

Public Meeting Of Our London Baptist Brethren

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes the historic faithfulness, unity, and spiritual responsibility of the Baptist denomination, urging believers to uphold the purity of the Gospel and the sovereignty of Christ over the Church.

Scripture: Acts 2, Romans 13:1, John 3:16, Matthew 28:19-20

Topics: "Church History", "Church Unity", "Sovereignty of Christ"

Description

In this stirring address, C.H. Spurgeon celebrates the unity and faithfulness of the Baptist denomination, tracing its apostolic roots and emphasizing its commitment to Christ's sovereignty over the Church. He highlights the importance of preaching Christ alone and the voluntary principle in sustaining the Church. Spurgeon calls believers to cherish their spiritual heritage and to guard the purity of the Gospel amidst external pressures.

Transcript

SIR MORTON PETO IN THE CHAIR.

A noble assembly having filled the house, after singing, the Rev. C. H. SPURGEON offered prayer. REV. C. H. SPURGEON—In inviting our Baptist Brethren to meet together this evening, it was in the hope that something might be suggested which might promote our success as a united body, and that words of encouragement from comrades in the same regiment might gladden all hearts; we offer the heartiest welcome to our beloved friends—this chapel belongs not to me nor to my Church specially, but to all the Baptist denomination! I feel tonight as if I were rendering up the trust deeds to the proper proprietors—acknowledging that this house belongs not to any man, but, first, to the God of the whole world, and, next, to those who hold the pure primitive ancient Apostolic faith. We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were Reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it. We have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves! We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a Government holding Baptist principles which persecuted others; nor, I believe, any body of Baptists ever held it to be right to put the consciences of

others under the control of man. We have ever been ready to suffer as our martyrologies will prove, but we are not ready to accept any help from the State to prostitute the purity of the Bride of Christ to any alliance with Government! And we will never make the Church, although the Queen, the despot over the consciences of men. I will now resign the meeting to my esteemed friend, Sir Morton Peto, who has many a stone in this building, and who, I trust, will honor us with his presence on many future occasions.

The CHAIRMAN—My dear Christian Friends—when invited to lay the first stone of this building, I deemed it a high honor and privilege. To be asked to preside tonight at the meeting of the Baptist Brethren of the metropolis, I deem also to be an honor and a privilege. Let me say at once how much I sympathize with all of you in meeting in this magnificent building tonight, under circumstances of the most gratifying character, without anything to allay or diminish our joy and thankfulness to God. I recollect having said when the first stone was laid, that I saw no reason why this building should not be opened free from debt, and what has just fallen from your esteemed pastor has shown how that anticipation has been abundantly realized! In meeting my Baptist Brethren for the first time in this building, my thoughts naturally recur for a moment to the past. Mr. Spurgeon has spoken of our history, of our martyrologies, and the sufferings of our forefathers. They have labored; we have entered into their labors. The result of that is shown in the ability of God's people connected with our denomination to raise a temple like this to His praise; and we have to acknowledge how much we owe to our forefathers in the opportunity we have of giving as a privilege, not as an exaction, and in seeing such a result of giving as this edifice displays. There are many grounds on which we rejoice with our friend—the first and greatest of all is that which was referred to in the text on the evening of the opening day—"Christ is preached and therein do I rejoice; yes, and I will rejoice." In the sermon of the afternoon, to which that of the evening seemed a graceful and fitting pendant, your pastor said that with all the misconceptions entertained with regard to his ministry, there was one point about which there could be no misconception—he thanked God he could say from his heart he had simply preached Christ. Now I believe the evidence we have in this building is no mean one that he has preached Christ—because if ministers have recourse to what they deem intellectual or philosophical preaching, or any other than that of preaching Christ, we soon find in our denomination empty pews show the result! There is an underlying stratum in the deep feelings and hearts of our countrymen of reverence and love for the old Gospel which nothing else can supplant. The great strength of this country is that, whatever may be written or said, the people at once refer to the Law and to the Testimony, and that which is not found written there has no place in their reverence or their esteem!

