

Understanding Spurgeon's Concept of Salvation

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[Abstract]

This study aims to understand Spurgeon's soteriology by studying selected sermons from his pastoralship. After a brief view of Spurgeon's biography, the author studies Spurgeon's preaching, relating it to the five points of Calvinism. The author chooses Calvinism's five points to study Spurgeon's soteriology because Spurgeon used Calvinism as the basis for his theology and preaching. By analyzing the theological themes of election, fall, atonement, calling, and preservation, the author reveals that Spurgeon's soteriology is based on Calvinism. However, the author also reveals that Spurgeon was at the center of a doctrinal controversy because of the ambiguous attitude between Calvinism and Arminianism. Through this study, the author raises questions, including: "Was Spurgeon a true Calvinist?," "Was he modified Calvinist?," or "Was he an Arminian?" The author concludes the study by arguing that Spurgeon is a Calvinist, but more than that, he is a faithful preacher of the Bible rather than a strict theologian.

Key Words: Spurgeon, Salvation, Grace of God, Calvin's Five Points, Limited Atonement, Doctrinal Controversy

논문투고일 2019.07.29. / 심사완료일 2019.08.14. / 게재확정일 2019.08.29.

I. Introduction

One day in London, a woman bought some butter at a store that was wrapped in newspaper. After coming back home, the woman by chance read a part of the newspaper on which Charles Spurgeon's Sunday sermon was printed. The woman was immediately converted. This is one of many amazing stories related to Spurgeon's ministry.¹ Who, then, was Charles Haddon Spurgeon? Craig Skinner summarizes Spurgeon's amazing life and ministry:

The five thousand and more hearers who jammed his huge Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle in London, Sunday morning and Sunday night, for over thirty years were matched by another three thousand there on most Thursday evening. He often preached elsewhere, up to twelve times in some weeks, and labored for long eighteen-hour days. He established a theological school, founded orphanages, fostered hundreds of churches, directed the operations of twenty-one city mission halls, counseled with innumerable inquirers, and baptized the thousand persons into his London congregation. He published about four thousand sermons, sales of individual sermons totaled about 25,000 copies per week, and the sermons were translated into forty languages.²

¹ There are many stories related to Spurgeon's ministry showing Spurgeon's greatness: Before he was 20, Spurgeon had preached over 600 times. Spurgeon typically read 6 books per week and could remember what he had read and where even years later. Spurgeon once addressed an audience of 23,654 without a microphone or any mechanical amplification. Testing the acoustics in the vast Agricultural Hall, Spurgeon shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." A worker high in the rafters of the building heard this and become converted to Christ as a result. For an average sermon, Spurgeon took no more than one page of notes into the pulpit, yet he spoke at a rate of 140 words per minute for 40 minutes. Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?," *Christian History* 29 (1991), 2-3.

As we can surmise from the above quotation, Spurgeon was a great servant of God with an unbelievable ability. No one doubts the fact that he was one of the greatest preachers in Christian history. God used him greatly as a tool for saving the lost in his day. Even in present day many Christians recognize his contributions to the Christian world, and shower him with unstinting praise for his great work. William R. Estep states that in Spurgeon there was a timeless quality that has marked him as the teacher of preachers in every subsequent generation.³ Lynn E. May, Jr. also claims that the life and work of this nineteenth-century English Baptist preacher continue to influence many Christians today.⁴

This paper is intended to discover Spurgeon's concept of salvation. In order to discover Spurgeon's concept of salvation. I will go over a brief biography, investigate his sermons to uncover what Spurgeon's soteriology was, and finally I will answer the question, "Was Spurgeon a Calvinist?"

II. A Brief Biography Of Spurgeon⁵

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex, England,

2 Craig Skinner, "Preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19/4 (1984), 17.

3 William R. Estep, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19/4 (1984), 5.

4 Lynn E. May, Jr., "Editorial-The Impact of One Life: Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 19/4 (1984), 2.

5 This brief biography was mostly quoted from Robert H. Ellison, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Brief Biography." The web site: <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/sermons/chsbio.html>

on June 19th, 1834. In his childhood, "He was a bright little boy and was always asking questions."⁶ Since his father and grandfather were pastors, young Spurgeon was raised in the knowledge and understanding of the Christian gospel; but it was not until a stormy January night in 1850 that he was converted.⁷ In August of the same year, Spurgeon preached his first sermon to a small gathering of farmers, and a year later he was called to pastor a village church. On April 28, 1854, at the age of nineteen, he accepted a formal invitation to the permanent pastorate of the New Park Street Chapel, in Southwark, London, later to become the Metropolitan Tabernacle.⁸ He held the position for thirty-eight years, until his death.

