

Spurgeon and the Slavery Controversy of 1860:  
A Critical Analysis of the Anthropology  
of Charles Haddon Spurgeon,  
as it relates specifically to his Stance on Slavery

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### Introduction

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was the most recognized preacher during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His popularity did not absolve him from controversy, however. His commitment to hold and herald biblical truth often put him at odds with others who disagreed with his position.<sup>1</sup> Most of the controversies surrounding Spurgeon are well known as well as highly researched. However, there is one particular controversy that has not received much scholarly attention: the Slavery Controversy of 1860. Spurgeon was unambiguous and unapologetic about his views on slavery. On multiple occasions he publicly voiced his sentiments, “I believe slavery to be a crime of crimes, a soul-destroying sin, and an iniquity which cries aloud for vengeance.”<sup>2</sup> As a result of his condemning remarks, he suffered. His life was threatened and his published sermons

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in 1864 Spurgeon launched no small controversy when he preached a sermon repudiating the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, a teaching that was highly esteemed by the Church of England. Another dispute involving Spurgeon was the Downgrade Controversy. Near the end of his life, theological liberalism had invaded his denomination, denying evangelical doctrines such as Jesus’ atonement and the inspiration of Scripture. Spurgeon fought vigorously against these unorthodox beliefs, using both his pen and pulpit. Spurgeon was never one to shy away from a dispute when the truth of Scripture was at stake.

<sup>2</sup> J.C. Carlile, *C.H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1933), 160.

were burned as well as boycotted by those living in the Southern United States.

Why did Spurgeon so adamantly oppose slavery when it cost him so much? Why was he quick to denounce slaveholders and embrace former slaves as friends? This paper will argue that Spurgeon despised slavery and its advocates because the practice contradicted his understanding of Scripture. The Bible taught him that every person, regardless of his or her race or class, was a human being made in the image of God, and was worthy of honor and respect. The first section of this paper will recount the historical details surrounding the Slavery Controversy of 1860, as well as Spurgeon's interactions with former slaves. The second section will present Spurgeon's anthropology, specifically as it relates to his aggressive stance against slavery, by examining his published works. This section will argue that Spurgeon's view of humanity, as revealed in Scripture, drove him to oppose this particular injustice.

### **Spurgeon and the Slavery Controversy of 1860**

#### **Spurgeon's Condemnation of Slavery**

In 1833, the year before Charles Spurgeon was born, Parliament passed an Act emancipating slaves throughout the British Empire, except for the territories controlled by the East India Company.<sup>3</sup> Although this legislation was approved, it was not implemented until August of the following year, just six weeks after Spurgeon was born.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Spurgeon was raised in a country that was virtually free from the injustices of slavery.

On December 8, 1859, Spurgeon invited a fugitive slave, John Andrew Jackson, to speak to his congregation at the New Park Street Chapel in London. On that Thursday evening, Jackson recounted the horrors he suffered while living on a slave plantation in South Carolina. His audience was captivated by his address and expressed their disdain for slavery with frequent outbursts of applause.<sup>5</sup> After his hour-long

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<sup>3</sup> Marika Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Full emancipation for every British slave was not actualized until 1838. Britain created an apprenticeship program for slaves, which emancipated adult males over the next four years.

<sup>5</sup> G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1894), 2:324.

discourse, Spurgeon stated his feelings regarding American slavery. He was forthright in his appraisal, calling it the “foulest blot” to have ever soiled a nation. He also indicted American theologians who refused to speak out against it. In his judgment, they had exercised a “wonderful complacency” towards this heinous practice and had lost sight of its evil character. Spurgeon was so bold in his statements against slavery that he went so far as to say that he would not even hold “communion of any sort with those who [were] guilty of it.”<sup>6</sup>

