



Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity

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The Founders Journal

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The Pastor's Chief Duty

Thomas Ascol

If anyone desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.

1 Timothy 3:1

The key word in this verse is *work*. The pastoral ministry is hard work. Paul compares the life of the pastor to that of a soldier and a "hardworking farmer." He encourages young Timothy to "endure hardship" in the ministry (2 Tim. 2:3, 6).

At the heart of this hard work is the holy task of preaching. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones stated that "the most urgent need in the Christian church today is true preaching." His predecessor, G. Campbell Morgan, also held this view of preaching when he called it "the supreme work of the Christian minister."

In the introduction to his classic work on homiletics, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John Broadus argues that "the great appointed means of spreading the good tidings of salvation through Christ is preaching." A pastor is expected to be many things. He must be a counselor to those who need guidance. He must be an encourager to those who are discouraged and a comforter to those who are distressed. He must be an administrator of the life and ministry of a local church and he must be a leader who guides the church into the proper paths. In and through all these and other responsibilities, however, the pastor is, first and foremost, a preacher.

When establishing such a priority in the discharge of his calling the pastor not only follows the pattern set by the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, he also follows the example of our Lord Himself. At the outset of His public ministry Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and announced His purpose from the words of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor...
To preach deliverance to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,...
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

He was anointed to *preach*.

Often when the life of Christ is studied in the gospels it is the miracles which stand out to the mind. As pronounced as they are, however, one must remember that Jesus performed His miracles in the midst of His preaching and teaching ministry. When the crowds clamored for more miracles He said to His disciples, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth" (Mark 1:38). God had only one Son, and He made Him a Preacher.

"Preach the word!" is the apostle's admonition to Timothy. "Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). This command is strong enough by itself to make pastors sit up and take notice of the great emphasis placed on preaching. Paul, however, goes on to buttress it with a very

disturbing argument. The reason that pastors must preach the Word is because "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (vv. 3-4).

Who is Paul talking about? Who are the "they?" He is not referring to people outside the church. Rather, he is speaking of church members--those who sit and listen to the preacher. The reason that Timothy must preach the Word with authority is because of the inevitable tendency within men to resist sound doctrine. Preaching is the God-ordained means to fight against this tendency.

We hear much today about the irrelevancy of preaching. Modern men--especially Baby Boomers and Generation X--simply will not sit still for such "traditional" church activities. What we must do, then, is give them what they like. Give them drama. Give them dance. Give them multimedia. All these and more are being trumpeted as the new vehicles of proclamation for today's church.

Preaching, we are told, is outdated. To expect large numbers of people to sit and listen to one man talk for half an hour or more is not only presumptuous, it is foolish. Yet, it has pleased God "through the foolishness of preaching [the *preached* message] to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

So, what must we do? How should the people of God respond to the Bible's emphasis on preaching while living in a world that increasingly despises preaching? First, we must determine to let our convictions be shaped by the unchanging Word of God and not by the shifting currents of modern culture. Preaching must become and remain the priority of our gospel ministers. Churches must insist on it for their pastors and pastors must insist on it for themselves.

Secondly, provision must be made in the church for the maintenance of this priority. Many good things compete for the pastor's attention. There are always needs to be met. There are always ministries that await willing hands. In the face of many demands pastors must cultivate the same kind of humble boldness and studied neglect which was displayed by the apostles who were pastoring the early church in Jerusalem. When confronted with important needs in the congregation, those early leaders refused to be distracted from their main work: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (Acts 6:2).

The situation was serious. Widows were being neglected in the church. Yet, the church entrusted that ministry to other Spirit-filled members so that the apostles could give themselves "continually to prayer and the ministry of the word" (v. 4). This kind of practical wisdom and willingness to delegate responsibilities must characterize a church if the priority of preaching is to be maintained.

Church members and officers should take great care to insist that their pastor maintain the work of preaching as the priority of his ministry. John MacArthur made this point with eloquent force during his sermon to the 1990 Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. How can church members encourage their pastor to make preaching his priority? Here are MacArthur's suggestions:

Fling him into his office, then tear the "Office" sign from the door, and replace it with a sign that says, "Study."

Take him off the mailing list. Lock him up with his books and his typewriter and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts and broken hearts and the flick of lives of a superficial flock and a holy God.

Force him to be the one man in the community who knows about God. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all the night through, and let him come out only when he's bruised and beaten into being a blessing.

Shut his mouth from forever spouting remarks and stop his tongue from forever tripping lightly over every non-essential. Require him to have something to say before he breaks the silence. Burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for the things of God. Make him exchange his pious stance for a humble walk with God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God.

Rip out his telephone. Burn up his success sheets. Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible and tie him to the pulpit. Test him, quiz him, examine him. Humiliate him for his ignorance of things divine. Shame him for his good comprehension of finance, batting averages and political party issues. Laugh at his frustrated effort to play psychiatrist. Form a choir, raise a chant and haunt him night and day with, "Sir, we would know God."

When at long last he does assay the pulpit, ask him if he has a word from God. If he doesn't, then dismiss him. Tell him you can read the paper. You can digest the television commentary. You can think through the day's superficial problems and manage the weary drives of the community and bless the assorted baked potatoes and green beans better than he can.

And when he does speak God's Word, listen. And when he's burned out finally by the flaming Word, consumed by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he's privileged to translate the truth of God to man and finally is himself transferred from earth to heaven, bear him away gently. Blow a muted trumpet. Lay him down softly and place a two-edged sword on his coffin and raise the tune triumphant, for ere he died he had become a Man of God.

The evaluation which John Broadus made in 1870 remains valid in the closing years of the twentieth century: "In every age of Christianity, since John the Baptist drew crowds in the desert, there has been no great religious movement, no restoration of Scripture truth, and reanimation of genuine piety, without new power in preaching, both as cause and effect."

If we hope to see genuine revival and reformation, there must be a return of power to the pulpit. Spirit-anointed preaching is the great need of the day. Let us labor to reestablish its priority in our churches. And let us pray for those whose job it is to fulfill the holy calling of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. May God grant us a revival of true preaching.



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The Apostle Paul's Prospects of Pastoral Ministry Among Modern Evangelicals

We can only guess how well the apostle Paul might have fared had he sought pastoral employment among evangelicals today, but we would not be risking much to suppose that he would start out with a few strikes against him. Happily, there would be a constituency deeply appreciative of his teachings and service. But he would not be without his critics. Indeed, they might very well be numerous. Some churches would doubtless be delighted that he was willing to support himself and leave more of the church budget for other matters, but the more professionalized congregation would probably be embarrassed by this. Who, they might ask themselves, really wants a cut-rate pastor? Few would warm to his personality, and that would be no small matter. Today, most pastors stand or fall today by their personalities rather than their character. Many would be agitated about his insistence on discipline in the church. Many would be offended by his refusal to grant the legitimacy of each person's private views so long as they were held sincerely. His insistence that truth is given objectively in Christ, not subjectively through private intuition as the pagans thought, would make him sound strangely out of touch. Indeed, his preaching, judged by contemporary standards, would be considered by many a failure because the brief summaries that we have of what he did show no penchant for telling stories at all. Besides, Paul was apparently in the habit of extending his discourses long beyond the twenty minutes to which many churches would limit him. He would probably end up provoking a churchly insurrection--for all the wrong reasons. Few would be able to make much sense of his concern with the connections between New Testament faith and Old Testament promises, because the Old Testament is *terra incognita* in the Church today. His passionately theological mind would get him into trouble on two counts: his preaching would be judged hopelessly irrelevant because its theological focus would put it out of step with modern habits, and his passion would simply prove embarrassing. His vision of God's purposes in the world, one supposes, would probably seem interesting but, in the small world of church life, not really compelling. And so the difficulties would mount. Paul would probably be condemned to flit from place to place, not out of choice but necessity, never finding secure lodging anywhere, his resume fatally scarred by his many pastoral failures until, abandoned and worn out, he would be left to pass his closing days in a home for the aged.

