

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Index

1. The Pastor's Letter (November 1979) – Traditionalism.
2. A Bunch of Everlastings
3. Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls – Always Learn the Whole Story
4. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 86 (Concluded)
5. Perseverance in The Teaching of Children
6. Justification and Sanctification – Psalm 103 verse 8
7. A Quick Quote from Bishop Jewel



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
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002

Traditionalism

The Pastor's Letter (November 1979)

Dear Friends,

In our last edition, we endeavoured to express a few thoughts on the right use of church history. In this edition, I want us to consider an issue that stands very much related to that, and that is the issue of *traditionalism*. We would define traditionalism as the acceptance of the authority and the authoritative statements of the Church of a bygone day, without subjecting that authority and those authoritative statements to the scrutiny of God's Word. We don't question for one minute that God has vested in the Church an authority that flows on from age to age – He has given “pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints ... for the edifying of the body,” and so forth. What we do question, however, is the acceptance of such authority in and of itself without subjecting certain of the statements and practices of that authority to the Scriptures of God. This is traditionalism, and this is what produces traditionalism within the churches of Christ at any given point of their existence.

In his “Shorter Writings,” B. B. Warfield has an article entitled, “Authority, Intellect, Heart.” In that article he reminds us that there are “three channels through which the truth of God is brought to man and made his possession.” The three channels are, of course, “Authority, the Intellect, the Heart;” that is, the things that God mediates to men out of that volume of authority that runs through the Church from one generation to another – what God conveys to man through his mind – and what God grants to man via his heart. “Authority, Intellect, and Heart.” What Warfield warns against is, what he calls, the “exaggeration” of any one of these three to the “discrediting” of the other two. So, he says, where we exaggerate the principle of the intellect to the discrediting of the others, we end up with *rationalism*; where we exaggerate the heart, we end up with *mysticism* (what we might term today, emotionalism;) and where we exaggerate authority, we end up with *traditionalism*.

Warfield's words ought to be well-weighted. The Church has been plagued with rationalism, the Church has been plagued with that "mystic" approach to the faith that is determined simply by what "*I feel*" to be right, and the Church has been plagued with traditionalism – that acceptance of the authority and the authoritative statements of the Church of a bye-gone day, without subjecting that authority and those authoritative statements to the scrutiny of God's word. We so often conduct our Church lives, and so often indulge in our Christian thinking and assessing with regards to spiritual things as though Christ had never said, "By the traditions of the elders, ye make void the word of God." The whole controversy in the ministry of Christ in Israel was over what had become hardened traditionalism and what was the revealed truth of God. It was through holding to the former and refusing the latter that they "crucified the Lord of glory." And that being the case, it constantly becomes us to know "the things whereof we affirm," that they are really the words of the living God and the dictates and directives of the living God.

Now, may we say that not all traditions are necessarily wrong, in and of themselves. There are those certain practices within a given community of the Lord's people that are almost "sanctified by usage." Where the issue comes to a head is where the particular practice or tradition is pressed as a necessary part of saving faith or where it runs into conflict with the Word of God. In such a case, the tradition must go, and the Word of God must be held supreme. If that does not become the case, then, we are found guilty of that very thing that Christ spoke of – making the Word of the Lord of "none effect" by the traditions of the elders. This is where the real challenge lies, and this is where our true evangelical and our true "reformed" position is put to the test. We are ever forced to face the possibility that what has been an "historic" view on a certain position may not be the full Biblical view on that position. What has been viewed as "traditionally" reformed, may not be Biblically reformed. The danger in traditionalism is the equating of the historical with the Biblical and then, becoming entrenched in that equation. This is where the need of the whole preaching and the whole hearing of the whole Word of God

in our churches becomes the great crying need of our day. And nowhere is that need more apparent than in so many of those churches that are looked upon as historically evangelical and reformed.

The greatest single factor in the promoting, or the retaining, of traditionalism, is the absence of a consecutive systematic exposition of the whole Word of God in our churches. Where a “textual” preaching predominates from week to week – here a text, there a text – then it is so easy for preacher and congregation alike to skate around vast, vast areas of the whole revelation of God, and so uphold the status quo of what has always been observed as that “which the church teaches.” *But*, is that which the church teaches Biblical? Or is it merely traditional? The answer to that may be of supreme importance with regards to some regions of the church’s thinking and behaviour. And the only way we may arrive at a satisfactory, conscience-free, affirmation of a given position is by an honest, open, searching of the Word of God through those legitimate channels that God has granted to us: a right use of all those things that have gone before us, and a right use of all those things that have gone before us via a sanctified and instructed heart and mind.