This was not the only time that Spurgeon denounced slavery from his pulpit. Though he never wrote an extensive treatise against the practice, he consistently condemned it in his sermons. For example, in one address delivered in June of 1857, he argued that British subjects are the freest people in the entire world, but they do not possess the same freedoms as the Americans. Unlike those living in the States,

we have not the freedom of beating our slaves to death, or of shooting them if they choose to disobey—though we have not the freedom of hunting men, or the freedom of sucking another man’s blood out of him to make us rich—though we have not the freedom of being worse than devils, which slave-catchers and many slaveholders most certainly are—we have liberty greater than that, liberty against the tyrant mob, as well as against the tyrant king.<sup>7</sup>

Not only did he attack those engaged in slavery, Spurgeon also denounced the horrible effects it had on slaves themselves. In one of his earliest published sermons, the young preacher described his country as a land that is “untainted by the groan of a single slave.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike America, England did not experience “the tear of a single slave woman shed over her child which has been sold from her.”<sup>9</sup> The practice of splitting up African families at a slave auction frequently occurred in America and was utterly deplorable in Spurgeon’s eyes.

Perhaps Spurgeon’s strongest denunciation of slavery was delivered in his sermon entitled “Scales of Judgment”. It was delivered on June 12, 1859 and was an exposition of Daniel 5:27, “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” Spurgeon made explicit that no one,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *NPSP* 3:229.

<sup>8</sup> *NPSP* 1:61.

<sup>9</sup> *NPSP* 1:61.

not even kings or emperors, can escape God's judgment. Wicked nations are not exempt either. "National sins demand national punishments."<sup>10</sup> Though America was not explicitly mentioned, it was clearly implied. The London preacher was certain that "the iniquity of slavery [will not] go unpunished" and God would indeed "bring down a red hail of blood upon the nation that still holds the black man in slavery."<sup>11</sup> For Spurgeon, this was such a heinous practice that he believed God would certainly judge any nation that refused to repent of it.

It should be noted that Spurgeon's remarks against slavery are somewhat limited, at least in comparison to the other sins he addressed. This was not due to a lack of concern, but rather a lack of necessity. Slavery had already been abolished in Britain for decades when Spurgeon began preaching, and therefore to rail against it was very much like "beating the air."<sup>12</sup> The London preacher had little need to warn his people about this particular sin because it was "the very last crime they [were] likely to commit."<sup>13</sup>

### Omitting Spurgeon's Comments on Slavery

Though his sermons were published and purchased in great numbers, Spurgeon's attacks against slavery never made it before American eyes. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sale of Spurgeon's sermons was a profitable enterprise. At this time, his sermons sold about 25,000 copies each week and brought in a great sum of money.<sup>14</sup> In an effort to avoid the loss of sales, American publishers began intentionally omitting his remarks against slavery.

Once these omissions were discovered, many incorrectly assumed that Spurgeon was the culprit. Some American newspapers concluded that the Baptist preacher had modified his position on the issue of slavery.<sup>15</sup> In order to determine if his views had truly changed, Spurgeon was asked if he knew about or gave consent to the omissions. His response was unambiguous. He emphatically denied editing any of his

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<sup>10</sup> *NPS* 5:257.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "Spurgeon On Slavery," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 3, 1860.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?" *Christian History*, 29, no. 1 (1991), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Pike, 2:330.

sermons. In a letter that was first published in a British newspaper, Spurgeon clarified that he had “never altered a single sentence in a sermon which has been sent out to [his] American publishers....”<sup>16</sup> He also took the opportunity to clarify that his position had not changed. Spurgeon still abhorred slavery. He wrote, I do from my inmost soul detest slavery anywhere and everywhere, and although I commune at the Lord’s table with men of all creeds, yet with a slave-holder I have no fellowship of any sort or kind.<sup>17</sup>

Spurgeon further explained that he would be as likely to receive a murderer as a member of his church as he would a “man-stealer.” In the conclusion of his letter, the Baptist preacher stated that he would continue to reprimand Americans because “the crying sin of a man-stealing people [should] not go unrebuked.”<sup>18</sup>