--David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth*



Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity

John Piper

[Adapted from a paper delivered at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, January 31, 1995.]

A Personal Introduction

Charles Haddon Spurgeon died January 31, 1892 at the age of 57. He had preached 38 years at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. His life is filled with instruction for Christians, especially for pastors.

Everyone faces adversity and must find ways to persevere through the oppressing moments of life. Everyone must get up and make breakfast, and wash clothes, and go to work, and pay bills, and discipline children and generally keep life going when the heart is breaking.

But it is different with pastors-not totally different, but different. The heart is the instrument of our vocation. Spurgeon said, "Ours is more than mental work-it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul."^[1] So when our heart is breaking we must labor with a broken instrument. Preaching is our main work. And preaching is heart work, not just mental work. So the question for us is not just, "How do I keep on *living* when the marriage is blank, when a child has run away, when the finances don't reach, and when pews are bare and friends have forsaken me?" No, the question for us is much more than, "How do I keep on *living*?" It is, "How do I keep on *preaching*?" It's one thing to *survive* adversity; it is something very different to keep on preaching, Sunday after Sunday, month after month, when the heart is overwhelmed.

Spurgeon said to the students of his pastors' college, "One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor....Ten years of toil do not take so much life out of us as we lose in a few hours by Ahithophel the traitor, or Demas the apostate."^[2] The question for the pastor is not merely, "How do you *live* through unremitting criticism and distrust and accusation and abandonment?" For pastors, the question is also, "How do you *preach* through it?" How does the preacher do heart work when the heart is under siege and ready to fall?

For the last year that has been perhaps the uppermost question of my life. Inevitably, it will at some point be a foremost question in the mind of every pastor. I remember a phone conversation with the wife of a faithful, godly pastor. Her husband was under so much criticism and accusation that she found it hard to go to church. She marveled that he could preach the previous Sunday morning.

Preaching great and glorious truth in an atmosphere that is not great and glorious is an immense difficulty. To be reminded week in and week out that many people regard your preaching of the glory of the grace of God as hypocrisy pushes a preacher not just into the hills of introspection, but sometimes to the precipice of self-extinction.

By that I do not mean suicide. I mean something more complex. I mean the deranging inability to know any longer who you are. What begins as a searching introspection for the sake of holiness and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors in your soul: you look in one and you're short and fat; you look in another and

you're tall and skinny; you look in another and you're upside down. Then the horrible feeling begins to break over you that you don't know who you are any more. The center is not holding. And if the center doesn't hold-if there is no fixed and solid "I" able to relate to the fixed and solid "Thou," namely, God, then who will preach next Sunday?

When the apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:10, "By the grace of God, I am what I am," he was saying something utterly essential for the survival of preachers in adversity. If, by grace, the identity of the "I"-the "I" created by Christ and united to Christ, but still a human "I"-if that center does not hold, there will be no more authentic preaching, for there will be no more authentic preacher, but only a collection of echoes.

O, how fortunate we modern pastors are, that we are not the first to face these things! I thank God for the healing history of the power of God in the lives of saints. For the sake of survival every pastor should *live in other centuries with other saints*.

I have turned to Charles Spurgeon in these days for help, and I have not been disappointed. My purpose in this article is to show how Spurgeon's life and ministry can encourage pastors to keep on preaching through adversity.

Why Spurgeon?

There are 7 characteristics that qualify Spurgeon as a helpful guide to preachers who need strength to preach through adversity.

1st, He Was a Preacher

First, because Spurgeon was preeminently a preacher. He preached over 600 times before he was 20 years old. His sermons sold about 25,000 copies a week and were translated into 20 languages. The collected sermons fill 63 volumes equivalent to the 27 volume ninth edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and "stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity."[\[3\]](#)

In the words of his son, Charles, "There was no one who could preach like my father. In inexhaustible variety, witty wisdom, vigorous proclamation, loving entreaty, and lucid teaching, with a multitude of other qualities, he must, at least in my opinion, ever be regarded as the prince of preachers."[\[4\]](#) Spurgeon was a preacher.

2nd, He Was a Truth-Driven Preacher

Secondly, Spurgeon was a truth-driven preacher. I am not interested in how preachers deal with adversity if they are not first and foremost guardians and givers of unchanging Biblical truth. If they find their way through adversity by other means than faithfulness to truth, I turn away.

Spurgeon defined the work of the preacher like this: "To know truth as it should be known, to love it as it should be loved, and then to proclaim it in the right spirit, and in its proper proportions."[\[5\]](#) He said to his students, "To be effective preachers you must be sound theologians."[\[6\]](#) He warned that "those who do away with Christian doctrine are, whether they are aware of it or not, the worst enemies of Christian living...[because] the coals of orthodoxy are necessary to the fire of piety."[\[7\]](#)

Two years before he died he said,

Some excellent brethren seem to think more of the *life* than of the *truth*; for when I warn them that the enemy has poisoned the children's bread, they answer "Dear brother, we are sorry to hear it; and, to counteract the evil, we will open the window, and give the children fresh air." Yes, open the window, and give them fresh air, by all means....But, at the same time, this ought you to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Arrest the poisoners, and open the windows, too. While men go on preaching false doctrine, you may talk as much as you will about deepening their spiritual life, but you will fail in it.[\[8\]](#)

Doctrinal truth was at the foundation and superstructure of all Spurgeon's labors.

3rd, He Was a Bible-Believing Preacher

Further, the truth that drove his preaching ministry was Biblical truth, which he believed to be God's truth. He held up his Bible and said,

These words are God's....Thou book of vast authority, thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of Heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee....This is the book untainted by any error; but it is pure unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it.[\[9\]](#)

What a difference where this allegiance holds sway in the hearts of preachers and people. I had lunch with a man recently who bemoaned the atmosphere of his Sunday School class. He characterized it like this: if a person raises a question to discuss, and another reads a relevant Bible verse, the class communicates, "Now we have heard what Jesus thinks, what do you think?"

Where that atmosphere begins to take over the pulpit and the church, defection from truth and weakness in holiness are not far behind.

4th, He Was a Soul-winning Preacher

There was not a week that went by in his mature ministry that souls were not saved through his written sermons.[\[10\]](#) He and his elders were always on the "watch for souls" in the great congregation. "One brother," he said, "has earned for himself the title of my hunting dog, for he is always ready to pick up the wounded birds."[\[11\]](#)

Spurgeon was not exaggerating when he said,

I remember, when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls.[\[12\]](#)

He was consumed with the glory of God and the salvation of men.

