

# The Wicket Gate Magazine

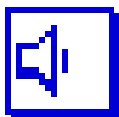
## A Continuing Witness



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At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine [www.wicketgate.co.uk](http://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 in the course of Church Worship
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- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002

# ***"Paul, Thou Art Beside Thyself"***

***(The Pastors Letter May 1980)***

Dear Friends,

One of the most consistent and persistent charges that is made against Evangelical Christianity is that it "turns the brain" of those who involve themselves in it. "Paul, thou art beside thyself," Festus told the great apostle as he preached before King Agrippa, "much learning doth make thee mad."

It was no new charge, of course, that Festus was delivering, for the disciples themselves, on the day of Pentecost, were accused of being "full of new wine," while the Lord Jesus was told He "had a devil," and away back in the old Testament, it was said of one of the prophets, "Wherefore came this mad fellow unto me?" No doubt Paul had shown a good measure of "warmth" and vigour as he preached before Agrippa that day, and as far as Festus was concerned, there was no better way to ward-off the blows of truth than with the old, well-tried accusation of madness and fanaticism. Festus knew his stuff, for is it not a charge that can sometimes throw us off our course, *because* it is a charge that levels itself at the pride of the human heart; for none of us want to be thought anything other than to be in obvious possession of all our faculties.

It's a strange charge, of course; and it would seem that a man or a woman can indulge in any pursuit to any degree without coming under such scathing stricture by those around them. There is a lovely incident in the life of old John Berridge that might serve us well as an example for answering our accusers along this line; on one occasion he was called before his Bishop to answer the charge of "preaching in other parishes." This was an unheard-of thing and showed definite signs of "enthusiasm!" "Well your Grace," said old John, "it is true that I go and preach in parishes other than my own; but," he went on, "I remember

seeing five or six clergymen away from *their* own parishes playing at bowls!” Just so and isn’t it a strange thing that it is this business of “soul” business that attracts so much opposition and charge of madness.

It seems that people can climb to the highest peaks of mountains and plunge to their deaths below; they can burrow into bowels of the earth, get stuck there, and have rescue teams toiling all night to get them out; they can hurtle round race tracks at 150 miles an hour and flash into hell at the turn of a wheel; they can hang from kits until they fall from them like a stone to the ground – *but*, they cannot see to the eternal welfare of their never-dying soul without being deemed some kind of a mad person, such as Paul, and a million others have been deemed.

It’s another well-trying shield and weapon that Festus falls back on when he reckons to know the “source” of Paul’s madness in this business of Christianity. “Paul, thou art beside thyself, *much learning* doth make thee mad.” But Paul’s reply is a model for any of us – both with regards to good manners, and also with regards to being confident in the Word of eternal life; “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

There was a time, indeed, when Paul reckoned himself something like a madman; when he persecuted the Church of Christ and fought against the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

“A little learning is a dangerous thing:  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:  
Those shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
But drinking largely sobers it again.”

How true on almost any subject. Get a few facts and we become drunk with their possession. The best way to “sober-up” is to take a deeper drink, and then, what a different view the whole thing takes on.

So, in the things of salvation. It is the shallow draughts of what the Bible has to say that absolutely intoxicate the brains of many men and women. But to drink deeper – with regards to sin and salvation, heaven

and hell, the devil and God – then it is to be “sober,” through the Word of “truth and soberness” itself. Like the man in the miracle, “whereas I was blind, now I see;” Paul is saying “Whereas I was mad and drunk, now I am sane and sober.”

It is a virtual epitome of gospel grace that is pictured for us in the Gadarene demoniac after Christ has released him from his “madness;” when the people see him, “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.” As Mr Ryle says, “We are only in our right mind as we sit at the feet of Jesus.” We need feel no intimidation: - “Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in His Name.”

May God be with us.

Yours sincerely

W. J. Seaton.

# BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

Remember how *sin* entered the world when Adam disobeyed God? Well, year after year that sin grew and spread throughout the whole world until God was sorry that He had made man at all. There was one man, however, who pleased God; that man’s name was Noah.