The next cause we have for rejoicing is the feeling that the privilege we have of worshipping God according to our consciences in this and every other edifice connected with His praise is to be traced to the result of the sufferings of our forefathers. But that privilege has entailed on us an adequate responsibility. In reading the writings of the Puritan Fathers, I am struck to see how deeply they were impressed with the principles on which they acted. They were not Nonconformists because their fathers were; they would themselves have gone to the stake to assert the principles connected with the Headship and the position of the Great Head of the Church in the sole right of sovereignty within that Church. In the present day there is entailed on us a great responsibility in guarding tenderly and carefully these privileges. There is not only a desire on the part of the State to keep the Church so-called allied to the State, but to put in the thin end of the wedge and intermeddle with other denominations. If we find the Church as we understand it, in the slightest degree interfered with, we must as one man arise and say we will never allow the privilege of the Headship of the Great Head of the Church to be interfered with by any State in existence—all honor to the Queen! No one can say more fervently than the Baptists, "God save the Queen," but while we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, we must have respect to the

commandment which enforces that nothing of Caesar's shall touch that which is God's. We—the members of other Baptist churches, congratulate with all our hearts the pastor, deacons, and members of this Church on the accomplishment of this great work, without any feeling excepting that of devout thankfulness to God for what He has enabled them to achieve! And we desire that abundant success may attend the proclamation of the Gospel in this building. Long may the pastor be spared to minister to a devoted, loving, and affectionate people! Long may he be surrounded by deacons who are able and willing to take the stroke oar in all the labors that appertain to them in connection with the secular affairs of the church; long may he see this place too narrow for even the communicants who assemble as his church members, and long may he have the power of the Holy Spirit attending an effective ministry and witnessing every month in that baptistery to the result of his labors! That which does not bring souls to Christ is worth nothing!

Among Evangelical bodies, especially our own denomination, there may be slight differences, and will be among men who think for themselves—yet in the great fundamental and vital Truths of godliness, there exists no difference among us, and we only rejoice in so far as our ministry is made effectual in the way I have mentioned. Look at the influences which will go forth from this Church—look at the schools brought together here, and the children instructed in the knowledge of God and Christ! Look at the evangelical labors of the Brethren who constitute the Church in the surrounding districts, teaching and preaching Christ! Mr. Spurgeon will not conceive that his members, when they have simply attended here on the Sabbath and partaken of the Lord's Supper, have done their duty, but will feel that they must become living Epistles of Christ, known and read of all men! And then, while we shall no doubt consistently maintain that great Truth which we feel has been committed to us, we shall live in harmony with all those who hold the great, vital truths of godliness. One cannot but feel a most anxious desire and hope that long after our Brother is called to the upper sanctuary, his place may be filled in generations to come by those who, like he, will lead their hearers constantly to Christ, and that this will not only be a monument to the praise of God in our own generation, but in many generations following!

What a splendid monument is this building to the voluntary principle! When I am in the House of Commons, I am continually told on the Church-rate question. "Oh, but the rural districts." Well, if my friend Mr. Spurgeon can raise during 18 months throughout the country a sum of money to erect this edifice, do you think that the State Church need be so anxious about the rural districts? One could not desire a better thing than that those members of Parliament who are so afflicted for fear the country churches should fall down, should come and see what has been raised here! This edifice tells—and may it long tell—the world at large that when people are imbued with all their heart and soul with the love of Christ, and feel that their great end is to live to Him, there is no fear of their allowing the House of God to fall about their ears! And when anything ceases to be a church which so holds the sympathies and hearts of the people, if the church falls down, I pity the church, I pity the people, I pity the denomination! Three years ago I called the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that the natives of Calcutta had spent more money in one year in the erection and sustaining of their heathen temples, than the whole amount of the church-rates of this country collected during the previous year! I then asked this question, "Is your religion not of a character to take a more vital hold on your hearts than the religion of Hinduism? Shall it be said that the Son of God became Incarnate and died in this world, and left as His legacy to His loving disciples the propagation of His Truth, and they can only support the edifices in which that glorious name is praised by exacting from their fellow men that which shall sustain them?" Our friends have done nobly in asserting what can be done on the voluntary principle, and if anyone points me in future to the rural districts with regard to the church-rates or anything of this kind, I shall, among other things, point to this place, and say,

"See what the Baptist denomination in the person of our friend and his Church have done, and do not insult me by imagining that I think Christian principles require such support as you would give it."

