

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 111 issued November 2014

Index

1. The Pastor's Letter – Self-willed behaviour a path to heartache. (May 1975)
2. Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers
3. A Child's Immortal Soul by J. C. Ryle
4. A Mother at Prayer by Ruby Tobias
5. Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls – "Sweeter Than Honey"
6. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 68 (Concluded)



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

Self-willed Behaviour
A Path to Heartache (*and Poverty of Soul*)
(Pastor's Letter May 1975)

Dear Friends,

It is one of the great and precious truths of the Word of God that God not only knows how to redeem His people, but also how to restore His people when, by their self-willed behaviour, they would turn to their own ways and follow out their own paths that ultimately lead them to heartache and poverty of soul.

One of the Bible's outstanding examples of this is the fall and consequent restoration of that man, Simon Peter. Peter very much furnishes us with a loud warning bell, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and yet, at the same time, sets before us an anchor of hope that "God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able." Peter's denial of the Lord that night in the judgment hall of Israel's High Priest is, in many respects, unique: nevertheless, we completely miss part of the purpose of its being recorded in the Bible (which is, our admonition) if we fail to look to it and learn from it by way of principle.

Now, the strange things about Peter that night – and some thing which we, perhaps, overlook at times – is this: that, in reality Peter was never really in any danger when he began to be questioned about his relationship with Jesus Christ by those who were assembled in Caiaphas's palace. This fact emerges very clearly in the apostle John's account of the incident where he speaks about that "other disciple." That man who was "known to the High Priest," and who "went in with them" to the High Priest's palace, and who "spake unto her that kept the door" and brought Peter in also. It seems more than clear that the "other disciple" was none other than John himself, for it is a favourite title for himself throughout his gospel, and Peter and he were ever close to one another, even right into the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. But, you see the situation? Here was "another disciple"

of this man Jesus of Nazareth present in that judgment hall that night. This "other disciple" was known to the High Priest, and yet, was able to move with perfect freedom in his palace. And not only that, but he is in a position to even ask a favour of the young portress who kept the gate, and have that favour granted in the admittance of his fellow-disciple Peter.

As far as danger was concerned that night, then, Simon Peter's danger was Simon Peter! And the fact of the matter is, humanly speaking, Peter should never have been near Caiaphas's hall, for his physical presence in that place simply bespeaks his spiritual condition that will finally show itself when he denies the Lord for the third time with oaths and curses.

Just when the malady began is hard to say; but most certainly the deadly symptoms were beginning to show themselves with Peter's failure to reconcile his mind to the thought of a suffering Messiah in the land of Israel. The idea of such a Christ was totally alien to the Judaistic theology that he held in common with most. And as the Saviour began to speak about "going up to Jerusalem" to be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles to be "crucified," Peter was repelled in his innermost heart and deemed it virtuous to withstand Jesus to the face – "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee." You get it again, on the mountain of transfiguration, where the Lord speaks with Moses and Elijah concerning "his *decease* which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." As soon as that ominous note sounds in Peter's ears he is immediately caught up with the thought of building three booths – three shelters – for, he says, "it is good for us to be here." Indeed, as far as Peter was concerned at that time, it was good for them to be *anywhere* other than on that road to Jerusalem where Christ had set His face steadfast as a flint to go.

The process continues in many forms and reaches one of its highest heights earlier on in that night of denial when Peter draws his sword and slashes off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest. If this Messiah is not going to take up the sword to establish and defend His kingdom, then, Peter is going to have to do it for Him!

It would have been well for Peter if he had remembered the words of Jesus just spoken when he had found the disciples incapable of "watching" with Him "one hour"; "Watch and pray, that ye may enter not into temptation." In the battle of the flesh, Peter was a tyrant as he swung that sword in the face of the Roman band (600 men) and the Temple police force, but in the battle of the spirit, he had proved himself a soldier who had slept at his post. And as Peter stood outside the door of Caiaphas's palace that same night he was still fighting that battle that Christ had never ordered him to enter into. He was still adamant that the Christ must set Himself up as the Deliverer of the nation of Israel, and so, must be kept back from this cross on Golgotha at all costs.

