

# The Relationship Between Science and Religion in the Vision of Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the relationship between science and religion from the perspective of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. While expressing concern regarding knowledge gained through scientific study, C. H. Spurgeon nevertheless rejected any approach—scientific or otherwise—that might lead man away from the full acceptance of the inspiration of Scripture and divine revelation. For this reason, starting from the premise that science and religion must never be in opposition, he developed a model for harmonizing them, emphasizing that through knowledge of God and acceptance of biblical truth, the best methods of interpreting, assimilating and developing the information obtained through scientific endeavors can be achieved.

**KEYWORDS:** C. H. Spurgeon, religion, science, biblical revelation

## Introduction

The first part of the article investigates Spurgeon's views on the role of science in confirming biblical truths as well as his own approach to the conflicts between scientific findings and biblical revelation. It also investigates his disassociation from any distortion of the authority of Scripture by rational or scientific approaches. The second part of the article, will explore his own approach to the role of knowledge of God and science in the life of the religious man. I will show what place each should occupy and how the information gained from scientific research can be properly exploited. I will show his thinking on the necessity of the knowledge of God in preparing the religious man for a good relationship with science in general, and the specific way in which C. H. Spurgeon proposed that each branch of science be approached by his followers. In order to do this, I will investigate some of his writings in which he mentions, even if only briefly, his vision of the relationship between science and religion.

Although I have not identified a detailed treatment of this subject by C. H. Spurgeon, there are sufficient occasions in which he, speaking on other subjects, has also set out his views on this relationship. C. H. Spurgeon was in love with nature and believed that all that God has created is for us to appreciate and investigate. At the same time, he broke away from any relativization of the biblical text, strongly affirming its infallibility, rejecting any scientific endeavor or approach that took him away from the revelation offered in Scripture. This tension between his two tendencies will be taken into account in dealing with this theme, as well as his conviction that the source of all scientific knowledge is the personal and real knowledge of God. I welcome the approach to this relationship as I have not so far identified sufficiently detailed analyses of his vision of this relationship. In addition, wishing to investigate the life, ministry and theology of C. H. Spurgeon, such an endeavor is necessary to obtain a complete picture of his theology and ministry. In addition, since C. H. Spurgeon did not shy away from controversy, and this relationship has often raised controversy, his approach I consider welcome because C. H. Spurgeon, as part of the English Victorian Nonconformists, is sufficiently accepted and beloved of the geographical and religious space in which we conduct our religious life and ministry.

## Science and religion in relation to biblical revelation

Where biblical truth has been called into question by scientific discoveries, always C. H. Spurgeon firmly denied their validity. For him, it was unacceptable that a new scientific discovery could in any way contradict the statements of Jesus or his teachings (Spurgeon 1869b, 12), for in his view to separate God from his works was to attempt to know a man without considering his whole face. Thus, he considered knowledge that separates God from His works to be diabolical (Spurgeon 1869e, 36), being firmly convinced that God's works cannot be separated from His words. In his view, science and theology could neither be considered in opposition nor separated (Spurgeon 1869e, 29).

In his first commentary on the book of Psalms, C. H. Spurgeon examines the creation of God described in Psalm 19. He quotes M'Cosh, who believes that as long as science and religion are in opposition, not only is this conflict futile, but it wastes much of the resources of each side. Therefore, the quoted author proposed that the two should be so united as to become "the outer court, and the other the inner court" (Spurgeon 1869d, 270) of the same sanctuary. The purpose of this union is to give every man an opportunity, on the one hand, to admire the works of God, and on the other, to worship God in prayer and praise (Spurgeon 1869d, 270).

For him the teaching that comes from above or the Gospel of Christ had to be protected from distortions due to human teachings or false scientific information that could jeopardize its authority. And though this teaching, if rightly used, causes devils to tremble, angels to worship, and bastions of error to crumble, yet it had to be fought for to preserve its integrity (Spurgeon 1864b, 148-149). Therefore, in his view, whatever the endeavors of science and however deep the scientific inquiry, it should have no result other than the confirmation of biblical truth (Spurgeon 2009e, 134). For this reason, the revelation of God in Scripture was for C. H. Spurgeon a reason to presume before Him, noting that science, reason, or his own judgments would never succeed in turning him away from it (Spurgeon 2009a, 168), suggesting that possible unbelief due to scientific arguments should be addressed by direct confrontation in the name of God (Spurgeon 2009a, 100).

Renouncing faith, motivated by scientific discoveries, meant for him nothing more than trying to hide his ignorance (Spurgeon 2009a, 97). To demonstrate this C. H. Spurgeon uses the image of a blind man who, even if given more light or even a pair of glasses, cannot have his lack of sight resolved. Likewise, for him, those who like to philosophize, argue and rationalize are unable to discern spiritual truth because they have not yet received eyes from God (Spurgeon 1883, 218-219). So the perception of revelation is conditional on receiving light from the One who is the Light, through the powerful influence of the Gospel. Therefore, in his view, science can as much help in the revelation of God to the unregenerate man as glasses help a man who is completely blind.

