

A full-page portrait of Charles Spurgeon, a man with a full beard and dark hair, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark bow tie. He is seated in an ornate, dark wooden chair with red leather upholstery. The background is dark and indistinct.

CHARLES SPURGEON

ON RELIGIOUS GRUMBLERS

AN EXCERPT FROM JOHN PLOUGHMAN'S TALKS



new england shores baptist church



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John Ploughman's Talks by Charles Spurgeon if Public Domain

JOHN PLOUGHMAN'S TALKS

INTRODUCTION

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a Baptist pastor who became known as “The Prince of Preachers” because of his eloquent and powerful style of preaching. He also had a deep burden for the common people. Spurgeon put together a series of articles for church laymen entitled, *John Ploughman's Talk: Plain Talk For Plain People*. John Ploughman is a fictitious character that stood for the laborer whom plows his own fields. His modern-day equivalent would be the blue-collar worker or low to middle-class member who lives paycheck to paycheck.

Spurgeon had a very witty sense of humor. He employed this humor in *John Ploughman's Talk* to communicate practical spiritual truths. Sometimes his humor seems sharp, but it is very effective. He began the book by saying,

Whether I please or whether I tease,
I'll give you my honest mind;
If the cap should fit, pray wear it a bit,
If not, you can leave it behind.

“No offense is meant; but if anything in these pages should come home to a man, let him not send it next door, but get a coop for his own chickens.”

Since the series of articles were first published together in 1868, the English is not modern and can be difficult to understand sometimes. Spurgeon did use illustrations that the modern user may not understand, but the message still comes through. When possible, we included the original artwork. Please take you time and enjoy Spurgeon's wit and wisdom.

ON RELIGIOUS GRUMBLERS

When a man has a particularly empty head, he generally sets up for a great judge, especially in religion. None is so wise as the man who knows nothing. His ignorance is the mother of his impudence and the nurse of his obstinacy; and though he does not know a bee from a bull's foot, he settles matters as if all wisdom were at his fingers' ends - the Pope himself is not more infallible. Hear him talk after he has been at a meeting and heard a sermon, and you will know how to pull a good man to pieces if you never knew it before. He sees faults where there are none; and if there be a few things amiss, he makes every mouse into an elephant. Although you might put all his wit into an eggshell, he weighs the sermon in the balances of his conceit with all the airs of a born-and-bred Solomon. If it be up to his standard, he lays on his praise with a trowel; but if it be not to his taste, he growls and barks and snaps at it like a dog at a hedgehog. Wise men in this world are like trees in a



No piper ever suited all ears.

hedge; there is only here and there one. When these rare men talk together upon a discourse, it is good for the ears to hear them; but the bragging wiseacres I am speaking of are vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, and their quibbling is as senseless as the cackle of geese on a common. Nothing comes out of a sack but what was in it; and as their bag is empty, they shake nothing but wind out of it. It is very likely that neither ministers nor their sermons are perfect - the best garden may have a few weeds in it, the cleanest corn may have some chaff - but cavaliers cavil at anything or nothing, and find fault for the sake of showing off their deep knowledge. Sooner than let their tongues have a holiday, they would complain that the grass is not a nice shade of blue and say that the sky would have looked neater if it had been whitewashed.

One tribe of these Ishmaelites is made up of high-flying ignoramuses who are very mighty about the doctrine of a sermon: here they are as decisive as sledge hammers and as certain as death. He who knows nothing is confident in everything; hence they are bullheaded beyond measure. Every clock, and even the at sundial, must be set according to their watches. The slightest difference from their opinion proves a man to be rotten at heart. Venture to argue with them, and their little pots boil over in quick style; ask them for reason, and you might as well go to a sand pit for sugar. They have bottled up the sea of truth and carry it in their waistcoat pockets; they have measured heaven's line of grace and have tied a knot in a string at the exact length of electing love. As for the things which angels long to know, they have seen them all as boys see sights in a peep show at our fair. Having sold their modesty and become wiser than their teachers, they ride a very high horse and jump over all five-barred gates of Bible texts which teach doctrines contrary to their notions. When this mischief happens to good men, it is a great pity for such sweet pots of ointment to be spoiled by flies, yet one learns to bear with them just as I do with old Violet, for he is a rare horse, though he does set his ears back and throw out his legs at times. But there is a bragging lot about, who are all sting and no honey, all whip and no hay, all grunt and no bacon. These do nothing but rail from morning to night at all who cannot see through their spectacles. If they would but mix up a handful of good living with all their bushels of bounce, it would be more bear able; but no, they don't care for such legality. Men so sound as they are can't be expected to be good at anything else; they are the heavenly watchdogs to guard the house of the Lord from those thieves and robbers who don't preach sound doctrine; and if they do worry the sheep or steal a rabbit or two by the sly who would have the heart to blame them? The Lord's dear people, as they call themselves, have enough to do to keep their doctrine sound; and if their manners are cracked, who can wonder! No man can see to everything at once. These are the moles that want catching in many of our pastures, not for their own sakes, for there is not a sweet mouthful in them, but for the sake of the meadows which they spoil. I would not find half a fault with their doctrine if it were not for their spirit; but vinegar is sweet next to it, and crabs are figs in comparison. It must be very high doctrine that is too high for me, but I must have high experience and high practice with it, or it turns my stomach. However, I have said my say and must leave the subject, or somebody will ask me, what have you to do with Don Quixote's windmill?

