

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 104 issued September 2013

Index

1. The Pastor's Letter (May 1974)– Dr. Gamaliel's Advice
2. Sermons in Candles by C.H. Spurgeon (Part 4)
3. Let a Man Examine Himself. Article by Matthew Henry
4. Letter from Mrs Seaton to the Boys and Girls – “Keep off Forgetful Green”.
5. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 63
6. Bits and Bobs! A haphazard assortment of Sweet-smelling Truths



At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine www.wicketgate.co.uk you will also find the following recordings:

- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



Podcast Service available at www.wicketgate.co.uk

Dr. Gamaliel's Advice

(The Pastor's Letter – May 1974)

When that Pharisee named Gamaliel, the doctor of the law, held in reputation by all the Jewish people, stood up and gave his advice concerning what should be done with the apostles of the Lord as they stood arraigned before the Jewish Council, he not only apparently settled the minds of his fellow-Sanhedrinists on the matter, but he also seemed to set a pattern of assessing spiritual things for generations of Christians yet unborn. You remember the basis of his counsel; “Refrain from these men,” he advises the other members of that Jewish Court, “... for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” (Acts 5 chapter 5 verses 38-39)

On face value, there is a lot in Gamaliel's advice to commend it. Men's works do come to nothing; God's works cannot be overthrown; it is a dangerous thing to be found “fighting against God.” And insofar as Christians adopt those principles and apply them with the added ingredients of pure spiritual understanding, they will not go far wrong in their assessments of the issues that confront them in these days. However, it does seem sad to say that this isn't the case, and all-too-many believing folk are all-too-inclined to apply the old Pharisee's advice in absolutely the same way that he did, and come to absolutely the same wrong conclusion as he arrived at, so rejecting the apostles and their gospel of eternal life.

Now, perhaps, that last phrase contains the whole root of the matter: - “their gospel of *eternal life*.” For the one thing that failed to enter into Gamaliel's advice, and, indeed, into his own method of assessing whether or not that apostolic thing was of God, was eternity. Yes, indeed, if a thing be merely of men it will come to nought, and if it be of God it cannot be ultimately overthrown. But Gamaliel failed to recognise that only the eternal day would fully reveal the origin of all the religious works and establishments appearing upon the earth in this short and puny realm of time. Should we ever forget that priceless glance that our dear Saviour gives us into that day of reckoning the deeds and works of men when He sets before us the case of that man who had prophesied in the Lord's name, as he claimed; in His name had cast out devils, and in His name done

many wonderful works. What a high success rating that man would have had in one of our evangelical periodicals reporting on his life's work and labours; he had enjoyed a life crowned with the fruit of his labours. Yet, what a staggering word comes from the Lord of eternity as He pronounces the true worth of those things that had seemingly been accomplished; "Depart from me, I never knew you." Who would have dared to say that all that "success" was not of God?

The answer is abundantly clear: God! Had Gamaliel been called to make an assessment, it would have been far otherwise, for Gamaliel adopted the touchstones of carnal sense, as does his followers even up to this time. Remember the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit with which that church at Jerusalem was called into being and maintained through the ministry of the Lord's apostles? Where is that splendour of that church today in that city? In fact, if Gamaliel could but walk the streets of Jerusalem today he would, no doubt, feel completely justified in his original suspicions – the church of Christ was not of God; to prove it, it has come to naught in Jerusalem.



But, as we say, Gamalielism is not dead, and, in fact, pervades the thinking of present-day Christianity. The great over-riding anxiety appears to be whether or not a thing is going to produce apparent success and favourable statistics, and not whether or not it is going to endure the eternal flame which is to raze all men's works to the ground. If it can give that appearance of success, then, obviously, it must be of God – Gamaliel said so – and if it is flagging a little and not appearing "fruitful", then obviously that state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue, and so, the "evidences of success" must be sought and achieved at any cost. Needless to say, we are never to rest in our meagre labours, or the fruits of them, but we are to continually seek the Lord to send us a blessing, being absolutely committed in the work of the gospel to the praise of His name. But we are also to remember that upon the same foundation it is possible to build with "precious stones," or with "wood, hay and stubble," and again, it is only eternity that will reveal which was which.

