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THE SPIRIT-LED PREACHING OF CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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To Laura, my favorite.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>MTP</i>	<i>Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit</i>
<i>NPSP</i>	<i>New Park Street Pulpit</i>
<i>Lectures</i>	<i>Lectures to my Students</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>The Sword and the Trowel</i>

PREFACE

To say that I feel inadequate to write about such a great man as Charles Spurgeon would be an understatement. Spurgeon is a giant in the field of preaching while I am simply a giant. I was inspired by many godly men and women throughout the ages, yet as I learned more about each of them, I became disappointed with their failures and became less interested. Spurgeon is different. The more I learned about him and from him, the more I respected and admired him. He has shaped my life and ministry in countless ways. I have five framed pictures of him on my wall and that is in addition to the bust and bobblehead. A lifetime learning about the Savior through Spurgeon's sermons and writings would be a life well lived, but you should still go outside every once in a while.

I am thankful for the Baptist church I accidentally joined in college after filling out a visitor card. Being a member of it allowed me to attend The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at a price I could afford. I am, of course, also grateful for the Cooperative Program, which made this possible. My two favorite aspects of the Southern Baptist Convention are the Cooperative Program and the potlucks. I am thankful for Southern and all of the godly men who influenced me during my time as a M.Div. student and as a Ph.D. candidate. These men include fellow students, who taught me so much, as well as professors who taught me even more. I will fondly remember the time spent in seminars when we would laugh so much that other professors would enter the classroom to see what was happening. We would also discuss important matters.

I would like to specifically thank my advisor, Hershael York. He is exactly the kind of man I want to be, and he is encouraging in a fatherly way. I say that because every time I made him laugh, he would say how much I remind him of his son. I would

also like to specifically thank Dr. Nettles who encouraged me and help me complete this dissertation. I was getting really sick of this dissertation before I spoke with Dr. Nettles.

During the duration of this doctorate program, I have been employed as a teacher and debate coach. I am grateful to Valor Christian High School for its support. It has helped both financially and by provided time off for seminars. Go Eagles!

A special gratitude must be extended to my wife, Laura. She is the kindest person I know and my biggest fan. She has helped me through this process more than anyone knows. From typing up bibliographies and annotation to encouraging me when the task seemed too big, my Sugar Bear has always been there for me. This project would not be complete without her. Plus, she's pretty.

Ultimately, I would like to thank my Savior. He loved me when I was unlovable. He is full of mercy, of which I am so very grateful. Jesus is my only hope. May everything I do bring him glory.

Jake Hovis

Denver, Colorado
May 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One Saturday, the time for sermon preparation had arrived. Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) shut himself in his study. A fellow minister arrived at his house, and though he did not give his name, he said, “Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord wishes to see him.” Spurgeon replied, “Tell the man that I am busy with his Master.” Spurgeon then discovered that the minister at his door was W. Poole Balfern, ran out to meet him, clasped both his hands in his own, and cheerfully welcomed him into his home. Long afterwards, Balfern expressed in an interview, “I learned then that the secret of Mr. Spurgeon’s success was, that he was *cradled in the Holy Ghost*.”¹

While Spurgeon became quite successful, such a prediction would have been hard to make given Spurgeon’s humble beginnings. He was born the oldest child into a poor family led by a nonconformist pastor. Spurgeon’s parents were so poor that they sent young Charles to live with his grandparents in Stambourne. His grandfather was also a nonconformist pastor. Spurgeon spent many days reading the puritan books in his grandfather’s library. He was a serious child, even to the point of confronting a man in his grandfather’s church for blatantly sinning.²

At the age of five, Spurgeon moved back into his parents’ home. He excelled in school except when to do so would put him further away from the fire.³ In his teenage

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1854–1860* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899), 2:181. Emphasis in original.

² *Ibid.*, 1:23-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 1:44.

years, he again lived away from his parents as he continued his schooling. During this time, although he was a convinced Baptist, he was yet to be a converted Christian.⁴ That all changed when he went to a primitive Methodist chapel during a snow storm when he was fifteen.⁵ From that day until the day of his death, Spurgeon was a passionate believer.

Spurgeon began his ministry shortly after his conversion. He passed out tracts in the towns surrounding his school and taught Sabbath-school at his Baptist church. He preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen when Mr. James Vinter convinced him to accompany another young man to a church service a few miles away. Both Spurgeon and his companion believed that the other was to preach. While walking, Spurgeon reluctantly agreed to preach.⁶ He went on to preach over 600 times before he turned twenty. Over the course of his lifetime, he preached to an estimated 10 million people.⁷ He is also widely known as “The Prince of Preachers.”⁸

Spurgeon pastored a church in the country before moving to London. His first pastorate was at a church in Waterbeach. He served this church starting when he was sixteen. During this time, the church attendance rose dramatically, many souls were saved, and the town was transformed. He was then contacted by New Park Street Chapel. At the time, this church owned the largest Baptist building in the world. It could seat 1,200 but, at this time, hardly more than 200 regularly attended.⁹ At first, Spurgeon was convinced they meant to invite someone else because he was only nineteen. He agreed to

⁴ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*. 1:50.

⁵ The exact date of his conversion is in question. The most probable date is January 13, 1850. For a detailed exploration, see Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 124-31.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel*: 1880 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 5.

⁷ Eric Hayden, “Charles H. Spurgeon: Did You Know?,” *Christian History*, no. 29 (1991): 2.

⁸ This phrase was popularized most recently by Lewis Drummond in his 900-page biography, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*.

⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*. 1:263.

preach there in London. The church and the deacons were immediately impressed. Not only that, they were convinced that they had their new pastor.

Spurgeon began his ministry in London taking a pastorate which would last the rest of his life. The New Park Street church attendance exploded. Soon, Spurgeon was preaching to crowds in excess of 5,000 people at Exeter Hall. In 1861, the church moved into the newly completed 6,000 seat Metropolitan Tabernacle. Though he was never formally educated, Spurgeon pastored the “largest church in Christendom.”¹⁰ In addition to this, he published more than 18 million words before his death in 1892.¹¹ He sold over 56 million sermons throughout his ministry. His sermons were translated into nearly forty languages.¹² In fact, he quite possibly may have been the most popular preacher in Orthodox Russia.¹³ Though he was first met with criticism in London, soon his popularity soared. He and Prime Minister William Gladstone exchanged letters. Gladstone even made it a point to visit the Tabernacle.¹⁴ According the legend, Queen Victoria donned pedestrian garb in order to hear Spurgeon preach at the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall.¹⁵

Not only is Spurgeon widely considered one of the best preachers ever to stand in a pulpit, but in the foreword to Lewis Drummond’s biography of Spurgeon, Carl F. H. Henry describes Spurgeon as “one of evangelical Christianity’s immortals”.¹⁶ Spurgeon

¹⁰ Eric Hayden, *Highlights in the Life of C. H. Spurgeon* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹² Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:291.

¹³ Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 155.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:183.

¹⁵ Christian T. George, “Jesus Christ, The ‘Prince of Pilgrims’: A Critical Analysis of the Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 2011), 4.

¹⁶ Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 11.

was also known for working up to eighteen hours in a day.¹⁷ The great pioneer missionary David Livingstone one asked Spurgeon how he was able to do two men's work in a single day. Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten that there are two of us, and the one you see the least of often does the most work."¹⁸ He was, of course, referring to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

For Spurgeon, his life in general and his pulpit ministry in particular most needed the sacred influence of the Holy Spirit. If a preacher were to bring the truth and power of the gospel to bear upon the minds and consciences of the congregation, he could only do so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Spurgeon was able to work long hours advancing the kingdom through his writing, preaching, and ministerial organizations such as The Pastor's College and Stockwell Orphanage. By being cradled by the Holy Spirit, Spurgeon became one of the world's greatest preachers.

Void in the Literature

In the two years after his death, a new biography of Charles H. Spurgeon was written every month.¹⁹ As Christian George pointed out in his dissertation, many of these biographies were largely hagiographic. This includes those written by G. Holden Pike, J. Manton Smith, Russell Conwell, Henry Davenport Northop, Thomas Handford, George C. Needham, H. L. Wayland, James J. Ellis, and Robert Shindler.²⁰ Zachary Eswine has provided a rather extensive review of these biographies.²¹ These works have been

¹⁷ Hayden, "Charles H. Spurgeon," 3.

¹⁸ Russell H. Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Nashville: Central Publishing House, 1892), 235.

¹⁹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Moody Press, 1985), ix.

²⁰ George, "Jesus Christ, The 'Prince of Pilgrims'," 18.

²¹ Zachary Eswine, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Preaching Theory and Practice of Charles Haddon Spurgeon" (Ph.D. diss., Regent University, 2003), 3–21.

consulted but have marginal value in the current study. They were written while those with first-hand knowledge about Spurgeon were still alive; however, most of these works contain very little unique information and even less critical information. They were written, it seems, to rehash well-worn stories of the great man and pay homage to his legacy. That is not to say that these works are in fact hagiographic. There is little evidence that these authors overlooked Spurgeon's character flaws. It seems much more likely that Spurgeon did in fact live a godly life.

The next work was Spurgeon's autobiography which was compiled after his death by his wife and his private secretary J.W. Harrald.²² It was first published in four volumes in the years 1897-1900. Much of the material contained in this work was first published in the *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon's monthly publication. Spurgeon acknowledged that *The Sword and the Trowel* was "in some sense our autobiography."²³ The *Autobiography* was much longer than most of the previous works. As such, it did include some unique information such as personal letters written by Spurgeon and anecdotes written by his wife Susannah. Subsequent works on Spurgeon reference the *Autobiography* extensively.

The next batch of biographies sought to have more critical appraisal but were not successful. Two of these were written by former students at the Pastor's College. The first was written by William Y. Fullerton in 1920.²⁴ He was a close friend of Spurgeon for several years as evidenced by the number of letters Spurgeon wrote to him.²⁵ The other was written by John C. Carlisle in 1933.²⁶ While these contain some interesting

²² Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor Imprint, 2013), 9.

²³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1885* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1885), 25.

²⁴ W.Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920).

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Marshall Brothers, Limited, 1923), 158–71.

²⁶ J. C. Carlisle, *Charles Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: Kingsgate Press,

reminiscences, they are not unlike the other biographies written at this time that they repeated much of the hagiography of the previous century.²⁷

The latter half of the twentieth century saw some very fine works produced concerning Spurgeon. While concise and written at a more popular level, the best of these works is by Arnold Dallimore.²⁸ Two books by Iain Murray are also worth mentioning. These are *The Forgotten Spurgeon* and *Spurgeon & Hyper-Calvinism*.²⁹ While these books deal with specific issues rather than Spurgeon's life as a whole, they contain solid scholarship. The last book that deserves to be mentioned at this time is Lewis Drummond's *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*. Some consider this nearly 900-page to be the definitive biography on Spurgeon.³⁰ However, others find this book to be riddled with historical inaccuracies and questionable scholarship practices.³¹ While this is a concern, Drummond is generally reliable.

In 2013, another biography was published that not only took a unique angle with regard to source material and content but also raised the level of scholarship concerning the study of Spurgeon. Unlike Drummond's work which occasionally leaves out citations, this new work is well researched and properly footnoted. This new biography is *Living by Revealed Truth* by Tom Nettles. It takes as its main source

1933).

²⁷ Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 5.

²⁸ Dallimore, *Spurgeon*.

²⁹ Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966); Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995).

³⁰ Austin B. Tucker, *The Preacher as Storyteller: The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 176.

³¹ Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 5. This rises to such a level that Christian George, one of the leading Spurgeon scholars and the former curator of the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, refused to cite Drummond in his dissertation without a more reliable cross-check. George, "Jesus Christ, The 'Prince of Pilgrims'", 21.

material *The Sword and the Trowel* “to understand his theology of pastoral ministry”.³²

While many other biographies have successfully treated Spurgeon’s life and ministry, Nettles brings a unique focus to Spurgeon’s theology. It is a look into the mind of this most influential preacher, and it covers both the breadth and depth of this subject beautifully.

There have been twenty-nine theses and dissertations written with Spurgeon as their primary focus.³³ Interest in Spurgeon has been increasing in recent years. From

³² Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 9.

³³ Jeremy Duane Jessen, “Mr. Valiant for Truth: The Polemic of Charles Haddon Spurgeon as Pastor-Theologian During the Downgrade Controversy (1887-1892)” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Ahn Shinyul, “A Critical Examination of Selected Biographical Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Dale Warren Smith, “The Victorian Preacher’s Malady: The Metaphorical Usage of Gout in the Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri - Kansas City, 2017); Keeney Ray Dickenson, “Preaching From the Overflow of Personal Piety: The Contribution of Prayer and Bible Intake to the Pulpit Ministry of Charles Spurgeon” (D.Min. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Elma Ray Rhodes Jr., “The Role of Bible Intake and Prayer in the Marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon” (D.Min. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016); William Brian Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold’: The Spirituality of Suffering and Depression in the Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Frederick Monroe Barton, “Developing a Leadership Training Curriculum Based on Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Lectures to My Students for Use at the West Elk Bible Institute in Gunnison, Colorado” (D.Min. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Nicholas Brennecke, “Gout Killed Him: A Study of Spurgeon’s Health” (M.A. thesis, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, 2015); John W. Lewis, “Insights From Charles Spurgeon’s Christ-Centered Preaching for a Changing Culture” (D.Min thesis, Liberty University, 2012); Arthur Gene Rice, “A Critical Examination of Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Theory and Practice of Sermon Illustrations” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); George, “Jesus Christ, The ‘Prince of Pilgrims’”; Veeneenea Erika Smith, “Dinna Forget Spurgeon: A Literary Biography” (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2006); T. Michael O’Neal Jr., “An Analysis of the Ministry of Charles H. Spurgeon, With Implications for the Modern Church Growth Movement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006); Eswine, “The Role of the Holy Spirit”; Timothy HeeBoon Yap, “Reading the Surrey Gardens Tragedy: Trauma, Ethos and the Rhetoric of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 2002); Kevin Wayne Regal, “Charles H. Spurgeon’s Theology of Prayer” (Th.M. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000); Kent Ellis Sweatman, “The Doctrines of Calvinism in the Preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998); Larry James Michael, “The Effects of Controversy on the Evangelistic Ministry of C.H. Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Rodney Douglas Earls, “The Evangelistic Strategy of Charles Haddon Spurgeon for the Multiplication of Churches and Implications for Modern Church Extension Theory” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); John David Talbert, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Christological Homiletics: A Critical Evaluation of Selected Sermons from Old Testament Texts” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Timothy Albert McCoy, “The Evangelistic Ministry of C.H. Spurgeon: Implications for a Contemporary Model for Pastoral Evangelism” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Robert Lewis Duncan, “An Investigation of the Preaching Style of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Its Relevance to Contemporary Preaching” (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979); Jeremy F. Thornton, “The Soteriology of C.H. Spurgeon: Its Biblical and Historical Roots and Its Place in His Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1974); Albert Roger Meredith, “The Social and Political Views of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1973); Patricia Stallings Kruppa, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon, A Preacher’s Progress” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968); J. D. Zeluff, “A Critique of English Speaking Preaching, 1864-1964” (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1964); William H. Crook, “The Contributive Factors in the Life and Preaching of Charles

1980 to 2010, ten dissertations and theses were written. That number goes up to nine in the years since 2010 with five of the nine being Ph.D. dissertations. Many different subjects have been covered by this scholarship; however, not much has been written concerning Spurgeon and the Holy Spirit.

There is one major exception to this: Zachary Eswine's 2003 dissertation on the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching theory and practice of Spurgeon.³⁴ This dissertation, however, has a very different focus from the current work. Eswine wrote as part of a Ph.D. in Communications from Regent University. As such, he was much more concerned with rhetorical theory. Eswine writes, "In this study, the writings of Charles Spurgeon are explored to promote an eloquence or rhetoric of the Holy Spirit for preaching theory and practice, which in turn, underscores an emerging theory of gospel-oratory, distinct in purpose and kind from traditional rhetorical theory."³⁵ Eswine argues that to the five canons of rhetoric, traditionally associated with Aristotle, "there is added a sixth canon, which refers to the immediate and partial inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the presence of the preaching event. The preaching event, therefore, is understood as a "plural-event" in which God pairs his voice with the preacher's voice."³⁶

Therefore, a void remains in the literature for a discussion based on Spurgeon and the Holy Spirit that comes from a more theological rather than rhetorical approach. After all, Spurgeon would consider himself a preacher long before he considers himself a rhetorician.

Haddon Spurgeon" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957); Paul Charles Klose, "The Preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon" (Ph.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1956); Henry Franklin Colquitt, "The Soteriology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon Revealed in His Sermons and Controversial Writings" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Edinburgh, 1951); Theodore Franklin Nelson, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon's Theory and Practice of Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1944); Robert Strong, "A Study of the Factors of Persuasion in the Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1933).

³⁴ Eswine, "The Role of the Holy Spirit."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, v.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Thesis

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to examine Spurgeon's ministry and writings through the lens of Greg Heisler's *Spirit-Led Preaching* to demonstrate that Spurgeon was, by Heisler's six characteristics, a Spirit-led preacher. Secondary questions include: Did Spurgeon demonstrate adherence to the Spirit's ministry for preaching in his sermons? Did he teach young preachers to be Spirit-led preachers?

As this dissertation will argue that Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher, the term "Spirit-led preacher" must be defined. In his work, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, Greg Heisler noted six ways in which the "the Spirit's ministry for preaching is intentionally and explicitly identified". These are "(1) the inspiration of the text, (2) the illumination of the preacher studying the text, (3) the conviction of the message, (4) the empowerment of the preacher, (5) the Spirit's Christological witness, and (6) Spirit-filled living."³⁷

Throughout the rest of his book, Heisler further expounds on each of these aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry with regards to preaching. Therefore, this dissertation will argue that Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher in that he preached and taught preachers to proclaim the Holy Spirit's role in the inspiration of the text, the illumination of the preacher in studying the text, the conviction of the message, the empowerment of the preacher, the rightful preaching of Christ, and living a life of devotion and piety. To clarify, proving that Spurgeon was in fact led by the Holy Spirit is a task that is either impossible or nearly impossible. This dissertation will not attempt to prove the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on Spurgeon's life and ministry. Instead, this dissertation will take the categories of a Spirit-led preacher as outlined by Heisler and demonstrate that Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because of the doctrines he preached, how he conducted his life, and the advice he gave to other preachers.

³⁷ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 21.

Methodology and Outline of Argument

Spurgeon's literary output was enormous. He produced more than "any other Christian author, living or dead."³⁸ As such, this dissertation will rely most heavily on Spurgeon's own words. The portions of his books, articles, and letters that discuss the Holy Spirit's ministry with regards to preaching will be examined. Attention will be given to Spurgeon's sermons which detail his doctrine of the Holy Spirit with respect to issues like illumination of Scripture and the conviction of the message. Attention will also be given to those works in which Spurgeon instructs preachers, namely *Lectures to My Students* and *All-Round Ministry*. In order to discuss Spurgeon's life of piety as well as his attributing certain events in his life to the work of the Spirit, his autobiography and numerous biographies will be consulted. These will pass through the framework built by Heisler. In doing so, this dissertation will prove that Spurgeon measured by those criteria was a Spirit-led preacher.

Chapter 1 introduces Charles Spurgeon by briefly demonstrating the enormous success and influence he achieved. It gives special attention to how he was said to, both by himself and others, have a special relationship with the Holy Spirit. It then discusses the voids in literature concerning Spurgeon and the Holy Spirit before stating the research question of what part did the Holy Spirit play in Spurgeon's pulpit ministry. Chapter one finishes by outlining the thesis of this dissertation, the importance of the study, and provide the methodology as well as the outline of argumentation.

Before moving on to focus on the pulpit ministry of Spurgeon in the rest of the dissertation, chapter two observes his life. It highlights events in Spurgeon's life which he attributed to the Holy Spirit's guidance. This chapter starts by discussing Richard Knill's prophecy that Spurgeon would be a great preacher. It moves on to the unusual circumstances that led him to be compelled to the ministry including his conversion.

³⁸ Lewis Drummond, "The Secrets of Spurgeon's Preaching: Why Would Thousands Come to Hear Him?," *Christian History & Biography*, no. 29 (January 1, 1991).

Next, this chapter discusses Spurgeon hearing the voice of God while walking through the Midsummer Commons. It also touches upon the fierce criticism he experienced as a young pastor in London and how the Holy Spirit strengthened him. Finally, it discusses his health issues, which include gout and depression, and how he said this forced him to rely to a greater degree on the Spirit.

Chapter 3 begins the process by which Spurgeon is shown to be a Spirit-led preacher. This and the next five chapters discuss the ways “the Spirit’s ministry for preaching is intentionally and explicitly identified.”³⁹ This chapter will begin with a discussion of Spurgeon’s doctrine of inspiration. It specifically shows how Spurgeon believed in the inerrancy of Scripture as well as had an attitude toward Scripture that could best be described as adoration. He treasured the Bible. This chapter then considers the implication of God having spoken in Spurgeon’s pulpit ministry before ending with the idea that the Holy Spirit still speaks.

Chapter 4 discusses the topic of illumination of the preacher studying the text. This concept is based upon inspiration, yet even though the faithful preacher can expect illumination from the Holy Spirit, this should never be an excuse for laziness or unpredictability. Sin and lack of prayer can be barriers to illumination, but an illuminated preacher is a powerful preacher. The illumination can help the preacher better incarnate the truths of Scripture making it more relevant to the readers. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the most capable teacher. As the Spirit illuminates the text in the study, the truths of Scripture are driven into the preacher’s heart and mind until he is able to internalize it. Calvin called this process imprinting.⁴⁰ Spurgeon acknowledged that the Holy Spirit must guide the preacher while studying. He pushed this idea a bit further by teaching that the

³⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 21.

⁴⁰ Geneva Catechism, quoted in T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London: J. Clark, 1959). Question 302.

Holy Spirit must aid the preacher in choosing the text.

Chapter 5 covers the conviction of the message. Spurgeon was clear that we cannot make men come to Jesus. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. This conviction is based upon clear preaching of Jesus. Spurgeon said, “We can preach Christ to sinners if we cannot preach sinners to Christ.”⁴¹ Specifically, it is the Spirit’s work to authenticate Scripture. As he moves through the sermon, the Holy Spirit declares that what is being spoken by the faithful preacher is true. The Spirit also applies the words to the lives of the hearers. Instead of filling in every blank for the congregation and thereby producing legalistic sermons, the Spirit-led preacher trust the spirit to make the connects between the sermon and the hearers’ lives.⁴²

Chapter 6 focuses on the empowerment of the preacher. The preacher partners with the Holy Spirit so, in a sense, both the preacher and the Spirit are preaching. Spurgeon acknowledged that while he was in the pulpit, “God the Holy Ghost speaks by me now.”⁴³ This process rejects all human manipulation. Rather the Holy Spirit empowers the preacher and thereby transforms lives. The Spirit-led preacher experiences freedom, vitality, unction, and possession when he is empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach.⁴⁴ Spurgeon, likewise, taught young preachers to seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 7 covers the Holy Spirit’s Christological witness. Christ is the theme of the Bible. He is the supreme subject of Scripture. In addition to this, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ. “The Spirit hears Jesus and applies Jesus to us.”⁴⁵ The New

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1883* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1883), 208.

⁴² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 133.

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, “An Urgent Request for an Immediate Answer,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 599.

⁴⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 166–69.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

Testament examples point to a Christological witness. Paul desired to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. The heart of Paul's preaching was Christ. The Spirit-led preacher in general, and Spurgeon in particular, preach redemptive sermons that draw attention to the person and work of Jesus by design not by accident. "A sermon without Christ as its beginning, middle, and end is a mistake in conception and a crime in execution. However grand the language it will be merely much-ado-about-nothing if Christ be not there."⁴⁶

Chapter 8 finishes the discussion of the six ways the Spirit's ministry is explicitly identified by considering how the Spirit-led preacher lives a Spirit-filled life. Part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to prepare the preacher to be a herald for God. This is done through character development as well as through personal piety. In both of these regards, Spurgeon was well prepared to be a preacher of God's Word. Part of the preparation process includes, of course, the preacher's salvation. The most powerful preachers never get over the wonder and joy of their salvation experience.⁴⁷ Spurgeon was no different. He constantly retold the story of his salvation. The Spirit-led preacher must be Spirit-called. He is to be summoned to the pulpit by God himself.⁴⁸ Spurgeon agreed. In his Pastor's College, he would not allow men to enroll who were not already preachers. His goal was to enable men to be powerful preachers and fervent soul-winners.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "Without Christ—Nothing," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 27 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 598.

⁴⁷ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁹ Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 105.

CHAPTER 2

SPURGEON'S SPIRIT-LED LIFE

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he lived a Spirit-led life. From the time he was a boy through to the end of his life, Spurgeon depicted the evidence of the Spirit of God. While a child, a quite famous preacher pronounced that Spurgeon would be a great preacher of the gospel. This happened before the lad was even converted. Much unusual activity surrounded Spurgeon's conversion and his later entrance into the ministry. Much of this bears the fingerprints of Divine sovereignty. After taking up the preaching ministry at a church in Waterbeach, Spurgeon sought university training before being halted in this quest by both providence and the voice of God. When he arrived in London to begin his ministry at New Park Street Chapel, he faced fierce and unwarranted criticism. This culminated in a tragic event at the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall. Through these dark times, the Holy Spirit strengthened Spurgeon. This strength was also evident in Spurgeon's daily life as he suffered from gout and depression. In all these circumstances of this great man's life, Spurgeon seemed to be led by the Spirit.

Knill's Prophecy

Due to economic hardship, Spurgeon's parents sent fourteen-months-old Spurgeon to live with his grandparents in Stambourne. His grandfather was a nonconformist pastor and young Spurgeon learned much from him. He returned to the care of his parents at the age of six.¹ As such, Stambourne and his grandfather held a special place in his heart. As a boy, Spurgeon spent his time not devoted to school in

¹ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 77-8.

Stambourne. In Stambourne, the preacher Richard Knill saw something special in young Spurgeon.

Richard Knill's name was a "household word" and his "memory is precious to thousands at home and abroad".² In 1844, Knill traveled from town to town in the county of Essex as part of the London Missionary Society. As part of that journey, he spent a few days at a parsonage in Stambourne.³ Though he only stayed a couple of days, Knill spent much time speaking with the young Spurgeon. This talk was not mere pleasantries but was all about Jesus and the pleasantness of loving Him. Knill pleaded with Spurgeon for the salvation of his soul.⁴ On three successive days he taught the boy and prayed with him.⁵ "After even more earnest prayer alone with his little *protégé*, he appeared to have a burden on his mind, and he could not go till he had eased himself of it."⁶

Knill later said that he felt a singular interest in Spurgeon. It was an expectation for which he could not account. While the family was gathered for morning prayers, Knill took Spurgeon on his knee in front of all of them.⁷ He then said:

I do not know how it is, but I feel a solemn presentiment that this child will preach the gospel to thousands, and God will bless him to many souls. So sure am I of this, that when my little man preaches in Rowland Hill's Chapel, as he will do one day, I should like him to promise me that he will give out the hymn beginning, 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.'⁸

This prediction came true. After Spurgeon had been preaching in London for some time, Dr. Alexander Fletcher was supposed to deliver the annual sermon to children

² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1865* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1865), 123.

³ C. H. Spurgeon and Benjamin Beddow. *Memories of Stambourne* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1892), 101.

⁴ Spurgeon, *ST: 1865*, 124.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography*, vol. 2: *The Full Harvest 1860-1892*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006), 1:34.

⁶ Spurgeon, *ST: 1865*, 124.

⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:34.

⁸ Spurgeon, *ST: 1865*, 124.

in the Surrey Chapel, Rowland Hill's former chapel. Fletcher became too sick to preach and Spurgeon was offered the opportunity to be a last-minute replacement. Spurgeon agreed with the stipulation that the children sing "God moves in a mysterious way" because he had made a promise a long time ago that that song should be sung. The song was sung and Spurgeon preached in Rowland Hill's chapel.⁹

Spurgeon, however, was not clear that the Surrey Chapel was the venue which Knill intended. Rowland Hill also ministered in his summer residence at Wotton-under-Edge. Though Spurgeon never sought to preach in this place, the minister at Wotton-under-Edge invited him there to preach. Spurgeon accepted the invitation on the same condition as he made for the Surrey Chapel. At both of these chapels once occupied by Rowland Hill, Spurgeon preached, "God moves in a mysterious way" was sung, and the prophecy spoken by Richard Knill was fulfilled.

Spurgeon later pondered if Knill's words brought about their own fulfilment. He surmised that they did. From the day this prophecy was spoken over him, he believed it and looked forward to the day when he would preach. He felt very sure that no unconverted person should dare enter the ministry though he, at the time of the prophesy, was an unconverted boy of about ten-year-old. This made him seek salvation all the more intently. When grace enabled him to cast himself on the Savior's love, he quickly began to speak of Christ's redemption.¹⁰ The fact that Richard Knill saw the benefit in spending time praying with the grandson of a fellow minister made a lasting impression on Spurgeon who would become just as passionate at soul-winning. It may also be true, as Spurgeon pointed out, that Knill may have affected more souls for the good of the gospel by spending time with that boy than he could have through dozens of sermons to crowded

⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:35.

audiences.¹¹

Spurgeon's life was led by the Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that burdened Richard Knill to prophesy such a specific prediction, a prediction that ultimately came true. As Spurgeon acknowledges, this prophecy was, at least in part, self-fulfilling. It directed Spurgeon during his childhood and set him up as a willing servant once he was converted.

Compelled to Ministry

Spurgeon's hope of salvation came true through a series of odd events. Throughout this experience, the hand of God can be seen directing Spurgeon's life. Lowly people, the weather, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit all had a part to play in bringing Spurgeon to the cross. Once there, Spurgeon's fervor burned. He labored to expand the Kingdom of God. Though he willingly taught Sunday school, he had to be tricked into preaching his first sermon. His life seemed to be led by the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon later admitted as much when, through the lens of time, he was able to see that he was compelled to ministry.

Conversion

The Holy Spirit seemingly compelling Spurgeon into the ministry began with his conversion. As the son and grandson of pastors, Spurgeon had a deep understanding of the Bible. In fact, due in large part to his grandfather's influence, Spurgeon had a rather Puritan upbringing. His grandfather ministered in the same spirit of the Puritans, and young Spurgeon spent much time reading the Puritan books in his grandfather's house.¹² As a boy, he read Richard Baxter's *Saint's Rest*, Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and other books

¹¹ Spurgeon, *ST: 1865*, 125.

¹² Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 78.

like these.¹³ Likewise, it was the custom for Spurgeon's mother to spend Sunday evenings with her young children explaining Scripture and reading portions of Alleine's *Alarm* or Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*.¹⁴ Spurgeon later said that this reading gave him dreams of flames and hardened his heart rather than melted it.¹⁵

With such a background, the fact that Spurgeon came under deep conviction of sin is no small wonder. "When I was in the hand of the Holy Spirit, under conviction of sin, I had a clear and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden."¹⁶ Spurgeon did not fear hell, but feared sin and by sinning that he might bring dishonor to God's name and the integrity of His moral government. He, however, was familiar with the plan of salvation. He heard of the sacrifice of Jesus in the gospel from the time of his youth, yet in his innermost soul, he did not know anything of salvation. In this way, he was no better off than one who had never heard the name Jesus. "The light was there, but I was blind: it was of necessity that the Lord Himself should make the matter plain to me."¹⁷

God showed Himself to this downcast boy of fifteen.¹⁸ God intervened in Spurgeon's life in the form of a snowstorm. Spurgeon said, "I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm."¹⁹ That Sunday in January, Spurgeon was home from his boarding

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "Sickness and Prayer, Healing and Praise," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 521.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:68.

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Old, Old Story," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 8 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 235–6.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:98.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The most likely date of Spurgeon conversion is January 13, 1850 although a strong case can be made for January 6, 1850. See Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 124–31.

