

## *Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners*

Why a chapter devoted to Spurgeon? For two reasons. *First*, Spurgeon was a fine example of a free-offer preacher. I have already shown that he preached duty faith; now I will demonstrate that he preached God's desire to save all sinners. *Secondly*, as I have already noted, Ella criticised a small book-review I wrote, in which I expressed my views on the paradox between God's decree to save his elect and his desire to save all sinners. Referring to the review, Ella accused me of having 'the audacity to thrust forward Charles H. Spurgeon, citing him as one who believed that the testimony of Scripture is irreconcilable with itself'.<sup>1</sup>

By answering Ella, I will make it clear that Spurgeon was one who preached God's desire to save all sinners, one who was not hung up on the seeming contradiction this involves. And his example will more-than-adequately illustrate what I have been trying to say throughout the book.

As for Ella's criticism, I would like to set the record straight. In the first place, I did not 'thrust forward' Spurgeon; after all, I was reviewing a book on the good man! And secondly, this is what I said: 'Spurgeon did not try to reconcile the irreconcilable – he preached what the Bible teaches'. I was not saying the truths of God's word cannot be reconciled. Of course they can. Not always by man, of course, but always by God! In fact, he has no need to reconcile them! What I was saying was that Spurgeon was happy to preach what he found in Scripture, even though he sometimes found paradoxes. When confronted with statements he could not reconcile – and which no man can – he did not try to do that for which God had given him no tools; namely, reconcile them. He simply got on and preached what he found in Scripture. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Ella: *The Free Offer* p22.

*Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners*

particular, he preached both the desire of God to save all sinners and his decree to save the elect. That is what I was saying. Here are my words:

Spurgeon argued from the Bible. A consistent Calvinist, he said that gospel invitations are sent to all sinners, that all sinners *may* trust Christ, that all sinners *must* trust Christ, and that God has a desire to see all sinners saved. Spurgeon did not try to reconcile the irreconcilable – he preached what the Bible teaches.

Now let me prove it. First, did Spurgeon find paradoxes in Scripture? And did he preach both aspects of these paradoxes? Indeed, he did! Hear him:

We hold tenaciously that salvation is all of grace, but we also believe with equal firmness that the ruin of man is entirely the result of his own sin. It is the will of God that saves; it is the will of man that damns...

There are great deeps about these... points... The best thing is to take what God reveals to you, and believe that... If you so act, you will be safe; but if you try to be wise above that which is written, and to understand that which even angels do not comprehend, you will certainly befool yourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Again:

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... That God predestines, 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 just the fault of our weak judgement. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other... it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity.

After speaking on God's sovereignty, Spurgeon moved on to the other side of the gospel: God stretches out his hand to those who refuse him. 'There now', says the hyper-Calvinist, 'he is going to contradict himself'. Spurgeon replied:

No, my friend, I am not, I am only going to contradict *you*... You ask

---

<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.40 p470.

## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

me to reconcile the two. I answer, they do not want any reconciliation; I never tried to reconcile them to myself, because I could never see a discrepancy. If you begin to put fifty or sixty quibbles to me, I cannot give any answer. Both are true; no two truths can be inconsistent with each other; and what you have to do is to believe them both.<sup>3</sup>

As he said on another occasion:

They say that if we preach the gospel freely we are inconsistent, to which charge we are at no pains whatever to reply. So long as we believe that we are consistent with Scripture, it never enters into our heads to want to be consistent with ourselves. To hold all revealed truth is our desire, but to compress it all into a symmetrical creed is beyond our expectation. We are such poor fallible creatures that if we were once to fabricate a system which should be entirely logical, we should feel sure that we must have admitted portions of theory and masses of mere guess-work into the singular fabric. In theology we live by faith, not by logic... If we will keep simply to what the word of God says, we shall find in it truths apparently in conflict, but always in agreement. On every subject there is a truth which is set over against another truth: the one is as true as the other; the one does not take away from the other, nor raise a question upon the other; but the one ought to be stated as well as the other, and the two set side by side. The two relative truths make up the great road of practical truth, along which our Lord travels to bless the sons of men. Some like to run on one rail. I confess a partiality to the two, and I should not like to make an excursion tomorrow on a railway from which one of the rails had been taken.<sup>4</sup>

In short: 'O that... seeming opposites would be received, because faith knows that they are portions of one harmonious whole'.<sup>5</sup>

So much for Spurgeon on the paradoxes of Scripture.

---

<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon: *New* Vol.4 pp337,341,343, emphasis his.