One Day God told Noah that He was going to deal with the wickedness of the world, but first of all, He told Noah that he was to build a great “boat.” God told Noah how he was to build it and gave him the exact measurements – telling him how to place the three decks, the cabins, the window, and the door.

Noah believed God, and he began building the “Ark”, as the great “boat” was called. He told all the people what he was doing, but they all just laughed and scoffed. Noah went on building the Ark as God had said.

At last it was ready. Then the rains came, and Noah and all his family, and two of all the animals and birds on the earth, went into the Ark with him. “God shut them in,” the Bible says. And as the rain began to fall, the people realised that Noah had told them the truth. But it was too late: they were “shut out.”

For forty days and forty nights the rain poured down, and the floods came, and all the waters on the earth burst out. But the Ark just bobbed along on the surface of the water, and although all those who were outside drowned in the floods, the ones who were inside the Ark were safe until the flood was over.

After forty days, Noah opened the window of the Ark and released a bird called a raven. Some days later he sent out another bird, a dove, and after a week, he sent out the dove again. When the dove came back the second time it had a leaf in its beak. After another week, he sent it out again, but this time the dove did not return to the Ark. Noah knew that the earth was now dry, and God told him to leave the Ark with his family and the animals.

The first thing that Noah did when he stepped on to dry land again was to build an altar and worship God – thanking Him for all His care and protection during the great flood.



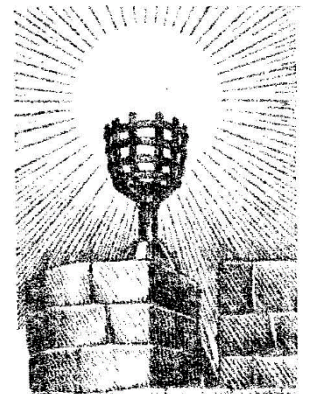
God then gave Noah a promise. He promised that never, ever, again would He destroy the earth *in this way*. But as long as the earth remained, there would be “seed-time and harvest; cold and heat; summer and winter; day and night.” God set a rainbow in the sky to remind us of this great promise.

Now, boys and girls, there are many great lessons to learn from this story of Noah and the flood. We must remember to be thankful to God for that promise and for our food and protection that we have day-by-day, and year-by-year. **But** we must also remember that God says He will punish sin; that is one truth of the Bible that the story of the flood is to show us. **However**, we can be thankful that God has given a place of safety for us, just as He gave a place of safety to Noah so long ago. The flood is to show us how God will, indeed, punish people for their sins and judge this world at the end of time. **But** the Ark is to show us that God has given a place of safety where we can be safe from that punishment and judgment. That “place,” of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ, when we trust in Him and believe in Him with all our heart. As surely as Noah was kept safe in the middle of all that flood, so every man and woman, boy or girl, who believes that Jesus died to save them from their sins, will be safe for ever and ever.

I trust that you will be like Noah, and believe God, and what He says about His Son Jesus Christ, and find safety in Jesus.

With Christian Love,  
Mrs Seaton.

***"The Lower Lights"***  
***Ananias of Damascus***



“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias ...”

If we ask who this Ananias was, then we can only say that he was “a certain disciple at Damascus;” for apart from the incident recorded in Acts chapter 9, and repeated in Acts chapter 22, we know nothing

whatsoever about that old saint. What we do know, however – although not telling us much about Ananias himself – tells us, yet again, something more of that precious truth of how God is so often pleased to use the ordinary to perform the extra-ordinary.

Ananias of Damascus, then, was the human instrument that God took up to use in the pointing of Saul of Tarsus to salvation in Christ. You remember the scenes? Saul on the way to Damascus, breathing out threats etc., against the church there. The Lord stops him in his path, directs him into Damascus, and eventually sends one to lay his hands-on Saul and to pronounce, in God's name "Brother Saul, receive thy sight." That one was Ananias; that one was the instrument that God used for the directing to Christ of the greatest apostle that the Church was ever to see. And when God used such a one as that, then it again highlights the lesson of how God so often takes up the apparently foolish, or despised, or insignificant to perform some of His greatest works.

