Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Biblical-Missional Model

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Charles Spurgeon is certainly one of the best known and oft quoted ministers in the modern history of the Evangelical, and certainly the Baptist Church. As with any figure of note, he is much loved and much criticized. He was beloved during his ministry by thousands worldwide, but he also garnered criticism from those both to the right and to the left of him. The sheer number of materials by him and biographies written about him gives credence to his lasting memory. Spurgeon himself wrote about 140 works. The two years after Spurgeon’s death a new biography appeared about once per month “these did little but emphasize admiration.”1 Since that time authors writing from a variety of perspectives have been published, and a well-rounded and honest picture of the preacher is available.

Given the topic of this conference, I thought it would be helpful to consider a historical figure who faced a time and city with a multitude of social and evangelistic needs and describe how he addressed them as a pastor of a local and influential church. This workshop will mainly compile information from two of Spurgeon’s biographies:


To try to present a glimpse of the life of such a figure as Spurgeon in one short paper could be compared to trying to view the Grand Canyon through one telescope. It is almost impossible to do. Some notes of trivia may help whet your appetite for further study:

- Spurgeon had a personal library of 30,000 volumes (all of which he claimed to have read, so if anyone ever uses him for an excuse for not going to seminary, tell them that).

- Over 3,800 of his sermons have been published

- Spurgeon was an evangelical Calvinist and treasured the Puritans. He considered Paul, Augustine, Calvin, John Owen, and the Puritans his spiritual forbears.

- Spurgeon, who discovered a copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in his grandfather’s attic as a boy, read over that work more than one hundred times during his lifetime.

- In nearly 40 years he added more than 14,000 new members to his church.

As mentioned earlier, Spurgeon has been held in high esteem by Evangelical Baptists in the last century. Some of those who would promote Spurgeon have said:

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• “Sell all that you have . . . and buy Spurgeon . . . Let him be a Socrates who helps you to find your own way” (Helmut Thielicke).2
• “The greatest man of modern times” (B.H. Carroll).3
• “Charles Haddon Spurgeon . . . began a pilgrimage that would ultimately give England, and the world, one of the greatest pastoral, evangelistic, social ministries ever seen.”4

Spurgeon is, in the estimation of this author, probably the pre-eminent pastoral example in Baptist History. It is to the brief history of the “Prince of Preachers” that we now turn.

**Historical Setting: England during Spurgeon’s Time**

It would do injustice to the life of Spurgeon in evaluating his ministry without at least a cursory understanding of the historical setting of his ministry. The Queen was Victoria (1837-1901). Queen Victoria was known for promoting morality in government and in daily life.5 The economy of England was prosperous, as the Victorian era followed closely on the heels of the Industrial Revolution. The rapid industrialization of Great Britain had made London the financial center of the world.6 Urbanization was a trait of the era as well. The population of London increased from 1.1 million in 1801 to 6.6 million in 1901. 1851 marks the “official” urbanization of Britain, where the urban population surpassed the rural one.

Regarding the demographic and socio-economic situation of London during Spurgeon’s time, there was a clearly marked, though not confining class system. The Upper class enjoyed the comforts of indoor plumbing, and the middle class had opportunities to advance in wealth and enjoy some of the same. The lower class, some destitute, had recourse to the workhouses, where conditions were designed so the people there would strive to gain employment and get out to support themselves.7 The lower class had a number of homeless children and orphans fending for themselves on the streets. Dallimore states that “we shall need to bear those circumstances in mind when we see Spurgeon creating an almshouse and an orphanage and providing education without charge for needy children and young men.”8 A good wage for a skilled laborer was 100 pounds per year. Drummond writes, “Traditionally London working masses were all but disenfranchised from certain segments of society, and that mentality seemingly spilled over into the churches.”9 We will see later that this is one of the main reasons Spurgeon chose the location of the Metropolitan Tabernacle where he did.

Imperialism was a characteristic of Britain, as they controlled one quarter of the world’s land mass by 1897. This gave freedom for the worldwide missions movement to expand.10 It was a time of great medical advances as antiseptics, among other things, were discovered. Victorian

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2 Ibid., 25.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 30.
5 Dallimore, xiii.
7 Dallimore, xiv.
8 Ibid.
9 Drummond, 42.
10 Ibid. 41.
England, while characterized with many advances in civilization and much finery and luxury in the society, also had many evil influences, and it was to combat these as expressions of depravity and evidences of a need for the gospel that Charles Spurgeon would devote his life.

Victorian England was a very religious era, with much diversity. The Church of England was the state religion. The government gave financial support to the Anglicans, and they were granted privileges that were denied to all other churches. There was a stream of Anglican Evangelicalism, from which the Keswick convention later arose in 1875. This movement gained broad support in continental pietism and nonconformist ministries.