In January 1885, Spurgeon published his first sermon, a practice, which would not cease until 1916, twenty-four years after his death. During his pastorate at London Spurgeon ministered to a congregation of almost 6,000 people each Sunday, published his sermon weekly, wrote a monthly magazine, and founded a college for pastors, two orphanages, an nursing home, and several mission stations. While his body was wracked by pain in the later years of his life and his ministry was attacked by his opponents, Spurgeon continued to preach the gospel until his death in January 1892.

⁶ Kathy Triggs, *Charles Spurgeon: Boy Preacher to Christian Theologian* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 9.

⁷ On January 6, 1850, a blizzard struck a Sunday night, by a shouting of a lay preacher at the Methodist Church that he went by accident, "Young Man, you look very miserable. and you always will be miserable - miserable in life and miserable in death - if you don't obey my text," Spurgeon was converted. Kathy Triggs, *Charles Spurgeon: Boy Preacher to Christian Theologian*, 21.

⁸ "The decision was surprising since Spurgeon, not quite twenty years old, was being called to a church whose previous pastors included such outstanding Baptist leaders as Benjamin Keeach, John Gill, and John Rippon." Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771-1892, From John Gill to C. H. Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 337.

III. Doctrine of Grace

The many facets of soteriology include conversion, regeneration, justification, atonement, sanctification, sin, grace, repentance, faith, covenant, predestination, election, redemption, adoption, reconciliation, assurance, perseverance and so forth. Thus when one studies a theologian's soteriology, it is important to carefully choose one's subjects and methodology. For the study of Spurgeon's concept of salvation, I will discuss Spurgeon's understanding of the Doctrine of Grace, also known as the five points of Calvinism. The reason I do so is because Spurgeon regarded the five points as a "glorious system which teaches that salvation is of grace from first to last,"⁹ and also stated that,

I believe there is a better epitome in the five points of Calvinism: election according to the foreknowledge of God; the natural depravity and sinfulness of man; particular redemption by blood of Christ; effectual calling by the power of the Spirit; and ultimate perseverance by the effort of God's might.¹⁰

1. Election

For Charles Spurgeon, the doctrine of election was too evidently true and biblical to tolerate those who denied the doctrine. In the sermon of September 2, 1855, entitled "Election," Spurgeon said,

We should all be bound to receive and acknowledge the

⁹ Spurgeon, "Exposition of the Doctrine of Grace," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit(=MTP)*, vol. 7, 302.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, "The Bible," *The New Park Street Pulpit(=NPSP)*, Vol. 1, 114.

truthfulness of the great and glorious doctrine of God's ancient choice of his family. But there seems to be an inveterate prejudice in the human mind against this doctrine; and although most other doctrines will be received by professing Christians, yet, this one seems to be most frequently disregarded and discarded.¹¹

There were several integral characteristics of Spurgeon's understanding of the doctrine of election. First, Spurgeon argued that election was not grounded in the merits of human response such as repentance and faith, good works, or any other human work, but in the sovereignty, mercy, and grace of God.¹² He declared that whatever may be God's reason for choosing a man certainly it is not because of any good thing in that man.¹³ Second, Spurgeon understood that God's election was made in eternity past and will stand forever. He stated that, before the sun and moon had been created, or any of the visible things were formed, God had set his heart upon his people in Christ and ordained them to eternal life in Him.¹⁴ He insisted that if we are the chosen of God and precious, then are we chosen for ever; for God dose not change the objects of his election.¹⁵ Third, Spurgeon denied that God had chosen a group or a nation in sum. Rather, he insisted that God's choosing His people was individual. He said, "[God] calls out his children one by one by their names."¹⁶

As we can see, up to this point Spurgeon espouses a traditional

¹¹ Spurgeon, "Election," *NPSP*, Vol. 1, 311.

¹² Spurgeon, "Election No Discouragement to Seeking Souls," *MTP*, Vol. 10, 73-77.

¹³ Spurgeon, "Election: Its Defenses and Evidence," *MTP*, Vol. 51, 50.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, "Glory Be Unto the Father," *MTP*, Vol. 29, 490.

¹⁵ Spurgeon, "Practical Election," *NPSP*, Vol. 3, 131.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, "Election: Its Defenses and Evidence," 51

Calvinistic doctrine of election. He, however, adds more. According to Spurgeon, election did not imply a decree to reprobation. In fact, he believed that the doctrine of reprobation did not have any Scriptural basis and impugned the character of God.¹⁷ Then what happened to those who are not saved? Spurgeon solved this question by arguing that:

Salvation is of God: then damnation is of man. If any of you are damned, you will have no one to blame but yourselves; if any of you perish, the blame will not lie at God's door; if you are lost and cast away, you will have to bear all the blame and all the tortures of conscience yourself; Remember, if saved, you must be saved by God alone, though if lost you have lost yourselves.¹⁸

That is, Spurgeon argued that people who were not saved were not because God discarded them in his sovereign will, but because they did not accept God.¹⁹ In Spurgeon's view, therefore, election could be no excuse for sin and the lost themselves were responsible for their own condemnation.