### Spurgeon’s Friendship with Former Slaves

An interesting contrast in Spurgeon’s disposition toward slave and slave-owner needs to be made at this point. While Spurgeon refused fellowship with those engaged with slavery, he was not hesitant to embrace former slaves as friends and fellow Christians. Two years after his address at the New Park Street Chapel, John Andrew Jackson published an autobiographical account of his life as a slave and subsequent escape. In his book, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, he explained how he met Spurgeon through a mutual friend and described the type of relationship they developed after their introduction. Spurgeon was quick to receive both Jackson and his wife as church members. Jackson even regarded Spurgeon as a close friend and personal adviser.<sup>19</sup> In his own words, Spurgeon testified that he was “very happy” to call Jackson a member of his church and that he was a man “well worthy of all confidence and regard.”<sup>20</sup>

Spurgeon also developed close friendships with other former slaves. One in particular was a man named Thomas L. Johnson. Johnson, an

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<sup>16</sup> “Spurgeon On Slavery,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 3, 1860.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2011), 32.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

emancipated slave from Virginia, served first as a missionary in Colorado and then in Africa. Before taking on this latter endeavor, he enrolled at the Pastors' College in 1876 where he met the London minister. Johnson, in his autobiography, recounts his first interaction with Spurgeon. He was incredibly anxious beforehand, but Spurgeon's sympathetic kindness, demonstrated by Spurgeon taking him by the hand and inquiring about his well-being, immediately put him at ease. "I at once fell in love with dear Mr. Spurgeon," wrote Johnson. He continued, "I felt so happy in his presence and so at home with him, that I could not help saying, 'Well, thank God he is my friend.'"<sup>21</sup>

After graduation, Johnson left London for the African mission field, but poor health and the death of his wife caused him to return to America after one year of service. Spurgeon gladly wrote a letter of recommendation testifying to his respect and esteem for his dear friend. He concluded his letter by describing Johnson as "a beloved brother in the Lord and should be received as such."<sup>22</sup>

Spurgeon also became friends with another former slave and renowned abolitionist, Fredrick Douglass. In 1887, Douglass traveled to London, and while there, he visited the Metropolitan Tabernacle. In personal correspondence with Spurgeon, he stated that he had an "ardent desire" to hear him preach as a result of reading some of his sermons.<sup>23</sup> He also inquired about the origin of a statement he made while crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In regards to the diversity of the human race, Douglass remarked, "we are many as the waves, but we are one as the sea."<sup>24</sup> Douglass wanted to know if he had "unconsciously borrowed" the phrase from Mr. Spurgeon because this remark was very similar to a statement Spurgeon made in one of his sermons. While it is difficult to

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas L. Johnson, *Born Three Times*, ed. Paul D. Sporer. (Chester, NY: Bylany Press, 2005), 64.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas L. Johnson, "Twenty-Eight Years a Slave: Electronic Edition," Documenting the American South, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/johnson1/johnson.html#ill20>.

<sup>23</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 4:176. From this point forward, this work will be referred to as *Autobiography*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

determine which one influenced the other in this matter, it is clear that Douglass and Spurgeon exercised a mutual respect for another.

### Southerners' Reaction to Spurgeon

The letter Spurgeon wrote condemning slavery and slave-owners was published in the Boston newspaper, *Watchman and Reflector*. It was distributed throughout several American journals, and the reaction was severe. Those living in the Southern States despised Spurgeon and his anti-slavery sentiments. This was made clear in no uncertain terms. One newspaper attacked Spurgeon by describing him as a "beef-eating, puffed-up, vain, over-righteous, pharisaical, English, blab-mouth, ranting preacher of doctrine not found in the Bible."<sup>25</sup> Others labeled him a "delectable scoundrel"<sup>26</sup> and a "hell-deserving Englishman" who possessed a corrupt heart.<sup>27</sup> While he was still serving as a slave in Virginia, Johnson recalled the animosity that his slave owners expressed toward his future pastor. "He used to hear talk about Spurgeon during the [Civil] war, but he did not stand very high in the estimation of his masters."<sup>28</sup>

