

The Wicket Gate Magazine

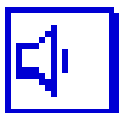
A Continuing Witness



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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
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- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
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William Tyndale
And
The Debt We Owe.

(The Pastors Letter Dated April 1980)

Dear Friends,

Eternity itself will alone reveal the debt that the Church of Christ owes to those individual men and women who, seeing the low condition that religion had sunk to in their day, resolved before the Lord to give their lives for the glory of the gospel.

Not least among this band was the gentle, but determined, William Tyndale, whose work of translating the Holy Scriptures into the language of the English-speaking peoples, caused the river of evangelical Christianity to burst its banks and overflow until, as it was later said, there was “a face of Godliness upon the whole nation.”

Tyndale’s famous resolve was made in the home of one John Walsh of Little Sodbury Hall, in the Cotswolds. Appalled at the abysmal ignorance of spiritual things even among the religious leaders of his day, William Tyndale’s voice one evening echoed through the rooms of the old Manor House, “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more scripture than thou doest.” This resolve came on the back of a conviction that had already begun to form in his heart and mind; “I have perceived by experience,” he told a friend, “that it is impossible to establish common people in any truth unless the scripture be laid clearly before them in their mother tongue.” So began the work that was to cost William Tyndale his devoted life.

These few words of this letter are not intended to give any kind of an outline of that life, but simply to draw our hearts out in appreciation to the God of our salvation, who was pleased to raise up such a man in His own good time to lay the foundations of an open Bible for our land today. Tyndale, of course, enjoyed the reception that many have

experienced who sought only the good of the Lord's Church and the prosperity of Zion, and he was hounded from pillar-to-post, complete with manuscripts and a few printed pages of the New Testament in English. The bloodhounds of the Bishop of London were constantly on his trail, and though he had little care for his own safety he was more than anxious for the precious work that he had already carried out on the Word of God. "I perceive," he wrote again – (he was always perceiving!) – "I perceive," he wrote, "that not only in my Lord of London's palace, but in all England, there was no room for attempting a translation of the scriptures." Accordingly, in the year 1524, Tyndale set sail for Europe complete with his two years of work and a hope of peace and safety, to give England a true rendering of the Word of Life.

However, the devil has two ploys with regards to the Word of God: he will either corrupt it by sowing his imitation "tares" in the same field, or else he will snatch it away, as our Lord told us in another parable. Being very much the angel of light in our own day, he is very much employed in sowing the corrupt among the good; but in Tyndale's day the devil was very much the roaring lion seeking those he would devour. Europe, therefore, proved only slightly better than England for Tyndale's work and again, we find him having to constantly fly from danger to preserve his life. "When they shall persecute in one city, flee to another," might well be the motto-text for Tyndale's work; but in spite of all, that work did flourish and abound to God's praise, and whichever way we look at it today we are eternal debtors to it.

The debt that we owe to the likes of William Tyndale is, perhaps, nowhere better seen than in the final letters that he wrote from his prison at Vilvorde, just north of Brussels. Remember the stature of the man; remember his gentle and gentlemanly background; remember the intellectual capabilities and powers of the man now imprisoned so that we might have an open Bible in our day. "I beg your Lordship," he writes to one of his friends, "that if I am to remain here through the winter, you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send me from the goods of mind which he has, a warmer cap, for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am affected by a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell. A warmer coat also, for this which I have is

very thin. A piece of cloth, too, to patch my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out ... and I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evenings; it is, indeed, wearisome sitting alone in the dark.” And then there comes what must be one of the most self-less utterances recorded anywhere in the history of Christ’s Church; “***But most of all,***” he writes, “I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study.” A few patches for his trousers, if possible; a warmer coat and cap, if possible; “***But most of all,***” the books, that he might continue his work and fulfil his resolve. The debt we owe; the debt we owe.

Sincerely,
W. J. Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 88 (Concluded)

We may remind ourselves of the assessment of this psalm given last month by Neale and Littledale that, “This psalm stands alone in all the Psalter for the unrelieved gloom, and hopeless sorrow of its tone.” That tone is little altered in the remaining verses.

Verse 9. “**Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee ...**” Weeping must not hinder praying. We must **sow** in tears. “Mine eye mourns,” says the psalmist, but “I will cry unto thee daily.” Let prayers and tears go together, and they shall be accepted together: “I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears.”

