

***Spurgeon Vs. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*** by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA, 1995 (27 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

## **1. Wind of Error**

As a Puritan once said, ‘The devil does not allow the wind of error to blow long in the same direction.’ (Page xiii)

## **2. Useless Doctrine**

Doctrine without usefulness is no prize. As Spurgeon says, ‘You may look down with contempt on some who do not know so much as you, and yet they may have twice your holiness and be doing more service to God.’<sup>1</sup> *MTP*, vol. 11, p. 34 (Page xiv)

## **3. Spirit of Truth**

If God promises to look with favour only upon those who tremble at his word (Isa. 66:2), then the Christianity which fails at that point is sure to lack the anointing and authority of the Spirit of truth. (Page 9)

## **4. God’s Word Is Not Void**

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul”, nothing else but the living Word of God will convince, convert, renew and sanctify. He has promised that this shall not return unto Him void; but He has made no such promise to the wisdom of men, or the excellency of human speech. The Spirit of God works with the Word of God...<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Address on ‘Beaten Oil for the Light’, *ST*, 1892, p. 687 (Page 12-13)

## **5. More Than Sermons and Theories**

It would scarcely be too much to say that Spurgeon’s sixty-three volumes of sermons are but a condensation of the wealth of evangelical writing already existing in the English language. One day in his study he pointed a friend to shelves loaded with the works of English Puritans and said, ‘I have preached them all.’<sup>1</sup> He had preached more besides but it was chiefly drawn from that same tradition. The result is that anyone who gives himself to reading Spurgeon will not be fed on a diet of nineteenth-century theological fashions, he will not be entertained with short-lived theories that were merely the quirk of a great individual, he will rather be given a love for a body of truth which has a past and a future – truths which will outlive all the oddities, errors and fantasies that arise to distract the church from her true calling.

<sup>1</sup>Williams, *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 34 (Page 16)

## 6. Holy Character

<sup>2</sup>In 1890 he was to say, ‘We have few Puritans because we have few penitents. An awful sense of guilt, an overwhelming conviction of sin, may be the foundation stone for a gloriously holy character’ (*MTP*, vol. 38, p. 56). (Page 17)

## 7. Humility

‘You may rest quite certain that, if God honours any man in public, he takes him aside privately, and flogs him well, otherwise he would get elevated and proud, and God will not have that.’<sup>2</sup> ‘Many a man has been elevated until his brain has grown dizzy, and he has fallen to his destruction. He who is to be made to stand securely in a high place has need to be put through sharp affliction. More men are destroyed by prosperity and success than by affliction and apparent failure.’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*MTP*, vol. 52, p. 165

<sup>3</sup>*MTP*, vol. 51, p. 356 (Page 18)

## 8. Trials are Blessings

Sometimes Spurgeon spoke of both feet and a hand as ‘a mass of pain’. His condition was generally worse in cold weather and his doctors believed that it was aggravated by excessive mental labour. As well as the physical anguish which attended these bouts, there were experiences which troubled him still more, namely what he calls ‘frightful mental depression’.<sup>2</sup> There were dark days when he was prostrated by despondency as well as by illness.

These and other trials Spurgeon came to believe were blessings from God. He could say, ‘I have been much the gainer by my sad hours and my sick days’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*C.H. Spurgeon: The Full Harvest*, p. 410

<sup>3</sup>*MTP*, vol. 35, p. 224 (Page 19)

## 9. More of God, Less of Self

‘O Lord, sink me in self that I may rise in thee’.<sup>1</sup> ... ‘Consciousness of self-importance is a hateful delusion, but one into which we fall as naturally as weeds grow on a dunghill. We cannot be used of the Lord but what we also dream of personal greatness, we think ourselves almost indispensable to the church, pillars of the cause, and foundations of the temple of God. We are nothing and nobodies, but that we do not think so is very evident, for as soon as we are put on the shelf we begin anxiously to enquire, “How will the work go on without me?”