There is just one point we would like to make in closing: always remember that it is possible to have traditional views of traditionalism! When we think of a “traditionalist” we need not think automatically of some old brother in a black Sunday suit and a butterfly collar. Indeed, no; perhaps the old brother is dressing appropriate to his age and station in life. But, more important than that, perhaps the old brother is as Biblically free as Noah’s dove, while some younger brother, with his most up-to-date-with-it translation of the Scriptures and a guitar slung over his shoulder is in total traditional bondage. You see, there is a “viewpoint” that says that the church must always be “with it” – must always “move with the times.” But it is not a Biblical viewpoint, it is a traditional viewpoint; and many are in chains because of it. The Church must be relevant to its times and age, but that is an entirely different matter, and no traditional catch-phrase ought to be allowed to obscure that fact. What does the Bible say? Is the final judge on all such

viewpoints, and it is just as easy to run contrary to the Word of God with a tradition that is ten years old as one that is a hundred years old.

What then? There is only one stance. As the hymn-writer of a by-gone day desired:

“O give me Samuel’s ear,
The open ear, O Lord.”

As we hold our views, positions, practices, can we honestly say, “Thus saith the Lord?” How precious, and worthwhile, and good are many of the “ancient paths” of the church’s “tradition” that we may still safely tread, *But*, where there arises a tension between such things and God’s revealed truth, then, God forbid that we should make that truth of “none effect” through our “traditions.”

Yours faithfully,
W. J. Seaton

A Bunch of Everlastings

I’m sure most of us have come across that class of book that sets before us thumb-nail sketches of some of the men and women that God has used in the history of His church: Luther and Calvin, Bunyan and Spurgeon – and a host of others, too.

“Men of the Morning,” is one such book; “An Orchard of Pomegranates,” is another – “A Casket of Cameos,” “A Bunch of Everlastings,” and so forth. Such works do valuable service in giving us some broad facts concerning the Lord’s saints of old; and whether it is intentional or not on the part of the authors they are, in fact, following the pattern of the New Testament itself. Have you ever noticed how most of the New Testament epistles wind-up with “A Bunch of Everlastings,” etc.? Name, after name, after name, is set before us, with one or two remarks concerning the particular person named. Some of

the people mentioned in these collections of saints are better known than others; some of them are hardly known at all – some of them are never mentioned again in the Word of God out with the epistle or book in which their name appears. But the Holy Spirit of God has seen fit to commit to everlasting memory the jobs they performed, or the persons they were, within the context of doing that job, or being that person to the glory of God and His everlasting gospel.

Take the closing chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, for example. Who was Tychicus, when all is said and done? Who was Onesimus, for that matter? Who was Aristarchus? or Archippus? Or Epaphras? “Luke the beloved physician,” we might feel a bit more acquainted with, and John Mark, as well. But who was Nymphas? Or “Jesus which is called Justus?” or, indeed, Demas, when all is said and done? Demas looms large in our thoughts, not because of any full-blown life story written about him, but on account of one memorable word in the course of one of Paul’s epistles, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.” And when we begin to take note of the brief words written about so many of the men and women who go to make up these Biblical Caskets of Cameos, we are immediately confronted with one very clear thought – that our lives and our actions are ultimately and finally assessed in the light of how those lives have been lived to the glory of our God and His gospel. We are not to think of that kind of thing as only true in the life of an apostle Paul in Particular. It is true with regards to every saint of God who ever lived. And it ought to be to our encouragement that God takes note of apparently little things done for His glory and honour – so much so, that He even causes those kind of things to be indelibly recorded in his Word that shall never pass away.

In what way precisely Aquilla and Priscilla “laid down their own necks,” in order to save the life of the apostle Paul (Romans 16 verse 3 forward) we shall probably never know this side of eternity. But the deed stands written; and Paul says that not only is he to be thankful for that deed towards him, but “also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Who were Andronicus and Junia, in that same 16th chapter of Romans? For Paul tells us that they were not only “of note among the apostles,” and his “fellow-prisoners,” but they were also his “kinsman,” *And* they were

“in Christ before me!” What a precious bit of revelation: that within the family-circle of that rampaging Saul of Tarsus there were already those who had professed the Lord of Glory while Paul was still in the blackness of his sin.

Rufus, Herodian, Tryphena and Tryphosa; Urbane, Mary, Julia, Appelles. Who were they all? So many of them unsung and unknown yet known fully to the Lord. And their almost unknown and, sometimes, apparently small, deeds, recorded by the Lord in His everlasting truth.