<sup>4</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.30 p473.

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.9 vii. Spurgeon returned to this theme repeatedly; see, for instance, *New* Vol.5 pp120,353; Vol.6 p302; *Metropolitan* Vol.9 pp358-359 (but note the omission of the 'not' on the last line of p358); Vol.15 p458; Vol.16 p501; Vol.30 pp49-50; Vol.40 pp529-530; Vol.45 pp325-327; *Early* pp173-174. See also Murray: *Spurgeon* pp81-84.

*Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners*

What about the second point? Did Spurgeon believe God desires the salvation of all sinners? Indeed, he did! Hear him on 1 Timothy 2:3-4:

It is quite certain that when we read that God will have all men to be saved it does not mean that he wills it with the force of a decree or a divine purpose, for, if he did, then all men would be saved. He willed to make the world, and the world was made: he does not so will the salvation of all men, for we know that all men will not be saved...

What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I think not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. 'All men', say they, 'that is, *some men*': as if the Holy Ghost could not have said 'some men' if he had meant some men. 'All men', say they; 'that is, some of all sorts of men': as if the Lord could not have said 'all sorts of men' if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written 'all men', and unquestionably he means all men. I know how to get rid of the force of the 'alls' according to that critical method which some time ago was very current, but I do not see how it can be applied here with due regard to truth. I was reading just now the exposition [by] a very able doctor<sup>6</sup> who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, 'Who *will not* have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth'. Had such been the inspired language every remark of the learned doctor would have been exactly in keeping, but as it happens to say, 'Who *will* have all men to be saved', his observations are more than a little out of place. My love of consistency with my own doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I have great respect for orthodoxy, but my reverence for inspiration is far greater. I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God. I never thought it to be any very great crime to seem to be inconsistent with myself, for who am I that I should everlastingly be consistent? But I do think it a great crime to be so inconsistent with the word of God that I should want to lop away a bough or even a twig from so much as a single tree of the forest of Scripture. God forbid that I should cut or shape, even in the least degree, any divine expression. So runs the text, and so we must read it, 'God our Saviour; who will

---

<sup>6</sup> Gill? See chapter 6.

## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.<sup>7</sup>

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word 'wish' gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus – 'whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.' As it is *my* wish that it should be so, as it is *your* wish that it might be so, so it is God's wish that all men should be saved; for, assuredly, he is not less benevolent than we are.<sup>7</sup> Then comes the question, 'But if he wishes it to be so, why does he not make it so?' Beloved friend, have you never heard that a fool may ask a question which a wise man cannot answer, and, if that be so, I am sure a wise person, like yourself, can ask me a great many questions which, fool as I am, I am yet not foolish enough to try to answer. Your question is only one form of the great debate of all the ages – 'If God be infinitely good and powerful, why does not his power carry out to the full all his beneficence?' It is God's wish that the oppressed should go free, yet there are many oppressed who are not free. It is God's wish that the sick should not suffer. Do you doubt it? Is it not your own wish? And yet the Lord does not work a miracle to heal every sick person. It is God's wish that his creatures should be happy. Do you deny that? He does not interpose by any miraculous agency to make us all happy, and yet it would be wicked to suppose that he does not wish the happiness of all the creatures that he has made. He has an infinite benevolence which, nevertheless, is not in all points worked out by his infinite omnipotence; and if anybody asked me why it is not, I cannot tell. I have never set up to be an explainer of all difficulties, and I have no desire to do so... I cannot tell you why God permits moral evil, neither can the ablest philosopher on earth, nor the highest angel in heaven.

This is one of those things which we do not need to know. Have you never noticed that some people who are ill and are ordered to take pills are foolish enough to chew them? That is a very nauseous thing to do... The right way to take medicine of such a kind is to swallow it at once. In the same way there are some things in the word of God which are undoubtedly true which must be swallowed at once by an effort of faith, and must not be chewed by perpetual questioning. You will soon have I know not what of doubt and difficulty and bitterness upon your soul if you must needs know the unknowable, and have reasons and explanations for the sublime and the mysterious. Let the

---

<sup>7</sup> I refer you, reader, to chapter 6 for my comments on Paul's desire for the salvation of sinners.

## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

difficult doctrines go down whole into your very soul, by a grand exercise of confidence in God.