Here lies tension between God's sovereign election and man's condemnation. In his doctrine of election, a clear self-contradiction existed, even though Spurgeon himself denied the contradiction. One may ask whether Spurgeon indeed was a Calvinist. In fact, because of this contradiction, both hyper-Calvinists and Arminians criticized him.

Another troublesome matter in Spurgeon's doctrine of election is

17 Spurgeon, "Election No Discouragement to seeking Souls," 74.

18 Spurgeon, "Salvation of the Lord," *NPSF*, Vol. 3, 200.

19 Spurgeon, "Election and Holiness," *NPSF*, Vol. 6, 137.

the fact that he denied any conflict between election and his universal gospel invitations. His conviction was that:

It has been my aim and object in my ministry, to show that while I believe the Lord knoweth them that are his, it is at the same time, written over the fountain of living waters, "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."²⁰

Here too, one may take issue with him that the doctrine of election and general gospel invitations were inherently contradictory.

How did Spurgeon reply to his critics? He replied in a sermon preached in 1858, entitled *Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility*:

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 each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and 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: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.²¹

²⁰ Spurgeon, "Effects of Sound Doctrine," *NPS*, Vol. 6, 302.

²¹ Spurgeon, "Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility," *NPS*, Vol. 4, 337.

2. Human Depravity

The doctrine of human depravity is an area in which Spurgeon ocused heavily on. In his sermons, Spurgeon repeatedly spoke of the absolute sinfulness and the utter lostness of humankind. To him human depravity was the focal point in which his other theologies depended on.

Spurgeon's discussion of human depravity begins by dealing with the doctrine of the fall, namely original sin. He was certain that all humans without exception are sinners by birth in Adam. He insisted that man did not fall separately and individually,²² and that:

We all of us fell without our own consent, without having, in fact, any finger in it actually. We fell federally in our covenant head; it is in consequence of our falling in Adam, that our heart becomes evil from our youth.²³

Human depravity, in fact, causes not only God's wrath and spiritual deadness in humans, but also the need of God's grace. Spurgeon argued that without God's grace, people are legally, spiritually, and eternally dead.²⁴

As for those who complained that in Adam humanity's fall was not fair, Spurgeon answered that if, like depraved angels, we fell individually, we would be condemned forever as the angels would. But since we fell through a first representative, Adam, we hope of being saved through another representative, Jesus Christ.²⁵

²² Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," *MTP*, Vol. 11, 106.

²³ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," 106.

²⁴ Spurgeon, "Free Will," *NPSP*, Vol. 1, 395-97.

²⁵ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," *MTP*, Vol. 11, 105-06.

Second, he believes that human depravity is also universal depravity. There is no exception. According to Spurgeon, human depravity is a natural depravity. Everyone is implicated in the fall by birth.²⁶ He argued that man was lost from the beginning, and an original and birth-sin had seized man in the womb and cast out to perish and to die.²⁷ He declared that:

And this, be it remembered, is without an exception in the long history of humanity, say six thousand years; there is not one that has escaped contamination, not one who has come into the world clean, not one who dares go before his Maker's bar, and say, "Great God, I have never sinned, but have kept thy law from my youth up."²⁸

The third aspect of Spurgeon's view of human depravity is that it is total depravity. This means that the fall affects all of man, such as memory, affections, imagination, judgment, conscience and so forth. He said, "the pollution is not of a part of a man, man is thoroughly evil; the heart is bed through and through to its very core, it is infected with sin and hatred of God in its center and essence."²⁹

At this point, it is important to emphasize that, although Spurgeon insisted on original sin and the natural, universal, and total depravity of it, he also emphasized human responsibility for sin. Spurgeon put the responsibility of sin on the shoulders of the individual. Spurgeon believed that both original sin and actual individual sin were the

²⁶ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," *MTP*, Vol. 11, 101.

²⁷ Spurgeon, "Ezekiel's Deserted Infant," *MTP*, Vol. 8, 494.

²⁸ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," 105.

²⁹ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," 102.

ground of God's anger. He asked, "is then natural depravity an excuse for sin?"³⁰ The answer was "No." He claimed that:

We could not blame Adam's sin for our sinfulness, because, he said, "you have willingly endorsed and adopted Adam's sin by committing personal transgressions. You have laid down your hand, as it were, upon Adam's sin and made it your own, by committing personal and actual sin. Thus you perished by sin of another, which you adopted and endorsed."³¹

Here, between original sin and human responsibility, a kind of tension occurs.

