

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
- 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. (A Work in Progress)

Our Only Authority

(The Pastor's Letter)

Dear Friends,

From time to time debates arise within the Christian Church and in many cases one of the features that arise within these debates is the enlisting of the great names of the past – Luther, Calvin, Owen, Goodwin etc. – to buttress and give weight to the particular viewpoint being expressed. Needless to say, in the course of the enlisting, not only are the strong points of the enlisted Puritan or Reformer paraded, but also the weak points of some other, or others. And it is in this exposing of the weak points of some of these men of the past that is a disturbing factor in the minds of some believers. This is not to say that we should necessarily hide these aspects of any man's ministry that were, or are, patently deficient; but from any debate it is obvious there would be a degree of deficiency in the handling of the deficiencies of others.

What I mean is this: there would perhaps be lots of frustration arising in the minds of many believers concerning the failings of the men of the past, if those men had not been originally presented to them as almost *without failings* in the first place.

Some time ago we had a Christian visiting us in our home who told us that she no longer read any of the writings of Charles Hadden Spurgeon. The reason given was that she had “come across something “ridiculous” in one of Spurgeon's sermons. “What?” I said, “only one ridiculous thing! I have come across more than one ridiculous thing in Spurgeon's sermons; ***and I thank God for those things.***”

God knows the proneness of the human heart to depart from Him and set up other god in His place, and so, it is the mercy of God that

gives us those reminders that men are not like God, and must not be treated as though they are. Every man that has ever been given to the Church as a “gift” from God has been given with the express purpose of leading us into the light of the truth of God in His Holy Word; but where a man deviates from that truth, then we see him as a man and treat him as such in that particular area of his thinking or speaking. And that applies to any man.

Now, unless a Christian has completely come to terms with that fact, or been brought to terms with that fact, that Christian is going to find a certain degree of perplexity of heart and mind with a certain fault or failing of some eminent saint of the past rises to the surface. And, as we’ve already said, much of the cause of that perplexity may be attributed to a presentation of some of these people of the past that has endowed them with a virtual infallibility. Too many ministers and writers have given too many impressions that too many men of the past have given the last word on too many subjects. It is “chaff” and not “wheat” for any minister to give the views of Dr So-and-So on any given doctrine or subject unless that good Doctor’s “views” square with the Holy Word of God, and are only used to hold forth the truth of the Holy Word of God.

Too many pastors spend too much time in too much discussion over too many men’s view. The result of this is that too many debates revolve around what one “Doctor” said in contrast to another, without due attention being paid to the fact that *no* “Doctor” – or, no one – has a monopoly on the truth of God.

Just after the Second World War, both America and Russia “liberated” a large number of German scientists; men especially skilled in rocket engineering etc. As the arms’ race and the space race then got under way and the tension between these two countries mounted, one American comedian quipped – “The real argument between us and the Russians is – our Germans are better than your Germans!” In much of the current theological arms’ races that go on it would appear that the real argument is – “Our Puritans are better than your Puritans,” or, “Our Puritans are better than your

Reformers,” and vice versa. And the very real danger is that *everything* that a particular man has said becomes accepted, simply because *some* of the things, or *many* of the things that he has said have become acceptable, and *are* acceptable in the light of the Holy Word of God.

Now, for “Baptists” at any rate, all of that should be clearcut. Who doesn’t rejoice in the guiding hand of dear Mr John Calvin as he leads us through those Biblical pathways of the Word of God concerning the things of our soul’s salvation stored-up in the eternal purposes of God from time immemorial? However, when Calvin makes that notorious statement relating to the parable of the “tares and the wheat,” that – “The field is the *Church*,” then we must say, “Pardon me, Mr Calvin, but I must accept what my Saviour says, that – “The field is the world.

That doesn’t mean that I have to clear my shelves of Calvin, or refuse to accept him as a precious “gift” from the Risen Saviour to His church here below. But it most-assuredly means that he must come to the Bar of scripture, as all must come to the Bar of scripture.

Who isn’t impressed with so much of the practicality and thoroughness of the Puritans? However, need we be reminded that, to a man, they hadn’t a clue between them with regards to the true nature and import of Biblical baptism!

Who wouldn’t stand in awe of so many of the Scottish Covenanters as they cast themselves in faith into the hand of God? However what New Testament saint in his right senses would want to follow them with a sword in his hand on to the battlefield of Rullion Green, or wherever, to shed blood in the defence of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace!