We do rejoice with you most heartily, genuinely, and lovingly tonight. I have told you the grounds on which we rejoice. It is not a mere sentiment, a mere effervescent feeling, but that true bond of brotherhood kindled in the heart by love to the same Savior, by adopting as we do from sincere conviction those Truths which we hold to be vital and necessary. It is to the assertion of those Truths that we desire to see not only this, but every edifice in connection with our denomination, so that in regard to all our churches and their pastors, there may be no doubt that they act from one principle—a love to Christ and a desire to follow Him—for it is in following Him, alone, that they honor Him!

Rev. J. H. HINTON—I am happy in being permitted to take a part in the services connected with the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and in having the opportunity of saying, in the terms of the invitation of my Brother Spurgeon, "a few kind words." Kind words are, indeed, easy of utterance when the heart is kind, and my heart is kind towards my Brother and has been so from my earliest acquaintance with him! Let Mr. Spurgeon, then, and his friends accept my warmest congratulations and best wishes! Long may the life be spared which is so devotedly and laboriously spent; the intellectual powers which acquire and supply so large an amount of Evangelical Truth; and the magnificent voice which, with so much facility, pours it into the ears of listening thousands! As no resolution or topic has been put into my hands, I will take one as presenting to us a collateral aspect of the great Doctrine of the Influence of the Holy Spirit—an influence blessed and Divine, wherein lies the entire success of the Evangelical ministry. It is said of our Lord that, "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Him." Undoubtedly, the absolute fullness of the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus; He was capable of receiving it all, and His great work required it all. But we get here the idea of the Spirit being communicated "by measure"—to some persons, and on some occasions, more—to others, less. It is natural that this should be so, the bestowment of that Divine Influence being an act of Sovereign Grace; the history of the progress of Christianity presents many illustrations of the fact. The Holy Spirit was poured out in a comparatively small measure during the life and ministry of our Lord. Of all preachers of the Gospel, He may be said to have been the least successful in the conversion of men—not absolutely unsuccessful, but successful in the smallest degree as to the number of conversions. There were, doubtless, fit reasons for this—the time was not then, nor the circumstances in which a very copious effusion of the Holy Spirit's influence could fitly have been given. You know how copiously the Spirit was poured out after the Ascension of Christ.

In subsequent ages the changes have been manifest. If the Spirit had continued to be poured out as it were on the day of Pentecost, I imagine that long before this time the whole world would have been converted to God. We know what took place in the Middle Ages; that, when the Man of Sin was to be revealed and Popery established, the influences of the Spirit were restrained—not absolutely, but communicated in small measure. At the time of the Reformation a large outpouring of the Spirit was given; at successive periods and in various parts of the world, as in America, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Jamaica, Sweden and elsewhere, at periods of no certain recurrence, and for durations of time not definite, but yet in extraordinary degree as compared with other times and places, the Spirit has been poured out. The present seems to me to be a dispensation in which the Spirit is communicated "by measure," and in a measure determined by Divine Sovereignty and Wisdom; a measure incorporated with and subordinated to the development of God's own plan, and the opportunities to be supplied for the manifestation of man's and the devil's corruption. Since we live under this dispensation, a question of practical interest to ourselves is this—what is the kind of measure, the amount according to which the influence of the Spirit is

poured out now? Thank God, it is not absolutely withheld, otherwise there would be no conversions at all under the ministry of the Gospel, and even a proclaimed Savior would be a Savior universally trampled on and despised! That it is not the outpouring of the Spirit in its fullness is palpable from the fact that, amid such multiplied privileges, such vast and multiform activities for the dissemination of the Truth, so few comparatively are converted to God. The majority, even of Gospel hearers, is probably unconverted—the entire population scarcely touched—and when we consider not only how many people are now alive, but how fast people are born and die, the small number of conversions takes a character still more striking! At this rate it appears to me quite certain that the conversion of the world would never come. To accomplish it there must be a much larger outpouring of the Spirit than there now is. Then, in connection with this, a much larger supply of the influences of the Holy Spirit may be had; the abundant supply lies in the hands of Christ! It is not that all is done that can be done; a very great deal more can be done; a power remains by which the whole world may be rapidly subdued to God! This may be done any time, anywhere—this moment, next year—whenever and wherever God pleases. It waits for the arrival of the appointed time given for the development of human corruption, and the time when the Man of Sin is to die. Whether the Church is awake or asleep—whether there is prayer or no prayer—whether there is activity or no activity—it matters not. It must come, and perhaps it will come like a heavy, copious shower to wake us all up from sleep, and to set us on an activity such as we have never entered on before! At the same time it may have, and probably will have its antecedent and concomitant signs. Very likely it may be a time when there is much prayer and activity—when there is much depression and agony of heart—when the Church humbles itself in unknown throes of sorrow for a declining work of Grace. Nobody knows when, nor how. We have to pray for it, to wait for it, to hope for it, to look for it, as some people say they look for Christ's Second Coming. We do not know when it comes; I only say, Sir, God grant it may be here, and grant it may be now!

