

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 43 issued July 2003

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My Dear Brethren,

By this time most of the congregation are eagerly waiting for or have seen their holidays past and gone for another year. One of the most interesting points of topic, I think, after the holiday period is "Where did you worship when you were away?" When this topic comes up for discussion, we find that the experience have been many and varied. Some have ended up in "cold" churches, some in "dead" churches, some in "modernistic" churches, and, of course, praise God for it, some in good, alive evangelical fellowships where the Word of God has been rightly divided.

When we begin to consider how we fared ourselves, however, it should serve to remind us that in these summer months we to have "the stranger within our gates". If you thought the Church you worshipped in while on holiday was cold and uninviting, what have you done to make our own fellowship appealing? If you are still nursing a grievance that the "singing was dead" in the place that you spent two weekends in, are you endeavouring to sing from the heart so that our own items of praise truly ring out like the songs of Zion? And, of course, what I apply to you, brethren, I trust I can take to my own heart also.

During our own holidays, my wife and I spent quite a bit of money in an effort to go and worship in a reputed evangelical fellowship with a good, young evangelical minister. Imagine our disappointment, however when we discovered that the evening service had been turned into a "religious catch-penny" with a group of young folk from Glasgow, and the "minister of the Word" reduced to an M.C. For an hour we were subjected to a trio who sang, but couldn't! A young boy who gave his testimony, but shouldn't! and a minister who might have preached the Word, but didn't! After many weeks in the pulpit, endeavouring, no matter how feebly, to feed others with the Word of Life, it is a great joy for a preacher to sit and have his own soul fed; but a great disappointment to be served with husks when the "Father's bread" is your desire.

In this point, you see, I must speak to my own heart, and endeavour to minister the Word of God faithfully in case some of "the strangers within our gates" are prophets in Israel dwelling under the juniper tree (1 Kings 19 verse 4). God forbid that we should fall into the trap of turning the house of God into a "hailing station" for Christians, but let us remember that we might well "entertain angels unawares" and let us pray that our visitors may look back to their time with us and "give thanks for our fellowship in the Gospel".

Sincerely
W.J. Seaton (1967)

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What makes mistaken men afraid
Of sovereign grace to preach?
The reason is (if truth be said)
Because they are so rich.

Why so offensive in their eyes
Doth God's election seem?
Because they think themselves so wise,
That they have chosen Him.

Of perseverance why so loth
Are some to speak or hear?
Because, as masters over sloth,
They vow to persevere.

Whence is imputed righteousness
A point so little known?
Because men think they all possess
Some righteousness their own.

No so the needy, helpless soul
Prefers his humble prayer;
He looks to Him that works the whole,
And seeks his treasure there.

His language is "Let me, my God,
On sovereign grace rely;
And own 'tis free, because bestow'd,
On one so vile as I.

Election! 'tis a word divine;
For, Lord, I plainly see,
Had not thy choice prevented mine,
I ne'er had chosen thee.

For perseverance strength I've none,
But would on this depend;
That Jesus, having lov'd his won,
He loves them to the end."

Joseph Hart

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BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

The story that I am going to tell you in this edition is about a little boy called Sidney, who is 10 years old. One day Sidney heard his Mummy talking about some bills that would have to be paid, and this

gave Sidney an idea! He decided to make out a bill himself for jobs that he had done.

The next morning, he quietly laid on his Mummy's plate at breakfast-time a bill, which read:

<u>Mummy owes Sidney:</u>	
For getting coals 6 times	.60p
For being a good boy	.05p
For fetching wood lots of times	.50p
For going messages twice	.40p
	<u>Total £1.55p</u>

His Mummy read the bill but said nothing. That evening at tea Sidney found on his plate the bill with the £1.55p as payment; but also, with it, another bill, which read:

<u>Sidney owes Mummy:</u>	
For his happy home	Nothing
For his food	Nothing
For nursing him when he was sick	Nothing
For being good to him	Nothing
	<u>Total Nothing</u>

When Sidney looked at this, how ashamed he was. His lips began to quiver, and he could feel tears ready to come to his eyes. Then he took the £1.55p out of his pocket and rushed to his Mummy, flung his arms around her neck and cried: "Oh Mummy, how mean I was! Please forgive me! Take back this £1.55p, and let me do lots of things for you because I love you".

