

**GEOFFREY
CHANG**

RECOVERING
A BIBLICAL &
THEOLOGICAL
VISION FOR
MINISTRY

Spurgeon
THE PASTOR



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GEOFFREY CHANG

Spurgeon
THE PASTOR

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To pastors called by God to shepherd His flock.
(1 Peter 5:1-4)

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ABBREVIATIONS

AARM—An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900.

Autobiography—C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary. Vols. 1–4. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897.

GFW—The Greatest Fight in the World: Conference Address. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1895.

Lectures—Lectures to My Students: Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastor’s College. Vols. 1–4. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881–1894.

LS—The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon. Vols. 1–6 Eds. Christian George, Jason Duesing, and Geoffrey Chang. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016–2021.

MTP—The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon. Vols. 7–63. Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970–2006.

NPSP—The New Park Street Pulpit: Containing Sermons Preached and Revised by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, Minister of the Chapel. Vols. 1–6. Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1975–1991.

S&T—The Sword and the Trowel; A Record of Combat with Sin & Labour for the Lord. 37 vols. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1865–1902.

TD—The Treasury of David: Containing an Original Exposition of the Book of Psalms; A Collection of Illustrative Extracts from the Whole Range of Literature; A Series of Homiletical Hints Upon Almost Every Verse; And Lists of Writers Upon Each Psalm. 7 vols. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1869–1885.



INTRODUCTION

ANOTHER FORGOTTEN SPURGEON



The Beginning of My Spurgeon Studies

Sometimes, life is changed by a major decision or event. For me, it was changed by an email. In 2016, I was happily serving as an associate pastor at Hinson Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon. I had been there since 2010 and in God's kindness, the church was healthy. So, wanting to further my pastoral training, I decided to pursue doctoral studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. After being accepted, I emailed my former pastor, Mark Dever, to ask for guidance on a dissertation topic. In classic fashion, he responded: "Something on Spurgeon's ecclesiology!!! Guaranteed edification!"

That short email led me to studying the ecclesiology of the most famous preacher of the nineteenth century. It led me to the archives of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, to the records of the Angus Library at Regent's Park, Oxford, to the offices of Pilgrim Publications in Pasadena, Texas, to out-of-the-way Spurgeon collections across America, and, of course, to many long nights exploring Spurgeon's own books housed in the Spurgeon Library in Kansas City. Ultimately, that email led to a whole new career in Spurgeon scholarship.

Today, I have the privilege of teaching at Midwestern Seminary and managing the Spurgeon Library. Midwestern exists to train up pastors and ministers who are committed to serving the local church. There is no better model of faithful pastoral ministry and commitment to the local church than Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Another Forgotten Spurgeon

One of the surprising discoveries of my research was how overlooked Spurgeon's pastoral ministry has been over the years. This doesn't mean that Spurgeon himself has been overlooked. Arnold Dallimore estimates that in the years following his death, a new biography was published every month.¹ While his popularity declined in the United Kingdom in the years after his death, Spurgeon has remained as popular as ever in the United States and other parts of the world. To this day, his works are still translated, and every Sunday, his sermons are quoted from pulpits around the world. And since the middle of the twentieth century, academic works have been produced critically examining Spurgeon's life and teaching. These works have not only sought to take Spurgeon seriously as a preacher, but as a theologian. With the establishment of the Spurgeon Library in 2015, a new wave of Spurgeon scholarship has begun, seeking to organize his theology and discern his impact during his lifetime and beyond.

In 1966, Iain Murray published *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, where he writes, "Despite the modern encomiums bestowed on him as 'the prince of preachers' and despite the anecdotes which still survive in the evangelical world about his abilities and his humor, some of

¹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), ix. These biographies were written mostly by his associates and friends. While they provided some new insights and anecdotes, they largely covered familiar territory.

the most important aspects of his ministry have been forgotten.”² In his work, Murray argues that it is Spurgeon’s theological framework that has been forgotten, “and Spurgeon without his theology is about as distorted as the cheap china figures of Spurgeon which were offered for sale by charlatans more than a century ago.”³

Murray explores Spurgeon’s theology through the various theological controversies that he encountered throughout his life. Those battles highlight Spurgeon’s evangelical orthodoxy, particularly as it relates to his doctrine of Scripture, sin, the person and work of Christ, and salvation. Much of the renewed interest in Spurgeon’s theology focuses on these doctrines. Still, little attention has been given to his understanding of the church. Spurgeon’s ecclesiology and pastoral ministry remain a part of the forgotten Spurgeon.

Though many have told the stories from Spurgeon’s background, preaching ministry, publications, orphanage, controversies, and more, very few have sought to examine the foundation of his ministry, namely his pastoring of a local church. Ever since the fall of 1851, when he was called as the bi-vocational pastor of the Baptist congregation in Waterbeach, Spurgeon’s ministry was rooted in the local church. Some historians have noted how Spurgeon’s ministry exemplified the fourfold evangelical emphasis of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.⁴ To those four, I would add a fifth (to invent a word): ecclesialcentrism.

Drawing on the Reformed tradition, which was sharpened by Baptist convictions, Spurgeon believed that Christian discipleship was rooted in and shaped by the local church. Along with all his other biblical and theological convictions, Spurgeon also had convictions about the local church. Biblical authority ruled the church, and

² Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2–17.

was exercised by the congregation, under the leadership of elders and deacons. The message of the cross was to be proclaimed from the church for the conversion of sinners. Those who experienced conversion would publicly profess their faith through baptism and membership in the church. The church was also to be an engine for evangelistic and social activism. For Spurgeon, the church was not optional to the Christian life. It was the place in which the Christian life was to be lived out. This was the vision he sought to implement in his own church and promote in his pastoral training.

Some scholars have observed Spurgeon's love for his fellow evangelicals and his eagerness to cooperate with them. As a result, they have concluded that Spurgeon minimized his own ecclesiological convictions. But this does not give a full picture. Yes, Spurgeon gladly cooperated outside of his denomination. However, the aim of his preaching, evangelism, pastoral training, and church planting was not simply to promote evangelical doctrine, but to plant distinctly Baptist churches.

One of the main instruments for organizing this work was his monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*. Writing in the very first article of the magazine in 1865, Spurgeon declared that his goal was "to advocate those views of doctrine *and Church order* which are most certainly received among us."⁵ For more than twenty-five years, this magazine provided not only Spurgeon's gospel teaching, but also, as Tom Nettles notes, his "view of pastoral ministry . . . [and] his views on the life of the church."⁶ Spurgeon's convictions about pastoral ministry and the church even led him to spread his views beyond his own congregation to the rest of the English-speaking world.

⁵ S&T 1865:1.