The Nonconformists—Methodists, Independents or Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers and Presbyterians, grew much during the previous century under Whitfield and Wesley. By the 19th century, they had become more formal and less evangelical. Famous leaders of this time were Baptist Alexander MacLaren and Brethren John Darby (1830’s and following). In describing Victorian evangelicalism, Drummond writes, “For them, Christianity must relate itself to the pressing social and spiritual issues of the ordinary affairs of daily life.” The Nonconformist ministries were the conduit of the prayer revivals of 1859, which moved from America and D.L. Moody’s influence through to England. While the Anglicans had a great deal of focus on the liturgy of the church, the Nonconformists focused their services on the sermon. The majority of nonconformists were moderate Calvinists who were greatly influenced by 17th century Puritanism. Spurgeon, as will be seen, was no exception to this characteristic.

The Baptists made up a relatively small segment of the Nonconformist church. Though some claim Baptists originated from Continental Anabaptists, Drummond contends that “Baptist origins and theology are English.” There was a group in the British reformation movement that rejected infant baptism, allowing only believer’s baptism, discovering “no case for infant baptism in the New Testament.” They concluded total immersion was the mode of the NT. There were two strains of Baptists—General Baptists, founded in 1609 by Englishman John Smyth when he formed the first Baptist church in Amsterdam, and Particular Baptists (founded in 1638). These two differed mainly on the extent of the atonement, thus the names “general” and “particular.” The Generals were more connected together, and the Particulars were more independent. Their doctrinal confessions outlined some more of their differences. In 1611, the General Baptist Confession was drawn up. They were essentially Arminian in their confession, stating, “That God before the foundation of the world hath predestined all that believe in Him shall be saved, Ephesians 1:4, 12; Mark 16:16; and all that believe not shall be damned.”

The First London Confession of 1644 was the confession of the Particulars. After earlier Particulars William Kiffin and Benjamin Keach passed off the scene, the Particulars tended toward Hyper-Calvinism under John Gill. Following Gill came the influence of Andrew Fuller and William Carey, who balanced the Calvinistic doctrine of the Particulars with using “means”

11 Ibid., 34.
12 Ibid., 50.
13 Ibid., 58.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 61.
for evangelism and human responsibility to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Robert Hall, Andrew Fuller and William Carey, Drummond observes, “retained a basic Calvinistic foundation, but they believed fully in human instrumentality and responsibility in the spread of the gospel.” They emphasized preaching, missions and the gospel invitation. This blend of theology and practice became known as Fullerism. “Hall [and thus Fuller and Carey] urged people to come to Christ and to remove any stumbling block that prevented sinners from doing so . . . In this context and this basic theological understanding, Spurgeon found his own foundations.”

Another movement in Britain leading up to Spurgeon’s time was the Oxford Movement (also known as the Tractarian Movement). This movement occurred when John Henry Newman and a large number of people left the Anglican church to return to Roman Catholicism. “Newman believed the established church provided the only security for salvation.”

An understanding of the philosophical movements in vogue upon Spurgeon’s coming will also aid in putting his ministry and its emphases in context so we can learn from them. Rational Skepticism, with its cousin Continental Christian Liberalism, embodied by such as Julius Wellhausen, attacked traditional views of the Bible. Utilitarianism, “Any action is right if it can be proved by its own rightness” or if it “gives the greatest amount of pleasure to the greatest amount of people,” was also en vogue during Spurgeon’s ascent. Evolution, the materialistic theory of Charles Darwin, was becoming accepted. The Idealism of Hegel and Kant became popular. This rationalism caused the church to attempt to reconcile itself with science, resulting in “reductionism that drained the supernatural elements from the Word.” This reductionism led to Spurgeon’s later-life theological battles in the “Down-Grade Controversy.”

The historical, religious, and philosophical setting presented may seem a little laborious, but I believe it is necessary in order to properly understand the ministry of C.H. Spurgeon. It is to easy for the modern reader to try to imagine their subject in present-day American evangelicalism, but that mindset simply must be avoided. God has placed gifted men in His time in certain eras, and Spurgeon was certainly one placed in Victorian England for the purpose of God’s service there.

Spurgeon’s Early Life and Conversion

Charles Spurgeon entered the world on June 19, 1834, only ten days after William Carey had died in India. He was the oldest of 17 children, nine of whom died in infancy. Spurgeon’s grandfather and father were both Congregational ministers. Being Nonconformists, they were not wealthy, and it seems Charles was sent to live with his grandparents for a number of early years so his parents could afford to bring their next child into the world.

\[\text{\underline{16 Ibid., 64.}}\]
\[\text{\underline{17 Ibid., 65.}}\]
\[\text{\underline{18 Ibid., 47. Drumond relates the following: “A fellow Baptist once said to Spurgeon he had attended a Catholic Mass in Paris and had ‘felt very near the presence of God.’ Spurgeon replied that this proved the text, ‘if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there” (Ibid., 46).}}\]
\[\text{\underline{19 Ibid., 44.}}\]
\[\text{\underline{20 Ibid.}}\]
\[\text{\underline{21 Fullerton, 6.}}\]
Charles conversion story is very well known, but fascinating, nonetheless. He was converted at 15 in Colchester Essex on a blizzardy day in January 1850 after a sermon by an Arminian Primitive Methodist layman.22 The text (and the sermon) were from Isaiah 45:22 “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Of his conviction of sin and view of salvation leading up to his conversion, Spurgeon writes: “The simplest of all matters—believing in Christ crucified, accepting His finished salvation, being nothing and letting Him be everything, doing nothing, but trusting to what He has done—I could not get hold of it.”23