The REV. ALFRED C. THOMAS said he could scarcely feel himself worthy of the name of a Christian, certainly not of a Baptist, if he could not rejoice in their Metropolitan Tabernacle, and express his hearty thanks to God for the accomplishment of its erection. He had been asked to say something upon the fact that the Baptists as a denomination were distinguished for maintaining the nullity of ordinances without faith—a point that might be well sustained by reference to the history of their denomination. They had never regarded anything external or ceremonial as worth a rush, except as inspired by faith in Christ, who alone could sanction with His Presence and fill with His blessing, the ordinances that set Him forth, and told to the world the great Truths of His Gospel. In order to sustain that, he purposed to read to them extracts from their confessions of faith set forth in the 17th Century. Those confessions were not made with a view to bring the minds of men under a servile sway, but to convey to others what in their estimation the mind and will of Christ was as revealed in His Scriptures. They had never sought, as it had been affirmed, to force them upon any set of men; they had never gone to any temporal power to ask the shield of its authority for the maintenance or the right of proclaiming them. Nevertheless, there had been times in their history when they had felt it necessary to put forward explanations of their faith in Christ. In the confession of faith put forth by the General Baptists in 1611, the Tenth article was as follows—"That the Church of Christ is a company of faithful people, separated from the world by the Word and the Spirit of God, being knit unto the Lord and unto one another by Baptism upon their own confession of faith and sin." In the 39th article of a confession put forth in 1646, by "seven congregations in London, commonly but unjustly called Anabaptists," they said, "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament given by Christ to be dispensed upon persons professing faith, or that are made disciples, who upon profession of faith ought to be baptized, and after to partake of the Lord's Supper." That would suit their strict Baptist brethren to the letter. In 1656, another confession maintained the same forms of faith.

He would read one given in 1660, which was rather more strong than some of the rest. It was, "That the right and only way of gathering churches according to Christ's appointment, is first to preach the Gospel to the sons and daughters of men, and then to baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, such only of them as profess repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. And as for all such who preach not this Doctrine, but instead thereof the Scriptureless thing of sprinkling of infants, (falsely called baptism), whereby the pure Word of God is made of no effect, and the New Testament way of bringing members into the church by regeneration, is cast out, when, as the bond-woman and her son—that is to say, the Old Testament way of bringing in children into the church by regeneration, is cast out, as says the Scripture, all such, we utterly deny, forasmuch as we are commanded to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." That, he thought, was strong enough for any Baptist! Another confession put forth by the Elders and deacons of many congregations in London and the adjacent counties, 1688, stated in the 29th article, "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ to be unto the party baptized a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him, of remission of sin, and of his giving up himself unto God through Jesus Christ, to live and to walk with Him in newness of life. Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, and faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subject of this ordinance. The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Immersion, or the dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance."

