

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 55 issued July 2005

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Our Missionary Situation in the Church Today

(The Pastor's Letter May 1969)

Dear Friends,

How often we find the church of Christ laying hold on some popular phrase in the vain belief that once having uttered the phrase our immediate problems are all dealt with. "This is a missionary situation today" seems to be the latest popular utterance, and although it may be perfectly true, I wonder have we ever considered the implications of what we are saying? If this is a "missionary situation" then there is a very straight and unbending finger of accusation pointing straight at every one of us who names the name of Christ.

Remember those awful seas that almost engulfed that little ship that the prophet Jonah was travelling in when he endeavoured to flee to the town of Tarshish? Both he and the pagan sailors were almost plunged to the bottom of the ocean. But Jonah wasn't in that terrible situation on account of the pagan sailors' paganism; they were in that terrible situation on account of Jonah's waywardness! So with our own present situation today, then it's not a case of the church being in such a state on account of the world, but it's a case of the world being in such a state on account of the church! How plainly our Lord expressed this very truth: "If the salt hath lost its saviour", He said, "wherewith all shall it (the world) be salted." "Ye are the salt of the earth." He said. And if this is a "godless" land today – a missionary situation, as we say, then it's because the salt has lost its savour – the light is under the bushel – the city is not built upon the hill.

Take the churches' attitude to prayer, first of all. How many really thriving prayer meetings are there in this land today? Some speak of "the winds of revival blowing through our denominational life," but where have these winds blown upon the prayer meetings? We can organise our simultaneous evangelism, café evangelism, agape evangelism, on step forward, or backward or sideward evangelism and what he you, but until the prayer meetings increase in volume – numerically and to the praise of the Lord – then the situation in this "mission field" will continue to downgrade. There is only one type of evangelism that has ever turned the world upside down, and this is "spontaneous" evangelism; the type that flows out of our prayer meetings.

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Take our attitude to the Word of God. What an attitude it is in the church today. How telling that phrase is when we find the re-discovery of the Word of God in the temple of Hilkiah, the High Priest: "I have found the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord!" What a place to "find" the Bible! And it was "found", you remember, because it had been "lost"! Buried! Under a dozen-and-one piles of rubbish and years of dust it lay buried. Ah church of Christ! This is why we have a missionary situation today! Time we "found" the Word of God in the very House of God itself. It's lain too long – buried under those stupid guitars and banjos; hidden out of sight by musical scores and cantatas; pushed to the one side to make way for endless reels of sloppy, sentimental gospel films; lost in a cloud of chorus sheets and solo pieces. Do you see it, believer! This is what the great and glorious Reformation was all about – the message of the Bible: Justification by faith alone. Any wonder we are in such a situation today, if we have lost that message? Any wonder that the theme of Christendom is "Back to Rome", seeing that it was the re-discovery of the Bible that led us out of Rome?

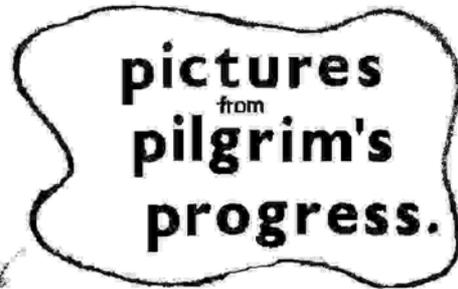
Take our attitude to "mission" itself. We say we are in a missionary situation, but how many believers act like that? How much "gossiping" of the gospel do we do? How many "out-stations" does the average church have? Is it not the case that so long as we are secure in our own four walls the world outside can continue to degenerate? This is not biblical Christianity. "Go into all the world," remember. We are to "go and tell what great things the Lord has done for us." Tell it simply, sincerely, warmly. This is our Christian calling in the world. We have lost that calling today, and so find ourselves in our missionary situation today. We have made the situation; the Lord has given it into the hands of His people to work for the righting of the situation.

"This is a missionary situation today"? Who made it so? Where is the spirit of mission and reformation?

Sincerely,
W.J. Seaton

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Christian and the House Beautiful

John Bunyan's "Christian" has now arrived at the "House Beautiful" – the "house built by the Lord of the Hill;" and while he tarries in that place he is to be cared for by three godly women, "Prudence", "Piety", and "Charity". Each one in turn talks with the Pilgrim-Christian ensuring that he is Prudent, and Pious, and Charitable; but, it's the conversation between Christian and the last-mentioned – Charity, that I want us to consider together for a few moments this month, because it's this conversation that reminds us once again of the responsibilities of bringing up our children in the fear and nurture of the Lord. And don't let those who have no children of their own feel that they need not read any further, or that the obligation of teaching the young and caring for them is no concern of theirs. Charity was an "old maid"; she had never been married; but, my, what an insight she has into the question of instructing those of tender years, as her interrogation of Christian will show.

