

Blast from the Past: Lessons from the Life of Charles Spurgeon ~ Ephesians 4:11-16
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'February 8, 1892, saw London honor a man without a title or even an academic degree. He had no political reputation, no aristocratic connections. The funeral procession, more than two miles long, included men and women of all social classes and economic conditions ... Newspapers reported that more than 100,000 people participated in memorial services, and practically all London suspended activities in respect for the deceased.'¹

Who was this man?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon lived from 1834-92 and was England's most famous preacher for most of the 2nd half of the 19th century, ministering in London at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. His theology was rooted in that of the Reformation, Puritan, Calvinistic, as well as historic Premillennial² and Baptist heritage, but he sought to focus his ministry not on any man or system but on the gospel and person of "Christ and Him Crucified." He was a God-centered, gospel-pleading, sovereign grace-exalting, Spirit-led, Bible-driven, Christ-compelled preacher. Spurgeon often spoke to audiences of 10,000 in the days before amplification, and was able to present "old truths" in fresh and compelling ways and to make God's Word come alive. He was one of the greatest evangelists ever, and his written sermons are estimated to have been read by 20 to 40 million people.

Today I can only introduce you to C. H. Spurgeon and touch on some things from his life that I think will be of interest and relevance, but if at the minimum I stir some in this room on to learn more about or read from this hero of the faith, it would be well worth it.

A few recommendations from Spurgeon's writings are as follows:

Morning and Evening (devotional classic)

All of Grace (all-time bestseller, gospel truths)

The Soul-Winner (shows his passionate zeal for evangelism)

Lectures to My Students (classic for students of the scriptures)

New Park Street Pulpit (his first six years of sermons while he was in his early twenties, some of his best. As of June '07 only \$35 on www.christianbook.com)

Treasury of David (wonderful commentary on the Psalms)

The Forgotten Spurgeon, by Iain Murray (brief biography of the his persecuted stands against Arminianism, hyper-Calvinism, sacramentalism, and liberalism)

Recommended Reading online:

Here are some good websites to whet your appetite as well:

www.spurgeon.org - excellent website hosted by Phil Johnson (my former pastor and theological mentor) with numerous links, sermons, online writings, etc. For those newer to Spurgeon, below are some suggested places to start:

<http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/abio011.htm> - Spurgeon's testimony of his conversion in his own words, from his *Autobiography*

<http://www.spurgeon.org/aboutsp.htm> - more bio and other links

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sprsmns.htm> - complete indexes of Spurgeon's sermons

Sample sermons to start:

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0573.htm> - Baptismal Regeneration, his most famous and controversial sermon that circulated 350,000 copies

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0041.htm> - Election

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0127.htm> - Spiritual Resurrection

“Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity” by John Piper, 1995 Pastor’s Conference
<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/> (**excellent article**)

Spurgeon Gems – big collection of Spurgeon sermon texts online (over 2500 and growing, slightly updated English) plus many quotes and good links at

www.spurgeongems.org

http://www.spurgeon.us/mind_and_heart/alphalist.htm - extensive quotes by topic

**Note: You can buy all his sermons and works on CD-ROM from Ages Software
http://www.ageslibrary.com/ages_spurgeon_collection_1.html (Adobe PDF format)

Why Study Church History and Biography?

One of the scriptural ways we see how faith works itself out and strengthens our faith is by reading about lives of real people in the past. The N.T. says this is one of the things we learn from O.T. times is by example of the lives of those who have gone before us.

John Piper has written a good article on his website “Brothers, Read Christian Biography” where he talks about how Hebrews 11 illustrates this vividly that it’s not only ok to have heroes in the faith, it is important.