Not all of the comments coming from the South were derogatory. Some publications exercised restraint and only criticized Spurgeon's response rather than his character, noting that it was "written in a very bad spirit" and "breathes nothing of the kindness of St. Paul."<sup>29</sup> One writer also indicted Spurgeon's public letter because it was marked by "uncharitableness" and full of "studied insults to the great body of our Southern countrymen."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to being criticized, volumes of Spurgeon's printed works were burned in the South. *The Montgomery Mail* invited everyone who possessed copies of the "notorious English Abolitionist, Spurgeon, to send them in to the jail yard to be burned..."<sup>31</sup> This was no idle threat

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<sup>25</sup> "A Southern Opinion of the Rev. Mr. Spurgeon," *New York Herald*, March 1, 1860.

<sup>26</sup> "Take It Out," *Bossier Banner*, April 20, 1860.

<sup>27</sup> "Take It Out," *Bossier Banner*, Feb. 24, 1860.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, 71.

<sup>29</sup> "Spurgeon's Sermons: A bonfire," *Newbern Weekly Progress*, March 20, 1860.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

either. Shortly after this invitation was given, *The Montgomery Mail* reported that, "about sixty volumes of Spurgeon were reduced to smoke and ashes."<sup>32</sup> They also encouraged other southern cities to follow their example by burning these "dangerous books."<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, physical threats were made against Spurgeon's life. In addition to calling him a "greasy cockney vociferator," one newspaper promised to lynch Spurgeon if he ever visited their city:

And if the Pharisaical author should ever show himself in these parts, we trust that a stout cord may speedily find its way around his eloquent throat. He has proved himself a dirty, low-bred slanderer, and ought to be treated accordingly.<sup>34</sup>

Spurgeon was threatened with a hangman's noose more than once. Another Southern newspaper promised "...a strong hemp rope for the eloquent throat of an English Spurgeon."<sup>35</sup> One biographer recorded that numerous letters, containing both insults and threats were sent to the Baptist minister.<sup>36</sup> These threats were taken seriously. Spurgeon had considered traveling to America in order to preach and lecture, but was advised against it because if he "ventured across the water, he would be mobbed."<sup>37</sup> Another Baptist minister, who traveled from Alabama to London, also strongly advised Spurgeon not to undertake a preaching tour because of the strong opposition he would face from Southerners.<sup>38</sup>

Along with the death threats and public bonfires, Southerners also stopped purchasing Spurgeon's printed sermons. Some even declared that anybody caught selling them should be arrested for "circulating incendiary publications."<sup>39</sup> This boycott severely hindered Spurgeon's ministry endeavors in London. The selling of sermons in America brought in a great sum of money, approximately £600 to £800 each

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<sup>32</sup> "Book Burning in Montgomery," *Randolph County Journal*, March 29, 1860.

<sup>33</sup> Pike, 2:332.

<sup>34</sup> "The Barbarities of Slavery: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner," *Randolph County Journal*, July 05, 1860.

<sup>35</sup> William M. Mitchell, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, (London: Woodfall and Kinder, 1860), 130.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Ray, *A Marvellous Ministry: The Story of C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons 1855-1905*, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1985), 13.

<sup>37</sup> "Slavery in the United States," *Liberator*, May 20, 1859.

<sup>38</sup> "Spurgeon's Anti-Slavery Mission to America," *National Era*, Nov. 3, 1859.

<sup>39</sup> "Rev. Mr. Spurgeon," *North Carolinian*, Feb. 18, 1860.



year.<sup>40</sup> All of these proceeds went back into funding the various ministries of the New Park Street Chapel and, specifically, the Pastors' College. Decades after the controversy had ended, Spurgeon recalled in his autobiography how his denunciations of slavery caused these precious resources to dry up and thus hindered his ability to prepare pastors for ministry.<sup>41</sup>

### The Aftermath

The boycott was effective in that it had a devastating effect on Spurgeon. He experienced a great amount of stress and anguish over the financial hardship that it placed on his ministry. The verbal attacks weighed heavily on him as well. One of his biographers described this episode as a "great trial" for the Baptist preacher.<sup>42</sup> Despite this difficulty, however, the abolitionist would not recant or alter his views. Nor would he remain silent. He continued to denounce the practice of slavery throughout the American Civil War and even after it had ended.

