

C. H. Spurgeon

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[0 : 0 0] hundred times over, appear to be inconsistent with myself than to be inconsistent with the Word of God. The hyper-Calvinists in Spurgeon's day had a way of approaching theological debates similar to Pelagius in Augustine's day.

Their primary charge against Spurgeon was that his theology, i.e. Calvinism, was inconsistent. And their dissent was largely most often based on what they perceived to be logical arguments rather than the actual teachings of Scripture.

For example, they would ask questions like, how can you exhort a sinner to believe and repent when he's spiritually dead? That doesn't make sense. That's illogical. That's inconsistent.

Well, Spurgeon, on the other hand, would ask, what does the Bible say? What does the Bible say? On the one side of the coin, Jesus says, no man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Right? On the other hand, on the other side of the coin, Jesus commands the crowd, come to me. Well, the Bible presents us with an apparent paradox here.

[1 : 1 8] And we can respond in one of two ways. We can either emphasize one side of the coin while neglecting the other, or we can simply believe both. Spurgeon said, I will believe both.

Whether I can explain it or fully understand it, I will believe both. Because that's what Scripture says. The Arminian doesn't know how to reconcile these things, so he tosses God's sovereignty aside.

The hyper-Calvinist doesn't know how to reconcile these things, so he tosses man's responsibility aside. Spurgeon wasn't willing to toss any part of Scripture aside, which of course made him an enemy and a target for both Arminians and hyper-Calvinists.

Let me read to you my all-time favorite Spurgeon quote. Then I'll briefly explain why it's my favorite. Spurgeon said, Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth.

Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly?

[2 : 4 2] Now I'm here to talk about Spurgeon, not myself, but let me share with you why Spurgeon has been so influential in my life. I grew up in hyper-Calvinist churches.

I became a hyper-Calvinist pastor. I believed in hyper-Calvinism, though I would have never used that term back then. Eventually I became a full-time pastor with ample time to study the Bible.

I also adopted the practice of preaching through entire books of the Bible verse by verse. So I was forced to see every word in context.

I had to expound upon every passage I came to, whether I wanted to or not. Whether I knew what to do with it. Whether I knew how to make it fit into my current understanding of things.

Well, to make a long story short, it was almost inevitable that I would eventually see some inconsistencies with myself. And I did. And like Spurgeon, I had to kind of become an outlier at that point.

[3 : 48] And there was a time when I didn't know what to do. My church was deeply entrenched in hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism. Every pastor I personally knew was a hyper-Calvinist.

Based on everything I learned growing up, hyper-Calvinism was apostolic, orthodox teaching. That's what the church had always believed. You may remember Johannes X' argument against Luther.

He basically said, Luther, how can you have the audacity to say you're right when you're the only one saying it? Everyone else, past and present, disagrees with you. Well, who was I to claim the Bible contradicts my church's long-standing tradition?

And that's when I turned to Spurgeon. Spurgeon was on my radar because several pastors had previously warned me about him and others like him. They'd say, be careful reading Spurgeon.

Be careful. He preached the doctrines of grace as soundly as any man. But a moment later, he'd preach Arminianism. Those warnings were still in my head because suddenly people were now accusing me of the same thing.

[4 : 56] So I sought out Spurgeon. And I began reading. And he spoke to me in two primary ways. First, he led me to realize I wasn't alone.

I had not invented new doctrines out of thin air. Even beyond Spurgeon, I came to realize many pastors and churches throughout history believed the very things I could now see in Scripture. And furthermore, having peered into the past for myself, I suddenly saw that hyper-Calvinism had its place in history.

I could see the evolution of hyper-Calvinism, and it was not orthodoxy. It was not a continuation of apostolic doctrine. And second, perhaps more importantly, Spurgeon equipped me with confidence.

And I don't mean confidence in myself. I mean confidence in the Word of God. I was immersed in hyper-Calvinism for so long that it was a struggle even then to accept straightforward biblical teachings in some areas.

And then I read Spurgeon. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly? I was afraid of betraying my convictions.

[6 : 18] I was torn between truth and tradition. I felt that I had to choose between God's Word and, frankly, my job. And my friends and my family.

And then I read Spurgeon. In one place, he said, what right have you to set up your feelings against the Word of Christ? Fair enough, Charles.

Fair enough. So that's how Spurgeon first spoke to me. And so I will forever be thankful to God for him. I'm also indebted to Ian Murray for writing his book, Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism.