Very often we say that God *can* use the little things to confound the mighty; and that is, of course, true; but it is not *all* the truth. And the truth is not simply that God *can*, but that God so often *does* just that. We would never have chosen Ananias of Damascus for such a task as leading Saul of Tarsus into the Church of Christ. What a catch! Don't let that fish get away! And so, we would have gone right to the top: Philip the evangelist, fresh from preaching that revival in chapter 8, or having carried out that tremendous piece of "personal work" with the Ethiopian Eunuch. But no. Not that either of those things are to be despised in the least degree; but it is this way in which God so often turns our thinking upside-down. What about Peter, or John, or Matthew – a professional man? But no; it is "A certain disciple named Ananias."

Isn't it like Jericho? Or Gideon's army? Or David slaying Goliath with a sling and stone? Ah, pre-eminently; isn't it like the Cross! And this is "the offence of the cross": - to bow to God's ways, and to be prepared for God's ways that are far above our ways in all.

# ***Expository Preaching***

## ***“A Need of the Hour”***

The expository method of preaching is best fitted to communicate the knowledge of scriptural truth in its connection. The knowledge of the Bible is something more than the knowledge of its isolated sentences. It includes a full acquaintance with the relation which every proposition sustains to the narrative or argument of which it is a part.

This is particularly true of trains of reasoning where everything depends on a recognition of the links that connect the several truths, and the order in which those truths are presented. Large portions of holy writ are closely argumentative and can be understood in their true intention only when the whole scope and sequence of the terms are considered. This logical connection is ***no less the result of inspiration than is any individual statement***. In some books of Scripture, the argument runs from beginning to end, and the clue to the whole is to be sought in the analysis of the reasoning ... But ... in the other methods of preaching (other than exposition) this great advantage is sacrificed. It is true that a man may announce as his text a single verse or clause of a verse, and then offer a full and satisfactory elucidation of the whole context; but, so far as this is done, the sermon is expository, and falls under the kind which we recommend.

But this species of discourse is becoming more and more rare. In the sermons of the Nonconformists this was usually the plan of proceeding. In modern sermons, there is, for the most part, nothing which resembles it. A text is taken, usually with a view to some preconceived subject; a proposition is deduced from the text; and this is confirmed or illustrated by a series of statements which would have been precisely the same if any similar verse, in any other part of the record, had been chosen. Here there is no interpretation, for there is no pretence of it. There may be able theological discussion, and we would by no means exclude this; but where a method merely textual or topical prevails, there is an absolute forsaking of that which we have maintained to be the true



notion of preaching. We can conceive of a hearer listening during a course of years to every verse of the epistle to the Hebrews, laid open in connection with as many sermons of the popular sort without obtaining thereby an insight into the grand scope ;and intricate contexture of that wonderful production. Now we say that the method which makes such an omission possible is unfit to be the exclusive method.

As a remarkable instance of what is meant, we may adduce the sermons of the Rev. William Jay, who is justly celebrated as one of the most fascinating and instructive preachers of Great Britain. In those sermons we find many valuable scriptural truths, many original and touching illustrations, much sound argument, pungent exhortation, and great unction. In themselves considered, and *viewed as pulpit orations*, they seem open to scarcely a single objection; yet, *as expositions of scripture*, they are literally nothing. They clear up no difficulties in the argument of the inspired writers; they give no wide prospects of the field in which their matter lies; they might be repeated for a lifetime without tending in the slightest degree to educate a congregation in habits of sound interpretation. The same remark applies to the majority of American discourses ..... The text is a sign or motto, after announcing which the preacher glides into a gentle train of common-places, or a series of thoughts which, however ingenious, interesting, and true, have no necessary connection.

The mental habits of any Christian community are mainly derived from the preaching which they hear. It is fair to ask, therefore, from what source can the Christians of our day be expected to gain a taste and ability for interpreting the Scripture in its connection?