Charity: Then said Charity to Christian, "Have you a family? Are you a married man?"

Christian: "I have a wife and four small children".

Charity: "And why did you not bring them along with you?"

Christian: Then Christian wept and said: "Oh, how willingly would I have done it! But they were all of them utterly averse to my going on pilgrimage".

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Charity: "But you should have talked to them and endeavoured to have shown them the danger of staying behind".

Christian: "So I did, and told them also what God had shown to me of the destruction of our city; but I seemed to them as one that mocked, and they believed me not. (Genesis 19 verse 14).

Charity: "And did you pray to God that He would bless your counsel to them?"

Christian: "Yes, and with much affection"

Charity: "But what could they say for themselves why they came not?"

Christian: "Why, my wife was afraid of losing this world, and my children were given to foolish delights of youth; so, what by one thing, and what by another, they left me to wander in this manner alone."

Surely in this short passage we see Bunyan as great as he has ever been. How replete with lessons this solemn interview between the immortal tinker's two great characters is.

Look at the word to fathers. "Why did you not bring them along with you?" Asks Charity. Charity begins at home, and never mind how many you have pointed Christ, she is saying here, why have you not brought your own flesh and blood into the way everlasting? "You should have talked to them," she tells him again. Don't give up at the first refusal – keep at them. "You should have ... shown them the danger of staying behind." As old Bishop Ryle has already told us, Preach sin and its consequences to your children (see Sermon for Parents). And did you pray to God that He would bless your counsel to them?" Charity asks. What a word for every father among us. How easy it is to talk sometimes – even about hell, but what of the prayer to make that counsel effective? A prayer before we speak; a prayer after we have spoken. "Did you pray to God that He would bless your counsel to them"? May our conscience be as clear as the Pilgrim's as we answer all those searching questions in the affirmative.

But, there is a word to young people. "But what could they say for themselves...?" "... My children were given to the foolish delights of youth, " says Christian. How many young people of good Christian homes are there and

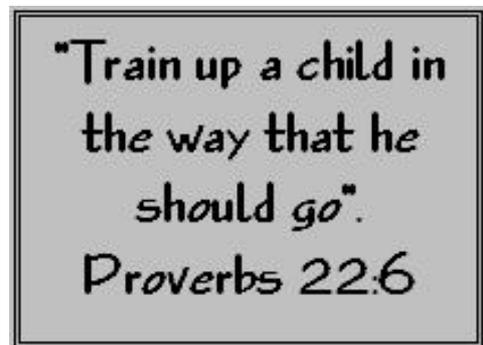
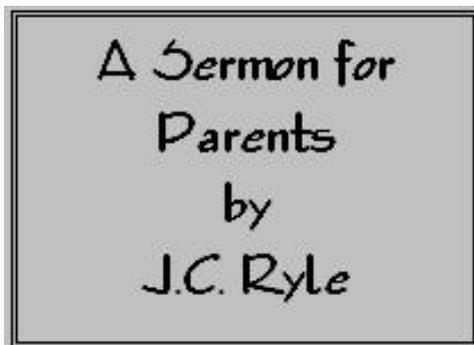
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this is a picture of them? In spite of endeavours and warnings and words of loving rebuke and prayers, they are still only concerned for this world and have no time for the things of Christ.

But, what a terrible world regarding the "heart of the home," – the mother! "What could they say for themselves?" "Why", says Christian – and can't you see the poor man's head bowed low as he answers Charity's question? "Why," he says, "my wife was afraid of losing this world". Mother! Where is your mother-heart? Don't you see, the mother wouldn't leave the world, and so the children were tied to the world as well, by the cords of her apron strings that their young hands clung to.

Oh Charity, speak to all our hearts.



(Part 5)

Train your Children, remembering continually how God trains His children. I have told you often that God has an Elect people – a family in this world. And God the Father is ever training the members of this family for their everlasting abode with Him in heaven.

Brethren, if you would train your children wisely, mark well how God the Father trains His.

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See how many things there are which God WITH-HOLDS from His children. Moses desired exceeding to cross over Jordan and see the goodly land of promise; but you will remember his desire was never granted. See too, how often God LEADS His people by ways which seem dark and mysterious to our eyes. There was a direct road from Egypt to Caanan, yet Israel was not led into it; but round through the wilderness. See also, how often God CHASTENS His people with trial and affliction. Paul the apostle had a thorn in his flesh, yet it was not taken away.