I think without that book, I may have never known about some of Spurgeon's early struggles. Ironically, a hyper-Calvinist pastor recommended that book to me. To this day, I'm not sure why.

Well, I'd love to go on. I could spend probably all day discussing how Spurgeon still speaks to me, but let's continue. I'll have to give you the abridged version of the remainder of his ministry.

[7 : 21] Under Spurgeon's preaching, New Park Street Chapel grew substantially. Within only a few months, more than 500 people were attending. The church had outgrown the building within the first year.

No church in London had ever seen that kind of rapid growth. Pretty soon, Spurgeon moved the church to Exeter Hall, which could hold nearly 5,000 people.

They outgrew that building as well. So they began plans to construct the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Meanwhile, they met in the music hall of Royal Surrey Gardens because it could hold 12,000 people.

They reached maximum capacity during the very first service. Thousands more had to be turned away. As much as Spurgeon's popularity attracted criticism, he once said, my name is kicked about the street as a football, it also attracted many allies, especially among younger preachers.

So in turn, Spurgeon founded the Pastors College when he was only 22 years old. Pastors College was a little different than a lot of seminaries, though.

[8 : 36] Spurgeon wasn't interested in raising up scholars. Instead, the only people he would accept into the college were preachers who were already filling pulpits.

And he funded the entire operation by selling his printed sermons, which sold about 25,000 copies each week. Spurgeon's time at the Surrey Music Hall was a season of significant revival for the church.

It was quite incredible, but it ended abruptly. Spurgeon discovered one day that the church would be forced to share the facility with various secular entertainment programs on Sunday, and he refused, saying, I neither can nor will give in anything in which I know I am right.

And in the defense of God's Holy Sabbath, the cry of this day is, arise, let us go hence. In other words, it was time for them to go.

Spurgeon was a man of principle, not pragmatism. Later that year, construction of the Metropolitan Tabernacle began. It opened a year or so later.

[9 : 57] It was the largest Protestant sanctuary in the world at that time, seating approximately 6,000 people. Better yet, until Spurgeon's death, 31 years later, that sanctuary was filled every Sunday morning and every Sunday evening.

Now, I'm not sure how he did it, but in addition to his pastoral responsibilities, not to mention his role at the pastor's college, Spurgeon preached as many as 10 times a week. People used to plead with him to slow down.

They said he'd break under that kind of stress. Here's how he responded. If I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had 50 constitutions, I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find ourselves able to preach 10 or 12 times a week, and we find we are the stronger for it. Oh, said one of the members, our minister will kill himself. That is the kind of work that will kill no man.

It is preaching to sleepy congregations that kills good ministers. Eventually, Spurgeon started a publication called The Sword and the Trowel, which defended biblical truth as more and more theological errors gained popularity.

[11 : 20] He also started the Stockwell Orphanage for Boys. Later, he started an orphanage for girls. He led 127 lay pastors or lay ministers to do missionary work throughout the city of London.

By the time he was 50, Spurgeon had founded 66 different organizations that were all used to advance the gospel. by the end of the 19th century, more than 100 million copies of Spurgeon's published sermons had been sold.

To this day, 3,800 of his sermons are still in print. He also wrote and published 135 books. Spurgeon said, I won't have time in my life to read them all.

I have no idea how he managed to write them all. Spurgeon, of course, faced several theological controversies throughout his life, but I think the downgrade controversy near the end was probably the worst.

The name downgrade comes from an analogy. Spurgeon compared what was happening in many of the Baptist churches to a train barreling down the side of a mountain, gaining speed as it goes, with no apparent way to stop before it hits the bottom.

[12 : 45] Many of the churches were abandoning orthodoxy. They were severely undermining the authority of Scripture. They were combining secular entertainment with their worship.

And Spurgeon warned them. But all of his warnings fell on deaf ears and in 1888, well, Spurgeon actually removed his church from the Baptist Union and then in 1888, the Baptist Union voted to censure Spurgeon.

Spurgeon preached his final sermon on June 7, 1891. He died the next January, January 31, 1892, at the age of 57.

On the side of his grave, we read the following words, Ere since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply.

Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die. Then, in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing thy power to save when this poor, lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave.

[13 : 56] Spurgeon still speaks. And his legacy is really too great to capture with just a few words.

But if I were to try, it might suffice to say he believed the Bible. He preached the Bible. And he genuinely loved people.

Frankly, I have not said nearly enough about this last point. Spurgeon was not exaggerating when he said, I remember when I have preached 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.

That was Charles Spurgeon. And with that, we're dismissed. Thank you. Thank you.