<sup>1</sup>*The Checque Book of the Bank of Faith* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888), p. 312

See also *ST*, 1887, p. 110 (Page 20)

## **10. Power of Scripture**

Christians have trials of many kinds but Spurgeon believed that peace of mind comes from faith in the Word of God in all circumstances and on all occasions. Spiritual stability and the right use of Scripture go together: ‘Ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you’ (I John 2:14). ‘A true love for the great Book will bring us great peace from the great God. Nothing is a stumbling-block to the man who has the Word of God dwelling in him richly.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, p. 100 (Page 24)

## **11. Walking by Faith**

Spurgeon would have agreed heartily with the words of Robert M’Cheyne Edgar writing on ‘Recent Attacks on Calvinism’ in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* (London: James Nisbet, 1881), p. 417: ‘There are two positions possible upon this subject: first, we may declare it impossible for God to be sincere in His general offer, if His atonement be limited in its extent; or, secondly, we may believe it possible for the Almighty to reconcile a limited atonement with a general offer, and that He will do so in His own good time, while our duty meanwhile is to proclaim the gospel fully and freely upon the ground of this assurance. The latter is the Calvinistic position. It is the attitude of trust. It is the resolve to walk by faith, and not by sight, in this high mystery. The advocates of universal atonement, on the other hand, refuse to give God credit for the ability to make the reconciliation between the definite and limited atonement and the general offer of His gospel. They seem to think that the skein becomes too tangled for the Divine fingers, that the general proclamation may be so accepted as to upset the definite purposes of the Most High, that, in a word, the Omniscience and Omnipotence of God are insufficient as a guarantee against a collision between the electing decree and the general offer of the gospel.’ (Page 74-75)

## **12. Grace**

‘What God gives us on the account of sanctification, we are ready enough to reckon on the score of justification. It is a hard thing to feel grace, and to believe as if there were none. We have so much of the Pharisee in us by nature’ (*Works of Owen*, vol. 6, p. 600). (Page 77)

## **13. Come, Just as You Are**

‘Sinners, let me address you with words of life; Jesus wants nothing from you, nothing whatsoever, nothing done, nothing felt; he gives both work and feeling. Ragged, penniless, just as you are, lost, forsaken, desolate, with no good feelings, and no good

hopes, still Jesus comes to you, and in these words of pity he addresses you, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out”.<sup>2</sup>

“Him that cometh to me:”...the man may have been guilty of an atrocious sin, too black for mention; but if he comes to Christ he shall not be cast out. He may have made himself as black as night – as black as hell...I cannot tell what kind of persons may have come into this Hall to-night; but if burglars, murderers, and dynamite-men were here, I would still bid them come to Christ, for he will not cast them out. No limit is set to the extent of sin: any “him” in all the world – any blaspheming, devilish “him” that comes to Christ shall be welcomed. I use strong words that I may open the gate of mercy. Any “him” that comes to Christ – though he come from slum or taproom, betting-ring or gambling-hell, prison or brother – Jesus will in no wise cast out.’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>MTP, vol. 9, pp. 537-8

<sup>3</sup>MTP, vol. 30, pp. 54-5 (Page 79)

#### **14. Free-Agency vs. Free-Will**

The two convictions...stated – that gospel invitations are to be addressed to all, and that the warrant to believe lies in the commands and promises of Scripture – lead us to the heart of the dispute between evangelical Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism. It concerns the place of man’s responsibility or, to use an equivalent term, his free-agency. Terminology here is important. Free-agency is not to be confused with ‘free-will’. Since the Fall, men have not lost their responsibility but they have lost the ability, the will, to obey God. Thus Spurgeon could say, ‘I dread more than anything your being left to your own free-will’. (Page 80)

#### **15. Sin Alone**

Spurgeon did not reply to the argument [of Hyper-Calvinism] as many have done, by weakening the biblical teaching on human depravity and inability. His sermons prove the truth of his words, ‘We shall proclaim the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, without toning it down, and electing love without stuttering over it.’<sup>1</sup> He asserted, as strongly as it has ever been asserted, that the will of God is omnipotent both in the provision and in the application of every part of salvation: ‘Our Lord’s mission was not so much to save all whom he addressed, as to save out of them as many as his Father gave him.’<sup>2</sup> But his response to the Hyper-Calvinist argument was to assert another equally biblical truth, namely, that man is wholly responsible for his own sin. God is not its author. Those who hear the gospel and reject the Saviour will not be able to plead that sovereignty prevented them from exercising the obedience of faith. None will be able to claim that God excluded them. No, it is on account of sin alone, including the sin of unbelief, that unrepentant sinners will finally be condemned and lost for ever.