How blinkered poor old Peter was at that particular time in his life. Could the Lord not have delivered Himself from those men if He had desired to do so? Indeed, yes! He has done that on several occasions because as John has told us, "His hour was not yet come." But, on that night when He entered Gethsemane His "hour" had "fully come." That same omnipotent power, of course, is still on display in that garden of Gethsemane, for it is the word of omnipotence that causes those Roman soldiers and the others to go back and fall to the ground. In Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus has come to stand as the sacrifice, but He is the Sovereign sacrifice! But, Peter has failed to fully comprehend that display of sovereign power, and must needs protect the King of kings with a sword of steel! "Shall we smite with the sword?" he cries out with the others; but he doesn't wait for any answer from Christ! Oh, no, not Peter; Peter has established his line of reasoning, and it is Jesus who had deviated from the accepted Messianic path.

And so, he follows him "afar off," as it says in the gospels. As one gospel writer puts it, "he went in to see the end." Surely his sword would be called for yet; surely Jesus would yet call down fire from heaven on these Roman occupiers of Israel and usher in the day of liberation; surely it was only a matter of time before Christ would emerge in His true role and lead His army forth. But, my friends, as the minutes ticked away into hours, and no display of carnal power

was forthcoming from the Saviour, then Peter's false hopes vanished and the vestiges of true hope had been so dulled with the false that strength was wanting, and denial had her perfect work.

The lesson of Peter's behaviour; the warning bell, if you like, is a very clear and distinct one. There is hope and strength and peace of heart and mind only in those things which the Lord has given us to believe. False hopes are like the false foundations that they rest on and will eventually crumble and fall, and great will be the fall of them. The fall of Simon Peter is very solemn, and, like several other similar accounts in scripture, is written for our learning and our admonition.

Yet, if the fall of Peter is solemn, and sounds a bell in our hearing, then, surely, the restoration of Peter is precious and gives experience to the psalm, "He restoreth my soul." The steps of the denial are marked out very clearly in all the gospels as Peter, once, twice, three times, denies any knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the Lord. But, the steps of the restoration of Peter are no less clear if we take the "combined" account of all the four evangelists. And, can we say this? The Lord's means of restoring Peter are so like the Lord in all His ways who "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."

The first thing you get, of course, is the crowing of that cock. There is nothing unusual about a cock crowing, of course; it is daybreak; they have had the Lord Jesus on trial all that long night through, and now, it is the break of day, and the cock cries out. In fact, it was so common-place that no one even apparently noticed it; except Peter, of course, for to Peter it was the loud prophetic sound in the deed he had just committed. Matthew tells us that when the cock crowed, then "Peter remembered the words of Jesus." How telling! The providence of the cock crowing was significant to Peter only in the light of the words of Christ already spoken. That lesson must never be lost: all providences are to be interpreted in the light of God's word, not the opposite way round. And then, says Luke, when the cock had crowed, "Jesus turned and looked at Peter." What a look that must have been, as the Lord who has now been beaten and spat upon

turns and looks into the face of Simon Peter – the mighty in the flesh who has been more than willing to be zealous for his own view of things, but who now stands at the fire with those soldiers as though he were more one with them than with his Saviour.

Those events, then even before the Lord has left Caiaphas's judgment hall, are the first steps in Peter's restoration, for, with that look we are told, "Peter went out and wept bitterly".

The way back to the Saviour is invariably paved with heart-searching and repentance. But, that isn't the end of the matter, for there is to come one of the most precious scenes of reconciliation that the Bible ever sets before us. You get it in the last chapter of John's gospel: The disciples have gone fishing, for, as far as they can ascertain, the Saviour has been crucified and His body buried away in the bowels of the earth. Suddenly, however, they see Him walking by the seashore, and when He has given them instructions how they will land a catch, they begin to recognise Him, and eventually they and their catch come to the shore. Now, it says in verse 9, "As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." An insignificant remark we might think; but, not so. My friends, one question comes streaming out of that verse, and it is this: Who built that fire? The disciples? No, no, for they are in the ship, or making their way to the fire. But Jesus built that fire! And Jesus built that fire to good purpose, for our Lord "reconstructs" the scene where Peter denied Him by the fire in Caiaphas's hall three times. And as there had been a threefold denial by Peter at that fire, so there will now fall from his lips a threefold profession of love and allegiance – "Thou knowest that I love thee" – once, twice, three times over.