You see, of course, the great defect in Gamaliel's counsel: he failed to apply to the *real* touchstone for assessing the things of religion. He looked around him and declared that it was possible to measure an eternal God by temporal sight; he looked into the realms of history – the case of Theudas and then Judas of Galilee; he looked to the possibility of “could be” - it could be of God even. But the one place that he did not look was the only one place that could have provided him with an answer and brought forth an entirely different scheme of assessing into his words and thinking. He did not look to the Word of God! Had he searched the Scriptures in the light of the apostolic message that Peter had just delivered who knows that there might never have been such an utterance, and never have been such a process as evangelical Gamalielism. Be that as it may, there is no justification for the believing people of God in giving it houseroom now that it has appeared.

Although “recorded” in the Word of the Lord, it is not an infallible directive for the people of God, for it wasn't even spoken by a regenerate believer, but by a stiff-necked old Pharisee who only proved to be instrumental in having the apostles flogged for their refusal to lay off speaking the words of the gospel. But, the believers' court of appeal is not Gamaliel, but God. It is not the “results” apparent to our natural senses that determines whether a thing is of God or men, but the ever abiding Word that is constantly telling us, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” Of course, Gamaliel's behaviour is classical, really. He doesn't turn to that word of God's truth, and so, is permitted to keep himself in that most flesh-satisfying position of all when it comes to man and his God; he permits himself the glory of *indecision*. He can't *really* say what the true position is, and so, he will stand uncommitted on account of that. The application there should be clear to us all; is it not true that we love to remain agnostic – without knowledge – in a lot of things concerning the position and state of the church today, and the direction we should be taking in the light of God's truth. To turn to the Word of God would be to leave us standing absolutely without excuse in a dozen-and-one areas, and prove the validity of the old hymn, “Neutral you cannot be.” And so, the word of God as the touchstone and director and assessor of our doings and behaviour is set in the background, and Dr. Gamaliel's method of diagnosis has come to hold the field.

Look around you today, and what determines much of our Christian thinking and behaviour? Is it God's eternal and infallible truth that will yet judge all things in the light of an eternal day? We fear that it is most often the counsel and doctrine of that Christ-defying Pharisee of the Jewish nation who only gave his carnal advice to meet an evil situation that that nation had found itself embroiled in. My friends, these things ought no to be; His word is the lamp to our feet.

Sincerely
W. J. Seaton



Sermons in Candles
By C.H. Spurgeon
(part 4)



Here is a candle which is in a lantern of a tolerably respectable sort. At least, it was respectable long ago, and you might not now have noticed its forlorn condition if it had not been for the candle within. As soon as you place a light within, the imperfections of the lantern are shown up; and it is the same with human character. Many a man would have seemed a decent sort of fellow if he had not professed to be a Christian; but his open profession of religion fixed many eyes upon him and his imperfections were at once observed by all observers. He who unites with a Church and takes upon himself the name of Christ claims a higher character than others; and if he is not true to his profession, his inconsistency is marked, and very justly so. How often do we see that an unconverted man may steal a horse, but a Christian man must not even look over the hedge at it! That which is winked at in a man of the world is a grave fault in a Christian. Prominent persons are looked at through microscopes. The more light you have the more your faults will be shown up and observed. We have heard of a wonderful preacher of whom they said that he preached so well and lived so badly



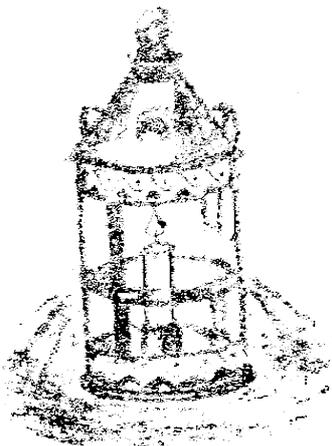
that when he was in the pulpit, they thought he ought never to come out of it; but when he was out of the pulpit they changed their minds, and sorrowfully concluded that he ought never to go into it again.

Butchers, it seems, were accustomed to do their work with a candle fastened upon their foreheads. There is an old story of one who had lost his candle and travelled all around his premises searching for it by its own light!



The parable is this: a person full of doubts and fears about his personal condition before God is searching for grace within, by the light of that very grace for which he is looking. He is fearfully anxious because he can see no trace of gracious anxiety in his mind. He feels sad because he cannot feel sad. He repents because he cannot repent. He has the candle on his forehead, and is seeing by the light of it, and yet he is searching for that very light, without which he could not search at all.

