simple servant of our blessed Lord. Great talents have been rightly used; and, under God's grace, have led to great issues.<sup>9</sup>

Even Spurgeon's wit went unwasted, for it found its expression in the teaching of scriptural truth. W. Williams attended Spurgeon's Friday lectures for fourteen years and often went to the Thursday evening services. He had a standing invitation to Spurgeon's home "of which privilege," Williams confessed, "I availed myself as often as conscience would allow." In harmony with thousands of other observers, Williams reported that "the wit of Mr. Spurgeon was proverbial." Referring to him as a "bubbling fountain of humour," Williams confessed to having laughed more in Spurgeon's company than in the entire rest of his life besides. Spurgeon believed that laughter in itself was a good thing and helped tone the mind for many of the charming incongruities slung into our experience by divine grace. "The religion of Jesus," he said, "puts no restraint upon innocent and healthy pleasure."<sup>10</sup> It is all the better if the quip or anecdote, or play on words becomes a barb by which an edifying point might remain lodged in the conscience. Browsing a bookshop brought an uninvited recommendation of a book on infant baptism with the cute remark, "Here, Mr. Spurgeon, is your thorn in the flesh." Undaunted, Spurgeon replied, "Finish the quotation,

brother—A messenger of Satan to buffet me."<sup>11</sup> Through several pseudonyms, the most famous of which was John Ploughman, Spurgeon made many a moral and theological point with a bit of humorous irony and honeyed vinegar. In a piece entitled "Great Thinkers Think Themselves Great Men," Spurgeon made many a pungent remark about feigned greatness and how little minds take little things to be marks of greatness. One such man thought he was great because he could stand on his head and drink a glass of beer and another because he knocked out a man's eye in a prize fight. The worst of the falsely great are those who deem themselves clever. At a distance they are swans but up close they are geese. And the worst of the clever are "those who know better than the Bible and are so learned that they believe that the world had no Maker, and that men are only monkeys with their tails rubbed off." Such talk one expects from Tom of Bedlam, but "now we get it from clever men. If things go on in this fashion a poor ploughman will not be able to tell which is the lunatic and which is the philosopher." Spurgeon went on to have John Ploughman bring the discussion of cleverness to a penetrating point:

Many a drop of good broth is made in an old pot, and many a sweet comfort comes out of the old doctrine. Many a dog has died since I first opened my eyes, and every one of these dogs has had his day, but in all the days put together they have never hunted out a real fault in the Bible nor started anything better in its place. They may be very clever, but they will not find a surer truth than that which God teaches, nor a better salvation than that which Jesus brings, and so finding my very life in the gospel I mean to live in it, and so ends this chapter.<sup>12</sup>

9. S&T, December 1882, 632.

10. W. Williams, *Personal reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: the Religious Tract Society, 1895), 171.

11. *Ibid.*, 162.

12. C. H. Spurgeon, *John Ploughman's Pictures* (Christian Focus Publications, 1989), 80-84.

Humor with no point, however, was indeed pointless. Ministers must not become “mere entertainers of the public, pouring out a number of stale jokes and idle tales.” A scourge of small cords should be applied in some places that have become venues for entertainment assisted by ministers. “To make religious teaching interesting is one thing, but to make silly mirth, without aim or purpose, is quite another.”<sup>13</sup>

Spurgeon interpreted his own ministry in terms of revealed truth. The content of Scripture’s representation of human sin had been sealed in Spurgeon’s own consciousness and the corresponding answer of the gospel satisfied his disturbed conscience. He found every proposition of Scripture surrounding him as a word of comfort, instruction, and conviction; divine truth “profitable for doctrine ... and instruction in righteousness.” Consequently the veracity of Scripture had been confirmed in his experience and by its own internal consistency and he needed no external verification of its truth. He argued with no one about “problems” in the biblical text or in the Christian faith. No good could come of it. Those who raised such problems had not yet felt the weight of their sin or of their need for a Redeemer. Mere intellectual jousting would solve no issue in their minds, for the Scripture is not given in order that the vain philosophical cavils of resistant intellects might be satisfied, but that wounded consciences might be shown a perfect Redeemer. In that light, all he did in preaching, in controversy, and in benevolent ministries arose from his own perception of revealed truth. “We have received the certainties of revealed truth,” he wrote, and “we do not bow to men’s theories of truth.” He did not argue, but declared that “there are certain verities—essential, abiding, eternal—

from which it is ruinous to swerve.” The only thing new in theology is that which is false, and Spurgeon rejoiced that he was considered an echo of the past, the biblical past and the Puritan past, rather than a leading voice for error.<sup>14</sup> He did not regard modern thought or theology as Christianity at all, but a totally new cult.

In a benevolent way, Spurgeon considered himself as a universal filter for all human experience and its vicar for the sake of his people. Philosophers and sceptics could pose no question that had not rolled over him in the deep recesses of his own soul in his days of intellectual and spiritual turmoil before conversion. Compared to his struggles, the objections of current doubters were mere trifles and his people need not concern themselves with that which he already had answered. His opinion on books should serve as a shield for others; if he saw nothing edifying in it, then others merely would waste their time in investigating.