¹⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:105.

school and directed by his father to attend a certain place of worship. He walked through the storm until he could go no more and turned down a side street into a Primitive Methodist Chapel. The church had fifteen or fewer souls in it that morning.²⁰

The storm was so bad that it even prevented the regular minister from attending, yet the service continued in his absence. Eventually, “a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, of tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach.”²¹ He was not trained to preach and did not have a lot to say. As such, he stayed very close to the text which was “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22). According to Spurgeon, he did not even pronounce the words correctly, but that did not matter.²²

The preacher began thus:—“My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look’. Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pains. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, ‘Look unto *Me*.’ Ay!” said he, in broad Essex, “many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto *Me*’. Some on ye say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says. ‘Look unto *Me*.’”²³

The preacher spoke for about ten minutes before completely running out of things to say. He then looked out into the congregation and, with so few there, knew Spurgeon to be a stranger. He looked directly at Spurgeon and said, “Young man, you look very miserable.”²⁴ Spurgeon, of course, agreed. He must have looked quite downcast, and though he was not accustomed to have preachers remark on his appearance

²⁰ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:105.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 1:105–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1:106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

from the pulpit, it was an affective blow. The preacher 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.”²⁵ He then lifted up his hands and shouted, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin’ to do but to look and live.” At once, Spurgeon saw the way of salvation. He did not know what else was said that day but was possessed by the thought of looking to Christ and being saved.²⁶

Spurgeon stated that when he first received the gospel of salvation he thought that he had never really heard it before. He considered that the preachers to whom he had listened had never truly preached it. However, in retrospect, he reconsidered this idea. Rather, he was sure that he had heard the gospel fully preached to him many hundreds of times, but this time was different. Before believing, he did not truly hear it. When he finally did hear the gospel for the first time in that Primitive Methodist chapel, the message was probably no clearer than other times that he heard it preached. This time “the power of the Holy Spirit was present to open my ear, and to guide the message to my heart.”²⁷ Spurgeon’s troubled heart found rest. “The Holy Spirit, who enabled me to believe, gave me peace through believing. I felt as sure that I was forgiven as before I felt sure of condemnation.”²⁸

Sent to Preach

Spurgeon was filled with zeal for the gospel. Soon after his conversion, he looked for ways to be of service to the Lord.

I think that, when I was first converted to God, if the Lord had said, “I have taken

²⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:111.

you into My house, and I am going to make use of you, and you shall be a door-mat for the saints to wipe their feet on,” I should have said, “Ah, happy shall I be if I may but take the filth off their blessed feet, for I love God’s people; and if I may minister to them in the slightest degree, it shall be my delight!”²⁹

He found a way to serve the Lord through the distribution of tracts. He placed tracts in envelopes and sealed them up to be sent. His hope was that if he chose the pertinent tracts and distributed them to the right people, God would bless his efforts. He also took other tracts and passed them out in certain districts in the town of Newmarket. He went from house to house telling all who would listen of the things of the Kingdom of God. In reminiscing about this, he noted, “I might have done nothing for Christ if I had not been encouraged by finding myself able to do a little.”³⁰

Spurgeon was busy all week with school, but he was free on Saturday afternoons. Though he might have been wise to give this time to rest, he instead used this time to distribute tracts and visit the poor. On Sundays, Spurgeon taught a class and eventually began addressing the Sunday-school.³¹ At one of the Sunday-school teachers’ meetings, those in attendance agreed that the male teachers should take turns giving a few words of address on the lesson, alternating with the superintendent. When Spurgeon’s turn came, he did a fine job, and the superintendent then asked him to take his place in addressing the school on the following Sunday. Spurgeon did so and again did well. The superintendent then asked him to address the children every Sunday. Spurgeon objected that this was not fair to the other teachers. The superintendent relented, but he still asked Spurgeon to speak when it was the superintendent’s week to give the address.³²

In the town where Spurgeon attended school, James Vinter led a group of preachers who proclaimed the gospel to the surrounding villages. Vinter asked Spurgeon

²⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:179-80

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:180.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:180–81.

³² *Ibid.*, 1:182.

to go to a nearby village to attend a Sunday evening service. He told Spurgeon that a young man was going to preach and that he would be glad to have the company. This was a cleverly devised sentence, and Spurgeon came to greatly admire Vinter's ingenuity in crafting it. For if Vinter had requested that Spurgeon go to this village and preach, Spurgeon would have refused. However, since the request was for him to accompany a fellow believer who did not like to be lonely, Spurgeon readily agreed. Spurgeon began traveling with a young man a few years older than him. After chatting for a few minutes, Spurgeon expressed his hope that he would feel the presence of God while preaching. The other young man was startled and said that he had never preached and would not be able to even attempt to do so. He was there as company for the young man who would be preaching which he assumed was Spurgeon. Though Spurgeon objected that he was unprepared, the other young man was firm and said that there would be no sermon if Spurgeon did not deliver one.³³

Spurgeon determined that it would be wrong to let the people go home without a word from God. He said that he would depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit and at least proclaim the story of the cross.³⁴ Spurgeon, then a boy of sixteen, stood up for the first time to preach the gospel. He was in a cottage with a handful of poor people gathered for worship. He took for his text "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." (1 Peter 2:7) Spurgeon did not think he could preach from any other text. Christ was precious to his soul, and he could not keep silent when Jesus was the subject. Not a few months before, he was in bondage, and he "had not forgotten the broken fetter."³⁵

From his conversion to his start in ministry the ministry, Spurgeon was

³³ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:200.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:201.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "Christ Precious to Believers," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 5 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1859), 137.

seemingly led by the Holy Spirit. His soul was prepared for the grace of the gospel through the Spirit's work of conviction. Yet when the time came for Spurgeon to believe, he was led to a chapel he did not intend on visiting and heard a man who did not intend on preaching that day all because of a snowstorm. Once converted, he had a passion to serve the Lord, yet throughout, he was continually compelled to do more.

I can truly say, that I never did anything which was a blessing to my fellow-creatures without feeling compelled to do it. For instance, before I thought of going to a Sabbath-school to teach, someone called,—asked me,—begged me,—prayed me to take his class. I could not refuse to go; and there I was, held hand and foot by the superintendent, and was compelled to go on. Then I was asked to address the children; I thought I could not, but I stood up, and stammered out a few words. It was the same on the first occasion when I attempted to preach to the people,—I am sure I had no wish to do it,—but there was no one else in the place who could, and the little congregation must have gone away without a single word of warning or invitation. How could I suffer it? I felt forced to address them; and so it has been with whatever I have laid my hand to. I have always felt a kind of impulse which I could not resist; but, moreover, I have felt placed by Providence in such a position that I had no wish to avoid the duty, and if I had desired it, I could not have helped myself.³⁶

Midsummer Commons

In 1851, at the age of seventeen, Spurgeon began preaching in a town called Waterbeach. He was soon asked to become the pastor of the church in this town. At the same time, Spurgeon sought to more fully prepare for the ministry and was advised to enter Stepney College, later called Regent's Park College. Dr. Angus, the tutor of the college, arranged a meeting with Spurgeon at the house of Mr. Macmillan. Spurgeon entered the house at exactly the appointed time and was shown into a room where he waited patiently for a couple hours. He was far too aware of his own insignificance and the greatness of the tutor to enquire about the long delay. After waiting as long as he could, Spurgeon was forced to leave to attend to some school duties. He spoke to the servant of the house who told him that Dr. Angus waited in another room until he could stay no longer and went to London by train. The servant never informed either of the

³⁶ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:183.

other's presence and, though in the same house, the meeting never occurred.³⁷

Spurgeon saw this missed opportunity as a work of the Holy Spirit. "I was not a little disappointed at the moment, but have a thousand times since thanked the Lord very heartily for the strange Providence which forced my steps into another path."³⁸ In a state of contemplation, Spurgeon walked over Midsummer Common on the way to a preaching engagement. He was still wrestling with the idea of entering college. He was then "startled by what seemed a loud voice, but which may have been a singular illusion."³⁹ Either way, the impression was vivid and intense, and Spurgeon seemed to distinctly hear the words, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!"⁴⁰ Spurgeon admitted that if it were not for those words, he would have probably never accomplished what he has accomplished. He consciously obeyed those words and never saw a reason to regret it. One dissertation claimed that this event was evidence of Spurgeon's mysticism; however, since there is scant evidence of such a claim, this event more clearly points to Spurgeon as a man led by the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

Criticism

While it seems odd from a twenty-first century perspective, Spurgeon was often heavily criticized. Most of this criticism came from other Christians. Though it was seemingly motivated by envy, it had devastating consequences on Spurgeon. However, through these storms, Spurgeon was comforted by the Divine Paraclete. While many sought his destruction, wrote vicious things about him, and even orchestrated the deaths of those who came to listen to him, Spurgeon remained faithful. Spurgeon eloquently

³⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:241.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:241–2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:242.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Crook, "The Contributive Factors," 110–20.

addressed his slanderers in a sermon in 1856.

I am the subject of detraction, but I can point to hundreds of souls that have been saved on earth by my feeble instrumentality, and my reply to all my enemies is this, “You may say what you like; but seeing these lame men are healed, can you say anything against them? You may find fault with the style or manner, but God saves souls, and we will hold up that fact, like giant Goliath’s head, to show you that although it was nothing but a sling or stone, so much the better, for God has gotten the victory.”⁴²

James Wells

One of Spurgeon’s most vicious attackers was a fellow Baptist minister named James Wells. He was a leading pastor among the London Strict Baptists who thought Spurgeon’s sermons contained too little of the things of Calvinism. Spurgeon would disagree. “And I have my own private opinion that there is no such a thing as preaching Christ and him crucified, unless you preach what now-a-days is called Calvinism. . . . It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else.”⁴³ Rather than comradery, Spurgeon found animosity from the other Calvinistic Baptists in London.

James Wells was one of the more vocal and hurtful critics. In January 1855, eight months after Spurgeon became the pastor of New Park Street Chapel in London, Wells wrote a long article for *The Earthen Vessel*. Wells, under the pseudonym Job, claimed to have doubts about Spurgeon’s conversion.⁴⁴ Wells stated that Spurgeon’s ministry was “most awfully deceptive”, produces false converts, and will soon have the numerous people who came to hear him leave in droves.⁴⁵ Nettles noted that Wells put forth five reasoned arguments that prove Spurgeon’s ministry was a fatal delusion. The sum of these arguments was that Wells believed that Spurgeon “exhibited only the form

⁴² C. H. Spurgeon, “Omniscience,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 255.

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Christ Crucified,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 50.

⁴⁴ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:36-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:39.

of Christianity but none of the Holy Spirit power of it.”⁴⁶

Spurgeon responded to this attack by showing that Wells may not have been wise to rebuke the young pastor. “I find much stir has been made by ‘Job’s letter’, and hosts of unknown persons have risen up on my behalf. It seems very likely that King James (James Wells) will shake his own throne by lifting his hand against one of the Lord’s little ones.”⁴⁷ A contemporary biographer, G. Holden Pike, said Spurgeon wrote to a dying Wells, saying, “Personally I own my great obligations to the furnace and the hammer; and I am sure that you also rejoice in the assurance that tribulation worketh patience, and brings, through the supply of the Spirit, a long train of blessings with it.”⁴⁸ Spurgeon saw the leading of the Holy Spirit even in the criticism of fellow workers of the kingdom.

Surrey Gardens Tragedy

The criticism that Spurgeon received continued throughout his ministry with his later years being occupied with the Downgrade Controversy. However, one event remains as a clear culmination of the criticism he faced. It began with the New Park Street Chapel realizing that their building was far too small the crowds of people who wanted to hear Spurgeon preach. The church occupied Exeter Hall for several weeks, but the directors of Exeter Hall refused to let New Park Street Chapel further occupy that place. The church then decided to rent the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens for one month beginning on the third Sunday in October 1856.⁴⁹

On October 19th, twelve thousand people gathered in the music hall to hear

⁴⁶ Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 95.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:19.

⁴⁸ G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of C.H. Spurgeon*, 6 vols. (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1894), 5:35.

⁴⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:199.

Spurgeon preach. Many more thousands were outside unable to enter, and the hall was filled to capacity. As the building was completely occupied, Spurgeon began the service about ten minutes early. After a time of singing, Spurgeon took the platform to pray. According to the minutes of New Park Street Chapel, “This was the moment chosen by the emissaries of darkness to spring the mine of mischief, which, in effect, resulted in manifold murder!”⁵⁰ During this time of prayer, “there were cries simultaneously, doubtless preconcerted, from all parts of the building, of ‘Fire!’ ‘The galleries are giving way!’ ‘The place is falling!’ the effect of which on the audience it is impossible to describe.”⁵¹

The recollections of this event were clear that this was a deliberate act of malice. One account claimed that those who yelled “understood their business thoroughly” and that they executed their plans with military precision.⁵² Another account stated that the shouts “could be likened to nothing but the sudden bursting forth of an immense body of trained singers, or a vast reservoir of water, whose sluices were opened, or whose banks had given way.”⁵³ This account went on to claim that those who shouted were not only well practiced but also started the stampede towards the doors.⁵⁴ Those who fell to the ground were trampled. The matter was made worse because as soon as a few people escaped the building others rushed into the building. Spurgeon, who was unaware of the extent of the commotion, tried to preach, but was unable to due to the noise of the crowd. He then pronounced a benediction and was led from the platform in a state of apparent unconsciousness. Serious bodily injuries were inflicted upon a great

⁵⁰ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:203.

⁵¹ This quote is from Dr. Alexander Fletcher in a sermon he preached soon after the event. *Ibid.*, 2:204–5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2:203.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:204.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

number of people, and seven lives were lost.⁵⁵

A police investigation concluded that the deaths were accidental. No one was ever charged or accused of being the instigators of this tragedy.⁵⁶ The minutes of New Park Street Chapel recorded the event and also included a statement on Spurgeon's response to the tragedy. "This lamentable circumstance produced very serious effects on the nervous system of our Pastor. He was entirely prostrated for some days, and compelled to relinquish his preaching engagements."⁵⁷ Spurgeon's own recollection was similar saying, "I was, for a short time, incapable of any mental effort."⁵⁸

He went on to record the anguish he experienced due to the "malicious act of wicked men".⁵⁹ It was a night that time never erased from his memory. After he learned the full extent of the events that transpired that night, Spurgeon refused to be comforted, "tears were my meat by day, and dreams my terror by night."⁶⁰ Spurgeon found difficulty in the spiritual disciplines that once brought him joy and sustenance. "My Bible, once my daily food, was but a hand to lift the sluices of my woe. Prayer yielded no balm to me; in fact, my soul was like an infant's soul, and I could not rise to the dignity of supplication."⁶¹

In this dark and downcast place, Spurgeon felt a reinvigoration that he attributed to the Holy Spirit. Like a flash of lightning from the sky, his soul returned to him. The burning in his brain and the throbbing of his head ceased. "I was free, the iron

⁵⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:205.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:213.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:207.

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Savior: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus* (London: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1858), 340.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 341.

fetter was broken in pieces, my prison door was open, I leaped for joy of heart.”⁶²

Spurgeon was refreshed with the unspeakable delight that comes from knowing God’s infinite excellence. He now counted ridicule and despair as less than nothing for God’s sake. He was filled with a peace and joy that he last experienced at the time of his conversion.⁶³ Two weeks after the tragedy, Spurgeon reentered the pulpit on November 2nd. On that morning, Spurgeon said, “God forgive those who were the instigators of that horrid act! They have my forgiveness from the depths of my soul. *It shall not stop us, however; we are not in the least degree daunted by it.*”⁶⁴

Spurgeon used this tragedy many times as an illustration that accidents are not to be regarded as Divine judgments. He made this point in a sermon entitled “Accidents, not Punishments” that he preached after the collision of two trains in the Clayton Tunnel, a mile and a half long tunnel between London and Brighton. To Spurgeon, this sermon was more memorable than others because he possessed a copy of it which David Livingstone carried with him to Africa and on which was written “Very good. -D.L.”⁶⁵ In this sermon, Spurgeon pointed out that if disaster or death is a sure of God’s judgement against something, then it is a fair inference that the congregation of New Park Street Chapel was sinful in being at the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens. From experience, Spurgeon knew this not to be true. They met for no other objective than to serve God. Spurgeon had no desire to preach at that place except that by doing so many would be able to hear him preach the gospel. He concluded that while accidents may be tragic, they are not evidence of God’s judgment.⁶⁶

⁶² Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Savior*, 342.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 343–44.

⁶⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Exaltation of Christ,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 377. Italics in original.

⁶⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:214–15.

⁶⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Accidents, Not Punishments,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*

Spurgeon was forever changed by this event even though Spurgeon was refreshed by the Holy Spirit after suffering a time of anguish and tried to use the tragedy to show biblical truths. “I thank God that, terrible as the great catastrophe was, there was never in my experience another like it, for I do not think I could have survived a second one.”⁶⁷ Twenty-five years after the tragedy, Spurgeon remained affected by it. In 1881, during a session of the Baptist Union, Spurgeon was to preach in the largest available room in Southampton. Before the service began, every seat and all standing room areas were completely occupied, yet there were still hundreds pressing forward. Some confusion happened as Spurgeon was getting on the platform. He seemed very distraught. He leaned his head on his hand and said that the circumstance vividly recalled the terrible scene at the Surrey Music Hall and that he felt unable to preach. “But he did preach, and preach well, though he could not entirely recover from the agitation of his nervous system.”⁶⁸

A student and friend of Spurgeon, William Williams, recalled how much the event affected him. Spurgeon asked Williams on what verse he was planning on preaching? Williams replied that he was preaching on “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just.” Before he finished saying the verse, Spurgeon’s countenance dropped. Williams asked why Spurgeon’s demeanor had become so solemn. Spurgeon replied that this was the text that he was to preach on the night of the accident at the Surrey Music Hall. Williams was unaware but learned how permanent the effect was upon Spurgeon’s mind. Williams said, “I never alluded either to this text or to the Surrey Gardens calamity after that. I cannot but think, from what I then saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the

Sermons, vol. 7 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1861), 484.

⁶⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:218.

⁶⁸ Robert Shindler, *From the Usher’s Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labours of Pastor C.H. Spurgeon* (Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 96–97.

furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night.”⁶⁹

Health Issues

Spurgeon suffered. His life was marked with chronic pain and depression. His physical health began to wane early in his ministry. He was afflicted with gout and ultimately died from Bright’s disease, a chronic affliction of the kidneys characterized by swelling. His failing health required that he spend many months in the south of France recovering in the warm weather. In addition to deteriorating health, Spurgeon also suffered from depression. While there are some circumstances that worsened his depression like the tragedy at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, Spurgeon was chronically afflicted with depression. Yet through all of these dark times, Spurgeon found comfort and strength in God. He was led by the Holy Spirit through the valley of death fearing no evil.

Gout

Spurgeon inherited his gout. Both his father and grandfather suffered from the affliction. His grandfather said, “Charles, I have nothing to leave you but rheumatic gout; and I have left you a good deal of that.”⁷⁰ Spurgeon also said to a friend that he had inherited most of his father’s excellences and the gout with them.⁷¹ This family trait was very painful. In a letter to Archibald G. Brown, Spurgeon quoted Lucian the ancient Syrian satirist and rhetorician, “I thought a cobra had bitten me, and filled my veins with poison; but it was worse – it was gout.” To this, Spurgeon added, “That was written from

⁶⁹ William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 46.

⁷⁰ Richard Ellsworth Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1934), 21.

⁷¹ Jesse Page, *C.H. Spurgeon: His Life and Ministry* (S. W. Partridge & Company, 1892), 148. William Albert pointed out that Lewis Drummond disputed the fact that Spurgeon’s father had gout. Drummond said that Spurgeon’s father had escaped “the family curse”. Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 577. Albert challenged this claim. Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 64.

experience, I know.”⁷² When asked what gout is like, Spurgeon replied, “If you put your hand into a vice and let a man press as hard as he can, this is rheumatism; and if he can be got to press a little harder, that is gout.”⁷³

Since Spurgeon often mentioned his gout in his sermons and writings, his condition was well known to the public. In 1874, an Anglican clergyman wrote to inform Spurgeon that gout is sent as a judgment from God for opposing the Church of England. To this charge Spurgeon replied, “If a swollen hand or foot was to be regarded as a mark of Divine displeasure, what was to be said concerning a broken neck?”⁷⁴ This was a reference to Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Winchester, who had recently fell off his horse and died from his injuries. Needless to say, Spurgeon never received an answer to that question even though he included this exchange in *The Sword and the Trowel*.⁷⁵

As a public figure with a known disease, Spurgeon received dozens of recommendations for alleviating his suffering. He wrote an article in 1867 thanking all those who sent him prescriptions of eminent physicians as well as advice to do things that ranged from cold compresses to animal magnetism. He remarked that it was a “comfort to discover that there are at least hundreds of ways in which rheumatism and rheumatic gout may be cured, in periods varying from an hour to a week.”⁷⁶ He then asked for his readers to stop sending him things as he has all that he needs and is under the care of a fine physician, Dr. Palfrey of Finsbury Place.⁷⁷ Some twenty-four years later, Spurgeon wrote that his enemy of gout is going “driven out by medicine, starved out by oatmeal

⁷² Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 147.

⁷³ Page, *C.H. Spurgeon*, 148.

⁷⁴ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:133.

⁷⁵ Spurgeon, *ST: 1874*, 117.

⁷⁶ Spurgeon, *ST: 1867*, 382.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

and nothing else for lunches and dinners.”⁷⁸

Victorian physicians often recommended a few things for those suffering from gout. It is reasonable to infer that Spurgeon may have been prescribed arsenic and opium both as a sedative to treat his depression and as a medicine to attack his gout and kidney disease. It seems, however, that Spurgeon never took these drugs as there is no record.⁷⁹ Another treatment that Spurgeon did not embrace was that of exercise. Many Victorian physicians believed that exercise was considered one of the greatest preventative measures against gout.⁸⁰ Long walks and horseback riding were recommended; however, Spurgeon did not like horseback riding and the only sport he enjoyed was the game of bowls which involves carefully rolling weighted balls with the intention of getting them closest to a smaller ball. This, along with the fact that gout sufferers prefer being off their feet as much as possible, makes the conclusion that Spurgeon exercised very little rather reasonable.⁸¹

Victorian physicians did make one recommended treatment for the treatment of gout that Spurgeon fully embraced. They endorsed trips to the sea.⁸² In 1871, Spurgeon took his first trip to the French Riviera. It was part of a longer trip that included visits to Rome, Naples, and Pompeii. As Susannah was too ill for the journey, Spurgeon wrote to her about a French city which immediately captured his attention. “Mentone is charming, but not very warm. It is as I like it, and is calculated to make a sick man leap

⁷⁸ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:350-1. This was recorded in January of 1891 when Spurgeon was asked to open a new Scotch Church but was overcome with a “sudden seizure of gout in both hands and one foot”. He took the service at this Scotch Church but was quite ill. He stated that he, “got through the sermon with trembling knees, and the bell gone out of my voice.”

⁷⁹ Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 153.

⁸⁰T. J. Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health, Invigorating Life by Regulating the Diet and Regimen* (London: Simpkin Press, 1842), 228.

⁸¹ Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 163.

⁸² Graham, *The Best Methods*, 69–70.

with health. How I wish you could be here!”⁸³ This began an annual tradition for Spurgeon to return to Mentone each winter to escape the damp and polluted air of London in an effort to rejuvenate his health. He eventually died in Mentone.

While Spurgeon’s gout may have been in large part hereditary, the severity of his condition was intensified by the painful aggravation of his joints due to added symptoms of Bright’s disease.⁸⁴ Bright’s disease is a historical classification of kidney diseases that would be described in modern medicine as acute or chronic nephritis which is the inflammation of the kidneys.⁸⁵ As Nicholas Brennecke pointed out, Spurgeon may have been diabetic which would have intensified his gout and Bright’s disease.⁸⁶ It is unclear when Spurgeon began suffering from Bright’s disease. Some scholars supposed that it developed later in life. Meanwhile, Patricia Kruppa claimed that Spurgeon began “to suffer from kidney trouble in his early twenties, which, complicated by rheumatic gout, led finally to chronic Bright's disease.”⁸⁷ Regardless of when it began, Charles Spurgeon died on January 31, 1892, from Bright’s disease.

Spurgeon experienced much physical pain and became fully aware of the impact that the body can have on the mind.⁸⁸ In his life, this manifested itself in such things as physical-fatigue as well as a loss of vitality. All that Spurgeon accomplished throughout his ministry, from the Pastor’s College to the orphanages to the books written and the sermons preached, accounts to a nearly unbelievable sum of productivity and

⁸³ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:238.

⁸⁴ Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 599–600.

⁸⁵ J. S. Cameron, “Bright’s Disease Today: The Pathogenesis and Treatment of Glomerulonephritis—1,” *British Medical Journal* 4, no. 5832 (October 14, 1972): 87–90.

⁸⁶ Brennecke, “Gout Killed Him”, 4. This is an interesting observation although Brennecke’s ultimate claim that it was gout that killed Spurgeon is less convincing. I agree with the other scholars that Spurgeon died from Bright’s disease.

⁸⁷ Kruppa, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon, A Preacher’s Progress,” 107.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Skoglund, *Bright Days, Dark Nights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 32.

influence. However, when his accomplishments are considered in light of his physical suffering it approaches incomprehensibility for his gout was so severe that it would often reduce him to near invalid status.⁸⁹ He was seemingly empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the good word set before him.

Depression

Spurgeon was subject to spiritual depression.⁹⁰ While he was an extraordinary laborer for Christ reaping a plentiful harvest of spiritual fruit, such a bounty did not come without a price as William Albert points out. “The cost was immense, varied and regular depression.”⁹¹ However, suffering in depression was a key factor in Spurgeon’s spirituality as it could be designed for spiritual measures. Spurgeon “firmly embraced that suffering, which included depression, was predicted by the divine revelation of Scripture, rooted and illustrated by Jesus Christ, sustained and nourished by faith in the living Christ, and maintained through the conscientious practice of spiritual devotion.”⁹²

Spurgeon regularly used his suffering as means of ministering to sorrowful people. His friend and former student William Williams said that Spurgeon “was as familiar with the glades of grief and the dark narrow gorges of depression as any man, or he could never with such consummate art have ministered comfort to the suffering, sorrowing sons of men.”⁹³ Dallimore, in his biography stated: “In his audiences each Sunday sat hundreds of persons who had come from a week of trial and who needed kindness and encouragement, and here was the man who could give it. His voice was

⁸⁹ Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 65.

⁹⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 18. Lloyd-Jones stated that the main explanation for his spiritual depression was the physical suffering of his “gouty condition”.

⁹¹ Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹³ Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 18.

often broken with his feeling for the sorrowing.”⁹⁴ Zack Eswine has sought to apply Spurgeon’s views on and experience with depression to modern believers with comparable struggles.⁹⁵

When speaking to his students, Spurgeon was frank about the reality of depression and sought to prepare them for it.

Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, the Lord knows, and makes them to know, that they are but dust. Knowing by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between, I thought it might be consolatory to some of my brethren if I gave my thoughts thereon, that younger men might not fancy that some strange thing had happened to them when they became for a season possessed by melancholy.⁹⁶

Spurgeon went on to say that because the work of God is a work of the heart and soul, by its very nature, it can lead to a melancholy state for the pastor knows too well of sin’s disastrous consequences and learns of many painful situations in the lives of his congregation. Spurgeon made this point succinctly saying, “Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression.”⁹⁷ Spurgeon did not only speak to his students with such honesty; he preached often on the topic of suffering and depression. He mentioned these topics, albeit briefly, an average of fourteen times per sermon. In addition, he took suffering and depression as the central focus in eight percent of his sermons.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 186.

⁹⁵ Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of CH Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006); Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon’s Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014). In *Kindled Fire*, Eswine devoted a chapter on the unique depression that affected Spurgeon as a pastor.

⁹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors’ College, Metropolitan Tabernacle.*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875), 167.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:170.

⁹⁸ Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold,” 29. He claims approximately five hundred sermons

Through his depression, Spurgeon kept his eyes on Christ. He knew that his suffering was neither in vain nor outside of Christ's domain. His depression made him more relatable and effective as a communicator of the gospel. The Holy Spirit sustained him throughout. His faith never faltered. He was seemingly empowered by the Spirit to turn this unquestionable negative into an unquestionable good. That Spurgeon's ministry maintained such soundness and consistency in the midst of his struggle with both gout and depression indicates that he was spiritually sustained even in the absence of physical strength and mental exuberance. His life shows how one who is cradled by the Holy Spirit handles chronic pain and spiritual depression.

Conclusion

Spurgeon lived a Spirit-led life. This did not mean that his life was empty of struggles. To the contrary, Spurgeon suffered for years both physically and mentally. However, through it all, the Spirit was there to sustain him. Spurgeon's life is soaked through with examples of the Spirit's guidance. It started when Spurgeon was a boy and a respected preacher said that Spurgeon would preach to multitudes. It continued through a snowstorm that forced Spurgeon into a Primitive Methodist chapel wherein Spurgeon heard the gospel and was converted. When Spurgeon later sought to attend college, the Spirit was again there to intervene. Divine sovereignty eventually placed Spurgeon in the place where he could most benefit the kingdom. He faced criticism and hatred that spurred him to depression, but the Spirit was there to strengthen this servant. This Spirit-led preacher lived a Spirit-led life.

from the MTP have a major theme of suffering and/or depression.

CHAPTER 3

INSPIRATION OF THE TEXT

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher and since the Spirit's ministry for preaching is "intentionally and explicitly identified" there are certain aspects which much accord with the life, ministry, and sermon content of a Spirit-led preacher.¹ According to Heisler, these are "(1) the inspiration of the text, (2) the illumination of the preacher studying the text, (3) the conviction of the message, (4) the empowerment of the preacher, (5) the Spirit's Christological witness, and (6) Spirit-filled living."² Attention will now be placed on the first of these six criteria. In order to be Spirit-led, a preacher must have a deep understanding of the inspiration of the text. This doctrine of inspiration needs to extend beyond the issue of inherency and to an attitude that sees Scripture as highly valuable and practical. The Spirit-led preacher recognizes that through the Bible, God spoke and that the Holy Spirit still speaks. The Spirit-led preacher has great confidence in his message, but this confidence comes from God's revealed Word.³ In all of these aspects, Spurgeon was faithful to the inspiration of the text.

Doctrine of Inspiration

When Heisler set forth the criteria of belief in the inspiration of the text for a Spirit-led preacher, he was referring to a particular type of inspiration, the total, verbal

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 21.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 62.

inspiration of the Old and New Testaments by the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴ After this, three aspects related to inspiration will be considered: the inerrancy of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and an attitude of treasuring Scripture. Inerrancy as part of a discussion on the doctrine of inspiration needs little defense for if the Bible is inspired by a holy and perfect God, then it will be without error. Likewise, the authority of Scripture while distinct from inerrancy is often included in discussion of inspiration. However, the Spirit-led preacher must also see the beauty in Scripture and highly value it. For even if a preacher sees no errors in the Bible and seeks to follow it as a guiding principle in his life and as the basis of truth in his sermons, if he does not do so joyfully he is not Spirit-led. Spurgeon not only agreed with this view of inspiration but also strongly advocated for it.

Plenary and Verbal Inspiration

Spurgeon used both the qualifiers of verbal and plenary to describe his views on inspiration, and his interpretation of these left little doubt regarding his views on authority. “We contend for every word of the Bible, and believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture, believing indeed that there can be no other inspiration but that.”⁵ Earlier, he said that he accepted the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact as opposed to a theory and that “If we are left in doubt as to which part is inspired and which is not, we are as badly off as if we had no Bible at all.”⁶

Spurgeon’s view on the doctrine of inspiration were rather fleshed out which should not come as a surprise given his enormous output. Spurgeon taught that there is a human side to inspiration. “Whoever doubted this?”⁷ However, this is not to say that the

⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Ever-Present Crisis,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 430.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Infallibility of Scripture,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 152.

