

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
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Peter and the Heretics

(Pastor's Letter, December 1977)

Dear Friends,

The fact of heretics and heresies existing in and around the churches of Jesus Christ can often be the cause of great consternation among the professing people of God. It was so in the past, and it can be so in the present. And whereas we are never in any way to be complacent with such a situation we are, nevertheless, to be careful that we don't become the unwitting victims of it.

You see, the devil seldom only ever strikes in one direction with any of the weapons at his disposal. This principle holds good with all his attacks and assaults upon the people of God, and it would be a strange thing, indeed, if it failed to hold with regards to his evil weapon of heresy. So it is, then, that when heresy comes it can cause darkness of soul in the heretic, but it can also cause darkness of soul in the believing child of God.

Now, the Bible is not silent with regards to this; and when the apostle Peter takes in hand to deal with the heretics who had begun to infiltrate the churches in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia" etc., he first of all begins by laying a few good layers of solid foundation for the feet of his readers on which they might stand firm. (2nd Peter 2:1-3.) And the very first thing that he sets before them is the fact of the heretics *existence* - their very existence. "**But**", he begins that chapter, "there were false teachers among you." The very connection that Peter makes there with the words that he has just written is part and parcel of his whole purpose. In the latter part of chapter one he has been speaking about the Word of God being the Word of God indeed, and not the word of mere men. He has called the writers of the Old Testament scriptures "holy men of God" who spoke "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And with that lovely title for those Old Testament prophets of God how easy it is to conjure up the picture of

their character and their strong, strong witness among the people of old. "***But***," Peter then goes on to say at the beginning of chapter two, "But there were ***false*** prophets ***also*** among the people." And with that very first word concerning this business of heresy and heretics among those churches to which he is writing, Peter is surely aiming to strip away one great fundamental mistake that very often lays hold on the people of God in their generations - viz. that there never was such a day as ours, and because it is such a day, then how hard it is to be faithful in this day, and what's the use of trying. "No, no," says Peter; "before I begin to tell you some details concerning these heretics in and around the churches in your day, let me first set you right about their existence - their very existence: they ***are*** - and they have ***always*** been. There were ***false prophets also*** among the people, and there shall be false teachers among you."

Now, is that written to "disturb" the believing soul? Surely not. But surely it belongs to that inspired word of God that God has given to us for the furnishing out of our life of faith. Peter is telling us some of the facts of the life of faith, and this is one of them. Was there a Jeremiah in the past? Indeed there was. Well, there was Jehudi with his pen-knife that was ever at the ready to carve-up the truth that Jeremiah wrote or spoke. Need we go any further than the gospel narratives concerning our Saviour's life here below. In one respect that life of Christ was one long continual "contradiction" of sinners against Himself and the things that He said. If He spoke, then, there was always some carping critic to cross His words. If such men and such views could exist in the atmosphere of Him who was "the Word made flesh," it would be passing strange if we didn't find ourselves confronted with the same thing.

The apostle Paul gives us a very striking word with regards to heresy. He says, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. 11:19.) Now that is a telling word, for it informs us of a God-given purpose in the permitted existence of heresies and heretics. In a word, they are part of the goldsmith's furnace that God employs in the "approving" (or, proving) of His own people. "They must be there,"

says Paul - they act like a goldsmith's fire in the approving of the faithful - those faithful who then appear "manifest" in their faithfulness. That last fact, of course, eliminates any thought that we merely "tolerate" heresy in our midst, or in our heart, as the case might be. No, no - there is required "manifesting" of our own position in these things before our God - our eternal Goldsmith of our souls. We are to act, and act aright. Therefore, we are not to stand "amazed" at the presence and existence of heresies and heretics, for once we begin to act like that towards them, then we are in danger of not being able to act aright towards them. And it's that danger-ground that Peter is steering his readers away from when he reminds them that even among the "holy men of God" in the old time, there were "false prophets also." "*As then, so now*," he is saying. Let us not lose sight of that fact.

Something else that Peter will have us remember with regards to the heretic is - the *method* by which heresy is introduced into the churches. For, he says, these men "shall *privily* bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." Those last few words of Peter are often used as a case against the doctrine of Particular Redemption, or the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. But is one of those classical cases of reading the word of God as mere words and coming up with any kind of a view - (like the "converted" thief who went on thieving, because, he said the Bible said, "Let him that stole, steal." Indeed the Bible does say those words as words; but the truth of the whole is, "Let him that stole, steal no more.) So it is with these "words" that Peter writes if we only care to look at them as mere words, and disregard the whole of what Peter is saying. Peter is dealing, neither with Particular Redemption nor Perseverance; and it is, surely, part of the genius of heresy that it can turn a great truth of God into the fallacy of "Free Will" in the things of salvation.