Spurgeon's doctrine of human depravity is related to his thoughts concerning human free will. His doctrine of depravity became a basis for his affirmation that salvation could not be accomplished by human free will. He clearly and consistently preached the human's inability for salvation, and said that, "the whole scheme of salvation, we aver, from the first to the last, hinges and turns and is dependent upon the absolute will of God, and not upon the will of creatures."³² Michael Reeves summarized Spurgeon's understanding of human's inability as "sinners do not naturally want Christ, and so they never naturally choose Him. Added to this, the sinner's understanding is darkened so that he cannot appreciate the glory of God in the Cross, Creation, or anything in the gospel."³³

³⁰ Spurgeon, "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy," 105.

³¹ Spurgeon, "Immeasurable Love," *MTP*, Vol. 31, 391.

³² Spurgeon, "God's Will and Man's Will," *MTP*, Vol. 8, 183.

³³ Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life: Alive in Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 96.

Here again Spurgeon's double mindedness appears. As with other occasions, he does not neglect the human will in the matter of salvation at all. He believed that anyone who was not willing to accept Christ could not be saved. Of course Spurgeon argued that the source of human will was not human itself. Rather, its source was God Himself. He stated that the work of the Spirit, which is the effect of the will of God, is to change the human will, and so to make men willing in the day of God's power.³⁴ After all, according to Spurgeon, human can choose to freely reject Christ in sinfulness and also freely choose Christ after the Spirit has changed the mind. In this sense, humans have free will.

Another cumbersome subject in his doctrine of human depravity is the relationship between human inability and human responsibility. Spurgeon asserted total human inability including both moral inability and natural inability. On some occasions he seems to limit human inability to solely moral issues; but on other occasions, he regards human inability as a natural characteristic. It is true that he emphasized moral inability more than natural inability in his preaching. It was natural that Spurgeon did so because he was an evangelist interested in unregenerate people. For them, therefore, his emphasis on moral inability alone was more effective.

Spurgeon's problem here is that while he forcefully proclaimed the truth of total human inability, he also claimed with equal weight the duty of every individual to repent and believe. Spurgeon preached that "God commends you to repent and believe. Surely you may do what God commands you to do. You may throw this in the devil's teeth."³⁵ This sentence clearly means that humans have the

³⁴ Spurgeon, "God's Will and Man's Will," 183.

responsibility and the ability to choose. It is a kind of contradiction. Furthermore, as his opponents criticized, if one has the inability to obey before regeneration, how can one have the responsibility to repent and believe? How are these two to be reconciled? Spurgeon replied in the same way as in other troublesome subjects that:

How are these two to be reconciled? We reply that they do not want any reconciliation; they are two truths of Holy Scripture, and we leave them to reconcile themselves, they are friends, and friends do not need any reconciliation.³⁶

3. Particular Redemption

The third element in Spurgeon's soteriology is the atonement. He insists that "reconciliation by the blood, by the substitutionary sacrifice of the infinite Son of God, this is the message of our ministry. If we do not preach this constantly and incessantly, we have missed our main topic."³⁷ It is obvious that Spurgeon regarded the doctrine of atonement the utmost importance throughout his sermons.

To understand Spurgeon's theory of the atonement, we must understand his view of the character of God. To Spurgeon, God is a sovereign God who has absolute authority, and absolute power to do exactly as he pleases³⁸ Second, he characterized God as a God of infinite justice, who is inflexibly severe in justice.³⁹ He insists that when his people rebel, God marks their crime, and never forgives them until he has punished it, either upon them, or upon a

³⁵ Spurgeon, "Faith and Repentance Inseparable," *MTP*, Vol. 8, 398.

³⁶ Spurgeon, "The Fainting Warrior," *NPSP*, Vol. 5, 86.

³⁷ Spurgeon, "God Blessing Sinners by His Ministries," *MPT*, Vol. 19, 426.

³⁸ Spurgeon, "Substitution," *NPSP*, Vol. 3, 274.

³⁹ Spurgeon, "Substitution," 275.

substitute.⁴⁰ Third, Spurgeon emphasizes that God is a God of grace. He believed that God is a God of illimitable love.⁴¹ These three attributes are displayed in the God of heaven and earth whom Christians worship.⁴²

After describing God's nature, Spurgeon depicts God's dilemma when a sinner comes to the bar of God's judgement. Spurgeon asks, "how will the two conflicting attributes work in God's mind? He is loving, he wants to save him; he is just, he must destroy him! How shall this mystery be solved, and the riddle be solved?"⁴³ Spurgeon answered stating that divine wisdom devised the plan of substitution the wonderful mystery of the transposition of Christ and the sinner.⁴⁴

The heart of Spurgeon's doctrine of atonement can be summarized with one word, substitution. As Spurgeon puts it: "I would desire never to preach at all without setting forth salvation by faith in the blood of Jesus. Substitution seems to me to be the soul of the gospel, the life of the gospel, the essence of the gospel."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that "there are in the world many theories of atonement: but I cannot see any atonement in any one, except in this doctrine of substitution."⁴⁶ What does Spurgeon mean by substitution? He explains:

Christ did really, literally, and truly, take the sins that belonged to all who do believe on him, and those sins did actually and in

⁴⁰ Spurgeon, "Substitution," 275.