But still the story isn't told, my friends. Soon after the Day of Pentecost, the storms of persecution begin to gather for the young Church of Christ, and the first two saints to appear before the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem are Peter and John. Where do they appear? "They appear "in the midst" of the Jewish court – and in the High Priest's judgment hall. And, this time, they are in much danger, and

again, the questions are issued regarding this man Jesus of Nazareth: and again, Peter's voice is heard to echo around those walls. But what a contrast from that former time: "Then Peter," it says, "filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them ..." What words came forth: this "Jesus of Nazareth" is owned and exalted to the heights of heaven itself; He is "the stone which was set at nought of you builders," but is now become "the head of the corner;" and let them all know assuredly that there is "no salvation in any other," and "none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Is that Peter! Yes, that is Peter: "ransomed, healed, *restored*, forgiven," and "Who like he His praise should sing?" Now he has a better sword – "A right Jerusalem blade" - and this sword he may continuously swing in the furtherance and defence of the Kingdom of grace. The Lord knows how to restore His people.

Yours sincerely
W.J. Seaton

Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers

Part 1 – What is Eccentricity?

From the earliest period it has been found impossible for the messengers whom God has sent to suit their style of utterances to the tastes of all. In all generations useful preachers of the gospel have been objected to by a portion of the community. Mere chips in the porridge may escape censure and mildly win the tolerance of indifference, but decided worth will be surrounded by warm friends and redhot foes. He who hopes to preach so as to please everybody must be newly come into the ministry; and he who aims at such an object would do well speedily to leave its ranks.

But let us pay our attention to this dreadful word "*eccentric*", and then see by what means it has been fixed upon certain preachers of the gospel, and those not the least in usefulness.

What is it to be eccentric? The short and easy method for determining the meaning of a word is to go to the dictionary. Dr. Samuel Johnson, what say you? The sage replies, "it signifies deviating from the centre, or not having the same centre as another circle." I suppose, then, the popular meaning is that a man is off the circle, or in a more vulgar phrase, "Off the square." But the point is, who is to tell us what the square is, and who is to decide which circle a man is bound to follow? Circle A is eccentric to circle B, but circle B is quite as much eccentric to circle A. A man called me a Dissenter the other day, and I admitted that I dissented from him; but I charged him with being a Dissenter because he dissented from me. Such terms, if they are to be accurately employed, require a fixed standard. And in the case of "eccentricity" we need first to settle a centre and a circumference, from which we may depart. God grant that we may not be eccentric towards God either as to holiness, or truth, for that were fatal. But when fashion and custom mark out ill-proportioned imitations of the circle of perfection, it may be grandly right to be eccentric, for an eccentric path many of the saints have trodden as they have tracked the narrow way in the teeth of the many who pursue the downward road. From such consecrated eccentricity comes martyrs, reformers, and the leaders of the advance guard of freedom and progress.

But as to preachers and their mode of procedure, what is eccentricity? Who is to fix the centre? Shall this important task devolve upon those gentlemen who buy lithographed sermons and preach them as their own? These men are in no danger of violating propriety in the excess of their zeal, for their discourses are cut and dried for them at wholesale establishments. Are we all to purchase spiritual food for our flocks, at the liberal rate of half a guinea a quarter for thirteen sermons, to be exchanged at Lady-day, Midsummer, Michaelmas, and Christmas? If these things be so, I suppose that we who think out our

own sermons, and deliver them fresh from our hearts, will be regarded as odd fellows.

Who is to fix the centre of the circle? Shall we give the compasses into the hand of the high-flying brethren whose rhetoric towers are in the clouds, and is shrouded and lost in them? Their big words are by no means needful on account of the greatness of their matter, but seem to be chosen upon the principle that the less they have to say the more pompous must be their phrases. Dr. Bloomfield tells me that a certain verger said to him, "Do you know I have been a verger of this church for fifty years, and though I have heard all the great sermons preached in this place I am still a Christian!" Now, are these dealers in words and dreams to fix the centre? If so, we intend to be eccentric; and blessed be God we are not alone in that resolve. There are others who join with us in the opinion that to be studying the prettiness of elocution, and the fancies of philosophy, while men are perishing around us, is the brutal eccentricity of a Nero, who fiddled while Rome was burning, and sent his galleys to fetch sand from Alexandria while the populace died for want of bread.