Those were confessions of faith in which they as heartily agreed that day, as their fathers had in every age of the Church. That amounted to an historical and unquestionable fact; but how were the Baptists entitled to say that they were the only denomination who had always maintained the nullity of religious ordinances without faith, and especially on the vexed subject of baptism? Two religious sections—the Papists and Episcopalians—maintained the requisiteness of sponsors, and baptized children upon the faith of the sponsors. Their Presbyterian and many of their Congregational or Independent Brethren baptized infants upon the supposition of there being some covenant between God and the believing parent together with his children. It was assumed that there was a faith in the parents, but it was a proxy faith. Others, like Dr. Halley, threw this altogether overboard, and did not charge baptism with the requisition of faith at all, either in the infant, the parents, or relatives. The Baptists believed that that which was without faith was sin. That of course was a Truth of God in religion, but it was equally a Truth of God in many other things! A worship which did not recognize God, lacked that element of faith. The service they gave to their Master—given without faith in His right to receive it, in His authority to command it, in His gracious acceptance of it—was not an act of religiousness to Jesus! Christ came to build up a Kingdom among men. Was it a national kingdom? Did He not come to overthrow it in the form of its nationality? Did He come to set up and maintain a kingdom of combined spiritual and unspiritual elements—to put the gold and the miry clay together? Or did He come to say that they should be henceforth separated—that He would cause them to be refined, and accept that which rendered to Him spiritual services alone? In that kingdom Christ was the only Redeemer, the only Lawgiver; there were none united to Him who were not united to Him by faith. They, only, who saw Him as the Crucified, and pursued Him with the same simple faith to His Throne, were the subjects of His Kingdom, whatever their name among men! In that Kingdom there were ordinances; Christ only had a right to appoint them, and without faith in Him as their King, how could they accept them? In that Kingdom all the subjects were distinguished from the rest of the world as Believers; that was their great distinction as separated from the world whose chief characteristic was unbelief.

But then, were those ordinances of Christ's appointment purely tests of their fidelity to Him, or were they expressions of His loving will for His children—were they exhibitions of His love, or mere mandates of His authority? "If you love Me, keep My commandments, and you who do not love Me have not even to do with My commandments. You not only have no part in My righteousness; you have not to touch My commandments." He could not be served as a King who had not been trusted as the Great High Priest and Apostle of their profession! He would not allow them to lift up His ordinances, maintain His precepts, and advance His Kingdom, unless they had enshrined Him as the one Offering for sinners in their heart's affection and trust! The ordinances were given as symbols of Himself, and when the minister went down with his candidates to the baptismal font, they would see there as eloquent an exposition of Christ's Gospel as they would ever hear from the platform on which he stood! He (Mr. Thomas) never administered the ordinance without wishing he could preach as effectively and eloquently what Christ was, and what He had done for men, as that ordinance set the Gospel forth. Did not Christ say to them, "I ordain these ordinances as proofs to you of My love; I give you once in your life at least the opportunity of saying to all who are witnesses, 'I deserve to die eternally; I build my hopes for escaping that eternal death on Jesus and Jesus only'?" Once in their life at least, though they had a stammering tongue, they could tell to thousands that witnessed their baptism, that this was the basis of their faith. "Union to Christ" would be the echo of that font whenever its waters were disturbed! "Nothing but His death avails me as a sinner; my hopes were brightened when He rose from the dead and, as He lives and reigns, nothing can cloud them." And when they passed on from that ordinance to the Table of the Lord, did they say anything very different? They said in their baptism that they had come into possession of life by faith in the Savior who died—and when they participated in the memorials of His death, what did they say but that whereas they had life only by union with Him, they could live only by ceaseless union with Him? Hence the next and permanent ordinance was a meal, to show that as they sustained bodily nature by food and drink, so they had no life in them except they ate His flesh and drank His blood! With such convictions they would set forth, each one for himself, as a unit of a denomination, that they had no faith in ordinances that did not require faith in their subjects—faith in Him who ordained them!

The Rev. C. H. SPURGEON—I have several things I want to say now that a great many Baptist brethren are gathered here. The first is, let me earnestly entreat all my Brothers and Sisters to back up our Chairman in a bill which he has introduced into the House with regard to the burial of unbaptized persons. I hope that all of you read the Baptist Magazine—you certainly ought to do so. I will not say that there is any improvement on the past—I can only say it is the aim of the editors to still make improvements, and to make it more worthy of the denomination of which it is the representative. In that magazine you may have read Sir Morton's speech, which is there embalmed in amber. There is a clergyman in Newton Flottman (I do not know whether the place is as dark as Timbaktu), who has actually been carrying away the mold from his churchyard to put it on his parish land. This mold was composed of bones of the dead, an entire skull having been found in it, and a complaint was made to the clergyman, who very coolly said, "Well, but that was the corner of the church yard where they buried Baptists, Methodists, and other Dissenters;" and therefore I suppose he thought it was the best thing to do to make some use of them after they were dead! If my bones shall ever by any ill fortune come into an Episcopalian churchyard, I hope they will be used in the same way, for I should like to be of use as long as ever there is an atom of me in existence! Sir Morton is introducing a bill into Parliament to compel clergymen to allow all, indiscriminately, to be buried in the church yard. It seems to be a very hard thing, indeed, that we are to pay to keep their churches up, and yet they will not allow us a tomb! The nation lends to the Episcopalian denomination, the national edifices—surely if they will not be generous enough to pay their own repairs—they might permit us to use the national graveyard in common with themselves! At present, in the dead of night, we are put up in a