Spurgeon also lauded Abraham Lincoln for emancipating American slaves. In the same year of Lincoln's death, Spurgeon praised the deceased president for defeating the "gallant and a mighty foe" known as slavery.<sup>43</sup> He also acknowledged that God raised up Lincoln specifically for the purpose of freeing the slaves. Like William Wilberforce, Lincoln was a gift to "the negro slave [who] had borne long years of bondage...."<sup>44</sup>

Decades later, when slavery was outlawed in Brazil in 1888, Spurgeon also celebrated this further abolition. He rejoiced over this good news and encouraged his congregation to do the same. In commenting on this legislation, he reminded his people that "[w]herever slavery exists, it is an awful curse; and the abolition of it is an unspeakable blessing."<sup>45</sup> Though many things changed over the course of Spurgeon's ministry, his detestation for slavery remained constant.

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<sup>40</sup> Ray, 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Autobiography* 3:138.

<sup>42</sup> Ray, 14.

<sup>43</sup> *MTP* 11:722.

<sup>44</sup> *MTP* 29:243.

<sup>45</sup> *MTP* 40:349.

## Spurgeon's Anthropology

Having examined the historical details surrounding the Slavery Controversy of 1860, this paper will now investigate Charles Spurgeon's anthropology as it relates specifically to his stance against slavery. It will argue that Spurgeon's strong opposition to slavery is directly connected to his scriptural view of humanity. Because he believed that all humans belong to one race and that every human is made in the image of God, he concluded that slavery is a grievous sin that Christians have a moral obligation to oppose.

### Humanity as One Race

One verse that repeatedly surfaced throughout Spurgeon's published works is Acts 17:26. In the seventeenth chapter the book of Acts, the apostle Paul visited the city of Athens on his second missionary journey. While in the city, he conversed with some Greek philosophers about the good news of the gospel. This strange message piqued their interest and consequently they invited him to address the Areopagus. When Paul stood up to deliver his sermon he began by telling them that the Lord of heaven and earth made the world and everything in it. This God also created the entire human race from one man. Though there are many people groups dispersed throughout the world, they all share a common lineage.

This theological truth that Paul asserted is found in Acts 17:26, which reads, "God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth." The emphasis of this verse, as one commentator observed, is on the universality of mankind, as well as man's relationship with God. Although there are many different nations, "...they are one in their common ancestry and in their relationship to their Creator."<sup>46</sup>

This verse was foundational to Spurgeon's anthropology. Though he never preached on this one verse specifically, he repeatedly referenced it in many of his published works and drew out specific implications from its meaning. In one of these works, Spurgeon described humanity as one united race by writing,

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<sup>46</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 374.

In Holy Scripture all partakers of flesh and blood are regarded as of one family. By the fact of common descent from Adam, all men are of one race, seeing that "God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth." Hence, in the Bible, man is spoken of universally as "thy brother" (Leviticus 19:17; Job 22:6; Matthew 5:23, 24; Luke 17:3; Romans 14:10, etc., etc.); and "thy neighbor" (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:13-18; Matthew 5:43; Romans 13:9; James 2:8); to whom, on account of nature and descent, we are required to render kindness and goodwill.<sup>47</sup>

Here, Spurgeon repeatedly emphasized the oneness of humanity. All human beings, which of course included African slaves, are members of this one race. And since all belong to this singular family, each one should be considered a brother and treated with familial kindness and benevolence.