5th, He Was a Calvinistic Preacher

He was my kind of Calvinist. Let me give you a flavor of why his Calvinism drew 5,000 people a week to his church rather than driving them away. He said,

To me, Calvinism means the placing of the eternal God at the head of all things. I look at everything through its relation to God's glory. I see God first, and man far down in the list....Brethren, if we live in sympathy with God, we delight to hear Him say, "I am God, and there is none else."[\[13\]](#)

For Spurgeon, "Puritanism, Protestantism, Calvinism [were simply]...poor names which the world has given to our great and glorious faith, -the doctrine of Paul the apostle, the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."[\[14\]](#)

But he did make distinctions between the full system, which he did embrace, and some central, evangelical doctrines shared by others that bound him together with them-like his favorite, the doctrine of the substitution of Christ for sinners. He said, "Far be it for me to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views."[\[15\]](#)

He said, "I am not an outrageous Protestant generally, and I rejoice to confess that I feel sure there are some of God's people even in the Romish Church."[\[16\]](#) He chose a paedobaptist to be the first head of his pastor's college, and did not make that issue a barrier to who preached in his pulpit. His communion was open to all Christians, but he said he "would rather give up his pastorate than admit any man to the church who was not obedient to his Lord's command [of baptism]."[\[17\]](#)

His first words in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the place he built to preach in for thirty years:

I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, "It is Jesus Christ."[\[18\]](#)

But he believed that Calvinism honored that Christ most fully because it was most true. And he preached it explicitly, and tried to work it into the minds of his people, because he said, "Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to vital truth."[\[19\]](#)

Therefore, he was open and unashamed: "People come to me for one thing...I preach to them a Calvinist creed and a Puritan morality. That is what they want and that is what they get. If they want anything else they must go elsewhere."[\[20\]](#)

6th, He Was a Hard-Working Preacher

Sixthly, I do not look to soft and leisurely men to instruct me how to endure adversity. If the main answer is, "Take it easy," I look for another teacher. Take a glimpse of this man's capacity for work:

No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear....I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with four thousand members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, *The Sword and the Trowel* to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of five hundred letters to be answered. This, however, is only half

my duty, for there are innumerable churches established by friends, with the affairs of which I am closely connected, to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me.[21]

At his 50th birthday a list of 66 organizations was read that he founded and conducted. Lord Shaftesbury was there and said, "This list of associations, instituted by his genius, and superintended by his care, were more than enough to occupy the minds and hearts of fifty ordinary men." [22]

He typically read six substantial books a week and could remember what he read and where to find it.[23] He produced more than 140 books of his own-books like *The Treasury of David*, which was twenty years in the making, and *Morning and Evening*, and *Commenting on Commentaries*, and *John Ploughman's Talk*, and *Our Own Hymnbook*. [24]

He often worked 18 hours in a day. The missionary, David Livingstone, asked him once, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?" Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten there are two of us." [25] I think he meant the presence of Christ's energizing power that we read about in Colossians 1:29. Paul says, "I labor, striving according to *His power, which mightily works within me.*" "There are two of us."

Spurgeon's attitude toward sacrificial labor would not be acceptable today where the primacy of "wellness" seems to hold sway. He said,

If by excessive labour, we die before reaching the average age of man, worn out in the Master's service, then glory be to God, we shall have so much less of earth and so much more of Heaven! [26]

It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living *sacrifices*, whose lot is to be consumed. [27]

Behind this radical view point were some deep Biblical convictions that come through the apostle Paul's teaching. One of these convictions Spurgeon expressed like this:

We can only produce life in others by the wear and tear of our own being. This is a natural and spiritual law,-that fruit can only come to the seed by its spending and be spent even to self-exhaustion. [28]

The apostle Paul said, "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Cor. 1:6). "Death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:12). And he said that his own sufferings were the completion of Christ's sufferings for the sake of the church (Col. 1:24).

Another Biblical conviction behind Spurgeon's radical view of pastoral zeal is expressed like this:

Satisfaction with results will be the [death] knell of progress. No man is good who thinks that he cannot be better. He has no holiness who thinks that he is holy enough. [29]

In other words, he was driven with a passion never to be satisfied with the measure of his holiness or the extent of his service (cf. Phil. 3:12). The year he turned 40 he delivered a message to his pastors' conference with the one-word

title, "Forward!"[\[30\]](#) In it he said,

In every minister's life there should be traces of stern labour. Brethren, do something; *do something*; DO SOMETHING. While Committees waste their time over resolutions, do something. While Societies and Unions are making constitutions, let us win souls. Too often we discuss, and discuss, and discuss, while Satan only laughs in his sleeve....Get to work and quit yourselves like men.[\[31\]](#)

I think the word "indefatigable" was created for people like Charles Spurgeon.

7th, He Was a Maligned and Suffering Preacher

The seventh reason that qualifies Spurgeon for this type of study is the fact that he knew the whole range of adversity that most preachers suffer-and a lot more. This point deserves some elaboration.

Spurgeon knew the everyday, homegrown variety of frustration and disappointment which every pastor experiences from luke-warm church members.

You know what one cold-hearted man can do, if he gets at you on Sunday morning with a lump of ice, and freezes you with the information that Mrs. Smith and all her family are offended, and their pew is vacant. You did not want to know of that lady's protest just before entering the pulpit, and it does not help you.[\[32\]](#)

Perhaps even worse are those occasions when frustration is provoked after the service.

What terrible blankets some professors are! Their remarks after a sermon are enough to stagger you....You have been pleading as for life or death and they have been calculating how many seconds the sermon occupied, and grudging you the odd five minutes beyond the usual hour.[\[33\]](#)

It is worse still, Spurgeon says, if the calculating observer is one of your deacons.

'Thou shalt not yoke the ox and the ass together' was a merciful precept: but when a laborious, ox-like minister comes to be yoked to a deacon who is not another ox, it becomes hard work to plough.[\[34\]](#)

In addition to common disappointments, Spurgeon also experienced the extraordinary calamities that come once in a lifetime.

On October 19, 1856 he preached for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own church would not hold the people. The 10,000 seating capacity was far exceeded as the crowds pressed in. Someone shouted, "Fire!" and there was great panic in parts of the building. Seven people were killed in the stampede and scores were injured.

Spurgeon was 22 years old and was overcome by this calamity. He said later, "Perhaps never soul went so near the burning furnace of insanity, and yet came away unharmed." But not all agreed he was unharmed. The specter brooded over him for years and one close friend and biographer said, "I cannot but think, from what I saw, that his

comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night."[\[35\]](#)

Spurgeon also knew the adversity of family pain. He had married Susannah Thomson January 8 in the same year of the calamity at Surrey Gardens. His only two children, twin sons, were born the day after the calamity on October 20. Susannah was never able to have more children. In 1865 (nine years later), when she was 33 years old she became a virtual invalid and seldom heard her husband preach for the next 27 years till his death. Some kind of rare cervical operation was attempted in 1869 by James Simpson, the father of modern gynecology, but to no avail.[\[36\]](#) So to Spurgeon's other burdens were added a sickly wife and the inability to have more children, though his own mother had given birth to seventeen.

He also knew unbelievable physical pain. Spurgeon suffered from gout, rheumatism and Bright's disease (inflammation of the kidneys). His first attack of gout came in 1869 at the age of 35. It became progressively worse so that "approximately one third of the last twenty-two years of his ministry was spent out of the Tabernacle pulpit, either suffering, or convalescing, or taking precautions against the return of the illness."[\[37\]](#) In a letter to a friend he wrote, "Lucian says, `I thought a cobra had bitten me, and filled my veins with poison; but it was worse,-it was gout.' That was written from experience, I know."[\[38\]](#)

For over half his ministry Spurgeon dealt with ever increasingly recurrent pain in his joints that cut him down from the pulpit and from his labors again and again. The diseases finally took his life at age 57 while he was convalescing in Mentone, France.