⁶ Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2013), 9.

Drawing on primary sources like *The Sword and the Trowel*, his sermons, church minutes, and more, this book will seek to bring out this overlooked theme of Spurgeon's life. We will focus particularly on Spurgeon's pastoral ecclesiology, looking at topics like the role of preaching in the church, corporate gatherings, membership interviews, elders and deacons, and much more.⁷ My main argument will be that Spurgeon's approach to these church matters was driven by biblical and theological convictions, rather than by pragmatism or convenience. For this reason, he remains a valuable conversation partner for pastors today.

Why Listen to Spurgeon?

Why should pastors care about Spurgeon's thoughts on the church? Let me offer three reasons:

1. *Spurgeon pastored amid an active ministry.* His sixty-three volumes of published sermons make it clear that the heart of Spurgeon's ministry was preaching, and this kept him busy. From his earliest days at Waterbeach, he would regularly preach eight times a week (three sermons on Sunday and five nights a week). After a few years in London, the demand for his preaching was so great that he found himself preaching as much as twelve or thirteen times a week.⁸ But as busy as Spurgeon was, he was more than just a preacher. He gave oversight to at least sixty-six institutions that existed out of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, including two orphanages, the Pastors' College, numerous Bible classes, Sunday schools, and more. We also can't forget the incessant deadlines of his weekly sermon publications, monthly magazine, unending correspondence,

⁷ For a study of Spurgeon's ecclesiology proper, see my forthcoming work, *The Army of God: Spurgeon's Vision for the Church* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2022).

⁸ *Autobiography* 2:81.

and many book projects. But as important and fruitful as those ministries were, Spurgeon was more than just a ministry director and administrator. Spurgeon was a pastor. He took responsibility for a church and sought to care for his flock. Busy-ness was no excuse to neglect his pastoral responsibilities.

So, why should we listen to Spurgeon? For the church leader with thousands of responsibilities, we need Spurgeon to remind us of the importance of our calling as pastors and to encourage us to persevere in faithfulness.

2. *Spurgeon pastored amid a revival.* When Spurgeon first arrived in London, the congregation of the New Park Street Chapel had dwindled to a few dozen. Sitting in a cavernous building that seated over a thousand, Spurgeon may have thought he had plenty of room to expand. But in just a few months, the whole city was stirred at the news of the boy-preacher from the fens. The roads and bridges leading to Spurgeon's chapel were blocked by traffic each Sunday. Before long, the congregation outgrew their space and needed to expand. During construction, Spurgeon rented large venues, like Exeter Hall and the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, to accommodate the growing crowds, but hundreds were still being turned away. And as the building expansion finished, the congregation once again outgrew their space.

The challenge of space vexed Spurgeon. But this wasn't about drawing the largest crowd possible. Instead, this was Spurgeon's recognition that he was the pastor of a church, not an itinerant preacher. At one point, he lamented how membership had exceeded the seating at the New Park Street Chapel by 300, which meant that if they were to observe the Lord's Supper in their building, 300 members would not be able to participate. Not only that but with so many being converted, Spurgeon feared that he could not responsibly bring them into church membership and care for them properly. The only options he could think of was to either build a larger

building or quit the pastorate altogether and become a traveling evangelist. But his congregation did not let him quit. They would approve the construction of a new building, seating well over 5,000. Even as church membership grew from 50 to 5,000, Spurgeon's view of pastoral ministry remained the same.

Why should we listen to Spurgeon? For pastors of large churches who are tempted to compromise their ecclesiology, Spurgeon offers an example of faithfulness even amid rapid growth.

3. Spurgeon pastored amid numerous societal and theological challenges. As the most famous pastor of the English-speaking world, people wanted Spurgeon's opinions on everything. Living in London during the Victorian era at the height of British imperialism, there were no shortage of societal and theological issues to discuss. From Darwinism to American slavery, from cholera outbreaks to the industrial revolution, from international wars to the temperance movement, from women's suffrage to state religion, and much, much more, Spurgeon had plenty to distract him from his pastoral ministry. To be clear, Spurgeon commented on many of these issues through his magazine and public correspondence, sometimes at great cost to himself. Still, Spurgeon understood that he was not responsible for pastoring the entire English-speaking world. His responsibility lay with the members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Even as Spurgeon engaged prophetically in the world around him, he never lost sight that his responsibility was for the members of his local church.

Why should we listen to Spurgeon? Even as we face controversies in our day, Spurgeon provides a model for faithfully pastoring our congregations through those challenges.

A Word of Caution

I once heard of a Spurgeon enthusiast at a Baptist convention selling vials of water from the River Lark (the river where Spurgeon

was baptized . . . a Baptist version of the Jordan River, if you will). As the story goes, at least one person bought a vial and sprinkled some of that water on himself to help him with his preaching! In case any are tempted toward this kind of Spurgeonic superstition, let me offer a word of advice about how to use this book.

This book is not about techniques for how to “do church” just like Spurgeon did. There is no guarantee that if you do these things, you will see the same kind of revival that Spurgeon saw. In fact, these practices may lead to decline before they lead to any growth. If you try to imitate Spurgeon without careful teaching and consideration of your context, you may very well get fired! Consider yourself warned.

My argument is that Spurgeon pastored out of biblical and theological convictions. When we consider Spurgeon’s pastoral practice, we must understand that behind those practices are convictions about the nature of the church and pastoral ministry. At the heart of his pastoral strategy was the belief that the Bible is sufficient and speaks to how the church is to be led. So, the best way to think about this book is as a conversation partner to help you consider what faithfulness in ministry looks like. Here is how one pastor sought to faithfully apply his convictions, given his church context. As you read, consider your own context. Examine your convictions from Scripture about the church and pastoral ministry. And pray about what it might look like to pursue faithfulness in your ministry.

Layout

We begin with the church gathered for worship (chapters 1–2). In the first chapter, we will be looking not so much at Spurgeon’s approach to preaching (though we will deal with some of that), but more importantly, the role of preaching in the life of the church.

Chapter 2 will discuss more broadly the corporate worship of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. How did Spurgeon organize the worship services? What was his approach to congregational singing? And so on.

Having gathered for worship and been shaped by God's Word, now the church begins to take shape. The next section (chapters 3–5) addresses the constitution of the church. The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper play a big role in Spurgeon's understanding of the church, and chapter 3 will explore their significance. Chapter 4 will deal with church membership and how people were brought into the church. But more than simply having a large membership roll, Spurgeon wanted to have meaningful membership, where church members were known and engaged and cared for. Chapter 5 will explain how Spurgeon did that in a church of 5,000.