Following his conversion, Spurgeon came to a conviction regarding believer’s baptism. After asking his parents permission to be immersed by a local Baptist preacher, his mother wrote, “Ah, Charles, I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist,” to which C.H. replied, “Ah, Mother, the Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty and has given you exceedingly abundantly above what you asked or thought.”24 From the day of his baptism forward, Spurgeon would be known as a Baptist.

Spurgeon’s Early Ministry

Spurgeon wasted no time getting involved in the work of the ministry. He began teaching Sunday School soon after his baptism. He preached his first sermon as a lay preacher (though he didn’t know he was to preach at the time) in Teversham. The lay preachers went out to preach in outlying villages. After this first sermon, Spurgeon began regularly preaching in the village setting.

At the age of 17, Spurgeon took his first Pastorate at The Baptist Church in Waterbeach. It grew quickly from forty to over four hundred. Spurgeon was entirely devoted to discipline in ministry. Dallimore states “Rising early, he filled the day with labor, studying and visiting, praying and preaching. He gave no attention to sports.”25

Spurgeon enjoyed immensely his pastorate in Waterbeach, and never anticipated moving on from there. In February 1854 (then officially in April), at 19, Spurgeon followed in the footsteps of John Gill, Benjamin Keach and John Rippon as pastor of the New Park Street Baptist Chapel in London. He would remain there until his death.

A Chronology of Church and Ministry Growth in Spurgeon’s Ministry

As seen earlier in the growth of the church at Waterbeach, Spurgeon experienced tremendous growth in his ministry. Things were no different in the New Park Street Baptist Chapel. When Spurgeon began his ministry there, the auditorium seated 1200 people, but the attendance had dwindled to only about two hundred or so. Soon after Spurgeon’s call there, the auditorium was

22 Spurgeon writes that it was a layman who preached. Later associates contended it was an itinerant Methodist minister, but there are no compelling reasons to oppose Spurgeon’s own account of himself.
23 Dallimore, 17.
24 Ibid., 26.
25 Ibid., 38.
soon filled. When the 1200 seat auditorium was filled, they expanded it to 1500 and met in the 4000 seat Exeter Hall during construction. When construction was finished, there was still no room and so Sunday evening services continued to be held in Exeter. Regarding the use of a hall like Exeter, Spurgeon received criticism as a showman for attracting crowds, since the hall was normally used for musical concerts.26

Exeter hall soon became unavailable. On October 19, 1856, he rented Surrey Gardens Music Hall, which seated 10,000. That night there was a disturbance in the hall and seven people were trampled to death. This upset Spurgeon very much, and was a memory that haunted him often later. After this, however, Spurgeon continued to meet at Surrey for three years in the mornings, and at New Park Street in the evenings. What type of people did Spurgeon target? People from every class came to hear him speak. During a cholera outbreak, Spurgeon’s faithful visitation of the people drew many hearts to him. Because of the vehement opposition to his ministry, many came out of curiosity.27 Dallimore observes that, to many, “going to the hall did not seem like going to so forbidding a place as church.”28

It was clear, however, that the church needed a new home from which to base operations. On August 15, 1859, the cornerstone was laid for the Metropolitan Tabernacle, which seated 3600 and had overflow room for 2000 more. Spurgeon wanted to build it debt-free, and so he traveled preaching to raise money, taught classes on weeknights, gave proceeds from his sermon sales and such to contribute himself. The construction, originally estimated to cost 13,000 pounds, actually cost 31,000, and was finished and the first service held on March 31, 1861. Spurgeon was 26 years old.

Some interesting characteristics of his ministry during this stage:

1. There was no organ, nor choir. The music pitch was set with a tuning fork.

2. Those who attended regularly bought a seat on a 3 month basis and were admitted by ticket. Others remained outside until five minutes before the service. The tickets were the main source of income.

3. There were no collection plates, but only a box at the entrance for college funds.

4. Spurgeon accepted no salary except for proceeds from book and sermon sales.

5. There were baptized and added, 77, 72, and 121 in the first three months after the Tabernacle opened.

In 1865, Spurgeon embarked upon another adventure which would further his influence and memory among many people. He began publishing a monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin, and Labour For the Lord*. This periodical would gain a wide circulation. In addition to this, every Monday he would edit the scripts of his sermons and they would be published and sent out the week of their preaching to thousands.

26 Ibid., 50-51.
27 Ibid., 76.
28 Ibid.
With the vastness of ministry the Tabernacle was to undertake, Spurgeon needed some aid. Spurgeon had deacons and elders in his leadership (10 deacons and 20 elders by the late 60’s). The deacons looked after material matters, and the elders the care and accountability of an assigned group of people per elder. The participation and leadership of the ministry by this group of men is seldom mentioned.