<sup>2</sup>MTP, vol. 19, p. 277 (Page 81)

## 16. God's Predestination/Man's Responsibility

In an early sermon on 'Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility' Spurgeon introduced his subject with these words:

'The system of truth is not one straight line, but two. No man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once...Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there is no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free to be responsible, I am driven at once to Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestinates, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is the fault of our weak judgment...it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>NPSP, Vol. 4, p. 337 (Page 82)

## 17. Win by Love

It is Christ's love, known and felt, which creates the spirit seen in such men Robert Murray M'Cheyne whose hearers believed that he was 'dying to have them converted'. 'We win by love,' says Spurgeon. 'We win hearts for Jesus by love, by sympathy with their sorrows, by anxiety lest they should perish, by pleading with God for them with all our hearts that they would not be left to die unsaved, by pleading with them for God that, for their own sake, they would seek mercy and find grace.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Morris, *Memoirs of Fuller*, pp. 80, 82 (Page 94)

## 18. Casual Gospel

John Duncan, another Calvinist, said in the words: 'the gospel does not say, "There is a Saviour, if you wish to be saved;" but, "Sir, you have no right to go to hell – you can't go there without trampling on the Son of God."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*In the Pulpit and at the Communion Table*, p. 63 (Page 97)

## 19. God's Love

All references to divine love in Scripture are not to be interpreted as universal (Arminianism), neither are they all to be made particular (Hyper-Calvinism). There is a differentiation observable in Scripture. In speaking to *Christians* Spurgeon would often make the difference clear: 'Beloved, the benevolent love of Jesus is more extended than the lines of his electing love...That [i.e. the love revealed in Matthew 23:37] is not the love which beams resplendently upon his chosen, but it is true love for all that.'<sup>1</sup> God's special love 'is not love for all men...There is an electing, discriminating, distinguishing

love, which is settled upon a chosen people...and it is this love which is the true resting place for the saint.’<sup>2</sup>

Arminianism, by making universal benevolence the *only* love revealed in Scripture, denies the sovereignty of grace and leads men to suppose that God had to make salvation equally available to all. Hyper-Calvinism, on the other hand, denies, in the words of John Murray, ‘that there is a love of God that goes forth to lost men and is manifested in the manifold blessing which all men without distinction enjoy, a love in which non-elect persons are embraced, and a love that comes to its highest expression in the entreaties, overtures and demand of gospel proclamation.’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*MTP*, vol. 12, p. 475

<sup>2</sup>*MTP*, vol. 19, p. 551

<sup>3</sup>‘The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel’ in the *Banner of Truth* (London, 1968), July-August, p. 29 (Page 98)

## **20. The Gospel Uncensored**

While holding firmly to these important theological distinctions, Spurgeon did not believe that they were ones which had necessarily to be introduced in presenting the gospel to the unconverted and he warned against the kind of preaching which appears more concerned to safeguard orthodoxy than to save the lost. ‘Many good people think they ought to guard the gospel...When we protect it with provisos, and guard it with exceptions, and qualify it with observations, it is like David in Saul’s armour.’<sup>1</sup> He refused to explain how men could be held accountable for not trusting in a Saviour in whom they were never chosen, on the grounds that Scripture itself offers no explanation. It was enough for him that there is salvation to be preached with love to all and that he call all to come to Christ and to say, ‘If he died for all those who trust him, I will trust him; if he has offered so great a sacrifice upon the tree for guilty men, I will relay upon that sacrifice and make it the basis of my hope.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*MTP*, vol. 32, p. 50

<sup>2</sup>*MTP*, vol. 19, p. 280 (Page 99)

## **21. Spurgeon’s Four Main Disagreements**

These, then, are the four main points at which Spurgeon disagreed with Hyper-Calvinism – its restriction of gospel invitations, its failure to treat the word and promises of God as sufficient warrant for faith, its minimizing of the place of human responsibility, and its denial of any love in God except love to the elect. (Page 99)