⁴¹ Spurgeon, "Substitution," 276.

⁴² Spurgeon, "Substitution," 276.

⁴³ Spurgeon, "Substitution," 277.

⁴⁴ Spurgeon, "Substitution," 277.

⁴⁵ Spurgeon, "Blood of Sprinkling and the Children," *NPSP*, Vol. 33, 581.

⁴⁶ Spurgeon, "The Death of Christ," *NPSP*, Vol. 4, 70.

very deed become his sins; (not that he had committed them, nor that he had any part or lot in them, except through the imputation to which he had consented, and for which he came into the world,) and there lay the sins of all his people upon Christ's shoulders.⁴⁷

In a sermon entitled "The Blood of the Lamb, The Conquering Weapon," Spurgeon declared:

We understand our Lord's death as a substitutionary sacrifice. If you proclaim the death of the Son of God, but do not show that he died the just for the unjust to bring us to God, you have not preached the blood of the Lamb. You must make it known that the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and that the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all, or you have not declared the meaning of the blood of the Lamb. There is no overcoming sin without a substitutionary sacrifice. The Lamb under the old law was brought by the offender to make atonement for his offence, and in his place it was slain: this was the type of Christ taking the sinner's place, bearing the sinner's sin, and suffering in the sinner's stead, and thus vindicating the justice of God, and making it possible for him to be just and the justifier of him that believeth. I understand this to be the conquering weapon the death of the Son of God set forth as the propitiation for sin. Sin must be punished: it is punished in Christ's death. Hear is the hope of men.⁴⁸

It is clear that Spurgeon regarded substitution as the central truth

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, "The Friend of Sinner," *MTP*, Vol. 8, 378-79.

⁴⁸ Spurgeon, "The Blood of Lamb: The Conquering Weapon," *MTP*, Vol. 34, 508.

of Christ's atonement and the theme that must be preached.

Now that we understand Spurgeon's doctrine of atonement, it is time to turn our concern to another important question related to atonement. For whom did Christ die? Did Spurgeon believe that Jesus died only for the elect? Or did Spurgeon maintain that Jesus died for everyone? In an 1858, sermon entitled "The death of Christ," Spurgeon preached that:

I may be called Antinomian or Calvinist for preaching a limited atonement; but I had rather believe a limited atonement that is efficacious for all men for whom it was intended, than an universal atonement that is not efficacious for anybody, expect the will of man be joined with it.⁴⁹

In a sermon preached in 1883, entitled "Incense and Light," Spurgeon also claimed that "as for the work of our Lord Jesus, you and I believe in the special substitution of Christ for his elect; what we call 'particular redemption' is held most firmly by us."⁵⁰

As we see above, between 1858 and 1883, namely, throughout most of his career, Spurgeon consistently maintained that Christ bore the sin, paid the penalty and secured the salvation of only the elect.

However, readers of his sermon may be confused, because on some occasions Spurgeon also affirmed a general or universal atonement in which the value or merit of Christ's sacrifice was unlimited. He argued,

⁴⁹ Spurgeon, "The Death of Christ," *NPSP*, Vol. 4, 70.

⁵⁰ Spurgeon, "Incense and Light," *MTP*, Vol. 29, 149.

Can you conceive a limit to the merit of such a Savior's death? I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: If my system of my theology needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, dare not, allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind; it seems so near akin to blasphemy.⁵¹

Spurgeon also argued, as stated earlier, that universal invitations of the gospel should be offered. He insisted that:

It is, I say, on account of this universal mediatorial power of Christ, that I can stand upon this platform and say in the broadest possible terms, that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus shall never perish, but have eternal life, and I can preach a gospel which, in its proclamation, is as wide as the ruin and as extensive as the fall.⁵²

Yet here we can find another apparent self-contradiction between limited atonement and universal atonement. Can we solve this dilemma? How did Spurgeon solve this problem? His answer was that atonement is "General and Yet Particular." Spurgeon argued that:

He is the Savior of all men let us never deny that but specially of them that believe. There is a wide, far-reaching sacrificial atonement which brings to all mankind, but by that atonement a special divine object was aimed at, which will be carried out, and that object is the actual redemption of his own elect from

51 Spurgeon, "Number One Thousand: or, Bread Enough and to Spare," *MTP*, Vol. 17, 389.

52 Spurgeon, "General, and Yet Particular," *MTP*, Vol. 10, 230.

the bondage of their sins.⁵³

After all, as was typical for him, Spurgeon embraces both sides, rather than abandoning one for the other.