Having properly drawn the boundaries of membership, Spurgeon did not envision the church as a headless body. Rather, he had clear convictions about the leadership and structure of the church, and this will be addressed in the following section (chapters 6–7). Chapter 6 will discuss Spurgeon's view of the roles and responsibilities of church officers, namely pastors, elders, and deacons. Apart from their tireless labors alongside him, Spurgeon believed that the church would have been a complete sham. It was their spiritual and practical service that made the Metropolitan Tabernacle possible. Spurgeon was also a congregationalist. The leadership of the elders existed alongside the authority of the congregation. Chapter 7 will explore how Spurgeon implemented congregationalism even as the church grew exponentially.

Finally, the church was made alive by God's Word. The next section (chapters 8–9) sees the church ready to engage the world with the gospel. For Spurgeon, the church was not a country club. It was an army amid a spiritual battle. And so, he called his members

to engage in the fight. As great as Spurgeon's impact was, that is only one part of the story. Out of the Metropolitan Tabernacle came countless gospel endeavors. Their full impact will only be known in eternity. Chapter 8 addresses the many charitable and evangelistic institutions that were established out of the Tabernacle and chapter 9 will deal with Spurgeon's approach to pastoral training and church planting. Chapter 10 will then offer some brief concluding thoughts.

Preaching in 1870, Spurgeon declared,

The proper study of the Christian is Christ. Next to that subject is the Church. And though I would by no means ever urge you so to think of the Church as for a moment to put her in comparison with her Lord yet think of her in relation to him. You will not dishonor the sun by remembering that there is a moon, you will not lessen the glory of "the King in his beauty" by remembering that the Queen, his Consort, is "all glorious within." You will not think any the less of Christ for thinking much of his Church.⁹

Spurgeon's love for Christ prompted him to also love the church. And as he encouraged his people to think rightly about the church, he believed this would only increase their love of Christ. My prayer is that our study of the church and pastoral ministry through Spurgeon's ministry would have the same effect on us; that we would not think any less of Christ for thinking much of His Church, but instead, we would be ever more devoted to Christ and to His people.

⁹ *MTP* 60:433.

**THE THERMOPYLAE
OF THE CHURCH
PREACHING**

The Prince of Preachers

The numbers associated with Spurgeon's preaching ministry are staggering. He began preaching at the age of sixteen. By the time he was called to be the pastor of the New Park Street Chapel at the age of nineteen, he had composed 365 sermons and preached nearly 700 times. In his more than thirty-eight years of ministry in London, Spurgeon preached anywhere from four to thirteen times a week. He preached when he was away on vacation. He preached when he was sick (at times, he had to be carried down from the pulpit). If he was unable to preach at the Tabernacle due to illness or travel, he would often provide a written sermon to be read for Sunday worship. We cannot know how many sermons he preached over his lifetime, but a conservative estimate might be around 10,000.

Beginning in 1855, his sermons were published and sold in weekly pamphlets called "The Penny Pulpit," with an average circulation of 25,000, but in one case, selling as many as 350,000 copies. Because his sermons were so popular, he couldn't just recycle an old sermon when preaching away. He often brought a new one. At the end of each year, his weekly sermons were collected in the *New*

Park Street Pulpit and the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* volumes. After his death in 1892, the series would continue for over two decades, ending only in 1917 because of a paper shortage from the war. In all, 3,563 sermons were published in sixty-three volumes, with more left unpublished. These sermons were sold throughout the English-speaking world and were translated into nearly forty languages. Spurgeon's publishers estimated that more than 100 million sermons were sold.

All these astounding numbers confirm that Spurgeon's mission in life was to preach. If we are to understand Spurgeon's view of pastoral ministry, we must begin with the pulpit. Spurgeon believed that God builds His church through His Word. Therefore, preaching is at the heart of pastoral ministry. This chapter will explore the role of preaching in Spurgeon's pastoral ministry, first by examining the relationship of preaching and the church, and then by considering Spurgeon's approach to preaching.

A Life Changed by Preaching

Where did Spurgeon's commitment to preaching come from? To understand the Prince of Preachers, it's important to recognize that he not only gave himself *to* preaching, but he himself was radically changed *by* preaching.

Growing up in a pastor's home, Spurgeon gained an interest in spiritual matters at a young age. The discipline of his father and grandfather kept him out of trouble, and the teaching of his mother deeply impacted him. Even so, beneath his religious, church-going exterior, Spurgeon knew the sin of his heart. Between the ages of ten and fifteen, Spurgeon struggled with doubts, discouragement, and the guilt of his sin. As a result, he fell into despair. At one point, he even experimented with atheism and skepticism, but when he saw the void of "the nothingness of vacuity," he turned back. For

years, he sought relief in the Puritan works in his grandfather's library, by going to church, by being active in religious societies, by refraining from worldly activities, and more. But none of these relieved his guilty conscience. All the while, Spurgeon wondered, "What must I do to be saved?"

The answer came during the Christmas break of 1849–1850. Fifteen-year-old Spurgeon was home from school, in Colchester. While hoping to find the way of salvation, he decided to visit every place of worship in town that winter. On Sunday morning, January 6, 1850, on his way to another church, a sudden snowstorm forced Spurgeon to turn in to the Artillery Street Primitive Methodist chapel, with a dozen or so people in attendance. The regular minister was unable to make it, so an unknown lay deacon took his place and preached on Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (KJV). He was not eloquent or well-educated. But he preached clearly about what it meant to respond to the gospel.

Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death,—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."¹

¹ *Autobiography* 1:106.

For years, Spurgeon had known about Christ's death on the cross for sinners, but he had never understood what was required of him. Preachers normally emphasized God's power and the need to prove one's faith by acting like a Christian. But now, sitting there in the pew, dripping wet, Spurgeon understood for the first time that faith was not doing anything for Christ but looking to Christ as your all-sufficient Savior.²

The unique circumstances of Spurgeon's conversion would forever leave a mark on his subsequent ministry. Spurgeon never got over the fact that he was converted under the preaching of the Word.

Personally, I have to bless God for many good books . . . but my gratitude most of all is due to God, not for books, but for the preached Word. . . . The books were good, but the man was better. The revealed Word awakened me; but it was the preached Word that saved me; and I must ever attach peculiar value to the hearing of the truth, for by it I received the joy and peace in which my soul delights.³

Spurgeon understood that preaching was only the medium. The substance and power of preaching lay in "the revealed Word," the gospel, not in the preacher himself. This understanding was underscored by the fact that this sermon came from a poor, uneducated man with no training, who barely got through the sermon.

² "I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, 'Look!' what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him." *Autobiography* 1:106.

³ *Autobiography* 1:104.

Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon was not afraid to use other mediums to communicate the gospel, and he gave himself to writing books, organizing Sunday schools, encouraging private devotions, equipping his people for evangelism, and more.

But because of his experience, he always believed there was a “peculiar value” in the preaching and hearing of the Word. Something unique takes place when the Word “comes with a living power from living lips.”⁴ As he states in the Preface of his first volume of sermons, “The Preaching of the Word by the chosen servants of the living God, is the ordained means for the gathering in of the elect.”⁵ It was this conviction that he carried with him into pastoral ministry.

The Thermopylae of the Church

As the rest of this book will show, Spurgeon’s pastoral ministry was more than just preaching. With so much to do, he envied Daniel Rowland who “would have nothing to do with the management of the church. . . . He kept himself to his preaching, came in through a door in the back wall of the meeting-house and disappeared suddenly when he had done.” A pastor in that situation “ought to preach like an angel.”⁶ This was not Spurgeon’s situation. He did not occupy a preaching station but pastored a church.

And yet, we should note that Spurgeon’s pastoral ministry was not less than preaching. Even with everything on his plate, he never failed in this most fundamental of pastoral responsibilities: to preach the Word. Spurgeon believed this to be true not only for himself but for all pastors. Spurgeon believed that the pulpit was “the Thermopylae of Christendom.” But in referring to “Christendom,”

⁴ *MTP* 53:188.

⁵ *NPSF* 1: Preface.

⁶ *S&T* 1886:83.

Spurgeon did not have any grand ideas about a Christian nation. Rather, he was referring to the local church. Just as the future of Greece depended on King Leonidas I in the Battle of Thermopylae, so Spurgeon believed that the health and unity of the church depended on the preaching of the Word. No matter how industrious of an administrator or counselor a pastor was, if he failed in his preaching, the church would also fail. At the pulpit, “the fight will be lost or won.” Therefore, Spurgeon charged his pastoral students that “the maintenance of our power in the pulpit should be our great concern, we must occupy that spiritual watch-tower with our hearts and minds awake and in full vigor.”⁷

Throughout Spurgeon’s ministry, for a congregation of more than 5,000 members, the Metropolitan Tabernacle demonstrated remarkable unity. The church meeting minutes do not give any evidence of congregational infighting or disagreement with the elders. The church repeatedly affirmed their love and support for their pastor. The reason for this cannot be that Spurgeon always made the right decisions and pastored his church perfectly. Rather, if you were to ask him, Spurgeon would point to his preaching. Week after week, his congregation was “really fed” from God’s Word, and thus, they were satisfied and forgave “a great many sins.” Therefore, for the pastor, “pulpits must be our main care,” or everything else will fail.⁸

As we will see, Spurgeon’s responsibilities as a pastor grew throughout his ministry. To help him with new members and pastoral care, Spurgeon led the church in calling men to serve as elders.

⁷ *Lectures* 2:146.

⁸ “We shall be forgiven a great many sins in the matter of pastoral visitation if the people’s souls are really fed on the Sabbath-day; but fed they must be, and nothing else will make up for it. The failures of most ministers who drift down the stream may be traced to inefficiency in the pulpit. The chief business of a captain is to know how to handle his vessel, nothing can compensate for deficiency there, and so our pulpits must be our main care, or all will go awry.” *Lectures* 2:146.

To help him with the day-to-day pastoral and administrative responsibilities, he brought on his brother, James, to serve as his associate pastor. For all the various institutions and societies connected with the church, he relied on his deacons to assist him in his leadership.

But when it came to the pulpit ministry of the church, Spurgeon alone took charge of the responsibility. He did most of the preaching, and when he was unable to preach, he arranged for pulpit supply from faithful preachers. This is not because he was territorial about the pulpit. Rather, Spurgeon understood that the heart of his pastoral calling was to responsibly give oversight to the preaching of the Word. The health and ministry of the church depended on this one thing, and he would not delegate that responsibility to anyone else.

As a result, Spurgeon felt the weight of responsibility in his preaching. The pulpit was his Thermopylae, and every sermon was a spiritual battle against the schemes of Satan. Because he preached so often and was so gifted, it would be easy to imagine Spurgeon growing comfortable with the task of preaching. This, however, was far from the case. Susannah, his wife, tells of the “soul-travail and spiritual anguish” that Spurgeon experienced during his sermon writing, not “in their preparation or arrangement, but in his own sense of accountability to God for the souls to whom he had to preach the gospel of salvation.”⁹ As his congregation multiplied and his sermons were being published around the world, Spurgeon felt the growing responsibility of each sermon. One friend tells how, in his earlier years, Spurgeon could not keep anything down before each sermon, in anticipation of the throngs who would gather to hear him. Only later in life would that physical struggle be overcome.

He did not, however, find this to be a deficiency. He once confessed to his grandfather about his physical and emotional struggles

⁹ *Autobiography* 4:65.

before entering the pulpit. His grandfather responded, “Be content to have it so; for when your emotion goes away your strength will be gone.” Though he preached thousands of sermons, Spurgeon never got over the weighty and awesome responsibility of preaching. “When we preach and think nothing of it, the people think nothing of it, and God does nothing by it.”¹⁰ As his ministry grew, Spurgeon did not coast in the pulpit but approached each sermon with trembling and prayerful dependence. This was his work as a pastor.

Preaching Shapes the Church

Spurgeon taught that a pastor who fed his congregation from God’s Word would go a long way in keeping the church united and happy under his leadership. Spurgeon believed that preaching shapes the church. Preaching is how a pastor leads and grows the church spiritually. The character and health of the church depend on the ministry of the Word. Therefore, the strongest influence for spiritual growth in the church lay not with the elders or deacons or Sunday school teachers but with the preacher. “Doubtless the hearers influence the preacher, but for the most part the stronger current runs the other way.”¹¹

Spurgeon saw many negative examples of this principle in the churches of his day. Many of these churches had a historic ministry. But over the years, new pastors came in with modern theologies and new emphases. Inevitably, the pulpit was no longer central in these churches and what preaching remained was characterized

¹⁰ *S&T* 1882:406.

¹¹ “No one can doubt that the spiritual condition of the Christian church is very much affected by the character of its ministry. For good or for evil, the leaders do actually lead to a very large extent. Doubtless the hearers influence the preacher, but for the most part the stronger current runs the other way. ‘Like priest, like people,’ is a well-known and truthful proverb, applicable with undiminished force to those who scorn the priestly title.” *S&T* 1871:215.

more by intellectualism and current events, rather than the gospel. As a result, these churches began to wither spiritually. Prayer meetings were canceled. Evangelistic fervor declined. Worldly entertainments crept into the church. Such churches might attract people with their innovations, but Spurgeon saw that the spiritual condition had changed. In all these things, he traced the root of these problems to the pulpit.¹²

The solution, then, was to reform the pulpit and help churches see the importance of the faithful preaching of God's Word. Spurgeon rejected those who undermined the pastorate and "would pull down the men God has raised up." Rather, he believed that the pulpit was at the heart of the life of the church. A faithful ministry of the Word is "the instrumentality by which the Lord especially works" in the church. Churches that rejected "God's chosen instrumentality of ministry" would soon have "Ichabod!" written upon their walls.¹³ But through the ministry of the Word, God displays His power in the church and in the world.