There are many other instances where Spurgeon characterized humanity as consisting of only one race. In his sermon "The Great Assize," he explained that "the entire human race" will be gathered and judged by God at the end of this age.<sup>48</sup> As he described the scene, he mentions that both "father Adam" and "mother Eve" will be present to look upon all of their "offspring." This "will be the first time in which [Adam] has ever had the opportunity of seeing all his children meet together."<sup>49</sup> In another sermon, he reminded his congregation that this type of "brotherhood extends to all ranks, races, and conditions."<sup>50</sup> Mankind, according to Spurgeon, is one family united "by the common tie of blood" and therefore all are considered "brethren."<sup>51</sup>

Spurgeon believed that the solidarity of the human race was a biblical truth that many were quick to forget.<sup>52</sup> When this happened, numerous negative consequences occurred. So what are some implications of

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<sup>47</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Till He Come: Communion Meditations and Addresses* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896), 184-185.

<sup>48</sup> *MTP* 18:581.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *MTP* 24:131; emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> *MTP* 51:243.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

remembering that God hath made of one blood all nations of men? There are at least four, according to Spurgeon. First, since all share a common descent from Adam all are equal. No individual or group of individuals can rightfully claim superiority over another. The one who considers another human "inferior" denies the truth of Acts 17:26.<sup>53</sup> So says Spurgeon, "The greatest fools in the world are those who despise other people."<sup>54</sup>

Second, a different skin color does not exclude one from belonging to the human race. In a sermon about the necessity of taking the gospel overseas, Spurgeon encouraged his people to view the heathens as a fellow human beings. Speaking from their viewpoint he says, "though our skin be of a color less fair than your own...we are...of your kith and kind!" He continued,

we are your brothers...mother Eve is our mother, as well as yours; Adam, too, is the father from whose loins we sprang; and because we are men, the common sympathy of humanity bids you to...come over and help us.<sup>55</sup>

For Spurgeon, possessing a darker color of skin does not exclude one from belonging to the human family.

Third, because every individual belongs to the human race, every death is tragic. In September 1855, Spurgeon referenced a battle that England had recently won.<sup>56</sup> Though there was much celebration throughout Britain, Spurgeon could not rejoice. For him, even the death of an enemy was a cause of great regret.<sup>57</sup> The reason for his remorse was that he considered everyone, even adversaries on the battlefield, his brothers. He explained the rationale for his sorrow, "Are we not all made of one flesh? And hath not God 'made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth?'"<sup>58</sup> Spurgeon could not rejoice over the death

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<sup>53</sup> Spurgeon, *ME*, 12 March, Morning.

<sup>54</sup> *MTP* 13:609.

<sup>55</sup> *NPSP* 4:197.

<sup>56</sup> The battle mentioned, though not explicitly stated by Spurgeon, was the Battle of the Great Redan, which was fought on September 8, 1855 between Britain and Russia.

<sup>57</sup> *NPSP* 1:293.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

of another human being because it was inconsistent with his Christian anthropology.

One final implication that results from the solidarity of mankind is that treating humans with malice or cruelty is sinful. This is one reason why Spurgeon so strongly detested slavery; it regarded fellow human beings in an inhumane way. “[T]o hold our fellow-creatures in bondage is a sin, and a damnable one, inconsistent with grace.”<sup>59</sup> The type of brutality that commonly accompanied antebellum slavery was forbidden in light of this biblical truth. “You are not to treat men with cruelty...” because “God has made of one blood all nations to dwell upon the face of the earth.”<sup>60</sup>

### Humanity Made in the Image of God

In addition to believing that humanity was one race without distinction, Spurgeon also held that everyone who belonged to the human race was made in the image of God. This facet of his anthropology greatly contributed to his belief in the equality of the African slave, as well as his fierce opposition against slavery as an institution. Since every human being, regardless of his or her skin color, was made in the likeness of God, each was worthy of honor and respect, which was something that the practice of slavery denied. Though Spurgeon may have never stated that those of African descent were made in the image of God, he clearly believed they were. This is evidenced by his affirmation that every human being was an image bearer and also by his belief that slaves could have a relationship with God.

One of the clearest passages of Scripture which affirms that humanity was made in the image of God is Genesis 1:26-27.<sup>61</sup> Just as in the case of Acts 17:26, Spurgeon never preached on these verses specifically, but he did reference them often in his published works. After examining these references it is clear that, among other things, Spurgeon affirmed that

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<sup>59</sup> *NPSP* 6:155.

