

LANDMARK BAPTIST COLLEGE

BOOK REVIEW OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON, A BIOGRAPHY

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BY
EDWARD G. RICE
9511 W. WANETA LAKE ROAD
HAMMONDSPORT NY 14840

HAINES CITY, FLORIDA

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A synopsis of the biographies of Baptist leaders as per required for masters students.

- I. Introduction to the book
- II. Spurgeon's Coming to Christ.
- III. Spurgeon's Transition to a Baptist.
- IV. Spurgeon's Eternal Accomplishments.

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Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Tim 2:15)

Fullerton states well that, “The contemporary sketches of the life of Spurgeon are an interesting conglomeration of significant facts, but they scarcely give an adequate picture of the man as he lived and labored with such prodigious energy.” Indeed, W.Y. Fullerton, a product, co-laborer and peer of the “Prince of Preachers” was remarkably able to capture that prodigious energy in CHARLES HADDEN SPURGEON, A BIOGRAPHYⁱ. His excellent book, out of print since the 1966 Tyndale series of great biographies, is available used for \$159 per copy but available for free from the Spurgeon Archive at www.spurgeon.org. This is the first biography I ever read on a Palm Pilot and I found it very gratifying. It will be impossible to reference exact page numbers, but easy to quote lengthy texts. Forgive both.

William Young Fullerton (1857-1932), a convert of Spurgeon, became a respected Baptist preacher himself. He became a regular and popular speaker at Keswickⁱⁱ, the Home Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and President of the Baptist Union. His Baptist penmanship may show itself in some of his other works like “Souls of Men” “Studies in the problems of the church today (1927), and “Christ of the Congo River (1929)”ⁱⁱⁱ Striving to capture C. H. Spurgeon in a biography Fullerton writes:

“His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that nature might stand up And say to all the world, This was a man. It is the living mixture that produces the result, and when, as in Spurgeon's case, there is added to the great gifts of nature the power of the Spirit of God dwelling within the man as in a holy temple, who can be surprised at the result, at once so natural, so singular, and so creative? It has been well said that

"Spurgeon was born with the key to the heart of humanity in his hand.^{iv}"

The pinnacle rising of a Baptist preacher in the ebb and flow of history was unprecedented in the previous 1700 years of torturous persecution of Baptists and unrivaled in the following 200. Charles Haddon Spurgeon the 'Prince of Preachers' has such stupendous rise in Baptist history as to command additional study. Why did God raise him so? Why are Baptist not called Spurgeonists as Lutherans or Wesleyans are labeled? Why have no other Baptist sprang to such world renown? Why indeed? How indeed?

Spurgeon's Coming To Christ

The salvation account of Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been glamorized by pulpits and villainized by Spurgeon himself. It is true, as Fullerton reports in the end of Chapter three, that a storm drove Charles into a Primitive Methodist Church where he heard an unknown unlettered preacher give his text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." This, however, was not his sole exposure to the gospel nor an irresistible grace.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a third generation offspring of Independent Preachers. He was raised in a praying, preaching, singing, family altered home. He had risen on that 6th day of January 1850 to study and pray before sunrise as was his custom. In his words he was a 16 year old with 10 black horses plowing through his soul that day. God moving him with snow into a message he would not normally hear was plenty miraculous, but, it is the climax not the crux of C.H. Spurgeon's salvation account. So too, Charles' examination of the miracle is tainted by his Augustinian/Calvinist theology and not snow of irresistible grace nor an unpredicted drawing of a young mans soul. All the wooing of the Holy Spirit on the heart of one man cannot take a single 'whosoever will may come' out of our Bible.

Spurgeon's coming to be a Baptist

After C. H. Spurgeon's salvation at age 16 he was convinced by his studies of the New Testament and by his understanding of the Church of England Catechism that he should be baptised by immersion after his salvation and prior to his first communion. His Grandfather and father were independent preachers but not Baptists. He had heard the scripture that converted his soul in a Methodist Church. Now the forth coming Baptist hallmark “cast about for a Baptist minister, and failed to find one nearer than Islenam, where Mr. W.W. Cantlow, formerly a missionary in Jamaica, ministered.”

With his parents blessing he went off to seek Scriptural Baptism. His mother told him she had prayed that he would become a Christian, not that he would become a Baptist. He replied just as playfully ... “the Lord had dealt with her in His usual bounty and had given her exceedingly abundantly above what she had asked.” Yea indeed to us all. C.H. Spurgeon was to become the Prince of Baptist Preachers. He came to his Baptismal convictions by study of the Scriptures. His quick mind and intensive parental schooling was to launch Spurgeon into a youthful pulpit ability without seminary training. So too they launched him into an immediate securing of all of the Baptist distinctives^{vi}. These seven pillars of truth caused C.H. Spurgeon to be an unshakable influence for the cause of Christ. Would that he could have drawn away from Augustinian and Calvin's mind capturing doctrines of predestinational salvation with that clarity.