If *Reformed* means anything, it means being *con*formed to, and *trans*formed *by* the Holy Word of God. And where it is evident that our brethren in the past were not Reformed in some things under that understanding of the term, then, we are not to follow them, but to

follow God. To believe that the process of reformation stopped with that first great breakthrough from the darkness of Romish Papalism, is a form of Papalism itself! The outcome of the Reformation was never meant to be that we would exchange one Pope for a whole body of popes whose every pronouncements was to bind the churches of Christ for all generations to come. The Reformation was the dawning of an ongoing impetus based on the fact that God had now thrown open the doors of His Word for all generations to come – *beginning with* that generation.

It must never affect us that the holding of a certain Biblical position, appears to leave us out of step with the merely accepted, and denies the “historical backing” of a whole army of eminent souls of the past. If mere weight of supportive numbers, or historic lineage meant anything, Rome would have many of us licked hands-down with its hundreds of millions of members and its structured existence dating back to a thousand years before the Reformation. But, as Mr Valiant-for-truth said, “Little or more are nothing to him that has the truth on his side.”

The all-important thing for a Christian is not whether or not he is on any man’s side – or whether any particular man is on his side – but that he is on God’s side. And we, or any, may only be on God’s side in so far as we stand on God’s Word, and ultimately on God’s Word, alone. To enable us to endeavour to do this, He has, indeed, granted us an open Word; and, indeed, they do so, we rejoice in the gifts and in the God who gave them. Where they don’t, we simply remember that the best of men are only men at the best.

Yours sincerely
W. J. Seaton (April 1981)

If we once get above our Bibles, and cease making the written Word of God our sole rule both as to faith and practice, we shall soon lie open to all manner of delusion, and be in great danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. ----- (George Whitefield)



Mrs Seaton's Letter To The Boys and Girls

Dear Boys and Girls,

Once upon a time there was a little girl, about ten-years old, called Jane, who lived on a large farm with her mother and father. One day, her father took very sick, and by the time the afternoon came he had to send Jane off to bring home some calves. She lost her way however, and as night fell in the forest, she became very cold and very frightened. All she could do was keep on walking, although she had no idea where she was.

At last she reached a farmer's house quite a distance from her own home, but she was safe. Lots of questions were asked her, and in answer to them, she said, "The wolves kept close to my heels and snapped at my feet, but I remembered how mummy always told me that whenever I was in danger to always pray to God for protection. So I prayed, and then I knew that the wolves couldn't hurt me, because God wouldn't let them."

Wasn't that sweet trusting faith, boys and girls, that Jane had that night? Here are some lines of poetry about trusting God.

"Trust God's wisdom you to guide,
Trust His goodness to provide;
Trust His saving love and power,
Trust him every day and hour;
Trust Him as the only light,
Trust Him in the darkest night;
Trust in sickness, trust in health,
Trust in poverty and wealth;
Trust in joy and trust in grief,
Trust his promise for relief;
Trust in living, dying, too,
Trust Him all your journey through."

The Minister and His Spiritual Works

The Minister and his Prayers. C.H. Spurgeon.

It may scarcely be needful to commend to you the sweet uses of private devotions, and yet I cannot forbear. To you, as the ambassadors of God the mercy-seat has a virtue beyond all estimate; the more familiar you are with the court of heaven the better shall you discharge your heavenly trust. Among all the formative influences which go to make up a man honoured of God in the ministry, I know of none more mighty than his own familiarity with the mercy-seat. All that a college course can do for a student is coarse and external compared with the spiritual and delicate refinement obtained by communion with God. While the unformed minister is revolving on the wheel of preparation, prayer is the tool of the great potter by which He moulds the vessel. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets. We grow, we wax mighty, we prevail in private prayer. Texts will often refuse to reveal their treasures until you open them with the key of prayer. The commentators are good instructors, but the Author Himself is far better, and prayer makes a direct appeal to Him and enlists Him in our cause. A certain Puritan divine at a debate was observed frequently to write upon the paper before him: upon others curiously seeking to read his notes, they found nothing upon the page but the words, “More light, Lord” “More light, Lord,” repeated scores of times. A most suitable prayer for the student of the Word when preparing his discourse.

The Minister and His Preaching. Charles Bridges.