I thank God for a thousand things I cannot understand... I do not intend meddling with such lofty matters. There stands the text, and I believe that it is my Father's wish that 'all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth'. But I know, also, that he does not will it, so that he will save any one of them, unless they believe in his dear Son; for he has told us over and over that he will not. He will not save any man except he forsakes his sins, and turns to him with full purpose of heart; that I also know. And I know, also, that he has a people whom he will save, whom by his eternal love he has chosen, and whom by his eternal power he will deliver. I do not know how that squares with this; that is another of the things that I do not know. If I go on telling you of all that I do not know, and of all that I do know, I will warrant you that the things I do not know will be a hundred to one of the things that I do know. And so we will say no more about the matter, but just go on to the more practical part of the text. God's wish about man's salvation is this – that men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth...

What truth? It is gospel truth, truth about Christ that they want. Tell it in a loving, earnest, affectionate manner, for God wills that they should be saved... by a knowledge of the truth. He wills that all men should be saved in this way... by bringing the truth before them. That is God's way of saving them.<sup>8</sup>

Again, speaking of God's voice, 'the voice of love':

How wooing are its tones! The Lord in Holy Scripture speaks of mercy and of pardon bought with blood, the blood of his dear Son. O man, he calls you to him, not that he may slay you, but that he may save you. He does not summon you to a prison, but he invites you to a banquet... Do not be cruel to almighty love! Be not ungenerous to eternal pity!<sup>9</sup>

Preaching on Isaiah 65:1, Spurgeon said:

We speak of God after the manner of men, for so God speaks of himself. It is true, then, that he is hurt and grieved when he stretches out his hands in vain... When his kindness is rejected God is grieved... As a relief to such a lamentation this verse has in it a true joy, an intensity of satisfaction, because some are coming to peace and love.

---

<sup>8</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.26 pp49-60, emphasis his.

<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.26 p439. How daring a statement this sounds today!

## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

God speaks it with pleasure: 'I am found of them that sought me not'. Do not forget that utterance, 'As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but that he turn unto me and live'. It gives God pleasure to see men turn to him. Infinitely happy as he must be from his own glorious nature, yet there is a joy which he only feels when he is sought after and found by the sons of men... What a delight it must be to God's heart when at last the poor sinner cries, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief'!... God rejoices when he is sought and when he is found! Oh do not think that you seek an unwilling God. He comes to meet you; he falls upon your neck and kisses you.<sup>10</sup>

Spurgeon preached a sermon he entitled: 'The Lamentations of Jesus', taking Luke 19:41 as his theme:

This weeping of the Saviour should much encourage men to trust him. Those who desire his salvation may approach him without hesitation, for his tears prove his hearty desires for our good. When a man who is not given to sentimental tears... is seen to weep, we are convinced of his sincerity. When a strong man is passionately convulsed from head to foot, and pours out lamentations, you feel that he is in downright earnest, and if that earnestness be manifested on your behalf you can commit yourself to him. Oh, weeping sinner, fear not to come to a weeping Saviour! If you will not come to Jesus it grieves him; that you have not come long ago has wrung his heart; that you are still away from him is his daily sorrow: come, then, to him without delay. Let his tears banish your fears; indeed, he gives you better encouragement than tears, for he has shed for sinners, not drops from his eyes alone, but from his heart. He died that sinners who believe in him might live... how can you doubt his readiness to receive you?...

Linking this with Matthew 23:37, he went on:

His love had gone so far that even prophet-killers he would have gathered.<sup>11</sup> Is not this wonderful that there should be grace enough in Christ to gather adulterers, thieves, liars, and to forgive and change them, and yet they will not be gathered? That he should be willing even to gather such base ones into a place of salvation, and yet should

---

<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.32 pp498-499.

<sup>11</sup> As I noted in chapter 6, Bunyan in his *Jerusalem Sinner* made the point even more graphically. Christ would have his gospel preached *first* at Jerusalem, the very place where *he* was crucified, and have it preached to Christ-killers, let alone prophet-killers.

## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

be refused?... See, here, the case stands thus – I would, but you would not. This is a grief to love... The failure of will is in you that perish, not in Christ who cries, 'I would, but *you* would not'. Yes, and he adds, 'How often would I'... Every prophet that had come to them had indicated an opportunity for their being gathered, and every time that Jesus preached there was a door set open for their salvation, but they would not be gathered, and so he foretells their fate in these words... 'gathered', that is what you might have been; 'desolate', that is what you shall be; and Jesus weeps because of it... Desolate! Desolate! Desolate! Because you would not be gathered! Well does the tender Saviour weep over men since they will perversely choose such a doom.<sup>12</sup>

Yet again on Matthew 23:37:

From this utterance of our Lord, I learn that, if any man be not saved, the cause of his non-salvation does not lie in any want of graciousness or want of willingness on the part of God... and so far as it is applicable to the sons of men in general, it declares that God wills not the death of any, but desires that they should turn unto him and live... Now... there is a great doctrinal difficulty; but I do not think you or I need go fishing for it... What Christ would have done for the Jews, but which they would not accept... I am sure he is willing to do... for us now...