Where then, is the centre to be found? Am I directed to yonder vestry? I beg pardon – sacristy. If you will open that door, you will perceive a considerable number of cupboards, presses, and recesses. Where are we? Is this a milliner's shop? Or a laundry? Or both? Those linen garments reflect great credit upon the washer-woman and ironer. But the establishment is not a laundry, for here hang black gowns, and white gowns, and raiment as fine as Joseph's coat. And what a variety! Here, young man, fetch the ecclesiastical dictionary! Here we have an alb and an amice, a cope for the parson, and a corporal for the bread and wine, and – well, there's no end of the concerns! We are not well instructed in the terminology of these drapery establishments, but we are informed that these things are not to be treated with levity, seeing that therein abideth much grace, which ministereth to the establishment of the saints.

In truth, we have small care to linger among these resplendent rags. But assuredly, if the centre of gravity lies with gentlemen who thus

bedizen their corporal frames, we prefer to be eccentric, and dress as other male humanities are wont to do. The centre is not here. They that wear soft raiment are in the king's houses, but the King of kings cares nothing for the finery and foppery of the ecclesiastical parade.

As to this supposed centre of the circle, which we have tried in vain to settle, it may be as well to remark that it is not fixed, and never can be fixed. And it would be a very great pity if the centre of the circle could be fixed by a decree like that of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. If we could settle once and for all what is concentric and what is eccentric, it would be a very serious evil, for the differences of utterance and modes of address among God's ministers serve a very useful purpose. When Dr. Owen said that he would give all his learning to be able to preach like the tinker, John Bunyan, he spake not wisely, unless he meant no more than to extol honest John. For Owen's discourses, profound, solid, weighty, and probably heavy, suited a class of persons who could not have received Bunyan's delightfully illustrated preaching of the plain gospel. No, Dr. Owen, you had better remain Dr. Owen, for we could in no wise afford to lose that mine of theological wealth which you have bequeathed to us. You would have looked very awkward if you had tried to talk like the marvellous dreamer, and he would have played the fool if he had imitated you.

Rowland Hill used to liken the unconverted to a number of pigs that he had one day seen following a butcher to the slaughterhouse. He marvelled at their willingness, until he discovered that the butcher had a pocketful of peas which he dropped on the way so that the pigs followed on happily to the slaughter, like sinners being led to hell by the devil's devices. If God moves a Rowland Hill to speak of pigs, it will be better than if he descanted upon purling brooks, or blue-eyed seraphim. Taste may be shocked, but what of taste when men are to be aroused from the fatal slumbers of indifference. It disgusts me to see a man whom God's word declares to be "condemned already" giving himself airs, and affecting to be too delicate to hear a homely sentence. He is course enough to despise the altogether lovely One.

Critics may take out their penknives to gore and gash, but honest hearts delight in the earnest man whom the world sets down as ----
---- *An Eccentric Preacher.*



A Child's Immortal Soul.

Train your children with this principle continually before your eyes; that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.

Precious, no doubt are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part that will never die. This is the thought that should be uppermost in your mind in all that you do for your children. In every step that you take about them, do not leave out that mighty question "How will this affect their souls?"

Soul love is the soul of all love. A Christian must be no slave to fashion if he would train his children for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways merely because it is usual. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short – the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his child for heaven rather than for earth – for eternity rather than for time – for God rather than for man – he is the parent that will be called wise at the last.

J. C. Ryle

A Mother at Prayer

And while she darns the children's socks,
She prays for little stumbling feet;
Each folded pair within its box
Fits faith's bright sandals, sure and fleet.

While washing out, with mother pains,
Small, dusty suits, and frocks, and slips,
She prays that God may cleanse the stains
From little hands, and hearts, and lips.

And when she breaks the fragrant bread,
Or pours a portion in each cup,
For grace to keep their spirits fed
Her mother-heart is lifted up.

O busy ones, whose souls grow faint
Whose tasks seem longer than the day
It doesn't take a cloistered saint
To find a little time to pray.

Ruby Tobias



Dear Boys and Girls,

I wonder if you have ever read the words of David in the 119th psalm where he says that God's words are like "honey" in his mouth. Here are the words, in the 103rd verse of that psalm: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."

Now David, of course, was once a little boy like so many of you, and David had to go along to school from day to day, just like many of

you have. But, the school that David would have gone to many years ago in the land of Israel would be unlike most of the schools that most of you now attend in this day. For one thing David would sit on the floor in his school, and his teacher would sit on the floor, as well! Then, David wouldn't have a book to do his lessons on, but he would have a large piece of slate, and on this slate he would write his lessons from day to day. One of the most important lessons that David would have to do would be to write the letters of the Word of God on his slate, and because this was such an important lesson, the teacher did a very special thing each day.