<sup>60</sup> *MTP* 47:579.

<sup>61</sup> The *imago Dei* in man is multi-faceted doctrine that cannot be dealt with at length in this paper because it falls outside its scope and purpose.

mankind was a special creation of God<sup>62</sup> and that God's image, though marred by sin, was "in every man."<sup>63</sup>

As an image bearer, every human is worthy of respect, despite his or her physical appearance or circumstances. This connection between the *imago Dei* and being treated with dignity was one that Spurgeon made explicit. While applying the command to "honor all men" which is found in 1 Peter 2:17, Spurgeon stated,

'Honour all men.' What, honor the lower classes? Yes, sir, 'honor all men.' Honour agricultural laborers? Yes, 'all men.' Honour paupers, negroes, crossingsweepers? Yes, 'honor all men.'...Anything in the shape of a man or a woman deserves to be honored, for man was made in the image of God.<sup>64</sup>

This is the most overt instance in which Spurgeon asserted that black persons are human beings made in the image of God, and that thus, like the rest of humanity, they should be treated with equality, dignity, and respect. In another sermon, he makes this connection clear as well, "There is God's image...in every man; and because he is a man, honor him."<sup>65</sup> These comments demonstrate that, along with those in the previous section, Spurgeon believed every black person belonged to the human race and thus, each one was made in God's image and should be treated accordingly.

Spurgeon's actions attest to the fact that he believed this biblical truth. Not only did he denounce slavery, he also showed honor to fellow image bearers, even though their skin was a different pigment than his own. This is evident in the kindness and cordiality he extended to former slaves, such as John Andrew Jackson and Thomas L. Johnson. As previously mentioned, Johnson noted Spurgeon's amicability towards him and wrote, "God raised up friends to cheer me and help, very memorable amongst them being Mr. Spurgeon."<sup>66</sup>

The assertion that Spurgeon believed every person was made in the image of God can also be demonstrated in that he affirmed everyone

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<sup>62</sup> MTP 30:652.

<sup>63</sup> MTP 61:539; emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> MTP 23:588; emphasis added.

<sup>65</sup> MTP 61:539.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, 100.

needed a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Like all other members of the human race, Africans had souls, for which Christ died. This is why Spurgeon urged the students of his Pastors' College to consider serving as missionaries in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> He also financially supported several missionaries to South Africa, Ethiopia, and the Congo.<sup>68</sup>

Spurgeon intentionally made his sermons accessible to everyone, even uneducated slaves. He believed that, just like white people, they too needed the gospel, and wanted them to experience salvation. Spurgeon recounts an episode of an interaction he had with a man who was offended by his indiscriminate preaching. He says,

I was once complimented by a person, who told me he believed my preaching would be extremely suitable for blacks — for negroes. He did not intend it as a compliment, but I replied, “Well sir, if it is suitable for blacks I should think it would be very suitable for whites; for there is only a little difference of skin, and I do not preach to people’s skins, but to their hearts.”<sup>69</sup>

Not only does this anecdote demonstrate that Spurgeon wanted everyone to grasp the good news of the gospel, it also shows that the color of a person’s skin was irrelevant in Spurgeon’s eyes. All people, regardless of their skin pigment, were made in God’s image and thus were capable of responding to the message of the gospel.

### The Christian’s Duty to Alleviate Suffering

One final component of Spurgeon’s anthropology, which contributed to his opposition of slavery, is the scriptural duty of Christians to help fellow humans in need. Spurgeon was a strong advocate and practitioner of social justice. He founded the Stockwell Orphanage, which cared for hundreds of boys and girls, all of whom would otherwise have been roaming the streets of London. Spurgeon also began and oversaw many

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<sup>67</sup> *ST* 5:364.

<sup>68</sup> *ST* 6:139; 5:511; 7:50.