Here is a sputtering candle – (I can give a specimen of it in actual fact, but I do not know how to sketch the sputter on paper.) You can light the thing, but it seems to spit at you, and crackles as if in a bad temper. We once had among us a good brother who would always give, and give generously, too, but he took the money out in grumbling. He thought that there were far too many appeals; he thought that the thing ought to be provided for in another way; he thought – in fact, he seemed to be full of discontented thought. But he always ended up by saying, “There's my share of it”. Our sputter candle has now got over his weakness, for he has burned out his damp bit. And whenever you or I come to a cantankerous half-hour, may we get through it as fast as possible. Go into your growlery and get it over: better still, go into the secret place, and get it under.



Here is a common lantern. The wind may blow, but the candle is safe within. The groom can cross the stable yard in a shower of rain or in a fall of snow when his light is thus safeguarded. On board ship also, the lantern is of utmost use; for even a gale of wind will not blow out the candle which is secured in a good lantern.

And surely God will preserve his own gospel, though popes and monks, men of “modern thought”, and theoretical scientists blow at its candle with all the fury of fiends. Burn on O sacred Light, that by thee men may be guided to the haven of rest!

The Providence of God is the great protector of our life and usefulness; and under the Divine care we are perfectly safe from every danger.

“Plagues and deaths around me fly;
Till He please I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love see fit.”

*Let a Man
Examine Himself*

*Matthew Henry's Instructions for
the Right Receiving of The Lord's
Supper.*

Now, the duty most required in our preparation for the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, is that of self-examination. He that desires the Lord's Supper desires a good work. But let these also first be proved, let them prove their own selves, and so, let them come, upon that condition, and with that preparation.

1. We must examine ourselves, as metal is examined by the touchstone whether it be right or counterfeit. We have a show of religion; but are we what we seem to be? Are we current coin, or only washed over as “a potsherd covered with silver dross?” The word of God is the touchstone by which we must try ourselves. Can I through grace answer the characters which the Scriptures give of those whom Christ will own and save? It is true, the best coin has an alloy, which will be allowed for in this state of imperfection; but the question is, is it sterling – is it standard? Are the interests of Christ the prevailing interests in my soul above those of the world, and the flesh? I bear God's image and superscription; is it of God's own stamping? When we are bid to try the spirits, it is supposed we must begin with our own, and try them first.

2. We must examine ourselves, as a malefactor is examined by the magistrate, so that we may find out what we have done amiss. We are all criminals - "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We are all prisoners to the Divine justice, and in order that we may not be judged of the Lord, we are commanded to judge ourselves. We must enquire into the particular crimes we have been guilty of, and their circumstances that we may discover more sins, and more of the evil of them, than at first we are aware of. We must dig into the wall as Ezekiel did and see the secret abominations of our own hearts; look further, as he did, and you will see more and greater. The heart is deceitful and has many devices. We have, therefore, need to be very particular and strict in examining them, and to give them that charge which Joshua gave to Achan, when he had him under examination; "Give glory unto the God of Israel, and make a confession unto him; tell me now what thou hast done, hide it not from me."

3. We must examine ourselves, as a copy is examined against the original to find out the errata (printing errors) that they may be corrected. As Christians, we profess to be "epistles of Christ;" to have His law and love transcribed into our hearts and lives. But we are concerned to enquire whether it be a true copy, by comparing ourselves with the gospel of Christ; whether our affections and conversations be conformable to it, and such as become it. How far do I agree with it, and what are the disagreements? What mistakes are there? What blots and what omissions? So that what has been amiss may be pardoned, and what *is* amiss may be rectified. In this examination, faith must read the original; and then, let conscience read the copy. And be sure that it be read true, because there will shortly be a review.

4. We must examine ourselves, as a candidate is examined that stands for preferment. Enquiry is made into his fitness for the preferment he stands for. We are candidates for heaven, the highest preferment – to be to our God, kings and priests. We stand for a place at the wedding-feast: Have we on the wedding-garment? Are we made meet for the inheritance? What knowledge have we? What grace? Are we skilled in the mystery we make profession of? What improvement have we made in the school of Christ? What proficiency in divine learning? What testimonials have we to produce? Can we show the seal of the Spirit of promise? If not, we shall not be welcome.

