

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 52 issued January 2005

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First-Footing

(The Pastor's letter from the Wicket Gate Magazine January 1969)

My Dear Friends,

It would appear that the old custom of "First-Footing" is fast falling out of favour with the majority of folk today. The habit of bringing a New Year's greeting across your neighbour's doorstep as soon as the last chimes of midnight had sounded on the 31st December seems to be no longer what it used to be.

Can I propose a "New Year Resolution" for us as a Church and as individual believers as we take up our positions at the start of this year of 1969? Can we endeavour to hold fast that good old biblical custom of CHRISTIAN "First-Footing"? The Bible doesn't call it that, of course, but the sentiment is surely the same when we are exhorted to "give" ourselves "to hospitality", or to be "kindly affectioned towards one another". The Christian door, according to the Word of God, is to be an ever-open door; the kettle is always on the boil and there is always an extra potato in the pot.

What a sad thing it is when we hear of believers - and unbelievers as well - who are so often left out in the cold simply because we let the spiritual gift of fellowship through hospitality drop dead through failing to exercise it. Our lord spoke about "standing at the door" and knocking to gain an entrance so that He might "sup" with us and we with Him. He also said that "as much as ye have done it unto one of these the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me." When our doors fail to open to our brethren and sisters in Christ they fail to open to Christ.

Is there a believer in the congregation in need of help - spiritual or temporal? Then surely, there should be a hundred open doors where he can enter with his burden and have it halved by having it shared. Are there any sick amongst us? Then do our doors open out the way as well as in? That is, is our hospitality outgoing as well as incoming, to take us to their bedside? What about the old folk or those who live alone? Consider the young parents of the Church.. They seldom are able to go up to the house of the Lord together; it is usually "one in the morning and one in the evening," unless granny comes to baby-sit. Have we ever offered to "stand guard" until the evening service is over?

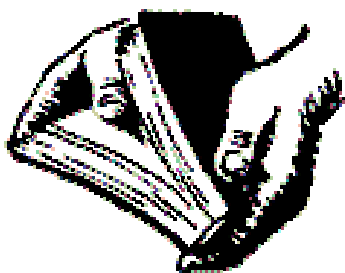
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And what of those still unconverted to Christ? There was another old custom in the Church of an earlier age and that was the "cottage meeting" when the house was opened for the work of the gospel. What a source of good those gatherings were. And, of course, we must remember that the Church, too, has an open door - wide enough to receive all your unconverted friends! Remember the "one borne of four"? Four men who really showed their faith in Christ and their concern for their lame friend by carrying him to Jesus. What a joy it must have been when all FIVE walked home together. Surely there is only one thing comparable, and that is when a believer perseveres in bringing that unconverted friend under the sound of God's Word until that night when they both walk home together partakers of the same grace and of the same Spirit.

That stranger in the congregation; that face that SEEMS familiar, because you have been seeing it for a few weeks now; that man, or that woman, or that young person that you're not quite sure of. Why not be a "first-foot" to them? Extend your hand and open your heart and your home, and so fulfil that precious calling that Christ has given to you.

Yours sincerely,
W.J. Seaton



GLEANINGS IN THE PSALMS (Psalm 17)

In verses 1 - 4 David craves justice in the controversy between him and his oppressors. In verses 5 and 6 he requests of the Lord grace to act rightly while under the trial. From verse 7 - 12 he seeks protection from his foes, whom he graphically describes; and in verses 13 and 14 he pleads that thy may be disappointed; closing the whole in the most comfortable confidence that all would certainly be well with him at the last.

David Dickson

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Verse 1. "Hear the right, O God, attend unto my cry ... that goeth not out of feigned lips". There are such things as "feigned lips" - a contradiction between the heart and the tongue. This is an unworthy conceit of God, to fancy that we can satisfy for inward sins, and avert approaching judgments by external offerings, by a loud voice, with a false heart, as if God (like children), would be pleased with the glittering of an empty shell, or the rattling of stones, the chinking of money, a mere voice, and crying without inward frames and intention of service.