⁷ Spurgeon, *ST*: 1889, 551.

writers of Scripture completely understood all of the implication and further revelations of what they wrote. They did not altogether understand what they revealed “for the Holy Spirit often carried them beyond themselves and made them utter more than they understood. The inspiration of the Bible is verbal inspiration. In some cases, it must have been only verbal; in every case it must have been mainly so.”⁸

Spurgeon taught that it was not the thoughts of the prophet which have been inspired by God so much as the words. They often were moved to speak prophecies beyond their understanding. In fact, all the mysteries of the faith are beyond human comprehension and no one, not even an inspired man, has ever known all the depths of God’s meaning contained within Scripture. Therefore, Spurgeon asserted that the Biblical authors were afforded verbal inspiration and that no other sort of inspiration was worthy of being called “inspiration.”⁹

While Spurgeon was fully assured that his Authorized Version of the Scripture was “sufficient for plain men for all purposes of life, salvation, and godliness”, he never claimed that either English versions were inspired.¹⁰ Spurgeon claimed that there are mistakes in the translation, but that in the original texts, as they were first written, he was not afraid to say that every jot or tittle was infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹¹ By way of example, Spurgeon sought to preach from the phrase “He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted” from Luke 4:18; however, he discovered that this phrase, while included in the Authorized Version, was rightfully omitted from the Revised Version. He

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “Your Personal Salvation,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 26 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 124.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Job among the Ashes,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 98.

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World (Final Manifesto)* (Toronto; New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), 29. Spurgeon was referring to the Authorized Version (KJV) and the Revised Version.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Living on the Word,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 44 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1898), 318.

supposed that some pious person added it, but “it is a pity that the unknown brother ventured to improve that which was perfect from the beginning.”¹²

Since Spurgeon only claimed verbal inspiration for the original text, it would follow that he would desire his hearers to read the Bible in the original language. However, here Spurgeon employed a wise double standard. While he would not dissuade his congregation from reading Scripture in the original text, he did say that “for all practical purposes the text we have is correct enough, and our old Authorized Version is a sound one.”¹³ On the other hand, he was clear that anyone who wished to comment upon Scripture must be able to read it in the original. “Every minister should aim at a tolerable proficiency both in the Hebrew and the Greek.”¹⁴ Spurgeon continued saying that ministers should not “forget that translations cannot be verbally inspired, and that to the original is the last appeal.”¹⁵

Spurgeon did not concern himself or his hearers too much with the mechanics of how the Bible was inspired. “I do not much mind how it is; I know that it is inspired, and that is enough for me, and I believe that it is verbally inspired.”¹⁶ Spurgeon saw how the Biblical authors quoted and used Scripture, and this is the reason he was so adamant about the verbal inspiration.

I find the apostle Paul hanging a weighty argument upon the use of a singular or a plural, where he says, “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy *seed*, which is Christ.” I find the apostle Peter dwelling upon a word spoken by a woman, and making it teach an important lesson: “Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord,” and so forth.¹⁷

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, “Heart-Disease Curable,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 27 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 341.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord’s Prayer for His People’s Sanctification,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 32 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1886), 155.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *ST: 1869*, 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, “Living on the Word,” 318.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In another sermon, Spurgeon stated that he believed in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and that those who reject verbal inspiration must in effect condemn the apostle Paul because his teaching was frequently based upon a word.¹⁸

One of the implications for Spurgeon's view of verbal and plenary inspiration is his adoration for the exact words of Scripture. "I can never refuse to believe in plenary inspiration while I have before me so many instances in which the mere tense, number and position of certain words, have been the instruments of quickening and consolation."¹⁹ In a later sermon, he preached on the how the very words of the Bible become wonderfully dear to the true child of God. As such, he willfully accepted verbal inspiration for he knew what it was like to hang his hope upon a single word of God.²⁰

There is a divine charm—a mystic power—about the very words of the Lord. I can never doubt the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, since I so constantly see, in actual practice, how the very words that God has been pleased to employ are blessed to the souls of men,—not merely their sense, but the very language.²¹

Spurgeon was well aware that his view on inspiration were attacked "in a thousand insidious ways. The fall of Adam is treated as a fable; and original sin and imputed righteousness are both denounced."²² He lived "in a day when even a bishop has ventured to impugn plenary inspiration."²³ Spurgeon pointed out that though malcontents think it foolish to speak of verbal inspiration, "I believe that we must have verbal

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "First King of Righteousness, and after That King of Peace," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 30 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1884), 121.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Means for Restoring the Banished," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 510.

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Jonah's Resolve, or 'Look Again!,'" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 30 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1884), 668.

²¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Need and Nature of Conversion," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 456.

²² C. H. Spurgeon, "A Dirge for the Down-Grade and a Song for Faith," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 35 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), 266.

²³ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Message from God for Thee," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 8 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 648.

inspiration or no inspiration.”²⁴ He put a finer point on this saying, “If the words are not inspired, neither is the sense, since there can be no sense apart from the words.”²⁵ In a much earlier sermon, Spurgeon expressed the same sentiment saying that he could not see how the sense of Scripture is inspired if the words are not also inspired. He went on to say that he firmly believed that if he were to give up his Master’s words, he must give up his thoughts also.²⁶

Spurgeon had little tolerance for any system of thought that eroded verbal plenary inspiration. He called such systems a tangled mass of ill weeds “which is nothing better than an infidelity too cowardly to wear its proper name.”²⁷ They denied plenary inspiration, yet churches allowed them to pollute the pulpits. Such men still claim to be ministers of the gospel even though they have plunged their daggers into the heart of vital doctrines as best they can, and then they “ask to be received into union on the ground of some peculiar inward virtue which exists in them apart from all doctrinal belief.”²⁸ In an earlier sermon, he compared such men to lions who prowled the jungle looking for the unaware antelope. When he found the antelope, he snatched in his fangs with the boastful exclamation, “Believe in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures! I cannot believe in any such absurdity” for this lion sought an intellectual religion for which he can be the judge.²⁹

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Taught That We May Teach,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 27 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 41.

²⁵ Spurgeon, “Jonah’s Resolve, or ‘Look Again!’”, 668.

²⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “God’s Thoughts and Ours,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 187. Though this sermon is published long after Spurgeon’s death, it was preached on Thursday, March 19, 1868 and, therefore, predates the previous quote by over 13 years as it was preached on Sunday, December 14, 1884.

²⁷ Spurgeon, *ST: 1878*, 225.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Lions Lacking—But the Children Satisfied,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 93–94.

Spurgeon was aggravated by those who sought to undermine verbal inspiration because they do this to rob believers of the choice truths of the gospel and thereby take away their portion from the people of God.³⁰ Though Spurgeon was well aware of the books of the broad school which came from Germany and were later produced in England, he felt it a pity to have even seen the bindings of these books. He wished that he had never heard of the existence of these quibblers and lamented that doctors of divinity were not only denying plenary inspiration but were aiding in that undermining work. These men may have all their books as long as Spurgeon can keep his Bible.³¹ Such denials of verbal inspiration undermine the message. Spurgeon said it this way, “words are to the thought what the shell is to the egg; and if you break the shell, you have destroyed the egg; somehow or other, the thought will ooze out unless it is conveyed in God’s own words.”³²

Spurgeon was firmly committed to the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture. As his friend and former student Archibald Brown said, “He maintained the perfectly verbal inspiration of the Bible from beginning to end, and that the Bible does not simply *contain* the Word of God, but that it *is* the Word of God.”³³ Spurgeon was clear in his commitments saying, “If it be folly to keep to what we find in Scripture, and if it be madness to believe in verbal inspiration, we purpose to remain fools to the end of the chapter, and hope to be among the foolish things which God has chosen.”³⁴

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “God Our Portion and His Word Our Treasure,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 23 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1877), 501.

³¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “God Glorified by Children’s Mouths,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 26 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 382.

³² C. H. Spurgeon, “Wakeful and Watchful Eyes,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 622.

³³ James T. Allen, *Charles H. Spurgeon: The Essex Lad Who Became the Prince of Preachers* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1893), 47. Italics in original.

³⁴ Spurgeon, *ST: 1872*, 152.

Inerrancy of Scripture

The doctrine of inerrancy quickly flows from the inspiration of Scripture. In inspiration, the Holy Spirit supernaturally influenced the writers of Scripture in such a way as to accurately record God's revelation.³⁵ As such, "Inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teaching."³⁶ Spurgeon unequivocally believed this doctrine and taught it from the pulpit. "Glory be to his name, the words of the Lord are without evil, without error, and without failure."³⁷

Spurgeon firmly believed "in the historic accuracy of every word of this blessed old Bible; in the absolute truth of everything that is recorded here."³⁸ He went on to say that he believed in the certainty of the fulfillment of every promise and every threat and that every unfulfilled prophecy is "just as certain as certainty itself."³⁹ Spurgeon pointed out that if someone cannot make all the truths in the Bible agree, then that person has done what not even God can do. For though God is mighty, He is unable to make two sets of truths opposite to each other.⁴⁰ The fault, therefore, lies not in the source of truth but in the interpretation.

Much like inspiration, Spurgeon only extended infallibility to the original texts. Though he thought the English translations available were quite good, it is only God's original that he accepts as infallible.⁴¹ He admitted that there are mistakes in the

³⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 225.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Bible Tried and Proved," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 35 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), 258.

³⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "Open Praise and Public Confession," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 21.

³⁹ Spurgeon, "Open Praise and Public Confession," 21.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Plea of Faith," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 275.

⁴¹ Spurgeon, "Jonah's Resolve, or 'Look Again!,'" 668.

translation as has already been discussed, but he believed “in the infallibility and the infinity of Holy Scripture.”⁴²

Of course, Spurgeon acknowledged that there was a human side to inspiration. Some drew from this an inference that the Bible must contain imperfection because man is imperfect.

But the inference is not true. God can come into the nearest union with manhood, and he can use men for his purposes, and yet their acts may not in the least degree stain his purposes with moral obliquity. Even so he can utter his thoughts by men, and those thoughts may not be in the least affected by the natural fallibility of man.⁴³

Spurgeon went on to argue that in the incarnation the Godhead was not deprived of any moral attributes due to its union with man. In the same way, the Bible is the union of the divine and human and the thoughts of God are in no degree perverted by being written in the words of men. It did not matter how others thought of this for Spurgeon said that he would not cease to believe it with all his heart and soul.⁴⁴

Spurgeon had little tolerance for people who claimed there were errors in the Bible. These people profess that they cannot understand the gospel, but they understand it enough to cast slurs upon it. “They have a cruelly keen eye for non-existent errors in Scripture: they find this mistake in Deuteronomy, and the other in Genesis.”⁴⁵ Spurgeon was crystal clear in his explanation saying, “The Holy Spirit has made no mistake, either in history, physics, theology, or anything else. God is a greater Scientist than any of those who assume that title.”⁴⁶

This last quote is a direct refutation of a charge laid at Spurgeon’s feet in the

⁴² Spurgeon, “Living on the Word,” 318.

⁴³ Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*: 1889, 551.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “Jesus Angry with Hard Hearts,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 32 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1886), 185.

⁴⁶ Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*: 1889, 551.

1980s. In an endnote, Craig Skinner quotes an from article from the 1889 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel*. According to Skinner, in this article John Tuckwell suggested an amendment to the London Baptist Association that read, “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament...be an infallible and sufficient guide in all matters of religious faith and practice.”⁴⁷ Skinner then said,

C. H. Spurgeon’s acceptance of this suggestion as a worthy one underlines the conviction of infallibility as meaning that there was an unfailing confidence in Scripture’s ability to fulfill the purposes for which it was created, chiefly, the “making wise unto salvation” purpose. There is no discussion of the historical/scientific accuracy/inerrancy question in all of Spurgeon’s convictions regarding inspiration.

Skinner’s attempt to put Spurgeon view on inerrancy in the neo-orthodox category with Karl Barth and Emil Bruner fails on several accounts. First, Skinner woefully misconstrued *The Sword and the Trowel* article. In this article, Tuckwell proposed seven questions to which he hoped would may be useful in the detection of “Modern Thought” which he considers to be error. Skinner quotes part of the first of these questions. “Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be an infallible and sufficient guide in all matters of religious faith and practice?”⁴⁸ Tuckwell’s second question shed light on how he hoped these questions would be used. “Do you believe in the deity as well as divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, i.e., that he is himself God? Note that a man may acknowledge Christ to be divine, as he might acknowledge the Bible to be divine, without admitting that he is God.” Clearly, Tuckwell devised these questions to discover if someone was orthodox or trying to cleverly redefine terms to appear orthodox.

Furthermore, while Spurgeon did publish Tuckwell’s list of questions, he did

⁴⁷ Craig Skinner, *Spurgeon & Son: The Forgotten Story of Thomas Spurgeon and His Famous Father, Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 255. This book was originally published in 1984.

⁴⁸ Spurgeon, *ST: 1889*, 75.

not endorse them. In fact, he said while Tuckwell is commendable in trying to gauge someone's theology, even questions like these "will not bring slippery gentlemen to book."⁴⁹ Therefore, Skinner's claim that Spurgeon accepted Tuckwell's statement as worthy is simply false.

In addition to Spurgeon's not agreeing with this statement and the fact that this statement was in fact a question, Skinner's characterization of Spurgeon's inerrancy fails in at least two more ways. First, as was pointed out by Whitcomb, the fact that Spurgeon did not spell out in exact late-twentieth century theological terms his convictions concerning infallibility does not mean that he would side with the anti-inerrancy position of Karl Barth.⁵⁰ Second, Skinner claimed "There is no discussion of the historical/scientific accuracy/inerrancy question in all of Spurgeon's convictions regarding inspiration."⁵¹ This is completely false. When speaking about Biblical inspiration and so-called errors in Scripture, Spurgeon said, "The Holy Spirit has made no mistake, either in history, physics, theology, or anything else. God is a greater Scientist than any of those who assume that title."⁵² Spurgeon preached a sermon on the infallibility of Scripture during which he said that science, when in conflict with Scripture, is false.⁵³

Authority of Scripture

To be Spirit-led, a preacher must not only see the Bible as from God and without error, but he must also see the Bible as the ultimate authority in his life. The

⁴⁹ Spurgeon, *ST: 1889*, 75.

⁵⁰ John C. Whitcomb, "C. H. Spurgeon, Biblical Inerrancy, and Premillennialism," *Grace Theological Journal* 7.2 (1986): 232.

⁵¹ Skinner, *Spurgeon & Son*, 255.

⁵² Spurgeon, *ST: 1889*, 551.

⁵³ Spurgeon, "The Infallibility of Scripture," 148.

authority for the preacher's message comes from the text itself, the very Word of God, and thereby invokes the ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ The Holy Spirit testifies to Scriptures inherent authority.⁵⁵ Spurgeon was in complete agreement with this as he believed and preached that man must submit to Scripture saying that the only authority and standard he recognized was the inspired Word of God.⁵⁶

Spurgeon preached that in himself he has no authority to command his congregation. If he wandered from the truth of Scripture, he should be ignored. Yet, when he spoke according to the blessed Book, he had all the authority he needed.⁵⁷ When he preached, he came to tell his hearers what he received upon divine authority. His hearers should not receive his testimony because it came from him, but because it was supported by divine authority and was, in fact, the echo of the divine word.⁵⁸ In preaching on John 14:23, "If a man love me, he will keep my words", Spurgeon said that those who love Jesus will believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, regard his teaching as infallible, and, most of all, carry out the words of the Lord through a change in behavior, enshrining them in daily life.⁵⁹

Treasured

"Spirit-led preaching cherishes and treasures the Spirit's inspiration."⁶⁰ The

⁵⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Right Observance of the Lord's Supper," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 422.

⁵⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "Christ's Ambassadors," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 55 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1909), 284.

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Message from the Lord's Mouth," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 24 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1878), 484.

⁵⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Love's Law and Life," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 32 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1886), 651.

⁶⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 44.

Spirit-led preacher not only sees the Bible as a faultless, inspired authority, he also loves it. Spurgeon loved his Bible. He often preached on the joy and sweetness he found in reading it. In *The Treasure of David*, Spurgeon commented on Psalm 19 by saying that the pleasures arising from a right understanding of the divine testimonies are so great that earthly enjoyments are utterly contemptible by comparison.⁶¹ During a sermon, Spurgeon told the story of a German Christian woman who made a custom of marking her Bible whenever she read a passage that was particularly precious to her, but near the end of her life, she ceased this habit because it became unnecessary as the whole of Scripture had become most precious to her. Spurgeon then remarked that to some Christians the Bible “is all precious, and altogether precious.”⁶²

Spurgeon’s views on the preciousness of Scripture are most clearly demonstrated in a speech included in *The Sword and the Trowel* on the essence of a Bible-society. In it, he enthusiastically supported efforts to spread the Bible throughout the earth for it is the umpire of truth.⁶³ He stated that “every stray hint in the Bible is of value”.⁶⁴ Scripture not only helps people judge what is true but tells people what truth is. As such, Christians should desire that all their neighbors possess such a treasure.⁶⁵ Spurgeon then revealed in the fact that such a blessing could be acquired with so small a cost. He noted that there was a time when Christians would have given all their worth if they could possess such a prize.⁶⁶ “Whenever you give a Bible, you bestow a priceless treasure upon the man who receives it; therefore, go on with your contributions, and do

⁶¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 274.

⁶² Spurgeon, “The Bible Tried and Proved,” 258.

⁶³ Spurgeon, *ST: 1882*, 442.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 443.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 446.

all that you can to spread the word of God.”⁶⁷

Spurgeon preached on the treasure that is the Bible. He said that to him it is a monitor which directs his paths away from evil, and because of this, he prized the voice of Scripture.

Nothing ever plays on the cords of a man’s soul like the finger of God’s Spirit. This Book can touch the deep springs of my being and make the life-floods to flow forth...May the Lord work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure; then shall the Book be more and more precious in our eyes; and this sense of its preciousness will be one of the rewards which come to us in keeping the statutes of the Lord.⁶⁸

Spurgeon, as a Spirit-led preacher, saw the Bible as inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and precious.

God Spoke

As Heisler explained, in order to be a Spirit-led preacher, “We must first be convinced that God has already spoken to us in his Word.”⁶⁹ The prime reason for this is that “the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical text will give witness through that same text when it is rightly divided and passionately proclaimed.”⁷⁰ Spurgeon was convinced that God has spoken to His people through Scripture. He preached that not only was the Bible the record of God speaking, but because it is what the Lord has spoken, it has the character of immutable fixedness. “Once spoken by God, not only is it so now, but it always must be so.”⁷¹

Much of this discussion has already been examined in the section on inspiration; however, there is one nuance worth pointing out at this juncture. Spurgeon

⁶⁷ Spurgeon, *ST: 1882*, 447.

⁶⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Warnings and the Rewards of the Word of God,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 168.

⁶⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁷¹ Spurgeon, “The Infallibility of Scripture,” 153.

taught that the doctrines of the gospel were settled when the Spirit first inspired the Bible.⁷² In a sermon, he cautioned his hearers how to avoid heresies and bring the church into a glorious union; to do this, they must read the Scriptures rather than man's comments or books and keep their faith on this: "God has said it."⁷³

Holy Spirit Speaks

God spoke through his Word; however, the Holy Spirit still speaks through the Spirit-led preacher who trusts in the inspiration of that Word. "The Word activates the Spirit, and the Spirit authenticates the Word. The Word is the instrument of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the implement of the Word."⁷⁴ The Spirit-led preacher uses Scripture as the source and substance of his preaching, yet the Spirit is the supernatural power of his preaching.⁷⁵ This is because his message is taken directly from the Bible and does not originate with him.⁷⁶ Spurgeon was directly in line with this.

It is God's Word that saves souls, not our comment upon it, however correct that comment may be. Let us, then, be scrupulously careful to honour the Holy Spirit by taking the weapon which he has prepared for us, believing in the full inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, and expecting that God will prove their inspiration by their effect upon the minds and hearts of men.⁷⁷

Spurgeon was even more forceful when he discussed preaching the truths of Scripture to combat error.

When we speak for the Lord against error, we do not soften our tones; but we speak thunderbolts. When we come across false science, we do not lower our flag; we give place by subjection—no, not for an hour. One word of God is worth more than libraries of human lore. "It is written" is the great gun which silences all the

⁷² Spurgeon, *ST*: 1883, 88.

⁷³ Spurgeon, "The Plea of Faith," 275.

⁷⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "'Come from the Four Winds, O Breath!,'" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 38 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1892), 114.

batteries of man's thought.⁷⁸

Spurgeon had little patience for people who sought to hear from the Holy Spirit through means other than the Bible. He preached that it is the truths of Scripture which the Spirit of God will apply to the heart; however, if someone wants the Spirit to say something over and above that, it will never be so.⁷⁹ Spurgeon taught that God speaks through his Word. God has many great conversations with his people as they are quietly reading their Bibles. "There, in your still room, as you have been reading a chapter, have you not felt as if God spoke those words straight to your heart there and then?"⁸⁰

Spurgeon explained that the preacher ought to rely on the Holy Spirit when explaining Scripture. Preachers should first feel the weight of the words of the text for they are solemn words. These words are dictated by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will help those who preach expound upon the text. After all, it was the Spirit who has given the passage to explain.⁸¹ While God has spoken in the Bible, the Holy Spirit still speaks through the Spirit-led preachers who trust in the inspiration of Scripture.

Conclusion

A.T. Pierson preached a series of five memorial sermons to commemorate the life and ministry of Spurgeon. Pierson said of Spurgeon:

Mr. Spurgeon believed first of all in the full infallible inspiration of the Word of God. To him the Bible was God's book par excellence, not pre-eminently God's book, but solely God's book, inspired in such a sense as makes the word inspiration applicable to no other book ever put before the human race...He believed, in the second place, in the inspiring Spirit as a personal Spirit; that, when God revealed his will in ancient times, holy men of old were moved to write the Scriptures by the Holy Ghost, so that the product was essentially the product of the Spirit of God, and

⁷⁸ Spurgeon, "The Infallibility of Scripture," 148.

⁷⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Faith, and the Witness upon Which It Is Founded," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 21 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 47.

⁸⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Speak, Lord!," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 343.

⁸¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Carnal Mind Enmity against God," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 150.

not of the spirit of man... In the third place, he believed in the personal indwelling of the Spirit of God in the soul and body of the believer, constituting him a temple of the Holy Ghost. Put these three things together and see whether any man can heartily believe in them without being a mighty and spiritual preacher.⁸²

Spurgeon was a “mighty and spiritual preacher” because he deeply believed in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. He believed in the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible because, with all its difficulties, there were “not half as many difficulties in that doctrine as there are in any other kind of inspiration that men may imagine.”⁸³ He believed in the infallibility of Scripture because if the Lord had spoken in any other way, he would be puzzled instead of edified for it would be quite a struggle to separate the true sense from the doubtful words.⁸⁴ Of course, Spurgeon only considered the original manuscripts to be inspired and inerrant. He only extended inerrancy to the translations as far as they were faithful, yet he believed that if he could get the exact words which were first written, he would have “a book as perfect, certain, and immutable as God himself.”⁸⁵ He treasured the Bible and saw it as the rightful authority in his life. Through Scripture, God has spoken, and through Scripture, the Holy Spirit still speaks. Spurgeon was committed to the inspiration of the text as any Spirit-led preacher would be.

⁸² A. T. Pierson, *From the Pulpit to the Palm Branch: A Memorial of C. H. Spurgeon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1892), 147–49.

⁸³ Spurgeon, “Open Praise and Public Confession,” 21.

⁸⁴ Spurgeon, “The Bible Tried and Proved,” 254.

⁸⁵ Spurgeon, *ST: 1882*, 442.

CHAPTER 4
ILLUMINATION OF THE PREACHER STUDYING
THE TEXT

According to Heisler, “Spirit-led preaching calls us to align our preaching with the ministries of the Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture.”¹ In this, Spurgeon agreed wholeheartedly saying, “Beloved, all the hope of our ministry lies in the Spirit of God operating upon the spirits of men.”² In order for the Spirit-led preacher to align his ministry with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he needs to experience the illumination of the Holy Spirit during the preparation for preaching. This is because it was the Holy Spirit who has quickened the preacher when he was dead in trespasses and sins. As Heisler said, it was the Holy Spirit who removed the darkness and who takes the things of Christ and reveals them.³

The illumination of the preacher studying the text must be based upon the inspiration of Scripture, yet it is not an excuse for laziness or unpredictability. The preacher must do the work of sermon preparation even though the Holy Spirit illuminates the text. Illumination carries with it much benefit while sin and lack of prayer can be barriers to it. To best accomplish illumination, the Spirit-led preacher must intimately know his congregation and the world in which they live and must experience the truth of his text personally and deeply. Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher as seen in his views

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 67.

² C. H. Spurgeon, “The Wedding Was Furnished with Guests.,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 260.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Saints' Love to God,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 507.

and practices relating to the illumination of the preacher studying the text.

Based on Inspiration

The Spirit-led preacher has a foundation of inspiration as he is illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The acknowledgement of the Scripture as the true Word of God is “fundamental to starting the hermeneutical process.”⁴ It is the Spirit-led preacher who cherishes the Spirit’s inspiration and seeks to avoid applying tests in wrong ways through establishing the contextual meaning of the Spirit-inspired author of Scripture.⁵ As has been seen in the previous chapter, Spurgeon believed in the inspiration of Scripture wholeheartedly. As such, he was quick to base the illumination of the text during the studying of Scripture on inspiration. He described his sermon writing process as beginning in earnest on Saturday evening when a passage of Scripture gripped his heart and soul. Then, he would fix his whole attention upon it looking at the precise meaning of the original and closely examining the context.⁶

As Spurgeon studied the text, he acknowledged the veracity of the Bible. He spoke against those preachers who practiced illegitimate spiritualizing of a text by violently straining it. “This is a sin against common sense. How dreadfully the word of God has been mauled and mangled by a certain band of preachers who have laid texts on the rack to make them reveal what they never would have otherwise spoken.”⁷ In the course of study, the Spirit-led preacher does no such thing. He, rather, willfully yields to the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Furthermore, the Spirit-led preacher is illuminated in his study to establish the meaning of the text through contextual examination. Spurgeon agreed saying,

⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁶ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:65-6.

⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:103.

We cannot expect to deliver much of the teaching of Holy Scripture by picking out verse by verse and holding these up at random. The process resembles that of showing a house by exhibiting separate bricks. It would be an astounding absurdity if our friends used our private letters in this fashion and interpreted them by short sentences disconnected and taken away from the context.⁸

In these ways, Spurgeon is seen to be a Spirit-led preacher in his experience of the Holy Spirit's illumination during the studying process because he based such illumination on the inspiration he so cherished.

Not Laziness or Unpredictability

Spurgeon fit perfectly into Heisler's criteria of Spirit-led preachers with regards to inspiration; however, there is an aspect of Heisler's model that Spurgeon does not easily accomplish. In fact, Heisler specifically criticizes Spurgeon. This is with regards to the idea that the Spirit's illumination of the preacher in the study is no excuse for laziness or unpredictability.⁹ Heisler told the story of how it was his usual practice to put the title of his Sunday sermon on the church sign a few days before. A member of Heisler's church then asked him, "Preacher, I don't understand how you can know on Thursday what you will preach on Sunday. . . . I thought you were depending on the Spirit?"¹⁰ Heisler did not agree with this dichotomy. He was critical of this "if you advertise it in advance, you cannot possibly be open to the Spirit" idea.

Yet, according to Heisler, some preachers use being open to the Spirit as an excuse for laziness. As will be shown, nothing could be further from the truth with regards to Spurgeon as he often labored with intensity during the process of selecting a text. Heisler even pointed out that Spurgeon would have taken some strain off of his

⁸ Spurgeon, *ST: 1869*, 215.

⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

already full schedule if he preached systematically through a passage or planned out sermon series.¹¹ Spurgeon saw laziness in preachers who rather than failed to plan a sermon series but who rather accumulated a stock of sermons and repeated them *ad nauseum* with horrible regularity. Spurgeon claimed that the “very best invention for promoting spiritual idleness must be the plan of acquiring a two or three years’ stock of sermons, and repeating them in order again and again.”¹²

While Spurgeon could never be accused of laziness due to his frequent eighteen-hour days laden with ministerial duties, unpredictability in the pulpit is another issue.¹³ Heisler claims that the Spirit-led preacher is one who plans out sermons and knows with a level of certainty what will be preached in the upcoming weeks and months. However, he cautioned that Spirit-led preaching is a balance between the extremes of picking a new text each week with no forethought and planning out every sermon for years with no deviation. While Heisler advocates for a middle approach, he is far more sympathetic to the preacher who plans rather than the “week-to-week specialist.”¹⁴ In this discussion, Heisler criticizes Spurgeon for choosing a new text each week. While Heisler is clearly affectionate towards Spurgeon, he wondered if “sequential, systematic exposition might have relieved Spurgeon of some of the angst of his text selection every week.”¹⁵

It is true that Spurgeon labored over his selection of texts. Heisler quoted Spurgeon in a way that would indicate Spurgeon was displeased with his process. “To me still, I must confess, my text selection is a very great embarrassment....I confess that I

¹¹ Ibid., 100.

¹² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:86–87.

¹³ Hayden, “Charles H. Spurgeon: Did You Know?,” 3.

¹⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 100.

¹⁵ Ibid.

frequently sit hour after hour praying and waiting for a subject, and that this is the main part of my study.”¹⁶ However, this quote is highly misleading for it indicates that Spurgeon was embarrassed about his process, but he was not as the full quote makes clear.

To me still, I must confess, my text selection is a very great embarrassment—*embarras de richesses*, as the French say—an embarrassment of riches, very different from the bewilderment of poverty—the anxiety of attending to the most pressing of so many truths, all clamoring for a hearing, so many duties all needing enforcing, and so many spiritual needs of the people all demanding supply. 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.¹⁷

Spurgeon was not ashamed of the way he selected texts. He was telling his students how blessed they are that so many texts are worth preaching. This quote comes as part of a discussion of selecting texts whereby Spurgeon remembered a statement in a homiletics book saying that if a man cannot select a text then he should not be a preacher. Spurgeon reasoned that this is a problem if a man sees too few texts worth preaching but not if he sees too many. Spurgeon found it difficult to pick a text because so many texts were beautiful in his sight. This section and the quote Heisler used have nothing to do with a discussion of whether a preacher prefers picking a text each week or planning out a series of sermons.

Spurgeon linked belief in the Holy Spirit directly to his method of selecting a text. He stated that while many claim to agree with the creed saying “I believe in the Holy Ghost”, few act on this belief. “Many ministers appear to think that *they* are to choose the text; *they* are to discover its teaching; *they* are to find a discourse in it. We do not think so.”¹⁸ Spurgeon told his students to search for the text with fervor and prayer.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:88; Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 100.

¹⁷ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:89. Italics in original.

They should “cry to God for it.”¹⁹ If prayer alone does not illuminate the topic and text for a sermon, it is still a profitable exercise to pray. “The difficulty of settling upon a topic, if it makes you pray more than usual, will be a very great blessing to you. Praying is the best studying.”²⁰ To Spurgeon, the preacher will know when he has selected the correct text when a passage of Scripture really grips his heart and soul.²¹ Spurgeon used the analogy of a fish. During the selection process, the preacher may nibble at many baits, but when the hook has pierced him, he will wander no more.²²

Heisler provided a few reasons why the Spirit-led preacher would plan sermon series. First among these reasons is so that the preacher might provide a balanced diet of biblical exposition to the congregation.²³ In this point, Spurgeon agreed that the preacher ought to provide a wide breadth of biblical preaching and a glance at his over 3,500 published sermons would demonstrate that he practiced what he preached. He said that he disagreed with those who claimed that some passages of Scripture, while true, are not edifying. He said it this way, “Whatsoever it has seemed good to God’s wisdom to reveal, it is wise for God’s servants to proclaim.”²⁴ While it may be wise for a preacher to have a well-planned out sermon schedule, doing so does not guarantee the congregation will benefit from a balanced diet of biblical exposition any more than picking a new text each week will ensure the preacher is only touching upon a few topics.