Now, brethren, notwithstanding all these things, did you ever hear of a single child of God who thought his Father did not treat him wisely? Brethren, I ask you to lay to heart the lesson which God's dealings with His people is meant to teach you.

(1) To fear not to with-hold from your child anything you think will do him harm, whatever his own wishes may be. This is God's plan.

(2) To hesitate not to lay on him commands, of which he may not at present see the wisdom, and to guide him in ways that may not seem reasonable to his mind. This is God's plan.

(3) To shrink not from chastising and correcting him whenever you see his soul's health requires it, however painful it may be to your feelings; and remember medicines must not be rejected because they are bitter. This is God's plan.

(4) And be not afraid, above all, that such a plan of training will make your child unhappy. I warn you against this delusion; depend upon it, there is no surer road to unhappiness than always having your own way. To have our wills checked and denied is a blessed thing for us.

Brethren, be not wiser than God; train your children as He trains His.

Home! How much that one word used to convey! It is still one of the most precious in the English language unto some of us. Is not our favourite concept of heaven embodied in that blessed expression "My Father's House"?

A.W. Pink

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BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

By Mrs Seaton

Hello Boys and Girls,

I wonder if the pastor were to ask you during one of the church services to pick up your hymn book, which book you would pick up. Probably you would do what all the people in a certain church did one evening when the pastor of that church asked them to do just that. "Will you please pick up your hymn book" he was heard to say. When the men and women and boys and girls all reached for their "Hymnals" the pastor said "You must have misunderstood me. I asked you to turn to your 'H-I-M' book." Finally the congregation understood. He was referring to the Bible!

It seems a strange way of putting it, doesn't it boys and girls? Yet I think there is a lesson here for us. The Bible is indeed the "HIM Book" because it speaks of HIM from start to finish. "And who is that?" You say. The Lord Jesus Christ, of course. You know, don't you, that the Bible is all about HIM. It speaks of His life, and His death, and His resurrection. Often we turn to those places in the Bible that speak about His birth in that manger in Bethlehem. I'm sure you know well why Jesus came to this earth – why He was born, and why He lived, and especially why He died on the cross and rose again from the grave. The Bible tells us it was to be our Saviour.

When you read the Bible, boys and girls, you should look to see just how much of it speaks about HIM. Sometimes we are inclined to think it is only the Gospels that tell about Jesus, but if you read many of the psalms and the prophets and the books that tell about the history of the Children of Israel, you'll find that in all these places there are verses and passages that speak about HIM. There's a hymn in our "hymn book" that speaks about God's great "H-I-M book".

"But the best is the story of Jesus,
Of the Babe with the ox in the stall,
Of the song that was sung by the angels,
The most beautiful story of all"

Mrs Seaton

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GLEANINGS IN THE PSALMS

(PSALM 19)

Division This song very distinctly divides itself into three parts, very well described by the translators in the ordinary heading of our version.

- (i) The creatures show God's glory, verses 1 to 6.
- (ii) The Word showeth His grace, verses 7 to 11.
- (iii) David prayeth for grace, verses 12 to 14.

Thus praise and prayer are mingled, and he who here sings the work of God in the world without, pleads for a work of grace in himself within.

C.H. Spurgeon

Whole Psalm The world resembles a Divinity College, says Plutarch, and Christ, as the Scriptures say, is our Tutor, instructing us by His works and by His words. For as Aristotle had two sorts of writings, one called Exoterical, for his common students, and the other Acromatical, for his private scholars and acquaintances: so God has two sorts of books, as David tells us in this psalm; namely, the Book of His creatures, as a common-place book for all men in the world: "The heavens declare the glory of God, verses 1 to 6; and the Book of His Scriptures as a statute book for His household of faith: - "This law of the Lord is an undefiled law", verses 7 to 8.

The first book is an open epistle for all, as David says in our text – "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world". And the preaching of the heavens is wonderful in three respects. (1) As preaching all the night and all the day without intermission: v2 – "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge". (2) As preaching in every kind of language: v3 – "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard". (3) As preaching in every part of the world and in every parish of every part, and in every place in every parish: v4 – "Their line is gone out through all the earth, etc."