4. Effectual Calling

Explaining the Bible passage, many are called but few are chosen, (Matt. 22:14) in a sermon entitled "Christ Crucified" in 1855, Spurgeon argued that:

There is a general call, a call made to every man; every man hears it. Many are called by it; you are all called this morning in that sense; but very few are chosen. The other is a special call, the children's call. Many are called with the general call, but they are not chosen; the special call is for the children only, and that is what is meant in the text.⁵⁴

As the above quote indicates, to Spurgeon, there were two types of calls: the general call and the special call. The general call is a universal invitation calling everyone primarily through the preaching of the gospel. However, it never results in salvation. Yet, according to Spurgeon, the general call will be the basis for condemning those who did not respond to the call. Because of the general call, they cannot make any excuse for God's wrath in the day of judgement.⁵⁵

Spurgeon suggested some values of the general call, even though

⁵³ Spurgeon, "Jesus, the Delight of Heaven," *MTP*, Vol. 21, 176.

⁵⁴ Spurgeon, "Christ Crucified," *NPSF*, Vol. 1, 56.

⁵⁵ Spurgeon, "Predestination and Calling," *NPSF*, Vol. 5, 130.

it never results in salvation. First, Spurgeon argued that the general call is the only call that the preacher is capable of giving. Second, it was the instrument by which the special call brings to fulfill the salvation of God's people. Spurgeon said,

God gives his ministers a brush, and shows them how to use it in painting life-like portraits, and the sinner hears the special call. I cannot give the special call; God alone can give it, and I leave it with him.⁵⁶

In another sermon Spurgeon said,

Election does not narrow the gospel call which is universal, but only affects the effectual call, which is and must be particular; which effectual call is no work of mine, seeing that it cometh from the Spirit of God. My business is to give the general call, the Holy Spirit will see to its application to the chosen.⁵⁷

In contrast to the general call, Spurgeon defined the special call the effectual call of grace, which is given to the predestinated ones⁵⁸ as the means whereby:

God secretly, in the use of means, by the irresistible power of his Holy Spirit, calls out of mankind a certain number, whom he himself hath before elected, calling them from their sins to become righteous, from their death in trespasses and sins to become living spiritual men, and from their worldly pursuits to become the lovers

56 Spurgeon, "Christ Crucified," *NPSF*, Vol. 1, 56-57.

57 Spurgeon, "Election No Discouragement to Seeking Soul," *MTP*, Vol. 10, 80.

58 Spurgeon, "Predestination and Calling," 130.

of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

5. Final Perseverance

The last of the five doctrines of grace is final perseverance, about which Spurgeon preached often. In an 1872 sermon, Spurgeon claimed that “for all of you who hear me continually know that, if there is one doctrine I have preached more than another, it is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints even to the end.”⁶⁰ He dealt with final perseverance as a vital part of redemptive truth. He said:

Ah, my brethren, if we could but once believe the doctrine that the child of God might fall from grace and perish everlastingly, we might, indeed, shut up our Bible in despair. To what purpose the Spirit, if he were not omnipotent enough to overcome our wandering, to arrest our sins and make us perfect, and present us faultless before the throne of God at last? That doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints is, I believe, as thoroughly bound up with the standing or falling of the gospel, as is the article of justification by faith. Give that up and I see no gospel left.⁶¹

Because of this deep conviction, Spurgeon was not reluctant to oppose those who denied the doctrine. He said, “wherever I go, I hope always to bear my hearty protest against the most accursed doctrine of a saint's falling away and perishing.”⁶²

What then exactly did Spurgeon mean by final perseverance? How

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, “Particular Election,” *NPSP*, Vol. 3, 130.

⁶⁰ Spurgeon, “Perseverance without Presumption,” *MTP*, Vol. 18, 337.

⁶¹ Spurgeon, “Dilemma and Deliverance,” *NPSP*, Vol. 6, 12.