Heisler also claimed that a planned-out sermon series will protect “the preacher

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:90.

²⁰ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:90.

²¹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:65–66.

²² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:88–89.

²³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 102.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Christ before Annas,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 103.

from wrongly using the Bible for selfish gain or revenge.”²⁵ Spurgeon agreed that the preacher ought not to preach out of selfish or vengeful motives. He warned that anything, even building a long row of almshouses, if done without the proper motive is not a good work “and there is no motive which can be said to be good but the glory of God.”²⁶ Spurgeon relied not on a sermon calendar to prevent him from preaching in a selfish or vengeful manner. He relied on the overwhelming burden he had to see people come to salvation. “Oh what a work we have to do, and how short the time to do it in! Millions of men unconverted yet, and nothing but our feeble voice with which to preach the Word!”²⁷

While Heisler criticized Spurgeon for being on the extreme side of the spectrum with regards to the planning of sermons, his reasons as to why this is inferior are unconvincing. It is true that Spurgeon often spent much time wrestling over which text would form his sermon, but that did not prevent him from covering the widest possible breadth of biblical exposition. Furthermore, he preached with a focus on Christ and the salvation of sinners rather than selfish or vengeful motives. While Heisler is wise in his advice, Spurgeon’s practice of selecting a text each week does not disqualify him as a Spirit-led preacher. In fact, as he labored each week to preach what “Holy Spirit would have me bring before the congregation”, he appears to be, if not more of a Spirit-led preacher, certainly not less.²⁸

Sermon Structure

Heisler said it eloquently. “The call to preach is a call to study. What the Holy

²⁵ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 103.

²⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Good Works,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 130.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Wailing of Risca,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 7 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1861), 13.

²⁸ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:65–66.

Spirit illumines in the study, he will empower in the pulpit.”²⁹ Part of what the Holy Spirit illumines in the study is a clear sermon structure. “Some preachers do not believe you can have the Spirit and structure at the same time because for them being led by the Spirit in preaching means spontaneity and unpredictability.”³⁰ Heisler disagrees. The Holy Spirit can and does work within good, clear sermon structure.³¹ He points out that though the preacher can use logic and reasoning effectively in preaching, he is not relying on those tools to change people’s hearts and minds but rather the Holy Spirit.³² However, the mechanics of sermon structure can and should be learned.³³

Spurgeon always preached with structure though the level of prewritten structure declined over the course of his ministry. He believed that, “*Our matter should be well arranged* according to the true rules of mental architecture.”³⁴ Early in his ministry, he prepared full manuscripts. This lasted until the claims on his time as the pastor of a large church in London made such work impossible. He often told his students that the revision of his printed sermons gave him all the advantages that he might have derived from more elaborate preparation.³⁵ As such, Spurgeon valued clear structure and logic in his sermons even if he was brilliant enough to do so from only an outline. This was his practice for the majority of his ministry even discussing the matter with his father.³⁶ On only very rare occasions did Spurgeon make anything more “than a hare

²⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 103.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:65–66.

³² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:80. Italics in original.

³⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1898, 1:213.

³⁶ Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 39. In a letter dated April 6, 1852, Spurgeon said to his father, “I shall always be glad of some of your skeletons, for though I do not want them to make me lazy, yet they give some hints when a passage does not open at once.”³⁵

skeleton of the address or sermon he was about to deliver.”³⁷

Likewise, Spurgeon taught his students that they must throw all their “strength of judgment, memory, imagination, and eloquence into the delivery of the gospel.”³⁸ Spurgeon said that they were to use their understandings and affections during the sermon preparation process for the Holy Spirit will not force the preacher to speak against his will. “He does not deal with us as though we were musical boxes, to be wound up and set to a certain tune.”³⁹ Spurgeon knew that structure and thought were essential parts of the preacher being illuminated by the Holy Spirit in his study to preach. Both Heisler and Spurgeon agree that the Spirit-led preacher is not the one who enters the pulpit unprepared. Spurgeon recounted this story during a sermon:

I have heard of a preacher, who thought that whatever came first into his head was good enough for his people. On one occasion, he informed one of his officers, at the end of his sermon, that he had never thought of it before he entered the pulpit; and the good elder replied, “I thought so while listening to you. I thought that, if you had considered it beforehand, you would never have said what you did.” We all need to wash and mend our nets;—I mean, that we all need to do Christ’s work in the best possible way; and that is the way in which we are most likely to be privileged with his presence.⁴⁰

Barriers to Illumination

The Spirit-led preacher recognizes that barriers to illumination can prevent him from experiencing the full power of the Holy Spirit. These barriers include sin, pride, and lack of prayer. According to Heisler, the Spirit-led preacher is guided by the Spirit’s illumination so his mind is not clouded by sin.⁴¹ The Spirit-led preacher is one who

³⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:182.

³⁸ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:78. Spurgeon went on to tell his students not to include random thoughts or meditations but rather plain evangelical doctrines. Heisler agrees saying, “Deliver the fruit of your study in your sermon, and spare them the details of how you went about picking it off the tree.” Heisler, 108.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:89.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Power of Christ’s Presence,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 55 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1909), 258.

⁴¹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 51.

expresses to God how unworthy he is to study the Scripture let alone proclaim it.⁴²

Through this humility and prayer, the Spirit-led preacher honors the Spirit's inspiration as he confesses the truthfulness the Bible through prayer.⁴³

Spurgeon agreed. In a sermon about the Lord's Supper, he warned his congregation not to ask if they are worthy. Of course, they are not, "but come, unworthy as you are, and take what Jesus has provided for unworthy sinners."⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Spurgeon preached saying those who come to God feeling their unworthiness are the worthy receivers of the gospel.⁴⁵ Spurgeon saw the humility necessary to come to God on God's terms. He was thankful that God, the great workman, can use bad tools and yet produce fine workmanship, and if Spurgeon has been the broken tool used to produce the conversion of souls, he would bless God so that God may have all the glory.⁴⁶ He knew and taught his students that the spiritual force that a preacher wields is directly affected by his personal holiness.

Recollect, as ministers, that your whole life, your whole pastoral life especially, will be affected by the vigor of your piety. If your zeal grows dull, you will not pray well in the pulpit; you will pray worse in the family, and worst in the study alone. When your soul becomes lean, your hearers, without knowing how or why, will find that your prayers in public have little savor for them; they will feel your barrenness, perhaps, before you perceive it yourself. Your discourses will next betray your declension. You may utter as well-chosen words, and as fitly-ordered sentences, as aforetime; but there will be a perceptible loss of spiritual force.⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid., 52.

⁴³ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Witness of the Lord's Supper," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 41.

⁴⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "Guests for the Royal Feast," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 543–544.

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "Independence of Christianity," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 339.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:9–10.

Benefits of Illumination

Illumination benefits the Spirit-led preacher in two ways. First, through the Holy Spirit's illumination, the preacher is able to "feel, touch, smell, hear, and see what is going on inside a text."⁴⁸ Second, illumination helps the preacher know what to emphasize.⁴⁹ Since sermons are of finite length, decisions must be made on what content should remain in a sermon. The Holy Spirit guides the preacher during this process.⁵⁰ Heisler pointed out that a Spirit-led preacher cannot live off of someone else's illumination.⁵¹ He must experience this for himself.

Spurgeon preached along these same lines. He told of the Holy Spirit who illuminates the believer and reveals the things of Christ.⁵² The Holy Spirit comes to teach all truth.⁵³ Spurgeon even said that while believers can learn something from the bodily presence of Christ, "it is the indwelling and the teaching of the Holy Ghost which we most of all need."⁵⁴ The Spirit teaches the Word, and the truth of God never has as much vividness as when a man tells it out of his own soul. When a godly man states that he has tasted and proven the truth of Scripture, it carries with it a great force.⁵⁵ Spurgeon said it elsewhere this way:

O my brethren, we shall never speak to the heart of our hearers, unless what we say has been first engraven on our own hearts. The best notes of a sermon are those that are written on our own inner consciousness. If we speak of the things which we have tasted, and handled, and made our own, we speak with a certainty and with an

⁴⁸ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵² Spurgeon, "The Saints' Love to God," 507.

⁵³ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Great Teacher and Remembrancer," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 221.

⁵⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Fainting Soul Revived," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 62 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1916), 215.

⁵⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Man of God Alone with God," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 442.

authority which God is pleased to use for the comfort of his people.⁵⁶

The illumination lets the Spirit-led preacher experience the Bible and from that position, he can preach with power and conviction. The Holy Spirit's illumination also aids the preacher in selecting the content for the sermon. Spurgeon said that his greatest difficulty was "to know what topics the Holy Spirit would have me bring before the congregation."⁵⁷ As has been stated, Spurgeon labored over his selection of texts and in doing so would make outlines of many sermons. He said that while selecting a text he could easily outline enough sermons for a month of preaching.⁵⁸ During this process, he relied on the Spirit's illumination to know what to preach to his congregation for he was a Spirit-led preacher.

Incarnational

The Spirit-led preacher is not speaking into a void. Rather he is preaching to a particular group of people during a particular time. Believing that he has the right message at the right time no matter what shape his preacher calendar may take is one of the keys to Spirit-led preaching.⁵⁹ As Heisler puts it, "Spirit-led preaching produces tailor-made messages!"⁶⁰ It is the Spirit-led preacher who brings the message of God to his hearers. In order to do this effectively and powerfully, the preacher know his congregation.⁶¹

Spurgeon completely agreed with this attribute of Spirit-led preaching. During a time when much of the preaching was designed to impress the listener with the

⁵⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Cure for a Weak Heart," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 42 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 109.

⁵⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:65–66.

⁵⁸ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:88.

⁵⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

eloquence and education of the preacher, Spurgeon spoke plainly so that he could be understood by many people. He said it this way, “We must preach according to the capacity of our hearers. The Lord Jesus did not say ‘Feed my giraffes,’ but ‘Feed my sheep.’ We must not put the fodder on a high rack by our fine language, but use great plainness of speech.”⁶² Spurgeon was diligent in bringing the message to his hearers. He would often ask his visitors to leave each Saturday evening by playfully saying, “You know what number of chickens I have to scratch for, and I want to give them a good meal tomorrow.”⁶³ However, most of all, Spurgeon was committed to preaching with clarity.

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 them. It is usually the short, dagger-like sentence that does the work best. A true servant of Christ must never try to let the people see how well he can preach; he must never go out of his way to drag a pretty piece of poetry into his sermon, nor to introduce some fine quotations from the classics. 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.⁶⁴

Spurgeon, like all Spirit-led preachers, sought to be among his hearers through the use of words that would make the message of the Gospel shine forth.

Conclusion

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because of his reliance on the Spirit’s illumination of the preacher during the sermon preparation process. Spurgeon based this reliance on the inspiration of Scripture. If the Holy Spirit inspired the text, then the Holy Spirit is capable of illuminating the text. While some poor preachers have used the Spirit’s illumination as an excuse for laziness or unpredictability, this is not true of Spurgeon. He did select a new text each week rather than relying on a preaching

⁶² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Salt Cellars: Being a Collection of Proverbs, Together with Homily Notes Thereon*, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), 1:56.

⁶³ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:64–65.

⁶⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Preaching Christ Crucified,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 489.

calendar, and although this might have relieved him of some anxiety, ultimately he showed himself to be even more led by the Spirit during the text selection process. Illumination has also been an excuse for a lack of sermon structure. Spurgeon taught that clarity and structure were vitally important if a preacher were to preach to the best of his abilities and so that people will come to the knowledge of the truth. While sin, pride, and lack of prayer can thwart the illumination of the Spirit, illumination allows the preacher to experience the text and prioritize what should be included in the sermon. It is the Spirit-led preacher who, through the illumination of the Spirit, is able to craft and deliver sermons that are tailor-made for a particular audience. Spurgeon, with his commitment to simple speech, did this incredibly well.

CHAPTER 5

CONVICTION OF THE MESSAGE

The Spirit's ministry for preaching includes the conviction of the message. According to Heisler, the Holy Spirit is confrontational.¹ A desperate need for the conviction of the Holy Spirit exists because of the sinfulness of the human condition. Men are born of the flesh and not inclined to spiritual things. The Holy Spirit must break into the hearts of men. Once there, he brings authentication of the message of the Spirit-led preacher. The Spirit of God affirms the truthfulness of the sermon and softens hearts so that men may be changed by hearing. The Spirit also applies the message. The Spirit-led preacher partners in this application, but ultimately, it must be the Spirit who applies the message for it to not degrade into legalistic nonsense. This conviction of sinners and application of Scripture is accomplished when the Spirit-led preacher takes as his subject the work and person of Christ. When Christ is glorified, the Spirit convicts. In these areas, Spurgeon demonstrated his reliance on the Spirit to convict and authenticate. He was a preacher who preached Christ without fatigue or shame. Throughout his ministry and his sermons, Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he relied on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict the hearers of his message.

Need for Conviction

According to Heisler, the Holy Spirit is necessary for one simple reason: sin.² Mankind is sinful. They have been tainted by the Fall and need a supernatural occurrence

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 67.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

to get them to see their spiritual bankruptcy. Sin has blinded them, and the Holy Spirit shines the light that lets them see. This must happen for sinful man to be quickened to life and to be able to recognize and submit to the call of the living God.³ The situation is dire, and the Holy Spirit must do something.

Spurgeon saw this need for the Holy Spirit's conviction due to the sinfulness of man. He preached:

A man may have the best parents that ever lived, but all that is born of the flesh is flesh, at the very best. Your father may be a saint, and your mother a saint, but thou art born in sin, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and unless thou be born of the Spirit, thou canst not understand or see spiritual things, and thou canst not enter into the spiritual kingdom, for thou hast no spiritual capacity... Therefore, we must be born again so as to receive that Spirit by which spiritual things are discerned and entered into.⁴

Spurgeon pointed out that no man can become a child of God by birth or by any ceremonial process. It is only through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit that man is quickened from his depraved state. Spurgeon hoped that those who were not yet saved would be convinced of their state before God, but that this was only accomplished by God. Only the Holy Spirit can convince a person that they are lost. Only the Holy Spirit can prove to a man who thinks that he is a Christian that they are not, but once this realization happens, he will soon be transformed into what he once thought he was which is a true child of the living God.⁵ The Spirit must descend to convict even those who are convinced they are counted among God's people for all unregenerate people are clouded by sin.

Spurgeon taught that the conviction of sin was a necessary part of the regeneration process. He preached that if a religion does not begin with a broken heart, it

³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 35.

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "Why Men Do Not Believe," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 287.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "Enquiring the Way to Zion," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 183.

lacks a firm foundation. He continued saying that any expression of Christianity that does not begin with a deep sense of sin and a thorough conviction of the immorality of it is a repentance that does not carry with it the full glory of God. One who believes in such an expression of Christianity will soon find himself repenting of such a foolish belief.⁶ Spurgeon preached that a godly sorrow will come to a man which is occasioned not merely by the sin but by the love of God. This is an action of the Spirit of God upon the heart whereby the Holy Spirit makes the man sorrowful on account of his evil ways. This conviction is the sharp steel needle of the law that is driven through the heart and draws the silk threads of comfort and salvation after it. “It is not God’s way to make men alive again until they are really dead; I mean, that, spiritually, they must be first slain by the law before they are made alive by the gospel.”⁷

While Spurgeon recognized the need for conviction of the Holy Spirit because of the sinful nature of man, he was also aware that some people will take this need too far. In fact, he was one such person. He thought he needed a certain amount of conviction of sin before he could be saved. He later realized that he did have a conviction of sin and did not need to wait until his guilt reached a certain level. Had he known this, he could have spared himself much needless suffering. If Spurgeon was unable to come to God with a broken heart, he preached that he should still have come to God in order that the Almighty might break it.⁸ Spurgeon warned about the distress that is felt when under the conviction of sin. He preached that some of this distress was the work of the Spirit but not all of it. He noted that while he is unable to draw the line indicating exactly how far the Spirit’s work extends, he is convinced that a portion of this horror does not come

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Hoping in God’s Mercy,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 42.

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “Hope for the Worst Backsliders,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 42 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 73.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Free-Agency of Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 345.

from God. It is certainly necessary that sinners need to come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit; however, it is not necessary for sinners to “traverse the whole ground of every other sinner’s experience in passing from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.”⁹

Authentication

Spirit-led preachers rely on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of the message. This conviction includes authentication which the Spirit produces by an inward burning in the hearer that affirms the veracity of what is being said and demands obedience.¹⁰ The Spirit-led preacher prays for the Holy Spirit to empower him and confirm the truthfulness and authority of his message in the hearts of those to whom he preaches. He prays “for Spirit-opened ears and Spirit-softened hearts.”¹¹ Spurgeon was in complete alignment with this ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Spurgeon knew that truth must be confirmed by the Holy Spirit who is the greatest teacher. Spurgeon taught that if Christians were fully equipped to understand the grand themes of Scripture without the teaching of the Holy Spirit, then the Spirit would not have been given. Even with Christ for a teacher, a teacher completely without fault, the disciples still did not learn the truths of the Gospel without the teaching of the Spirit. To those who have not experienced Christ’s teaching firsthand, the Spirit’s teaching is even more necessary though certainly not less.¹²

Spurgeon preached that the preservation of truth is owing to the direct interposition of God. This same unceasing care is seen in the inward witness of the truth

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Cases of Conscience,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 569.

¹⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Spurgeon, “The Great Teacher and Remembrancer,” 221–222.

in the heart of every individual believer. When the Holy Spirit influences a person during a sermon, the Spirit applies the truth to the conscience and confirms its truthfulness.¹³ Truth alone is not powerful enough to quicken the soul of a believer or work regeneration. “There is not force enough in truth to convert souls without the influence of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴

Spurgeon acknowledged that Christ was the “last stepping-stone across the brook of time. All who come after him are only confirmers of the testimony of Christ.”¹⁵ The godly men who preached with power throughout the centuries never pretended to say anything fresh. They only revived the gospel. This is true even of the reformers like Luther, Calvin, and Knox. While dissenters like Spurgeon were sometimes charged with inventing a new gospel, Spurgeon strongly deny this charge. He and his kind only profess to be confirmers of the witness of Christ as affirmed by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Spurgeon preached that a child of God, empowered by the Spirit, would be able to judge the authenticity of anything recorded as having been done by Christ. This is why those “miserable false gospels that were brought out did very little if any mischief, because nobody, with any true spiritual discernment, was ever duped into believing them to be genuine.”¹⁷

Spurgeon preached that the authentication that the believer enjoys is unique. Things of a divine nature are often hidden from moral eyes and discerned only by those who live in fellowship with God because the child of God carries on a secret intercourse

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Intimate Knowledge of the Holy Spirit,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 35 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), 133.

¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Time of Finding for Lost Sheep,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 170.

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “Confirming the Witness of Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 138–139.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Last Words of Christ on the Cross,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 494.

with heaven. He said that whether those outside the kingdom of God believe or not, the great Spirit pours into the praying heart.¹⁸ This fellowship causes the believer to act, speak, and think in such a way that the evil world misunderstands and condemns because the carnal mind does not know the things that are of God. These things are spiritually discerned. The Spirit that aids the believer in discernment and authentication is not the spirit of the world.¹⁹

Spurgeon taught that the Spirit's discernment extended to another very important aspect of life: personal sorrows. For Spurgeon it would be very difficult and painful to think that he has experienced an affliction which was not sent to him by God. He offered comfort by preaching that even when the cup is bitter, children of God can rest knowing that it was measured out with a loving hand and is meant to do permanent good. He said that believers can discern if suffering is from God's hand and that this discerning is the process by which believers can know more fully the truth of God's message through experience.²⁰ The troubles in this life are redeemed by the Holy Spirit and are used so that believers can clearly see God's wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, and truth.²¹

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the conviction of the message through the authentication of the veracity of the message is, in part, a process by which the Spirit opens the eyes and hearts of the hearers. Spurgeon preached of this reality saying that the Holy Spirit must lead men to believe "for no man can see Christ until his eyes are

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "Private and Confidential," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 497.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Covenant Promise of the Spirit," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 220.

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Woe and Weal," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 99–100.

²¹ Ibid.

divinely opened.”²² He went on to say that preachers can put the truth of Scripture as plainly as they can and preach so that they are convinced no one will be able to misunderstand it, but it will be misunderstood still until the Holy Spirit shall work effectually in them.²³ While still outside the door of the heart, Jesus is a stranger, but once that door has been opened by divine grace, “his worth is known, and his goodness is felt.”²⁴ This renewal of heart, Spurgeon preached, is not in fallen man to accomplish, “Can the adamant turn itself to wax, or the granite soften itself to clay?”²⁵ The clear answer to his question is no. “The power to make the rock of our nature flow with rivers of repentance” is not within man; this power lies in the omnipotent Spirit of God.²⁶

Spurgeon taught that the mark of the true believer is that he sees Jesus.²⁷ The Spirit-led preacher knows this. He knows that the Holy Spirit reveals and authenticates the words of his message. The Spirit opens the eyes and hearts and provides a level of supernatural verification that the preacher alone never could. The Spirit-led preacher does not attempt to preach a new gospel nor does the Spirit. Eyes are opened that they may be convicted of the truth of the message. Spurgeon, knowing that many reject the truths of Scripture, said, “It is not possible that the gospel should have shone upon those eye-balls without either giving light or increasing the blindness. I do not believe that any man has regularly sat under the sound of a gospel ministry for three months without being either

²² C. H. Spurgeon, “A Pressed Man Yielding to Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 46 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 141.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Honoured Guest,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 553.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “How Hearts Are Softened,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 33 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1887), 518.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “Sharing Christ’s Life,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 169.

sensibly hardened or manifestly softened by it.”²⁸

Application

A large part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the conviction during the message is application. Heisler defined application as “the Holy Spirit’s ministry of bringing people into a life-changing encounter with the living God through the truth of his Word.”²⁹ This is the process by which the Spirit applies the truth to the conscience of the believer. Heisler pointed out that this application ought to have a certain level of specificity for it to not fall into legalism. In addition, the Spirit-led preacher is the one who partners with the Spirit in the application of the truths of the message to the lives of the hearers. Spurgeon knew the importance of the application of the Spirit. “I could almost affirm that Christ’s words would be of no use to us unless they were applied to us by the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ Elsewhere, he used the analogy of medicine saying that the medicine of Scripture might be very powerful, but it cannot heal unless it is applied.³¹ This is the work of the Spirit.

Not Legalism

Heisler used an analogy to explain how the Spirit-led preacher’s message is applied. The preacher is building a bridge in his sermon, and the Spirit is the escort who takes the audience across the bridge applying the message to them.³² Spirit-led preaching “recognizes that the Holy Spirit is the one who ultimately applies the Word to the deepest

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “Heedful Hearing,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 268.

²⁹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 132.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit in the Covenant,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 343.

³¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Black Clouds and Bright Blessings,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 448.

³² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 131.

parts of a listener's soul."³³ Heisler pointed out that this must be done with the right level of specificity. The Spirit-led preacher grounds the truth in specifics and stays away from the abstract. At the same time, he avoids legalistic preaching that fills in the blanks for the people and does not build disciples. "Spirit-led preaching trusts the Spirit to make the connection and builds mature, Spirit-filled, fruit-producing disciples."³⁴

Spurgeon preached that the application comes from a conviction of the Holy Spirit. He told a story of a little boy who came to the Metropolitan Tabernacle for the first time. When Spurgeon stood up to preach, the boy asked his nurse, "Is Mr. Spurgeon talking to me?" Spurgeon said, "I wish you would all say that, if my words apply to you."³⁵ He knew that the Spirit will apply his Word in many different ways, but if his hearers think that what he is saying applies to them, he would agree that it did in fact apply.

Spurgeon condemned any sort of legalistic preaching usually doing so with either mockery or contempt. On one occasion, Spurgeon preached against the legal preacher who is apt "to whip his hearers with, 'Do this' and 'Do that'".³⁶ He noted that God himself always makes his people find a better pastor so that they can "lie down in a good fold" and "feed in a fat pasture."³⁷ On another occasion, Spurgeon spoke against "preachers who preach mere morality".³⁸ While he noted that the number of preachers who did this was smaller, there were still too many. They were like another minister who

³³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Empty Place: A Christmas Day Sermon," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 38 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1892), 618.

³⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Promise and a Providence," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 62 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1916), 428.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Royal Saviour," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 618–9.

preached morality until there was no morality left in that place and then imitated Paul by preaching Christ crucified and soon found that “vice hid her dishonored head” and “that all the graces and virtues flourished under the shadow of the cross.”³⁹ Spurgeon firmly believed this saying:

Whenever justification by faith has been uppermost in the preaching, the morals of the people have been purest, and their spirituality has been brightest. But whenever the preachers have extolled the works and ceremonies of the law, or the Arminianism which brings in something of trust in works, or human power, it is most certain that there has been a declension in point of morals, while religion itself has seemed almost ready to expire.⁴⁰

Spurgeon taught that this is true even when speaking to children. Spurgeon saw that many Sunday-school addresses have no gospel in them. “To stand up in a Sunday-school and say, ‘Now, be good boys and girls and God will love you,’ is telling lies.”⁴¹ Spurgeon’s remedy was to preach the same gospel to the children that he would preach to the adults. This moralistic teaching had no place in Spurgeon’s theology even when speaking to children.

Spurgeon pointed out that one remedy for the sin-sick sinner is the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit. He preached that certain passages will always be particularly precious to believers for they were the passage by which the truth of the Gospel penetrated the soul. Spurgeon stated that he could never forget the text that brought peace to his troubled spirit which was “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”. He summarized this point this way, “It is the Word of God, applied by the Holy Spirit, that is the means of healing sin-sick souls.”⁴²

³⁹ Spurgeon, “The Royal Saviour,” 618–9.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Pride Catechized,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 46 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 170.

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Withholding Corn,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 11 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1865), 426.

⁴² C. H. Spurgeon, “Sickness and Prayer, Healing and Praise,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 523.

Spurgeon gave particular instruction with regards to application to his fellow preachers. He taught that the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary to make everything the preacher does to be alive. “We are sowers, brethren, but if we take dead seed in our seed-basket there will never be a harvest. The preacher must preach living truth in a living manner if he expects to obtain a hundred-fold harvest.”⁴³ The preacher must rely on the Spirit’s application and conviction of the message. For it is by this ministry of the Holy Spirit which makes men become true disciples of Christ.

Spurgeon told the story of a gang of hardened sinners who came to hear the gospel preached. These men sat and seemed to have a deep reverence for the preacher as if he were God and not a man. These men were changed. This change would have never happened but through the power of the Holy Spirit of God. “Let the gospel be preached and the Spirit poured out, and you will see that it has such power to change the conscience, to ameliorate the conduct, to raise the debased, to chastise and to curb the wickedness of the race, that you must glory in it.”⁴⁴ Spurgeon, as a Spirit-led preacher, said with boldness that there is nothing like the power of the Spirit.⁴⁵

The application of the truths of Scripture during the conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit results in lives changed and disciples nourished. Those that claim to be the children of God and yet live in sin are clinging to nothing but a vain profession. Spurgeon plainly stated, “Let such know that their professions are lies, that falsehood is the only groundwork that they have for their hopes; for, wherever the grace of God is, it makes a difference.”⁴⁶ When the Spirit applies the truth of the Bible, lives are changed. Any claim

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Our Urgent Need of the Holy Spirit,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 23 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1877), 16.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Power of the Holy Ghost,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 233.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Dumb Become Singers,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 589.

to be a child of God without a changed life is a false claim by one who has not experienced the application and conviction of the Spirit.

Partnering in Application

Heisler pointed out that there are three keys of partnering with the Holy Spirit in application that the Spirit-led preacher does. First, the Spirit-led preacher must preach from a heart that has “already been touched and transformed by the truth”.⁴⁷ The Spirit-led preacher has experienced the healing power of the Spirit as the Word is applied. Second, the Spirit-led preacher must understand that the Spirit’s knowledge knows no limits.⁴⁸ This means that while the preacher is limited by time to only make a few applications from the text, limited by knowledge because he does not know all the things that happened in his listeners’ lives, and limited by the text by which he only makes textually relevant application, the Holy Spirit is not limited in any of these respects. The Spirit can make any number of applications in the hearts of the hearers, knows the exact life situation each person sitting under the sermon is experiencing, and can draw applications that are not confined to the text. Third, the Spirit-led preacher’s partnership with the Spirit in application is in alignment with the Spirit’s ultimate purpose in making disciples.⁴⁹ When the applications are focused on making people more Christ-like, the preacher is partnering with the Spirit.

Spurgeon utilized these three keys in partnering with the Holy Spirit in application. He knew that in order to partner with the Spirit in application, the preacher must speak from a heart that has been transformed by God. He said it this way:

No preaching or teaching can equal that which is experimental. If we would impress the gospel upon others, we must have first received it ourselves. Vainly do you

⁴⁷ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 134.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 135.

attempt to guide a child in the pathway which you have never trodden, or to speak to adults of benefits of grace which you have never enjoyed. Happy is that preacher who can truly say he speaks what he doth know and testifies what he hath seen.⁵⁰

This is something that he said often. He proclaimed that every preacher should see to it that it is true concerning himself. “When we pass on to the people the words which God has given to us, we supply them with real spiritual food, and so we glorify God; but if we only give them our own words, we do but mock their hunger, and we dishonor God.”⁵¹ He taught that the preacher must show in himself that faith is a healing medicine or men will not believe. Such inconsistency will show Christ to seem to be a pretender unless the preacher is proven to have been healed by him. The people should see the cheerfulness and hope that comes from trusting Christ in the life of the preacher.⁵² Spurgeon also taught that those who have been lifted up from the lowest depths of sin and purified by the blood of Jesus make such mighty Christians and fervent preachers.⁵³

Spurgeon preached that God’s knowledge had no boundaries. “The poor struggling child of God in poverty is as well known by God as you bright songster who walks the golden streets.”⁵⁴ Spurgeon operated under the reality that ultimately the Holy Spirit applied the Word of God in whatever manner fitting. He warned that “if all were known, and all is known by God, the man without fault himself who would dare to cast the first stone is not sitting in your seat.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Sermon on a Grand Old Text,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 193.

⁵¹ C. H. Spurgeon, ““Until He Find It,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 119.

⁵² C. H. Spurgeon, “A Sermon to Ministers and Other Tried Believers,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 510–511.

⁵³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Paul as Pattern Convert,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 391.

⁵⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Saints in Heaven and Earth One Family,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 21 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 460.

⁵⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The King’s Weighings,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 29 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1883), 466.

Spurgeon partnered with the Spirit in application that would make disciples.

We cannot expect that men will come and make an application of the truth to themselves. We must, having our hearts glowing, and our souls on fire with love to them, seek to bring the truth to bear upon them, to impress it upon their hearts and consciences, as in the sight of God and in the stead of Christ.⁵⁶

Spurgeon taught that it is not within the power of the preacher to make disciples. If he preached, argued, and reasoned as best as he can, the preacher has done nothing until the Holy Spirit sends home the argument. Spurgeon knew “that which as a mere matter of argument would be irresistible to a rational man, yet as a spiritual force fails to have any influence over the carnal mind.”⁵⁷ Disciples are made through the supernatural influence of Christ raising the spiritually dead and giving them life. Spurgeon would stop during a sermon and pray that the Spirit would apply this truth to his hearers’ hearts.⁵⁸

Spurgeon preached that salvation cannot spring from the devices of the poor human heart. People seek to be made disciples in vain through religious ceremonies or bodily experiences. “The source and fountain of salvation are only to be found in the eternal purpose of God.”⁵⁹ The wisdom of God planned such and the Spirit of God applied it. Salvation is from the Lord. Spurgeon taught that if converts were made by man, if men were his disciple rather than Christ’s, then such can be unconverted by man. “If some charm or power of one preacher can bring them to Christ, some charm or power of another preacher can take them from Christ. True conversion is the work of the Holy

⁵⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “The True Aim of Preaching,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 158.