5. We must examine ourselves, as a wife is examined concerning her consent in the confirming of the marriage covenant. A covenant is to be ratified between God and our souls in the Lord's Supper. Do we freely and cheerfully consent to that covenant? Am I willing to make this surrender of myself unto the Lord? We must examine ourselves as Joshua examined the people, whether they would choose to serve the Lord or not. And the product of our enquiry must be a fixed resolution like theirs, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord."

6. We must examine ourselves, as a wayfaring man is examined concerning his business. Our trifling hearts need to be examined as vagrants – whence they come, whither they go, and what they would have. We are coming to a great ordinance, and should be concerned to enquire what is our purpose in coming? What brings us here? Is it only custom or company that draws us to this duty? Or is it a spiritual appetite for the dainties of heaven? Our hearts must be catechised as Elijah was, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Boys and Girls

(Letter from Mrs Seaton)

Once upon a time there was a little boy called Johnny who had a bad memory. One day his mother asked him to run down to the grocer's shop for a box of spice. She needed the spice for the cake she was starting to mix. "Hurry now, Johnny, and come straight back home with the spice, because I'm waiting for it," his mother reminded him. So, off went Johnny feeling quite important.

He reached the shop in record time, bought the spice, and then, started off home, putting the box of spice in his pocket for safe keeping. As he was passing the village playing field, he noticed some of his friends playing football. "Come on, Johnny, have a game with us, we're a man short for the team." Would you believe it? Johnny puffed out his chest, stretched his full height, and ran over to join the game, completely forgetting that his mother was waiting for the spice.

What a good game he had; he had scored a goal, too! Johnny was still thinking about the game when he went in through the garden gate. But not for long, for there was his mother waiting at the door. Oh dear, she was angry. And what was Johnny's excuse? That's right: "I forgot."

I wonder how many boys and girls have bad memories like Johnny? Most of you, I'm sure. When you do something you shouldn't, or fail to do something you should, you usually explain by saying, like Johnny, "I forgot." Two little words, but they can do so much harm. Not only in ordinary everyday things, but, more especially, in important things such as the things you are taught in Sunday school and Church about God and His blessings, and His promises, and especially His gift to us, the Lord Jesus Christ Who died that we might be forgiven.

In the second part of the Pilgrim's Progress, Mr Greatheart says to Christiana (Pilgrim's wife) and her children, "You must know that *Forgetful Green* is the most dangerous place in all these parts."

Boys and girls, don't be betrayed by your bad memories, but always try to remember all that God has said through the Bible – His Holy Word. Don't wander on to "Forgetful Green." Do what the Bible says: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

Yours Sincerely,
Mrs Seaton

Gleanings from the Psalms

(Psalm 63)



Title: - "A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah."
Even in Canaan though a fruitful land, and the people numerous, yet there were wildernesses ... There are Psalms proper for a wilderness; and we have reason to thank God it is the wilderness of Judah we are in, not the wilderness of Sin.

Matthew Henry

Verse 1. “Oh God, thou art *my God* ...” While the atheist says, “No God,” and the heathen worship “gods many,” the true believer says, “O God, thou art *my God*.” He is so, 1. by Choice, 2. by Covenant, 3. by Confession.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 1. “O God, ... my soul thirsteth for thee ...” 'Tis undoubtedly a greater mercy to have a spiritual appetite for the means of grace, and to be providentially debarred from enjoying them, than to have the opportunity without the appetite.

James Lee

Verse 3. “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.” Is it possible that any man should love another and not commend him, nor speak of him? If thou hast but a hawk or a hound that thou lovest, thou wilt commend it; and can it stand with love to Christ? You shall see the Spouse (Song of Solomon 5; 9 and 16) when she was asked what her beloved was above others, she sets him out in every part of him, and concludes with this, “He is altogether lovely.” “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,” says David, “my lips shall praise thee,” and “I shall bless thee while I live.” I tell you it will be one main reason why you desire to live, that you may make the Lord Jesus known to your children, friends, acquaintances, that so in the ages to come His name might ring, and His memorial might be of sweet odour, from generation to generation. If before thy conversion, especially, thou hast poisoned others by thy vain and corrupt speeches, after thy conversion thou wilt seek to reason the hearts of others by a gracious, sweet, and wise communication of savoury and blessed speeches. What the Lord has taught thee, thou wilt take it unto others, for the sake of Him whom thou lovest.