When all the children had finished their writing of God's Word on their slate, the teacher would go round all the children and look for the one who had done the best. He would then take that child's slate and, then, boys and girls, David's teacher would do something that I'm certain you have never seen your school-teacher do – he would dip his finger into a little jar of honey that he had by his side and, then, he would take his finger with the honey on it, and he would "go over" the letters of the word of God on that slate. After that, he would sprinkle some sugary flour over the honey on the slate, and then, came the best part of all for the pupil whose slate had been chosen as the best: the teacher would hand the slate back to that pupil who would then lick all that scrumptious honey into his mouth, and then, smack his lips when it was finished!

Now, boys and girls, I'm sure David often got the prize when he was a little boy in a school just like that; and, perhaps, that's what he remembers in that 119th psalm when he says that God's words are sweeter than honey to his mouth. That honey that he licked off his slate was, indeed, sweet, but how sweet and precious he knew God's Word in the Bible to be, for it told him about his God and about the Saviour who was to come.

I trust boys and girls, that the bible will be like that to each of you.

Mrs Seaton.

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 68 – Concluded)



Verse 20. "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." The Lord is here set forth as a doorkeeper of the house of death, and no matter how the issues of "death" present themselves to the Elect of God, the God, who is "the God of salvation," has all the issues in hand. From spiritual death He called them by the effectual working of His power and Spirit; from "deaths abundant" He delivers them every waking hour of their temporal lives upon this earth; and in that great eternal day – even when they are "in the graves" – they shall all "hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth ... unto the resurrection of life." Indeed, He has given us "the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead."

Verse 26. "Bless ye God in the congregations ..." Our business, when assembled, must be to *bless* God in our congregations; and a pleasant work this is. Israel had reasons, and great reasons, to bless the Lord; but Christians have more. Thank Him for His unspeakable gift; bless Him for the means of grace; extol Him for the hopes of glory. This is an employment that fits us for heaven. The tears of a mourner in God's house were supposed to defile His altar. We may mourn for sin; but a fretful spirit – discontented and unthankful – defiles His altar still. "Bless ye God in the congregations ..."

Andrew Fuller

Verse 27. "There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali." The worship of God must be attended with *diligence*. There are the princes of Zebulun and Naphtali; they had to travel about two-hundred miles three times a year to the place of worship – about twenty-four miles a week. Those who neglect the worship of

God for little difficulties show that their heart is not in it, and when they do attend, cannot expect to profit: "they have snuffed at it." The worship of God, too, must be undertaken in brotherly love. All the tribes must go up together. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." It greatly concerns us to cultivate such a spirit.

Andrew Fuller

Verse 28. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us." As all power comes from God at first, so its continual maintenance is also of Him. We who have life should pray to have it "more abundantly;" if we have strength, we should seek to be more established. We expect God to bless His own work. He has never left any work unfinished yet, and He never will. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." and now, being reconciled to God, we may look to Him to perfect that which concerns us, seeing He never forsakes the works of His own hands.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 28. "... that which thou hast wrought for us." When we see men of ability and talents, using them against the God who gave them, let us weep over such men. Better for them had they lived and died as slaves and fools, than to do the devil's service with those things that God has wrought for them.

William Gurnall

Verse 30. "Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls ..." When the enemies of God rise up against His church, it is time for His church to fall down before her God and to implore His aid against those enemies. Holy prayers are more powerful than profane swords.

Thomas Wall

Verse 33. "To him that ridest upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; Lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice." The praises of the church are sung to Him, who, after His

sufferings here below, reascended to take possession of His ancient throne, high above all heavens. From there, He speaks to the world by His glorious gospel – mighty and powerful, as thunder in its effects upon the hearts of men. The power of Christ's voice, when He was upon the earth, appeared by the effects which followed, when He said, "Young man, arise" – "Lazarus, come forth" – "Peace, be still." It will yet further appear, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth."

George Horne

Verse 33. "... a mighty voice." It is a soul-shaking and awakening voice; it is a heart-melting and a heart-breaking voice; it is a quickening and an enlightening voice; it is a soul-charming and alluring voice. It draws us to Christ, engages the affections to Him, and fills the soul with unspeakable delight and pleasure.

John Gill