The Eternal Legacy of C. H. Spurgeon

Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me,

The legacy of the Baptist preacher that became world renown, the most listened to preacher and the most read preacher in the world, and the only titled 'Prince of Preachers', is immense. Fullerton puts it well:

“Heroes are generally exaggerated or appreciated by the estimates of their own generation. The calm judgment of history, though not infallible, is fairer. Some of earth's great ones have no doubt sunk into oblivion, but among those whom history remembers only those are great whom history greatens. Spurgeon is among that number. It will be conceded without argument that he was greater than any of his pulpit contemporaries. In an earlier chapter the comparison has been made, and the fan is so evident that it needs no insistence. There is perhaps no detail in which he was not excelled by others of his time, but none approached him in the sum of his gifts.^{vii}

Because Fullerton spends chapters dealing with the profound legacy of C. H. Spurgeon I wish to address the one negative aspect of his legacy. Spurgeon became a well cited spokesman for the errant doctrine of Calvinism's Predestination. This entanglement with error is a result of excessive esteem for the Catholic's Saint Augustine, and the Protestant's John Calvin. As he states it:

””You may take a step from Paul to Augustine, then from Augustine to Calvin, and then well, you may keep your foot up a good while before you find such another.” When he visited the Simplon Hospice, he said, "I was delighted to find that they are Augustine monks, because, next to Calvin, I love Augustine. I feel that Augustine was the great mine out of which Calvin digged his mental wealth; and the Augustine monks, in practicing their holy charity, seemed to say: 'Our Master was a teacher of grace, and we will practice it, and give without money and without price to all comers whatsoever they need.'^{viii}

This tenacity to their error is illustrated in his conversation with a peer:

When Mr. Spurgeon went, years ago, to preach for Dr. Clifford, whose church was then at Praed Street, he said in the vestry before the service, "I cannot imagine, Clifford, why you do not come to my way of thinking," referring to his Calvinistic views. "Well," answered John Clifford, "you see, Mr. Spurgeon, I only see you about once a month, but I read my Bible every day."^{ix}

For his defense of Calvinism Protestants continually cite Spurgeon as our Baptist spokesman, and Baptists lean on his authority to travel on this garden path of predestinational error. This is the unfortunate side of C. H. Spurgeon's otherwise immaculate legacy. His tomb reads:

Here lies the body of
Charles Haddon Spurgeon
waiting for the appearing of his
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Then on one side of the tomb is the verse of the hymn he was accustomed to write in albums,
and the verse that follows it.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

Even though Spurgeon dragged Augustin's error into Baptist circles, his theme was
always the redeeming love of Christ available to whosoever would believe. This Biography of
Charles Haddon Spurgeon is worth every ounce of reading.

NOTES

- i Fullerton, William Young, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon A Biography*, Spurgeon Archive, www.spurgeon.org
- ii Keswick is a famous 1300 seat auditorium in Philadelphia.
- iii Biography info on W.Y Fullerton from www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/fullerton_wy.htm
- iv *ibid* Chapter 18 pg 174 (soft copy)
- v *ibid* Chapter 3 pg 25 (soft copy)
- vi Bible as sole authority; Autonomous independent local churches; Priesthood of all believers; Two ordinances, believers baptism and believers receiving of the Lord's Supper; Individual soul liberty; and Total separation of Church and state authority.
- vii *ibid* Chapter 20 pg 182 (soft copy)
- viii *ibid* Chapter 20 pg 184 (soft copy)
- ix *ibid* Chapter 13 pg 135 (soft copy)

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- iii Biography info on W.Y Fullerton from www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/fullerton_wy.htm
- iv *ibid* Chapter 18 pg 174 (soft copy)
- v *ibid* Chapter 3 palm page 257
- vi Bible as sole authority; Autonomous independent local churches; Priesthood of all believers; Two ordinances, believers baptism and believers receiving of the Lord's Supper; Individual soul liberty; and Total separation of Church and state authority. (from memory)
- vii *ibid* Chapter 20 pg 182 (soft copy)
- viii *ibid* Chapter 20 pg 184 (soft copy)
- ix *ibid* Chapter 13 pg 135 (soft copy)