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Well, children, I hope none of you would ever think of giving your Mummy a bill like Sidney did. It was very ungrateful of him after all his Mummy had done for him. You know, boys and girls, Sidney's Mummy reminds me of our Lord Jesus and all that He has done for us. Jesus even died on the cross for us; He paid the debt for our sins, the Bible tells us. Jesus does not ask us to PAY Him in any way for what He has done for us, but surely when we really believe that He died for us, then we will love Him more and more and try to do everything to please Him.

Here is a little chorus you may not know; it is sung to the tune "Stand up, stand up for Jesus".

"A little child of seven - or even three or four,
May enter into heaven - through Christ, the Open Door:
For if that child believeth on Christ, the Son of God,
That little child receiveth salvation through His blood."

Mrs Seaton

GLEANINGS IN THE PSALMS

PSALM 8



Verse 1. "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens."

Yes, God's name is excellent in all the earth, though millions of mankind are not aware of it. Excellent is His Name, and everywhere present is His power, and everywhere manifest is His wisdom and His love. No one thing there is in all the universe which does not tell

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of the hand that made it. The greatest and the least are alike the works of God's creation, the objects of His care, and the proofs of His omnipotence.

Charles Girdlestone

Verse 2. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength..."

"I cannot help adding that some little boys and girls who were fond of sitting round me on the pulpit while I preached, and handed to me people's notes - though they were often pelted with eggs, dirt, etc., thrown at me - never once gave way; but, on the contrary, every time I was struck they turned up their little weeping eyes, and seemed to wish that they could receive the blows for me. God make them, in their growing years, great and living martyrs for Him, who, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, perfects praise".

From a letter by George Whitefield

Verse 3. "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained".

How cometh he to mention the moon and the stars, and omit the sun, the other being but his pensioners, shining with that exhibition of light which the bounty of the sun allots them? It is answered: "This was David's night meditation ... Night was made for man to rest in. But when I cannot sleep, may I, with the Psalmist, entertain my waking with good thoughts.

Thomas Fuller

Verse 3-4. "When I consider the heavens, etc. ...What is man that thou art mindful of him?"

To study whether it be the sun or the earth that moveth, and not to consider what motion is predominant in thy soul and life, is a pitiful, preposterous study. To think more what stars are in the firmament than that grace is in thy heart; and what planet reigneth, than what disposition reigneth in thyself, and whether the spirit or the flesh hath dominion, is but to be learnedly beside thyself.

Richard Baxter

Verse 4. "What is man...?"

The Scripture gives many answers to this question. Ask the prophet Isaiah: "What is man?", and he answers "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field". Ask David "What is man?" He answers: "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie". Man is a lie; not only a liar, or a deceiver, but "a

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lie" and a deceit. All the answers that the Holy Ghost gives concerning men are to humble man: man is ready to flatter himself, and one man to flatter another, but God tells us plainly what we are.

What is man that God should take notice of him. Is he not a clod of earth, a piece of clay? But consider him as a sinner... and we may wonder to amazement. One step further; what is REBELLIOUS man, man an enemy of God, that God should magnify him? What admiration can answer this question?

Joseph Caryl

Verse 6. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; THOU HAST PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET".

Let none of us permit the possession of any earthly creature to be a snare to us, but let us remember that we are to reign over them, and not to allow them to reign over us. Under our feet we must keep the world, and we must shun that base spirit which is content to let worldly cares and pleasures sway the empire of the immortal soul.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 9. "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth".

He closeth the psalm as he began it with admiration: whence learn - (1) the praises of our Lord, and the excellency of our covenant right and interest in Him are worthy again and again to be considered; ... therefore, is this verse repeated again; (2) When a man hath begun to declare some reason of his wondering at the glory of God, manifested in the whole world, and specially in His Church, he must give over the full explication of this glory, and close as he began with wondering still; as here, the same exclamation of wondering at the excellency of God's glory concludeth the psalm as it began it... "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth".