Therefore, as we'll see in chapter 9, Spurgeon devoted himself to raising up faithful preachers of God's Word. He could not envision reforming any church apart from the pulpit. Apart from the power of God's Word, any efforts at church reform would fail. But if a dying church would call a faithful preacher to fill the pulpit and preach God's Word faithfully, Spurgeon believed, by God's grace, that any church could be restored and once again see God's blessing upon its ministry.

¹² "Under a drowsy preacher the spirit of the people becomes lethargic; a minister absorbed in politics leads his hearers into party strifes; a would-be intellectual essayist breeds a discipleship marked by affectation of superior culture; and an unsound thinker and uncertain talker promotes heresy in his congregation. Satan knows full well the power of the ministry, and therefore he labors abundantly to pervert the minds of the Lord's servants, and also to raise up false teachers who may do his evil cause great service." *S&T* 1871:215.

¹³ *MTP* 8:196.

Spurgeon's Approach to Preaching

If you are looking to grow in your preaching, let me commend Spurgeon's instructions on preaching to you, found in *Lectures to My Students*. At least twenty out of the thirty-two published lectures deal directly with preaching, giving practical teaching, as well as a theological vision for preaching. For the purposes of this book, allow me to highlight seven brief points to summarize Spurgeon's approach to preaching. If you are a regular preacher yourself, perhaps you will find something in Spurgeon's example to encourage you in your labors.

Prepared

Having preached thousands of sermons, when did Spurgeon ever find time to prepare them? One answer is that Spurgeon never really stopped preparing. He was always thinking about his sermons, meditating on Scripture, on the lookout for good content, and, in general, working on his craft as a preacher. Spurgeon warned his students, "We ought to be always in training for text-getting and sermon-making . . . the leaf of your ministry will soon wither unless, like the blessed man in the first Psalm, you meditate in the law of the Lord both day and night . . . I have no belief in that ministry which ignores laborious preparation."¹⁴

Sermon preparation not only focused on the manuscript, but also the preacher himself. Spurgeon reminded his students that preachers are "our own tools, and therefore must keep ourselves in order."¹⁵ This included not only cultivating the right skills and abilities, but it also meant keeping one's heart and soul in nearness to Christ and love for the lost. Such preparations did begin and end in the study but marked the preacher's entire life.

¹⁴ *Lectures* 1:97.

¹⁵ *Lectures* 1:1.

More specifically, however, Spurgeon did have a sermon preparation process that usually took place on Saturday evenings after 6:00 p.m. He once gave the following description of his process:

Brethren, it is not easy for me to tell you precisely how I make my sermons. All through the week I am on the look-out for material that I can use on the Sabbath; but the actual work of arranging it is necessarily, left until Saturday evening, for every other moment is fully occupied in the Lord's service. I have often said that my greatest difficulty is to fix my mind upon the particular texts which are to be the subjects of discourse, on the following day; or, to speak more correctly, to know what topics the Holy Spirit would have me bring before the congregation. As soon as any passage of Scripture really grips my heart and soul, I concentrate my whole attention upon it, look at the precise meaning of the original, closely examine the context so as to see the special aspect of the text in its surroundings, and roughly jot down all the thoughts that occur to me concerning the subject, leaving to a later period the orderly marshalling of them for presentation to my hearers.

When I have reached this point, I am often stopped by an obstacle which is only a trouble to those of us whose sermons are regularly printed. I turn to my own Bible, which contains a complete record of all my published discourses; and, looking at these I have preached upon the text, I find, perhaps, that the general run of thought is so similar to that which I have marked out, that I have to abandon the subject, and seek another.

Happily, a text of Scripture is like a diamond with many facets, which sparkles and flashes whichever way it is held, so that, although I may have already printed, several sermons upon a particular passage, there is still a fresh setting possible for the priceless gem, and I can go forward with my work. I like next to see what others have to say about my text; and, as a rule, my experience is that, if its teaching is perfectly plain, the commentators, to a man, explain it at great length, whereas, with equal unanimity, they studiously avoid or evade the verses which Peter might have described as 'things hard to be understood.' I am very much obliged to them for leaving me so many nuts to crack; but I should have been just as grateful if they had made more use of their own theological teeth or nut-crackers. However, among the many who have written upon the Word, I generally find some who can at least help to throw a side light upon it; and when I have arrived at that part of my preparation, I am glad to call my dear wife to my assistance. She reads to me until I get a clear idea of the whole subject; and, gradually, I am guided to the best form of outline, which I copy out, on a half-sheet of notepaper, for use in the pulpit. This relates only to the morning sermon; for the evening, I am usually content if I can decide upon the text, and have a general notion of the lessons to be drawn from it, leaving to the Lord's-day afternoon

the final arrangement of divisions, sub-divisions, and illustrations.¹⁶

Notice that Spurgeon does not commend this process as the best way to prepare a sermon. He acknowledges that his process is influenced by his unique circumstances and abilities. While he's glad to share his approach, each preacher must figure out what works best for him. Spurgeon's sermon prep process generally followed four steps.

First, he selected week-by-week the text from which he would preach. He found this to be "the greatest difficulty" of his preparations. This process involved not only careful study and pastoral consideration of his congregation's needs, but he also looked to the Spirit's leading. He shared with his students, "I confess that I frequently sit hour after hour praying and waiting for a subject, and that this is the main part of my study." But this was not a passive waiting. Even as he labored "in manipulating topics, ruminating upon points of doctrine, making skeletons out of verses," he depended on the Spirit to guide him to a text.¹⁷ Spurgeon did not forbid his students from planning a sermon series ahead of time and preaching through books of the Bible. But he warned them that a long series could end up being wearisome to a congregation.¹⁸ Part of the issue was that Spurgeon generally followed the Puritan model of preaching, which took one verse as its text and meditated on that text deeply. So, to preach through a book of the Bible one verse at a time could prove to be difficult, even for the most gifted of preachers.

Second, Spurgeon studied his text intensely, examining it in the original language, considering the surrounding context, and

¹⁶ *Autobiography* 4:65–68.