“The unmistakable implication of the chapter is that, if we hear about the faith of our forefathers (and mothers), we will “lay aside every weight and sin” and “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1). If we asked the author, “How shall we stir one another up to love and good works?” (10:24), his answer would be: “Through encouragement from the living (10:25) and the dead” (chap. 11). Christian biography is the means by which “body life” cuts across the generations ... [God] uses human agents to stir up His people. So the question for us pastors is: Through what human agents does God give us vision and direction and inspiration? For me, one of the most important answers has been great men and women of faith who, though dead, are yet speaking. Christian biography, well chosen, combines all sorts of things pastors need but have so little time to pursue. Good biography is history and guards us against chronological snobbery (as C.S. Lewis calls it). It is also theology - the most powerful kind - because it burst forth from the lives of people like us. It is also adventure and suspense, for which we have a natural hunger. It is psychology and personal experience, which deepen our understanding of human nature (especially ourselves). Good biographies of great Christians make for remarkably efficient reading.”³

Those who do not learn from history's mistakes are doomed to repeat them

If you read about Spurgeon's complaints during the Downgrade controversy⁴ and other trends in his day, it sounds as if he's speaking to American Christianity of the last 30 years. He was not just a teacher to 19th century London, he has a lot to say to 21st century California (and America)

Someone might say "why not just read the Bible and ignore what people have believed in the past?" In other words, "I just let the Holy Spirit teach me."

Spurgeon considered that foolish, if not arrogance: 'It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others ... A respectable acquaintance with the opinions of the giants of the past, might have saved many an erratic thinker from wild interpretations and outrageous inferences. Usually, we have found the despisers of commentaries to be men who have no sort of acquaintance with them; in their case, it is the opposite of familiarity which has bred contempt.'⁵

Turn to Ephesians 4. Spurgeon was above all a preacher of texts of the Bible, and although he departed from his Puritan heroes in that he rarely preached consecutively on the same passage from week to week, he still preached from the Bible. He often preached topically using his vast knowledge of the whole counsel of God, or he preached doctrinally based on key phrases or truths in his text, but he always had a text. Ephesians 4 will be our main text today and starting point as we draw out lessons from his life.

11 And [God] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

In Ephesians 4:11 and following, the Bible says God gave pastors and teachers and evangelists for the church (Spurgeon had multiple gifts) to build the saints up to maturity and stability, so that they would not be tossed around by every wind of doctrine like children, but that they would grow up in Christ by speaking the truth and by every one doing their part. The Metropolitan Tabernacle really exemplified this passage.

What are some of the highlights of Charles Spurgeon's biography and life?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is history's most widely read preacher (apart from the biblical ones). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead.

- One woman was converted through reading a single page of one of Spurgeon's sermons wrapped around some butter she had bought.
- Spurgeon read *The Pilgrim's Progress* at age 6 and went on to read it over 100 times.
- The New Park Street Pulpit and The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit—the collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry with that congregation—fill 63 volumes. The sermons' 20-25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The series stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity.
- Spurgeon's mother had 17 children, nine of whom died in infancy.
- When Charles Spurgeon was only 10 years old, a visiting missionary, Richard Knill, said that the young Spurgeon would one day preach the gospel to thousands and would preach in Rowland Hill's chapel, the largest Dissenting church in London. His words were fulfilled.
- Spurgeon missed being admitted to college because a servant girl inadvertently showed him into a different room than that of the principal who was waiting to interview him. (Later, he determined not to reapply for admission when he believed [God did not want him to seek great things for himself])
- Spurgeon's personal library contained 12,000 volumes—1,000 printed before 1700. (The library, 5,103 volumes at the time of its auction, is now housed at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri.)
- Before he was 20, Spurgeon had preached over 600 times.
- Spurgeon drew to his services Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone, members of the royal family, Members of Parliament, as well as author John Ruskin, Florence Nightingale, and General James Garfield, later president of the United States.
- The New Park Street Church invited Spurgeon to come for a 6-month trial period, but Spurgeon asked to come for only 3 months because "the congregation might not want me, and I do not wish to be a hindrance."
- When Spurgeon arrived at The New Park Street Church, in 1854, the congregation had 232 members. By the end of his pastorate, 38 years later, that number had increased to 5,311. (Altogether, 14,460 people were added to the church during Spurgeon's tenure.) The church was the largest independent congregation in the world.
- Spurgeon typically read 6 books per week and could remember what he had read—and where—even years later.
- Spurgeon once addressed an audience of 23,654—without a microphone or any mechanical amplification.
- Spurgeon began a pastors' college that trained nearly 900 students during his lifetime—and it continues today.
- In 1865, Spurgeon's sermons sold 25,000 copies every week. They were translated into more than 20 languages.