They be diligent pastors, as preaching at all times; and learned pastors as preaching in all tongues; and evangelistic pastors as preaching in all towns. This is God's PRIMER, as it were, for all sorts of people, but He has another book made for the use of His house of faith, the Church. Heathen men read His

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primer, but His people are well-acquainted with His Bible. The primer is a good book, but it is imperfect; for after a man has learned it he must learn more; but "The law of the Lord", that is the body of the Holy Scriptures, is a most absolute canon of all doctrines appertaining either to faith or christian living; it is "a perfect law, converting the soul, giving wisdom to the simple, sure, pure, righteous, and rejoicing the heart".

John Boys

Verses 4 to 6. This gospel dispensation commences with the resurrection of Christ. In that the Sun of Righteousness rises from under the earth, as the sun appears to do in the morning. The sun after it is risen ascends up to the midst of heaven, and then at that end of its race descends again to the earth. So Christ when He rose from the grave ascended to the height of heaven, and far above all heavens, but at the end the gospel day will descent again to the earth.

Jonathan Edwards

Verses 7 to 11. All of us are by nature the children of wrath. Our souls are like the "porches of Bethesda" in John chapter 5, in which are lodged a great many sick folk, "blind and halt and withered". But, if our souls are like the porches of Bethesda, then the Scriptures are like the POOL of Bethesda, into which whosoever enters when God's Holy Spirit has "stirred the water" a little is "made whole of whatsoever diseases he hath". Is any man heavy-laden? "The statute of the Lord rejoices the heart" it says in verse 8. Is any man in want? "The judgments of the Lord are more to be desired than fine gold" it says again. Is any man ignorant? "The testimonies of the Lord giveth wisdom to the simple" the scriptures tell us.

John Boys

Verse 11. "Moreover, by them is thy servant warned". A certain Jew had formed a design to poison Luther, but was disappointed by a faithful friend who sent Luther a portrait of the man, with a warning against him. By this Luther knew the murderer and escaped his hands. Thus the Word of God, O Christian, shows thee the face of those lusts which Satan employs to destroy thy comforts and poison thy soul.

G. S. Bowes

Verse 12. "Who can understand his error...?" After this survey of the works and words of God, David comes at last to peruse the THIRD book – his own

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conscience! A book which, though wicked men may keep shut up, and by nature do not like to look into, yet will one day be laid open before the great tribunal in view of the whole world, to the justifying of God when He judges, and to the impenitent sinners' eternal confusion.

Adam Littleton

The Act of Uniformity – The Puritan Ejection

Some of the darkest days that the Church of Christ on this earth has ever known were those days surrounding the Puritan ejection of 1662. An act of Uniformity had been passed by Charles 11, and the refusal to conform to the strictures of religion "as established by law" meant immediate withdrawal of all rights to hold any pastoral charge or to exercise the work of the ministry. "For conscience sake," many men felt that they could never bow the knee to what was required of them, and on "Black Bartholomew's Day" 1662, these "Puritans" were driven from their pulpits, churches and homes.

Many letter exchanged hands in those days as the Puritans endeavoured to "unitedly" know the mind of the Lord on this issue which now faced them, but it was mostly within the confines of the homes that they must shortly leave that "non-conformists" came to their decision before the Lord. As old Philip Henry, father of Matthew Henry, looked around his parish and the home where his children had been reared, he expressed the thought of many in his day: "We must either conform," he said, "or leave all this by Bartholomew's Day.

How heavily this aspect of their actions weighed upon them. "I have eleven arguments for conformity," said the godly Edward Lawrence as he looked at his wife and ten children, "But Christ has said, 'whoso loveth wife or children more than me is not worthy of me.'" When he was asked how he and his family might live if he were ejected he referred his enquirer to the Word of God: "We must live on the 6th of Matthew," he said: "'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.'" When Richard Baxter expressed his thoughts in poetry his question was answered by a resounding "YES!" almost two thousand strong: -

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"Must I be driven from my books?
From house, and goods, and dearest friends?"

"YES!" said the Puritan preachers of England; "If there be no other way to have a 'conscience void of offence,' then, we must be driven out." "Our work is dear to us," said the mighty Oliver Heywood, "but God is dearer, and we must not do the least evil to obtain the greatest good ... the bargain will be too hard to provide a livelihood by making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience."

What homes these must have been to produce such unwavering allegiance to God's truth in a day of wholesale compromise. Would to God our homes were such today; men of "Puritan" spirit and zeal – and women too!

In the above passage mention is made of the "mighty Oliver Heywood" and in the next edition of the magazine we will carry an article on his wife Elizabeth Heywood entitled "Elizabeth Heywood – Christian Wife and Mother.

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