In addition to these ministries, Spurgeon formed about forty missions in various parts of London, such as Sunday schools and ragged schools. In addition, the Tabernacle had foreign missionaries in China, Ceylon, India, and in varied African countries. The ministry of Spurgeon grew well beyond the scope of most ministries of the era. A few of the foci of Spurgeon’s life and ministry deserve special attention.

The Primacy of Preaching in Spurgeon’s Ministry

While many ministries were begun under the auspices of the Tabernacle, none supplanted the primary focus of the preacher—evangelism—more particularly evangelism by the primary method God has ordained—preaching. Spurgeon is known as “The Prince of Preachers” for good reason, as no one has ever had his sermons so published or wide spread, even across denominational lines as his was. Spurgeon’s style of preaching was in language that all could grasp, and he illustrated his sermons in such a way to hold the attention of the listeners. While he communicated so that all could understand, he did not make his preaching of little content, and so he emphasized training the next generation of preachers.

While some like to recognize the fact that Spurgeon preached with no formal education, they fail to realize his passion for training ministers. Spurgeon desired to provide education for those who were saved, called and had been involved in preaching in some way—“preferably for two years.” He had a love for sound theology as well. “Calvinistic theology is dogmatically taught . . . as the undoubted teaching of the Word of God.” Another school, Regent’s Park College,

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29 Ibid., 154.
30 Ibid., 173.
31 Ibid., 154.
32 Ibid., 105.
33 From The Sword and the Trowel, 1866, p. 36 in Dallimore, 105.
was also Calvinistic, “but Spurgeon doubted that those doctrinal concepts were taught there in a
manner that aroused men to evangelistic zeal and gave powerfully convicting force to the
message they proclaimed.”

The course lasted two years, and tuition, board, books, and pocket money were provided. There
were no tests, degrees or graduations. The main advantage was its close association with the life
of the church, and Spurgeon related personally to all of the students. He delivered lectures on
Friday afternoons, many recorded in Lectures to My Students. Many of these students went out to
fill pulpits and plant new churches. By 1866, 18 new churches had been planted by men from the
school.

Illustrations From Lectures to My Students . . .
• Men who since conversion have betrayed great feebleness of mind and are readily led to
  embrace strange doctrines, or to fall into evil company and gross sin, I never can find it in my
  heart to encourage to enter the ministry. (p. 35)
• So, too, those who cannot endure hardness, but are of the kid-gloved order, I refer elsewhere.
  We want soldiers, not fops; earnest laborers, not genteel loiterers. Men who have done
  nothing up to their time of application to the college, are told to earn their spurs before they
  are publicly dubbed as knights. Fervent lovers of souls do not wait till they are trained; they
  serve their Lord at once. (p. 35)
• Certain good men appeal to me who are distinguished by enormous vehemence and zeal, and
  a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk forever and ever upon nothing—
  who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it at all; earnest, awfully
  earnest, mountains in labor of the most painful kind; but nothing comes of it all, not even the
  ridiculus onus.
• You may think it odd, but still I feel very well assured that when a man has a contracted
  chest, with no distance between his shoulders, the all-wise Creator did not intend him
  habitually to preach. (p. 36)
• We have occasionally had applications at which, perhaps, you would be amazed, from men
  who are evidently fluent enough, and who answer all our questions very well, except those
  on doctrinal views, to which repeatedly we have had this answer: “Mr. So-and-so is prepared
  to receive the doctrines of the college whatever they may be!”

In early photos Spurgeon seemed quite animated, with a finger pointed heavenward. As
Spurgeon matured, his preaching became more conversational as he strongly desired that it be
Jesus that convinced people, not the orator. At his 25th anniversary, Spurgeon was honored.
His comments there show his heart and passion for preaching: “Our crown, under God, has been
this—the poor have the gospel preached unto them, souls are saved, and Christ is glorified . . .
the first and last thing I long for is to bring men to Christ.” It was not preaching alone that, as a
means, effected his success. His preaching was fueled by a fervent prayer life.

34 Ibid.
35 David Otis Fuller, Ed. Spurgeon’s Lectures to His Students (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945)
36 Ibid., 164.
37 Ibid., 167.
“Spurgeon and expository preaching” by Phil Johnson.

People frequently point out to me that Spurgeon did not normally do expository preaching. Usually the point is made with the tone of a challenge, and with a clear subtext: How can you criticize the seeker-sensitive style of topical and relational preaching? Your own historical hero wasn't an expositor, either. He was the Rick Warren of his day.

