

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- 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

The Issue of Self

(The Pastor's Letter August 1980)

Dear Friends,

John Newton used to say, "I have read of many wicked Popes, but the worst pope I ever met with is Pope Self." It's a wise Christian who realises that, and who realises the desire of that old Pontiff to set himself up on a papal chair in our hearts.

There is hardly another subject more pin-pointed in the Word of God than the issue of self, and it lies right at the outset of the Christian life for any who would enter into that life. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." That word of our Saviour is, most assuredly, a call to the sacrificial Christian life of cross-bearing; but it is also a directive as to how we bear any cross in the Christian life. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself" – that is the first step; then comes the taking up of the cross and following Christ. There are many *self* issues that need to be dealt with by God's grace in the initial work of conversion – the greatest of these probably being self-righteousness as opposed to Christ-righteousness. But, for ever thereafter, we enter into a life that revolves around the denial of self in its many and varied forms. You can take the prefix of self and attach it to numerous motions or emotions of the human heart, and when you do you've got a problem to contend with in your Christian life. Self-righteousness (which never really leaves a Christian, if we understand self-righteousness aright, self-will; self-seeking; self-reliance; self-aggrandisement. Fill out the list for yourself; it is probably endless.

It is very much the issue of self that Paul has in mind when, by the Holy Spirit of God, he lists "temperance" as part of the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians chapter five; "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance ..." Temperance simply means self-control, and is very

much an all-embracing virtue in the Christian life. When we are in danger of manifesting hatred instead of “love,” badness instead of “goodness,” pride instead of “meekness,” it is “temperance” – self-control – that can come into operation and help us to be productive of those other parts of the fruit of the Spirit. Self-control acts like a “sprinkler valve” and helps to douse an over-heated heart or mind before it bursts into flames. Self-control is like a “modulator” to the ear that tells me that what I am hearing is off-key and will only result in damage to my ability to hear aright those things that are honest and of good report. Self-control acts like a “brake” on the tongue, or a “fuse” in the mind, or a “burglar alarm” to the soul. The devil knows that self is a blind-spot with us all, and how he labours to exploit that blind spot. Self blinkers us to the existence of others, and gives us a tunnel vision with regard to our own acts or actions. Doesn’t Paul, again, give us the example of the physical runner for anyone who would rightly run the Christian race and finish it? “And every man that striveth for the mastery,” he tells us, “is *temperate* in all things.” The athlete exercises self-control, that’s what he’s saying. We all ought to know this well enough: let a runner indulge his “self” in what he eats and what he drinks, and let him fail to train and fail to build his muscles, and he will soon know about it when he drops out of the prize-list and out of the running. Well, says Paul, shall we not learn from that? “They do it to obtain (only) a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” If they exercise temperance in their sphere – self-control – how much more, we? (1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 24ff.)

There is another very telling word from the apostle Paul, in his *second* epistle to the Corinthians – 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 verse 9. He is speaking about the time when he and some of his fellow-workers were engaged in the spread of the gospel in Asia. “We would not have you to be ignorant of our trouble,” he tells them, “... that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” We were like a pint jug, says Paul, into which the Lord in His will and purpose seemed (to us) to be pouring *two* pints! “Pressed out of measure.” “But” he says, “we had this sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves ...” It is tacit confession that Paul is making in those words to the Corinthians, that there, in the

Asian missionary journey, there was a time when he and the others had begun to give ear to old Mr Self-trust in the affairs of their life. So, says he, God poured in trouble after trouble – bringing us to the very pronouncement of death itself in our lives. For what reason? “That we might not trust in ourselves.” That we might learn to put old Mr Self-trust on the gallows. “But we had this sentence of death in ourselves, that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead.” It is the death of self-trust and the life of God-trust that Paul is speaking about there, and of course, the agent he would employ in the execution of self-trust would be Mr Self-control – Mr Temperance. We should be quite convinced in our minds, if Mr Self-control doesn’t gain the upper hand with Self-trust, Self-righteousness, Self-will, Self-reliance, or whatever, then Self will have the upper hand and eventually bring us down. It is like Ahithophel in the history of David. There was no counsellor quite like him in Israel, but when his counsel was rejected, he couldn’t bear it, and he went out and hanged himself. There is often too much Ahithophel in all of us; we resent the rejection of *our* counsel, or *our* assessment, or *our* advice etc. And it is that spirit that old Mr Self-trust exploits as he drives us on to a form of “spiritual suicide,” and then rejoices over our calamity.