Matthew Henry

Verse 9. “Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, *I have stretched out my hands unto thee.*” He used the appropriate posture of a supplicant, of his own accord. When men are eagerly pleading for mercy, they need no posture-maker or master of the ceremonies; nature suggest to them attitudes both natural and correct. As a little child stretches out its hands to its mother while it cries, so did this afflicted child of God. He prayed all over: his eyes wept, his voice cried, his hands were outstretched, and his heart broke. This was prayer indeed.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verses 10-12. “Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” In these verses we find mention made of four things on the part of God: “wonders,” loving kindness,” “faithfulness,” and “righteousness.” These were four attributes of the blessed Jehovah which the eyes of the psalmist had been opened to see, and which the heart of the psalmist had been wrought upon to feel. But he comes, by divine teaching, into a spot where these attributes seem to be completely lost to him. And yet, (so mysterious are the ways of God!) that spot was made the very place where those attributes were more powerfully displayed and made more deeply and experimentally known to his soul.

The Lord led the blind by a way that he knew not into these spots of experience, that in them He might more fully open up to him those attributes of which he had already gained a glimpse. But the Lord brought him in such a mysterious way, that all his former knowledge was baffled. He therefore puts up this enquiry to the Lord, how it was possible that in those spots where he now was, these attributes could be displayed or made known.

He begins – “Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?” He is speaking here of his own experience; *he* is that “dead” person to whom those “wonders” are to be shown. “Shall the dead arise and praise thee?” The dark, stupid, cold, barren, helpless soul that cannot lift up

one little finger etc ... - “Shall it *arise?*” And more than that, shall it “praise thee?” Can lamentation ever be turned into praise? Can complaint ever be turned into thanksgiving? Can the mourner ever shout and sing? Oh; it is a wonder of wonders, if “the dead” are to “arise,” if “the dead” are to “praise thee;” if “the dead” are to stand upon their feet, and shout victory through Thy blood.

J. C. Philpot

Verse 13. “But unto thee have I cried, O Lord” That “but” seems to come in as an expression of his resolution made in the first verse. He knew his condition, yet he had sought the Lord, and would go on doing so. Suppose you find no relish in the ordinances and means of grace – yet use them. You are desperately sick, yet you must take the food that is brought to you, and some strength will come of that. Say to yourself; “Be I damned or saved I resolve to go on!”

From Thomas Goodwin

Verse 15. “I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up” We found the heat more oppressive this day than we had yet experienced it. The hillocks of sand between which we were slowly moving at the usual camel’s pace, reflected the sun’s rays upon us, till our faces were glowing as if we had been by the side of a furnace ... Perhaps it was through this part of the desert of Shur that Hagar wandered, intending to go back to her native country; and it may have been by this way that Joseph carried the young child Jesus when they fled into the land of Egypt. Even in tender infancy the sufferings of the Redeemer began, and He complains, “I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up.” Perhaps these scorching beams beat upon His infant brow, and this sand-laden breeze dried up His infant lips, while the heat of the curse of God began to melt His heart within. Even in the desert we see the Suretyship of Jesus.

Robert Murray McCheyne in the Holy Land.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

When Jesus lived on this earth, He told many stories. The stories all had very important meanings and were called Parables. Here is one such story.

A sower went out to sow seeds, and as he scattered them some were blown by the breeze on to the road. When the birds saw the seeds lying there, they flew down and ate them. Other seeds fell on stony places, and began to grow, but the soil was so shallow that the plants soon withered and died. Some seeds fell in thorny places, and the thorns grew so fast that they choked the good seeds. But the seeds weren't all wasted: many of them fell on good ground. There they sprouted-up and sent their roots into the rich soil. Eventually they grew into many, many stocks of good grain.

The disciples were puzzled by this story that Jesus told, and later on they asked Him to explain what He meant. Jesus explained like this:

“The sower,” He said, “is the person who speaks the Word of God. The different kinds of soil represent the ways people act when they hear God’s message. Those who hear it and do not try to understand are like the road where the seeds fell. Just as the birds flew down and ate those seeds, the devil comes and snatches away the message that they have heard. Those who listen gladly to God’s word, but do not obey are like the stony places. The seeds fall, but do not grow, because they cannot take root in stony places. Those who believe God’s Word in their heart, but allow troubles or pleasures to crowd it out, are like the soil where the thorns choked-out the good seeds. But those who hear and obey

God's Word are like the good ground. Here the seeds fell, sprouted, grew into stocks and produced much good grain."

I do trust, boys and girls, that you will desire to have hearts like the good ground, and as you grow up day-by-day the seed of the Word of God will also grow, day-by-day, in your heart, and that you will obey all its truth.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

Our Attitude towards God's Sovereignty ***By Arthur W. Pink.***

Every truth that is revealed to us in God's word is there not only for our information, but also for our inspiration. The Bible has been given to us not to gratify an idle curiosity, but to edify our souls. The sovereignty of God is something more than an abstract principle which explains the rationale of the divine government: it is designed as a motive for godly fear; it is made know to us for the promotion of righteous living; it is revealed in order to bring into subjection our rebellious hearts. A true recognition of God's sovereignty humbles as nothing else can or does humble. It brings the heart into lowly submission before God, causing us to relinquish our own self-will, and making us delight in the perception and performance of the divine will.