On top of the physical suffering Spurgeon had to endure a life time of public ridicule and slander, sometimes of the most vicious kind. In April 1855 the *Essex Standard* carried an article with these words:

His style is that of the vulgar colloquial, varied by rant....All the most solemn mysteries of our holy religion are by him rudely, roughly and impiously handled. Common sense is outraged and decency disgusted. His rantings are interspersed with coarse anecdotes.[\[39\]](#)

The Sheffield and Rotherham *Independent* said,

He is a nine days' wonder-a comet that has suddenly shot across the religious atmosphere. He has gone up like a rocket and ere long will come down like a stick.[\[40\]](#)

His wife kept a bulging scrapbook of such criticisms from the years 1855-56. Some of it was easy to brush off. Most of it wasn't. In 1857 he wrote:

Down on my knees have I often fallen, with the hot sweat rising from my brow under some fresh slander poured upon me; in an agony of grief my heart has been well-nigh broken.[\[41\]](#)

His fellow ministers criticized from the right and from the left. Across town, from the left, Joseph Parker wrote,

Mr. Spurgeon was absolutely destitute of intellectual benevolence. If men saw as he did they were orthodox; if they saw things in some other way they were heterodox, pestilent and unfit to lead the minds of students or inquirers. Mr. Spurgeon's was a superlative egotism; not the shilly-shallying,

timid, half-disguised egotism that cuts off its own head, but the full-grown, over-powering, sublime egotism that takes the chief seat as if by right. The only colors which Mr. Spurgeon recognized were black and white.[\[42\]](#)

And from the right James Wells, the hyper-Calvinist, wrote, "I have-most solemnly have-my doubts as to the Divine reality of his conversion."[\[43\]](#)

All the embattlements of his life came to climax in the Downgrade Controversy as Spurgeon fought unsuccessfully for the doctrinal integrity of the Baptist Union. In October 1887 he withdrew from the Union. And the following January he was officially and publicly censured by a vote of the Union for his manner of protest.[\[44\]](#)

Eight years earlier he had said,

Men cannot say anything worse of me than they have said. I have been belied from head to foot, and misrepresented to the last degree. My good looks are gone, and none can damage me much now.[\[45\]](#)

He gives an example of the kinds of distortions and misrepresentations that were typical in the Downgrade Controversy:

The doctrine of eternal punishment has been scarcely raised by me in this controversy; but the `modern thought' advocates continue to hold it up on all occasions, all the while turning the wrong side of it outwards.[\[46\]](#)

But even though he usually sounded rough and ready, the pain was overwhelming and deadly. In May of 1891 eight months before he died he said to a friend, "Good-bye; you will never see me again. This fight is killing me."[\[47\]](#)

The final adversity to be considered was the result of all the others-Spurgeon's recurrent battles with depression.

It is not easy to imagine the omni-competent, eloquent, brilliant, full-of-energy Spurgeon weeping like a baby for no reason that he could think of. In 1858, at age 24, it happened for the first time. He said, "My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for."[\[48\]](#)

Causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discourings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness....The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back[\[49\]](#)

He saw his depression as his "worst feature." "Despondency," he said, "is not a virtue; I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God."[\[50\]](#)

How Did Spurgeon Do It?

In spite of all these sufferings and persecutions, Spurgeon endured to the end, and was able to preach mightily until his last sermon at the Tabernacle on June 7, 1891. So the question which begs to be asked in studying this man's life

and work is, "How did he persevere and preach through this adversity?"

O, how many strategies of grace abound in the life of Spurgeon! Those selected for this article are very limited and personal. The scope of this man's warfare, and the wisdom of his strategies were immense.

Consider first the issue of despondency and depression. If this one can be conquered, all the other forms of adversity that feed into it will be nullified in their killing effect.

Belief that God is Sovereign Over Depression

Spurgeon saw his depression as the design of God for the good of his ministry and the glory of Christ. What comes through again and again is his unwavering belief in the sovereignty of God in all his afflictions. More than anything else, this kept him from caving in to the adversities of his life. He said,

It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity.[\[51\]](#)

This is exactly the opposite strategy of modern thought, even much evangelical thought, that recoils from the implications of infinity. If God is God, He not only knows what is coming, but He knows it because He designs it. For Spurgeon this view of God was not primarily an argument for debate, it was a means of survival.

Our afflictions are the health regimen of an infinitely wise Physician. He told his students,

I dare say the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, *with the exception of sickness*....If some men, that I know of could only be favoured with a month of rheumatism, it would, by God's grace mellow them marvelously.[\[52\]](#)

He meant this mainly for himself. Though he dreaded suffering and would willingly avoid it, he said,

I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable....Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library.[\[53\]](#)

He saw three specific purposes of God in his struggle with depression. The first is that it functioned like the apostle Paul's thorn to keep him humble lest he be lifted up in himself. He said the Lord's work is summed up in these words:

`Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' Instruments shall be used, but their intrinsic weakness shall be clearly manifested; there shall be no division of the glory, no diminishing of the honor due to the Great Worker....Those who are honoured of their Lord in public have usually to endure a secret chastening, or to carry a peculiar cross, lest by any means they exalt themselves, and fall into the snare of the devil.[\[54\]](#)

The second purpose of God in his despondency was the unexpected power it gave to his ministry:

One Sabbath morning, I preached from the text, `My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' and though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience. I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow-prisoners in the dark; but I could not tell why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness, for which I condemned myself. On the following Monday evening, a man came to see me who bore all the marks of despair upon his countenance. His hair seemed to stand up right, and his eyes were ready to start from their sockets. He said to me, after a little parleying, "I never before, in my life, heard any man speak who seemed to know my heart. Mine is a terrible case; but on Sunday morning you painted me to the life, and preached as if you had been inside my soul." By God's grace I saved that man from suicide, and led him into gospel light and liberty; but I know I could not have done it if I had not myself been confined in the dungeon in which he lay. I tell you the story, brethren, because you sometimes may not understand your own experience, and the perfect people may condemn you for having it; but what know they of God's servants? You and I have to suffer much for the sake of the people of our charge....You may be in Egyptian darkness, and you may wonder why such a horror chills your marrow; but you may be altogether in the pursuit of your calling, and be led of the Spirit to a position of sympathy with desponding minds.[\[55\]](#)

The third design of his depression was what he called a prophetic signal for the future. This has given me much encouragement in my own situation.

This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's richer benison.[\[56\]](#)

I would say with Spurgeon that in the darkest hours it is the sovereign goodness of God that has given me the strength to go on-the granite promise that He rules over my circumstances and means it for good no matter what anyone else means.

Proper Use of Rest and Nature

Very practically Spurgeon supplements his theological survival strategy with God's natural means of survival-the use of rest and nature. For all his talk about spending and being spent, he counsels us to rest, take a day off and open ourselves to the healing powers God has put in the world of nature.

"Our Sabbath is our day of toil," he said, "and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down."[\[57\]](#) Eric Hayden reminds us that Spurgeon "kept , when possible, Wednesday as his day of rest."[\[58\]](#) More than that Spurgeon said to his students,

It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on for ever, without recreation may suit spirits emancipated from this

"heavy clay", but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt, and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of

going out of harness for a while.[\[59\]](#)

I can testify that the four extra weeks that the church gave me last summer were crucial weeks in breathing a different spiritual air.