S. Charnock

Verse 3. "Thou hast proved mine heart... I am purposed that my heart shall not transgress". Therefore, if thou be upon a mountain, look not back again unto Sodom as Lot's wife did; if thou be within the ark, fly not out again into the world as Noah's crow did; if thou be well washed, return not again to the mire as the hog doth; if thou be going towards the land of Canaan, think not on the fleshpots of Egypt; if thou be marching against the host of Midian, drink not of the waters of Harod; if thou be upon the housetop, come not down; if thou have set thine hand to the plough, look not behind thee.

Thomas Playfere

Verse 4. "Concerning the works of men, by the words of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer". As if David had said - Would you know how it comes to pass that I escape those ungodly works and practices that men ordinarily take liberty to do? I must ascribe it to the good Word of God; it is this I consult with, and by it I am kept from those foul ways whereinto others, that make no use of the Word for their defence, are carried by Satan the destroyer. Can we go against sin and Satan with a better weapon than Christ used to vanquish the tempter with? And certainly Christ did it to set us an example.

William Gurnall

Verse 5. "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not". As a stone cast up into the air cannot go any higher, neither yet there abide when the power of the hurler ceaseth to drive it; even so, seeing our corrupt nature can go downward only; and the devil, the world, and the flesh, driveth to the same way; how can we proceed further in virtue, or stand therein, when we are tempted, if our merciful and good God do not by His Holy Spirit, from time to time, guide and govern us.

R. Cawdray

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Verse 6. "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me..." I have called upon thee formerly, therefore, Lord, hear me now. It will be a great comfort to us if trouble, when it comes, finds the wheels of prayer a-going, for then may we come with the more boldness to the throne of grace. Tradesmen are willing to oblige those that have long been their customers.

Matthew Henry

Verse 6. Two Words - both great, though little - "call" and "hear". Two Persons - one little and the other great - "I" and "thee". Two Tenses - past and future - "I have" and "thou wilt". Two Wonders - that we do not call more, and that God hears such unworthy prayers.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 11. "...they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth". They are ever watching my "steps"; that is, they are looking for the impress or footsteps in the earth. For this purpose the eyes of David's enemies were "bowing down to the earth".

Joseph Roberts

Verse 14. "...men of the world, which have their portion in this life..." This discovers that rotten foundation on which many men build their hope of heaven. Surely (are many ready to argue) if God did not love me He would not give me such a portion in the world. Deceive not thyself in a matter of so great concernment. Thou mayest will say God loved Judas, because he had the bag, or the "rich man of the parable" because he fared deliciously.

John Frost

Verse 15. But as for me, I thine own face
In righteousness will see;
And with thy likeness, when I wake,
I satisfy'd shall be.

Metrical Version

*(HAVE YOU READ THE PSALM? These " gleanings " are intended as a
HELP to reading, not a SUBSTITUTE).*

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Boys and Girls

Danny and the Chewing Gum Machine

I wonder how many of you have at some time put a penny in a chewing gum machine. You know the kind of machine, with all the coloured balls of gum that you see standing outside or on the counter of a sweetie shop. Well, here is a little story about an American boy called Danny and something that happened to him and a chewing gum machine.

Danny waited by the chewing gum machine while his mother did some shopping. For a long time he looked longingly at the gumballs in the machine. If only he had a penny, he thought, he could get a ball of gum. Suddenly Danny had an idea. He stuck his finger up the slot to see how the gumballs dropped down. To his surprise there was a gumball stuck in the slot. Danny bent his little finger around it. If only he could get it to drop down. He tried and tried, but the gumball stayed in the slot and so did his finger. In just a few minutes mother came. She tried in vain to get Danny's finger out of the gum ball machine. Before long, the owner of the shop came to offer his help, but nothing seemed to work. "We'll just have to saw the machine in half," said the owner. This frightened Danny. He had visions of the saw touching his finger. In just a few seconds he pulled his finger easily from the gum ball machine. "How did you get it out?" mother said. "Oh, it was easy!" said Danny. "I just straightened my finger."

On the way home Danny explained that he had his little finger hooked around the gumball, hoping to get it out. He did not want to let go for fear of losing the gumball.