From the Pen of J. W. Alexander (1804-1859)



## *Gleanings in the Psalms*

### *Psalm 89*

We have now reached the majestic *Covenant Psalm*. It is the utterance of a believer, in presence of great national disaster, pleading with his God, urging the grand argument of covenant engagements, and expecting deliverance and help, because of the faithfulness of Jehovah.

#### **Division: -**

The sacred poet commences by affirming his belief in the faithfulness of the Lord to His covenant to the house of David and makes his first pause at verse 4. He then praises and magnifies the name of the Lord for His power, justice, and mercy, verses 5 to 14. This leads him to sing of the happiness of the people who have such a God to be their glory and defence, verses 15 to 18. He rehearses the terms of the covenant at full length with evident delight, verses 19 to 37. And then mournfully pours out his complaint and petition, verses 38 to 51, closing the whole with a hearty benediction and a double Amen. May the Holy Spirit bless to us the reading of this most blessed psalm of instruction.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

The present psalm makes a pair with the preceding one. It is a spiritual “Allegro” to that “Penseroso” ... That psalm was a dirge of Passion-Tide; this psalm is a carol of Christmas.

*Christopher Wordsworth*

There are many passages in this psalm which do clearly evidence that it is to be interpreted of Christ. Yea, there are many things in this psalm that can never be clearly, pertinently, and appropriately applied to any but Jesus Christ for a taste, see: -

**Verse 19 - “I have laid help on one that is mighty.”** Mighty to pardon, to reconcile, to justify, to save, to bring to glory; suitable to that of the apostle – “He is able to save to the uttermost” – that is, to all ends and purposes, - perfectly, completely, fully, continually, perpetually. Christ is a thorough Saviour, a mighty Saviour: Isaiah 63:1, “Mighty to save.” There needs none to come after Him to finish the work which He hath begun.

**Verse 19 – “I have exalted one chosen out of the people.”** Which is the very title given to our Lord Jesus: Isaiah 42:1, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect” – or, chosen One – “in whom my soul delighteth.” And so, in verse 20 – “I have found David my servant ...” And Christ is very frequently called by that name as being most dearly beloved of God, and most highly esteemed and valued by God ....

**Verse 20 – “With my holy oil have I anointed him.”** Suitable to that of Christ in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” And therefore, we need not doubt of the excellency, authority, certainty, and sufficiency of the gospel.

**Verse 27 – “also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.”** Christ is the firstborn of every creature, and in all things hath the pre-eminence.

**Verse 29 – “His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”** This is chiefly spoken of Christ and His kingdom. The “temporal” heavens are corruptible, but the kingdom of heaven is eternal; and so, shall be Christ’s seed, throne, and kingdom.

**Verse 36. – “His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.”** Christ shall “see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” His throne shall be “as the sun before me” – or “shall shine as the sun.” Other kingdoms and thrones have their times and their turns, their rise, and their ruin, but this is not the case with the kingdom and throne of Christ. Christ’s

kingdom is “an everlasting dominion” which shall not pass away and is “that which shall not be destroyed.

I might give further instances out of this psalm, but enough is as good as a feast. Now saith God, “I have made a covenant with *Him*.” So then, there is a covenant that God the Father has made with Christ the Mediator. This covenant, which the Father commits to the Son, shall stand fast – there shall be no cancelling it, or disannulling of it.

Therefore, God the Father has not only made a covenant of Grace for the saints, but a covenant of redemption with Christ His Son. “My covenant shall stand fast,” says the Father, but it shall “stand fast *with him*,” that is, with Christ, as we have fully and clearly demonstrated.

*From Thomas Brooks*

(To be continued).

## ***Seasonal Advice From a Father to his Daughter***

In the cold month of January 1692, Philip Henry wrote some homely words to his daughter about keeping warm, with the spiritual counterpart.

1. **Get into the sun;** under His blessed beams there are warmth and comfort.
2. **Go near the fire;** “is not my word like unto a fire?”
3. **Keep in motion and action;** stir up the gift and grace of God that is in you.
4. **Seek Christian communion;** “How can one be warm alone?”

(From the Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry.)