Peter is speaking about heresy - that is the subject of his words and thoughts, and at this point, he is speaking about the heretic and his method of infiltrating the churches of Jesus Christ. Well then, how will the heretic approach the church in order to gain an entrance? Will

he come banging on the door and calling out, "I deny everything that the church of Christ stands for?" Will he have a big badge in his lapel, "Heretic against the truth of the gospel?" Of course he won't. But what he will be is the paragon of orthodoxy until he has found his place within the church, and then, he will begin with his work on hand. In other words, it is his "profession" of the faith that Peter has in view when he speaks about that heretic "denying the Lord that bought him." Did the Lord "buy" him? No, He did not! But how could the heretic ever get across the thresh-hold of the church unless he professed to be of the blood-bought of the Lord? In that way he comes, and in that way he continues - *until*; until he "crosses the Rubicon," as it were. Until he grows bold, and eventually shows himself to be what he ever really ever was - when he denies the Lord - and thus shows himself in his true heretical colours.

In a sense, it is a merciful means of exposing the heretic. It isn't "denying" such as Peter himself lapsed into at that time in his life, and which can grasp any believer in one form or another at times. But it is that determined downgrading of the Person and Work of the impeccable Son of God. But how does the heretic get into the position of attack in the first place? It is by his profession. Peter says the heresies are brought in "privily" - under cover of darkness, as it were. Jude says, "Certain men have crept in *unawares*." It is like Eden itself; the devil began with what appeared an enquiry - "Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat ...?" the flat denial of God's word will eventually come - "Ye shall not surely die." but he dare not start at that point. Neither can the heretic; but being of his father the devil, then, it is the works of his father that he does, and in the way his father does them.

Peter also mentions the heretics' *following*: "And many shall follow their pernicious ways," he says. Dear old Peter knew how to establish the hearts of those who had ears to hear and right here he will now protect us against that weapon of *doubt* that the devil so much loves to use in our lives. Is it not so easy for us to look at that which is apparently "blooming" and adopt the idea, "Well, perhaps there is something in what that man says, or that church does, or that group holds - and so forth." Just so says Peter; and never forget that

heresy has a fatal fascination for the human heart of man, for, in essence, it is but rebellion against the word of God to which the natural heart has a continuous aversion. "Many shall follow their pernicious ways," says Peter. His implication is clear - "See that you are not among them!" And if we would not wish to be carried about with every wind, then we must anchor fast in the whole counsel of God to our souls. In Old Testament times God gave the touchstone for judging the false prophet from the true. Although the false prophet might claim many things, *and do them*, yet he was not to be believed or received because he did not square with God's word. That touchstone has not been changed.

Peter informs us concerning the heretics' *motive* and *end*. The motive is twofold - to defame the faith, and to gain for themselves. With regards to the former, Peter tells us that when they draw away these "followers," then "the way of truth" begins to be "evil spoken of." How that delights the devil's heart, and how much the gospel is held in ridicule through the lives of those who imbibed an imitation of it. That fact we must recognise and rightly lament. Yet we must guard our hearts against the devil's ploys in it and strive against defection in ourselves, deflection from our course, or dejection in our hearts and minds.

With regards to the latter - their own gain, Peter says in verse 3, "through covetousness shall they with *feigned words*, make merchandise of you." Here he would "jolt" any who would follow after such men. They have one thing in view - their own gain; honour, esteem, self-aggrandisement - whatever. And to realise that, they treat the people under them like mere merchandise - like so many pieces of commodity on a shop-keeper's shelf. The soldiers who were blown asunder in the First World War were often referred to as, "The Generals' Cannon-fodder." These are the heretics' "sermon-fodder." And not only that, says Peter, not only are men treated like mere "merchandise" by them, but with *feigned words*, make merchandise of you." It is a sobering picture for any to consider. One of the saddest aspects is that there is a "ready market" in the whole business, for it is

still like the days of old, "the prophets prophesy smooth things, and the people love to have it so."

Finally, Peter speaks about their *end*. It is an inevitable word, really. Is the biggest question of all so often not along these lines - "Why doesn't God act?" Like the martyrs under the throne, "How long, O Lord ...?" And as the faithful of the Lord look at the state of things around them in their day - when all the heresies of hell appear to be abroad, how easy to suspect that God is not acting. Yes, God is acting; these men, Peter tells us in verse 1, "bring upon themselves swift destruction;" and then, at the end of verse 3, "whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." Their judgment is not lingering on the way to them; their damnation has not fallen asleep; their destruction is "swift;" it is only our failure to think "eternally" that it makes it appear otherwise. ***Be True!***

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 78 (Continued)



Verses 26-27. "He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens ... he rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls ..." He is Lord Paramount, above the prince of the power of the air; storms arise and tempests blow at his command. Winds sleep until God arouses them, and then, like Samuel, each one answers, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." If one wind will not serve his purpose, another will, and if need be they shall both blow at once. We speak of *fickle* winds, but their obedience to their Lord is such that they deserve a better name. If we ourselves were half as obedient as the winds, we should be far superior to what we now are.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 32. "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works." They went on sinning, "and believed not for his wondrous works." That is, even his great miracles did not bring them to believe. Neither speculative atheism, nor atheism of heart, nor practical atheism was ever cured by seeing a miracle. It is not lack of evidence, but the lack of right disposition that keeps men from believing God.