¹⁷ *Lectures* 1:88.

¹⁸ *Lectures* 1:99–101.

jotting down all his thoughts and reflections on the text. Having done that work, he then went back to see if he had already preached on this text and compared his notes to make sure there was not too much overlap. Spurgeon believed Scripture to be “like a diamond with many facets” and thus, he often preached multiple sermons on a single verse. It must be said here that Spurgeon was remarkably original as a preacher of thousands of sermons. Some scholars have accused Spurgeon of being open to plagiarizing other’s sermons. It is true that Spurgeon read widely and drew from others’ insights, especially earlier in his preaching career. But it is clear that the heart of Spurgeon’s sermon preparation was his original work and meditations on the text. He despised repeating himself, let alone another preacher.

Third, only *after* having studied it for himself, Spurgeon consulted other sources, both academic commentaries and devotional writings. He found academic works less useful in his preparation. He consulted them particularly for difficulties in the text, but too often, commentators evaded those difficulties. More helpful were devotional works and sermons. For this portion of his preparations, his wife read from selected works, while Spurgeon reflected on what he heard. Susannah was always amazed at her husband’s knowledge of his library and cherished these times for her own spiritual growth.¹⁹

¹⁹ “I always found, when I went into the study, an easy chair drawn up to the table, by his side, and a big heap of books piled one upon the other, and opened at the place where he desired me to read. With those old volumes around him, he was like a honeybee amid the flowers; he seemed to know how to extract and carry off the sweet spoils from the most unpromising-looking tome among them. His acquaintance with them was so familiar and complete, that he could at once place his hand on any author who had written upon the portion of Scripture which was engaging his attention; and I was, in this pleasant fashion, introduced to many of the Puritan and other divines whom, otherwise, I might not have known.” *Autobiography* 4:68.

Finally, he took all he had studied, and he organized his sermon, writing down his thoughts onto a half-sheet of paper. Earlier in his preaching career, Spurgeon tended to write out his sermons in fuller outlines or even manuscripts. Some of the sermons found in the *Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon* series can span several pages. But as he grew more experienced, Spurgeon forced himself to preach more extemporaneously, reducing his sermon preparation to a simple outline. This final step mattered because Spurgeon believed in the importance of well-arranged sermons. He taught his students that rather than simply letting truths fall at random from the pulpit, the sermon should proceed logically. "The thought must climb and ascend; one stair of teaching leading to another; one door of reasoning conducting to another, and the whole elevating the hearer to a chamber from whose windows truth is seen gleaming in the light of God."²⁰ Even though he only took an outline into the pulpit, it represented a disciplined process of preparation and prayer.

Extemporaneous

Spurgeon encouraged two kinds of extemporaneous preaching. The first was a sermon that was extemporaneous in its words, but not in content. These were the kinds of sermons he preached on Sunday mornings. Having carefully studied the text, organized his outline, and prepared his teaching points and illustrations, Spurgeon stepped into the pulpit fully prepared and at the same time relying on the Spirit to give him the right words to say.²¹

²⁰ *Lectures* 1:80.

²¹ "Do not go into the pulpit and say the first thing that comes to hand, for the uppermost thing with most men is mere froth. Your people need discourses which have been prayed over and laboriously prepared. People do not want raw food, it must be cooked and made ready for them. We must give out of our very souls, in the words which naturally suggest themselves, the matter which has been as thoroughly prepared by us as it possibly could have been by a sermon-writer;

An extemporaneous delivery was extremely important to Spurgeon. The last thing he wanted was for his sermon to sound read. Sermon manuscripts were fine in preparation. Spurgeon encouraged his students to write out their sermons and to revise them carefully “that you may be preserved from a slipshod style.” But then after all that work is done, “leave them at home afterwards” and preach the sermon directly to the people. Spurgeon also warned his students against memorizing sermons. This was “a wearisome exercise of an inferior power of the mind and an indolent neglect of other and superior faculties.” Instead, he commended his own practice: “the words are extemporal, as I think they always should be, but the thoughts are the result of research and study.”²²

Spurgeon also encouraged another kind of extemporaneous preaching. For pastors who preached once or twice a week, they could afford to spend the needed time preparing these sermons. But for a busy pastor like Spurgeon who preached multiple times a week, he had to develop a new skill. For his sermons on Monday evenings, Spurgeon preached them almost entirely extemporaneously, exercising what he called “speech impromptu, without special preparation, without notes or immediate forethought.” To be sure, he warned against using this practice as the main diet of a church’s preaching. Such unstudied sermons tended to be of “a very inferior quality,” even from the most gifted of preachers. “Churches are not to be held together except by an instructive ministry; a mere filling up of time with oratory will not suffice.”²³ Some traditions, like the Quakers, suffered because of their insistence on impromptu preaching as the only method of preaching. Spurgeon

indeed, it should be even better prepared, if we would speak well. The best method is, in my judgment, that in which the man does not extemporize the matter, but extemporizes the words; the language comes to him at the moment, but the theme has been well thought out.” *Lectures* 1:142.

²² *Lectures* 1:153.

²³ *Lectures* 1:151.

also warned about attempting this without practice. Such careless preaching would result in tiresome repetition, jumbled thoughts, and embarrassment.

At the same time, for the pastor who was disciplined in reading and meditation, who knew his congregation well, and who worked on this skill, such preaching could prove to be beneficial for the church and his own development as a preacher. Since his early days in London, Spurgeon sought “to get into the habit of speaking extemporaneously” by using the Monday night prayer meeting. Those meetings were smaller and more intimate, composed mostly of his own people. In those meetings, Spurgeon could afford to be more personal and speak from the heart.²⁴

Just as any tradesman could speak about his work without any preparation, so should a preacher be able to expound on the doctrines of the gospel for the edification of his people. As Spurgeon developed this skill, he grew in his extemporaneous preaching on Sundays, and it equipped him for other impromptu preaching opportunities that he encountered.