And when we take time away from the press of duty, Spurgeon recommends that we breathe country air and let the beauty of nature do its appointed work. He confesses that "sedentary habits have tendency to create despondency...especially in the months of fog." Then he counsels, "A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best."[\[60\]](#)

I must speak a personal word to younger ministers. I am finishing my 15th year at Bethlehem and I just celebrated my 49th birthday. I have watched my body and my soul with some care over these years and noticed some changes. They are partly owing to changing circumstances, but much is owing to a changing constitution. One, I cannot eat as much without gaining unhelpful weight. My body does not metabolize the same way it used to.

Another is that I am emotionally less resilient when I lose sleep. There were early days when I would work without regard to sleep and feel energized and motivated. In the last seven or eight years my threshold for despondency is much lower. For me, adequate sleep is not a matter of staying healthy. It is a matter of staying in the ministry. It is irrational that my future should look bleaker when I get four or five hours sleep several nights in a row. But that is irrelevant. Those are the facts. And I must live within the limits of facts. I commend sufficient sleep to you, for the sake of your proper assessment of God and his promises.

Spurgeon was right when he said,

The condition of your body must be attended to...a little more...common sense would be a great gain to some who are ultra spiritual, and attribute all their moods of feeling to some supernatural cause when the real reason lies far nearer to hand. Has it not often happened that dyspepsia has been mistaken for backsliding, and bad digestion has been set down as a hard heart? [\[61\]](#)

Prayer and Meditation

Spurgeon consistently nourished his soul by communion with Christ through prayer and meditation. John Owen's book, *Communion with God*, has nourished me again and again when the soul asked, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" Spurgeon gave careful attention to his own spiritual life. He warned his students,

Never neglect your spiritual meals, or you will lack stamina and your spirits will sink. Live on the substantial doctrines of grace, and you will outlive and out-work those who delight in the pastry and syllabubs of "modern thought" [\[62\]](#)

One reason Spurgeon was so rich in language, full in doctrinal substance and strong in spirit, in spite of his despondency, physical oppression and his embattlements, is that he was always immersed in a great book-six a week. We cannot match that number. But we can always be walking with some great "see-er" of God. I walked with Owen most of last year on and off little by little and felt myself strengthened by a great grasp of God's reality. Spurgeon demonstrates that the key in all good reading of theology is utterly real fellowship with Christ.

Above all, feed the flame with intimate fellowship with Christ. No man was ever cold in heart who

lived with Jesus on such terms as John and Mary did of old....I never met with a half-hearted preacher who was much in communion with the Lord Jesus. [63]

In many ways Spurgeon was a child in his communion with God. He did not speak in complex terms about anything too strange or mystical. In fact, his prayer life seems more business-like than contemplative.

When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a bank clerk when I have a cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, and the clerk gives me my money, I take it up, and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks; when I have received my change I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray; but there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the mercy seat as though one had no particular reason for being found there. [64]

This may not be entirely exemplary. It may dishonor the Lord to treat him like a bank clerk rather than like a mountain spring. But it would be a mistake to think that Spurgeon's business-like praying was anything other than childlike communion with his Father. The most touching description I have read of his communion with God comes from 1871 when he was in terrible pain with gout.

When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, "Thou art my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?"...So I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: "I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer." I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned.[65]

If we are going to preach through adversity we will have to live in communion with God on such intimate terms—speaking to him our needs and our pain, and feeding on the grace of his promises and the revelations of God's glory.

Meditation on Eternity

Spurgeon rekindled the zeal and passion to preach by fixing his eyes on eternity rather than the immediate price of faithfulness. The apostle Paul saw that the outer nature was wasting away. What kept him going was the abiding assurance that this momentary affliction was working for him an eternal weight of glory. Therefore he looked to the things that are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). So did Spurgeon.

O brethren, (he said to his pastors' conference) we shall soon have to die! We look each other in the face to-day in health, but there will come a day when others will look down upon our pallid countenances as we lie in our coffins....It will matter little to us who shall gaze upon us then, but it will matter eternally how we have discharged our work during our lifetime.[66]

When our hearts grow faint and our zeal wavers for the task of preaching he calls us to

Meditate with deep solemnity upon the fate of the lost sinner....Shun all views of future punishment

which would make it appear less terrible, and so take off the edge of your anxiety to save immortals from the quenchless flame....Think much also of the bliss of the sinner saved, and like holy Baxter derive rich arguments for earnestness from "the saints' everlasting rest"...There will be no fear of your being lethargic if you are continually familiar with eternal realities.[\[67\]](#)

Spurgeon took the long view when it came to his own persecution. In the Downgrade controversy he said,

Posterity must be considered. I do not look so much at what is to happen to-day, for these things relate to eternity. For my part, I am quite willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years; but the more distant future shall vindicate me. I have dealt honestly before the living God. My brother, do the same. [\[68\]](#)

To keep on preaching in storm of adversity, you must look well beyond the crisis and feelings of the hour. You must look to what history will make of your faithfulness and most of all to what God will make of it at the last day.

Peace with Himself

For Spurgeon a key to his perseverance in preaching through adversity was that he had settled who he was and would not be paralyzed with external criticism or internal second-guessing. One of the great perils of living under continual criticism is that this is a constant call for you to be other than what you are. And, in fact, a humble saint always wants to be a better person than he is. But there is a great danger here of losing your bearings in sea of self-doubt; not knowing who you are; not being able to say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). Spurgeon felt this danger keenly.

In comparing one ministerial identity with another he reminded other pastors that at the last supper there was a chalice for drinking the wine and there was a basin for washing feet. Then he said,

I protest that I have no choice whether to be the chalice or the basin. Fain would I be whichever the Lord wills so long as He will but use me....So you, my brother, you may be the cup, and I will be the basin; but let the cup be a cup, and the basin a basin, and each one of us just what he is fitted to be. Be yourself, dear brother, for, if you are not yourself, you cannot be anybody else; and so, you see, you must be nobody....Do not be a mere copyist, a borrower a spoiler of other men's notes. Say what God has said to you, and say it in your own way; and when it is so said, plead personally for the Lord's blessing upon it. [\[69\]](#)

And, I would add, plead personally for the Lord's purifying blood upon it too, because not even our best labors are untainted. But the weight of this truth must not paralyze the preacher with fear of man and doubt of self.

Eleven years later in 1886 Spurgeon struck the same anvil again:

Friend, be true to your own destiny! One man would make a splendid preacher of downright hard-hitting Saxon: why must he ruin himself by cultivating an ornate style?...Apollon has the gift of eloquence; why must he copy blunt Cephas? Every man in his own order.[\[70\]](#)

Spurgeon illustrates with his own struggle to be responsive to criticism during the Downgrade controversy. For a season he tried to adapt his language to the critics. But there came a time when he had to be what he was.

I have found it utterly impossible to please, let me say or do what I will. One becomes somewhat indifferent when dealing with those whom every word offends. I notice that, when I have measured my words, and weighed my sentences most carefully, I have then offended most; while some of my stronger utterances have passed unnoticed. Therefore, I am comparatively careless as to how my expressions may be received, and only anxious that they may be in themselves just and true." [71]

If you are to survive and go on preaching in an atmosphere of controversy, there must come a point where, having done your best to weigh the claims of your critics and take them to heart, you must now say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." There must be an end to the deranging second-guessing that threatens to destroy the very soul.

Confidence in Christ's Victory

In the final analysis, the strength to go on preaching in the midst of adversity and setbacks came for Spurgeon from the assured sovereign triumph of Christ. Near the end of his life (1890) in an address to his pastors' conference, he compares adversity and the eclipse of truth to the ebbing tide.