- At least 3 of Spurgeon's works (including the multi-volume Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit series) have sold more than 1,000,000 copies. One of these, *All of Grace*, was the first book ever published by Moody Press (formerly the Bible Institute Colportage Association) and is still its all-time bestseller.
- During his lifetime, Spurgeon is estimated to have preached to 10,000,000 people.
- Spurgeon once said he counted 8 sets of thoughts that passed through his mind at the same time while he was preaching.
- Testing the acoustics in the vast Agricultural Hall, Spurgeon shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." A worker high in the rafters of the building heard this and became converted to Christ as a result.
- Susannah Thompson, Spurgeon's wife, became an invalid at age 33 and could seldom attend her husband's services after that.
- Spurgeon spent 20 years studying the Book of Psalms and writing his commentary on them, *The Treasury of David*.
- Spurgeon insisted that his congregation's new building, The Metropolitan Tabernacle, employ Greek architecture because the New Testament was written in Greek. This one decision has greatly influenced subsequent church architecture throughout the world.
- The theme for Spurgeon's Sunday morning sermon was usually not chosen until Saturday night.
- For an average sermon, Spurgeon took no more than one page of notes into the pulpit, yet he spoke at a rate of 140 words per minute for 40 minutes.
- The only time that Spurgeon wore clerical garb was when he visited Geneva and preached in Calvin's pulpit.
- By accepting some of his many invitations to speak, Spurgeon often preached 10 times in a week.
- Spurgeon met often with Hudson Taylor, the well-known missionary to China, and with George Muller, the orphanage founder.
- Spurgeon had two children—twin sons—and both became preachers. Thomas succeeded his father as pastor of the Tabernacle, and Charles, Jr., took charge of the orphanage his father had founded.
- Spurgeon's wife, Susannah, called him Tirshatha (a title used of the Judean governor under the Persian empire), meaning "Your Excellency."
- Spurgeon often worked 18 hours a day. Famous explorer and missionary David Livingstone once asked him, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?" Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten that there are two of us."
- Spurgeon spoke out so strongly against slavery that American publishers of his sermons began deleting his remarks on the subject.⁶

As a sixteen year old and new Christian, he began teaching a Sunday School class with good success. James Vinter led a Local Preacher's Association and had heard of Charles. One day he asked young Charles to come "over to Teversham, for a young man was to preach there who was not much used to services and very likely would be glad of company." Spurgeon met up with another young man who he assumed James had been talking about and the two walked along their way.

‘Spurgeon turned the conversation to the service and prayed his friend would be mightily sustained in his preaching. His companion expressed great surprise, declaring he had never preached in his life and had no intention of doing so today; he simply was accompanying his young brother who was to take the service. If Spurgeon did not feel equal to it, he suggested, they had better turn back ... Spurgeon decided to do his best ...

How long or how short it was I cannot now remember. It was not half such a task as I had feared it would be, but I was glad to see my way to a fair conclusion and to give out the last hymn. To my own delight I had not broken down nor stopped short in the middle, nor been destitute of ideas, as the desired haven was in view. I made a finish and took up the hymn-book, and to my astonishment a woman’s voice exclaimed, “Bless your dear heart. How old are you?” I solemnly replied, “You must wait till the service is over before making any such inquiries. Let us now sing.”⁷

Soon the sixteen year old Spurgeon had been asked to be the weekly preacher of a country church near where he lived. He faithfully pastored the congregation for 3 years, and it doubled in size. By God’s unique Providence, the historic New Park Street Chapel in London had fallen on hard times and were in need of pulpit supply and new life (chapel seating 1200 now only had a couple hundred). In what may have seemed like an act of desperation on their part, they invited this 19-year old country preacher to speak.

Susannah Thompson was staying with old Mr. and Mrs. Olney, but she did not go to the service although like many others the much-talked of experiment of asking a lad from a rural village to occupy the historic pulpit of Benjamin Keach, Dr. Gill and Dr. Rippon interested her. The members of the Olney family when they returned from the morning service, were full of praise for the preacher, and, in common with others of the congregation, they were determined that in the evening the many empty seats which had obviously discouraged and disconcerted the young minister, should be filled. Friends and acquaintances were called upon and urged to go to New Park Street Chapel, with the result that in the evening the church was full.