In addition, C. H. Spurgeon did not stop talking about the limitations of scientists. Especially with reference to archaeologists, he wanted to point out that although their work has contributed to some discoveries that have disproved some popular falsehoods, yet this work cannot provide enough data to fully disentangle us from the information given in Scripture (Spurgeon 2009d, 85-86). As Patricia Kruppa has observed, C. H. Spurgeon rejected the laws of science, philosophy, or new discoveries as a method of supporting his own arguments. When accused of being ignorant of science or higher criticism, he stubbornly denied the need to know anything that contradicted Scripture (Kruppa 1982, 394).

What he was accusing was the abuse of researchers who, while boldly asserting what they could not prove, also claimed to be believed. Spurgeon felt that one who uses Holy Scripture and has faith in the existence of God is not obliged to accept so readily "the ever-changing teachings

of so-called scientists" (Spurgeon 2009a, 97). For him, the scientific assumptions of the past, later shown to be erroneous, were reason enough to cautiously welcome any new scientific theories or discoveries that deny the revelation of the Holy Scriptures (Spurgeon 2009a, 97-98). Moreover, as the charlatans who dominated the world of medicine in the past have come to the ridicule of men at a later age, the same course, C. H. Spurgeon will also be followed by those who deny biblical revelation with these alleged theories and hypotheses (Spurgeon 2009a, 98).

However, in his view, even scientific confirmations will not be enough for anyone who does not want to accept biblical revelation. To argue his position, he refers to the words of Scripture that if one does not obey "Moses and the Prophets" they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead (Spurgeon 2009a, 135). Especially since for C. H. Spurgeon, God could not be discovered on his own. Therefore, finding God through science was impossible. Rather, he believed that science should be read and understood by discovering him who comes down from heaven and reveals himself to men (Spurgeon 1890, 9).

As Patricia Kruppa pointed out, C. H. Spurgeon's knowledge of his contemporary science was not as much as it probably seemed. However, although he "knew little about the actual discoveries of science, he knew enough to show the fundamental weakness of scientific 'truth'" (Kruppa 2018, 399). Therefore, he did not bother to assert that religion that comes only from science and ignores biblical revelation contains neither religious nor elements of science. Rather, in his view it could be likened to meaningless talk that is of no use (Spurgeon 2009a, 230) or to "donkey's snorts" (Spurgeon 2009c, 254) that are of no use. So, as Tom J. Nettles has observed, for C. H. Spurgeon the authority of Scripture was independent of reason and scientific inquiry, and trust in Scripture as the superior form of knowledge was the conviction to which he adhered with the greatest devotion (Nettles 2013, 13).

### **The role of science and the knowledge of God in the life of the religious man**

For C. H. Spurgeon, to know Christ was to possess and understand the most precious of all sciences (Spurgeon 2009a, 52). Therefore, when analyzing the benefits of the "goodness of science", he considered it not as valuable as the knowledge of God, which for him, represented the most adequate food for the human heart, mind and soul (Spurgeon 1882, 136). In another context, he appeals to the writings of Matthew Henry who stated that the fear of the Lord should be our most assiduous concern, on the grounds that it surpasses all skill and knowledge derived through scientific deepening (Spurgeon 1869e, 133). Perhaps for the same reason, he argued that it is a delightful thing to have access to (learn) earthly science, but even more delightful to know spiritual truths (Spurgeon 1869a, 478).

So obvious was to him the superiority of the knowledge of God that he considered that the pulpit should be used primarily for the revelation of Christ, and not for its use in imparting scientific or artistic elements which, though they may delight the hearers, must not be subordinated to that desideratum (Spurgeon 1870, 11). For this reason, all the human labor put into scientific development could not be placed alongside the concern to win souls for Christ (Spurgeon 1869c, 26). Although Spurgeon was very interested in science that did not contradict the revelation of Scripture, he nevertheless advised his disciples in their own scientific journey, lest being too much absorbed in the beauties discovered, they abandon their primary purpose, to provoke salvation as many souls as possible (Spurgeon 2009a, 115). As Michael Reeves notes, C. H. Spurgeon demonstrated his enormous esteem for the knowledge of God even as he imagined the moment of his coming before God. Thus, for him, the priority was not to be what on earth science had not yet been able to discover but his own encounter with Jesus. And though he enjoyed exploring creation, yet for him in heaven, the exploration of the redeemed physical

creation would be almost eliminated by the possibility of enjoying the exploration of the spiritual one (Reeves 2018, 177). Therefore, in another context, speaking of knowledge by the spirit or experiential as opposed to knowledge by the literal or theoretical, C. H. Spurgeon pointed out that although some sciences can be learned through research and theoretical study, religion itself necessarily requires learning with the heart and application of acquired religious convictions (Spurgeon 2009e, 115-116).

As Tom Nettles notes, by converting C. H. Spurgeon believed he held the key to all knowledge. Thus, in his view, Christ not only surpassed all human science, but also offered him the possibility of relating correctly to all that science offered. Specifically, he believed that confusion would disappear when every branch of science was related to Christ from whom and through whom all things come. To explain Christ's unique position in the universe of knowledge, he used the image of the planets and heavenly bodies, which maintain their existence and revolve around the sun (Nettles 2013, 17). For him, therefore, the Bible occupied a special place, being considered the encyclopedia of divine science (Spurgeon 1896, 279).