It's true that Spurgeon was not an expository preacher. In fact, he regarded biblical exposition as something distinct from "preaching." His approach to "exposition" was simply to read a phrase and comment on it. Some of his printed sermons include an "Exposition" section, but the "exposition" was a whole different part of the worship service, distinct from the preaching. Here's an unusually stark example of Spurgeon's departure from the expository style in his sermons. In his sermon "Things That Accompany Salvation", Spurgeon began by acknowledging that his sermon didn't quite reflect the meaning of the text from which he borrowed his title. His very first words were:

“I AM not quite certain that my text will warrant all I shall say upon it this day if read and understood in its connection. But I have taken the words rather by accommodation than otherwise, and shall make use of them as a kind of heading to the discourse which I hope to be enabled to deliver.”

Now, don't misunderstand: That wasn't his normal approach, either. In that sermon, he was just borrowing a phrase from Scripture to use as a title, and he formally acknowledged that. Normally, he at least took time to explain both the context and the meaning of his text, even if he then departed from the text and its context into a more topical kind of message.

So what does this prove? It certainly doesn't invalidate Spurgeon's whole preaching ministry. Do I recommend the approach he used? No. But fortunately, in Spurgeon's case, his mind and heart were so saturated with Scripture that (to borrow his words) his very blood was bibline. Cut him, and he would bleed Bible verses. His topical approach to preaching also did usually include some elements of exposition. (Before I preach on a given passage, I always read Spurgeon to see how he dealt with it. I find he often gives great help with the exposition of the passage, even though that was not his main focus in his sermons.) And if he ever spoke anywhere on any topic (even when he was just delivering a "lecture" to an academic audience), there was enough Scripture in the message that practically any talk he ever gave anywhere would likely exceed even some of today's "expository" sermons for sheer biblical content.

Nevertheless, the topical approach to preaching is certainly not one I would commend to young men who fill their spare hours with "American Idol" and Jack Bauer, rather than with Puritan literature and Bible commentaries, the way Spurgeon did.

By the way, Spurgeon lived in an era when almost no one did expository preaching. He was, in that sense, a product of his times.
Moreover, the so-called "topical sermons" the typical contemporary preacher delivers are something entirely different. My chief objection to the average seeker-sensitive homily is not merely that it's is not exposition, but that it sometimes deliberately makes no connection to Scripture whatsoever, or at least makes the "biblical" connection as wispy and tenuous as possible. One of the leading gurus of the seeker-sensitive movement advises preachers it is unwise to begin their sermons with Scripture. Spurgeon would rightly have abominated such advice.

In other words, whatever else you say about Spurgeon's approach to Scripture, you can't accuse him of not being biblical, and you cannot summon him for support of the seeker-sensitive methodology. I don't think anyone could honestly argue that someone who needs to hire Hulk Hogan as a shill (Ed Young, Jr.) is very concerned about being biblical in any sense. Some preachers nowadays even seem to pride themselves on the way they relegate Scripture to a footnote in their message.


The Role of Prayer in the Ministry of Spurgeon

In communicating the importance of prayer to Spurgeon’s priorities, Dallimore states: “Spurgeon did not make the gathering of a crowd his first interest. In view of the spiritual warfare in which the Christian is placed, he was concerned first of all that his people learn truly to pray. He knew that God’s power was manifested in the services in proportion as God’s people truly prayed, and that in such proportion also souls were brought under conviction and drawn to Christ.”38 When someone asked Spurgeon the secret of his success, he replied, “My people pray for me.”39

He spent much time in prayer up until the time to preach. Dallimore recounts: “he spent some time before the beginning of the services alone with God, feeling the awesome responsibility of preaching the gospel to lost mankind and pouring out his soul in prayer. On some occasions he seemed unable to go out and stand before the people, and the deacons found it necessary almost to lift him from his knees as the service was about to begin.”40 He spent time after the services in prayer as well, “weeping out the failure of his preaching and pleading that the seed sown in hearts might take root and bring forth fruit unto eternal life.”41

Spurgeon usually opened the new year at the Metropolitan Tabernacle with a “week of prayer.” The prayers were not as what we are typically aware of, but were described as characteristic of “real, awful, general grief . . . His people had a sight of themselves and of their ways, in the very light of His holiness.”42 Spurgeon was a praying preacher who prayed for his people, taught them to pray, and then saw the ministry grow because of their prayers.

38 Ibid., 48.
39 Ibid., 49.
40 Ibid., 76-77.
41 Ibid., 77.
42 Ibid., 109-110.
Spurgeon’s Evangelistic Outreach

It would be good to survey the various methods employed in evangelism by Spurgeon to help gain an understanding of why his church grew as it did. His evangelistic outreach personally began soon after his conversion. Spurgeon became involved in distributing tracts weekly to homes and individuals. He “dropped them here and there in the hope someone would pick them up and read them. He later visited 70 people on Saturdays in his tract ministry. His method was: “I do not give a tract and go away, but I sit down and endeavor to draw their attention to spiritual realities.”

Caring for people in the midst of their trials furthered Spurgeon’s outreach. During his first pastorate, it was said that he knew the people by name and knew their sin and suffering. His first method of societal transformation was to preach the gospel, as he said, “He showed the power of Jesus’ name, and made me a witness of that Gospel which can win souls, draw reluctant hearts, and mould afresh the life and conduct of sinful men and women.”