May our hearts be encouraged to do what the old hymn exhorts us to do – “Let the lower lights keep burning.” God takes note! If ever one lesson above all others was contained in the general closing remarks of the epistles of the Word of God, it would be that lesson. God takes note; our labour is not in vain in the Lord: “Ye did it unto me.” A whole collection of names, a whole bevy of saints, a whole bunch of everlastings, a whole orchard of pomegranates bear testimony to the fact that God is no man’s debtor, and that He will honour them that honour Him. The Lord make us faithful.

Note – Within the podcast section of the online Wicket Gate Magazine you will find podcasts in which many “lower lights” were considered. The link is: -

http://www.wicketgate.co.uk/podcast_the_lower_lights/podcast_the_lower_lights.html

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

As I have been reading over the life of that great man Joseph in the Bible it has occurred to me how important it is to know the “whole story” of a person’s life, or else we will always have a wrong idea about that person and who he really was, and what he really did. Most of us know the “first part” of the life of Joseph very well, and how he was taken by his brothers, who were jealous of him, and was placed in a pit

and then, sold as a slave to some people who were going into the land of Egypt.

We know of how the brothers took his “coat of many colours” and after they had torn it and dirtied it and smeared blood on it, and showed it to his father Jacob, pretending that a wild animal had caught Joseph and ripped him to pieces. But, there we sometimes leave the story of Joseph, and the only remembrance we have of him is that dirty and dusty coat with the blood on it, or that pit in which he was thrown, or the men who carried him away to sell him as a slave in Egypt. But that wasn't the end of the life of Joseph! The Bible tells us that God was with Joseph and that he soon became the most important person in the whole land of Egypt, with the exception of the King himself.

A great famine came to the land of Canaan, where Joseph's brothers lived, and the next time we see Joseph and his brothers together again it is very different from that time when they put him in the pit and took his old crumpled coat of many colours back to his father. Now they stand before Joseph, and they see him dressed in his royal robes, the one who rules the land for the King of Egypt. What a change, boys and girls; and you only know about the change by reading all that the Bible has to say about Joseph.

But the Bible tells us of a greater change than that, boys and girls. How many people only think of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was a baby in the manger? Or when He, too was sold for the price of a slave by Judas Iscariot? Or when He died upon the cross and was laid in the grave? But that wasn't the end, boys and girls, and Jesus is now exalted at God's throne, and one day He is coming back to the world again. Do you want to meet Him then, as your Saviour? Then, believe with all your heart.

Love

Mrs Seaton



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 86 (concluded)

Verse 11. “Teach me thy way, O Lord ...” There is no point on which the world is more dark than that of its own ignorance. We might truly say, “It is ignorant of its ignorance.” It comforts itself that it is not atheistical because it believes that there is a God. But as to knowing this God in His way, and in His laws, and in His mind with these things it has nothing to do. Further, the people of the world do not care for enlightenment on the subject; they feel no pressing need for it. And, indeed, in all probability, they have an instinctive feeling that if enlightened they would know a little more than they wish to know, and that their newly acquired knowledge would interfere with their old habits and ways. This is one reason why all spiritual teaching which goes beneath the mere surface is distasteful to the majority of people. They cannot bear to be brought into contact with God in more than a general way; for the particulars of His character may not agree over well with the particulars of their lives!

John Hyatt

Verse 11. “Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth.” Conform to Scripture. Let us lead Scripture lives. Oh, that the Bible might be seen to be imprinted in our lives! Do what the Word commands. Obedience is an excellent way of commenting upon the Bible. Let the Word be the sundial by which you set your life. What are we the better for having the scriptures, if we do not direct all our speeches and actions according to it? What is a carpenter better for his rule about him, if he sticks it at his back, and never makes use of it for measuring and squaring? So, what are we the better for the rule of the Word, if we do not make use of it, and regulate our lives by it?

Thomas Watson

Verse 12. “I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.” We glorify God by praising Him. Though nothing can add to God’s essential glory, yet praise exalts Him in the eyes of others. When we praise God, we spread His fame and renown; we display the trophies of His excellency. In this manner the angels glorify Him. They are the choristers of heaven and do trumpet forth His praise. Praising God is one of the highest and purest acts of religion. In prayer, it may be said, we act like men; in praise we act like angels. Believers are called “Temples of God,” – 1 Corinthians 3 verse 16. When our tongues praise, then the organs of God’s spiritual temple are sounding. How sad it is that God has not more glory from us in this way! Many are full of murmuring and discontent, but seldom bring glory to God by giving him the *praise* due to His name. We read of the saints having harps in their hands – the emblems of praise. Many have tears in their eyes and complaints in their mouths, but few seem to have harps in their hands, blessing and glorifying God. Let us honour God in this way. Praise is the quit-rent we pay to God: while God renews our lease, we must renew our rent.