⁵⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “How to Please God,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 192.

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Soul’s Awakening,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 26.

⁵⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Assurance Sought,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 63 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1917), 15–16.

Ghost, and of the Holy Ghost alone.”⁶⁰ In this way, Spurgeon demonstrated his partnership with the Holy Spirit to make disciples.

Based on Clear Preaching of Jesus

Heisler pointed out one aspect of the Spirit’s ministry of conviction. The Spirit convicts, authenticates, and applies when the message of Jesus is proclaimed. The Spirit-led preacher is the one who bases the Spirit’s conviction upon such clear presentation. “The Spirit opens the eyes of the blind when a clear picture of Jesus is laid before them in our preaching.”⁶¹ Heisler also noted that the Spirit’s three pillars of conviction are sin, righteousness, and judgement.⁶² Any preacher who is even remotely biblical could not discuss these topics without also discussing Christ. As such, the foundation of the Spirit’s ministry of conviction is the clear preaching of Jesus.

In this regard, Spurgeon was the Spirit-led preacher par excellence. He recognized that the Holy Spirit does not speak of himself but rather is a witness to Christ. Likewise, the preacher ought to be a witness to Christ lest he be accused of going beyond the wisdom of the Spirit. He told preacher not to try to be original but “be content to take of the things of Christ and show them to the people; for that is what the Holy Ghost himself does; and you will be wise to use his method and his sword.”⁶³ Any application or conviction that the preacher hopes to impress upon his hearers must be based upon the clear preaching of Christ.

Spurgeon had no tolerance for any other sort of preaching. He warned other preachers saying, “Shame on the preacher who doth not bend the bow with all his might,

⁶⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Election: Its Defences and Evidences,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 54.

⁶¹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Sword of the Spirit,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 239.

and throw his whole strength of spirit, soul, and body into his efforts to win souls!”⁶⁴ Of course, souls could only be won through the preaching of Christ. Spurgeon said,

Jesus Christ and him crucified should be the Alpha and the Omega of every sermon. Even if the preacher is not preaching Christ directly, he ought to be preaching him indirectly, proclaiming the truth in such a way that it shall either draw the sinner or else drive him to the cross of Christ. In the chariot of our ministry I hope that we can without hesitation say that Jesus Christ rides in his glory and in his majesty.⁶⁵

When Spurgeon was teaching his students at the Pastor’s College, he said, by way of summary, “preach Christ, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme.”⁶⁶ He said that preachers ought to preach Christ to sinners rather than attempting to preach sinners to Christ.⁶⁷ Jesus needed to be the subject.

With regards to other subjects that preachers discuss, Spurgeon was inflexible. The preacher’s business was not to teach politics unless these immediately touch the kingdom of Christ and then the Gospel is still the best weapon. Preachers ought not to preach mere morals or duties. The Christian’s ethic must begin and end at the cross of Christ. “We have not so much to declare what men ought to do as to preach the good news of what God has done for them.”⁶⁸

Spurgeon pointed to his clear preaching of Christ as the reason for his success.

People have often asked me, “What is the secret of your success?” I always answer that I have no other secret but this, that I have preached the gospel—not about the gospel, but the gospel—the full, free, glorious gospel of the living Christ who is the incarnation of the good news. Preach Jesus Christ, brethren, always and everywhere;

⁶⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Satan’s Arrows and God’s,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 373.

⁶⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Almighty Warrior,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 115.

⁶⁶ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:82.

⁶⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “Israel’s Hope; Or, the Centre of the Target,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 212.

⁶⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord’s Preaching,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 75.

and every time you preach be sure to have much of Jesus Christ in the sermon.⁶⁹

Elsewhere, he said in a sermon that the only reason why crowds gather at the Metropolitan Tabernacle was because the preacher's theme was Christ. The multitudes assemble because Spurgeon preached the theme of the cross, the precious blood, and the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. "This is a theme which never palls upon the ear, this is a subject which never grows stale. 'We preach Christ crucified,' for this is the magnet that draws the people unto him."⁷⁰

Spurgeon concluded that sermons, when criticized by conscientious hearers, are measured "by the amount of gospel truth and force of gospel spirit which they contain."⁷¹ Elsewhere, he expressed his disgust with preachers who do not plainly preach Christ.

A discourse without Christ in it is a delusion and a sham, mere playing with immortal souls, a mockery both of God and man. Jesus Christ and him crucified should be the Alpha and the Omega of every sermon. Even if the preacher is not preaching Christ directly, he ought to be preaching him indirectly, proclaiming the truth in such a way that it shall either draw the sinner or else drive him to the cross of Christ.⁷²

Reflecting on his own mortality, Spurgeon said that if he had only one more sermon to preach before he died, he knew what it would be about. He would preach about his Lord Jesus Christ. He then said, "I think that, when we get to the end of our ministry, one of our regrets will be, that we did not preach more of him. I am sure no minister will ever repent of having preached him too much."⁷³ Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he relied on the conviction of the Holy Spirit through a clear presentation of the

⁶⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner: How to Lead Sinners to the Saviour* (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1895), 99.

⁷⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Praise for Jesus," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 163.

⁷¹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:73.

⁷² Spurgeon, "The Almighty Warrior," 115.

⁷³ C. H. Spurgeon, "An Exciting Enquiry," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 149.

Gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher as seen by his reliance upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict the hearers of the sermon. He held this reliance his entire ministry as seen in his first known preaching notebook when the sixteen year old Spurgeon noted that his sermon outlines would remain “only skeletons without the Holy Ghost.”⁷⁴ He recognized the need for the Holy Spirit’s conviction because of the sinfulness of the human heart. The Spirit must authenticate the veracity of Scripture as no man is able to believe the message of God without the Spirit as his teacher. Spurgeon taught that the Spirit makes application to the hearers and that such application was not a legalistic set of rules but the result of a life changed. Spurgeon partnered with the Holy Spirit and preached from a heart and life that was transformed by the truths of the Gospel and the supernatural power of the Spirit. Spurgeon relied on the Spirit to make disciples based upon the clear preaching of Christ. Spurgeon told his students to hold to the very words of the Holy Spirit for they are the “most useful and the most agreeable to the major part of our congregations.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Christian George, *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon: His Earliest Outlines and Sermons Between 1851 and 1854*, vol. 1 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 61.

⁷⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:75.

CHAPTER 6

EMPOWERMENT OF THE PREACHER

The ministry of the Holy Spirit for preaching includes the empowerment of the preacher during the sermon. The Spirit first compels the minister to preach by taking hold of the Spirit-led preacher and inspiring the message. The Holy Spirit also partners with the preacher so that the words spoken in the pulpit are both the preacher's and the Spirit's. The Spirit-led preacher seeks to be empowered by the Spirit and nothing else. As such, he must reject all human manipulation. Oratory and flowery words have no place alongside the Holy Spirit's ministry of empowering the preacher. Relying on an outside source for strength necessitates that the Spirit-led preacher recognize his weakness and humbly trust the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit anoints the preacher blessing him with an ability to feel the subject more deeply and to think more clearly about the things of God. The effects of the Spirit's empowerment include freedom, vitality, unction, and possession. All of this is included in the Holy Spirit's ministry of empowerment. Spurgeon preached concerning these doctrines and taught his students to seek the Spirit's empowerment. As such, Spurgeon demonstrated that he was a Spirit-led preacher throughout the way he dealt with this topic of the Spirit's empowerment.

Participate with the Holy Spirit in Preaching

The empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the act of preaching requires a synergistic approach.¹ Heisler stated that "Preaching is a team effort."² This is because

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 86.

² *Ibid.*, 158.

the preacher must cooperate with and be empowered by the Spirit in order to produce life-changing sermons. The Spirit-led preacher decides early in his ministry that he needs to be continually filled with the Spirit of God before he is able to powerfully preach God's Word.³ In order to participate with the Holy Spirit in preaching, the Spirit-led preacher must always be open and ready to follow the Spirit's lead.⁴ Heisler gave the example when he preached the same sermon during a morning and an evening service. However, during the evening service, he sensed a holy seriousness pervading the room and delivered the sermon in a different manner. To participate with the Holy Spirit in preaching means the Spirit-led preacher must follow the Spirit's promptings while he preaches.⁵ Doing so demonstrates that the preacher is driven along by the Holy Spirit.⁶ Furthermore, he shows he is absolutely dependent on the Spirit.⁷

Spurgeon taught this same doctrine. He told fellow ministers to believe that the Holy Spirit can provide content of the sermon even while the pastor is preaching. The Holy Spirit can direct the preacher to say what he has not previously thought and make this new utterance the "very arrowhead of the discourse, which shall strike deeper into the heart than anything you had prepared. Do not reduce your dependence upon the Holy Ghost to a mere phrase; make it more and more a fact."⁸ Spurgeon preached that those who are called to preach have to cry to the Lord often in order to bring Christ into the assembly through their words.⁹ This is part of what he means by preaching with

³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (Rev. ed. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1960), 350.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Love's Vigilance Rewarded," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 42 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 478.

dependence on the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon made this point in an earlier sermon saying:

Oh, that all of us who profess to preach the gospel would learn to speak in entire dependence upon the direction of the Holy Spirit, not daring to utter our own words, but even trembling lest we should do so, and committing ourselves to that secret influence without which nothing will be powerful upon the conscience or converting to the heart. . . . It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit.¹⁰

Spurgeon was concerned with every detail of the sermon. He desired not to just preach a holy sermon but wanted every word to be a holy word and every sentence to be a right sentence. He pointed to the verbal inspiration for the Bible. He reasoned that, in the same way, the preacher ought to pray for verbal guidance in his speech so that the entirety of the discourse will be excellent with every line and every letter in the proper place. Spurgeon then stated that carelessness for the parts will spoil the whole.¹¹ As he taught his students, the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit are necessary to accomplish such an endeavor for the Holy Spirit incites the preacher in his utterance.¹²

Spurgeon said much about following the promptings of the Spirit. While the believer cannot control the consequences, he can control if he ignores the voice of the Lord or obeys God's directive. Spurgeon warned that when God prompts the conscience to take a course of action, the slightest deviation will cause the man of God to recoil with an intolerable sense of guilt.¹³ If the preacher would grow weary in prayer, Spurgeon declared that the Comforter encourages and refreshes. The Holy Spirit incites, suggests, and inspires the preacher to go onward. According to Spurgeon, the Holy Spirit is the prompter; therefore, let the ear be opened to the Spirit's voice.¹⁴ To this statement,

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Abiding of the Spirit the Glory of the Church," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 32 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1886), 487.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Holy Longings," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 357.

¹² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 2:25.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Lions' Den," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 571.

¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit's Intercession," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*

Spurgeon added an illustration. When a boy is learning archery, he does not have the strength to draw the bow so his father places his hands over the boy's hands and draws the bow. In the same way, the Holy Spirit places his hands over those of the believer so that the bow of prayer may be drawn.¹⁵ It is in the same way that the Holy Spirit guides the preacher during the sermon so that two are drawing the bow, yet the power is coming primarily from one.

Spurgeon taught that the Holy Spirit can speak through the ministers of God. He stated that the preached message is often blessed so that God's ministers preach as if they were the original author who received the original word from the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon cautioned that this is only possible when the word preached is in conformity with God's written Word.¹⁶ When God blessed any of Spurgeon's sermons, he made it a rule not to preach that same sermon again for fear of putting his trust in that sermon or placing his confidence in the way in way he set forth the truth rather than the truth itself. However, if Spurgeon determined that the Holy Spirit lead him to preach the sermon again and again, he would not hesitate to do so.¹⁷

While Spurgeon taught that the Holy Spirit leads the preacher and participates in the sermon construction and delivery process, he provided some warnings in this area. Spurgeon pointed out that the Holy Spirit leads believers into an intense love for the souls of sinners. As such, if a preacher's teaching leads anyone to the conclusion to view the damnation of man with complacency or indifference, it is assured that such a preacher

Sermons, vol. 26 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 222.

¹⁵ Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit's Intercession," 222–3.

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Leading of the Spirit, the Secret Token of the Sons of God," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 21 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 128.

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Free-Agency of Christ," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 16.

was not led by the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Even those preachers who are led by the Spirit need to take caution. Spurgeon warned that those preachers who are endowed with the dangerous gift of humor need to show restraint lest they utter a syllable which might suggest to the hearer an impure thought or raise a questionable memory. “We need the Spirit of God to put bit and bridle upon us, to keep us from saying that which would take the minds of our hearers away from Christ and eternal realities, and set them thinking upon the groveling things of earth.”¹⁹

Spurgeon taught that the Holy Spirit participates in the preaching event. He advised his students that the Holy Spirit’s incitement was necessary for the preacher’s utterance. He also preached that the Holy Spirit prompts the preacher and that it is better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Spirit than seventy years’ worth of sermons without the Spirit. Yet, he acknowledged that the Holy Spirit does not smile upon every preaching opportunity, and while he wished to have the Spirit smile upon him, if he does not, then he will speak well of God behind His back.²⁰ Through this stance on participation with the Holy Spirit during the sermon, Spurgeon demonstrated himself to be not only a minister hungry for the empowerment of the Spirit but a Spirit-led preacher.

Rejection of Human Manipulation

To be a Spirit-led preacher is to rely on the empowerment of the Spirit for preaching. It is an attitude of dependence upon the Spirit to provide the results. As a necessary component of such an attitude, the Spirit-led preacher rejects all human means of manipulation and persuasion. “Spirit-led preaching totally depends on God as the supernatural source of power that changes and transforms lives through the Word and the

¹⁸ Spurgeon, “The Leading of the Spirit, the Secret Token of the Sons of God,” 125.

¹⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:25.

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Joy in God,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 44 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1898), 5.

Spirit.”²¹ According to Heisler, this rejection of human manipulation in the preaching of the Gospel is most clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.²² Informed by this passage, the Spirit-led preacher refuses to rely on eloquence or flowery oratory for he knows that such may be able to change a man’s mind for a moment, but only the Spirit of God can change a heart for all eternity. Heisler went on to point out that the Spirit-led preacher can use logic, reasoning, and argumentation effectively in preaching, but that he does not rely on those tools to bring about the heart change that is only possible through the Holy Spirit.²³

Spurgeon completely agreed that preachers should reject all human manipulation and rely on the Holy Spirit to transform sinners into saints. This is entirely compatible with Spurgeon’s mindset of the preacher as subordinate to the Word of God and constrained to preach only those things contained within the Bible. While this theme is throughout Spurgeon’s works, he said it best during a sermon delivered on a winter’s night in 1877. “I am bound to preach what I find in God’s Word. Whatever may be the consequences, I must not alter the form of my Master’s message.”²⁴ For Spurgeon, that meant he must not rely on any sort of manipulation. He knew that effective and God-honoring preaching must affect the men’s hearts, “and nothing that comes of man, or that can be manipulated by the human hand, seems able to touch that.”²⁵ As Spurgeon said, it is only the “old sword” which is affective:

When I am invited to preach the novel doctrines of the present age, or to try the modern methods of fighting the devil, I look these new weapons up and down, and I advise those who offer them to me to send them to the Exhibition of Inventions up in the West of London. You may see them there, but you will never see them here.

²¹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 30.

²² *Ibid.*, 31.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Disobedience to the Gospel,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 531.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “Heart Piercing,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 255.

The old sword suits my hand, and God blesses it to the cutting and the wounding and the killing of sinners; God the Holy Spirit, who made it, uses it most effectually; so, by the grace of God, we will keep to it, and use no other; as long as we live.²⁶

Spurgeon saw himself as oxen whose fate it is to plough and plough without necessarily seeing the results, yet this is his lot in life and he would do anything if God be glorified. He would love if anyone could teach him to preach better. If that were the case, he would gladly go back to school if it meant he could influence men's hearts for good. Even if that schooling would teach him to speak in a vulgar style so that he would lose all of his reputation, for the blessings of saving men's souls, he would willingly fling his reputation to the winds. If he needed to learn oratory in order to touch men's hearts, he would sit at the feet of Cicero or Demosthenes. Yet, Spurgeon recognized that the fate of one such as him is to keep on ploughing. He will remain faithful in his preaching and unflashy with his words because the Holy Spirit is the only one able to transform men's hearts.²⁷

While Spurgeon acknowledged that he would take the mantel of oratory if such were affective, he spoke against any such manipulation because he knew that flowery speech was unable to save men's souls. He lamented how far mere polish will go with certain hearers. "Let a man affect fine language and pompous manners, and there are professed Christians who will delight in him."²⁸ He grieved that these Christian will prefer such speakers even though they deliver no spiritual food in their sermons noting that mature Christians look more to the meat than the garnishing. Spurgeon used this analogy. "We have no reason to believe that Caligula's horse liked his oats any the better for their being gilded, but with certain persons the gilt is everything."²⁹

²⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Portrait No Artist Can Paint," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 8.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "Ploughing a Rock," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 52 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1906), 116.

²⁸ Spurgeon, *ST: 1872*, 120.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Spurgeon preached about some churches that desire fine oratory. He confessed that he could not provide it for he hated oratory from his very soul. Spurgeon desired to speak the truth clearly and simply. That was his aim. If any of his hearers desired the beauties of rhetoric, they must search some place other than the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Some preachers looked for scraps of poetry or quaint and curious stories to weave into their discourse. To Spurgeon, such things were the chaff to the wheat of the gospel.³⁰ Yearning after such things is not what a true teacher does. According to Spurgeon:

The true teacher should not seek to soar on the gaudy wings of brilliant oratory, pouring forth sonorous polished sentences in rhythmic harmony; but should endeavour to speak pointed truths,—things that will strike and stick,—thoughts that will be remembered and recalled, again and again, when the hearer is far away from the place of worship where he listened to the preacher’s words.³¹

The reason for Spurgeon’s animosity is simple. “Fine sermons never win souls.”³² Orators may speak with brilliance and trot out fine pieces of poetry and quotations from eminent authors. They might even speak with such eloquence as to rival a display of fireworks, but when it is all over, that will not save souls. Only the truth of the Scripture and the power of Christ is up to such a task.³³ In his sermons, Spurgeon urged his hearers that if they are to be saved, they must be diligent in hearing the Gospel. He told them to frequent places where the most of Christ is preached and do not seek after eloquence or oratory. He warned them not to waste time on the Lord’s Day having their ears tickled. “There is a soul in you that will either be saved or lost, and this day is given you peculiarly that you may listen to the gospel which saves you.”³⁴

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Observing the King’s Word,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 494.

³¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Wide-Open Mouth Filled,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 183.

³² C. H. Spurgeon, “A Sabbath Miracle,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 330–331.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Spurgeon, “The Soul’s Awakening,” 33.

Spurgeon went so far as to say it “was one of the worst days that ever dawned upon the Church of Christ when it began to cultivate the art of oratory.”³⁵ He condemned these enticing words of man’s wisdom as trying to use unrelatable vocabulary and nicely-rounded sentences in order to magnify the preacher and thereby dishonoring the Word of God. “But when men speak out of an overflowing soul of what God has done for them, that is the power which the Spirit of God gives to them, and the power which he will bless to their hearers.”³⁶

Not only will oratory fail in saving men’s souls, Spurgeon taught that such high-sounding words and flowery periods make a mockery of men’s spiritual needs. He said that is not worth the minister’s time to demonstrate his elocution from the pulpit. It was Spurgeon’s contention that if a man wanted to display his oratory, such a man should study for the bar or enter Parliament, but he should never “degrade the cross of Christ into a peg to hang his tawdry rags of speech upon.”³⁷ According to Spurgeon, the preacher is not to stand in the pulpit and display his skills in spiritual sword play, but he should actually fight, driving the sword of the Spirit through men’s hearts. Spurgeon pointed out that the preacher should be judged by the work he has done and that, in this sense, the preacher should always aim at effect. Spurgeon tempered this statement by saying:

I do also say, never aim at effect, in the unhappy sense of that expression. Never aim at effect after the manner of the climax makers, poetry quoters, handkerchief manipulators, and bombast blowers. Far better for a man that he had never been born than that he should degrade a pulpit into a show box to exhibit himself in. Aim at the right sort of effect; the inspiring of saints to nobler things, the leading of Christians closer to their Master, the comforting of doubters till they rise out of their terrors, the repentance of sinners, and their exercise of immediate faith in Christ.³⁸

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Glory of Our Strength,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 55 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1909), 189.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *Flashes of Thought* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 133.

³⁸ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:30–31.

Although he spoke out against any sort of oratory, Spurgeon was still accused of using theatrical tactics and manipulation. One newspaper said this about Spurgeon's congregation, "I would charitably conclude that the greater part of the multitude that weekly crowd to his theatrical exhibitions consists of people who are not in the habit of frequenting a place of worship."³⁹ Another reporter attacked Spurgeon more directly. "Mr. Spurgeon is the youngest, and the loudest, and the most notorious preacher in London—little more; the idol of people who dare not go to theatres, and yet pant for theatrical excitement."⁴⁰ However, Dale Smith, in his dissertation, pointed out that Spurgeon's priority was to keep the crowd listening. If Spurgeon had to do this with humor or the recreation of a Bible character, he would do so because his greatest desire was to spread the gospel. "His whole being, mind, body, and voice would be used to present the gospel."⁴¹

Mohler, in his preaching book, discussed this situation briefly. He noted that Spurgeon was accused of theatrical tactics and manipulation, but that "Helmut Thielicke, who observed Nazi propaganda and manipulation firsthand, absolved Spurgeon of such methods."⁴² This is what Thielicke said:

Charles Haddon Spurgeon – it is he of whom we are speaking – was still unaware of the wiles of propaganda, and completely ignorant of the subliminal influence that operates by appealing to secret images, wish-dreams, and anxiety complexes – and hence begins with the result of psychoanalytical tests. He worked only through the power of the Word which created its own hearers and changed souls.

Now this was not *his* word, the product of his own rhetorical skills. It was rather a word which he himself had "merely" heard. He put himself at its disposal, as a mere echo, and it brought to him the Spirit over whom he did not himself dispose. His

³⁹ The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent, April 28, 1855. (Quoted in vol. 2 of Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, 55.)

⁴⁰ James Ewing Ritchie, *The London Pulpit*, 2nd ed. (London: William Tweedie, 1858), 159.

⁴¹ Smith, "The Victorian Preacher's Malady: The Metaphorical Usage of Gout in the Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon," 114.

⁴² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Moody Publishers, 2008), 164.

message never ran dry because he was never anything but a recipient.⁴³

Spurgeon did not manipulate in his sermons. He despised oratory and flowery speaking noting that it does not save souls. Rather, such desire to be seen as a brilliant speaker makes a mockery of the gospel and ignores that men need a Savior. He lamented that some churches desire sermons filled with such nonsense. Spurgeon relied not on his own brilliance or any sort of theatrical tactic, but he relied on the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of sinners. He desired to have his preaching empowered by the Holy Spirit not empowered by oratory or manipulation, and in this way, he was in conformity to what it means to be a Spirit-led preacher. Spurgeon said it best when he said, “The Lord persuade you. I have done my best. He can do it. The Lord the Holy Ghost create you anew and make you Christians, and his shall be the glory forever. Amen and Amen.”⁴⁴

Weakness and Humility

According to Heisler, the Spirit’s empowerment seems to be directly associated with five factors two of which will now be considered: weakness and humility.⁴⁵ These issues are linked in this section because Heisler linked them. “Weakness keeps us humble by reminding us that we are human, and we are frail. Humility embraces weakness as a blessing, not as a burden, and causes us to call on the Lord for help.”⁴⁶ These are necessary for the Spirit-led preacher to be empowered by the Spirit. Such a preacher knows that he is a servant and not a superstar.⁴⁷ According to Heisler, such a man preaches in accordance to Richard Baxter’s famous quote “as a dying

⁴³ Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2016), ix.

⁴⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, “To Those Who Are ‘Almost Persuaded,’” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 15 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1869), 288.

⁴⁵ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 174. The other three factors, prayer, fullness, and faith, will be treated elsewhere in this chapter.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

man to dying men.”⁴⁸ Spurgeon was quick to admit his weakness and to rejoice in it. More than that, he taught his students and fellow ministers to do the same. This demonstrates his inclusion as a Spirit-led preacher.

While Spurgeon often acknowledged his weakness and dependence upon God, he said that there was a particular situation which made him feel his weakness so much more acutely. He preached that he never felt so weak as when he stood in the pulpit and pled with the unconverted to yield to the Savior. He challenged any man who thinks he can preach to come and try it knowing that they will be unsuccessful because affecting the hearts of men is a work that must come from the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ In a different sermon, Spurgeon addressed an objection that his congregation might have. He told of someone who is nervous to speak about the gospel for fear of emotionally breaking down. Spurgeon comforted such a person by saying that such a breakdown might do more than anything else. He went on to say, “God does not need your strength: he has more than enough of power of his own. He asks your weakness: he has none of that himself, and he is longing, therefore, to take your weakness, and use it as the instrument in his own mighty hand.”⁵⁰

Spurgeon recognized that there is a tendency for Christians to think much about those preachers whom God has blessed with a large congregation. He warned against such ideas saying if anyone begins to suppose that a particular minister will necessarily be the mean of the conversion of a friend, then that is imputing to a son of man what belongs only to the Son of God. He goes on to say that this does the minister a serious mischief for the minister is nothing. Then, speaking about ministers, Spurgeon

⁴⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Marvellous Change,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 46 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 69.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Best Strengthening Medicine,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 331.

said, “It will do us good to be very empty, to be very weak, to be very distrustful of self, and so to go about our Master’s work.”⁵¹

Spurgeon continued this idea in another sermon saying that God is not dependent upon human strength. “I tell you, our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength.”⁵² To prove this point, Spurgeon drew a comparison between the early church and the church of his time. He noted that the early church was composed of poor and unlearned men who no one would have guessed would be consequential to history, yet that early church was filled with power and those humble fishermen shook the world. Spurgeon then said that the church of his time is composed of too strong, too wise, and too self-dependent people to be able to do much. He wished that this church would be more God-reliant.⁵³

Spurgeon preached that weakness and humility are not only for preachers but are essential parts of the Christian life. “It has been well said that the angels excel in strength, but the saints excel in their weakness. When we are most weak, and Christ strengthens us, then are the most excellent virtues produced.”⁵⁴ In an earlier sermon, he spoke of faith in terms of weakness saying that faith is weakness clinging to strength and becoming strong through doing so. “Faith in God made the cripple at the temple gate stand, and walk, and leap, and praise God; and even so does faith make our sin-crippled manhood obey the will of the Lord with exultation.”⁵⁵ Spurgeon preached that God will send the heavenly principalities to help his people so that in their weakness God’s

⁵¹ C. H. Spurgeon, ““Come from the Four Winds, O Breath!”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 38 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1892), 112.

⁵² C. H. Spurgeon, “The Great Pot and the Twenty Loaves,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 113.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Prayer, the Cure for Care,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 120.

⁵⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Best Strengthening Medicine,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 327.

strength shall be glorified and sinners shall be saved.⁵⁶ He said that those who are blessed are those who the Lord elects to suffer, who sit humbly at the Lords feet, and who feel like they are less than nothing yet they served the Lord actively and joyfully.⁵⁷

Spurgeon held a high view of God and considered it the Christian's purpose to glorify God. Because of this, Spurgeon developed a strict view on the relationship between faith and weakness. He said this, "We ought to blame ourselves when we find our faith to be weak, but we must never commend ourselves when faith is strong. The weakness of faith is ours, but the strength of faith comes of the Holy Spirit, and of him alone."⁵⁸ Spurgeon applied this idea to a situation that he knew well. He battled depression and often became downcast after obtaining a great blessing. He preached that when this happens to anyone, he should not be terribly alarmed about it because it no longer matters and since the work is over, he can afford to be laid low before God. "It will be well for you to know how empty and how weak you are, that you may ascribe all glory to the Lord alone. He is almighty, however weak you may be."⁵⁹

As a man who experienced depression, Spurgeon knew it was not wise to wallow in weakness. He preached that the Christian is wise to look within himself in order to discover his weakness and spiritual poverty but that the Christian is unwise to always dwell upon that weakness. Spurgeon was quick to point out that neither the Christian's strength nor his riches are to be found within himself. In order to find those, the believer must look to Christ. Spurgeon warned his hearers to look within to be

⁵⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "Jehovah's Challenge," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 46 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 237.

⁵⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "Going and Weeping," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 357.

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Oil of Joy for Mourning," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 79.

⁵⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Man Whose Hand Clave to His Sword," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 185.

humbled but not to be made unbelieving.⁶⁰

Spurgeon did not only speak to his congregation about weakness nor did he limit his instruction on humility to his sermons. Spurgeon taught fellow ministers these valuable lessons. He told them that every minister and all preachers are weak, exceedingly weak.⁶¹ He said it this way, “The weakest man here is not, in this business, really any weaker than the strongest man, since the whole affair is quite beyond us, and we must work miracles by Divine power, or else be total failures.”⁶² Spurgeon told his students and fellow ministers that weakness and humility was the only way to truly be used by God.

The Lord pours most into those who are most empty of self. Those who have least of their own shall have the most of God’s. The Lord cares little what the vessel is, whether golden or earthen, so long as it is clean, and disengaged from other uses. He sees whether there is anything in the cup; and if so, he throws it all out. Only then is the cup prepared to receive the living water. If there was something in it before, it would adulterate the pure water of life; or if what was there before was very pure, it would, at least, occupy some of the room which the Lord seeks for His own grace. The Lord therefore empties us, that we may be clear from prejudice, self-sufficiency, and foregone conclusions as to what His truth ought to be. He would have us like children, who believe what their father tells them. We must lay aside all pretense of wisdom. Some men are too self-sufficient for God to use.⁶³

Spurgeon told about preachers who are too clever. He said that if a preacher was a superior person, when he gets God’s message, he corrects it and adds his own ideas. Spurgeon pointed out that such a preacher does not think that the old Gospel can be suitable for these enlightened days. Such a preacher not only adds, but he omits because he judges that certain truths have become obsolete. Spurgeon warned that in all of his additions and subtractions, the clever preacher has left little of the pure Word of God.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, ““Grace and Glory,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 277.

⁶¹ Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 327.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 328.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 329–30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

Spurgeon said all this to illustrate that if the preacher wanted his sermons to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, that he must approach the pulpit and the study with humility and a recognition of his weakness.

Anointing of the Spirit

Heisler acknowledged that the “most confusing and controversial subject related to the Holy Spirit and preaching is the spiritual dynamic popularly known as ‘the anointing’.”⁶⁵ Heisler also acknowledged that the Old Testament is filled with examples of the Holy Spirit empowering God’s prophets for proclamation.⁶⁶ Heisler suggested that the word “anointing” is less accurate and subject to misinterpretation. As such, he recommended that instead of speaking about the anointing to describe the Spirit’s work in preaching those seeking accuracy should speak of the Spirit’s empowerment.⁶⁷ This is based on a few reasons. First, the term empowerment is broad enough to capture the dynamic of the Spirit’s power while avoiding the confusion in the term anointing. Second, all believers are anointed by the Holy Spirit in the biblical sense.⁶⁸ Spurgeon, while not as precise with his terminology, spoke of the Spirit’s anointing and was in alignment with Heisler that whatever it is, it is necessary for the Spirit-led preacher.

Spurgeon preached about the anointing of the Spirit. He spoke of the anointing as the Christian’s supreme need saying that if he had preached without the Holy Spirit’s anointing, he would have preached in vain. He continued to say that even if he was in his prayer chamber and praying with a sincere earnestness, that prayer would be in vain.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 154.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Priesthood of Believers,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 425.

