

Spurgeon and Graham: Addressing Social Evils Without Diluting the Gospel

Without a doubt, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) and Billy Graham (1918-2018) were gospel preachers rather than social justice warriors. Yet both of them addressed some of the greatest social evils of their day without for a moment diluting their Jesus-centered messages. To be sure, they lost some of their audiences because of the stands they took. But they never took their eyes off the ultimate goal: lifting up the risen Savior and pointing all people to Him.

As for Spurgeon, slavery and the slave trade had already been abolished in 1807 in England, more than a quarter of a century before he was born. So when he spoke out against slavery, he was addressing America rather than his homeland.

An article on the website gives the background, along with one of Spurgeon's best-known anti-slavery quotes:

Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation 154 years ago today, promising liberty to some 3 million enslaved Black men and women.

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Charles Spurgeon also fought the evils of slavery: '[The] hope of deliverance seemed far away, it was God that gave an Abraham Lincoln, who led the nation onward till 'Emancipation' flamed upon its banners' (MTP 29:243).

Spurgeon exchanged correspondences with Frederick Douglas, received former slaves into his Pastors' College and pulpit, and condemned slavery in his sermons and media articles:

“I do from my inmost soul detest slavery ... 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. Whenever one has called upon me, I have considered it my duty to express my detestation of his wickedness, and I would as soon think of receiving a murderer into my church ...as a man stealer” (Pike, “The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” p. 331).

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How did many Southern Americans respond, including not a few Southern Christians? Representative headlines from 1858-1860 proclaimed:

- Spurgeon is a “beef-eating, puffed-up, vain, over-righteous pharisaical, English blab-mouth.”
- Spurgeon is a “fat, overgrown boy.”
- Spurgeon is a “hell-deserving Englishman.”

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