William Plumer

Verses 34-37. "When he slew them, then they sought him ... nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth ... for their heart was not right with him" In these words you see plainly that these people are very quick and earnest in seeking God to take off his hand, and remove the judgments that were upon them, but not that God would cure them of those sins that had provoked him to draw his sword, and to make it drunk with their blood in the first place. They would fain be rid of their sufferings, but did not care to be rid of their sins. Ah! But a gracious soul cries out, "Lord, do but take away my sins, and it will satisfy me and cheer me, though thou shouldst never take away a heavy hand." A true Nathanael sighs it out under his greatest affliction, as that good man Augustine did, "Deliver me, O Lord, from that evil man - myself." "Lord!" says the believing soul, "deliver me from my inward burden, and lay upon me what outward burden thou pleasest.

Thomas Brooks

Verse 36. "Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues," God may be the *object* of their words, but self is the purpose, for a heavenly object can be made subservient to a carnal design. Hypocrisy passes a compliment on God that is called flattery: "They did flatter him with their mouth" etc. They gave him a package of good words to ensure their preservation. A hypocrite may well be termed "a religious atheist;" - an atheist masked with religion.

S. Charnock

Verse 38. "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath." When his hand was up and giving the blow, he "called it back again," as one that could not find it in his heart to do it. And when he did it, "he did not stir up *all* his wrath;" he let some drops of it fall, but would not shed the whole shower of it. It is natural for the bee to give honey, yet it stings: but it stings only when it is provoked. And this we see by experience to be true of God; he suffers men, and suffers them long: they continue in their sin, and yet, he continues in his mercies, and withholds his judgments.

*John Preston:
The Golden Sceptre held forth to the Humble.*

Verse 39. "For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again."

The secret wheels of hurrying time do give
So short a warning, and so fast they drive,
That I am dead before I seem to live.

And what's a life? A weary pilgrimage,
Whose glory in one day doth fill thy stage
With childhood, manhood, and decrepit age.

And what's a life? The flourishing array
Of the proud summer-meadow, which today
Wears her green plush, and is tomorrow hay.

And what is life? A blast sustained with clothing,
Maintained with food, retained with vile self-loathing,
then weary of itself, again to nothing.

Francis Quarles

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Hello, boys and girls,

Have you noticed how the leaves on the trees are beginning to turn red, or brown, or yellow? The winds are getting chilly, and the evenings are getting duller. There is also a great twittering and noise amongst the birds around our houses and gardens. The swallows especially are saying goodbye to us. They gather by hundreds and sit on roofs and telegraph wires, waiting for the signal to start their journey southward. It is mysterious how they know when to move on, and yet, they do. They leave their mud nests under the eaves, but they will be back next spring. They fly to far-off places; some to the south of France, others to Spain and North Africa; much warmer places than Britain in the wintertime.



There are three birds which look very alike in the air; they are the Swift, the Martin, and the Swallow. But if you are looking out especially for the swallow you will know him by his long forked tail and the chestnut colour on his throat. By October they will all be gone. God has given them the instinct to find their way without books or maps or compasses. And He will guide them back from thousands of miles to the same spot in our country once the Springtime has come again. When you think of all the hazards and dangers and difficulties that must face these little birds, and yet, we know that their lives are guided by God. They are not forgotten by God.

How do we know that? Well, God says so in His Word, the Bible. This is what we read in Luke chapter 12 verse 6; "Are not five

sparrows sold for two farthings and not one of them is forgotten before God." If God says that about the common little sparrow, then surely the swallows are not forgotten, *and much more*, we are not forgotten by God. In the very next verse of Luke chapter 12 we are told, "... even the very hairs of your head are numbered."

Isn't that wonderful, boys and girls. Although we are so sinful - for the Bible says we are all sinners in God's eyes - yet God in His love did not forget about us and simply leave us in our sin. He sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross to save us from our sin, for here is what the Bible says, "This is a faithful saying ... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." God has not forgotten us. I trust that each and every one of us will not forget Him.