Spurgeon saw his need for anointing in his role as a preacher, but he also saw the need every believer had of a fresh anointing of oil. He noted that such an anointing is in abundant supply because Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure and the believer has access to the hem of Christ's garments which overflows with anointing oil. The abundance of the anointing of Christ assures an anointing for those who follow Him.⁷⁰

Spurgeon preached recognizing that believers may be anointed and yet very weak. He stated again and again in one sermon that the Christian is an anointed king. Spurgeon explained that believers were anointed in the covenant of election before the world began and were constituted a royal priesthood in the person of Christ. He continued saying that every child of God was actually anointed when Jesus ascended. Spurgeon could not find the time to enumerate all the ways in which the Christian is an anointed king, yet it is very possible for the same Christian to be mourning his weakness. Spurgeon preached that "weakness and Divine Anointing may stand together."⁷¹ He knew that as a prelude to great marvels that God intends to accomplish through the believer, the believer might first be compelled to feel very deeply his utter weakness although he is God's anointed.

Spurgeon spoke about the effects of the Spirit's anointing. Spurgeon first preached of the healing power of the anointing of the Spirit saying that the Holy Spirit comes like the Good Samaritan and pours oil and wine. He continued saying that this anointing of the Spirit anoints the head of the believer and heals his wounds. "How soft the liniments which he binds round our bruises! How blessed the eye-salve with which he anoints our eyes!"⁷² Spurgeon then spoke of how over the centuries Christians have

⁷⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Fresh Grace Confidently Expected," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 19 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1873), 402.

⁷¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Man's Weakness, and God's Anointing," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 6 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1860), 382.

⁷² C. H. Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit and the One Church," in *The New Park Street Pulpit*

endured hardships and presented to the current believer an unbroken line of doctrine that extends to the apostles and avoids the filth of Rome through the power of the Spirit's anointing.⁷³

Spurgeon did not give a clear description of the anointing of the Spirit for preaching in his sermons, but in his communications to his students and fellow ministers, he spoke directly about it. Like Heisler, however, Spurgeon found the topic difficult to articulate. He said this:

What is it? I wonder how long we might beat our brains before we could plainly put into words what is meant by *preaching with unction*; yet he who preaches knows its presence, and he who hears soon detects its absence; Samaria, in famine, typifies a discourse without it; Jerusalem, with her feasts of fat things full of marrow, may represent a sermon enriched with it. Every one knows what the freshness of the morning is when orient pearls abound on every blade of grass, but who can describe it, much less produce it of itself? Such is the mystery of spiritual anointing; we know, but we cannot tell to others what it is.⁷⁴

Whether or not he could precisely define the Spirit's anointing, Spurgeon still told ministers not to preach without it. "If you deliver a stale story of your own concocting, or if you speak without a fresh anointing from the Holy One, your ministry will come to nothing."⁷⁵ In the second volume of *Lectures to My Students*, Spurgeon was more direct about advocating for the Holy Spirit as an anointing oil. He said that the Spirit's anointing relates to the entire delivery of the sermon and can make the preacher feel the subject at hand until he is thrilled by it either into a depression to be crushed into the earth or an exultation so as to be flown on eagles' wings. Spurgeon continued saying that the Spirit's anointing can also intensify the preacher's feelings for the object of the sermon and make him yearn for the conversion of men's souls and the uplifting of

Sermons, vol. 4 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1858), 20.

⁷³ C. H. Spurgeon, "The True Apostolical Succession," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 7 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1861), 613.

⁷⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:49. (Italics in original)

⁷⁵ Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 329.

downcast Christians.⁷⁶

According to Spurgeon, the Spirit's anointing will not only sharpen the preacher's emotions but also his intellect. While the preacher is speaking, many thoughts can travel across his mind. Spurgeon said that he once counted eight separate thoughts that were going on in his brain simultaneously while preaching. Spurgeon taught that the Holy Spirit can multiply the preacher's mental state and make him much more than he is by nature. "How much he can make of us, and how grandly he can elevate us, I will not dare to surmise: certainly, he can do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think."⁷⁷ Spurgeon pointed out that the preacher needs the Spirit to keep his heart and mind in a proper condition in order to maintain the right spirit and tone of the message which persuades and prevails.⁷⁸ Specifically, Spurgeon taught that it is the Holy Spirit's work to sustain in the preacher a devotional frame of mind while he is speaking even to the point of continually praying while simultaneously preaching.⁷⁹

Effects of Empowerment

Heisler had much to say about the effects of empowerment on the Spirit-led preacher. The Holy Spirit accompanying the preached Word with power is the demonstration of the Spirit in the role of communicator alongside the preacher as a herald.⁸⁰ It is the obligation of the Spirit-led preacher to partner with the Holy Spirit so as to preach with fearlessness.⁸¹ "To be empowered by the Holy Spirit means we are filled

⁷⁶ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:27.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:27–28.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:28.

⁸⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

and controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁸²

Heisler continued to lay out four characteristics of Spirit-empowered preaching. First, the preacher experiences freedom and thereby is able to surrender his fear of disappointing or displeasing people and focus on pleasing and obeying God while preaching.⁸³ Second, Spirit-empowered preaching is characterized by vitality. It brings life and sustains.⁸⁴ Third, Spirit-empowered preaching is filled with unction or power. The Spirit’s empowerment gives intensity, and the Spirit-led preacher delivers the Word with urgency and conviction.⁸⁵ Fourth and finally, the Spirit-empowered preacher experiences possession. This gives the preacher a sense that an outside power greater than the preacher takes control during the actual delivery of the sermon.⁸⁶ While these four are the characteristics of Spirit-empowered preaching and are limited to the act of preaching, the Spirit-led preacher experiences a heightened sense of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture as well as an increase in compassion.⁸⁷ It is not possible to say with any degree of certainty if Spurgeon actually experienced the empowerment of the Spirit; however, his preaching on this issue and his advice to young ministers reveal that he was in agreement with Heisler’s ideal of a Spirit-led preacher.

Spurgeon preached concerning the characteristics of Spirit-empowered preaching. With regards to the freedom the preacher experiences not to feel that he must please the congregation, Spurgeon said that he learned it is not the preacher’s business to seek to please his congregation and if the preacher labors to do so, he probably will not

⁸² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 165.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 170–71.

attain it. Spurgeon continued to say if the preacher does successfully please his congregation then that is a miserable success for he has traded the favor of his Master for the favor of his fellow man. “We therefore ought to preach many truths which will irritate our hearers; we ought to declare to them the doctrines which are really for their present and eternal welfare, however distasteful they may be to their carnal reason and natural inclinations.”⁸⁸ Here, Spurgeon draws an analogy saying that the preacher who is truly sent by God must sometimes play the role of a physician and give bitter medicine in order to cure his patients of disease. In fact, Spurgeon continued saying that the faithful preacher must preach more often on “those very bitter truths because men are so unwilling to receive them.”⁸⁹ In another sermon, Spurgeon called it a “cruel mercy” not to preach eternal wrath and its terrors and said, “You cannot get a harvest if you are afraid of disturbing the soil, nor can you save souls if you never warn them of hell fire.”⁹⁰

Spurgeon often preached concerning the second of the characteristics of Spirit-empowered preaching: vitality. While preaching, he would beg the Spirit of God to bring back to the Church a belief in the Gospel and to bring to the church ministers who preached with the Holy Spirit. He said this as a rallying cry because, “The Gospel must succeed; it shall succeed; it cannot be prevented from succeeding; a multitude that no man can number must be saved.”⁹¹ In a different sermon, he preached that if the whole congregation is consecrated to God and they are all filled with the fruits of righteousness, then the minister can never be dull. He continued that this minister will preach with divine fire and the pews will respond with fire kindling flame and flame bringing fresh

⁸⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Rule of Grace,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 494.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Ploughman,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 584–585.

⁹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Multitude before the Throne,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 198.

fire. “Vitality will promote revival; our tone will be spirited and inspiring.”⁹² Another time, Spurgeon preached about another minister who told his hearers that he was not talking about them for he had written the current sermon for a congregation in Massachusetts. Spurgeon said that he cannot make such a claim because he is preaching to those who are hearing him. He then said, “Oh, that you may have grace to take home these thoughts to yourselves; for if you do so, they will by the Spirit’s power bring the light of hope into your souls!”⁹³

Spurgeon also mentioned the third characteristic of Spirit-empowered preaching, unction or power, in his sermons. He preached, “It was because the Lord had made Ezekiel a watchman unto the house of Israel that he proclaimed his Master’s message with such power and unction; and it must be in a similar way that a minister must be to his people as the mouth of God.”⁹⁴ Spurgeon also preached that all believers are blessed with unction for the Spirit was first poured upon Christ and all those who are united to Him should rightfully expect the heavenly unction to flow from Him and anoint their souls.⁹⁵ Spurgeon also looked forward to that day when the Lord shall come. He spoke of this day as a time “when every minister of Christ shall speak with unction, when all the servants of God shall preach with power, and when colossal systems of heathenism shall tumble from their pedestals, and mighty, gigantic delusions shall be scattered to the winds.”⁹⁶

Spurgeon spoke concerning the fourth characteristic of a Spirit-empowered

⁹² C. H. Spurgeon, “The Golden Lamp and Its Goodly Lessons,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 26 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 655.

⁹³ C. H. Spurgeon, “‘Lo, I Come’: Application,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 258.

⁹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Faith Justifying Speech,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 266–267.

⁹⁵ Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit in the Covenant,” 338.

⁹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Songs in the Night,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 44 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1898), 103–104.

preacher, possession. This has been mentioned earlier in the section concerning partnering with the Holy Spirit; however, Spurgeon did directly address this issue in his sermons. “If the Holy Ghost takes possession of a man, or a woman, what can they not say? . . . I will rely in no degree upon oratorical power, or human learning, or natural gifts, or acquired aptitude, or on anything that I have, but I will rest in the Lord alone.”⁹⁷ In another sermon, Spurgeon spoke on the possession of the Holy Spirit in terms very similar to the way Heisler spoke about this topic as mysterious, confusing, and challenging.

There is a mysterious, supernatural energy which comes from the Third Person of the blessed Trinity which really at this day falls upon men, as really as when Peter spake with unknown tongues or wrought miracles; and though the power of working miracles be not given now, yet spiritual power is given, and this spiritual power is as manifest, and just as certainly with us to-day, if we possess the Spirit, as it was with the apostles.⁹⁸

Spurgeon not only preached about the empowerment of the preacher by the Holy Spirit, but he also taught his students the necessity of such empowerment and the effects they can expect if they do receive the Spirit’s empowerment. As has been previously noted, Spurgeon taught his students that the Holy Spirit’s work is to keep the preacher in a devotional frame of mind.⁹⁹ He also taught his students that the Holy Spirit empowers the entire delivery, makes the preacher feel the subject until he is thrilled by it, and makes the preacher yearn for the conversion of men. In addition to this vitality, Spurgeon taught that the Holy Spirit also brings power in the form of mental acuity.¹⁰⁰ He told of the freedom to speak bravely. “Speak boldly; for if you speak by the Holy Spirit,

⁹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “An Epistle Illustrated by a Psalm,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 490.

⁹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “Prayer-Meetings,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 411.

⁹⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:28.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:27–28.

you cannot speak in vain.”¹⁰¹ He even went so far as to say that if a sermon has fire, life, and truth quickened by the Spirit, then the preacher has no need to be elegant.¹⁰²

The greatest generator of force which is available to man is heat. I suppose that nothing produces so much power for human purposes as fire; and even so, the burning and consuming element in the spiritual world is a great factor in the development of spiritual strength. We must be in downright earnest, and *must* feel the burnings of a zeal which consumes us, or we shall have little force. We *must* decrease; we must be burning if we would be shining lights. We cannot save our lives and save others; there must be a destruction of self for the salvation of men.¹⁰³

The effects of the Spirit’s empowerment are great. Spurgeon recognized and agreed with such effects. In addition, he taught his students to seek such effects and claimed to have sought them for himself. While it is not possible to say if Spurgeon was in fact empowered by the Spirit, looking at him through the lens of Heisler, Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher.

Conclusion

Concerning this fourth criteria of the Holy Spirit’s ministry in preaching of the empowerment of the preacher, Spurgeon was in complete alignment with the claims and doctrines associated with this criterion as seen in his sermons and taught his students to seek the empowerment of the preacher in the same ways that Heisler advocated. Spurgeon taught about the Holy Spirit compelling the minister to preach and empowering him to do so. He recognized that preaching was a cooperative effort and that the successful preacher must partner with the Holy Spirit. As has been demonstrated, Spurgeon rejected all efforts of human manipulation. More than that, he hated any such oratory because it cannot save men’s souls. Spurgeon knew that part of being empowered by the Holy Spirit is being humbled for a man cannot reach out for strength until he

¹⁰¹ Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 343.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 340. Italics in original.

knows he is weak. Spurgeon was very aware of his personal weakness. He told of the necessity of an anointing of the Spirit for the service of preaching and of the mighty effects that result from the preacher being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through what he said in the pulpit and what he taught to his students, Spurgeon demonstrated that he was a Spirit-led preacher due to his reliance on the empowerment of the Spirit. Heisler recognized that Spurgeon was the right man to introduce the concept of the Spirit's empowerment because he began his chapter on the subject with this quote:

The Gospel is preached in the ears of all; it only comes with power to some. The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of man... We might preach till our tongues rotted, till we should exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless there were the mysterious power of the Holy Ghost going with it, changing the will of man. O sirs! we might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the Holy Ghost be with the Word, to give it power to convert the soul.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Spurgeon, "Election: Its Defences and Evidences," 54. Quoted in Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 153.

CHAPTER 7

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S CHRISTOLOGICAL WITNESS

The Holy Spirit's ministry for preaching includes a Christological witness. This Christological witness includes four elements as derived from Heisler. First, Christ is Scripture's theme. The Spirit-led preacher recognizes that Jesus is the supreme subject of all the Bible. Second, the Holy Spirit's role is to glorify Christ. The Spirit is not interested in bringing glory to Himself. The Spirit-led preacher knows that in order to cooperate with the Spirit he must imitate the Spirit and bring glory to Christ. Third, the New Testament provides examples for Christ-centered preaching. The Spirit-led preacher recognizes and emulates these examples. He echoes Paul in saying that he will know nothing except Christ and him crucified. Fourth and finally, the Spirit-led preacher intentionally preaches Christ in every sermon. For him, Christ is not an afterthought; rather, every sermon ought to be filled with Christ by design. For the Spirit-led preacher is driven by a passionate Christological motive to glorify Jesus.¹

Christ is Scripture's Theme

Heisler noted that "Christ is the grand theme, the singular message, and the supreme subject of all the Bible."² As biblical support for this, he pointed to the disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus in Luke chapter 24 when Jesus interpreted for them that all Scripture concerns Him. As such, the preacher's task is to explain to his audience what is said in all the Scripture about Jesus. Heisler called on

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

preachers to practice in the pulpit what they believe in their theology namely that Christ is the theme of the Bible. All of the Bible bears witness to the Christological theme and should be preached as such. Spurgeon taught this same doctrine throughout his ministry and told his students to do the same.

The theme of Spurgeon's life was arguably the redeeming love of Christ. This was so precious to him because he saw it as the theme of God's Word. Whenever a lady in his church would ask him to sign her album, he always wrote the same thing: "E'er since by faith I saw the stream / Thy flowing wounds supply, / Redeeming love has been my theme, / And shall be till I die."³ This was part of a hymn titled "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood."⁴ In 1892 when Spurgeon was laid to rest, this verse was inscribed upon his monument so that even from the tomb he continues to preach the Gospel that he loved.⁵

Spurgeon said that a preacher really does not declare the gospel if he leaves out Christ for by omitting Christ the message is no longer the gospel. He continued saying that such a discourse will only invite men to look upon an empty table unless Christ is the very center and substance of the sermon.⁶ Spurgeon preached that to leave out Christ is "to leave out the main cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, and preach a religion which is all a mist and a haze, without any definite truths whatever."⁷ He agreed with Heisler that Christ was the main subject of Scripture.

In another sermon, Spurgeon asked himself the question, "What is the

³ C. H. Spurgeon, "God's Works Made Manifest," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 39 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1893), 245.

⁴ This hymn was written by William Cowper in 1771 and first published in *Conyers's Collection of Psalms and Hymns* in 1772.

⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:378.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "Christ's Triple Character," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 325.

⁷ Spurgeon, "Christ Crucified," 50.

Scripture's great theme?" Unsurprisingly, he provided the answer that Scripture's great theme is first and foremost Christ Jesus.

Take thou this Book, and distil it into one word, and that one word will be Jesus. The Book itself is but the body of Christ, and we may look upon all its pages as the swaddling bands of the infant Saviour; for if we unroll the Scripture, we come upon Jesus Christ himself.⁸

This is something that Spurgeon taught to his students. He told them that the master theme of the preacher is the good news from heaven that brings tidings of mercy to the chief of sinners through the atoning death of Jesus upon believing in Him.⁹

Spurgeon preached that leaving Christ out of the Scripture leaves out the essential truth the Bible is meant to declare, and for Spurgeon, Christ being so essential to the Bible brought certain implications. He taught that leaving Christ out of the Word strips it of its vitality and power because Christ cannot exist apart from the Word nor can the Word exist apart from Christ. Therefore, according to Spurgeon, it is only because Jesus is not dead that the Word becomes living, effectual, and sharper than any two-edged sword.¹⁰

Spurgeon was so adamant about this that at times he sounded drastic though not unreasonable. He said that if any man preaches that which does not lead his hearers to Christ, they should not listen to him, and if any book teaches that which makes its reader think less of Christ, that book should be burned. "It will do you no good, and it may do you a great deal of mischief."¹¹ Spurgeon continued saying that all sound teaching leads to Christ for God the Father teaches Christ to His children and believers ought to imitate

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "How to Become Full of Joy," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 496.

⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:78.

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Word a Sword," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 110.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Choice Teaching for the Chosen," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 43.

God from beginning to end in teaching Christ crucified.¹²

One of the more cited examples of Spurgeon advocating for a Christocentric approach to Scripture in general and preaching in particular involves him using the illustrative story of another preacher. A Welsh minister preached at the chapel of Spurgeon's friend, Jonathan George, and told this story to explain how Christ was the sum and substance of the Gospel.

A young man had been preaching in the presence of a venerable divine, and after he had done he went to the old minister, and said, "What do you think of my sermon?" "A very poor sermon indeed," said he. "A poor sermon?" said the young man, "it took me a long time to study it." "Ay, no doubt of it." "Why, did you not think my explanation of the text a very good one?" "Oh yes," said the old preacher, "very good indeed." "Well, then, why do you say it is a poor sermon? Didn't you think the metaphors were appropriate and the arguments conclusive?" "Yes, they were very good as far as that goes, but still it was a very poor sermon." "Will you tell me why you think it a poor sermon?" "Because," said he, "there was no Christ in it." "Well," said the young man, "Christ was not in the text; we are not to be preaching Christ always, we must preach what is in the text." So the old man said, "Don't you know young man that from every town, and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London?" "Yes," said the young man. "Ah!" said the old divine "and so from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, 'Now what is the road to Christ?' and then preach a sermon, running along the road towards the great metropolis—Christ. And," said he. "I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it."¹³

Spurgeon, by approvingly quoting this story, showed he agreed with the idea that every passage has an avenue to Christ and that it is the preacher's job to find it. In addition, he made it very clear that preaching without Christ is unacceptable. In a different sermon, Spurgeon compared the sun and the sky to Christ and the Bible saying just as the sky would be incomplete without the sun so too would the Scriptures be

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, "Choice Teaching for the Chosen," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 43.

¹³ Spurgeon, "Christ Precious to Believers," 140. A truncated version of this story was included in Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 288.

without Christ.¹⁴

In 1870, Spurgeon published a book titled *Feathers for Arrows*. He meant this book to aid preachers and teacher in illustrating divine truths. As such, it reads much more like an encyclopedia or dictionary than anything else. In this book, he provides a quote by John Angell James under the topic of Christ as the preacher's theme.¹⁵ In this quote, James states that the pulpit is intended to be a pedestal for the cross; therefore, if the preacher fails to make Christ the great subject of his preaching, he has forgotten his errand and can do no good. James continues by saying that Satan trembles at nothing but the cross for it is the only means by which the preacher can extend God's kingdom.¹⁶ Any doubt that Spurgeon would not entirely agree with James on this matter are dispensed with this account. Early in Spurgeon's ministry, he was seized with an intense desire to hear James preach. Although his finances were meager, Spurgeon made the trip from Cambridge to Birmingham with the singular goal of hearing James preach. He was able to attend a weekday lecture and thought about the subject and sermon for years afterward.¹⁷

Later in *Feathers for Arrows*, Spurgeon wrote that Christ Jesus is the "marrow of theology".¹⁸ He then told of the American Presbyterian theologian and professor at the Princeton Theological Seminary Dr. Archibald Alexander. Spurgeon recounted that when Alexander was on his death-bed, he told a friend "All my theology is reduced to this narrow compass—*Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.*"¹⁹ Spurgeon

¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "God in Nature and in Revelation," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 375–376.

¹⁵ Spurgeon, *Feathers for Arrows*, 31–32.

¹⁶ John Angell James, *The Attraction of the Cross: A Sermon Preached Before the London Missionary Society* (London: London Missionary Society, 1819), 40.

¹⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:208.

¹⁸ Spurgeon, *Feathers for Arrows*, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Italics in original.

completely agreed. In 1889, he preached a sermon on this verse entitled “The Whole Gospel in a Single Verse” and said that this text contains the gospel in brief, yet it also contains the gospel in full.²⁰

Spurgeon had much to say about a sermon that did not contain Christ. He said that such a sermon is a worthless sermon for it is like bread made without flour since the essential element is lacking.²¹ Elsewhere, he said that a sermon without Christ is like a chariot without a rider which is no good at all. He reasoned that some preachers tell of the doctrines of the Gospel and thereby bring out the chariot, but it contains no rider. “But whatever else the preacher may forget, he should never forget his Master, but always give him his rightful place.”²² Spurgeon called a sermon without Christ “a delusion and a sham, mere playing with immortal souls, a mockery both of God and man.”²³ Spurgeon preached that Jesus Christ should be the alpha and omega of every sermon. “Even if the preacher is not preaching Christ directly, he ought to be preaching him indirectly, proclaiming the truth in such a way that it shall either draw the sinner or else drive him to the cross of Christ.”²⁴

For Spurgeon, Christ was the essence of the preacher’s message. “Yes, it is Christ, Christ, Christ whom we have to preach; and if we leave him out, we leave out the very soul of the gospel.”²⁵ He said that he pitied anyone who had to hear a sermon with no Christ in it, yet if anyone heard another sermon from that man, it is his own fault. “I

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Whole Gospel in a Single Verse,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 39 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1893), 133.

²¹ Spurgeon, *The Salt Cellars*, 1:55.

²² Spurgeon, “The Almighty Warrior,” 114–115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “Why the Gospel Is Hidden,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 63.

would not give a man a second chance to preach me a Christless sermon.”²⁶ Spurgeon raised the objection that such a stance is too harsh, yet he disagreed. “When I get the idea that a gentleman believes in a gospel in which Christ is not first and last I leave him alone in his glory. Christ must be all in all, or the gospel is not preached.”²⁷

Spurgeon taught his students that Christ was the theme of Scripture and the essence of the message of faithful preachers. He told them to always and evermore preach Christ for Christ is the whole gospel. “His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme.”²⁸ Spurgeon stated that what the world needs is to be told of its Savior and the way to reach Him. He said that in young preachers resolved to deal with important truths in their pulpits, then they must not hover around mere angles of truth. Spurgeon pointed out that some doctrines are not vital to the soul’s salvation or even essential to practical Christianity. While Spurgeon did advocate that every part of Scripture is profitable and that the preacher should preach the whole truth, he also warned not to make minor doctrines main points. “Do not paint the details of the background of the gospel picture with the same heavy brush as the great objects in the foreground of it.”²⁹ The main theme of the Scripture is Christ and sermons should reflect this. Spurgeon demonstrated that he was a Spirit-led preacher by taking Christ as the theme of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit Glorifies Christ

The Spirit’s ministry for preaching includes a Christological witness because it is the Spirit’s role to glorify Christ. As Heisler pointed out, Jesus gave the instruction that when the Spirit came, He would testify about Jesus. “The Spirit rejoices to place all attention and focus on the magnification of Jesus Christ as Lord, to shine the spotlight on

²⁶ Spurgeon, *ST: 1882*, 446.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979, 1:82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:78.

the risen Christ. . . whatever begins with the Holy Spirit always ends in Jesus Christ.”³⁰ Heisler pointed out that this is why much of what is done in the name of the Spirit is not of the Spirit because Jesus is never mentioned or glorified. It is the obligation of the Spirit-led preacher to partner with the Holy Spirit so that the preacher can preach Christ to his audience while the Spirit reveals Christ to his audience.³¹ The Spirit-led preacher knows that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to glorify Christ, preaches this doctrine, and teaches young pastors to do the same.

Spurgeon preached this doctrine. He proclaimed that the Holy Spirit shows man the things of Christ for His purpose is to glorify Christ. “The Holy Spirit’s object is to make Christ appear to be great and glorious to you and to me.”³² According to Spurgeon, the Holy Spirit does many things, but all His actions have one aim, to glorify Christ. Spurgeon preached that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by showing Him to the poor creatures called humans. Spurgeon marveled that making men’s weak eyes see Christ and their trembling hearts love Him actually brings Christ glory. Yet, Spurgeon preached, that revealing Christ to man is the Holy Spirit’s principal way of glorifying the Lord Jesus. “He takes of the things of Christ, not to show them to angels, not to write them in letters of fire across the brow of night, but to show them unto us.”³³

Spurgeon reasoned that if the principal task of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, then God’s people are correct in imitating Him and should endeavor to glorify Christ. “To what higher ends can we devote ourselves, than to something to which God

³⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

³² C. H. Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit Glorifying Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 522.

³³ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit’s Chief Office,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 481.

the Holy Ghost devotes himself?”³⁴ Spurgeon taught that a ministry full of Christ is a ministry that God can bless. He warned that sermons without Christ contain nothing of unction and nothing of savor. He continued:

Leave Christ out of your preaching, and you have taken the milk from the children, you have taken the strong meat from the men; but if your object as a teacher or preacher is to glorify Christ, and to lead men to love him and trust him, why, that is the very work upon which the heart of God himself is set. The Lord and you are pulling together, and God the Holy Ghost can set his seal to a work like that.³⁵

The Holy Spirit can set his seal on a work like that because he is the Lord’s glorifier. Spurgeon said that all things being equal, the Holy Spirit honors preaching in proportion to the amount of the Savior that is in it.³⁶ Spurgeon desired that his hearers keep this truth forever in their minds, “that which does not glorify Christ is not of the Holy Spirit, and that which is of the Holy Spirit invariably glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁷ Spurgeon was more specific in another sermon saying that the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to saints and sinners who cannot see such things for sin puts a veil between man and Christ. Spurgeon continued saying that the Holy Spirit comes and takes the veil away thus demonstrating the community within the Godhead.

It is the Holy Spirit’s office to come between us and Christ, to lead us to Christ, even as the Son of God comes between us and the Father, to lead us to the Father; so that we have the whole Trinity uniting to save a sinner, the Triune God bowing down out of heaven for the salvation of rebellious men.³⁸

Spurgeon used the fact that the Holy Spirit shows the things of Christ to men as a way of advocating for humble service. He pointed out the condescension of the Holy Spirit coming down to the level of man and likened it to a man teaching the things of

³⁴ Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit’s Chief Office,” 481.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Great Sermon by the Greatest Preacher,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 41 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1895), 186–187.

³⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Depths and Heights,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 385–386.

³⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit’s Chief Office,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 482.

³⁸ Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit Glorifying Christ,” 518.

Jesus to children. He then told this story:

I remember a young man who was a great fool, but did not know it, and therefore was all the greater fool; once, speaking to children, he said, “My dear children, it takes a great deal to bring a great mind down to your capacities.” You cannot show me a word of Christ of that kind. Where does the Holy Ghost ever talk about its being a great come-down for him to teach children, or to teach us? Nay, nay; but he glorifies Christ by taking of his things, and showing them unto us, even such poor ignorant scholars as we are.³⁹

Spurgeon concluded that Christ must be preached for the Spirit of God bears no witness to sermons without Christ. “Leave Jesus out of your preaching, and the Holy Spirit will never come upon you.”⁴⁰ Spurgeon stated that it is the Spirit’s purpose to take the things of Christ and show them to man. The man who wants the blessing of the Spirit ought to never wander from the central point of Christ and His cross. Spurgeon was determined that the Lord Jesus Christ must be preached and even that is not enough unless the Holy Spirit brings Christ home to the soul. Spurgeon continued that unless the Spirit comes, God’s people cannot be fed for God himself must put the spiritual food into the mouths of his people. Spurgeon noted that the best doctrines and the best preaching of Christ cannot accomplish the purpose for “We are babes: we must receive our nourishment from our God, and from nowhere else; and if he be not pleased to convey it to our souls, we shall hear the word, and see the word, but feed upon the word we never shall.”⁴¹

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he recognized that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ. This made him adamant about preaching Christ filled sermons. He sought to imitate the Holy Spirit in His work of showing the things of Christ Jesus to saints and sinners. Heisler knew that Spurgeon was a fine example of a preacher

³⁹ Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit Glorifying Christ,” 519.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Mediator,—Judge and Saviour,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 26 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 315.

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Prayer for the Church Militant,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 13 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867), 490.

who taught that the Holy Spirit's role is to glorify Christ because he included this quote which also demonstrates that Spurgeon taught his students the importance of this doctrine. "The Spirit of God is peculiarly precious to us, because he especially instructs us as to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that is the main point of our preaching. He takes of the things of *Christ*, and shows them unto us."⁴²

New Testament Example

The Holy Spirit's ministry for preaching includes a Christological witness. According to Heisler, part of the reason for this is the New Testament examples. "The heart and soul of Paul's preaching was the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁴³ Heisler noted that Paul's preaching had a strong emphasis on the Christ-centered gospel. Heisler showed that the Spirit's empowerment was the dynamic in Paul's preaching as the gospel of Jesus Christ was the content of his message. "Paul located the power of his preaching ministry in the cross of Jesus."⁴⁴ According to Heisler, the need to preach the cross of Jesus Christ has not changed today. Therefore, the Spirit-led preacher ought to look to the example set in the New Testament for preaching and proclaim Christ.

Spurgeon looked to the Apostle for examples on how to preach. He told his students that he has heard that some ministers are blamed for mentioning their personal conversion stories during the sermon, but that such a censure should be disregarded due to the precedent set by the example of Paul.⁴⁵ Spurgeon noted that in Acts 13, Paul went by way of the Old Testament history to Christ and by way of John the Baptist to Christ. Spurgeon concluded that this is how the preacher of the gospel should travel.

⁴² Spurgeon, *Feathers for Arrows*, 152.

⁴³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 37. Heisler points to the Christ-centered Gospel in 1 Cor. 2:2, 2 Cor. 4:5, and Eph. 3:8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:273–74.

On whatever road he journeys, his terminus must be Christ. The motto of all true servants of God must be, “We preach Christ, and him crucified.” A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.⁴⁶

Spurgeon had much to say about following Paul’s example to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. He noted that Paul did not think it best to educate the people to a certain mark before coming to his main point nor was he afraid that laying bare his main point from the onset would frighten his hearers away like birds seeing the spreading of a net. Spurgeon noted that Paul looked at the matter from every direction as a prudent man should and came to the resolve that he will know nothing among his hearers except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Spurgeon then lamented that all the preachers consumed by modern thought and culture would never follow the example of Paul the great and scholarly divine who, after reading, learning, and inwardly digesting as few men could, determined not to know anything but Jesus Christ and him crucified.⁴⁷ Spurgeon acknowledged that he might know a great deal but that for him to speak about such things he would have to speak beyond the comprehension of some. For Spurgeon, this was unacceptable for he loved his hearers too much to do that. Rather, he would follow Paul’s example. “And I ask you now, my brethren, one thing more; is not Christ and him crucified the thing to live on and the thing to die on?”⁴⁸

In a different sermon, Spurgeon judged that it is good when a preacher loses the thread of his discourse if he had been wandering in the mazes of modern thought. Spurgeon continued that such a departure would be a blessing if it meant that the preacher would get back onto the old paths and preach about the grace of God in the

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, ““To You,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 430–431.