<sup>69</sup> *NPS* 4:397.

other benevolent ministries that cared for the needs of widows, pregnant women, the underprivileged, and alcoholics.<sup>70</sup> He was rightly concerned with philanthropy because Jesus taught that “we are bound to love and honor all men, simply because they are men.”<sup>71</sup>

Spurgeon believed that individual Christians had a moral obligation to help those who were suffering. One place this is demonstrated clearly is in his exposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan. He exhorted his congregation to assist those in need, but especially those whose affliction was not the result of their own vice or folly. “When we see innocent persons suffering as the result of the sin of others,” declared Spurgeon, “our pity should be excited.”<sup>72</sup> He listed many examples of those who are suffering at the hands of others and even specifically mentioned “the oppressor’s cruelty” as a particular cause of such anguish.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, Spurgeon explained that the Samaritan’s rationale for helping the wounded stranger was grounded in Acts 17:26. He was compelled to act because he “felt that touch of nature which makes all men kin.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it can be safely concluded that Spurgeon’s hard stance against slavery stemmed from this scriptural duty to help fellow humans who are suffering as a consequence of the sins of others.

This duty to love, care, and assist fellow human beings should be extended to all races. The color of one’s skin is an irrelevant factor when exercising Christian charity. “Suffering humanity is to be aided even when it wears the ebon hue,” declared Spurgeon, “and [a] high-handed wrong is to be impeached even when the much despised negro is its victim.”<sup>75</sup> Neither fear nor self-preservation should interfere with a Christian’s duty to aid others. Like the Good Samaritan the Christian is “under obligation to [help] everybody that is a man.”<sup>76</sup>

The injustices of slavery not only motivated Spurgeon to action, but it also provoked him to anger. As Spurgeon considered the horrific

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing, 1992), 430-439.

<sup>71</sup> *NPS* 3:504.

<sup>72</sup> *MTP* 23:440.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *MTP* 23:440.

<sup>75</sup> *MTP* 11:663.

<sup>76</sup> *MTP* 23:441.



treatment of African slaves he burned with fierce indignation. Twenty-six years after the slavery controversy was over Spurgeon, preaching on an imprecatory psalm, asked his congregation,

Did you ever read the story of 'the middle passage' in the days of the African slave trade, when the negroes died by hundreds, or were flung into the sea to lighten the ship? Did you ever read of those horrors without praying, 'O God, let the thunderbolts of thy wrath fall on the men who can perpetrate such enormities'?<sup>77</sup>

This was not the only instance where Spurgeon referenced the middle passage and his righteous indignation toward it. In another sermon, he recounted how a Baptist minister, upon hearing about these atrocities, kneeled down, prayed and asked God to "[l]ift up thy thunderbolt and damn these wretches."<sup>78</sup> Spurgeon contrasted his desire for "speedy justice" with divine forbearance, stating that, in light of such cruelty, he was "very thankful to think that [he] had not the handling of the thunderbolts."<sup>79</sup>

Though Spurgeon understood that he had an obligation to help relieve the physical sufferings of humanity, he was more concerned about alleviating people's spiritual suffering, which was the result of sin and eternal judgment. Spurgeon's greatest passion was to see spiritual captives set free through the preaching of the gospel. He understood this was humanity's greatest need and that of "all bondage and slavery in this world, there is none more horrible than the bondage of sin."<sup>80</sup> This was one reason that Spurgeon preached much more about the redemption that is found only in Jesus Christ than he did about the abolition of antebellum slavery.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the historical details surrounding the Slavery Controversy of 1860 as well as Charles Spurgeon's anthropology as it relates specifically to his uncompromising stance against enslaving African men and women. It has argued that Spurgeon's opposition to

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<sup>77</sup> *MTP* 42:541.

<sup>78</sup> *MTP* 15:262.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Autobiography* 1:84.

slavery is the result of his beliefs that all humans, including black persons, belong to one race and that every human being is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignity and respect. Slavery stands in opposition to these biblical truths, and thus Christians have a moral duty to oppose this kind of suffering. This view of his fellow man is what convinced Spurgeon to use such harsh words to condemn slavery and slave owners; it also is what motivated him to stand by his statements even though they caused him great difficulty.