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“Spurgeon the Warrior”

How Spurgeon became embroiled in controversy.

What were the controversies that assaulted him in his early years in London. He didn't like conflict and yet for most of his ministry he was embroiled in some kind of controversy.

Today Spurgeon is widely beloved — not only Baptists, but even a man like Thielike! — and yet during his day that was not true.

Almost everyone today wants to claim Spurgeon — they think of him as a big theological teddy-bar and theological neutral and devotional in his preaching. Yet all these things are not true.

He was even a rigorous separatist. He embraced everything that the neo-orthodox reject. He was a vocal defender of virtually every doctrine that postmodernists have attacked. He was commonly attacked as being behind the times, even in his own era. Spurgeon stubbornly clung to the doctrines of the Puritans.

He like reading church history from the church fathers. He decried the theater as no place for Christian. He hated stylistic, worldly religion. “Are you sure you like Spurgeon?” (on Phil's website — www.spurgeon.org).

Here is a glimpse of the true Spurgeon, who still speaks to our age.

The battles Spurgeon fought are still relevant to us. Spurgeon obviously picked his fights pretty well. Johnson's “weekly dose of Spurgeon” addresses the issues of the postmodern emergent folks even today.

Yet the stress from all these controversies undoubtedly hastened his death. Yet neither the reality of controversy was not new to Spurgeon when the Downgrade Controversy began five years before his death.

He fought faithfully and fiercely for the truth and honor of God.

Spurgeon had been a Christian for less than four years and was only 19 when he became pastor of New Park Street Chapel. Very quickly the church grew tremendously, having to move in less than a year to Exceter Hall having an auditorium that was large (4000+) — and easily accessible by public transport — and known as the center of evangelicalism in London.

It was almost inevitable given the suddenness of his rise that he would be criticized, and yet it did catch him by surprise. His critics were unmerciful in their attacks of him — of his style and his theology and character.

But Spurgeon would not respond in kind — he never stooped to vitriolic, mean-spirited attacks like he was subject to enduring (though he was unafraid of responding — even with sarcasm — to those attacks).

Even Spurgeon's salvation was attacked and criticized and doubted.

Spurgeon never sought or relished controversy, but they came to him, mainly sparked by petty jealousy. From the start of his ministry to the end, his theology stayed substantially the same; nothing of significance changed in his theology, and nothing of major significance ever needed to be corrected later. Holding steady to the same worldview and theology today is a demonstration of "arrogance." In reality, he doesn't speak on a topic and tell he was well-read on a topic and had thought it through clearly and had come to conviction of heart.

Spurgeon loved soundness, clarity and firm conviction and those were the very attributes that made controversy inevitable. Iain Murray's book — *Forgotten Spurgeon* — traces three major controversies in his life, over Calvinism, baptismal regeneration and the Downgrade Controversy.

From early 1870s through 1886 there were times when he was not embroiled in wide-spread public controversies — relative peace. So when the Downgrade Controversy broke in 1887, he is characterized as becoming "crotchety because he became old."

Read chapter 53 in Spurgeon's autobiography (written by his assoc. ___ Harold after his death) for a greater sense of his response to the controversies.

Spurgeon was controversial in his day not because he was pugnacious, but because he was devoted to the truth. Thankfully, for the church, Spurgeon was willing to fight even to the impact on his health. Harold would later refer to him as a martyr.

His attempts to awaken evangelicalism was mostly in vain in his lifetime. It cost him everything and seemed vain, though he was not discouraged for he knew that hell could not win the battle. So today we still benefit from his work.

We need to follow his example — men who will fight the good fight even though we know it will not win us any accolades from the world.