When we speak of the sovereignty of God, we mean very much more than the exercise of God's governmental power, though, of course, that is included in the expression. ***The sovereignty of God means the Godhood of God.*** Truly to recognise the sovereignty of God is therefore to gaze upon the Sovereign Himself. It is to come into the presence of the august "Majesty on High." It is to have a sight of the thrice-holy God in His excellent glory.

Why is it that, today, the masses are so utterly unconcerned about spiritual and eternal things, and that they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Why is it that even on the battlefields of war multitudes were so indifferent to their souls' welfare? Why is it that defiance of heaven is becoming more open, more blatant, more daring? The answer is, "There is no fear of God before their eyes," (Romans 3:18.) Again, why is it that the authority of the scriptures has been lowered so sadly of late? Why is it that even among those who profess to be the Lord's people there is so little subjection to His word, and that its precepts are so lightly esteemed and so readily set aside? Ah! What needs to be stressed today is that God is a God to be feared.

Time was when it was the custom to speak of a believer as a "God-fearing man;" that such an appellation has become nearly extinct only serves to indicate whither we have drifted. Nevertheless, it still stands written, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that *fear* him," (Psalm 103:13).

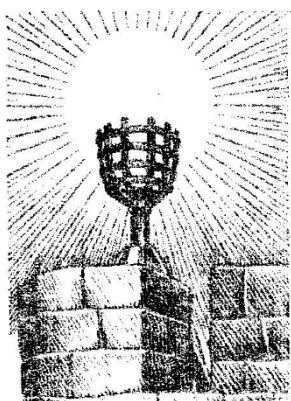
When we speak of godly fear, of course, we do not mean a servile fear, such as prevails among the heathen in connection with their gods. No; we mean that spirit which Jehovah is pledged to bless; that spirit to which the prophet referred when he said, "To this man will I (the Lord) look; even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word," (Isaiah 66:2.) It was this the apostle had in view when he wrote, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king," (1st Peter 2:17.) And nothing will foster this godly fear like a recognition of the sovereign Majesty of God.

A sight of God leads to a realisation of our littleness and nothingness, and issues in a sense of dependency and of casting ourselves upon God. Or again; a view of the divine majesty promotes the spirit of godly fear, and this, in turn, begets an obedient walk. Here then is the divine antidote for the native evil of our hearts. Naturally, man is filled with a sense of his own importance – with his greatness and self-sufficiency, in a word, with pride and rebellion. But, as we remarked, the great corrective is to behold the mighty God, for this alone will really humble him. Man will glory either in himself or in God. Man will live either to

serve and please himself, or he will seek to serve and please the Lord. None can serve two masters.

Irreverence begets disobedience. Said the haughty monarch of Egypt, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go,” (Exodus 5:2.) To Pharaoh, the God of the Hebrews was merely “a” god – one among many – a powerless entity who needed not to be feared or served. How sadly mistaken he was, and how bitterly he had to pay for his mistake he soon discovered. But what we are here seeking to emphasize is that Pharaoh’s defiant spirit was the fruit of irreverence, and this irreverence was the consequences of his ignorance of the majesty and authority of the divine Being.

Now if irreverence begets disobedience, true reverence will produce and promote obedience. Once the Sovereignty of the author of the word is apprehended, it will no longer be a matter of picking and choosing from the precepts and statutes of that word – selecting those that meet with our approval; but it will be seen that nothing less than an unqualified and wholehearted submission is becoming the creature.



The Lower Lights

Onesimus and Tychicus

In our day and in our land, we are more or less accustomed to a postal service that makes the conveyance of mail a relatively simple matter. In the ancient world, such facilities didn’t really exist, and the despatch of a letter from its writer to its intended reader was normally dependant on a mutual acquaintance who would act as bearer. This was no less the case with the apostle Paul, and several of his epistles, including the

epistle to Philemon and the one to the Colossians, reached their destinations in this way – the one being carried by the hand of the runaway slave, Onesimus, the other by “a beloved brother” called Tychicus.

Onesimus.

Onesimus was a slave in the household of Philemon, a man of some standing in the region of Laodicea. It would appear that at some point in his life Onesimus committed a crime against his master Philemon and apparently fled to the great city of Rome, where he possibly thought his anonymity would be secure. God moves in a mysterious way, however, and through some train of events, of which we are not told, Onesimus was brought into contact with Paul, now imprisoned in Rome for the truth of the gospel. As we know, Paul always looked on himself in such circumstances as “the prisoner of Jesus Christ,” and so, within the confines of that Roman prison he preached Christ and Him crucified to the servant who had absconded from his masters service. “Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds,” he calls him.