Our Lord’s pungent addresses to the Scribes and Pharisees exhibit the boldness of a Christian Ministration. The same spirit in the Apostles – unaccountable upon human calculations – confounded their judges to the face. Witness Paul before Felix – a prisoner on his trial for life – “no man standing by him” – hated even unto death by the influential body of his countrymen; yet, mean, and in peril, looking his judge in the

face with the power of life and death in his hands, and remembering only the dignity of his office – delivering to this noble sinner and his guilty partner the most personal and offensive truths. How did this splendid example of Ministerial boldness “magnify his office!” For what can be more degrading to our divine commission, than that we should fear the face of men? What unmindfulness does it argue of our Master’s presence and authority, and of our high responsibilities, as “set forth for the defence of the gospel!” The independence that disregards alike the praise and the censure of man, is indispensable for the integrity of the Christian Ministry. Luther would have been tolerated on many truths of general application, but his bold statements of justification could not be endured. But the question is not how our people may be pleased, but how they may be warned, instructed, and saved. We would indeed strongly rebuke that modesty, which makes us ashamed of our grand message; or that tremulous timidity, which seems to imply that we are only half-believers in our grand commission. To keep offensive doctrines out of view, or to apologise for the occasional mention of them, or to be over cautious respecting the rudeness of disquieting the conscience with unwelcome truth; to compromise with the world, to connive at fashionable sins, or to be silent where the cause of God demands an open confession – this is not the spirit which honours our Master, and which He “delighteth to honour.”

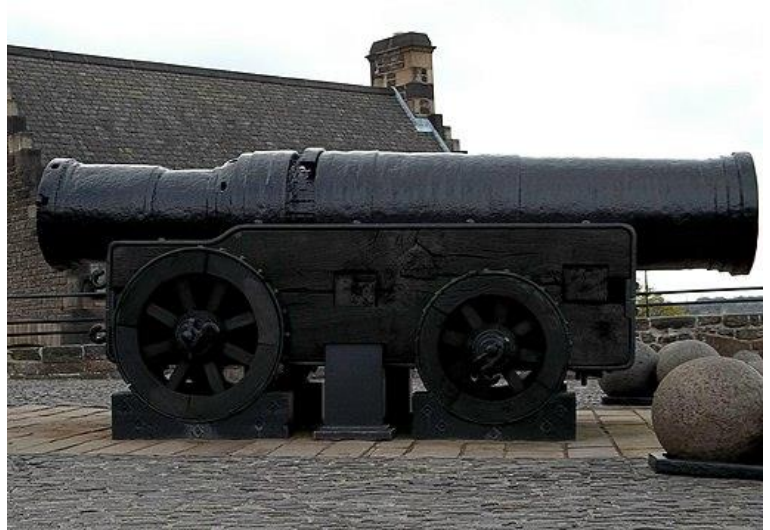
The Minister and his Soul. Richard Baxter.

See that the work of saving grace be wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to that effectual working of that gospel which you preach. Take heed to yourselves lest you perish while you call upon others to take heed of perishing, and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save me for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves? Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in His Master’s service. Take heed therefore to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which

you persuade them to believe, and have heartily entertained that Christ and that Spirit which you offer unto others. It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professor of religion, but much more to be an unsanctified preacher of the gospel.

Baptism of Fire.

(By W. Arthur)



Suppose we saw an army sitting down in front of a granite fortress, and they told us they intended to batter it down. We might ask them, *how?* They point to a cannon-ball.

Well, but there is no power in that. It is heavy; but not more than a hundredweight. If all the men in the army were to throw it at the walls that would make no impression. They say, no, but look at the cannon.

Well, there is no power in that; it is a machine, and nothing more. But look at the powder, we are told. Well, there is no power in that either; a child may spill it, a sparrow may pick it up.

Yet – this powerless powder, and this powerless ball, put into this powerless cannon with one spark of fire! Then, in the twinkling of an eye, that power is a flash of lightening, and that cannon-ball is a thunderbolt which smites as if it had been sent from heaven.

So it is with our Church machinery. We have our instruments for pulling down the strongholds of Satan, but, oh, for that baptism of fire that comes from God to the glory of God.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 90

Title – “A Prayer of Moses the man of God.” Moses was mighty in word as well as in deed, and this psalm we believe to be one of his weighty utterances. Moses was peculiarly a man of God and God’s man: chosen of God, inspired of God, honoured of God, and faithful to God in all his house, he well deserved the name that is here given to him. The psalm is called a prayer, for the closing petitions enter into its essence, and the proceeding verses are a meditation preparatory to the supplication. This is the oldest of the psalms and stands as a composition unique in its grandeur, and alone in its sublime antiquity.

C.H.S.