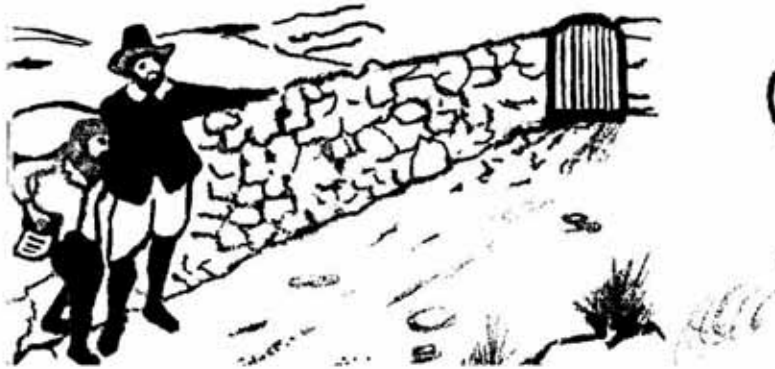
You know, sometimes Christian boys and girls are like that. They play with sin. Those boys and girls who have asked Jesus into their hearts, and yet, who still want to hold on to sin. They try to live for God, and yet, they seem to enjoy sin, as well, and will not let go of it.

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The Bible tells us to "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Those of you who are true Christians remember this and look to Jesus, asking Him to give you strength and courage each day to live for Him and to hate sin.

With Love,
Mrs Seaton.



In the last edition we left the burdened Pilgrim heading straight for the Wicket Gate to which Evangelist had pointed him. In this edition John Bunyan will teach us from his great book that many a one can be faithfully pointed in the way of salvation, and yet never enter into a conversion experience. This is on account of influence that can be brought to bear on the seeking soul and which can way-lay him in his quest for salvation. Bunyan sets out some of these influences which lurk, sometimes partly hidden, between the Evangelist's pointing finger and "Yonder Wicket Gate". Here are some of the names that Bunyan brings to our notice.

There were Obstinate and Pliable; two characters from the City of Destruction, Bunyan tells us, "who resolved to fetch Pilgrim back by force". There was one Mr Worldly Wiseman and his friend, Legality, who lived in the Village of Morality. There was the Slough of Despond and Mount Sinai. All these things lay between Pilgrim and the Wicket Gate and would have kept him back from reaching the Cross of Christ, the place where his burden would be taken from his back.

Now, what does it all mean? Look at Obstinate, first of all, and listen to these words from Alexander Whyte writing in his Bunyan Characters. "Little Obstinate was born and brought up in the City of Destruction", he reminds us; "his father was old Mr

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Spare-the-Rod, and his mother's name was Spoil-the-Child. Obstinate was like a mule, and when Pilgrim tried to reason with him from the Word of God that he held so tightly on to, Obstinate had but one word for him. "Tush", he said, "away with your book; will you go back with us or no?"

Pliable is a different kettle of fish entirely. "Don't revile", he tells Obstinate, as he jumps to Pilgrim's defence; "if what good Christian says is true, the things that he looks after are better than ours; my heart inclines to go with my neighbour"; and off he sets at Pilgrim's side. Of course, he soon turns back! The Slough of Despond is in the way, and once he has struggled out of its mud and mire, as we'll see in a moment, he steals off home never to go on pilgrimage again.

But, here is the cardinal doctrine of this part of the Pilgrim's Progress. BEWARE of Obstinate and Pliable, it says. And Obstinate and Pliable, of course, have their abodes right within our own hearts, for they are part and parcel of our old nature and two of the most darling off-springs of the sons of Adam's race. Obstinate will always rebel against the Word of God - "Away with your book", he'll say; and Pliable is the weaker young brother who will always refuse "the cost of discipleship" and whine us homeward when the road is treacherous. It was at the Slough of Despond that Pilgrim and Pliable parted company. As long as there was plenty of talk about "an endless kingdom ... and crowns of gold ... and everlasting life ... and garments that will shine like the sun", Pliable was quite happy, but the Slough of Despond was something that he had failed to reckon with.

Now, what is this Slough that seeking souls can fall into and which can make the Pliables turn back to the City of Destruction?