Spurgeon knew enough of suffering and mental distress to be a sure guide to fellow sufferers and to shield others from needing the experience for themselves. In explaining his suffering, he noted that “*The complete Pastor’s* life will be an epitome of the lives of his people, and they will turn to his preaching as men do to David’s Psalms, to see themselves and their own sorrows, as in a mirror. Their needs will be the reason for his griefs.”<sup>15</sup>

The martyrdoms of the universal church recorded so poignantly by Fox found their way into his daily experience through the endlessly bothersome misrepresentations of the media and the mean-spirited opposition from many fellow-clergy. Lampooned and ridiculed with merciless

13. S&T, October 1879, 492-93.

14. Charles Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 17.

15. S&T, May 1876 197.

## INTRODUCTION

glee by many whose fame was built on their ability to humiliate, he gathered these testimonies of opposition in large scrap-books as a memorial to his shouldering such humiliation for others as he patiently took his place with Christ outside the camp.

Biblical doctrine was verified for all his hearers because he knew it to be true; bibliology, Christology and soteriology, all flowed through his personal engagement to all that heard and read him. Their confidence in its power and sanctifying influences could be trusted largely on the credit of his thorough test of their genuineness. To an intellectually troubled inquirer he stated, "If you believe that I am a liar, you are free to think so if you like; but I testify what I do know, and state what I have seen, and tasted, and handled, and felt, and you ought to believe my testimony, for I have no possible object to serve in deceiving you."<sup>16</sup>

Not only did Spurgeon's conversion make him a conduit for all human experience, it gave him the key to all knowledge. Christ crucified trumped by infinite measure the most celebrated wisdom, polity, art, science, and philosophy of all peoples everywhere that did not come from the treasures of revealed truth. A true Christian in possession of God's wisdom in the cross is "in a right place to follow with advantage any other branch of science." It proved true for him. "I confess I have a shelf in my head for everything now. Whatever I read I know where to put it; whatever I learn I know where to stow it away." In former days all that he read and all that he observed just whirled together in mindless confusion, "but ever since I have known Christ, I have put Christ in the centre as my sun, and each science revolves round it like a planet, while minor sciences are

satellites to these planets." Since Christ had become the center of his personal universe, he declared with confidence, "I can learn everything now."<sup>17</sup>

Most prominently in his preaching ministry did Spurgeon show that his mind and heart formed a receptacle and a dispensary for the constant outgo and income of revealed truth. Week after week he poured forth what seemed to him the captivating, heart-forming, sinner-saving power entrenched in Scripture texts. The killing frequency of proclamation in Spurgeon's life compelled him toward such a death because he believed that relentless distribution was divinely ordained as the means by which revealed truth manifests its liveliness in breathing, under the blessing of the Spirit, spiritual, saving life into sinners. His mouth became a channel through which revealed truth flowed as a life-giving stream. He viewed texts not only as having their peculiarly appropriate interpretation, but embodying an entryway into the whole truth of Scripture. He paid attention to peculiar context but also brought his historic confessional commitment to bear in the sermonic presentation arising from the chosen text. The Bible could not be fragmented, in Spurgeon's view, to isolated pericopes or individualized developments of theology from book to book or era to era, but moved toward the fullest display possible in this life of the glory of God manifest in the Redeemer's redemption. Managing a biblical text without Christ and his saving work was a gross mismanagement, because the sum of all the truths revealed in Scripture finds expression in Christ.

This view of preaching expressed consistently his driving theological concern. The covenant of redemption, precious to Spurgeon from the ear-

16. Charles Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1895), 110.

17. NPSR, 1855, 60.




*LIVING BY REVEALED TRUTH*

liest days subsequent to his conversion until his dying moments, found its yea and amen in Christ and embodied all the “I wills” of God. Nothing partook more of the very nature of revelation and summarized the fullness of its intent than the covenantal transactions of eternity, and nothing seemed more certain in his own experience and ministry than the security brought by knowledge of that covenant. Because it was at the farthest limits of revealed truth, and went deeper into the eternal purpose and self-knowledge of the triune God than any other idea of Scripture, it was most foundational to our reception of every other item in that body of truth. It should be foundational to all theology and all confessional expressions of it. In his brief statement prior to his edition of the 1689 Baptist confession of faith Spurgeon wrote:

This ancient document is the most excellent epitome of the things most surely believed among us. It is not issued as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby you may be fettered, but as a means of edification in righteousness. It is an excellent, though not inspired, expression of the teaching of those Holy Scriptures by which all confessions are to be measured. We hold to the humbling truths of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of lost sinners. Salvation is through Christ alone and by faith alone.

That constitutes the abiding testimony of Charles Spurgeon. That, to him, was the message of Holy Scripture. It was nothing less than the sovereign work of the Redeemer explained for us in revealed truth.



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