## **22. Justification before Election**

In so thinking Spurgeon was surely siding with what the wisest preachers in the church had always taught. While Reformed Confessions may begin with statements on the

doctrine of God and divine decrees, that is not where preachers and teachers need to begin in addressing men about salvation. In the apostolic preaching to the lost, recorded in the book of Acts, nothing is said of the doctrine of election, while in the Epistles 'it is scarcely ever omitted.'<sup>4</sup> In accordance with this approach, Calvin, in the later editions of his *Institutes*, moved his treatment of election to *follow* teaching on justification. He recognized that Scripture generally introduces the doctrine of election to show *believers* the security and certainty of their salvation and to make clear who made them to differ. But when election is constantly introduced as a preliminary to hearing the gospel it inevitably comes to be seen as though it were designed to limit or obstruct the salvation of men and women. No one put this point better than John Bradford, the English reformer, whose words were often quoted by Whitefield, 'Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the university of election and predestination.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Crawford, *Mysteries of Christianity*, p. 364

<sup>1</sup>George Whitefield's *Journals* (Banner of Truth, 1960), p. 491 (Page 115-116)

### **23. Faith and Repentance**

The doctrine of election is not to be regarded as what an apostle calls the "milk that babes have need of," but as the "strong meat that belongs to them who are of full age." It ought not, therefore, to be prefixed to the calls of the Gospel, or placed in the forefront of the calls and invitations which are therein addressed without restriction to all sinners. When so placed, it is apt to perplex and disquiet humble souls...No man can be of the number of the elect if he utterly neglects the appointed means of salvation; and no man can be of the number of the non-elect if he truly repents and unfeignedly believes the Gospel. The salvation of a sinner is *actually* brought to pass, according to the plainest declarations of Holy Scripture, *in the way of faith and repentance, and no otherwise.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Mysteries of Christianity*, pp. 317, 363, 338 (Page 116-117)

### **24. God's Mysterious Ways**

'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.' (Rom. 11:33). We do not know why God has purposed to save some and not others, nor why, given his desire for the good of all, many are left in their sin. We cannot say why his love to all men is not the same as his love to the elect. We do not know how God works in us 'to will and to do' and yet leaves us wholly responsible for our own actions, nor how invitations to all to believe on Christ for salvation are to be harmonised with electing grace. As Crawford said, various attempts have been made to solve such mysteries, 'but, it must be owned, they have been signally unsuccessful.' He concludes: 'We do well to be exceedingly diffident in our judgments respecting matters so unsearchable as the secret purposes of God.'<sup>2</sup>

## 25. God's Will

It was Calvin, shortly before his death, who, on the words, 'Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (Ezek. 18:23) said this: 'If anyone again objects – this is making God act with duplicity, the answer is ready, that God always wishes the same thing, though by different ways, and in a manner inscrutable to us.

Although, therefore, God's will is simple, yet great variety is involved in it, as far as our senses are concerned. Besides, it is not surprising that our eyes should be blinded by intense light, so that we cannot judge how God wishes all to be saved, and yet has devoted all the reprobate to eternal destruction, and wishes them to perish. While we look now through a glass darkly, we should be content with the measure of our own intelligence (I Cor. 13:12).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Commentaries on the Prophet Ezekiel*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1850), pp. 247-8 (Page 119)

## 26. Doctrines of Grace

Hyper-Calvinism still exists today but what is needed far more than a renewed controversy on the subject is living evidence that the doctrines of grace are harmonious with true evangelistic preaching. The ministries of such men as Whitefield, Spurgeon and, more recently, Lloyd-Jones, proved that more than a thousand books could ever do. Such preaching can only come from a baptism of new and deeper devotion to Christ. (Page 122)

## 27. Humble, Teachable Spirit

[T.J. Crawford (1812-1875) was Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh. The following material is taken from his Baird Lecture for 1874, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, pp. 356-7.] Whatever the Scriptures may have *expressly affirmed* regarding the fact that God has such purposes, we are bound in a humble and teachable spirit to believe. But when we proceed to *draw inferences* from such affirmations, to the effect of weakening our confidence in other statements – emanating from the same source and equally explicit – with reference to things that are more level to our comprehension, we are certainly going beyond our proper province. And therefore, convinced though we be, on the authority of Scripture, that it is God's purpose to bring an elect people to a willing and hearty reception of the great salvation, we cannot, and never will, thence deduce any conclusions tending to obscure the brightness of that manifestation which God has made of His love to a sinful world in the mediatorial work and sufferings of His beloved Son, or to cast a shadow of doubt on the earnestness of

His desire, as indicated in the calls and offers of the Gospel, that all sinners should come to the Saviour that they may have life. (Page 148)