Thomas Watson

Verse 13. “For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.” Personal experience is ever the master singer. Whatever Thou art, O God, to others, to me thy mercy is most notable. The psalmist claims to sing among the loudest, because his debt to divine mercy is among the greatest. From the direst death and the deepest dishonour David had been kept by God – for his enemies would have done more than send him to hell had they been able. His sense of sin also made him feel as if the most overwhelming destruction would have been his portion had not grace prevented. Therefore, does he speak of deliverance from the nethermost abode of lost spirits.

There are some alive who can now use this language unfeignedly, and he who pens these lines most humbly confesses that he is one. Left to myself to indulge my passions, to rush onward with my natural vehemence, and defy the Lord with recklessness, what a candidate for

the lowest abyss should I have made myself by this time. For me there was but one alternative, great mercy, or the lowest hell. With my whole heart do I sing, “Great is thy mercy towards me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verse 16. “O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.”

1. My Pedigree: The son of thy handmaid.
2. My Occupation: Thy servant.
3. My character: In need of mercy.
4. My request: Turn unto me.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Perseverance in the Teaching of Children

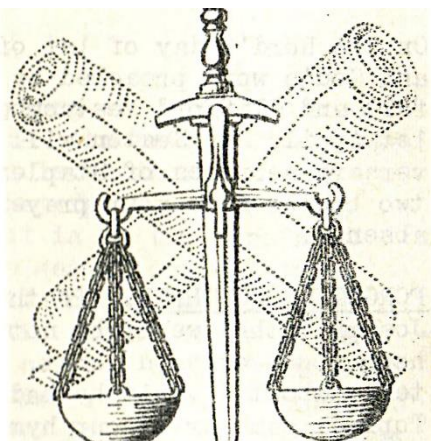


Mr Spurgeon uses an old practice of planting beans to illustrate the steady perseverance needed in the teaching of children. “The old practice,” he tells us, “was to put three beans in each hole: one for the worm, one for the crew, and one to live and produce the crop.” So it is, he says, in teaching children: “we must give line upon line, precept upon precept, repeating the truth which we would inculcate, till it becomes impossible for the child to forget it. We may well give the lesson once, expecting the child’s frail memory (like some worm) to lose it; twice, reckoning that the devil, like some ill bird, will steal it;

thrice, hoping that it will take root downward, and bring forth fruit upward to the glory of God.”

So be it. But it is not only the teaching of children with perseverance that the old practice illustrates. How often we fail to take into account the kind of conditions of heart and mind in which the gospel is to live and grow by the grace of God, so that when we make one little effort and there doesn't seem to be any immediate “success,” we leave off to be faithful.

Better to take into account “the worm,” and the crow,” and labour accordingly. We may remember what Paul said about not wearying in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not. It was a tremendously unlikely place that the man in the 72nd psalm sowed his “handful of corn:” – “upon the top of the mountains.” But “the fruit thereof” was to “shake like Lebanon.” The human heart is a devouring worm – the old devil is a swooping bird, but we may yet sow on, looking for that seed that will “take root *downward*, and bring forth fruit *upward* to the glory of God.”



*Justification
and
Sanctification
From
Psalm 103 Verse 8*

The third verse of Psalm 103 – “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;” grants us one of those great verses of the Word of God setting out, both our Justification and our Sanctification side-by-side.

“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities:” that is Justification; “Who healeth all thy diseases:” that is Sanctification. The distinction between Justification and Sanctification is clearly and simply out-lined in the famous illustration of Robert Trail, 1696, and quoted by J.C. Ryle in his book on Holiness.

“Justification is an act of God about the *state* of a man’s person; but sanctification is the work of God about the *nature* of a man. Justification is an act of God as a judge about a delinquent, absolving him from a sentence of death; but sanctification is an act of God about us, as physician, in curing us of a mortal disease. There is a criminal that comes to the bar, and is arraigned for high treason; the same criminal has a mortal disease that he may die of, though there was *no* judge on the bench to pass the sentence of death upon him for his crime. It is ‘an act of grace’ that absolves the man from the sentence of the law, that he shall not suffer death for his treason – *that* saves the man’s life. But notwithstanding this, unless his disease be cured, he may die quickly after. Therefore, justification is an act of God as a gracious Judge; sanctification is a work of God as a merciful Physician.”

A Quick Quote from Bishop Jewel.

The Bible is the water of life; the more you lave it forth, the fresher it runs. It is the fire of God’s glory; the more you blow it the clearer it burns. It is the corn of the Lord’s field; the better you grind it, the more it yields. It is the bread of heaven; the more it is broken and given out, the more remains. It is the sword of the Spirit; the more it is scoured, the brighter it shines.