Thomas Sheppard

Verse 5. “My soul shall be satisfied”

“Ever full, but hungry ever,
What they have, they still desire.
Never suffer surfeit's loathing,
Nor yet famine's torment dire.
Hungry still, they eat, and eating,
Still the sacred food require.”

Peter Damiano

Verse 6. “While I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate ...” The “meditation” of anything hath more sweetness in it than bare remembrance. The memory is the chest to lay up a truth, but meditation is the palate to feed upon it. The memory is like the ark in which the manna was laid up; meditation is like Israel's eating of the manna. When David began to meditate upon God, it was sweet to him as marrow. There is as much difference between a truth remembered and a truth meditated upon, as between a cordial in the glass, and a cordial drunk down.

John Wells

Verse 6. “... and meditate on thee in the night watches.” There were “night watches” kept in the Tabernacle for praising God - “Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 134 verse 1) – and it is probable that David, when he was at liberty, joined with the Levites in this. But now that he could not keep *place* with them, he kept *time* with them, and wished himself among them - “I will meditate on thee in the night watches.”

Matthew Henry

Verse 7. “Because thou has been my help ...” God is the help of His people; **1. In duty.** He helps His people here. There is nothing which God requires of His people, as to be done by them, but Himself helps them in the doing of it. He is not like the Egyptian task-masters, which require brick and give not straw wherewithal to make it. **2. In Conflict.** He assists here also. As when the Israelite and Egyptian strove together, Moses came in and helped the Israelite, even so does God with us, when we are wrestling and struggling with Satan, who is our spiritual enemy. The Lord is nigh to help us, which may encourage us still in our resistance and opposition; we have a mighty second to stand for us and take up or quarrel. **3. In Affliction.** God helps His people; namely, to bear patiently those crosses which He lays upon them. He takes part in their sufferings, and in all their afflictions, He Himself is afflicted.

Thomas Horton

Bits and Bobs

*Dictionary definition of “bits and bobs”
A haphazard assortment.*

The Labours of Preaching – by William Gurnall.

In this labour there must be:-

- 1) The labour of study *before* preaching.
 - 2) The labour of zeal and love *in* preaching.
 - 3) The labour of suffering *after* preaching.
 - 4) The labour of prayer *to crown the whole* with success.
-

Two Useful Pets: -

John Newton tells the story of an old couple of his acquaintance who were infamous in a small village on account of their constant quarrelling and bickering with one another. All of a sudden, he tells us, the strife ceased, and the couple were seen to live in absolute harmony and consideration for one another. They had, in fact, been converted by the grace of God to their hearts, and let it be known to the village – through the village gossip who called on them one day to ascertain the source of their new behaviour – only to be told that they now kept “two Scripture bears” in the house. The first was “Bear ye one another's burdens,” and the second was, “Forbearing one another in love.” The names of their two useful pets were, Bear and Forbear.

Personal Piety – by Robert Bruce 1554-1631 past Minister of St. Giles, Edinburgh.

“May I count God to be mine, and may I say in my heart and conscience that God is a God to me. For it is but a general thing to know that God is good, if I know not that He is a God to me. So if thou in thy heart can say and be assured that 'God is a God to me,' that heart makes God to be the armour of it, to be the storehouse out of which it seeks provision. It converses perpetually with God, and depends ever upon His providence; it

counts the presence of God when in bondage to be liberty; in poverty it counts the presence of God to be riches; in sickness it counts the presence of God to be health. Now he that may say, 'God is a God to me', will not run to man, but to God, and will depend upon the help of God.”

The Natural Man – by Thomas Boston.

The natural man is a spiritual monster.

- (1) His heart is where his feet should be – fixed upon earth.
 - (2) His heel is lifted up against heaven – which his heart should be set on.
 - (3) His face is toward hell – his back towards heaven.
 - (4) He loves what he should hate and hates what he should love.
 - (5) He joys for what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he ought to rejoice in.
 - (6) He glories in his shame and is ashamed of his glory.
 - (7) He abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor.
-

William Gurnall wrote: -

“Say not that thou has royal blood in thy veins, and art born of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy.”

John Newton wrote: -

By whom was David taught
To aim the dreadful blow,
When he Goliath fought,
And laid the Gittite low?
No sword, nor spear,
The stripling took,
But chose a pebble from the brook.

'Twas Israel's God and King
Who sent him to the fight;
Who gave him strength to sling,
And skill to aim aright:
Ye feeble saints,
Your strength endures,
Because young David's God is yours.