⁴⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Man of One Subject,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 21 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 638.

⁴⁸ Spurgeon, “The Man of One Subject,” 647.

same manner that Paul had done.⁴⁹ Spurgeon made himself very clear saying “the preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified never loses its power.”⁵⁰ Spurgeon made this promise, “As long as this tongue can move, and these lips can speak, I will preach nothing to you but Jesus Christ and him crucified; that he, who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”⁵¹

Spurgeon concluded that to know nothing but Christ and him crucified means that ministers ought to preach Christ only. He stated that this is what every true minister should do as they imitate Paul. Spurgeon continued saying that the preacher must never mix anything else with the gospel. “Christ is the Alpha of the gospel, and he is the Omega too; the first letter of the gospel alphabet, and the last letter, and all the letters in between. It must be Christ, *Christ*, CHRIST from beginning to end.”⁵² Spurgeon claimed that the truest science is the science of Jesus Christ and him crucified and that the deepest of all metaphysics are found at the foot of the cross. He said that the men who keep on simply and earnestly preaching the old-fashioned gospel are those who will most certainly win the victory.⁵³

Spurgeon also followed Paul’s example in 2 Corinthians 4:5. When Paul says that “we preach not ourselves”, Spurgeon agreed saying that if the preacher was forced to take for his topic himself, it would make for a miserable sermon. For Spurgeon, this means that the preacher is not on a higher or more prestigious plane than the rest of the

⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Paul’s Parenthesis,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 134.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Voice with Four Messages,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 55 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1909), 556.

⁵¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 41 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1895), 413.

⁵² Spurgeon, “Preaching Christ Crucified,” 489. Italics and capitalization in the original.

⁵³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Idolatry Condemned,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 620.

believers but that ministers on equal to the rest of the Christian brotherhood.⁵⁴ Spurgeon taught that ministers are to follow the example of Paul and preach Christ Jesus the Lord as the great theme of their sermons.⁵⁵

Spurgeon noted that following Paul's example in preaching not himself but preaching Christ results in a ministry that avoids the error of elevating the minister to too high of a position. He preached that that Paul, Apollos, and Cephas are all laborers and that none of them owns even the smallest parcel of land. In Spurgeon's analogy, the land is Christ and it is the land which owns the laborers not the laborers who own the land. Spurgeon reasoned that this is because the godly minister does not preach himself but preaches Christ.⁵⁶ Spurgeon recognized that it is possible after a man is saved and has been fed under a godly pastor that he looks no higher than the pastor. Spurgeon continued that such a man, instead of looking to the Lord, stands on the wisdom of man and foolishly looks for the living among the dead. Spurgeon warned his hearers not to do anything like this. "To the Lord Jesus we bid you look; for we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake."⁵⁷ True ambassadors of God do not stand between the people and God to take any share of praise.⁵⁸

Spurgeon often pointed to New Testament saints as examples for modern preachers. He condemned some "microscopic divines" who did not heed the Apostle's advice not to preach about unimportant topics or old wives' tales but instead crafted sermons that demonstrated they were more concerned with making a clever point than in

⁵⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "Our Light Affliction," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 166.

⁵⁵ Spurgeon, "Why the Gospel Is Hidden," 70.

⁵⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Farm Sermons* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1882), 170.

⁵⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Timely Expostulation," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 124–125.

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "God Beseeking Sinners by His Ministers," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 19 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1873), 425.

saving souls.⁵⁹ Spurgeon began one sermon saying that he had nothing to do but preach Jesus Christ because in doing so he was following the first Christian ministers. He then quoted verses of the apostles never ceasing to preach Jesus, Philip going to Samaria to preach Christ, and Paul preaching in the synagogues after he was converted. “We shall not be ashamed to preach what the apostles preached, and what martyrs and confessors preached.”⁶⁰

In a sermon, Spurgeon told the story of a Christian minister who preached morality until there was no morality left in the place. This man then decided to imitate Paul and preached Christ crucified. Soon, he discovered that vice had vanished, and that graces and virtues flourished under the shadow of the cross. Spurgeon then declared that he had found what works. He will let other men preach anything else, but he will stick to the old-fashioned theme that Paul preached, “that old, old story which the seeker after novelties condemns as stale.”⁶¹ For Spurgeon knew that while some find the old story stale those seeking eternal life and longing for something that will satisfy the conscience see the freshness, and in their eyes, the charm of the old story does not fade.

Spurgeon demonstrated himself as a Spirit-led preacher by following the New Testament example of preaching Christ and him crucified. He knew that no other subject produces life changing effects. “The Spirit of God bears no witness to Christless sermons.”⁶² Spurgeon preached not himself so that no one would follow men’s wisdom. Rather, he preached Christ. In this, he participated with the Spirit in His ministry for preaching through being a Christological witness.

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:79. In this section, Spurgeon attributed the condemnation of preaching old wives’ fables to Peter when he is probably referring to 1 Timothy 4:7, “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.”

⁶⁰ Spurgeon, “Depths and Heights,” 385.

⁶¹ Spurgeon, “The Royal Saviour,” 618–619.

⁶² Spurgeon, “The Mediator,—Judge and Saviour,” 315.

Christological by Design

Heisler noted that words spoken without reference to the Lord will fall to the ground.⁶³ The Spirit-led preacher knows this and intentionally preaches Christ. Heisler was clear that “every sermon should be redemptive in focus and should by design, not by accident, draw attention to the person and the work of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ Haphazardly adding Jesus to a sermon is not honoring to Christ, the text, or the Spirit, and Heisler was clear Jesus only coming up during the last minute of a sermon is not Christological by any stretch of the imagination. Spirit-led preaching is always saturated by the gospel and filled with the person and work of Christ.

Spurgeon and his preaching were intentionally centered on Christ and he taught his students to purposely preach Christ in every sermon. He was very interested in winning souls to Christ. As such, he was ashamed of those preachers who did not bend the bow with all their might and throw their whole strength into the efforts to win souls.⁶⁵ He was serious. He once preached that while he cannot bear to be lost, yet he will be lost if he declines to warn others of the doom of unbelief. He reiterated saying that while he cannot bear to be cast away from the presence of God forever, yet this woe will be his fate if he does not preach the Gospel and does not declare the whole counsel of God. He made his point that preachers should not avoid talking about the more painful parts of God’s message. “The result of unbelief and sin in others will fall on us if we do not warn them.”⁶⁶

Spurgeon mocked preachers who would leave Christ out of their preaching. He told them that they are like bakers making bread without flour who will soon have to shut

⁶³ Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 329.

⁶⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 72.

⁶⁵ Spurgeon, “Satan’s Arrows and God’s,” 373.

⁶⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Private Enquiry,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 32.

up the shop for all the customers will go to other tradesmen. He continued this thought saying that just as men have a natural prejudice of bread made with flour so there is an unaccountable prejudice in men's minds for a Gospel that contains Christ.

A sermon without Christ as its beginning, middle, and end is a mistake in conception and a crime in execution. However grand the language it will be merely much-ado-about-nothing if Christ be not there. Ay, and I mean by Christ not merely his example and the ethical precepts of his teaching, but his atoning blood, his wondrous satisfaction made for human sin, and the grand doctrine of "believe and live." If "Life for a look at the Crucified One" be obscured, all is dark; if justification by faith be not set in the very forefront in the full blaze of light, nothing can be accomplished. Without Christ in the doctrine ye shall do nothing.⁶⁷

Spurgeon gave the advice that preachers ought not to try to preach sinners to Christ with misguided advocacy for morality, but rather faithful preachers ought to preach Christ to sinners. Spurgeon was convinced that a full and clear declaration of what Jesus is, as to His person, offices, character, work, and authority, would do more to produce faith than many exhortations. He continued saying, "The very best topic for the immediate conversion of men is Christ crucified—the doctrine that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."⁶⁸ However, Spurgeon taught that preaching Christ does not only convert men, but it also sanctifies them. He reasoned that if a minister's preaching does not turn men from drunkenness to sobriety, from thieving to honesty, from unchastity to purity, then the Gospel he is proclaiming is not worth a button. Spurgeon then said if a minister's preaching does do all of this, then it is evidence that such preaching is from God and that he has rightly centered his Gospel on Christ.⁶⁹

In a sermon, Spurgeon advocated purposely Christ-centered sermons because Christ is the soul's food. He said that believers are nourished by the truth as it is in Jesus.

⁶⁷ Spurgeon, "Without Christ—Nothing," 598.

⁶⁸ Spurgeon, "Israel's Hope," 212.

⁶⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Great Joy in the City," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 127.

This is how they get the marrow and fatness of the Gospel. Spurgeon then told a story about a friend who was a pastor. This pastor went to the British Museum Library looking for sermons upon Christ. Looking through book after book, he found five hundred sermons that had a subject other than Christ. Spurgeon then said perhaps this pastor is wrong and there were only five sermons without Christ. For Spurgeon, this was still far too many and faithful men should still lament about how lean the pulpit is. “Leave Christ out? O my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ’s name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach.”⁷⁰

Spurgeon recognized the objections. He knew that some would say that preaching Christ in every sermon means that they would hear the same old doctrine again and again. Spurgeon was not surprised if anyone said that but neither will he make any sort of excuse. “The doctrine of justification by faith through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is very much to my ministry what bread and salt are to the table.” He said that just as bread and salt are necessary things to be at every meal so too is Christ. For Spurgeon, this was a doctrine to be preached continually for it is the very salt of the Gospel, and “it is impossible to bring it forward too often.”⁷¹ Spurgeon said that he would never preach a sermon that is not full to overflowing with his Master. He told of a man who said that Spurgeon preached of Christ too often, and if he preached a sermon without Christ in it, this man would come hear him. Spurgeon responded with this:

Ah! he will never come while this tongue moves, for a sermon without Christ in it—a Christless sermon! A brook without water; a cloud without rain; a well which mocks the traveller; a tree twice dead, plucked up by the root; a sky without a sun; a night without a star. It were a realm of death—a place of mourning for angels and laughter for devils. O Christian, we must have Christ!⁷²

⁷⁰ Spurgeon, “A Prayer for the Church Militant,” 489–90.

⁷¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Justification, Propitiation, Declaration,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 565.

⁷² C. H. Spurgeon, “A Bundle of Myrrh,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol.

Spurgeon gave some glimpse into why he was so adamant to always preach Christ during a sermon. He told of how his heart cried out with joy when he saw Jesus on the cross because he then understood that God had executed the full vengeance due to his sin upon Son who had willingly undertaken to bear the punishment. Spurgeon recognized that he is always preaching Christ and of the doctrine of substitution. He said that he could not help it because this was the only through that brought him comfort. According to Spurgeon, this doctrine was the only thing that got him out of the dungeon of despair.⁷³ As such, he must continually preach of Christ and the cross which set him free.

As has been previously mentioned, for Spurgeon preaching Christ meant preaching the doctrine of justification and the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement. However, Spurgeon was much clearer than this saying that he believed that preaching Christ and him crucified is preaching what is called Calvinism. He was direct saying that preaching a batch of philosophy or leaving out the main cardinal doctrines of the Word of God and instead preaching a religion which is a mist and a haze is not preaching Christ. For him, to preach Christ means the minister must mention the Holy Spirit's work. Spurgeon said to preach Christ is to preach Calvinism. Spurgeon was quick to point out that "It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else."⁷⁴ He went on to say that it is not possible to preach the gospel without mentioning justification by faith and not by works or the sovereignty of God. Furthermore, Spurgeon said that the preacher must "exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering, love of Jehovah" and must base the Gospel "upon the peculiar redemption which Christ made for his elect and chosen people".⁷⁵ For Spurgeon,

10 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1864), 139.

⁷³ Spurgeon, "God's Works Made Manifest," 245.

⁷⁴ Spurgeon, "Christ Crucified," 50.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the message of Christ must also include the perseverance of the saints because leaving these elements out produces a Gospel that Spurgeon abhors and is a gospel not of the Bible.⁷⁶

Spurgeon preached that Christians all agree that the best sermons are those which are the fullest of Christ.⁷⁷ He suggested that if a preacher wanted to increase his eloquence to preach Christ for doing so may sweeten his mouth. He told such a man to speak for Jesus and see if any honey does not come into his mouth at once. He said that in the previous centuries an orator was pictured with bees buzzing around his lips storing up the honey that dripped from his sweet expressions. Spurgeon noted that this may be a fable concerning the human talker, but it is certainly true of the man who preaches Christ for “the more he speaks of his dear Lord and Master, and the less he tries with human eloquence to magnify himself, the more of sacred sweetness shall there be in every word that he utters”.⁷⁸ Therefore, the preacher who seeks to be eloquent should purposely preach Christologically.

Spurgeon taught that there was another reason to consciously preach Christ in every sermon. He said that leaving Christ out of the sermon leaves out the very soul of the Gospel and such sermons make a merriment for hell.

Christless preachers, Christless Sunday-school teachers, Christless class-leaders, Christless tract-distributors—what are all these doing? They are simply setting the mill to grind without putting any grist into the hopper, so all their labour is in vain. If you leave Jesus Christ out, you are simply beating the air, or going to war without any weapon with which you can smite the foe.⁷⁹

In a different sermon, Spurgeon continued this point. He stated that it is the chief aim of the enemy’s assaults to get rid of Christ and get rid of the atonement.

⁷⁶ Spurgeon, “Christ Crucified,” 50.

⁷⁷ Spurgeon, “Christ Precious to Believers,” 140.

⁷⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Best Christmas Fare,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 39 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1893), 619.

⁷⁹ Spurgeon, “Why the Gospel Is Hidden,” 63.

Spurgeon said that the enemy is then glad for sinners to accept the rest of the gospel but that there is nothing of value remaining. “What is there left? A bloodless, Christless gospel is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; it neither honours God nor converts the sons of men.”⁸⁰ Spurgeon that such a result was a sad affliction when the brilliance of the Gospel light is dimmed by error. He mourned to hear that the clearness of the testimony is spoiled by doubtful voices scattered among the people and that those who should preach whole truth and nothing besides it are advocating for the doctrines of men’s imaginations and the inventions of the age. “Instead of revelation, we have philosophy, falsely so-called; instead of divine infallibility, we have surmises and larger hopes. The gospel of Jesus Christ... is taught as the production of progress, a growth, a thing to be amended and corrected year by year.”⁸¹

Spurgeon outlined another reason for the preacher to deliberately preach Christ. He said that there are no gatherings of people anywhere else like those who come to Christ. He noted that the multitudes have gathered in his church. He is confident that the only reason such crowds gather is because the preacher’s theme is Christ.

Feebly as he sometimes preaches, his unvarying theme is the cross, the precious blood, the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ offered once for all on Calvary. This is a theme which never palls upon the ear, this is a subject which never grows stale. “We preach Christ crucified,” for this is the magnet that draws the people unto him.⁸²

Spurgeon told his students to follow his example in intentionally preaching Christ and remain unwaveringly the champions of a soul-winning gospel.⁸³ He told them to throw all their strength of judgment, memory, imagination, and eloquence into the delivery of the Gospel. He told them that if he were to take the intellect of Locke or

⁸⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Living Care of the Dying Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 315.

⁸¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Sermon for the Time Present,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 33 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1887), 602.

⁸² Spurgeon, “Praise for Jesus,” 163.

⁸³ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:82.

Newton and the eloquence of Cicero to bear upon the simple Gospel, there would be no surplus of strength. “Brethren, first and above all things, keep to plain evangelical doctrines; whatever else you do or do not preach, be sure incessantly to bring forth the soul-saving truth of Christ and him crucified.”⁸⁴

The Spirit-led preacher deliberately preaches Christ in every sermon. In this way, Spurgeon demonstrated that he was a Spirit-led preacher. He provided reasons for his conviction saying that preaching Christ was necessary for the nourishment of the soul of the believer and the winning of the soul of the unbeliever. He pointed out that if a preacher wanted to add eloquence to his sermon, then he only needed to add Christ and eloquence would come along. For Spurgeon, the preaching of Christ was also the reason behind the success of his church because Christians desire to hear of their Lord. He dealt with objections of repetitiveness and pointed out that the enemies of Christ would prefer him preach about anything other than the Savior. All of this comes together to verify that Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he intentionally preached Christ and taught others to do the same.

Conclusion

Spurgeon recognized the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the act of preaching includes a Christological witness. He was “unreservedly Christ-centered.”⁸⁵ As such, he preached many times that Christ is the main theme of Scripture and to leave Him out of a sermon is to leave out the flour from bread. He recognized how essential it is to preach Christ from every text and said that a sermon may be successful in presenting the meaning of a passage of Scripture but if that sermon leaves out Christ, it is a failure. Spurgeon acknowledged that the role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ. This fueled

⁸⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:78.

⁸⁵ Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life: Alive in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 16.

even more his desire to preach Christ-filled sermons as he sought to imitate the Holy Spirit in glorifying Christ. Spurgeon followed the New Testament example laid forth for the preacher. He, like Paul, desired to know nothing but Christ Jesus and him crucified. He did not want to sound clever or engaging. He wanted to tell dying men about the Savior. Spurgeon was also deliberate in his preaching of Christ. He preached Christ in every sermon and said that men who did not should no longer be allowed to preach. For him, a sermon without Christ was an abomination. As such, he deliberately included the gospel of Jesus Christ in every sermon. In these ways, Spurgeon showed that he was a Spirit-led preacher because he recognized and cooperated with the Holy Spirit's ministry in preaching as a witness to Christ.

CHAPTER 8

SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING

The sixth and final ministry of the Holy Spirit for preaching is Spirit-filled living. As Heisler noted, Spirit-filled lives are conformed to Christ.¹ In order for the Spirit-led preacher to live a life filled with the Spirit, he must make sure he is called to preach and not an imposter. While formal education can be useful, it is much more important for the Spirit-led preacher to be educated by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit prepares the preacher for the sermon long before the preacher prepares the sermon for delivery. As such, the Spirit-led preacher must have a level of spiritual maturity as well as integrity and a transformed life in order to truly be living a Spirit-filled life. These sorts of preachers are filled with the Holy Spirit to the point that they have a voracious passion for preaching. These men also love their personal experience of salvation, and it constantly spills over into their sermons. The Spirit-led preacher knows that there are attitudes and actions that will quench the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and he seeks to avoid these as well as warn others concerning their peril. In these ways, the Spirit-led preacher participates with the Holy Spirit in Spirit-filled living.

Spirit-Called Preacher

Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in producing Spirit-filled lives is calling the preacher to the ministry. “Spirit-led preaching can only be undertaken by a Spirit-called preacher.”² Heisler noted that not all believers are candidates for the pulpit. Those

¹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

seeking to preach must have a divine call. Heisler drew the distinction between professions that people choose and preaching which is a call to which men surrender. This results in confidence on the part of the preacher who stands in the pulpit because he has been summoned there by God himself.³ According to Heisler, the Spirit will take hold of the Spirit-led preacher and compel him to preach.⁴ The Spirit-led preacher does not take the mantle on himself. He is called of God, and, more than that, he is driven to the work of preaching by the Holy Spirit.

Spurgeon viewed this matter in the same way. He knew that faithful preachers were called by God and not made by men. In his Preacher's College, Spurgeon would not accept as students those who wished to become preachers. He knew he could not make preachers. This college only accepted those who have been preaching with some measure of success for at least two years.⁵ Spurgeon recognized that God called preachers, while he could aid in their education, he could not take a man and make him into a preacher.

Spurgeon taught this same truth. In speaking with his students, he said that the first sign of the call to preach is an "all-absorbing desire for the work."⁶ This raging thirst to tell others what God has done is required for a true call to the ministry. Spurgeon preached that he felt he was sent by God to preach.⁷ In another sermon, he stated that he and other preachers are "bound to preach."⁸ He also spoke of a Christ through a "sacred instinct" constraining martyrs and missionaries "to go forth to the apostolic task of turning savages into saints."⁹ Spurgeon described the phenomenon of being compelled by

³ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), viii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:23.

⁷ Spurgeon, "How to Please God," 183–4.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "There Is No Difference," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 45 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 63.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Gathering in the Chosen," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*,

the Holy Spirit to preach in these terms. For him, this compelling was an intense desire or calling that constrained the preacher to continue his task.

Spurgeon elaborated on what he meant by the Christ binding men to preach when he told his students the sound advice a pastor once provided, “Do not enter the ministry if you can help it.” Spurgeon went on say that if any student in the Pastor’s College could be content to hold any occupation other than preacher in the whole world including being king, he should leave the college immediately. This is not the sort of man “in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants.”¹⁰ To have the fullness of the Holy Spirit and thereby be empowered by so great a force is to be compelled to preach.

Spurgeon preached that it would be far better for him to break stones on the road or any other occupation, no matter the difficulty, rather than proclaim God’s words from the pulpit for fear of being unfaithful to the many souls committed to his charge. He said that “every sermon involves me in most dire peril unless divine grace makes me faithful.” This is because he is dealing with immortal souls and any mistake cannot be rectified at some later date. Once the souls are lost, they are lost forever.¹¹ This is the seriousness with which Spurgeon took the call to preach. If he thought he could do anything else, he would do it for it would be better both for him and for those in his congregation. However, those who are compelled by the Holy Spirit must preach.

If a man be truly called of God to the ministry, I will defy him to withhold himself from it. A man who has really within him the inspiration of the Holy Ghost calling him to preach cannot help it. He must preach. As fire within the bones, so will that influence be until it blazes forth. Friends may check him, foes criticize him, despisers sneer at him, the man is indomitable; he must preach if he has the call of

vol. 58 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912), 304.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:23.

¹¹ Spurgeon, “Christ’s Ambassadors,” 283–4.

heaven.¹²

Spurgeon recognized that the natural means which make men think that they are called by God to be preachers can vary. He told of persecution which can compel Christian men who would have otherwise rested to go forward and dispense the Gospel to perishing men.¹³ While this is a positive example, Spurgeon also warned that the fascination of the preacher's office is very great to weak minds. Some desire the ease and respect that they think comes with being a pastor. Spurgeon warned his students "not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ He added that any desire to become a pastor must be accompanied with aptness to teach if it were really from the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Spurgeon often ended sermons like he did on one Thursday evening 1874 by pleading with his hearers that their eyes might be opened to see the realities of God's love and the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus and by seeing these things they might be startled into serving the Lord with all their beings.¹⁶ For Spurgeon, this meant living out the Christian life so as to be a living and powerful illustration of the power of Jesus to bless and to save. He said that preaching with the tongue is good if God has called a man to do so, but the best preaching is done with the rest of the body. All believers are called to preach with their feet, with their walk before the Lord.¹⁷

Spurgeon warned about preachers who move from church to church. In

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, "Preach the Gospel," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 267.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Pierced Heart of Jesus," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 63 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1917), 174.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:25.

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "Eyes Opened," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 540.

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "A Sabbath Miracle," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 333.

Spurgeon's opinion, when a man remains in service at one place for only about two years, he needs to question whether he was called into the ministry. "God does not generally plant trees in his vineyard that need shifting every two years."¹⁸ Spurgeon said that a minister called by God may stand years in one place and see ministers called by man swept away because they have no divine life in them. Spurgeon spent thirty-eight years in the service of a church who called him when he was nineteen thus demonstrating his call and his faithfulness.

In order to be led by the Holy Spirit for the task of preaching, a man must be called of the Spirit to the task. It is the Spirit who is the inspiration for preaching, and it is the Spirit who compels men to preach. Spurgeon taught just as much by saying that those who could possibly do any other occupation should do it and cautioned against entering the ministry on a whim. While Spurgeon saw being bound to preach as a grave responsibility as he is dealing with immortal souls, he also saw it as a great joy saying, "It fills my soul with pleasure to think that I am sent to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to poor lost souls. There is no joy like it, except that of seeing them actually saved."¹⁹ As a Spirit-led preacher, it is no wonder that Spurgeon saw himself as being sent by Holy Spirit.

Spirit-Educated Preacher

As part of the Spirit-led preacher's divine directed life, he is ultimately educated by the Spirit. As Heisler said, "the ultimate instructor is the Holy Spirit."²⁰ This is due to the Holy Spirit being the supreme inspirer of preaching.²¹ It is only the Spirit

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Wandering Bird," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 160.

¹⁹ Spurgeon, "Guests for the Royal Feast," 550.

²⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

who can teach the dynamic element of preaching.²² While Heisler noted that the ultimate educator of the preacher is the Holy Spirit, he acknowledged that the mechanics of sermon development can and must be learned, and teachers of preaching can do much to make a preacher better. Heisler grants that college or seminary degrees are not in conflict with the Holy Spirit or with being a Spirit-led preacher; however, “Education can produce a false confidence and a misplaced trust.”²³

This complex view of the preacher’s education was shared by Spurgeon. As already noted, Spurgeon did not admit men who were not preachers into his Pastor’s College. He was not in the business of making preachers but in making preachers better. He taught that nearness to Christ is an education. “Get near to Jesus, and you will find that the Corpus Christi is the true college. He that knows the body of Christ has got the body of theology, the body of divinity—the true theologian to the Word of God.”²⁴ Yet, Spurgeon did agree with Heisler that men meant for the ministry should be educated that the proper sermon development can and should be taught as evidenced by his Pastor’s College and throughout *Lectures to My Students*.

Spurgeon preached about the misleading nature of education saying that it is outrageous to suppose that education, even carried to the highest degree, will produce a better man. “A man may be all the worse for education unless the spiritual part of his nature be educated.”²⁵ Spurgeon went on to say that an educated man may be a profound philosopher and many justify the butchery of innocent people or he may be the finest of art critics and yet may support a monster who could allow men to whip pregnant women

²² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, ““Peace Be unto You,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 198.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Three Hours’ Darkness,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 380.

and shoot down fugitives in cold blood. “The highest education does not keep a man from justifying inhumanity.”²⁶

While Spurgeon was clear that education does not necessarily improve the morals of a man, he was also distrustful of education in connection with the gospel. “What has the gospel of Christ to do with education?”²⁷ He answered this by saying that a man does not need a degree from a university in order to find Christ.

Knowledge sometimes misleads in spiritual things. I would not commend ignorance; but, certainly, it is a fact that the shepherds of Bethlehem, when they wanted to see the newborn King, went straight to him, but the wise men from the East went a long way round before they came to him.²⁸

Spurgeon pointed out that the heart has more power in pastoral work than the head. “In this ministry, a humble, godly, ill-educated man with a great, warm heart will be blessed far more than the large-headed man whose heart is a little diamond of rock-ice which could not be discovered without a microscope, even if he were dissected.”²⁹ In a different sermon, Spurgeon applied this to the topic of prayer. He said that if prayers were powerful and effective according to the beauty of how they were expressed then rhetoric would be more valuable than grace and a university education would be better than sanctification. He pointed out that this is not the case and some are able to express themselves with fluency because of natural gifts. He concludes by saying, “we often pray best when we stammer and stutter, and we pray worst when words come rolling like a torrent, one after another.”³⁰

²⁶ Spurgeon, “The Three Hours’ Darkness,” 380.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Big Gates Wide Open,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 461.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Feed My Sheep,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 399.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Comfort for Those Whose Prayers Are Feeble,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 126.

Spurgeon also said that if men in the ministry want to shine for Jesus they must be made into stars to be held in His right hand. Spurgeon continued that there is no possibility of a minister being of spiritual use except he is made into a light to be held in the right hand of the Lord Jesus. “All the education in the world, all the natural talent that any possess, all the acquired practice of oratory, all the powers which are the result of long experience, can never make a good minister of Jesus Christ.”³¹ To be used by the Lord, they must be fashioned into an instrument that the Lord can use and this is not done through education. Spurgeon said that it is the Holy Spirit who teaches in the church and there is a simple test to know whether he is teaching those who claim to be Spirit-educated. “The Holy Ghost will never go farther than the cross, and the coming of the Lord. He will go no farther than that which concerns Christ.”³²

Spurgeon told young men in college that they must eat their way into the ministry. He explained that a preacher will never be able to tell others to eat of the gospel for it is good if that preacher has not feasted upon those things himself. “Unless you have an inward appreciation of their sweetness, and have sucked them into your very being, you will never be able to talk with power to others concerning them.”³³ Spurgeon was adamant that young preachers do not need education but time with the Holy Spirit. While he valued education as a way to sharpen those who were already being used by God to preach the gospel, he clearly said that no amount of education is evidence of a call from God for the ministry.³⁴ In this regard, Spurgeon recognized that the Holy Spirit’s ministry for preaching extends to the proper education of the preacher. This along with Spurgeon’s

³¹ Spurgeon, “A Portrait No Artist Can Paint,” 3.

³² C. H. Spurgeon, ““Honey in the Mouth!,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 375.

³³ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Soul’s Best Food,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 322.

³⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:3.

own experience with education as noted in chapter two demonstrate that he is a Spirit-led preacher.

Preparing the Preacher

Spirit-led preaching is not so much about preparing a sermon to preach as it is God preparing his vessel to preach.³⁵ Heisler noted that from the time of the preacher's conversion, the Holy Spirit is a daily reality in his life as he seeks to submit to the Spirit's role as sanctifier. Heisler continued that the Spirit leads the preacher through the calling for ministry and the formation of his character. "The Spirit of God molds and makes the preacher long before the preacher molds and makes the sermon."³⁶ The Spirit-led preacher knows that the Spirit prepares the preacher for service.

Spurgeon recognized the reality of the Spirit preparing the preacher for the task, and he taught this same doctrine to his students. He told young ministers that they are not made by men but by the Lord Himself.³⁷ He also said that the Holy Spirit will move the congregation by first moving the preacher. This is particularly true with regards to the emotions the preacher feels toward the unconverted. Talking to preachers, Spurgeon said, "If you can rest without their being saved *they* will rest too; but if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too."³⁸

Spurgeon stated that the Holy Spirit must go before the sermon and prepare the preacher. He knew that a preacher may think that he is thoroughly prepared for his work but that the smallest thing may halt his efforts. Spurgeon pondered that this might be a

³⁵ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁷ Spurgeon, "A Portrait No Artist Can Paint," 3.

³⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "Conversions Desired," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 22 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1876), 143. Italics in original.

disarrangement of his dress, something not right in the pulpit, somebody dropping an umbrella in the aisle, or someone in the congregation who seems completely unimpressed. “Oh, shame upon us that we, who have such a message to deliver, should be affected by such very little things! Yet preachers are so affected, and often they cannot help it.”³⁹ This is why he said it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to prepare the preacher for the act of preaching. Spurgeon did not neglect the need for God to prepare the people for the preacher. He said, “I ask the Lord to give me preparation for the pulpit, but I often think that the other side of it, the preparation of the people for the pulpit, is equally important, and that the Lord will give it in answer to prayer.”⁴⁰ Spurgeon was confident that the Lord not only sends his servant but the persons He intends them to meet for God equally prepares the preacher and the hearer.⁴¹

Speaking about different sorts of people, Spurgeon preached that God has all sorts of stones in His temple. While Spurgeon was glad that he was never sent into the world to make people perfect, he did believe that God uses people as he finds them and gradually prepares them for higher uses.⁴² Spurgeon said something similar when speaking with his students. He told them about Michael Angelo who knew the importance of his tools and always made his own brushes with his own hands. He said this to illustrate how God fashions for Himself all true ministers.⁴³ Spurgeon taught that the Lord prepares the preacher and thus showed himself to be a Spirit-led preacher.

³⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Lord Leading; David Following,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 75–76.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “God’s Mercy Going Before,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 60 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1914), 321.

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Widow of Sarepta,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 353.

⁴² C. H. Spurgeon, “Following Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 449.

⁴³ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:1.