You never met an old salt, down by the sea, who was in trouble because the tide had been ebbing out for hours. No! He waits confidently for the turn of the tide, and it comes in due time. Yonder rock has been uncovered during the last half-hour, and if the sea continues to ebb out for weeks, there will be no water in the English Channel, and the French will walk over from Cherbourg. Nobody talks in that childish way, for such an ebb will never come. Nor will we speak as though the gospel would be routed, and eternal truth driven out of the land. We serve an almighty Master....If our Lord does but stamp His foot, He can win for Himself all the nations of the earth against heathenism, and Mohammedanism, and Agnosticism, and Modern-thought, and every other foul error. Who is he that can harm us if we follow Jesus? How can His cause be defeated? At His will, converts will flock to His truth as numerous as the sands of the sea....Wherefore be of good courage, and go on your way singing [and preaching!]:

The winds of hell have blown
The world its hate hath shown,
Yet it is not o'erthrown.
Hallelujah for the Cross!
Hallelujah It shall never suffer loss!

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. [72]



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²Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 161.

³Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?" in *Christian History*, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 2.

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⁷² *An All Round Ministry*, pp. 395-396.



The Priority of Doctrinal Preaching

Ernest Reisinger

The volumes that have been written in order to show and teach ministers how to preach are enough to make a small library--we all have plenty of books on the subject. In this little article I only purpose to touch one branch of the subject, and that is Direct Doctrinal Preaching.

Doctrinal preaching is the foundation of all true Christian experience. Without a sound doctrinal foundation Christian experience is like cut flowers stuck in the ground--they soon wither and die. Doctrinal truth is not only the foundation but also the superstructure of all true biblical preaching.

Christian doctrines are nothing less than the truths of Christianity. The Bible emphasizes that "all Scripture is profitable for **doctrine**."

Generally, the objection to preaching doctrine has reference to those doctrines which the objector dislikes.

All Christian affections and purposes are inspired by a view of Christian truth (doctrine). There are no Christian truths (doctrines) which, if presented in their due proportions and surroundings, do not tend to nourish some holy affections. There can be no doubt, therefore, that it is a fundamental part of true biblical preaching. It is the preacher's duty to make these truths clearly understood as the very condition of true faith, holy living and whatever is involved in right practice.

Doctrinal preaching is sometimes stigmatized as dull, dead and unprofitable. It is referred to as the offering of dry bones to souls craving pure milk and meat of the word. We do not deny that there may be some doctrinal preaching that deserves this charge, however, it is not the doctrinal content, but rather the unthoughtful manner in which it is handled by the preachers. Doctrinal preaching should not be cold theological lectures or dogmatic polemic arguments. Doctrine should always be clearly defined and established and developed in its practical and experimental context. Therefore, all Christian practice must be based on correct doctrines and rooted in Christian principles in order to be that kind which accompanies salvation. A preacher who attempts to edify the church without doctrinal instruction is like a builder attempting to build a house without a good foundation.

Some may call the doctrines dry bones. We must ask what kind of a body would that be which has flesh and blood but has no bones? Of course, if the preacher presents doctrine in skeleton nakedness, apart from a vital relationship to life and experience, it is the fault of the preacher and not the fault of true doctrinal preaching.

Sound doctrinal preaching must always be practical and experimental, applied to the necessity and capacities of the hearers. In fact, the two should never be separated any more than flesh and bones should be separated. If they are separated there is death for sure.

They should always blend together in order to compliment and establish each other, and be pervaded by the unction of the Holy One.

The doctrinal preacher need not be concerned that good people will not attend to his sermons. I have generally found that good people will attend if the preacher gives them something to attend to.

Jesus was a Doctrinal Preacher

In Mark 1 we learn some important lessons from the Preacher of preachers--the wise Master Preacher Himself.

First, we learn that He prayed before He preached (Mk. 1:13). He was forty days and nights in the wilderness before he began to **preach**. He prayed before He came to Galilee preaching (Mk. 1:14). Note in Mk. 1:35, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." Immediately after He prayed He said to His followers (v. 38) "Let us go...that I may preach...because for this purpose I have come...." He stated very clearly His purpose: "I have come to preach."

In this chapter we can learn some other important lessons from the Master Preacher. In 1:22, 27 we learn that He preached with authority. In 1:41 we learn that he preached with compassion. But what I wish to emphasize is that He was a doctrinal preacher. Mk 1:22, "And they were astonished at His doctrine...." Mk. 1:27, "What new doctrine is this?" This question tells us plainly that Jesus was a doctrinal preacher.

When Jesus gave the church their marching orders preaching was the priority--"Go ye into all the world and preach" (Mk. 16:15). In Mk. 16:20 we see that they understood His orders--"And they went forth and **preached** everywhere"--the priority of preaching.

Doctrinal Preaching Must Be Direct

Bishop J.C. Ryle has some very good advice for all preachers on direct preaching. Bishop Ryle was First Bishop of Liverpool and was instrumental in founding twenty-five churches. Doctrine, experience, and practice based upon and shaped by the pure word of God were to him the essentials of the on-going life of the church.

In the book, *The Upper Room*, published by Banner of Truth, there is a chapter called "Simplicity in Preaching." In this chapter Ryle gives five hints for attaining simplicity in preaching (I wish all preachers would study it); the fourth hint will help us in discussing direct preaching. A quote from his sermon:

The fourth hint is this: If you wish to preach simply, *use a direct style*. What do I mean by this? I mean the practice and custom of saying "I" and "you." When a man takes up this style of preaching, he is often told that he is conceited and egotistical. The result is that many preachers are never direct, and always think it very humble and modest and becoming to say "we." But remember good Bishop Villiers saying that "we" was a word kings and corporations should use, and they alone, but that parish clergymen should always talk of "I" and "you." I endorse that saying with all my heart. I declare I never can understand what the famous pulpit "we" means. Does the preacher who all through his sermon keeps saying "we" mean himself and the bishop? or himself and the Church? or himself and the congregation? or himself and the Early Fathers? or himself and the Reformers? or himself and all the wise men in the world? or, after all, does he only mean myself, plain "John Smith" or "Thomas Jones"? If he only means himself, what earthly reason can he give for using the plural number, and not saying simply and plainly "I"? When he visits his parishioners, or sits by a sick-bed, or catechises his school, or orders bread at the baker's, or meat at the butcher's, he does not say "we," but "I." Why, then, I should like to know, can he not say "I" in the pulpit? What right has he, as a modest man, to speak for any one but himself? Why not stand up on Sunday and say, "Reading in the Word of God, I have found a text containing such things as these, and I come to set them before you"?

Many people, I am sure, do not understand what the preacher's "we" means. The expression leaves them in a kind of fog. If you say, "I, your rector; I, your vicar; I, the curate of the parish," come here to talk of something that concerns your soul, something you should believe, something you should do--you are at any rate understood. But if you begin to talk in the vague plural number of what "we" ought to do, many of your hearers do not know what you are driving at, and whether you are speaking to yourself or them. I charge and entreat my younger brethren in the ministry not to forget this point. Do try to be as *direct* as possible. Never mind what people say of you. In this particular do not imitate Chalmers, or Melville, or certain other living pulpit celebrities. Never say "we" when you mean "I." The more you get into the habit of talking plainly to the people, in the first person singular, as old Bishop Latimer did, the simpler will your sermon be, and the more easily understood.