Susannah Thompson was there, more to please her friends than herself, for having rigid ideas as to the proprieties of the pulpit, she entertained no prepossessions in favor of one — and he a mere youth — who dared to break those proprieties. The chapel was filled, a hush fell upon the multitude, and all eyes, including those of the young maiden, were turned towards the pulpit. At last the door in the wall opened and the preacher entered briskly. Miss Thompson was shocked.

This was quite contrary to her ideas of what a preacher should be. Young Charles Haddon Spurgeon was evidently from the country; she could have told that in a moment even if she had not known. His clothes had the village tailor marked upon every part of them; round his neck he wore a great stock of black satin, and in his hand he carried a blue

handkerchief with white spots! What business had such a youth in the pulpit of Dr. Gill and Dr. Rippon? and with that thought in her prejudiced mind Susannah Thompson settled down to hear what he had to say.

“Ah!” wrote [Susannah] in after years, “how little I then thought that my eyes looked on him who was to be my life’s beloved; how little I dreamed of the honor God was preparing for me in the near future! It is a mercy that our lives are not left for us to plan, but that our Father chooses for us; else might we sometimes turn away from our best blessings, and put from us the choicest and loveliest gifts of His providence. For, if the whole truth be told, I was not at all fascinated by the young orator’s eloquence, while his countrified manner and speech excited more regret than reverence. Alas, for my vain and foolish heart! I was not spiritually-minded enough to understand his earnest presentation of the Gospel and his powerful pleading with sinners; — but the huge, black satin stock, the long badly-trimmed hair, and the blue pocket handkerchief with white spots which he himself has so graphically described, — these attracted most of my attention and I fear awakened some feelings of amusement.”⁸

A little over 2 years later, they married in January and were immediately blessed with twin boys. This same year of a high point in the life of the 22 year old was also one of the lowest points as there was the disaster at Surrey Gardens which devastated him.⁹ It was only by God’s sustaining grace that the young man continued the ministry amidst great difficulty and opposition, for which we all can be grateful to God.

After their first year of marriage, Susannah was never able to have more children and she had severe physical difficulties that were not helped by an operation nine years later that left her as a virtual invalid from age 33 on. She rarely ever heard her husband preach for nearly 3 decades. He was a faithful husband to her all those years, and although he could have no children, he started an orphanage that cared for many other children. Susannah ministered from her home writing and encouraging pastors; both are great examples.

What are some things we CAN’T emulate about Spurgeon?

- Remarkable memory (read 5-6 substantial books a week with comprehension)
- Extraordinary mind and gifts (able to grasp, digest and present profound truth in popular and powerful ways)
- Unequaled voice (illustration: one sitting in between guy peeling oranges, “then I heard a voice” – also the “behold the lamb of God” when testing acoustics)
- Unparalleled influence and evangelistic fruitfulness

It should be stated that although remarkable, he *was* human:

- when young, he had severe stage fright, sometimes vomiting before preaching and would sweat profusely (yet by God’s power he preached fearlessly with power)
- he suffered from rheumatism, gout, and died in poor health at only age 57
- he suffered tremendous persecution, criticism, opposition, and battled with depression for much of his ministry (see Piper’s article for more on this)

What are some things we SHOULD emulate about Spurgeon?

1. Seek unity of the true faith (Eph 4:13a)

D.L. Moody was significantly different than Spurgeon in some of his theology and methods and those who followed after him went a different direction in evangelism than what Spurgeon practiced and approved of. But Spurgeon appreciated Moody's love for the gospel and knew that America needed it as well.

Charles Finney went quite a bit further away from historic Christian evangelism and had serious theological errors which I think negatively affected modern Christianity revivalism and methods,¹⁰ but Spurgeon was more charitable to him than many would be. It seems he wanted to have the attitude of Paul who said in Philippians that whatever the motives, if Christ is truly proclaimed, he could rejoice. He spoke kindly of the Arminians John and Charles Wesley while strongly disagreeing with their views on sovereignty, free-will, perseverance, etc.