Let us go no further than Bunyan's own explanation. Pilgrim is soon assisted out of the Slough by a man called Help, and Pilgrim, a little upset about the whole business, wants to know why such a patch of ground should exist between the City of Destruction and the Wicket Gate. "This miry slough", Help tells our friend, "is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attend conviction for sin do continually run, and, therefore, it is called the Slough of despond; for still, as the sinner is awakened by his lost condition, there arise in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them set together, and settle in this place; and this is the reason of the badness of this ground". When a man, or woman, or a young person is being convicted of their sins, these very sins seem to form themselves into a great quagmire that bellows out to us that we can

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never be forgiven. Our sins appear "exceedingly sinful", and we can come to the point where forgiveness seems almost impossible. This is our Slough of Despond.

Oh, "it is not the pleasure of the King", Help informs Pilgrim, "that this place should remain so bad. His labours also have, by the direction of His Majesty's surveyors, been for above these sixteen hundred years (Bunyan's own time from the death of Christ), employed about this patch of ground, if perhaps it might have been mended; yea, and to my knowledge," he said, "here have been swallowed up at least twenty-thousand cartloads, yea, millions of wholesome promises ...". In spite of all God's promises of forgiveness to the seeking souls, still withal, many fall into the Slough of Despond, like Pliable, and give up their quest.

Let me ask now, "Are there any Pliables reading these lines?" Listen to John Bunyan's vivid description of the end of this man, and this is the end of all Pliables in this life, they never are at rest in their souls. His friends have only scorn for him and what he has done in turning back and leaving Pilgrim to travel alone; "so Pliable, " Bunyan tells us, "sat sneaking among them". Up on your feet, Pliable! Play the man! Your peace of mind and your salvation lie before you. There are "steps" through the Slough of Despond; find them and you too, go to the Wicket Gate and to the Cross of Christ.

Just one word, then, to close, on Mr Worldly Wiseman. Our Obstainacy and Pliability will hinder us on our Christian search. But here is a very real enemy in every age; he is called Mr Worldly Wiseman. He "dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy" our author tells us, i.e. he was one of those citizens who could only look at things in so far as they affected his natural life. Spiritual things have no place in his philosophy, and when he meets the burdened Pilgrim he proceeds along entirely worldly lines of thought and advice. "Who bid thee go this way to be rid of thy burden?" he asks Pilgrim. "Evangelist", Pilgrim tells him. "I beshrew (condemn) him for his counsel", he tells our friend. "How camest thou by thy burden at first?" he asks again; "By reading this book in my hand," Pilgrim confesses, pointing to the precious Word of God. "I thought so", smirks Worldly Wise. And will you just notice how Bunyan will remind us again and again how so much revolves around that "Book" that Pilgrim has in his hands? After having demoralised the burdened Pilgrim, the Worldly Wiseman next brings forth his own brand of salvation.

Worldly Wiseman points Pilgrim to a village called Morality, to "a gentleman whose name is Legality". In other words, away from the Wicket Gate, away from the

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narrow way that leadeth unto life, away from the Cross of Christ. Look to your works, and to your own efforts to observe the legal things of religion, and act as moral as you can, and God will have to save you for your goodness. This is the redemption of the Worldly Wise, but it is not God's redemption, and soon poor, burdened Pilgrim was going to find that out.

One thing Worldly Wise had not told him was that between him and the Village of Morality there lay a mountain called Sinai - i.e. The Law of God - the Ten Commandments. And soon this mountain began to erupt like a volcano and pour out God's condemnation against Pilgrim's sin, for Pilgrim knew he could never keep the whole law of God.

How thankful he is when Evangelist appears on the scent again with the same old message of salvation only through Christ alone, and he is pointed afresh to the cross.



Quick of Wit: -

One day a woman called on the great Dr. Gill to complain of the length of the white bands on Dr. Gill's preaching gown. "Well well," said the Doctor, "what do you think is the right length? Take them and make them as long or as short as you like".