Expositional

Spurgeon believed that the power of the pulpit lay not in the preacher, but in the Word of God. Therefore, he believed that preachers should preach expositional sermons. These were sermons that took a text of Scripture as their main theme and sought to explain and apply those texts to the people. Spurgeon did not forbid

²⁴ “I have never studied or prepared anything for the Monday evening prayer-meeting. I have all along selected that occasion as the opportunity for off-hand exhortation; but you will observe that I do not on such occasions select difficult expository topics, or abstruse themes, but restrict myself to simple, homely talk, about the elements of our faith. When standing up on such occasions, one’s mind makes a review, and inquires, ‘What subject has already taken up my thought during the day? What have I met with in my reading during the past week? What is most laid upon my heart at this hour? What is suggested by the hymns or the prayers?’” *Lectures* 1:158–159.

other kinds of sermons, but he charged pastors to make expositional preaching their main practice.²⁵

When crafting a sermon, Spurgeon taught his students to stick closely to the text. Whatever doctrine or application they taught, their matter “must be congruous to the text.” They should avoid thrusting the text to the side to make room for their own ideas. Instead, “the discourse should spring out of the text as a rule.” This should be evident not only to the preacher but to all that listen. The more people can see that the preacher is speaking “plainly the very word of God,” the more the sermon comes “with far greater power to the consciences of hearers.”²⁶

Some have critiqued Spurgeon’s preaching and have wondered if he was really an expositional preacher. Perhaps in reading his devotions from *Morning and Evening* or working through one of his more typological sermons, some have found Spurgeon to be looser in his handling of the text than they’re used to. At least two things can be said in response.

First, Spurgeon’s expositional preaching was not about a style, but a commitment to rooting his sermons in the Word of God. Some associate expositional preaching with a certain style, particularly with verse-by-verse preaching. Spurgeon, however, cared less about style. He cared more about his preaching being rooted in God’s Word. Preaching was “not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced.” Most of Spurgeon’s sermons covered a single verse. But on occasion, he also preached longer passages (for example, see *MTP* 23, Sermon No. 1360, “The Good Samaritan,” or *MTP* 55, Sermon No. 3155, “The Beatitudes”).

²⁵ “Let us be mighty in expounding the Scriptures. I am sure that no preaching will last so long, or build up a church so well, as the expository. To renounce altogether the hortatory discourse for the expository, would be running to a preposterous extreme; but I cannot too earnestly assure you that, if your ministries are to be lastingly useful, you must be expositors.” *AARM* 44.

²⁶ *Lectures* 1:75.

But regardless of style or length of passage, Spurgeon's aim (and the aim of all expositional preaching) was to open and apply the Scriptures to his people.

Second, Spurgeon was unafraid to preach the overarching narrative and theology of Scripture. When preaching on a single verse, Spurgeon often used that verse as a lens through which he meditated on all of Scripture, both systematically and redemptive-historically. But even in doing so, he did not abandon the text but constrained his reflections by it. Careful reading of his sermons will show that his points are not random; they are flowing from the structure and content of the passage. Additionally, Spurgeon was mindful of the context of the passage, which he often incorporated in the Scripture reading. In planning the service, Spurgeon always looked for readings drawn from the context or related to the text. He also provided brief commentary as he read so that by the sermon, his people had some understanding of the context. This preparatory work in the text allowed him to go further and deeper in his preaching without losing the historical-grammatical context.

At the end of the day, whether he succeeded in preaching any given sermon expositionally can be debated. What is clear is that Spurgeon advocated such preaching and sought to do it himself. These are the kinds of sermons that should make up the bulk of a pastor's preaching. "Although in many cases topical sermons are not only allowable, but very proper, those sermons which expound the exact words of the Holy Spirit are the most useful and the most agreeable to the major part of our congregations."²⁷

Theological

His very first sermon as a nineteen-year-old guest preacher at the New Park Street Chapel was on James 1:17, on the "Father

²⁷ *Lectures* 1:75.

of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (KJV). The sermon, which he had recently preached at his own church in Waterbeach was on divine immutability. Even as a teenager, Spurgeon did not shy away from preaching doctrinally weighty sermons. About a year later, on Sunday morning, January 7, 1855, Spurgeon preached another sermon on the same theme, entitled, “The Immutability of God,” from Malachi 3:6. This would be the very first sermon published out of the sixty-three volumes of sermons, perhaps a tribute to his first sermon at New Park Street. Spurgeon opens in this way,

It has been said by some one that “the proper study of mankind is man.” I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God’s elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.²⁸

From the very beginning, Spurgeon committed to preaching theologically rich sermons. He urged his students to follow his example, “Brethren, if you are not theologians, you are in your pastorate just nothing at all. You may be fine rhetoricians . . . but without knowledge of the gospel, and the aptness to teach it, you are

²⁸ *NPSP* 1:1.

but a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.”²⁹ Gifted preachers often hid their theological ignorance behind their eloquence, humor, and charisma. These things were no substitute for sound doctrine and deep thought. Without theological sermons, churches starved for good food. Preachers were called to feed their people from the meat of the Word.

Spurgeon also believed in the importance of sound doctrine for protecting preachers from error. Even as he emphasized expositional preaching, Spurgeon saw many preachers attempt to preach difficult texts without a solid theological framework, leading them into error. “Many preachers are not theologians, and hence the mistakes which they make. It cannot do any hurt to the most lively evangelist to be also a sound theologian, and it may often be the means of saving him from gross blunders.”³⁰ Scripture must interpret Scripture, and theology guards the preacher from error.

But more than just protecting the church, Spurgeon believed that theology revealed the riches of God’s truth to the church. On one occasion, he envisioned the gospel “like a cavern into which you must enter bearing the torch of the Holy Spirit.” As you first enter, you cry for joy at the precious metals that line the walls, but the Spirit takes you further into the cavern and each chamber is “more lofty and more spacious than the last. The floor, the roof, and the pendant stalactites [are] all of gold.” Even as we marvel at the truth of Scripture and think there is no more to be seen, still “no mortal hath fully seen God’s glory as yet, and the Divine Spirit waits to lead you by study and prayer to a yet clearer vision of the deep things of God.”³¹ The call of the pastor-theologian, then, is to explore the depths of the gospel and to bring the deep things of God for the joy of his people.

²⁹ *Lectures* 1:74.

³⁰ *AARM* 43–44.

³¹ *AARM* 119.

Simple

But being a theological preacher was of no value to the people if a preacher did not know how to communicate God's Word effectively. Combined with his commitment to expository preaching and sound theology was also a commitment to preaching with simplicity. Spurgeon once quipped, "The Lord Jesus did not say, 'Feed my giraffes,' but 'Feed my sheep.'"³² Indeed, his congregation tended to be made up of the working class of London, or lower. Many had little to no education. Some were illiterate. Therefore, when preaching on themes like divine immutability, predestination, or the hypostatic union, he preached them in a way his people could understand.

This meant that Spurgeon could not rely on technical theological terms like the ones just mentioned. Of course, such terms were important to learn, but Spurgeon never assumed that his people understood them. Rather, he was careful to define, illustrate, and apply them. His goal was to speak plainly and not hide behind obscure terms.