The controversy over election and depravity and the doctrines of grace he considered "exceedingly important, but it does not so involve the vital point of personal godliness as to make eternal life dependent upon our holding either system of theology."¹¹

While Spurgeon recognized true conversions can take place in some of the more decisionistic or revivalistic meetings, he did not assure sinners that they were saved because they walked an aisle or prayed a prayer or raised their hand or felt emotional during the music. He believed firmly in regeneration, that salvation is not just a change of eternal destiny, but a change of nature, a transformation, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). He was greatly concerned with false assurance and didn't equate human acts like "coming forward" with salvation as many do today.

Man has made a connection between coming forward after an appeal and 'coming to Christ', but Spurgeon would have strongly repudiated any such connection. Not only does such an evangelistic method not exist in Scripture, it vitiates what Scripture does teach on coming to Christ: 'It is a motion of the heart towards Him, not a motion of the feet, for many came to Him in body, and yet never came to Him in truth ... the coming here meant is performed by desire, prayer, assent, consent, trust, obedience.'¹²

Spurgeon was not big on labels or denominations, but was big on gospel truth. Piper writes: 'For Spurgeon "Puritanism, Protestantism, Calvinism [were simply] ... poor names which the world has given to our great and glorious faith,—the doctrine of Paul the apostle, the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." But he did make distinctions between the full system [of Calvinism], which he did embrace, and some central, evangelical doctrines shared by others that bound him together with them—like his favorite, the doctrine of the substitution of Christ for sinners. He said, "Far be it for me to imagine ... that there are none saved who do not hold our views"

He said, "I am not an outrageous Protestant generally, and I rejoice to confess that I feel sure there are some of God's people even in the Romish Church." He chose a paedobaptist [Christian who baptized infants] to be the first head of his pastor's college, and did not make that issue a barrier to who preached in his pulpit.¹³

Carlisle writes (p. 22): 'At one time, it was generally expected that Spurgeon would found another Christian denomination. Nearly a thousand ministers had sworn fealty to him, and many thousands in the churches would have responded to his call. Leaders of wealth and influence urged him to become the rallying personality of another communion. But never for a moment did he yield to temptation. He hated separation among Christians.'

At the same time, he was against ecumenism with groups that denied essential truths, which came to head at the end of his life in the downgrade controversy.

Piper says his communion was open to all believers, but it was said he would not fellowship with slave owners, and he was not shy to attack the institution of slavery boldly as he also did the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

Part of unity of the true faith is being passionate for the truth

- Spurgeon read deeply of the best books of the faith, rather than fads and bestsellers, and would encourage others to do the same
- He would not compromise on the truth
- He distinguished between secondary and essential truths

2. *Pursue Christ-centeredness* (Eph 4:13b) – to truly know Jesus above all

Here's the introduction from his 1st sermon at Metropolitan Tabernacle:
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, although I claim to be rather a Calvinist according to Calvin, than after the modern debased fashion. I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist. You have there (pointing to the baptistery) substantial evidence that I am not ashamed of that ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ; 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.¹⁴

From first to last, Christ was the theme of his ministry. Here are his last words at the Tabernacle:

‘if you wear the livery of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was his like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen.’¹⁵

3. *Mature doctrinal stability and balance (Eph 4:13-14)*

What is Paul picturing here with “Not to be children” – what are children like and where is that not a good thing spiritually?

- fickle (changing mind all the time, easily distracted)
- undiscerning
- gullible
- immaturity
- instability
- ignorant, etc.

Spurgeon was himself a child by age and was only a teenager when he began preaching, but it’s possible to be 30 or 40 years old or more and be a Christian for a long time and still be the kind of spiritual children Paul is talking about.

Obviously the foremost need is to be grounded in God’s Word, but maturity also is dependent on applying what you learn – don’t just sit around but do something!