corner where the nettles grow. I have buried people in country church yards, and if I had time, I would go and do it in every churchyard, and defy anyone who dared do it, to use the law against me! If laws cannot be altered, they can be defied. It is abominable that any sect of Christians should have the opportunity of becoming obnoxious to their Brethren by fighting over the coffin of a dead child! I am as heartily at one with the Evangelicals of the Church of England as any man that lives; some of my dearest friends are members of that body, and it is a pity that they should be put in a position where they can insult the feelings of Christians by refusing to bury our dead. Let us put them out of harm's way; let every Baptist congregation send up a petition, a form of which they will find in the Baptist Magazine; let us show that Sir Morton does not represent a slender handful of men, who are inactive, but a Christian body who feel if they are to be insulted, it shall not be their fault if they do not remove the stumbling block out of their Brothers' way!

I have a project on hand for which I want to engage your sympathies. The incomes of most Baptist ministers are so miserably small that they are not able to buy books. It would do all our country Brothers good to read more Puritan theology, and have the opportunity of stocking their libraries better. I have long had this project on my mind, and some time ago I asked Mr. Nichol, an eminent publisher in Edinburgh who brought out a series of the British Poets at a cheap rate, whether, if I could get some Presbyterians and Independents to back up the scheme, and spoke myself to my Baptist Brethren, he could not reprint much of our standard divinity at a cheap rate. There will be six magnificent volumes each year for a guinea. One hundred thousand copies at the very least must be sold before he will be able to see any profit at all; and what I have to propose is that every Baptist Church throughout the country should devote one guinea at least each year to provide a library which shall permanently belong to the Church so that in the course of 100 years, there would be a splendid mass of old divinity stored away which would be read by coming generations. Some time ago I offered my deacons all the books I had, to start a library here for the use of future ministers. They did not wish me to do that, but we shall seek to get such a library that any minister after me may find a well-stored granary at hand! If all our churches do the same, and spend their money this year in backing up the admirable scheme of Mr. Heaton by purchasing the four volumes setting forth Baptist views, they will have the first installment, to which they can add, little by little, in successive years, and thus confer a gift on the denomination second to none! Then again I should like to say a good word for the iron chapel movement. I wish some of them could be bought and moved about from place to place, although for permanent buildings, I have no faith in them. They are dreadfully cold in winter, and they are frightfully hot in summer, but they may be put up very cheaply, and attempts may in this way be made to increase the number of our churches in this city.

I have been the means of opening two new churches within the last 18 months and I hope to start some more. I wish we could as a body commence fresh places, and give our services for six months, taking it in turn until we worked the place up. I do not think there is the slightest reason why we should not double our number in the next two years; it seems to me that we have got such a real hold upon the public mind, that we only need to bring our principles out. I know they will say that we are getting desperately Baptist—we must be—we shall never tell until we do, we must hold inviolable the essential union of the Church; we must stand to it that all God's people are one in Him—but why should we lower our standard any more than any other denomination? What is there about Baptism that we should be ashamed of it? What is there about the history of our Church, the power of our ministers, our poets and divines, that we should be ashamed of? When we know that we have borne the palm in poetry with Milton, in allegory with John Bunyan, and stand second to none in the ministry with Robert Hall, I think we have no reason whatever to be ashamed! Let us come straight out determined that we will restrain no part of the Truth of God! I am

glad that we have here Brothers representing different views among us. Here am I a strict Baptist, and open communion in principle; some of our Brothers are strict in communion, and strict in discipline; some are neither strict in discipline nor in communion. I think I am nearest right of any, but you all think the same of yourselves, and may God defend the right!