George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist that ever set foot on American soil, had some distinctives that will help us. One author said of Whitefield's preaching:

- He preached a **singular**, pure gospel--much wheat and little chaff.
- It was preeminently a manifestation of truth. Sin--sins--your heart--Jesus Christ--the Holy Ghost--absolute need of repentance, faith, and holiness.
- His preaching was singularly lucid and simple.
- He was a bold and **direct** preacher, not that abstract expression "we." "I have come to speak to you about your souls." There was a constant vein of application all the way through the sermon, not a tail piece stuck on at the end. This is for YOU--YOU--YOU.
- He was descriptive. He turned men's ears into eyes.
- Earnestness marked all his preaching.
- He preached with pathos and feeling.
- The glory of Whitefield's sermons was in their directness.

William Perkins, one of the great puritan fathers, in a Treatise, *The Art of Prophesying* (preaching) had a chapter entitled "How To Use And Apply Doctrine".

The ways of application are chiefly seven, according to the different conditions of the people, which is seven-fold:

1. UNBELIEVERS, who are both ignorant and unteachable.

2. SOME ARE TEACHABLE--BUT YET IGNORANT.

To these men the Catechism must be delivered. Acts 18:25, Apollos was catechised...in the way of the Lord. Perkins was very strong on this point. He said, "The catechism is the doctrine of the foundation of Christian religion, briefly propounded for the help of the understanding and memory, in questions and answers made by lively voice."

The matter therefore, of the catechism, is the foundation of religion.

3. SOME HAVE KNOWLEDGE--BUT ARE NOT YET HUMBLED.

In such the foundation of repentance ought to be stirred up, that is to say, a certain sorrow which is according to God. Sorrow according to God, is a grief for sin simply because it is sin. Under this point Perkins tells how to use the Law to stir up the heart.

4. SOME ARE HUMBLLED.

"Here we must very diligently consider whether their humiliation be complete and sound, or but begun, and but light, or slight; lest that he or they, receive comfort sooner than is meet, should afterwards wax more hard, like iron, which being cast into the furnace, becomes exceedingly hard, after it is once cold."

In reading Jeremiah, chapter 6:13, 14, I noted again one of the marks of the false prophets is just this point, "Even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely, they have healed also the hurt of the daughters of my people slightly, saying peace, peace, when there is no peace."

5. SOME DO BELIEVE.

He points out how these must be built up (expository preaching).

6. SOME ARE FALLEN.

Falling is either in faith or manners.

7. THERE IS A MINGLED PEOPLE.

If the preacher is aware of these different kinds of hearers he will be balanced in doctrinal preaching.

Let me close with a question from the Larger Catechism:

Question--How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

Answer--They that are called to labor in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God: wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at His glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

Note carefully the six areas emphasized in this answer:

1. **Diligently**--The Scripture, in speaking of Apollos, who was an eloquent speaker says, Acts 18:25 (KJV) "This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord,"
2. **Plainly**--1 Cor. 2:4--see the pattern of a faithful minister, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."
3. **Faithfully**--making known the whole counsel of God (expository).

Jer. 23:28, "He that hath my Word, let him speak **faithfully**."

1 Cor. 4:1,2 "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found **faithful**."

4. **Wisely**--Col. 1:28, "When we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all **wisdom**."

5. **Zealously**--with fervent love to God, and the souls of His people.

2 Cor. 4:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth...." This is heavenly fire.

6. **Sincerely**--2 Cor. 2:17, "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of **sincerity**, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."



News

Don Whitney Joins SBFC Planning Committee

The Southern Baptist Founders Conference Planning Committee has recently added Don Whitney to their ranks. After serving as pastor of the Glenfield Baptist Church in Glen Ellyn, IL for more than fourteen years, Dr. Whitney has recently been elected to the faculty of the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, KS as the professor of spiritual formation. He received his MDiv. from Southwestern Seminary and his DMin. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Whitney is best known for his best selling book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. He and his wife Caffy have one daughter.

New Contributing Editor

The Founders Journal is pleased to announce that Mark Dever has been added to our board of Contributing Editors. Dr. Dever is the pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. He previously served as Associate Pastor at Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge, England. He is a graduate of Gordon Conwell (MDiv.), Southern Seminary (ThM), and Cambridge University (PhD), where his major emphasis was the English Puritans. His work has appeared previously in the journal and he is no stranger to those who are familiar with the Founders Conference. He and his wife, Connie, have two children.

A Southern Baptist Explanation of Calvinism

The Southern Baptist Founders Conference Southwest has produced a 6 cassette tape set entitled, *A Southern Baptist Explanation of Calvinism*. The set consists of 5 sermons by Fred Malone, pastor of First Baptist Church in Clinton, LA, on "Total Depravity," "Unconditional Election," "Particular Redemption," "Effectual Calling," and "Perseverance of the Saints." Also included is a message by Tom Ascol entitled, "From the Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention." These six tapes come in a vinyl album and are available for \$10.00 plus postage from Rusty Canoy at First Baptist Church of Roosevelt * Rt. 1, Box 398 * Lubbock, TX 79401 * phone (806) 842-3433.

Midwest Founders Conference

The first Southern Baptist Founders Conference Midwest is scheduled for March 5-7. It will be hosted by First Baptist Church of Harvester, Missouri. The cost for the conference is \$30.00 (\$15.00 for students). A list of conference hotels will be provided upon request. The theme of the conference is "Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God." For more information contact either Dr. Curtis McClain at 8454 Engler Ave * St. Louis, MO 63314 * phone (314) 428-4079; or Pastor Chuck Todd at 313 S. East St. * Pinckneyville, IL 62274 * phone (618) 357-9220.



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Book Reviews

Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching, by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth, 1995, 164 pp. \$5.99.

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

Among evangelicals, the last twenty-five years have witnessed a revival of what historically has been called "Calvinism." This renewal transcends denominational boundaries and shows no sign of abating.

In Southern Baptist life this theological revival is nothing less than a homecoming to our doctrinal roots. All across the Southern Baptist Convention pastors, churches, denominational servants, and educators continue to rediscover that God-centered perspective on the gospel which the Bible teaches and which was prevalent when the denomination was founded one hundred-fifty years ago.

While this doctrinal renewal is a necessary corrective to the man-centered Arminianism which has decimated much of our contemporary faith and practice, it also comes with dangers of its own against which we must constantly guard. The greatest of these dangers is hyper-Calvinism.

The error of hyper-Calvinism can only emerge where true Calvinism has taken root. It is a perverting error. It distorts that which is good and true. It is a parasite which sucks the life out of its host.

There is no indication that the present renewal of Calvinism has begun to foster the error of hyper-Calvinism, but, as the old saying goes, forewarned is fore-armed.

Iain Murray's newest book is a theological prophylactic for evangelical Calvinists. By drawing on the life and ministry of Spurgeon Murray makes clear distinctions between *true* or evangelical Calvinism and *false* or hyper-Calvinism. This is a great service for, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "The ignorant Arminian does not know the difference between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism." This sad fact, which need not be taken caustically, is being repeatedly demonstrated in our day.

On one seminary campus students are currently taught that Spurgeon himself was not a real Calvinist. On that same campus one professor defines hyper-Calvinism as best represented by the Canons of Dort. Murray's book gives the lie to both claims.

Spurgeon's first major controversy was against hyper-Calvinism, particularly as expressed and defended by fellow Baptist pastor, James Wells. The debate which followed Wells's attacks on Spurgeon displays clearly that Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism are different not simply in degree but in kind. The most serious difference is seen in that the latter denies that faith and repentance are duties which God requires of sinners as sinners.