Mr Spurgeon, in his usual telling way, has a word very much akin to what is involved in the issues of Self in the Christian life. “The old proverb has it,” he says, “Here’s talk of the Turk and the Pope, but ‘tis my next-door neighbour that does me the most harm.” So he says, “It is neither popery nor infidelity that we have half so much cause to dread as our own besetting sins.” And then, a lovely appeal that ought to find a place in all our hearts and minds on account of the lovely ironic force of its wording:

“We want more Protestants against sin, more Dissenters from carnal maxims, and more Nonconformists to the world.”

And then the final application: - “Our own besetting sins require far more of our watchfulness than State blunders or Ecclesiastical abuses.”

“Here’s talk of the Turk and of the Pope, but ‘tis my next neighbour that does me most harm.” “I have read of many wicked Popes, but the worst pope I ever met with is Pope Self.” May we all be aware of that old fellow within our breasts and, by the grace of God, be able to call on the aid and the strength of the grace of God, be able to call on the aid and the strength of one who is of another character altogether – Mr Self-control, Mr Temperance.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 89 (Continued)

Verses 30-32. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgements; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” How astonished many would be, if they knew what the real case was of those perhaps whom they admire, and think highly advanced and exalted in the divine life. If they were to know the falls, the wretched falls; falls in heart, in word and practice. If they were to know the deep distress that the children of God, who are far advanced in the divine life, are continually suffering from the effect of their transgression! That is exactly what God says, He comes and contemplates such a case, and He says, “If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then ...” – then what? What will God do? Some people say, “Then God will leave them.” But let us be instructed by God. He does not say He will leave them and forsake them. Mark what He will do! He says, “I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” That is the provision which God has

made in His covenant; and it is comforting to see how God has contemplated our case to the uttermost. There is nothing in our history that God has not met in the covenant with Christ. Nothing can befall you which is not contemplated – nothing which God has not provided for. Even if you fall, God has provided for it. But take heed; the provision involves much that will be terrible and desperately painful to your mind. There is nothing about it to encourage sin; there is nothing to give us license; nothing to lead a man to boast, “I am safe at last.” He is so; but how is he so? How does God secure the safety? “I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.”

Capel Molyneux

The Longer I live, the more I am brought to this – to know that there is not a sin that ever was committed, but I need the grace of God to keep me from it.

J.J. Evans

When our heavenly father is, as it were, forced to put forth His anger, He then makes use of a father’s rod, not an executioner’s axe. He will neither break his children’s bones, nor His own covenant.

Thomas Lye

Verse 33. “Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.” The shift from the plural to the singular with this thirty-third verse is not to go unnoticed. It is the “children” who forsake God’s law, in verse 30; it is “they” who break His statutes, in verse 31; it is “their” transgression, and “their” iniquity that God promises to visit with His rod and stripes, in verse 32; but it is “**Him**” that God promises not to take His lovingkindness away from in this present verse. The concept is really a very simple one, if we can receive it: - we receive God’s “smacks” on account of our sin, and God’s “smiles” on account of His grace mediated to us through Jesus Christ His Son. We sin and God deals with our sins, each and every one of us. But we are not utterly forsaken nor left without God’s lovingkindness to us, for that He can never remove from “Him” and, therefore, will never remove from us.

“Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the just is satisfied,
To look on Him, and pardon me.”

Verse 35. “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.” It is as though God had said, since I have not a more excellent perfection to swear by than my holiness, I lay this to pawn for your security, and bind myself by that which I will never part with, were it possible to be stripped of all the rest. It is a tacit imprecation of himself, if I lie unto David, let me never be counted holy, or thought righteous enough to be trusted by angels or men.

Stephen Charnock

Verse 36. “His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.” His “seed” and “throne” are coupled together, as if his *throne* could not stand if his seed should *fail*. If his subjects should perish, what would he be king of? If his members should be consumed, what would he be head of? Therefore, his seed shall never fail, for, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,” Hebrews chapter 1 verse 8.

Stephen Charnock

(To be continued.)

***Mrs Seaton’s Letter
To
The Boys and Girls
The Death of Stephen.***



Dear Boys and Girls,

I want to tell you about a very brave Christian man who was killed by wicked men many, many years ago just because he was preaching and telling men and women, boys and girls that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

The man's name was Stephen. You see, after Jesus was crucified on the cross many people repented of their sins and became Christians, and one such person was Stephen.