Spurgeon’s theology did not stifle his evangelistic zeal. He was a five-point Calvinist, preferring the term “particular redemption” to limited atonement, but “His preaching abounded with the free offer of the gospel to all mankind.” In one of his few recorded prayers, he prayed, “They will not come unto thee that they may have life; but thou canst draw them and then they shall run after thee. They cannot come; but though canst give them power.” Dallimore reports Spurgeon’s reconciliation of his doctrine with preaching the gospel:

[He] recognized that the human heart is set against God and that so severe is the nature of sin that unregenerate man ‘will not’ and ‘cannot’ come to God of himself. Man is lost in sin, and such is his condition that he can no way help himself. Yet Spurgeon found assurance in knowing that Christ on the cross accomplished the full salvation of all whom God would call, and that God makes unwilling men willing ‘in the day of His power.’ He regarded himself as responsible to preach the gospel to them all—‘to every creature’—and to do so as zealously as if the outcome depended entirely on himself. He knew that ‘salvation is of the Lord’ and that as he went on with the mighty task he could be confident that the Word would ‘not return void,’ but that God would use it to bring about the salvation of souls.”

Almost every sermon contained, especially toward the end, an entreaty to sinners—warning, begging, pleading, urging the sinful to turn to Christ.

Spurgeon had no invitation, nor did he ask people to perform any outward action. He expected people to make decisions where they were. He had messengers meet with those who made a profession and they looked for three “marks of true conversion.”

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43 Ibid., 24-27.
44 Iain Murray in Dallimore, 36.
45 Ibid., 68.
46 Ibid., 78. It was said Spurgeon disliked the recording of his prayers, and thus they are rarely seen.
47 Ibid., 79.
48 Ibid., 80.
1. Had the person, knowing himself to be a sinner and unable to do anything toward saving himself, gone to God, begging for mercy, and had he entirely trusted his soul to Christ, believing in the saving merit of his death on the cross?

2. Had the person entered into newness of life, experiencing a change of affections, victory over sin, a love for the Word of God, and a desire to win others to Christ?”

3. Did he or she possess a basic understanding of the doctrines of grace, recognizing that salvation did not begin with himself or his own will, but with God’s choice and God’s action, and that God, who saved him, would keep him through time and through eternity?

The messengers either recommend the professor to Spurgeon for counsel for baptism, recommended them to a class for further instruction, or placed them on the list of refusals (60-70 per year). It was clear that “easy-believism” was no part of Spurgeon’s evangelistic preaching!

Not all converts of his ministry grew “his” church. The Tabernacle was involved in missions outreach. In 1865, the church supported two city missionaries, two missionaries to Germany, and aid given to foreign missions in addition. Spurgeon began the Colporteurs’ Association, in which men went to remoter villages and neighborhoods to sell tracts and Bibles, with the goal of leaving tracts and evangelizing the people, trying to actually get a meeting place to preach in the area. This was in effort as well to combat the spread of atheistic literature. In 1878 there were 94 colporteurs who made 926,290 visits. It was estimated that there were up to one thousand of the members out serving or conducting meetings in London on Sunday evenings. At times Spurgeon would even ask his members to stay away so the church could be filled with the unconverted.

It was not until the late 1860’s that Spurgeon began adding full-time pastoral staff members. His brother James was hired as an assistant, and became basically the “comptroller” of the Spurgeon ministries. G. Holden Pike was hired to edit the *Sword and Trowel*.

**Spurgeon’s Social Involvement**

Spurgeon believed his faith should cause him to participate in selfless ministries that unbelievers would avoid. Politically, he was not ashamed to express a biblical opinion on matters of great importance to society. He preached to a crowd of 23,654 during the mutiny in India, speaking clearly against Britain’s involvement there. Shortly before the US Civil War, he wrote that “I do from my inmost soul detest slavery . . . and . . . with a slave-holder I have no fellowship or [sic] any sort or kind.” This caused the loss of much revenue in America, as many ceased printing his sermons there.

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49 Ibid., 81.
50 Ibid., 115.
51 Ibid., 159.
52 Ibid., 134.
53 Ibid., 96.
In 1887, Spurgeon lent his support to the temperance movement. This was the topic of much of his “John Ploughman’s Talks and Pictures” that were published. He said, “Next to preaching of the gospel, the most necessary thing to be done in England is to induce our people to become abstainers.” 54 Let’s look at some of his main social outreaches in light of the times in which he lived.

First, it is necessary to note the foundation of Spurgeon’s leadership in these areas. As Drummond notes, “It must be understood that Spurgeon’s approach to social problems essentially expressed itself as a personal one-to-one endeavor... he still believed that seeing an individual come to faith in Christ and become a converted person still presented the best and basic means of revolutionizing society [quipping] no social plans will make our earth a paradise while sin still curses it, and Satan is abroad.” 55 Thus, it was Spurgeon’s philosophy that the problems of the people in their community were best met by individuals in the church touching other individual’s lives and particularly in the leading of those people to Jesus Christ as Savior. 56 Drummond almost apologizes for Spurgeon’s individualistic approach, writing, “Perhaps Spurgeon can be faulted to some extent for seeing the basic approach to social problems in an individualistic, philanthropic basis.” 57 However, I believe this reflects his view of the distinction between the mission of the church and the lives of church members very clearly, and it is a distinction that we would encourage pastors in similar areas to make.