Oh, how I wish that this might be the time when Jesus would securely cover you as the hen covers her chicks! Do you really desire this blessing? I know you would not desire it if he did not desire it. If there is a spark of desire towards Christ in your heart, there is a whole flaming furnace of desire in Christ's heart towards you. You never get the start of him... No sinner can ever say that he stopped for Christ, and waited for Jesus. I more willing than Christ? Never! A sinner more anxious for pardon than Christ is willing to pardon him? Never! There was never seen, and there never shall be seen... a soul more hungry after Christ than Christ is hungry after that soul... O poor, guilty sinner, do not doubt your welcome to Jesus! The gate of salvation is flung wide open. The door is taken off the hinges... Your<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.26 pp661,666,671-672, emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> In this section, Spurgeon was addressing those who had a desire towards Christ, who were anxious for pardon, who were hungry after Christ, and so on; that is, those in whom the Spirit was at work. I presume, therefore, in such circumstances Spurgeon felt able to speak of Christ as '*your* Saviour'. I myself would still have preferred '*the* Saviour'. The original, naturally, had '*thy* Saviour'. Just because I quote him, it



## Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners

Saviour waits for you. The Father tarries for you; no, he does more; he comes to meet you. I see him running. Is it true that I see you coming? And what a spectacle is now before me! I see you coming with feeble footsteps, and I see him running faster than the angels fly. I see the father falling on the neck of the prodigal, I see him kiss him, and delight in him... There is joy tonight.<sup>14</sup>

One last word:

And now, you that are outsiders, see what trouble the Saviour takes with you; for what he did for men of his age he does for men of every age: he longs that you should come to him; he puts the truth so that you may see it, and he preaches it persuasively and affectionately. Alas, that men should require such trouble to be taken with them! If anyone were giving away gold and silver he would not need to go down on his knees and entreat men to accept the precious metals; but when we have to preach 'the word', how must we entreat, implore, beseech men to come, or else they will not come at all; nor even when we have implored and besought will they lend a listening ear and a believing heart unless the arm of the Lord be revealed. See you this, you outsiders; let the reflection of this make you ashamed, and cause you to resolve that now henceforth, having ears to hear, you will hear, and when Jesus pleads you will bow to him. May God the Holy Spirit make it so.<sup>15</sup>

---

does not mean I endorse Spurgeon's every turn of phrase, of course. On the point at issue, this passage may not be strictly relevant, since it may be argued that Spurgeon was addressing only sensible sinners. But was he? Not only are his sermons replete with warnings against preparationism, he here used the phrase 'O poor, guilty sinner' not 'O poor, guilty, *sensible* sinner'. Furthermore, I am bound to ask, while hyper-Calvinists *in theory* could address sensible sinners like Spurgeon did, do they? See Appendix 2. In the various extracts above, note Spurgeon's constant use of the most general of terms when addressing sinners, such as 'all men', 'O man', the universal 'you', 'men', 'the sons of men', 'the poor sinner', 'any man', 'you... outsiders', 'men of every age'.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.45 pp325-334.

<sup>15</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.28 p391; see also, for instance, *New* Vol.4 pp341-344; Vol.5 pp17-24,77-78,130,323-328,406-407,433-440,487-488; Vol.6 pp126-131,467-468; *New and Metropolitan* Vol.7 pp110-111,126-127,145-152; *Metropolitan* Vol.9 pp65-66,169-180,461-466, 521-528; Vol.15 p688; Vol.19 pp128-129,421-432; Vol.20 pp126-127, 132; Vol.22 pp20-22,154; Vol.26 pp414-420,439; Vol.28 pp653-660; Vol.29 pp199-204,337-348; Vol.31 pp124,236-237,673-684; Vol.32 pp345,393-396,

*Chapter 10: Spurgeon and God's Desire to Save Sinners*

Reader, I believe the above to be a fair representation of Spurgeon's position, drawn from his own words. I believe it substantiates my claim that he preached God's decree to save his elect, and God's desire to save all sinners, without attempting to reconcile the two, knowing they form one perfect will of God. Just because Spurgeon did this, of course, it does not make it right. But do it, he did.