Mr. DICKERSON said he had been much struck with the surprising contrast of circumstances between the original formation of that Church and the present moment, and if he knew how, he would deliver a capital speech upon the words, "Then," and, "Now." "Then," when the Church was originally formed, they were not permitted to have a chapel. "Now," they were not only permitted to have a chapel, but a splendid place which they called a, "Tabernacle." When passing the building, he had tried the several points of resemblance in his own mind, to reconcile his thoughts to its being called a Tabernacle, that is—a temporary building, to be removed to different places. He supposed that was not meant, but he hoped it might always continue to be a Tabernacle, where God should dwell with men—that He who tabernacled among men might by the embodiment of His Spirit in the ministry, tabernacle with His people, and bless them with an abundant blessing. He looked upon the Church as having been formed in the year 1662. Their second pastor, in 1664, suffered persecution, imprisonment and the pillory. Benjamin Keach in that year wrote a book, called "A Child's Primer," which was deemed schismatic and wicked. He was tried at the Aylesbury Assizes in 1666, before Lord Clarendon, who, in a most wanton manner, browbeat the poor man, told the jury he should send a fellow before them presently, and he hoped they would do their duty by him. He told them that the man had written a book for the instruction of their children, and that if they learned from it, they would become as base heretics as he was himself! And he hoped they would stop his proceedings. The jury retired, but could not come to a decision, and one of them said there was a discrepancy in the indictment relating to a passage that was in the book. "Pray what is that?" said his lordship. The juror replied, "My Lord, the book says, 'that after the one thousand years reign of Christ, the rest of the dead shall be raised,' and the indictment says, 'The rest of the devils shall be raised.' " "Is that all?" said his lordship. "Is that all the difference? It is a mere slip of the pen, correct that, and find your verdict accordingly." The sentence passed on the prisoner was as follows—"The sentence of this court is—and you will consider it a very lenient one—that you stand in the pillory four hours—two hours during the market at Aylesbury; two hours during the market at Winslow; to have a label placed on your head, 'For writing and publishing a wicked and schismatic book, called 'The Child's English Primer.' Afterwards, this book to be burned before your eyes by the common hangman; you are to forfeit also £20 to the king; to find securities for your good behavior till the next assizes (that is, he was not to preach) and then to come to this court and renounce all your doctrines." That was then. The now, they saw tonight. The statements they had heard would have subjected the speakers to incarceration and the pillory. They blessed God that that monster of civil and religious tyranny, that colossus that strode over their liberties, had been slain, and they blessed Him for the liberty they enjoyed, and prayed that they might never become indifferent to its value or to the responsibilities devolving upon them.

Poor Benjamin Keach was given to understand that probably he might have greater liberty in preaching the Gospel if he came to London. So he turned his few effects into money, and started with his wife and three children. He had to travel 50 miles from Winslow to London, a frightful day's work then, and so it turned out. On a heath, a set of highwaymen attacked the coach, compelled all the passengers to alight, robbed them of everything, and then allowed them to proceed; Keach, his wife and family, were set down at the Blue Boar, Holborn Hill, without a shilling or a known friend in London. That was then. Now the express travels from Winslow to London in 55 minutes. Keach became the pastor of this church in 1668, and in 1672, a proclamation was instituted called King Charles' Indulgence—an indulgence to allow the

people to think and to tell what they thought. Well, it was a privilege, though Keach was one among the rest who saw through the scheme; it was an artful dodge, but still they availed themselves of it, and built their first chapel at Horsley Down to accommodate one thousand people, where Keach preached for the remainder of his life!

Then in the year 1688 came what was called the glorious revolution out of which arose the Act of Toleration— which ought to be perpetuated by an annual service! He (Mr. Dickerson) lived in the country till he was nearly 40 years of age, and if it had not been for a few books, he would never have known that such an Act had ever passed! Dissenters never heard anything about it. If Benjamin Keach's book was read more extensively, it would give a vast amount of information concerning the "Then" as compared with the "Now." In his book called, "Distressed Zion Relieved, or the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness," there were some very choice passages. The address to the reader concluded as follows—"Let us strive to be thankful to God, and labor to live in love with one another, and improve the present Providence (referring to the Toleration Act). For since God has graciously been pleased to do wonders for us, let us endeavor to do some great things for Him." So he said then, what would he not, and what ought not Christians to say now! It was an important thing to keep the great point of civil and religious liberty permanently before the people so that the gigantic limbs of tyranny in Church and State might never stride over their liberties again; but as their fathers fought, were pilloried, suffered loss of property, and many of them of life, and had bequeathed unto their children that inestimable blessing, it was the duty of the latter to cherish it and always keep it in view. He concluded by citing two verses of the 90th Psalm, wishing he could do so as well as the aged Dr. Rippon at the opening of New Park Street Chapel. "Let Your work appear unto Your servants, and Your glory unto their children, and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish You the work of our hands upon us; yes, the work of our hands establish You it."