One day, as some foreign Jews were meeting in the Synagogue to study the Scriptures, Stephen went there to preach the gospel. But the leaders argued with him about his teaching, and they tried to prove that Jesus was not the Christ, the Saviour. However, God gave Stephen the right words to say, so that the leaders couldn't answer him, and had to go away without a word. This made them very angry with Stephen; they couldn't answer him, so they told lies about him, and got other men to tell lies, saying, "We have heard Stephen speak against Moses and against God." They told so many lies that soon the rulers and Scribes in Jerusalem seized Stephen and put him to trial.

Stephen's accusers told all their lies again. The High Priest then turned to Stephen and asked, "Are these things true?" Stephen stood up bravely, and beginning at the times of Abraham, right up to the time when they crucified Jesus, Stephen steadfastly spoke out about the Jews disobedience to God. The Lord gave Stephen great power to speak, and he finished with these words; "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." When he said this, they were filled with fury and stuck their fingers in their ears, so that they wouldn't hear any more of what Stephen was saying. Then they rushed at him, and dragged him outside the city, and threw large stones at him. Even then, Stephen held fast to his faith in Jesus, and he lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." As the stone struck his body, he then knelt down and cried out loudly, "Lord, do not blame them for this sin," and then his body was still, for he was dead.

Well, boys and girls, I don't think that is very likely to happen to any of us today in this country, but, I wonder, do we have the same faith in Jesus as Stephen had, so that when we hear people speaking wrongly about Jesus, we want to speak the truth, no matter how we might be ridiculed or criticised for it.

Mrs Seaton.

ETERNALLY
PURCHASED
yet
CONTINUOUSLY PENITENT.

A RELIGIOUS QUERY
ANSWERED
by
J. G. VOSS

Question: If a person's sins – past, present and future sins, - are all forgiven when he is justified, then why should a Christian daily confess sin and pray for forgiveness, throughout his life?

Answer: This problem has puzzled many Christians. The key to its solution lies in the distinction between justification and adoption.

Justification and adoption, although simultaneous and inseparable, are nevertheless two distinct acts of God, and they involve two distinct relationships between the believer and God.

In justification, God is our Judge; in adoption, God is our Father. Justification makes us citizens of God's kingdom; adoption makes us members of God's family. Justification is a judicial act, which concerns the legal penalty of sin and the legal requirement of absolute righteousness. Adoption is a matter of personal relationship, which concerns our position as children in God's family, and our enjoyment of the light of His countenance.

Justification, on the ground of the blood and righteousness of Christ, settles for all eternity the question of the Christian's standing in relation to the law of God. In justification God declares, once and forever, that the penalty of the law has been satisfied, and that by reason of the imputed righteousness of Christ, the Christian is positively and absolutely righteous in God's sight. This is done once for all; it never need nor can be repeated. To all eternity, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Justification is a permanent, final transaction.

Adoption on the other hand, concerns the relation of the Christian to God as his heavenly Father. The penalty of the law has been satisfied, and the righteousness demanded by the law has been imputed. All that

is finished business. But by reason of his continuing sinful nature the Christian still daily sins against God in word, thought and deed. These daily sins cannot bring the Christian into condemnation. They cannot take away his permanent justification. They cannot have the slightest effect on his eternal safety. But they can and do displease God, the Christian's heavenly Father. They are violations of the holiness of the family of God.

If these daily sins are not promptly repented of and confessed, they will have serious consequence in the believer's life. True, they will not take away his justification or his eternal salvation. But they will have serious consequences in the present life. They will harden the believer's own conscience, grieve the Holy Spirit, and bring God's chastening upon the Christian in the form of suffering of some kind. They will also destroy the believer's present usefulness in Christian service. And they will cast a deep gloom upon his soul, as the light of God's countenance is withdrawn. Read Psalm 32 and see how miserable David felt during the interval between his great sin and his confession of that sin. But if David had died during the interval, he would instantly have gone to heaven, for he was a justified man.

The chastening which God visits upon his sinning children has absolutely nothing to do with the judicial punishment of sin. As far as the judicial penalty of sin is concerned, the believer has already had the sentence of death executed upon him in the person of his representative, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. God's chastening of His children is not punishment but discipline. It proceeds not from His righteous wrath, but from His fatherly love and compassion. Its purpose is not to satisfy the righteous demands of the law, but to bring erring children back to a spiritual state.