The old lady was delighted; she was so sure her dear Pastor would grant her request that she had brought her scissors. Snip, snip, went the scissors, and the thing was done, and the bands returned. "Well now, my good sister," said the doctor, "you must do me a good turn also ... you have something about that is a great deal too long, and causes me no end of trouble, and I should like to see it shorter". "Indeed, dear sir," she said; "here are the scissors, use them as you please." "Come then, good sister," said the doctor, "PUT OUT YOUR TONGUE".



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A Sermon for
Parents
by
J.C. Ryle

"Train up a child in
the way that he
should go".
Proverbs 22:6

PART 2

Train your children with abiding persuasion on your mind that much depends upon you.

Grace is the strongest of all principles. See what a revolution grace effects when it comes into the heart of an old sinner. Nature too is very strong. See how it struggles against the things of the kingdom of God. But after nature and grace undoubtedly there is nothing more powerful than education. Early habits (if I may so speak) are everything with us, under God. We are made what we are by training. Our character takes the form of that mould into which our first years are cast. We depend in a vast measure on those who bring us up. We get from them a taste, a colour, a bias which clings to us more or less all our lives. We catch the language of our mothers or our nurses, and learnt to speak it almost insensibly, and unquestionably we catch something of their manners, ways and mind at the same time. Time only will show, I suspect, how much we all owe to early impressions, and how many things in us may be traced up to seeds shown in the days of our very infancy by those who were about us.

And all this is one of God's merciful arrangements. He gives your children a mind that will receive impressions like moist clay; He gives them a disposition at the starting point of life to believe what you tell them and to take for granted what you advise them, and to trust your word rather than a stranger's. He gives you, in short, a golden opportunity for doing them good. See that the opportunity be not neglected and thrown away.

Beware of miserable delusion into which some have fallen: - that parents can do nothing for their children, that you must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still. These persons have wishes for their children in Balaam's fashion - they would like them to die the death of the righteous, but they go no further; they desire much, and

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have nothing. And the devil rejoices to see such reasoning, just as he always does over everything which seems to excuse indolence, or to encourage neglect of means.

I know that you cannot convert your child; I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I know also that God says expressly: "Train up a child in the way he should go", and that He never laid a command on man that He would not give man grace to perform. And I know that our duty is not to stand still and dispute, but to go forward and obey. Fill the water pots with water, and we may safely leave it with the Lord to turn the water into wine.

A New Year Letter from Aberdeen Prison

My Dear Brother,

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied upon you. I am almost wearing, yea wondering, that ye write not to me: though I know it is not forgetfulness. As for myself, I am every way well, all glory to God. I was before at a quarrel with Christ (but it was bought by me and unlawful), because His whole providence was not yea and nay to my yea and nay, and because I believed Christ's outward look better than His faithful promise. Yet He hath in patience waited on, while I be come to myself, and hath not taken advantage of my weak apprehensions of His goodness. Great and holy is His name!

Oh, what I owe to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of My Lord Jesus! Who hath now let me see how good the wheat of Christ is that goeth through His mill, and His oven, to be made bread for His own table. Grace tried is better than grace, and it is more than grace; it is glory in its infancy! I now see that godliness is more than the outside, and this world's decorations and adornments. Who knoweth the truth of grace without a trial? And how soon would faith freeze without a cross!

Why should I start at the plough of my Lord that maketh deep furrows on my soul? I know that He is no idle Husbandman, He purposeth a crop. I desire now to make no more quarrels with Christ. Verily He hath not put me to a loss by what I suffer; He oweth me nothing; for in my bonds how sweet and comfortable have the thought of Him been to me, wherein I find a sufficient recompense of reward!

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How blind are my adversaries who sent me to a banqueting house, to a house of wine, to the lovely feasts of my lovely Lord Jesus, and not to a prison, or place of exile! Why should I smother my Husband's honesty, or sin against His love, or be a niggard in giving out to others what I get for nothing? Brother, eat with me, and give thanks.

Dear brother, ye are in my heart, to live and to die with you. Visit me with a letter. Pray for me. Remember my love to your wife. Grace, grace be with you; and God, who heareth prayer, visit you, and let it be unto you according to the prayers of

*Your own brother,
And Christ's prisoner,
Samuel Rutherford*

*Aberdeen Prison,
January 1st 1637.*

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