David Dickson

George Whitefield was once asked if he would found a denomination after him just as John Wesley had founded the Wesleyans. "No", he answered, "Brother John Wesley may do as he pleases, but let my name perish; let Christ's name last for ever".

"O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth".

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If you care to look up your diary for 24th August, you will find that it is listed as "St. Bartholomew's Day". In the diary of the Church of Christ, however, we find 24th August 1662, listed as "Black Bartholomew's Day". On that day, almost 2,000 sermons were preached by almost 2,000 ministers of the Church of England, and the nature of those sermons and the men who preached them is well summarised in the words of one of them...

"I preach as never sure to preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men".

The 24th August 1662, is the date of what Church History has called "The Great Ejection". It was on that day that almost 2,000 ministers of the Church of England were ejected from their churches, and pulpits, and homes, because, "for conscience sake", as they put it, they could not bring themselves to submit to "An Act of Uniformity" drawn up by Charles 11 and his bishops. Like everything else in the history of the Church, however, 24th August 1662 was merely the climax of a state of affairs that reached back almost 100 years, to the years just following the Reformation in the Church of England, when Henry V111 was on the throne of England.

Under Henry, the Church in England had been "reformed", but it wasn't long until many were beginning to question whether or not the reform had gone far enough. These people became known as "Puritans". It was the Puritans' desire to move the Reformation right to the point where everything that had been added to the Church during the middle ages by the Popes of Rome would be cast out, and not only the doctrine of the Church, but the practice and the discipline of the Church be "purified"; so they were called the Puritans.

The main body of opinion in the Church at this time was that "things indifferent, which are neither contrary to Scripture, nor forbidden by it, may be imposed by the Church or some lawful power". The "things indifferent" referred to were things such as candles, crosses, vestments, and altars. The Puritans held that nothing that was not entirely consistent with the teaching of the Bible should be maintained; "for, if they be kept in the Church as things indifferent", said John Hooper, who has been called "the father of Puritanism", "they will at length be maintained as things necessary".

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These were the two parties that first drew their swords right back in the reign of Henry VIII.

During the reign of Mary Queen of Scots - "Bloody Mary" - the martyr fires of Smithfield began to burn. Many of the leading Reformers were put to death, but many more managed to escape to the continent of Europe where they came more and more under the influence of the Swiss Reformers, Calvin and Bullinger.

When Elizabeth ascended the throne of England at the death of her sister, Mary, Protestantism was re-established in the realm, and the Puritans who had fled to Europe began to make their way back to England. But, what were Elizabeth's intentions? Let me quote Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones here. "There is no question", he says, "but that this whole trouble and dispute which lasted for the 100 years ending in 1662 is mainly to be attributed to that headstrong woman, Queen Elizabeth I. She caused an Act of Uniformity to be passed in the year of her accession to the throne, 1558, and in that, assent to the Prayer Book and its teaching was made obligatory. But - and this is an important point - at first this was not rigidly enforced, so the Puritans felt that they could honestly and conscientiously still stay in the Church of England. They felt that they had to but bide their time, and that the inevitable logic of their teaching would eventually become evident to all. So, there was no thought in their minds of leaving the Church; they remained within, determined to develop their teaching and to influence others. It cannot be emphasised too frequently that the main body of the Puritans persisted in that attitude right down to 1662".

This was the position then, that the Puritans returned to; Elizabeth's Church, in theory, said that all had to conform to the Prayer Book; in practice, however, this was not the case, and so the Puritans remained within its ranks in the hope that reformation would soon be complete through their efforts.

During Elizabeth's reign, however, some of the Puritans began to see that this state of affairs held out little hope, and there sprang up a strong Presbyterian group under a man called Thomas Cartwright, and a third group - the Separatists - under Robert Browne. The watchword of this latter party was "reformation without tarrying for any", and they were sorely persecuted by Elizabeth.

In the reign of James I (VI of Scotland), things at first appeared to be favourable towards those of Puritan sympathies, but by 1620 the famous voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers in the "Mayflower" was a direct outcome of the opposition still held out towards the Reformers.