⁶² Spurgeon, “The Necessity of Increased Faith,” *NPSP*, Vol. 2, 247.

did he understand the doctrine of the security of believers? According to his understanding, Spurgeon believed that “no sheep of Christ shall ever be lost. None that he has purchased with his blood, and made to be his own, shall ever wander away so as to perish at last.”⁶³ He was certain that this doctrine was greatly supported by scriptural passages such as Job 17:9, John 10:27-29, Romans 8:28-39, and so forth. Spurgeon stated, “so clear is the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, that I venture to assert boldly, that if the Bible does not teach it, it does not teach anything at all,”⁶⁴ and he went on saying, “unless the Christian shall persevere, the eternal purpose of God will be defeated.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, however, Spurgeon went on to argue that this doctrine of final perseverance did not guarantee the ultimate salvation of those who did not show ongoing faith and repentance after an initiatory faith. His critics may find another of Spurgeon's self-contradictions here. In a sermon he preached:

The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road; it is not true that one act of faith is all, and that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer, and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way; or in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer and under the influence of the grace of God.⁶⁶

63 Spurgeon, “The Security of Believers: Or, Sheep Who Shall Never Perish,” *MTP*, Vol. 35, 691.

64 Spurgeon, “The Righteous Holding in His Way,” *MTP*, Vol. 13, 261.

65 Spurgeon, “The Righteous Holding in His Way,” *MTP*, Vol. 13, 261.

66 Spurgeon, “The Final Perseverance of the Saints,” *MTP*, Vol. 3, 362.

Here again, there was a tension in his theology in that he acknowledged both divine grace and human responsibility in his doctrine of perseverance. Indeed, the above quote may be understood as saying that salvation can be accomplished by human works and human will. It hints at the possibility of losing our salvation, as Arminians insist. It seems contradictory to his view of final perseverance. This tension is found even in his own expression: I would seek to live as if my salvation depended on myself, and then go back to my Lord, knowing that it does not depend on me in any sense at all.⁶⁷

How can we solve this contradiction in Spurgeon's doctrine of final perseverance? I believe that Spurgeon emphasized sanctification. He argued that the doctrine of final perseverance could not weaken the saint's personal responsibility. In a sermon preached in 1867, titled "The Righteous Holding on His Way," after enumerating the symbolic meaning of pilgrim, runner, wrestler, warrior, disciple, and builder, Spurgeon concluded that "in every aspect of the Christian, continuance in faith and well-doing is essential to his safety; without a perpetual perseverance his profession is of no value."⁶⁸

IV. Conclusion: Was Spurgeon a Calvinist? Or, What Else?

Throughout this paper, we have seen Spurgeon's view of the doctrine of grace. We found a kind of tension in every important view Spurgeon held. In the doctrine of election, he maintained both

⁶⁷ Spurgeon, "The Perseverance of the Saints," *MTP*, Vol. 15, 299.

⁶⁸ Spurgeon, "The End of the Righteous Desired," *MTP*, Vol. 13, 255.

God's sovereignty and human responsibility, and he did not affirm the doctrine of reprobation. He held both the total inability of human and the duty of humans to repent and believe the gospel. He affirmed both particular redemption and a universal gospel invitation. Finally, he also affirmed both the doctrine of final perseverance and human responsibility in holding onto salvation.

At this point, therefore, it is natural to ask, "was Spurgeon a Calvinist?" In one sense, he was a Calvinist. Estep writes that:

Spurgeon's theology was basically the Calvinism. For Spurgeon, as for Calvin, the Scriptures were eminently trustworthy. He felt himself in a line with Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin in the Doctrine of Grace.⁶⁹

Spurgeon recognized strongly the authority of the Bible as the word of God, as Estep notes, his forty-year ministry was unshakable theological commitment to the word of God.⁷⁰ Demarest describes Spurgeon's understanding of God's grace as infinite, sovereign, free, and effectual.⁷¹ He also emphasized the importance of faith in salvation. According to Spurgeon, no human merit is needed for salvation. All that man has to do is simply accept what Christ has already done by faith.⁷² He believed that baptismal regeneration was a false doctrine that sent millions to hell.⁷³ He declared that baptism

⁶⁹ William, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," 6.

⁷⁰ William, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," 5.

⁷¹ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 69.

⁷² William, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," 7.

without faith saves no one.⁷⁴ He believed in the work of the Holy Spirit in the matter of salvation. He averred that “only the Spirit can remedy this situation; he alone can change the will, correct the bias of the heart, set men and women on the right road and give strength to run in it.”⁷⁵ Spurgeon also said, “Anyone who believes that man's will is entirely free, and that he can be saved by it, does not believe the Fall.”⁷⁶ In this sense, Spurgeon seems to be a traditional Calvinist.

On other hand, however, as Skinner notes, Spurgeon refused to interpret the five points of Calvinism as some did by insisting that man was only a sinner and could do no good at all. He declared that the fall meant ruin for the image of God in man and an inability to respond to the gospel without the sovereign work of God.⁷⁷

Spurgeon did not believe in reprobation, and believed in a general Gospel invitation. According to Skinner's understanding of Spurgeon, those who came forward to God with a willingness to be saved would not be rejected. Spurgeon saw the continuance of faith and repentance of sin as the sign of salvation. In this case, one may see in Spurgeon's theology a potential election for all men and personal decision as a condition for salvation. In some cases he insisted a universal atonement. Here Spurgeon appears to be not a Calvinist, but rather an Arminian.