Not only did he see the knowledge of God as more important than any scientific endeavor, but also the good character skills. Thus, for him, common sense represented "the rarest gift of heaven" (Spurgeon 2009c, 302), and it was worth so much that although he acknowledged that we are not dealing with a science, it would be worth as much as seven such sciences. He also did not accept the quoting or use of persons or concepts of questionable character in the preaching and development of the kingdom of God (Spurgeon 2009a, 334-335), pointing out that "when men's lives have been defiled, and their principles atheistic, there should be great hesitation in quoting their language" (Spurgeon 2009a, 335).

In addition, through the knowledge of God and the benefits that come from it, C. H. Spurgeon believed that scientific development also stands to gain. Thus, in his view, the Reformation initiated by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli was due to the subsequent progress of the arts and sciences. According to him, through the Reformation, human thought not only became free, but also expanded (Spurgeon 1864, 236). Also, on the same grounds, he compares the arts, science, and religion to the windows of a house, which, when it collapses, affects the component parts. For this reason, he believed that when a community fails to achieve its major goals, it is the arts and science that will inevitably suffer (Spurgeon 2009c, 322). In his writings, religion is often associated with science, C. H. Spurgeon finding much in common. For example, for him, in both science and religion, falsehood and error were worse than lack of knowledge (Spurgeon 2009b, 75). Thus, for him, it was better to be uninformed than misinformed.

However, he believed that no area of knowledge should be neglected, for he believed that Jesus' presence on earth sanctified the whole realm of nature, and that all that God has created is for us to learn from (Spurgeon 2009a, 36-37). For this reason, encourage reading, traveling, and perusing as much scientific material as possible, combining the various fields of science (Spurgeon 2009a, 37). Nor did he consider the possibility that too much knowledge about God's created world could harm spirituality. On the contrary, he asserted that when grace abounds, however high the level of knowledge, it will not impair the simplicity of a genuine Christian but on the contrary will make him a more suitable instrument in the hand of his Creator (Spurgeon 2009a, 37). Thus "out of a ram's horn" man becomes "a trumpet of silver" (Spurgeon 2009a, 37) as a result of his equipping in all these areas of knowledge.

Perhaps drawing from the example of his father who sought to use all that science had to offer in cultivating and sharing biblical truths (Spurgeon 2009d, viii), C. H. Spurgeon urged his students to do the same. In his view, for their good preparation, they needed to know and explore the close connection between each science and religion as doctrine; a connection they were to use in communicating the truths preached. However, he believed that the analysis of these

relationships should not hinder the zealous individual study of the Holy Scriptures. This was all the more so because that information derived from scientific study alone was not sufficient to meet all their need for knowledge (Spurgeon 2009a, 168).

## Conclusions

In this article, we have discussed the relationship between science and religion in the view of C. H. Spurgeon. I have shown that, in his own approach, he started from the premise that the two can never be in opposition but, on the contrary, must support each other. On the other hand, he firmly believed that so-called scientific arguments which distort biblical revelation should not be accepted, and that such an approach (to contradict Scripture by means of science) is harmful to the spiritual development of the religious man. In his view, any objective approach to science must be made after inner regeneration and full acceptance of biblical revelation. Although he apparently did not possess very detailed knowledge in all branches of science, he firmly asserted that he would contradict any information obtained through scientific investigation that would contradict the statements of Scripture.

Wishing to point out the vulnerabilities of the science that opposed the biblical revelation, a revelation in which he firmly believed, he brought up the insufficiency of the information obtained on the basis of scientific endeavors, but also the inconsistency of some conclusions obtained on the basis of scientific findings. In addition, he advised his listeners that any religious conviction should be obtained not primarily through scientific investigation but through research into biblical truths. Therefore, according to his view, it is only through the knowledge of Christ (Rotaru 2005b, 295-324) that one interested in science can correctly decipher and accumulate scientific information. According to the proposed model, with Christ at the center, all that science can offer can be obtained and used to its fullest capacity. In addition, C. H. Spurgeon believed that when the religious life of society excelled, science would also progress. He attributed some of the important scientific discoveries to the Reformation, but also pointed out that it was necessary to form good habits for the good of humanity, habits which were more necessary than scientific development itself.

Regarding the role and place of science (Rotaru 2005a, 34-38) in the life of the believer, C. H. Spurgeon did not deny its contribution to the life of the Christian believer or minister. He advised his own disciples to develop their knowledge by combining as many branches of science as possible, believing that there was no danger that this knowledge, accompanied by the presence of God's grace, could divert him from his main purpose. On the contrary, what he was showing was that it would make him a more suitable instrument in the hands of his Creator. However, he emphasized the superiority of knowledge of information of a spiritual nature and one's personal search after God over any endeavor to acquire scientific ability. For him, every human concern must have this search at its center, and every ministry, especially of those who care for the souls of others, had to take this into account.

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