At a pastor’s conference he exhorted his fellow ministers:

"In every minister's life there should be traces of stern labour. Brethren, do something; do something; DO SOMETHING. While Committees waste their time over resolutions, do something. While Societies and Unions are making constitutions, let us win souls. Too often we discuss, and discuss, and discuss, while Satan only laughs in his sleeve ... Get to work and quit yourselves like men"¹⁶

Like Spurgeon, we need to seek balance in all of life

Spurgeon was Calvinistic *and* evangelistic. It was completely consistent with His high view of God and His Word to have an equally high concern for his responsibility in God's Word to proclaim salvation for all who would believe, and to weep like Jesus when his city would not believe. His belief of God's sovereignty over salvation did not hinder his proclaiming the gospel, *it motivated it* because he knew that God had elect people out there and His grace was powerful enough to conquer even the most depraved and stubborn of sinful hearts. Spurgeon's hope was not in the sinful will of man, but in the Sovereign will of a truly Almighty God. He didn't need to manipulate emotions; he labored to be faithful in proclaiming the biblical gospel, knowing God would do the actual saving. He gave some of his harshest rebukes to hyper-Calvinists, those who taught much of God's sovereignty but diminished man's responsibility, those who because the Bible teaches election and God's control of all things, they wrongly conclude "why evangelize or pray."¹⁷ Spurgeon, in contrast to those who for whatever reason did not freely preach God's grace to all, is a wonderful example of the balance of sound theology with compassion and passion for the lost:

"I remember, when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls"¹⁸

Evangelistic apathy and laziness and excuses disturbed him greatly: "I tremble lest we should go to sleep, and do nothing: I am alarmed lest there should be no conversions, and nobody caring that there should be any."¹⁹

He points out that the greatest missionaries and evangelists of the past all believed the doctrines of grace (God's sovereignty over salvation) while maintaining man's responsibility in equal balance. They were not content to have right theology, they earnestly pursued right living and balance and obeyed the Great Commission, passionately laying down their lives in preaching the gospel to every creature.

The greatest missionaries that have ever lived have believed in God's choice of them; and instead of this doctrine leading to inaction, it has ever been an irresistible motive power, and it will be so again. It was the secret energy of the Reformation ... It may not work superficial results, but for deep work it is invaluable ... Was Whitefield a man who cared nothing for the salvation of the people? ... Did Jonathan Edwards have no concern for the souls of others? Oh, how he wept, and cried, and warned them of the wrath to come! Time would fail me to tell of the lovers of men who have been lovers of this truth.²⁰

Spurgeon was not only balanced in his theology, he tried to balance his life.

He had a seriousness about things of God, but did not take himself too seriously. Unlike many in his day in England, he did not consider a sense of humor to be sin.

He told one critic, “That’s nothing. You should hear what I think and *don’t* say”

His mother wrote that she often prayed that Charles might become a Christian, but not necessarily a Baptist. He replied with wit that it was just like the Lord to not only answer prayer, but to bestow more than had been asked.²¹

4. *Growing by speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15)*

Spurgeon mentions the insight of a preacher commenting on the text John 13:14, about the duty of disciples to wash one another's feet, and how "One way in which disciples wash one another's feet is by reproofing one another. But the reproof must not be couched in angry words, so as to destroy the effect; nor in tame, so as to fail of effect. Just as in washing a brother's feet, you must not use boiling water to scald, nor frozen water to freeze them."²²

Spurgeon was not afraid to lovingly rebuke and speak out against serious error or sin in his congregation, or against compromise he saw in other ministers and in the Baptist Union who were allowing more liberal ministers into their denomination. He cared more for the truth than his own reputation. “What is said of us is nothing; but shall truth be sold to keep up a wider fellowship?”²³

In a day when many avoided contending for the truth, Spurgeon called them back to speaking the truth in love. It is not loving to avoid important truth for the sake of a superficial unity or to water down or weaken the true church by letting it be infected with bad teaching and doctrine. This is one of those areas where the modern American church would do well to listen to Spurgeon.

Yet imagine that in those ages past, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their compeers had said, “The world is out of order; but if we try to set it right we shall only make a great row, and get ourselves into disgrace. Let us go to our chambers, put on our night-caps, and sleep over the bad times, and perhaps when we wake up things will have grown better.” Such conduct on their part would have entailed upon us a heritage of error. Age after age would have gone down into the infernal deeps, and the pestiferous bogs of error would have swallowed all. These men loved the faith and the name of Jesus too well to see them trampled on ...