The *purpose* of Paul’s epistle to Philemon, then, is to effect the reinstatement of Onesimus to Philemon – back into his service and back into his favour once more – and in the course of that short epistle, you have one of the great Biblical illustrations of the truth of substitutionary atonement. “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought,” Paul writes to Philemon concerning Onesimus, “put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it.”

It takes very little spiritual effort to envisage, by faith, the essence of that plea being made on the behalf of guilty slaves such as we are before our God in heaven by the One who had all “our transgressions” laid to His account. “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought;” and with that word in his hand Onesimus set off from Rome to his master’s house again.

Tychicus.

When Onesimus set out from Rome to Laodicea that day, he wasn’t travelling alone. As Paul draws his epistle to the Colossians to a close,

he says this:- “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother ...” Then, right at the end of Colossians, Paul tells the believers there, “And when this epistle is read among your, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

“The church of the Laodiceans” at that point was, in all probability, the “church that is in thine house,” as Paul writes to Philemon. Therefore, “the epistle from Laodicea” would be the epistle to Philemon that they were to later receive and read, after Philemon had read it.

And so, side-by-side – now running, now walking; now resting, now talking – the two epistle-bearers made their journey from Rome to Laodicea, and then on to Colosse, and the reading of the two epistles in question.

The assessment and descriptions of the two men (quoted above) which Paul makes in his epistle to the Colossians, might well catch our hearts and minds. Tychicus was one of those men who joined themselves to Paul just after the uprising at Ephesus under Demetrius the silversmith, (Acts chapters 19 and 20.) No doubt, he had gone through manys and up and down with Paul, and it’s from the depth of his Roman imprisonment that Paul gives this description and assessment of him. There is one precious phrase in particular that Paul uses; he calls him, “a beloved brother.” “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother.”

There was a time when Paul would never have used such a phrase as that of a man like Tychicus. Tychicus was a Greek Gentile, and nothing could have been more unthinkable for an orthodox Pharisee such as Paul had once been to consider any Gentile dog a “brother” to himself. Ironically, of course, brothers they most assuredly were! If Paul had only stood and listened to our Lord’s ministry in John chapter 8 then he would have known that unless a man is “born again” he is of his “father

the devil,” be he Jew or Greek. Saul of Tarsus (the apostle Paul) and Tychicus of Colosse were, indeed, brothers together for they had one common father – their old father, the devil. But then, there came a point where the “brotherly” relationship was broken. Whoever was converted first – Saul of Tarsus or Tychicus, we are not told – but when either one of them was converted, the old relationship was broken. One of them now had “God to his Father,” and the other was still of his father the devil; but they were no longer brothers. But then, again, when the day of salvation arrived for the other party in the twosome, then, “brothers” they became, indeed, in Paul’s use of the term now, and he calls Tychicus, “a beloved brother.”

He calls Onesimus the same thing; “with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother,” he says. And what could better illustrate the gospel terms? Tychicus, and Paul, and Onesimus, too, must look to one common ground of redemption – the Spirit of God granting them adoption from their old family to their new: The Spirit of God causing them to be “born of God,” and true living sons of the living God. No *nationality* would do; Paul the Jew as well as Tychicus the Greek must be “born again.” No *status* could mean anything; Paul, of the elite of Israel and Onesimus the runaway rebel slave must both be “born again.” But once they are born of God then, they are “children of the living God,” and “brothers,” indeed, in the household and family of the redeemed.

But so, the apostle Paul places the letter to the Colossians firmly in the hand of Tychicus, and the letter to Philemon firmly in the hand of Onesimus, and off they go – bearing the very Word of God itself to its earthly destinations. Take one last look at them as they set off. See the mighty Empire of Rome that they leave. Paul is a despised prisoner there as these two non-descripts in the eyes of the world take their leave of him with the small scrolls that he has just written in their hands. But that Empire has now gone; God’s word we have yet. And when all the Empires of this world, and this world, shall have passed away, that Word will remain for ever. And every believer in Christ is made a “bearer” of that Word; they can “hold forth” the Word of life – indeed, they are themselves made to be “living epistles.” And although the

earth should pass away, nevertheless, to be faithful in our calling will write our names on the rocks of eternity. So, “Let the lower lights keep burning,” indeed.

Joseph Hart

Wrote:

How strange is the course that a Christian must steer!
How perplex is the path he must tread!
The hope of his happiness rises from fear,
And his life he receives from the dead.

His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,
And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved,
Till he finds himself utterly lost.

When all this is done, and his heart is assured
Of the total remission of sins;
When his pardon is signed, and his peace is procured,
From that moment his conflict begins.