Second, the simple fact of the chosen location of the new Metropolitan Tabernacle tells us a great deal about Spurgeon’s concern for the community. The church purchased property near the Elephant and Castle, “a very busy pub, right in the heart of the working class district of London’s south side.” Because of this “He was considered ‘vulgar’ by the sophisticates of the day.” 58 Spurgeon knew there was an recognized and definable class system in London. However, he also wanted the church to be a place where classes were not eliminated, but between which barriers were removed so they could worship together, and that they did. 59

Third, Spurgeon, viewing the societal ills brought on by industrialization and urbanization, provided educational opportunities for the needy. As part of the Pastor’s school, classes were taught in the evenings of a primary nature for those that were uneducated free of charge. About 200 attended each evening. 60

Fourth, through his leadership, he began some other humanitarian works as well. A women’s almshouse, started by the former pastor Rippon, was continued by Spurgeon. It was rebuilt to consist of 17 small houses connected in a row. Living and necessities were provided for these elderly women. A school was later constructed adjoining the almshouse which could accommodate 400 students. This almshouse was known as the “Old Ladies’ Home,” which would certainly raise an eyebrow today! The ladies were to be members of the Tabernacle, over sixty, and unable to care for themselves.

54 Drummond, 440
55 Ibid., 403-404.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 440.
58 Ibid., 401.
59 Ibid., 402.
60 Dallimore, 108.
Fifth, the Stockwell orphanage was constructed in 1866 to meet the needs of the area in which it was built, with hundreds of orphans and street urchins. The original endowment was made by the widow of an Anglican Clergyman who, after her husband’s death, had joined the Tabernacle. She gave the sum of 20,000 pounds for its construction and outfit. Spurgeon purposed to maintain the orphanage by faith, inspired by the example of George Muller of Bristol, rather than by fundraising. It consisted of a row of houses, each keeping fourteen boys with a matron, “providing discipline, education, Christian instruction, sports and individuality.” Ten years later, an equal building for girls was constructed to form a quadrangle.

During the ministry a host of other ministries would be established as opportunities for individuals to get involved in ministry: the Ordinance Poor Fund, which centered on ministering to members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle was developed. The Ladies Benevolent Society and Maternal Society made clothes for the poor in the community. The Blind Mission held a Sunday school class for blind people and an afternoon tea outreach on Sundays. Lord Shaftesbury summed up the impact of Spurgeon’s social outreach: “Few men have preached so much and so well, and few men have combined so practically their words by their actions.”

Spurgeon was a man known for his preaching, for his prayer and for his philanthropy. He was a man of deep theological conviction, and his ministry is marked by three major theological controversies, of which brief discourse shall be made here.

**Spurgeon’s Theological Controversies**

Spurgeon’s ministry was marked by three distinct controversies or debates, though there were others, that show that a Pastor committed to reaching the lost, need not ignore matters of theology, and must not sacrifice doctrinal purity for feigned unity or ecumenism. The first of the controversies was the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy. In the 1830’s John Henry Newman had begun the “Tractarian movement” at Oxford, claiming the need for a return to the true church, the Roman Catholic Church. This raised the potential of the Anglican church return to Catholicism. J.C. Ryle, among others, were evangelicals in Anglicanism who Spurgeon respected. Spurgeon criticized their acceptance of regeneration by infant baptism, equating it with a works justification. Spurgeon preached a sermon, “Baptismal Regeneration,” knowing it would hurt his publication sales significantly (it actually increased them). His message was directed especially against the Evangelical clergy, saying they were inconsistent by saying infant baptism regenerated, but then later saying they were unregenerate. Many evangelicals thought Spurgeon too forthright in the matter. This led to Spurgeon withdrawing himself from the Evangelical Alliance. Many knew he spoke from conviction, however, with no personal malice, and later respected him for it.

The second controversy, that with the Hyper-Calvinists, showed Spurgeon’s understanding of doctrinal excesses and his commitment to the whole of Scripture. Spurgeon was a Calvinist, and

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61 Drummond, 420-421.
62 Ibid., 128.
63 Quoted by Charles Ray in Drummond, 441.
64 Dallimore, 116.
far from an Arminian. He once said, “Arminian perversions, in particular, are to sink back to
their birthplace in the pit.” The hyper-Calvinists believed the gospel offer should not be
extended to an audience that consisted of saved and unsaved people, but only to “sensible
sinners”—people conscious of their need of Christ. James Wells attacked Spurgeon in the hyper-
calvinist paper The Earthen Vessel in this regard. As was seen earlier, Spurgeon was committed
to offering salvation to all who heard, but very diligent in interviewing those who came with a
profession. Many of an Arminian persuasion will tend to point out the excesses of Hyper-
Calvinism when arguing their position. Spurgeon gave the church a stellar example of a Biblical
ministry balance of the doctrines of grace with the use of means in gospel proclamation.