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James' right hand man was Archbishop Laud, and between them, they tried to impose the rule of Bishops, not only in England, but in Scotland as well. This led to the drawing up and signing of "The Solemn League and Covenant", and the emergence of "The Covenanters" - the Scottish Puritans.

Civil war followed and the "monarchy" was abolished in the kingdom. Under Cromwell, who ruled the nation during its "Commonwealth" period, religious liberty was granted to all Protestants, but, at the death of Cromwell, no equal successor was forthcoming, and the "Royalists" in Parliament recalled Charles 11 to occupy the throne of England. He returned in May 1660, with the promise that he would grant "a liberty to tender consciences... in matters of religion".

The Puritans asked the king to recognise their position; the king replied when his "chosen" Parliament met in May 1661, and publicly burned a copy of the "The Solemn League and Covenant". Puritans were expelled from lecturing posts in the universities, etc., and the Episcopal form of church government was fully restored. A year later the Act of Uniformity became law. "The principal terms required by the Act were a Declaration of "unfeigned assent and consent" to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, re-ordination for those not episcopally ordained, and a renunciation of the Solemn League and Covenant". (Iain Murray). It laid down "that all ministers in the Church of England must conform to the demands of this Act by St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24th, 1662".

The death knell had sounded for the Puritans; they had lived for a long time side by side with what they discerned to be the marks of an unreformed Church in the hope that they could reform it, but now the cry was "conform"; this they could never do! And so, on Black Bartholomew's Day 2,000 of them left all that they had "for conscience sake".

There was to follow the "Conventicle Act", forbidding them to meet together for worship; and then "The Five Mile Act", forbidding them to live within 5 miles of their old congregations. They were imprisoned and abused; Bunyan spent 12 years in jail for his non-conformity. "Those great preachers whose names we remember", says C.H. Spurgeon, "were men who counted nothing their own; they were driven out from their benefices, because they could not conform to the Established Church, and they gave up all that they had willingly to the Lord. They were hunted from place to place, they wandered here and there to preach the Gospel to a few ... Those were foul times; but they promised they would walk the road, fair or foul, and they did walk it, knee deep in mud; and they would have walked it had it been knee deep in blood too."

They were forbidden to preach, and yet they preached more than they might have done had they not been ejected, for when they were silenced, they wrote, and their words are speaking yet.

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The following is part of one of those "Farewell Sermons" preached on that Ejection Sunday. The words were addressed by Richard Alleine to the congregation that he had served for over twenty years.



Preaching From The Past

The sun is setting upon not a few of the prophets; the shadows or evening are stretched forth upon us; our work seems to be at an end; our pulpits and our places must know us no more. This is the Lord's doing; let all the earth keep silence before Him. It is not a light thing for me, brethren, to be laid aside from the work and cast out from the vineyard of the Lord ... I know that some will add to the affliction of the afflicted by telling the world it is their own fault, and that they might prevent it if they would. You are not ignorant what things there are imposed upon us as the condition of continuing our ministration.

I must profess before God and angels, and men, that my non-submission is not from any disloyalty to authority, nor from pride, humour, nor fractious disposition; but because I dare not contradict my light, or do anything concerning which my heart tells me the Lord says "Do it not". After all my most impartial enquiries, after all my seeking counsel of the Lord, I find that I am plainly put to this choice - to part with my ministry or my conscience. I dare not lie before God and the world, nor tell you that I approve, I allow, I heartily consent to what I neither do nor can; but must choose rather that my ministry be sealed up by my sufferings than lengthened out by a lie. Since matters stand so that I must either lose my place or my peace, I cheerfully suffer myself to be thrust off the stage. And now, welcome the cross of Christ; welcome reproach; welcome poverty, scorn and contempt, or whatever else may befall me on this account.

This morning I had a flock, and you a pastor; now behold a pastor without a flock, a flock without a shepherd; this morning I had a house, but now I have none; this morning I had a living, but now I have none. "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord".

And thus, brethren, I bid you farewell in the words of the Apostle: "Finally, brethren, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you".

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