

Tom Nettles

The CHILD is FATHER of the MAN

C. H. Spurgeon

BOOK REVIEW: THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN

TOM NETTLES (CHRISTIAN FOCUS PUBLICATIONS)

REVIEWED BY CASSIE WATSON

Few historical figures are as renowned among evangelicals as the 19th-century pastor Charles Spurgeon. It's not surprising that he is known as the "Prince of Preachers," for thousands of his sermons have been published, as well as scores of commentaries, devotional literature, and other books. He is known for his doctrinal insight as well as his rich piety—this was a man who walked intimately with his Saviour and radiated the joy of Christ.

How did Spurgeon end up as such a towering figure? That's one question Tom Nettles explores in his new book on the preacher, *The Child is Father of the Man*.

SPURGEON'S LIFE IN TEN CONVICTIONS

Rather than a straightforward biography, Nettles traces ten themes or convictions that reoccurred throughout Spurgeon's life—from around or before his conversion to the full bloom of his faith in adulthood. He explores Spurgeon's beloved doctrines of grace, his Baptist convictions, the primacy of preaching and soul-winning in his ministry, and—above all—Spurgeon's view of Scripture as the ultimate authority, foundation, and treasure. Through these themes and more, Nettles shows us how much we still have to learn from Charles Spurgeon.

The chapter on evangelism was particularly challenging to me. Spurgeon was convinced that "soul-winning" was of the highest importance.

Three months after his conversion, he wrote in a letter: "Oh that I could see but one sinner constrained to come to Jesus" (95). Little did he know that many thousands would be converted under his preaching. Spurgeon preached for the salvation of sinners, and urged every member of his congregation to be involved in this mission, through whatever opportunities and gifts God had given them. Both in his day and ours, it is all too easy for other pursuits to distract us from prime goal of seeing people saved. We need to heed Spurgeon's call to "mind soul-winning."

All throughout this book, we see what it looks like to remain faithful to Jesus through great suffering. Nettles includes chapters on Spurgeon's recurring depression, his conflicts and controversies, and how he was slandered by others. Spurgeon did not see these things as obstacles to his faith, but as ways that God was growing and sanctifying him. And this was the deep desire of his heart. Shortly after his conversion, Spurgeon wrote: "Yes, where Jesus comes, He comes to reign; how I wish He would reign more in my heart; then I might hope that every atom of self, self-confidence, and self-righteousness, would be swept out of my soul" (182). He saw all suffering as worth it to trust in Jesus more and be conformed to his image.

A LEGACY OF HUMILITY

So, what accounts for Spurgeon's enduring legacy? The impression I got all throughout this book was that it was not primarily about his talents or

power—indeed, Spurgeon himself saw those as greatly lacking. Rather, he had such an impact because he relied on the life-changing power of the gospel as set forth in the Scriptures. The final chapter of *The Child is Father of the Man* explores Spurgeon's love for and reliance upon the Bible, which may be the foremost theme of his life. He knew that God did all his work through his Word, with preachers like himself as mere instruments. Spurgeon was humble and eager to be used by God

for his glory—and God certainly answered this prayer!

It was fascinating to learn more about Charles Spurgeon's life and thinking, but that's not the important end in itself. By reading this book you will be encouraged to follow in Spurgeon's example—to press on in serving Jesus, rely more fully upon his sovereignty, and rejoice all the more in “free grace and dying love” (94).

Tom Nettles examines the life of one of the world's most famous preachers. He isolates key convictions that appear in Spurgeon's life either before or immediately after his conversion, and traces them through his life as Spurgeon develops into the charming, interesting, confident, humble, spiritual-minded man and pastor whose work and witness dominated evangelicalism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

... perhaps the most, well-rounded treatment of Charles Spurgeon that has been achieved in Spurgeonic literature. ... A must read not only for pastors but for all Christians in learning how to love and serve Christ with unflinching fidelity.

Kurt M. Smith

Pastor, Providence Reformed Baptist Church, Remlap, Alabama and author of *Thundering the Word: The Awakening Ministry of George Whitefield*

... remarkable insights from a writer who is not only a Spurgeon scholar, but a man who has served the church as a professor of historical theology for more than forty years.

Donald S. Whitney


Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky and author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, *Praying the Bible*, and *Family Worship*

... brilliantly focusses on ten key moments, convictions really, that shaped the larger-than-life Charles Haddon Spurgeon. These convictions steeled Spurgeon to weather controversy, depression, and setbacks. Through it all, Spurgeon's exuberant love for God, the gospel, and for the church shines through.

Stephen J. Nichols

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