Be sure, moreover, to speak plainly; because, however excellent your matter, if a man does not comprehend it, it can be of no use to him; you might as well have spoken to him in the language of Kamskatka as in your own tongue, if you use phrases that are quite out of his line, and modes of expression which are not suitable to his mind.³³

Of course, this kind of plainness is hard work. Spurgeon believed one must "go up to his level if [the listener] is a poor man;

³² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: Being a Collection of Proverbs Together with Homely Notes Thereon*, Vols. 1–2, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889–1891), 1:56.

³³ *Lectures* 1:141.

[and] go down to his understanding if he is an educated person.” To speak to the uneducated, one must “walk in a path where your auditors can accompany you, and not to mount the high horse and ride over their heads.”³⁴

Simplicity in preaching was especially emphasized in the Pastor’s College. To cultivate this, Spurgeon urged them not to lose contact with the realities and challenges of life. Though traditional colleges tended to remove students from natural settings, Spurgeon’s students lived with families, remained active in church, interacted with people from all walks of life, and actively ministered while they studied. All this was part of their education. The last thing Spurgeon wanted was to breed an artificiality in his students’ preaching.³⁵

In the end, simplicity in preaching was about gospel clarity. Rather than pursuing eloquence, the preacher should speak in whatever way was needed to get the gospel across. “Speak from your heart, and never mind about eloquence. Do not speak after the manner of the orator; speak as a lover of souls, and then you will have real eloquence.”³⁶ Too often, the pursuit of unnatural preaching styles came from a desire for respectability, not a love for the listener. But a confidence in the truth of the gospel produces preachers who aim for simplicity.³⁷

³⁴ *Lectures* 1:141.

³⁵ “We think it a fit thing that students who are to become ministers in sympathy with the people, should continue in association with ordinary humanity. To abstract them altogether from family life, and collect them under one roof, may have its advantages, but it has counterbalancing dangers. It is artificial, and is apt to breed artificialness. It may be objected, that residing, as our men do, with our friends around, they may be disturbed by the various family incidents. But why should they not? . . . Recluse life or collegiate life is not the life of the many, and much of it soon puts a man out of harmony with the everyday affairs of life.” *S&T* 1871:227.

³⁶ *AARM* 129.

³⁷ “The preacher must also mind that he preaches Christ very simply. He must break up his big words and long sentences, and pray against the temptation to use

Evangelistic

The very first sermon that Spurgeon preached at the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle on March 25, 1861, was on Acts 5:42, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (KJV). In this sermon, Spurgeon made a definitive statement about his preaching,

I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist. . . . I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist . . . but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply—“It is Jesus Christ.” My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a body of divinity, admirable and excellent in its way, but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in himself all theology the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.³⁸

Spurgeon carried this out throughout his preaching ministry. Wherever he was preaching, whether in the Mosaic law, or the prophets, or the epistles, Spurgeon always found his way to Christ

them. It is usually the short, dagger-like sentence that does the work best. . . . He must employ a simple, homely style, or such a style as God has given him; and he must preach Christ so plainly that his hearers can not only understand him, but that they cannot misunderstand him even if they try to do so.” *MTP* 56:489.

³⁸ *MTP* 7:169.

from every part of Scripture. Just as every road in England eventually led to London, so Spurgeon believed that every text of Scripture (and thus, every sermon) should have a road to Christ. Other doctrines like perseverance or election were important but secondary. “Whatever we do not preach, let us preach Jesus Christ.”³⁹

Still, his commitment to preach Christ did not mean that he avoided preaching the imperatives of the Christian life. Depending on his text, he would preach both the grace of the gospel and the demands of the law. He addressed both individual sins and societal sins. He challenged Christians outside and inside his denomination. When speaking to his congregation, he thought about different categories among his people and applied God’s Word to each group specifically. “Consider the condition of your hearers. Reflect upon their spiritual state as a whole and as individuals, and prescribe the medicine adapted to the current disease, or prepare the food suitable for the prevailing necessity.”⁴⁰

Regardless of his audience, their spiritual condition, or the challenges of their context, Spurgeon believed that their primary need was to hear the gospel. Only through repentance and faith in Christ could sinners be saved. But in using the term *gospel*, he did not reduce his message to an abstract plan of salvation or a theoretical idea. No, for Spurgeon, preaching the gospel meant preaching Christ, in all his glory. “Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Savior, and of the way to reach him.”⁴¹

The preaching of Christ should not, however, be limited to individual salvation. Spurgeon believed that Christ was the solution to

³⁹ *MTP* 19:381.

⁴⁰ *Lectures* 1:90.

⁴¹ *Lectures* 1:82.

all societal ills. In his sermon, “How to Meet the Evils of the Age,” Spurgeon walks through a litany of discouraging contemporary challenges that Christians faced in his day both in the church and in society. But then he offers the remedy,

I have only one remedy to prescribe, and that is, that we do preach the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in all its length and breadth of doctrine, precept, spirit, example, and power. . . . We have only to preach the living gospel, and the whole of it, to meet the whole of the evils of the times. The gospel, if it were fully received through the whole earth, would purge away all slavery and all war, and put down all drunkenness and all social evils; in fact, you cannot conceive a moral curse which it would not remove; and even physical evils, since many of them arise incidentally from sin, would be greatly mitigated, and some of them for ever abolished.⁴²

Committed to preaching Christ, Spurgeon was convinced the world needed no other remedy. As sinful hearts were redeemed and transformed, as people lived out their faith in their communities, workplaces, and nations, Spurgeon believed the gospel could truly impact the world.

Dependent

Finally, and most importantly, Spurgeon believed in his absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit in his preaching. “To us, as ministers, the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. Without him our office is a mere name.”⁴³ This has been evident in the preceding points. In

⁴² *AARM* 112–113.

⁴³ *Lectures* 2:3.

HOW WOULD YOU GET MORE THAN 5,000 PEOPLE TO SHOW UP AT YOUR CHURCH?

Almost every pastor feels the pressure to get people in the doors. More people means more success, more stability, and more godly influence, right? Often, in their zeal for fruit and growth, pastors and church leaders adopt worldly mechanisms for church growth that end up undermining the very call God has given them.

Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, was a pastor to well over 5,000 people in a day long before “mega-churches” were the norm. But you might be surprised to know that Spurgeon’s vision for ministry was not pragmatic. He did not borrow “best practices” from the business leaders of his day. Rather, his ministry vision was decidedly, staunchly biblical and theological in nature—and it was a ministry vision we ought to adopt more than a century later.

IN *SPURGEON THE PASTOR*, GEOFFREY CHANG, DIRECTOR OF THE SPURGEON LIBRARY AT MIDWESTERN SEMINARY, SHOWS HOW SPURGEON MODELS A THEOLOGICAL VISION OF MINISTRY IN PREACHING, BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER, MEANINGFUL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP, BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND MORE.



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