The book consists of three significantly different parts. The first is introductory and contains a heretofore unpublished "Impression of Spurgeon" in his early years by one who attended his ministry. The second part is the heart of the book in which Murray traces Spurgeon's controversy with hyper-Calvinism and, thereby, shows the differences between it and true Calvinism. Ample excerpts of Spurgeon's writings and sermons greatly add to the value of this section. Chapter 4, "Spurgeon's Fourfold Appeal to Scripture," is worth the price of the book and could well stand on its own. The last of these appeals deals with the love of God. Spurgeon has much to teach those who would doubt

our Lord's compassion for sinners.

The final part of the book contains a helpful hodgepodge of "Illustrative Material" drawn from various sources. Murray's treatment of John Gill and William Huntington as prototypical hyper-Calvinists is sure to provoke response from those who read these two men differently. The author's analysis, however, is lucid, amply illustrated, and not without merit.

This book ought to be read by every lover of Spurgeon, every pastor, every seminary and religion professor, and every ministerial student. If you are one of these, secure a copy without delay. If you know someone who fits one of those categories, do that person a great favor and make this little book a gift to encourage him in his calling.

Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern, by John MacArthur, Jr., Crossway Books, 1994, 256 pp. \$17.99

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

John MacArthur is exemplary in his ability to stay on the cutting edge of evangelical life. The problems and issues on which he sets his sights are always relevant to the health and vitality of modern believers. *Reckless Faith* While lacking a central focus that can be traced from beginning to end, MacArthur brings several critical issues into the light of his perceptive evaluation. He shows quite clearly how subjectivism, mysticism and existentialism have gained the upper hand in many sectors of evangelical life. The loss of belief in objective truth combined with the loss of ability to reason from the Scriptures has left many evangelicals intellectually paralyzed and therefore open to theological aberrations of every stripe.

Two of these, the so-called "laughing revival" of "Toronto Blessing" fame and the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document, receive special attention. MacArthur does a much better job analyzing the former than he does the latter. With light from the writings of Jonathan Edwards, the Toronto Blessing is exposed as being significantly different from earlier, historical accounts of true revival. Some of the laughing revival's chief defenders are allowed to speak for themselves to show the contrast between their understanding of awakening and that of Edwards. This chapter (six) is the best in the book.

MacArthur's evaluation of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is not as valuable. He issues proper warnings about the primacy of justification by faith alone and speaks for many evangelicals (this reviewer included) who lament the fact that some of our most loved and respected leaders signed the document. However, for several reasons his critique lacks the force which it could have had.

Not the least of these is an unfortunate mistake in research. MacArthur erroneously includes Timothy George as one of the signers of the document (p. 120) and therefore misconstrues some of George's published comments about the issue. To his credit, MacArthur has acknowledged this mistake, apologized to George, and made significant changes in future editions of the book. His gracious manner of handling this mistake is exemplary of what Christian scholarship ought to be.

Overall, this is not a bad book. It simply is not one of the better books to come from an author whose writings have

set an unusually high standard by which everything he publishes is judged. The book may prove helpful to someone who has uncritically imbibed the mysticism or subjectivism of our day. But much of what is found here has been treated by the author in a more balanced and careful way in previous books (especially in *Charismatic Chaos* and *The Vanishing Conscience*).



A Solemn Charge to the Pastor

The charge you are about to receive is awful and solemn. The work before you is weighty and important. The consequence before you, both to yourself and your hearers is much to be regarded, and will be joyful or sorrowful as you are faithful or unfaithful in it, as you are found or not found a pastor according to God's heart. Let me, therefore, exhort and beseech you, in the language of the Apostle, 1 Timothy 4:16, *Take heed unto thy self and to thy doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thy self and them that hear thee.* The work before you is great, it is weighty, it is very important. You are called to it in a time and place when and where you may expect great difficulties, perhaps uncommon trials. Keep your eyes fixed upon Christ. Let those promises and declarations of His be your encouragement, *Lo I am with you always: My grace is sufficient for thee.*

Dear sir, the time is coming when you and I, in a vastly more solemn and august assembly, before God and Christ, must appear and come under examination as to whether we have been pastors according to God's heart or not. The good Lord grant that you and I may obtain mercy and grace to be found faithful; that, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away. Amen.

--John Shaw, an excerpt from *The Character of a Pastor According to God's Heart, An Ordination Sermon Preached August 26, 1752.* First Printed in 1752 in Boston. Reprinted in 1992 by Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 213 W. Vincent Street, Ligonier, PA 15658.



Letters

I am currently serving on the board of trustees of Southern Seminary. I was elected to serve in 1986 by the SBC meeting in Atlanta, GA. I will have completed my ten-year tenure next year. I have been privileged to witness the beginning of the reformation at our mother seminary. God has richly blessed the board of trustees by giving us the vision to employ Al Mohler as its president. Thank you for your kind words of support in issue #21, Summer 1995. A good friend passed it on to me. Enclosed is my check for a two-year subscription.

D.B.

Morton, TX

I just wanted you and the editorial staff to know how much I appreciate the *Founders Journal*. I heard about it from Timothy George, and I enjoy reading every issue. By God's grace I became convinced of the truth of the doctrines of grace about three years ago.

I graduated from SBTS with an MDiv in '87. Of course, while there I got a good dose of Arminianism, esp. when I read Dr. Moody's systematic theology for my intro class. Since there were few there at the time to defend the doctrines of grace (Dr. George being a notable exception), I, like most Southern Baptists, bought into the Arminian line without much question. Still, whenever I would read the Scriptures, all that talk of grace, election, foreknowledge, predestination, and choosing really bothered me. I started re-thinking my theology, but I really didn't want to become a (gasp!) "cold-hearted Calvinist!" Who, me? Why, I believe in evangelism!

As time went on, however, God led me to a complete affirmation of the doctrines of grace. Actually, I was investigating our Baptist roots due to the SBC Controversy. Along the way, I came across Tom Nettles' book, *By His Grace and For His Glory*. Along with my own study of the Scriptures, this book caused a turning point in my theological thinking. Since I have affirmed and pursued the study of the doctrines of grace, with their concomitant emphasis on the sovereignty of God, I have begun to revise my entire theological perspective. I have come to understand, as J. I. Packer so clearly put it in his introduction to Owen's *Death of Death*, that the faith summarized in the doctrines of grace is nothing less than the gospel.

The *Founders Journal* is one of the few places in Southern Baptist life that I have found this theology affirmed and supported. Most Southern Baptists, whether fundamentalist, conservative, moderate, or liberal, seem to center their theology on human sovereignty, rather than the sovereignty of God. Thank you for standing firm "for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

By His Grace,

Via e-mail:

K.M., pastor

Providence, RI

Thanks for an outstanding article on the subject of Baptists and Baptism. Your statement, "These `drive-by-baptisms' not only cheapen the ordinance from which Baptists take their name, they also leave widespread spiritual carnage in their wake," is a shockingly true fact that our Baptist denomination needs to understand. Thanks for writing clearly and boldly on such a needed subject area. . . .

Via e-mail:

P.N., pastor

Memphis, TN

I am pastor of a small SBC church in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I am writing, first of all, to let you know how much I appreciate the ministry provided by the *Founders Journal*. It is a true voice of hope and encouragement to pastors like myself who are Reformed, yet ministering in churches and associations where Reformed thought is a decided minority. Keep up the good work! . . .

Via e-mail:

S.C., pastor

Fayetteville, AR



10th Annual Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference

When: June 17th-21st, 1996

Where: Panama City Beach, FL, at the Boardwalk Beach Resort

Theme: "The Holy War"

Speakers: Pastors Tom Ascol & Bill Ascol

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