Love,
Mrs Seaton

Our Attitude Towards God's Word

One most essential exercises of our Christian lives is the continual examination of our attitudes towards the Word of God. Not only do its promises cheer us and its hopes encourage us, but do its precepts compel us and its principles direct us in all that we would seek to do, both with regards to our individual lives and also in connection with all that we would seek to do within the churches of Christ where He has placed us? The apostle Peter gives an "examining" word along these lines in the first few verses of the second chapter of his first epistle, where he urges us, "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." It's a very striking word of examination, indeed, for in it the apostle Peter is not only telling us to assess our spiritual condition through our attitude to the Word of God but to look at our very spiritual origin itself.

Very often we find the Bible contrasting our spiritual childhood and our spiritual manhood. It has some very strong things to say along that line, e.g. - "At a time when ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again ... and have need of *milk* and not of strong

meat." "Milk" belongs to babes, we are told in the course of God's word, "strong meat" belongs to those who are of a mature and manly age in the things of the Lord. We are called on time and time again to care for the spiritual development of our spiritual systems, so that our systems are kept healthy - learning to feed more and more on the wholesome and vital things of our salvation - growing out of the first stages of our spiritual existence into spiritual men and women who can come forth and take their adult place in the affairs of Christ's household. They are great exhortations; such exhortations are as badly needed in our own days when it seems that in so many ways, the church must have toys and baubles from the nursery to keep it amused like some spiritual infant that has never left its childhood.

Now, there is that kind of thrust in Peter's words that he holds up before us; but it is not the primary purpose in Peter's usage of the picture of a newborn babe. It is not here a baby as opposed to a man, but it is a baby *with regards to the reality of its desire for the milk of the mother who first gave it its birth* - and that is most challenging! "Desire the sincere milk of the word," says Peter. In what way? Like a newborn babe desires the milk of its mother's breast. It's not the spiritual *age* of the professing man or woman that Peter has here under review, but the spiritual *appetite*; and not only the spiritual appetite, but the very spiritual *origin* itself.

If you look back into the total context of Peter's words, you'll see from the previous chapter that he is speaking about those who have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." He then goes on to speak about that word, until, when he begins chapter two he begins with a "Wherefore;" "Wherefore, laying aside all malice etc. ... as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word." What word? The one by which they were "born again." Their origin and their appetite are one; the mother that begets them – the incorruptible seed of the word – is the mother that then sustains them and for which they seek – the sincere milk of the word. The "examination" which Peter here invites us to conduct with regards to our attitude to God's truth in our lives has not only to do with our "age," but with our healthy spiritual

"appetite;" and, indeed, not only our appetite, but the very birth of the spiritual life itself. So that, in one respect - according to one emphasis of God's word in the matter - let us continually strive to reach that adult stage of Christian profession that the Bible holds out before us; yet, in this present respect, in Peter's letter and context, let us desire to be for ever "babes" in the things of our Christian lives - ever desiring the sincere milk of the word of God that first "begot us again unto a lively hope."

Dear old Robert Leighton has a lovely word about our continuing development in our spiritual lives upon this earth, and yet, our constant remaining as "babes" for all that. Speaking about the degrees of growth in grace in this life, he says, "If one measure of grace is called infancy in respect of another, much more is *all* grace infancy in respect of glory." You see what he is saying there? When I am first converted I come into growth in grace; but, as I go on in the Christian life, I must *grow* in grace; and those first years of my Christian life are like the infancy of it compared to the number of years I spend as a Christian thereafter.

In "natural" terms: what are the one-to-three years we spend as infants compared to the three-score-and-ten years which constitute the rest of our natural lives. *But then*, what are all the years of our spiritual lives - be it ten, twenty, sixty or whatever - *compared to eternity*? And in the light of eternity what is our spiritual life on earth, no matter how long, but an "infancy?" That is what Robert Leighton means when he says, "if one measure of grace is called infancy in respect of another, much more is *all* grace infancy in respect of glory."

It's the same kind of thing that lies behind Paul's words in First Corinthians 13; "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. *For now*, we see through a glass darkly; but then, face to face" the apostle Paul had no difficulty whatsoever in seeing himself in the role of an infant yet in the light of the coming revelations of eternity. On the one hand, he is forever the maturing believer in his love and attitudes towards the word of God given to

him as well as through him. But, on the other, he is ever an infant for all his days on this earth compared to that day when he shall know even as he is known. An infant - a babe - such as Peter sets before us; one whose appetite not only bespeaks its health but the very source of its life in the first place.

How essential then, it must surely be for us to exercise ourselves with regards as to how the word of God features in our lives. Individually or collectively as the Lord's people, in all its parts for all our hearts until our eternal three-score-and-ten years begin.

W.J.S.