Spiritual Maturity of the Preacher

Heisler was clear that the Spirit-led preacher is a spiritually mature believer. “Preachers who desire to see God’s hand on their preaching must first desire to see God’s hand shape their character. The desire to preach with power must be matched with an equal desire to live holy before the Lord.”⁴⁴ Heisler said that the Holy Spirit’s power for preaching is grounded in the process of spiritual sanctification.⁴⁵ He continued saying that the Spirit-led preacher’s life is marked by unceasing prayer, consistent study of the Bible, and repentance.⁴⁶

Spurgeon taught this same doctrine both from the pulpit and directly to his young preachers. He told them about the cases of men who appeared to be very passionate and who were no doubt the means of directing others to heaven but were not themselves saved. “Too many ministers are like the sign-posts on country roads; they hold out their hands and point the way, but never walk the road themselves; they, like the posts, still stand where they always did.”⁴⁷ Spurgeon warned fellow ministers not to be in the same predicament but to strive to travel the road for themselves. Spurgeon made this point very clear in another sermon.

You must first be called yourselves into Christ before you may dare to even so much as think about being called into the ministry or into the service of Christ. You cannot serve him until first of all you have learned to sit at his feet. Before you can serve God you must have a new heart and a right spirit. The blind eye is not fit for the service of Christ. The eye must be illuminated, the understanding must be instructed. That stubborn will of yours cannot bear the yoke of Christ; it must be subdued. “Ye must be born again.” Should there be some among you here tonight who are teaching in Sunday-schools, distributing tracts, or in any other way are trying to serve God, and yet are not yourselves saved, I would very affectionately, but with great earnestness, entreat you to consider that you are reversing the natural and proper order of things. Your first business is at home, in your own soul and your

⁴⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “God’s Care of Elijah,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 57 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1911), 405.

own heart.⁴⁸

In addition to being converted, Spurgeon told ministers to be mature believers living lives worth emulating. He gave the encouragement to a young, aspiring preacher to begin preaching at home where people know how he practices. Spurgeon continued that if such a preacher cannot preach at home because his practice runs counter to his preaching, then he should not preach at all “for a man has no right to talk and instruct others if he cannot, at least in some measure, live out what he teaches”.⁴⁹

Spurgeon provided some encouragement to those downtrodden by sin and yet desiring the ministry. He said that if a believer mourns his imperfection and lack of absolute holiness, then that very sighing and crying are proof of salvation. “The heart is clean, and the course of the soul is heavenward, when the heart can never be satisfied with anything short of perfect holiness.”⁵⁰ He encouraged those fighting sin. “May we be enabled to go on, brave as lions, and valiant for the truth and cause of King Jesus, and by the help of the Spirit, vow eternal warfare with every sin, and rest not until the sword of the Spirit has destroyed all the enemies in our hearts!”⁵¹ This is the mindset of a Spirit-led preacher.

Spurgeon noticed a tract published by “The Open Air Mission” included qualifications for open-air preachers. After reproducing the list, Spurgeon said that if “any man has all these qualifications, the Queen had better make a bishop of him at once”.⁵² It is not surprising that many of these qualifications align with spiritual maturity such as a loving heart, sincere belief, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, a close walk with

⁴⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “Peter’s Three Calls,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 12 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1866), 410–411.

⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “A Pastoral Visit,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 367–368.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “Our Leader through the Darkness,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 424.

⁵¹ Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 49.

⁵² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:146.

God by prayer, and a consistent walk before me by a holy life.⁵³ Spurgeon plainly stated that ministers accomplish the most when they are in the best spiritual condition and they do worse when their gifts and graces are most out of trim. He said that is because the preacher is, in a certain sense, his own tools and must therefore keep himself in order in the same way a lumberjack ought to sharpen his axe.⁵⁴ He continued that it would be foolish for a preacher to stock his library or organize societies if he neglects the culture of himself for books and agencies are hardly the instrument of his calling. The calling of the preacher is upon his own spirit, soul, and body. Spurgeon was clear that the preacher's spiritual faculties and his inner life are his battle axe and weapons of war.⁵⁵

Spurgeon warned his students against being “shoddy” preachers and to instead place focused attention on being pious men.⁵⁶ “True and genuine piety is necessary as the first indispensable requisite; whatever “call” a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.”⁵⁷ He argued that it is very important that the minister's piety be vigorous.⁵⁸ “His pulse of vital godliness must beat strongly and regularly; his eye of faith must be bright; his foot of resolution must be firm; his hand of activity must be quick; his whole inner man must be in the highest degree of sanity.”⁵⁹

One issue that Spurgeon spoke of at length was that of the quality of man who desires to be a preacher. “Our weakest-minded, most timid, most carnal, and most ill-

⁵³ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:146. The other qualifications include a good voice, naturalness of manner, self-possession, a good knowledge of Scriptures and of common things, ability to adapt himself to any congregation, good illustrative powers, and zeal, prudence, and common sense.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:8.

balanced men are not suitable candidates for the pulpit.”⁶⁰ He revolted at the idea that when a man is too brainless to succeed in any common calling, then he is to argue that he is called to the ministry. “This mischievous notion fills pulpits, but it empties pews.”⁶¹ Rather, Spurgeon argued that the very best of the Christian men are needed for this work. He said that when God calls a preacher into ministerial labor, he should endeavor to get grace that he may be strengthened into fitness for such a position and be a novice to be carried away by the temptations of Satan to the injury of the church.⁶²

Spurgeon also spoke about men who while good men should never be elevated to a role as minister. He said that some men should not be put into ministerial service because their heads are too weak and if they were permitted a little success they would be intoxicated with vanity. He argued that the other men are well enough as simple members of the church but are disqualified because the role of minister demands the highest moral character.⁶³

Spurgeon so demanded a high level of spiritual maturity from men who would become preachers that he said himself he “hold very stern opinions with regard to Christian men who have fallen into gross sin”.⁶⁴ While Spurgeon rejoiced that such men might truly be converted and be cautiously received into the church, he seriously questioned whether a man who has grossly sinned should be readily restored to the pulpit. Instead, Spurgeon agreed with John Angell James in saying that a disgraced preacher should only reenter the pulpit when his repentance is as notorious as his sin. Spurgeon held such a sharp line because he taught that as the result of the decline of the preacher,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Spurgeon, *Feathers for Arrows*, 152.

⁶² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:9.

⁶³ Ibid., 1:8.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:8–9.

every one of his hearers will suffer.⁶⁵ Therefore, Spurgeon reiterated that preachers must cultivate the highest degree of godliness because their work imperatively requires it. He taught that the work of the Christian ministry is performed in exact proportion to the vigor of the ministers renewed nature. “As is the workman, such will the work be.”⁶⁶ As a Spirit-led preacher, Spurgeon new the importance of the preacher’s spiritual maturity.

The Preacher’s Integrity and Transformation

A couple of character traits are worth special attention. The Spirit’s ministry for preaching included a transformed life for the Spirit-led preacher. The Spirit-led preacher believes the Bible to be true because it continues to change his life.⁶⁷ According to Heisler, this transformation is important since character matters to God and the man cannot be separated from the message.⁶⁸ Heisler pointed out how important integrity is to the Spirit-led preacher. “Just as the structural integrity of a building must bear the weight of the building, so the structural integrity of the preacher—his character and integrity—must be able to carry the burden of God’s Word to God’s people.”⁶⁹ He went on to say that character, preaching, and the Holy Spirit are all intertwined and feed off one another. This produces an atmosphere of credibility and integrity.⁷⁰ Heisler said that people need to see in the pulpit a man who has been transformed by the truth he is proclaiming “not an imposter under the pretense of false spirituality.”⁷¹ The Spirit-led preacher is a man of integrity who speaks out of a life transformed by the truth of the gospel.

⁶⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:12.

⁶⁷ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

Spurgeon agreed saying that believers should thank God for the good things He has done to keep them out of sin. “No man has any right to take credit to himself for his own integrity, for, if he be a Christian, that integrity is the gift of God’s grace, and the work of God’s Spirit within him.”⁷² Spurgeon more specifically told his congregation to value the Holy Spirit above all things because their entire dependence is upon him. He continued that they should seek to be filled with the Spirit so that even if strong men seize them, they will not flee, they will not be overtaken by shame, and they will stand “in unblemished integrity to the end as the true servants of Jesus Christ.”⁷³ Spurgeon marveled at the great grace on display when a believer is enabled to live in the teeth of the ungodly world and yet maintain his integrity to the end.⁷⁴ With all of this, Spurgeon clearly saw integrity as a gift of God for which the believer should strive.

On the topic of the preacher’s integrity and transformed life, Spurgeon had much to say to his students. He told his students that it is important for preachers to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit because a considerable and essential part of Christian ministry lies in providing a good example.

Our people take much note of what we say out of the pulpit, and what we do in the social circle and elsewhere. Do you find it easy, my brethren, to be saints?—such saints that others may regard you as examples? We ought to be such husbands that every husband in the parish may safely be such as we are. Is it so? We ought to be the best of fathers. Alas! some ministers, to my knowledge, are far from this, for as to their families, they have kept the vineyards of others, but their own vineyards they have not kept. Their children are neglected, and do not grow up as a godly seed. Is it so with yours? In our converse with our fellow-men are we blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke? Such we ought to be. I admire Mr. Whitfield’s reasons for always having his linen scrupulously clean. “No, no,” he would say, “these are not trifles; a minister must be without spot, even in his

⁷² C. H. Spurgeon, ““Nevertheless at Thy Word,”” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 48 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1902), 608.

⁷³ C. H. Spurgeon, “John Mark; Or, Haste in Religion,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 45–46.

⁷⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “Witnessing at the Cross,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 59 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1913), 337.

garments, if he can.” Purity cannot be carried too far in a minister.⁷⁵

Spurgeon warned preachers, especially those with a forceful personality, not to shock their more genteel audiences. He noted that while it might be helpful to shock the foolish gentility out of this sort of people, ultimately it is discouraged because it makes for a powerful example. Spurgeon finished his warning saying that such preachers are somewhat responsible for the weaklings who copy them.⁷⁶

Spurgeon encouraged his students to be known to be godly, devout, large-hearted, and self-sacrificing. He said that such a man has power in his very person and his advice carries weight because of his character. Spurgeon continued that when such a man begins to plead with tears for sinners to come to the Savior, the Holy Spirit yokes this man’s reputation and character into his service.⁷⁷ While this is effective, Spurgeon warned that earnestness in the pulpit must be real.

It is not to be mimicked. We have seen it counterfeited, but every person with a grain of sense could detect the imposition. To stamp the foot, to smite the desk, to perspire, to shout, to bawl, to quote the pathetic portions of other people’s sermons, or to pour out voluntary tears from a watery eye will never make up for true agony of soul and real tenderness of spirit.⁷⁸

Spurgeon told his students that it is imperative that the preacher’s personal character agree in all respects with his ministry. “We have all heard the story of the man who preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again.”⁷⁹ He continued saying that people do not trust those who have two faces and congregations will not believe someone whose verbal and practical testimonies are contradictory. Spurgeon agreed that actions speak louder than words, “so

⁷⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:34–35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:191–92.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:273.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:219–20.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:12–13.

an ill life will effectually drown the voice of the most eloquent ministry.”⁸⁰ He noted that because a preacher’s character is more persuasive than his speech, he needs to be concerned with both sins of commission but also sins of omission. Spurgeon warned that too many preachers forget to serve God when they are out of the pulpit and thus lead negatively inconsistent lives.

Abhor, dear brethren, the thought of being clockwork ministers who are not alive by abiding grace within, but are wound up by temporary influences; men who are only ministers for the time being, under the stress of the hour of ministering, but cease to be ministers when they descend the pulpit stairs. True ministers are always ministers.⁸¹

Spurgeon said, “It is a horrible thing to be an inconsistent minister.”⁸² He said that for the herald of the gospel to be spiritually out of order in his own person is a serious calamity to himself and his work. He continued saying while holiness in a minister is his chief necessity and best ornament, mere moral excellence is not enough for a preacher ought to have a consistent character. Spurgeon claimed that such a life is like a fragrant oil or a magnet that draws men to Christ for the sanctity of the minister is a loud call to sinners to repent and when it is allied with holy cheerfulness the pair become wondrously attractive.⁸³

Spurgeon told this story to illustrate that the minister should take care to live consistently even in the little things and should especially be careful to never fall short of his word. A celebrated Doctor of Divinity in London gave notice one Sunday that he intended to visit all his people. He said that he would get to each household once in the year, and he will be taking the seat holders in order. A poor man in the congregation was delighted with the idea. A couple of weeks before the poor man thought it would be his

⁸⁰ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:13.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 1:14.

turn to host the doctor, his wife carefully swept the hearth and kept the house tidy. Every day the man ran home early from work hoping to see the doctor. This went on for a considerable time as the doctor either forgot his promise or grew weary of performing it. Either way, he never went to the poor man's house, and the poor man lost confidence in all preachers because he concluded that they care for the rich but not the poor. This poor man was not settled to any one place of worship for many years until he became Spurgeon's hearer after dropping into Exeter Hall. Spurgeon noted that it was no small task to make him believe that any minister could be an honest man or could impartially love both rich and poor. "Let us avoid doing such mischief, by being very particular as to our word."⁸⁴

Spurgeon warned young preachers that many eyes are on the minister. He said that men hardly are so unwise as to break the law in public, yet the preacher always lives in public and are watched by a thousand eagle eyes. Spurgeon offered the solution that the preacher should never act in a way that he should care if all heaven and earth were spectating. Spurgeon provided some caution here. He said that the preacher should not feel bound to every whim or fashion of the society.

As a general rule, I hate the fashions of society, and detest conventionalities, and if I conceived it best to put my foot through a law of etiquette, I should feel gratified in having it to do. No, we are men, not slaves; and are not to relinquish our manly freedom, to be the lacqueys of those who affect gentility or boast refinement. Yet, brethren, anything that verges upon the coarseness which is akin to sin, we must shun as we would a viper. The rules of Chesterfield are ridiculous to us, but not the example of Christ; and he was never coarse, low, discourteous, or indelicate.⁸⁵

Spurgeon preached the importance of being a person of integrity and sharing the gospel from a life transformed. He taught his students to not just be holy but to be men of their word. To be most effective, they must be consistent in their character. This will make them more persuasive to both saints and sinners as the Holy Spirit will yoke

⁸⁴ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:17.

the preacher's reputation into His service. A transformed life is something that cannot be mimicked in the pulpit for the congregation sees right through fakery. In all of this, Spurgeon shows himself to be a Spirit-led preacher in the way he speaks about integrity and preaching from a transformed life.

Passion for Preaching

The Holy Spirit's ministry for preaching includes producing Spirit-filled living which culminates in the preacher's life as a passion for preaching. The Spirit-led preacher has the passion for preaching Christ emanating from his total being.⁸⁶ "The Spirit of God births passion in our hearts long before we stand to preach on Sunday."⁸⁷ As Heisler noted, while deep, clear thinking is essential to preaching, it will turn into a dry-as-dust lecture unless the Spirit's illumination ignites fire in the preacher's soul.⁸⁸ The Spirit-led preacher is to deliver passionate, engaging sermons that remain open to the Spirit's leadership. Such passion is not to be contrived or coerced. The Spirit-led preacher's passion originates from the power of the Word of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹ Heisler gave this advice, "Preach fresh from the presence of God, and you will preach with fire, and people will leave saying, 'Surely the presence of the Lord was in this place today!'"⁹⁰

Spurgeon was a man of passion and preached about the passion believers should have in their lives. He preached that as he read the matchless story of love in the gospel, he wonders how the hearts of all of God's children are not on fire or how all of their passions do not boil over so that their lips become like the red lips of Vesuvius with

⁸⁶ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 36.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

burning lava. He said that surely the souls of believers ought to feel a fervor and a heavenly flame for love like this.⁹¹ In another sermon, Spurgeon said when the Lord fires His people with zeal, God's work never lags behind and when God's people cry and groan for revival, it is because revival has already come beginning in their souls. "When the whole company of the faithful shall glow together with passionate desire and importunate prayer, we may know that our redemption draweth nigh."⁹²

Spurgeon drew a sharp line saying that every preacher who is not earnest is unfaithful. He would rather be a murderer of men's bodies than a destroyer of men's souls as the man who preaches a gospel which he does not believe and is the pastor over people he does not love.⁹³ Spurgeon spoke of Whitfield who said that when he thought about the wicked city of London and how so many are dying because they do not know the truth of the gospel, he wished to stand upon every carriage in the streets to preach Christ to sinners. Spurgeon said that Whitfield's passion was so burning because he had seen the sinfulness of men. "We shall never be thoroughly in earnest till we are thoroughly aware of the evil that is before us."⁹⁴

Spurgeon acknowledged that young Christians often have upon them the sweet smell of zeal and some older believers may speak against it. However, Spurgeon always took up the fight in favor of zeal as long as he lived. He said that in the work of God, ministers cannot do without fire.

We Baptists like water because our Master has ordained the use of it; but we must also have fire, fire from heaven, the fire of the Holy Ghost. When I see our young men and young women full of zeal for God's glory, I say, "God bless them! Let

⁹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "An Earnest Entreaty," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 61 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1915), 362.

⁹² C. H. Spurgeon, "A Call to Prayer and Testimony," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 95.

⁹³ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:240.

⁹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Sight of Iniquity," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 47 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1901), 46.

them go ahead.” Some of the old folk want to put a bit in the mouths of these fiery young steeds, and to hold them in; but I trust that I shall ever be on their side, and say, “No, let them go as fast as they like. If they have zeal without knowledge, it is a deal better than having knowledge without zeal; only wait a bit, and they will get all the knowledge they need.”⁹⁵

Thus, Spurgeon made the case in favor of zeal even saying it was better to have zeal without knowledge than knowledge without zeal. However, he said that the best case is to have both. He said that knowledge is the bridle in the mouth of zeal for while zeal is a good thing, it is like the horse without a bit becoming useless and even dangerous. “Zeal is like fire, which may burn the house which it was intended to warm unless it be carefully governed. There must be knowledge in zeal.”⁹⁶

Spurgeon demonstrated how much he cared about the practice of preaching through his dissatisfaction. He said that he does not think any man ever preaches as he ought to preach if he is satisfied with his efforts. He is thankful for the feeling of dissatisfaction that possesses him every time he preaches. On his way home after preaching, Spurgeon often felt like he would like to go back, try again, and do much better, but not better in an oratorical sense. Spurgeon wanted to be better pressing the truth home to men’s hearts with more passion. He concluded that in this sense it is right that preachers should always fear that they could have preached better and thus feel dissatisfied. He then encouraged young preachers that they will never become cold-hearted as long as they cherish this fear.⁹⁷ Spurgeon told preachers that they must plead with their hearers and beseech them to come to Christ. “Any and every appeal which will reach the conscience and move men to fly to Jesus we must perpetually employ, if by any means we may save some.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Tender Grapes,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 42 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 415.

⁹⁶ Spurgeon, “A Timely Expostulation,” 131.

⁹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Right Kind of Fear,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 52 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1906), 46.

⁹⁸ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:273.

Spurgeon warned against a preacher pretending to have zeal in the pulpit. He said that the best piece of acting is still acting and while those who look only at appearances may be pleased, the lovers of reality will be disgusted. He was appalled by such hypocrisy it is to manage the voice so as to mimic the passion which is the genuine work of the Holy Spirit. “Let mere actors beware, lest they be found sinning against the Holy Spirit by their theatrical performances. We must be earnest in the pulpit because we are earnest everywhere; we must blaze in our discourses because we are continually on fire.”⁹⁹

Spurgeon also cautioned his students about their passions waning. He said if their zeal grows dull, they will not pray well in the pulpit, they will pray worse in the family, and they will pray worst in the study alone. He advised that when a preacher’s soul becomes lean, the congregation, without fully understanding, will find his public prayers to have little savor for them. Spurgeon continued saying that the congregation will feel the preacher’s barrenness perhaps before the preacher himself has but soon his sermons will show his lack of passion for they will be delivered with a perceptible loss of spiritual force.¹⁰⁰ Spurgeon knew that the Spirit-led preacher was a man of passion.

This desire should be one which *continues with us*, a passion which bears the test of trial, a longing from which it is quite impossible for us to escape, though we may have tried to do so; a desire, in fact, which grows more intense by the lapse of years, until it becomes a yearning, a pining, a famishing to proclaim the Word.¹⁰¹

Salvation Experience

For the Spirit-led preacher, his personal salvation experience leaves such an unforgettable impression on his heart and mind that he continues to have it spilling over

⁹⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:219-20.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:9–10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1:25.

into his preaching.¹⁰² Heisler said that the most powerful preachers have never gotten over the wonder and joy of their salvation experience.¹⁰³ He stated that Spirit-led preaching is personal and transparent, and to a believer, his salvation experience is the most personal thing about him.¹⁰⁴ The power behind great preaching has always been the transformative effect of the gospel on a soul and this transformation goes from the abstract to the concrete when the preacher tells of his conversion experience.¹⁰⁵

Spurgeon is in complete alignment with this point. He was a man who never got over his conversion. He told the story of the snowy night at the Primitive Methodist chapel again and again. Over twenty years after he was converted, Spurgeon returned to the chapel his Colchester. He went to the very pew where he sat as a boy of fifteen. He said he wanted to buy the seat and take it home for he loved the spot where Jesus met with him and saved him.¹⁰⁶ He said that he would never forget that day nor will he ever keep from repeating the text by which he came to know the Lord.¹⁰⁷ In 1876, Spurgeon preached on this text which is Isaiah 45:22, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” He noted that he has preached from this text many times and hoped to do it many more times for through this text he found salvation twenty-six years ago. Every January, Spurgeon wished to preach from this text even though he thought that some might not provide so attentive an audience. He said that he must preach from this text and wished to always do so on his spiritual birthday.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 78.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “Hastening Lot,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 347.

¹⁰⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “Sovereignty and Salvation,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 49.

¹⁰⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Life-Look,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 50

If any preacher never got over his salvation experience, it was Spurgeon.

Spurgeon preached that he often told his congregation what he felt when he first realized he was pardoned through the blood of Christ. He had been miserable for months and even years, but when he heard the message of the gospel with fresh ears his heart leapt for joy.¹⁰⁹ He said that he could never forget the spot where Christ first met him nor the tones of His voice when He won young Spurgeon's heart. Spurgeon said that such tones are ringing just as clearly in his ears tonight as if they were marriage bells of yesterday. He heard the voice of Christ, responded to it, and knew that he was Christ's and that Christ was his.¹¹⁰

Spurgeon said that salvation is the great necessity of the human race because humans need to be saved from the consequences of the fall and from the results of their own transgressions. He said that every person knows this by the witness of their own conscience, so he does not need to argue or attempt to prove it.¹¹¹ As the greatest need, this must be discussed from the pulpit including the preacher's experience with it. Spurgeon said that just like Paul's conversion every true conversion was an instance of divine power. "Every man who is saved must be operated upon by the might of God the Holy Spirit: every jot and tittle of true regeneration is the Spirit's work."¹¹² The preacher must declare this work of the Spirit.

Spurgeon said that just as the best gamekeepers are those who used to be poachers, the best preachers are those who knew themselves to be great sinners. "They

(London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904), 37-8.

¹⁰⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Pardon and Justification," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 53 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907), 416.

¹¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Personal and Effectual Calling," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 206.

¹¹¹ Spurgeon, "Assurance Sought," 13-4.

¹¹² Spurgeon, "Paul as Pattern Convert," 394.

know the ins and outs of a sinner's heart, and they can talk from experience instead of from theory."¹¹³ He said that these preachers have the smell of fire still upon them and are able to more effectively warn others not to meddle with fire. Speaking from their conversion experience, they are able to influence others to enter the Kingdom of God. No preacher should ever think a person is too bad for salvation. Spurgeon said that hope remains as long as the man is not dead. He encouraged such a preacher to look to his own salvation for if Jesus has saved him, the salvation of other sinners must be possible.¹¹⁴

Spurgeon was encouraged by the scores of young men who have begun preaching for Christ. He encouraged them to continue to bear their testimony for the Lord. He rejoiced that these young men are telling people what Christ has done for them for they have received a commission from the King of kings to tell of the wonderful deeds of Jesus.¹¹⁵ Spurgeon recognized that these young men will be lifted up in due time because they do not try to justify themselves. Spurgeon said that the man who acknowledges his own condemnation is the one who is justified but the man who magnifies himself will be broken down by God and cast into pieces.¹¹⁶ For Spurgeon, a man who testifies to his conversion knows he is rightfully condemned before God and looks to Christ as the only possible means of salvation.

Spurgeon was a man who could not get over his salvation. He spoke about it often and told his students to do the same. He taught them that they are doing right when they mention their own experience of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ and plead with

¹¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 588.

¹¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "Knowing and Doing," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 54 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1908), 236.

¹¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Two Gatherings," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 56 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1910), 460.

¹¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "What Self Deserves," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 62 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1916), 158.

men to come and taste. He said that preachers ought not to be abstractions or seen as merely authority figures but should plead with people as a real person. Spurgeon told his students to quote themselves as a living instance of what grace has done for this is a powerful plea.¹¹⁷ As a Spirit-led preacher, Spurgeon let his conversion experience spill over into his preaching and advocated that other preachers should do the same.

Quenching the Spirit

The Holy Spirit's ministry for preaching includes providing for the preacher a Spirit-filled life. This is the sort of life that comes with spiritual maturity, integrity, and passion for preaching. It is also the sort of life that enables the Spirit to empower the minister to preach with power and conviction. However, the preacher can fail to live a Spirit-filled life and thereby miss out on the empowerment offered by the Spirit for the Spirit's empowerment for preaching grows out of Spirit-filled living.¹¹⁸ Heisler pointed out that the preacher can quench the Spirit through preparing without prayer and when they fear man more than God.¹¹⁹ He said that preaching dirty never invites the Spirit's empowerment.¹²⁰ Heisler approvingly quoted Hershael York, "Although we cannot take credit for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we can usually take the blame for his absence."¹²¹

Spurgeon agreed that the preacher can quench the Spirit and thereby lose out on the benefits of being Spirit-led. He said preachers can greatly grieve the Holy Spirit by a general "scantiness of grace".

¹¹⁷ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:274.

¹¹⁸ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 159.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹²¹ Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 8; Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 177.

The phrase is awkward, but it describes certain persons better than any other which occurs to me. The Scanty-grace family usually have one of the brothers in the ministry. I know the man. He is not dishonest, nor immoral, he is not bad tempered, nor self-indulgent, but there is a something wanting: it would not be easy to prove its absence by any overt offence, but it is wanting in the whole man, and its absence spoils everything. He wants the one thing needful. He is not spiritual, he has no savor of Christ, his heart never burns within him, his soul is not alive, he wants grace. We cannot expect the Spirit of God to bless a ministry which never ought to have been exercised, and certainly a graceless ministry is of that character.¹²²

In addition to this, Spurgeon said that the preacher can drive away the Spirit with pride. He outlined the paradox that to be very well used by God is to be very little and to be noteworthy in one's own esteem is to be unnoticed by God. In addition to this, Spurgeon warned pastors that the neglect of private prayer will produce the same unhappy result.¹²³

Heisler noted that another way to quench the Spirit is to preach for any other motive other than the glory of God for the Spirit will not empower such preaching.¹²⁴ Spurgeon taught this same truth. He said that if a man can detect, after an earnest self-examination, any other motive other than to glorify God in his seeking the pastorate, then that man should turn aside from ministry at once. Spurgeon continued that the Lord will not tolerate bringing of buyers and sellers into His temple and that the introduction of any selfish motive, even in the smallest degree, will be the fly in the pot of ointment spoiling it all.¹²⁵ Spurgeon used a similar analogy of a locomotive being stopped because of insects in the grease-box of the carriage wheels to illustrate how a man in all other respects may be perfectly fitted for use in the church but may by some small defect seriously hindered or even rendered useless.¹²⁶

Heisler also noted that one of the greatest ways to quench the Spirit's

¹²² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:40–41.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2:41.

¹²⁴ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 180.

¹²⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:24–25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:2.

empowerment is to talk about everything under the sun except for the Son.¹²⁷ As a Spirit-led preacher, Spurgeon was aware of this danger. He hated sermons that were not about Christ and pitied those who had to suffer through them. He repeatedly told his preaching students to preach Christ, and he modeled that behavior in his own pulpit. Since the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, when the preacher's message is something other than Christ, the Holy Spirit is grieved for the sake of Jesus Christ.¹²⁸ In this, Spurgeon demonstrated that he was a Spirit-led preacher by recognizing and warning other about the ways a preacher can quench the Spirit.

Conclusion

Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he was in conformity to the Holy Spirit's ministry in preaching to produce a Spirit-filled life. Spurgeon was called by the spirit to enter the ministry, and he recognized and explained that call to the preaching students in his care. He was educated by the Spirit. While Spurgeon had little formal education, he was taught by the Spirit, and he taught how being educated by the Spirit was more important than any university degree. Spurgeon knew that the Holy Spirit prepares the preacher even more than the preacher prepares the sermon. Part of this preparation of the preacher is the spiritual maturity as well as the integrity of the preacher. Spurgeon taught the absolute necessity of both of these ideas and demonstrated their truths in his life. The Spirit-filled life of the preacher produces a passion for preaching. Spurgeon had this passion and advocated that his students be passionate as well. As Heisler noted, great preachers are those who do not get over their salvation experience. If this alone was a mark of a great preacher, then it is obvious why Spurgeon is known as the Prince of Preachers. The joy and transformation he experienced during

¹²⁷ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 181.

¹²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "Grieve Not the Holy Spirit," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 13 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867), 123.

his conversion spilled into his sermons, and he told his students to do the same. Finally, Spurgeon recognized that certain attitudes and actions can quench the Spirit, and he was quick to warn others to stay away from these pitfalls. Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher because he lived and advocated for a Spirit-filled life.

APPENDIX 1

TOP TEN SERMONS ACCORDING TO E.W. BACON

The following is a list of sermons Spurgeon preached, which are, according to

E.W. Bacon, the best sermons he preached.

- 152 – Things That Accompany Salvation (Heb. 6:9) – Sept. 20, 1857
- 195 – Looking Unto Jesus (Ps. 34:5) – May 23, 1858
- 227 – Compel Them To Come In 2 (Luke 14:23) – Dec. 5, 1858
- 236 – The Shameful Sufferer 3 (Heb. 12:2) – Jan. 30, 1859
- 471 – Accepted In The Beloved (Eph. 1:6) – Sept. 21, 1862
- 1259 – There Go The Ships (Ps. 104:26) – No Date
- 1699 – Supposing Him To Be The Gardener 4 (John 20:15) – Dec. 31, 1882
- 2171 – Runaway Jonah, And The Convenient Ship (Jonah 1:3) – Nov. 9, 1890
- 2226 – Lay Hold On Eternal Life (1 Tim. 6:12) – Mar. 19, 1891
- 2663 – A Leap Year Sermon (1 Cor. 15:8) – Feb. 29, 1880

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ABSTRACT

THE SPIRIT-LED PREACHING OF CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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This dissertation centers on the role the Holy Spirit played in the pulpit ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. It argues that Spurgeon was a Spirit-led preacher by examining six criteria of the Holy Spirit's ministry for preaching is intentionally and explicitly identified as discussed by Greg Heisler in his book *Spirit-Led Preaching*. These criteria include the following: (1) the inspiration of the text, (2) the illumination of the preacher studying the text, (3) the conviction of the message, (4) the empowerment of the preacher, (5) the Spirit's Christological witness, and (6) Spirit-filled living. This forms a more complete picture of the cause and nature of Spurgeon's massive success. Some attention is given to the life of Spurgeon as one that was Spirit-led. Consideration is also provided for how Spurgeon might serve as a model for a modern preaching ministry. The scope of this research is a survey of the Holy Spirit's influence on Spurgeon's pulpit ministry by way of his sermons, published writings, lectures, and letters. The purpose of this study is to analyze Spurgeon's beliefs and practices concerning the Holy Spirit as it relates to his theory and practice of preaching.

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