Because of this double-sidedness, Spurgeon was seriously attacked by Hyper-Calvinists. Spurgeon's ambiguity between limited

73 Spurgeon, “Suffering and Reigning with Jesus,” *MTP*, Vol. 10, 5.

74 Spurgeon, “Baptismal Regeneration,” *MTP*, Vol. 10, 315.

75 Spurgeon, “The Necessity of the Spirit's Work,” *NPSP*, Vol. 5, 210.

76 Spurgeon, “Free Will A Slave,” *NPSP*, Vol. 1, 401.

77 Skinner, “Preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” 23.

atonement and universal atonement was a point of contention for the Hyper-Calvinist. At that time, almost 1,370 independent Baptist churches in England followed the belief of limited atonement, which was Calvinistic or Particular redemption. They, therefore, criticized Spurgeon's openness for the universal redemption. To give some background on this argument, Iain H. Murray said, "It was common knowledge that Spurgeon had not grown up as a Particular Baptist, and at the outset of his London ministry no one was sure where his future affiliations would lie in terms of other congregation."⁷⁸

Was, then, Spurgeon a modified Calvinist? Possibly. As a Calvinist, I would say that, in my own words, he was an Arminianistic Calvinist. (If I were an Arminian, I would name him as a Calvinistic Arminian.) He is possibly considered a modified Calvinist or a modified Arminian because of his double mindedness.

At this point, I would like to understand him as a preacher, rather than a systematic theologian. Surely he was a preacher having a strong understanding and view of the Bible. I believe that the main focus in his ministry was not on shaping a theology or a dogma, but on evangelistic ministry. As he argued, therefore, he preached the Bible in which both sides appeared. When he was preaching, he could become both an Arminian and a Calvinist, depending on what Bible passage he chose. That is, throughout his preaching, he could seem to be either an Arminian or a Calvinist. I do not believe that any preacher can consistently preach as either a Calvinist or Arminian. While I do not hesitate to regard myself as a Calvinist practically (my father was a strong hyper-Calvinistic pastor and I

⁷⁸ Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon V. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 42.

gained my all degrees from a hyper-Calvinistic college and seminary), I have frequently found myself taking an Arminian stance when I preach. So am I a modified Calvinist? No. I am not.

I believe that a preacher cannot be a strict systematic theologian, nor can they be either a strict Calvinist or a dedicated Arminian. It is in this light that I see Spurgeon and his apparent self-contradictions. I will conclude this paper by quoting Spurgeon's own words:

There are some who read the Bible, and try to systematize it according to rigid logical creeds; but I dare not to follow their method, and I feel content to let people say, how inconsistent he is with himself! The only thing that would grieve me would be inconsistency with the word of God. As far as I know this Book, I have endeavored, in my ministry, to preach to you, not a part of the truth, but the whole counsel of God; but I cannot harmonize it, nor am I anxious to do so. I am sure all truth is harmonious, and to my ear the harmony is clear enough; but I cannot give you a complete score of the music, or mark the harmonies on the gamut, I must leave the Chief Musician to do that.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Spurgeon, *Preventing Grace*, MTP, Vol. 52, 101.

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[Abstract]

찰스 스펔전의 설교를 통해 살펴본 그의 구원론 이해

양현표(총신대학교, 조교수, 실천신학)

본 연구는 스펔전의 설교를 연구함으로써 그의 구원론을 이해하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 먼저, 스펔전의 일대기를 간략하게 살펴본 후에, 칼빈주의 5대 교리를 중심으로 해서 스펔전의 설교를 연구한다. 스펔전의 구원론을 연구하기 위해 칼빈주의 5대 교리를 택한 이유는, 그가 칼빈주의 5대 교리를 그의 신학과 설교에 기초로 삼았기 때문이다. 선택, 타락, 속죄, 부르심, 보존 등의 신학적 주제들을 그의 설교를 통해 분석함으로써, 그의 구원론이 다분히 칼빈주의에 기초하고 있음을 밝힌다. 그러나 그가 종종 보이는 칼빈주의와 알미니안주의 사이에서의 모호한 태도로 인해 그는 논쟁의 중심에 있음을 연구자는 드러낸다. 결국, 연구자는 스펔전이 진정한 칼빈주의자인가? 혹은 수정 칼빈주의자인가? 아니면 알미니안주의자인가? 하는 질문을 던진다. 연구자는 스펔전을 칼빈주의자라는 결론 하에, 그러나 그가 신학자 이라기보다는 성경 본문에 충실한 설교자라고 결론을 맺음으로 연구를 마친다.

키워드: 스펔전, 구원, 하나님의 은혜, 칼빈주의 5대 교리, 제한속죄, 교리적 모순