Dr. JABEZ BURNS said a great number of things pressed upon his mind with regard to the Tabernacle. It appeared to him remarkable that such a building should be raised at all as a place of worship and, then, that it should be by any other than the wealthy State Church, or the wealthiest Non-conformist bodies. That it should be reared by the Baptists, who had been considered to occupy a very small place proportionately among the sections of the Christian Church, was a matter of very great surprise—especially when it was remembered that the building was mainly raised through the labors of a young minister, and during the first seven years of his pastorate! These things were really so wonderful, that if anybody had predicted their occurrence eight or nine years ago, no one would have believed it. As the building was peculiar in itself, so it was peculiar in its opening services. The Methodists had generally taken the lead in having protracted services at the opening of their chapels, but he believed the services in which they were assisting would far outdo any Methodist services as to any building in any part of the world, not only in their number, but their importance, in the various plans to be developed, the things to be suggested, and the classes of persons addressing the assemblies convened. As the building was magnificent externally and internally, and capable of holding a vast concourse of people, he would pray that it should always be filled with the Divine Presence and Glory, and that the Church within it might prosper and increase from year to year. He had been asked, "What is the great secret of Mr. Spurgeon's success?" Did anyone know? If anyone did, he would be much obliged for the information! He was inclined to think that there were a number of things connected with the secret of his success—some human, and others Divine. Some connected with himself as a man—others as a minister whom God had raised up, and abundantly blessed. Unquestionably, one secret was that he had broken through the old-fashioned conventionalities connected with the pulpit and with preaching. The pulpit had become so

stiff, starched, and stereotyped, that something was required to break it down, and to bring it into closer contact with the masses of the people. Some reference had been made to the voice of the minister, and, certainly, it was not everybody who could by ordinary speaking fill the building, though it was not as difficult to speak in as might be supposed from its size.

After speaking of the several divisions in the denomination, Dr. Burns said he had read enough of Mr. Spurgeon's sermons to know that he preached Christ, and made Him the central theme of his ministry! Among the various peculiarities which distinguished the Baptist denomination, the first was their conviction that religion was a personal thing, that it could not be hereditary, that it could not be transmitted from the ends of the fingers of priests, nor be obtained by proxy; but that in all cases religion was a personal thing, connected with spiritual illumination, with heart conviction, the regeneration of the soul, and with personal holiness. As the result of that, they held most tenaciously that if religion was necessarily a personal thing between man and God, it was not for any human authority to interfere; and therefore Baptists in all ages had been the persecuted, not the persecutors! It might be said that they had not the chance. That was a mistake, Roger Williams was banished from one of the New England States in the very depth of winter, for holding Baptist views; he was directed to the shores of Providence, and there, with his party, he founded one of the United States of America, where he gave the utmost freedom of conscience, and did not demand from any of those who chose to dwell with him the least infringement of their Christian liberties! He was the first, on that side of the Atlantic, to teach in all their depth, height, and blessed purity, the principles of religious equality! He (Dr. Burns) agreed with the last speaker that the word, "Tabernacle," was improperly applied to the building, except in one respect, and that was that, like the ancient Tabernacle, it was reared by voluntary contributions, and there was money enough and to spare. He prayed that the Lord would bless the congregation, the minister, the office bearers, Sabbath school teachers, and those who should visit the benighted heathen in that locality—and unto Him, the source of all good, should the entire glory always be given!

A vote of thanks having been accorded to the Chairman, Mr. Spurgeon pronounced the benediction, and the proceedings terminated.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/public-meeting-of-our-london-baptist-brethren/>

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