Verse 1. **“Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.”** Moses was an old and much tried-man, but age and experience had taught him that, amidst the perpetual changes that are taking place in the universe, one thing at least remains immutable, even the faithfulness of Him who is “everlasting to everlasting, God.” How far back into the past may the patriarch have been looking when he spoke these words? The burning bush, the fiery furnace of Egypt, the Red Sea, Pharoah with his chariots of war, and the weary march of Israel were all before him. But Moses was looking beyond these scenes of his personal history when he indited the words of this song – “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.” Yea, he was reflecting in his mind how God had been the refuge of Jacob and Isaac, of Abraham, Noah, and all the patriarchs. Moses could take a retrospect of over a thousand of years, all of which confirmed the truth – but I can do more! At this point of time I can look back to the days of Moses and Joshua and David, and descending thence to the days of the Son of God upon earth, and of Paul and Peter, and all of the saints of the church

down to the present hour. And what a thousand years confirmed to Moses, these thousands more confirm to me – that the Lord is the dwelling place of them that trust in Him, from generation to generation. Yes, and to Him who was the God of an Abraham and a Moses, I too, can lift my hands.

A. Tholuck

Verse 1. “... our dwelling place.” Many seem to seek God’s help in a storm and when all other forms of refuge fail them. But a Christian must maintain constant communication with Him – they must “dwell” in God, not run to him now and then.

T. Manton

Verse 1. “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place.” The apostle Paul speaks almost in the same strains when he says, “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” It is a much clearer and luminous expression to say that believers dwell in God than God dwells in them (though both are true.) But because the believer dwells in God, then it is certain that he cannot be moved, for God is an habitation that cannot shift or perish. Moses wished to express the certainty of our life when he said, God is our dwelling place. Not just the earth, not just heaven, not just paradise, but simply God Himself.

Martin Luther

Verse 4. “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” The Holy Ghost expresses Himself according to the manner of men, to give us some notion of an infinite duration, by a resemblance suited to our capacity. If a thousand years be but as a day to the life of God, then as a year is to the life of man, so are three-hundred- and-sixty-five-thousand years to the life of God. And as seventy years are to the life of man, so are twenty-five-million five-hundred-and-fifty thousand years to the life of God. However, since there is no proportion between time and eternity, we must dart our thoughts beyond these!

Stephen Charnock

Verse 4. “... a watch in the night.” The whole space of human life on

earth, though it could reach “a thousand years”, is still esteemed with God as a very little – not only as one day already past, but scarcely equal to the three hours of a night which constituted “a watch in the night.”

From Mollerus

Verse 9. “For all our days are passed away in they wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told.” Moses may well be referring to the thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness which are no part of the sacred history, for little or nothing is recorded of what happened to Israel between the second and fortieth year after Egypt. Those years were like a “tale that is told.” Forbid that we should have such years in our life if we profess to be the redeemed of the Lord from bondage.

(To be continued).



The Beginning of Mission

By Farrar.

“We are never to forget that the most fruitful impulse to what we now call mission work, came neither from Bishops nor High Churchmen, but from a Baptist cobbler. His name was William Carey. Teaching a poor school; brooding over a map of the world which he posted up for his geography lessons, and seeing how vast a part of the globe was covered by waste places – he read at a meeting of Ministers, a paper on the duty of attempting to spread the gospel among the heathen. At first it awoke no echo. These Ministers had nothing better to say to him than that his plan was highly preposterous, and that If God wished to convert the heathen, He would do so of Himself. Such was the torpid assurance of stereotyped religionism. In their ignorance they had not even observed

that God works by men. Yet, the work of mission, indeed, began in that obscure setting.

At about the same time, a shop-boy of fifteen, carrying a parcel of books for his employer, stopped for a moment to rest, and burst into tears to think that his life would have to be spent in carrying those heavy books! He lifted up his eyes and saw some statues of a few great men who had worked for God and, being filled with a new determination, he went on with a happier heart. His name was William Marshman, and when he grew up, he joined Carey to become the man who translated the Book of books into more than twenty languages. Such were God's beginnings."

Regeneration.

"A man may work brass to great beauty and perfection, but no artificer can work it into gold. To change our natures must be the work of Omnipotence. The change required to make us fit to enjoy heaven is not like that of the snake when it has cast its skin and yet remains a reptile still; it is the change of the caterpillar when it dies, and its crawling life ceases, but from the dead body rises the butterfly – a new animal without nature.

To hew a block of marble from the quarry and carve it into a noble statue; to break up a waste wilderness and turn it into a garden of flowers; to melt a lump of ironstone and forge it into watchsprings, all these are mighty changes. Yet, they all come far short of the change which every child of Adam requires, for they are much the same thing in a new shape; but man needs a change as great as a resurrection from the dead. He must become a new creature."

From the works of J. C. Ryle.