The last of the controversies, and, according to some the one that drove Spurgeon to his early
death, was the Downgrade Controversy. In 1887, Spurgeon attacked liberal theology in a series
of articles in The Sword and the Trowel. It was Spurgeon’s contention that the atheistic
philosophies of Victorian England, Unitarianism and Darwinism had made their way into the
church, and into the Baptist Union, a fellowship of Evangelical Baptist churches as well. He
eventually resigned from the Union amid the controversy, seemingly quite alone. Time would
vindicate Spurgeon, however, as the Union continued to slide into apostasy.

The severe bouts of gout that plagued Spurgeon since the late 1860s worsened throughout the
later years of his ministry. On January 31, 1892, Spurgeon went to his reward with his savior. He
had lived a relatively short but full life of ministry, being spent in service for the One for Whom
it is worthy.

Appropriateness of Spurgeon’s Methodology

Surely a study of the life and ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and the great Metropolitan
Tabernacle of London should yield some insights into his methodology and its potential for
application to modern times. Without sounding too pietistic, to do so would be to miss the main
jewels of mining this Pastor’s life. Spurgeon was a man in love with Jesus Christ. If method
should be employed in imitation to him, it would be to continue in fervent love for our Savior
Jesus Christ. It would be to make it our primary task to win souls for our Savior by preaching the
glorious gospel of His person and work. It would be to make fervent prayer the fuel of the work
of the ministry. It would be to exhort those under ministerial charge to go forth and live life as
one bought by Jesus Christ, and so show your faith to the hurting and lost people all around you.
It would be to commit the passion we have learned to the next generation. It would include
earnestly contending for the faith, being aware of the tendency of Satan to get believers on the
“Down-Grade.” I believe also we can learn from his desire to minister as a local church, albeit a
large and influential one, in the community in which it is planted. Related to this is his desire to
have the church reflect the cross-societal, cross-cultural change that God intended for the church
to reflect. The ministries of Spurgeon’s Tabernacle were appropriate for the needs of Victorian
England in their application, but the traits learned from his life and discussed in the previous
pages will be foundational and will transcend cultural boundaries.

65 G. Holden Pike in Ibid., 66.
Works on Spurgeon’s Life

One of the most notable biographies was written by G. Holden Pike, Spurgeon’s assistant editor for his monthly periodical, The Sword and the Trowel. It is a six-volume work published in 1894 which was excellent, but rather unwieldy for the average reader. Spurgeon’s wife and secretary edited a four-volume autobiography in 1897 titled, C.H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography. Again, this is an excellent resource. Iain Murray condensed and edited the Autobiography into two volumes, published by Banner of Truth, titled The Early Years and Full Harvest. These were published in 1962 and 1973. These works are required reading for the Baptist historical connoisseur. W. Y. Fullerton, a contemporary of Spurgeon’s, wrote C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography. His purpose is that “It seemed desirable, therefore, that before those who knew him and shared in his ministry had passed away, some one who had the privilege of his friendship should say the things about him that still needed to be said, and place the familiar things in truer perspective than was possible at the time [of his passing].”66

Probably the most consumable biography for the average church member was written by Arnold Dallimore, the well-known biographer of George Whitfield. He wrote Spurgeon: A New Biography by Arnold Dallimore (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985). This was originally published by Moody Press in 1984. Dallimore wrote his biography of Spurgeon for three reasons:

1. “Because his burning earnestness and unyielding theological convictions are so little known it is assumed that he was much like the average evangelical of today;”
2. To give “a more definitive treatment given to his theological and preaching methods;” and
3. “To present something of the inner man—Spurgeon in his praying, his sufferings and depressions, his weaknesses and strengths.”67

In 1992, on the centennial of Spurgeon’s death, a Southern Baptist, Lewis Drummond, penned Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1992). Drummond taught at Spurgeon’s Theological College, London from 1968-1973. He was the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Southern Seminary from 1973-1988 and President of Southeastern from 1988-1992. In the foreword, Carl Henry describes Drummond’s work as “a highly readable and spiritually rewarding account . . . [set] in the context of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress in an intriguing way.”68 This author would agree that Drummond’s work is a very enjoyable read, with more flow than some biography. At nearly 900 pages, it is still rather lengthy for the average person, but well worth the read.

Finally, Phil Johnson, who is on staff at Grace Community Church, has compiled a website full of excellent material, searchable sermons, links and other information at www.Spurgeon.org. I would commend that to you.

67 Dallimore, Spurgeon, x.
68 In Lewis Drummond, Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 11.
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Johnson, Phil. [www.Spurgeon.org](http://www.Spurgeon.org), a website containing much helpful information on Spurgeon, his life and ministry.