The Christian's daily repentance and confession of sin concerns exclusively this relation to God as Father. It has nothing to do with the judicial guilt and penalty of sin, which is settled forever by justification. Rather, it is necessary in order that right relations may exist within the family of God. When the believer truly repents and confesses, as David did, the light of God's countenance will be restored to his soul. In short,

the believer should daily repent and confess his sins, not because of any danger of eternal damnation, but because he has offended his heavenly Father, and needs to have his consciousness of the Father's favour restored.



The Risen Christ ***By*** ***B.B. Warfield***

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the Dead.” – 2nd Timothy 2:8.

The opening verses of the second chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy are in essence a ***comprehensive exhortation*** to faithfulness.

The apostle Paul was lying imprisoned at Rome, with expectation of no other issue but death. The infant church had fallen upon perilous times. False teachers were assailing the very essence of the gospel. Defection had invaded the innermost circle of the apostle's companions. Treachery had attacked his own person. Over against all these dreadful manifestations of impending destruction, he strenuously exhorts his own son in faith, Timothy, to steadfast faithfulness. Faithfulness to himself, faithfulness to the cause he had at heart, faithfulness to the truth as he preached it, faithfulness to Jesus Christ, their common Redeemer and Lord.

The temptations to unfaithfulness by which Timothy was assailed were very numerous and very specious. Many good men had fallen and were falling victims to them. The perverted teachings of the errorists of the day were urged with a great show of learning and with eminent plausibility. And they were announced with a fine scorn which openly declared that only dull wits could rest in the crude ideas with which Paul had faced to world – and lost.

The sword of persecution had been ruthlessly unsheathed, and sufferings and a cruel death watched in the way of those who would fain walk in the path that Paul had marked out. It seemed as though the whole fabric which the apostle had built up at such cost of labour and pain was about to fall about his ears.

Paul does not for a moment, however, lose courage, either for himself or for his faithful followers. But neither does he seek to involve Timothy *unwittingly* in the difficulties and dangers in which he found himself. He rather bids him first of all to count the whole cost. And then he points him to a source of strength which will supply all his needs.

We called the passage an exhortation. We might better call it, more specifically, an encouragement. And the encouragement culminates in a very remarkable sentence.

This sentence is pregnant enough to reveal at once the central thought of Paul's gospel, and the citadel of his own strength. Amid all the surrounding temptations, all the encompassing dangers, Paul bids Timothy to bear in mind, as the sufficing source of abounding strength, the great central doctrine – or let us say, the great central fact – of his preaching, of his faith, of his life. And he enunciates this great fact, in these words: - Jesus Christ raised from the dead, of the seed of David.

It is, of course, to the glorified Christ Jesus that Paul directs his own and Timothy's gaze. Or to be more specific, it is to the *Regal Lordship* of the resurrected *Jesus* that he points as the Christian's strength and support. Paul bids Timothy in the midst of all the besetting perplexities and dangers which encompassed him, to strengthen his heart by bearing constantly in remembrance, not just Jesus Christ (simply as Jesus Christ,) but Jesus Christ conceived of specifically as the Lord of the Universe, who has been dead, but now lives again, and abides for ever in the power of an endless life; as the royal seed of David ascended in triumph to His eternal throne.

No doubt a part of the apostle's purpose in his allusion to the past humiliation of the exalted Lord is to constitute a connection between

Jesus Christ and his faithful followers, that they may become imitators of Him. (He who suffered is now exalted; so it will be with them.) But the “nerve-centre” of the exhortation, obviously, does not lie in this. How could Timothy imitate our Lord in being of the seed of David? How could he imitate Him by ascending the throne of the Universe? Fundamentally the apostle is pointing to Christ not as our example, but as our almighty Saviour. He means to adduce the great things about Him. And the central one of the great things he adduces about Him is that He has been raised from the dead. To Paul, it is clear, the resurrection of Christ was the hinge on which turned all his hopes and all his confidence, in life, and also in death. “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.”

Brownlow North and Honouring God.

“I believe”, said Brownlow North, “there is nothing honours God more, or that God more honours, than praising him in tribulation. When did Paul ever honour God more than when at midnight in the inner prison, his back cut to pieces with the Roman whips and his feet made fast in the stocks, he prayed and sang praises unto God? And when did God ever honour Paul more than when, through the instrumentality of those prayers and praises, He brought the jailer to his feet with the question, ‘What must I do to be saved?’

Paul was once caught up into the third heaven, and he thanked and praised God for the honour and glory. Yet I never heard of any one who was converted by that portion of Paul’s history. But who can count the number that owe their soul’s salvation to the answer given to the jailer’s question – ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!’”