It is to-day as it was in the Reformers’ days. Decision is needed. Here is the day for the man, where is the man for the day? We who have had the gospel passed to us by martyr hands dare not trifle with it, nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors, who pretend to love it, but inwardly abhor every line of it. The faith I hold bears upon it marks of the blood of my ancestors. Shall I deny their faith, for which they left their native land to sojourn here? Shall we cast away the treasure which was handed to us through the bars of prisons, or came to us charred with the flames ...

When I think of how others have suffered for the faith, a little scorn or unkindness seems a mere trifle, not worthy of mention. An ancestry of lovers of the faith ought to be a great plea with us to abide by the Lord God of our fathers, and the faith in which they lived. As for me, I must hold the old gospel: I can do no other. God helping me, I will endure the consequences of what men think obstinacy.

Look you, sirs, there are ages yet to come. If the Lord does not speedily appear, there will come another generation, and another, and all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to his truth to-day. We have come to a turning-point in the road. If we turn to the right, mayhap our children and our children's children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to his Word. I charge you, not only by your ancestry, but by your posterity, that you seek to win the commendation of your Master, that though you dwell where Satan's seat is, you yet hold fast his name, and do not deny his faith. God grant us faithfulness, for the sake of the souls around us! How is the world to be saved if the church is false to her Lord? How are we to lift the masses if our fulcrum is removed? If our gospel is uncertain, what remains but increasing misery and despair? Stand fast, my beloved, in the name of God! I, your brother in Christ, entreat you to abide in the truth. Quit yourselves like men, be strong. The Lord sustain you for Jesus' sake. Amen.²⁴

5. *He encouraged and equipped others to their part in service (Eph 4:16, 11-12)*

He believed a critical part of growth and building up was prayer. An American once asked Spurgeon, 'In our country, there are many opinions as to the secret of your great influence. Would you be good enough to give me your own point of view?' After a moment's pause, Spurgeon said, 'My people pray for me.'²⁵

Ephesians 4 indicates that every part of the body is to be involved in the ministry of serving and building up the whole. Spurgeon's church was in the inner city of London and continues to have a strong ministry in their community to this day. He trained hundreds of pastors and thousands of people to use their gifts. He deplored spiritual laziness and those who only showed up at church but didn't serve or do anything else.

How can I best utilize myself for the benefit of the rest of the members of the Church?" Do not ask, "How can I benefit myself?" but let your enquiry be, "How can I be most profitable to my fellow-Christians?" ... Oh, for grace to be unselfish! There is such a thing as Christian selfishness; and, of all evil things in the world, it is the most unchristian. When the first and last concern of a man is his own salvation, his own comfort, his own advancement, his own edification, and nothing besides, he needs to be saved from such a selfish spirit as that.²⁶

If one part of body is not working, the whole body suffers. If a body part is not following the head's direction, it's being dysfunctional.

It's very easy to let even good or neutral things completely dominate your life to that you neglect the family of Christ. I know from experience we can begin to become lazy or make excuses as to why we're letting ourselves slip spiritually. You may not have a lot of time, but don't underestimate even the power of your prayers for each other, or an encouraging note, or having people over, or doing something kind that you know someone really needs. Seek out an iron-sharpening discipleship relationship with another.

Remember, don't think of ministry as something that has to happen on church campus, think of ministry as your heart focus and constant desire to serve the body.

We *must* grow out of our individualism, instability, and immaturity so that by speaking the truth in love, every body part is involved in this growth. What will you do this week to obey the word of God and seek to live more for King Jesus?

How will you follow Christ more in light of these principles? The choice of where to serve may vary, but the one choice not open to us is to sit in the stands and do nothing: that would not only be sin, it's selfish, and hurts the whole body, not just yourself.

Spurgeon was not perfect and would want the focus and glory to Christ, and it would not be in keeping with his life emphases to close on a note other than His Lord. We don't want to praise any man, but let us praise God that he raised up a servant who impacted so many and pray that God will raise up grace-loving gospel servants in our day as well.

The key to his success cannot be all attributed to natural ability, but was his *availability*. Spurgeon submitted his life and soul to a great God in dependence and prayer and stood for the truth no matter what the cost. Any of God's servants who yield fully to him can be used in various ways as we serve the same great God in however He sees fit to use us in His sovereignty. Few if any will ever again have the position and power of a Charles, but we all can be used by God like Susannah Spurgeon, no matter what our physical limitations or lack of giftedness, we can't make excuses. God wants to use us as we faithfully serve him outside the limelight, behind the scenes, encouraging others.