Sometimes it is the way the preacher speaks which is hauled over the coals. Here again is a dime field for fault-finding, for every bean has its black, and every man has his failing. I never knew a good horse which had not some odd habit or other, and I never yet saw a minister worth his salt who had not some quirk or oddity: now, these are the bits of cheese which cavillers smell out and nibble at, this man is too slow, and another too fast; the first is too flowery, and the second is too dull. Dear me, if all God's creatures were judged in this way, we should wring the dove's neck for being too tame, shoot the robins for eating spiders, kill the cows for swinging their tails and the hens for not giving us milk. When a man wants to beat a clog, he can soon find a stick; and at this rate, any fool

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may have something to say against the best minister in England. As to a preacher's manner, if there be but plain speaking, none should cavil at it--because it lacks polish, for if a thing is good - and earnestly spoken, it cannot sound much amiss. No man should use bad language in the pulpit - and all language is bad which common people cannot make head or tail of but godly, sober, decent, plain words none should carp at it. A countryman is as warm in homespun as a king in velvet, and a truth is as comfortable in homely words as in fine speech. As to the way; of dishing up the meat, hungry men leave that to the cook, only let the meat be sweet and substantial. If hearers were better, sermons would be better. When men say they can't hear, I recommend them to buy a horn and remember the old saying, "There's none so deaf as those who will not hear." When young speakers get downhearted because of hard, unkind remarks I generally tell them of the old man and his boy and his ass, and what came of trying to please everybody. No piper ever suited all ears. Where whims and fancies sit in the seat of judgment, a man's opinion is only so much wind, therefore take no more notice than of the wind whistling through a keyhole.

I have heard men find fault with a discourse for what was not in it. No matter how well the subject in hand was brought out, there was another subject about which nothing was said, and so all was wrong. That is as reasonable as finding fault with my plowing because it does not dibble the holes for the beans, or



abusing a good corn field because there are no turnips in it. Does any man look for every truth in one sermon? You might as well look for every dish at one meal, and rail at a joint of beef because there are neither bacon, nor veal, nor green peas, nor parsnips on the table. Suppose a sermon is not full of comfort to the saint; yet if it warns the sinner, shall we despise it? A handsaw would be a poor tool to shave with; shall we therefore throw it away? Where is the use of always trying to hunt out faults? I hate to see a man with a fine smelling about for things to rail at like a rat catcher's dog sniffing at rat holes. By all means let us cut down error, root and branch, but do let us save our pruning shears till there are brambles to chop, and not fall foul of our own mercies. Judging preachers is a poor trade, for it pays neither party concerned in it. At a plowing match they do give a prize to the best of us; but these judges of preachers are precious slow to give anything even to those whom they profess to think so much of. They pay in praise, but give no pudding. They get the gospel for nothing, and if they doff not grumble, they thinly that they have made an abundant return.

Everybody thinks himself a judge of a sermon, but nine out of ten might as well pretend to weigh the moon. I believe that, at bottom, most people think it an uncommonly easy thing to preach, and that they could do it amazingly well themselves. Every donkey thinks itself worthy to stand with the king's horses; every girl thinks she could keep house better than her mother. But thoughts are not facts; for the sprat thought itself a herring, yet the fisherman knew better. I dare say those; who can whistle imagine that they can plow, but there's more than whistling in a good plowmen. And so let

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me tell you, there's more in good preaching than taking a text and saying, firstly, secondly, and thirdly. I try my hand at preaching myself, and in my poor way I find it no very easy thing to give the folks something worth hearing. If the line critics, who reckon us up on their thumbs, would but try their own hands at it, they might be a little more quiet. Dogs, however, always will bark, and what is worse, some of them will bite too; but let decent people do all they can, if not to muzzle them, yet to prevent them doing any great mischief. It is a dreadful thing to see a happy family of Christians broken up by talkative fault-finders, and all about nothing, or less than nothing. Small is the edge of the wedge, but when the devil handles the beetle, churches are soon split to pieces, and men wonder why. The fact is, the worst wheel of the cart creaks most, and one fool makes many, and thus many a congregation is set at odds with a good and faithful minister, who would have been a lasting blessing to them if they had not chased away their best friend. Those who are at the bottom of the mischief have generally no part or lot in the matter of true godliness, but like sparrows, fight over corn which is not their own, and, like jackdaws, pull to pieces what they never helped to build. From mad dogs grumbling professors may we all be delivered, and may we never take the complaint from either of them. Fault-finding is dreadfully catching: one dog will set a whole kennel howling, and the wisest course is to keep out of the way of a man who has the complaint called the grumbles. The worst of it is that the foot and mouth disease go together, and he who bespatters others generally rolls in the mud himself before long. "The fruit of the Spirit is love," and this is a very different apple from the sour Siberian crab which some people bring forth.

Good-bye, all ye sons of Grizzle, John Ploughman would sooner pick a bone in peace than fight over an ox roasted whole.