D. L. Moody and Spurgeon were friends, and in one of the times he shared the pulpit with Spurgeon in London, Moody said to the congregation: 'if God can use Mr. Spurgeon why not the rest of us, and why should not we all just lay ourselves at the Master's feet, and say "Send me, use me"? It is not Mr. Spurgeon after all, it is God. He is as weak as any other man away from him. Moses was nothing, but it was Moses' God. Samson was nothing when he lost his strength, but when it came back to him then he was a mighty man; and so, dear friends, bear in mind that if we can just link our weakness to God's strength we can go forth and be a blessing in the world.'²⁷

NOTES

¹ J.C. Carlile. *Charles Spurgeon: The Great Orator*. Abridged and edited by Dan Harmon. Barbour Publishing: Uhrichsville, Ohio, p. 11.

² Spurgeon did not major on eschatology often, but wrote: ‘Some think that this descent of the Lord will be post-millennial—that is, after the thousand years of his reign. I cannot think so. I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial; that he will come first; and then will come the millennium as the result of his personal reign upon earth.’ (“Justification and Glory,” MTP, 11:249). For more in-depth analysis of his end times views of restoration and conversion of national Israel in the land, and other topics, see the articles by Dennis Swanson available at <http://www.spurgeon.org/aboutsp.htm>

³ http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1562_Brothers_Read_Christian_Biography/

⁴ There is an excellent appendix detailing this in John MacArthur’s book *Ashamed of the Gospel*, which traces the late 19th century controversy in England and its striking parallels to the late 20th century downward spiral of American evangelicalism. See also www.spurgeon.org for an online edition of this and the related “downgrade” documents, of which some biographers believe the stress of this controversy (and the “fire” incident) contributed largely to his early death.

⁵ Charles Spurgeon. *Commenting and Commentaries*. London, 1893: Passmore & Alabaster, p. 1.

⁶ The above list of facts is from Eric W. Hayden, former pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, in article ‘Did you Know?’ *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 29, pp. 2-3. Available online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/spurgn2.htm>

⁷ Carlile, 46.

⁸ Charles Ray. *Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon*. Pilgrim Publications: Dallas, Texas.

⁹ See John Piper’s article for more on this summary: ‘On October 19, 1856 he preached for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own church would not hold the people. The 10,000 seating capacity was far exceeded as the crowds pressed in. Someone shouted, “Fire!” and there was great panic in parts of the building. Seven people were killed in the stampede and scores were injured. Spurgeon was 22 years old and was overcome by this calamity. He said later, “Perhaps never soul went so near the burning furnace of insanity, and yet came away unharmed.” But not all agreed he was unharmed. The specter so brooked over him for years, and one close friend and biographer said, “I cannot but think, from what I saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night” - Darrel W. Amundsen, “The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon,” in: *Christian History*, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 23.

¹⁰ See <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/unorthdx.htm>

¹¹ Carlile, 98.

¹² Iain Murray. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 103 (Banner of Truth Trust: Carlisle, Penn., 2002).

¹³ Piper, “Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity,” p. 5-6. Available at www.desiringgod.org

¹⁴ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Sermon, Vol. 7, Sermon # 369 “The First Sermon in the Tabernacle.”

¹⁵ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 37, Sermon # 2208 (June 7th, 1891).

¹⁶ *An All Round Ministry*, p. 55.

¹⁷ For an excellent response to imbalanced Calvinism, read Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, pp. 46-49; 113-116.

¹⁸ *A Marvelous Ministry*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁹ Murray, 116.

²⁰ Murray, 113-14.

²¹ Carlile, 36.

²² *The Quotable Spurgeon*. Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Inc, 1990.

²³ Murray, 148.

²⁴ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 34, Sermon #2007 (p. 83-84)

²⁵ Carlile, 20.

²⁶ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 48, Sermon # 2763.

²⁷ ‘Mister Moody on Spurgeon: Remarks Made at a Jubilee Testimonial Service for C. H. Spurgeon in 1884.’ Reprinted in back of *Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon*, by Charles Ray. Pilgrim 2003 reprint of 1903 ed.