

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 56 issued September 2005

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The Pastor's Letter

Our Image of Christ

My dear friends,

It surely must cause us some concern as we view the image of Christ that is being presented and forwarded in these days in which we live. For a long time, the evangelical church as presented Christ somewhat in the terms of Holman Hunt's famous painting, which portrays Christ standing outside the door (of the human heart) and patiently waiting to gain admittance. This, of course, is a travesty of the Christ of the New Testament who came to "seek and to save that which was lost," for He it is "that opens and no man closes, and closes and no man opens." "The image of "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," is no less offensive to any truly born again believer with a balanced view of Scripture and truth than that of the violent Jesus, and to present Christ as a man of his own age, but of this very age in which we ourselves live. Incidents such as the "cleansing of the temple" are proving to be great capital for the purveyors of this image of Christ as the Son of Man is set forth as one who would have been in completely in sympathy with the anarchy and violence of this present age.

How we long for a "mighty" Christ in our pulpits and in our churches today in contrast to the insipid Jesus of the gospel according to Holman Hunt, and the sentimentalities of some of our children's hymns – aye, and gospel hymns, too.

Let us beware of this trend, for underlying it is one of the oldest evils that man has ever concocted, and that is, moulding Christ to conform to our own age and situation, instead of, by God's enabling grace, moulding that age to conform to Christ. This was the burden of the great Charles Spurgeon as he stood almost alone in an age that was conforming Christ to be the great Teacher of a time when intellectual pride ran rampant in the country. The doctrine of evolution was in full swing and Christ was looked upon as the One who had reached the fullest expression of man's evolutionary quest, and the Bible was viewed as the book to be dissected to explore man's unceasing quest for perfection.

"Brethren," said Spurgeon, "we shall not adjust our Bible to the age; but before we have done with it, by God's grace, we will adjust the age to the Bible." And Spurgeon only knew one message: "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

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You see, when all is said and done, all that is being presented in these latest terms is an "image" of God's own Son. Many people – and young people especially – may well be attracted to this image: this manly figure who could rebel against His age and finally give up, even His life, for His convictions. For in the same way, many felt, and feel attracted to the "pathetic" Christ standing outside the door of their heart; but all this is far from salvation. It is not an "image" of Christ that saves the soul, be that image attractive to us, either in its meekness or violence or whatever it is Christ that saves.

In this age, as in every age, there is only one way to present Christ, and that is in His Saviourhood to those who feel their need of a Saviour. We must learn that people – even in their natural, sinful state – will come to Christ, as we put it, for many reasons; and not least among these reasons, because He fulfils their ideas of some ideal.

A Man of ideal patience, and ideal Teacher, and ideal Leader, an ideal Martyr for His cause – an ideal anarchist, or demonstrator even; look close enough and an ideal violence can be found in Christ as this age apparently seem to be beginning to find. But, our Lord Himself said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life". By nature, we will cleave to an "image" but we will turn away from a Saviour from our sins.

Let us beware, then, of any distortion of Christ – and all distortions. Let us preach Christ as Saviour in all its length and breadth, and if men and women will not have Christ as their Saviour, then they must not have Him at all.

God forbid that the church of Christ itself should become the purveyor of idolatry – a Christ which is just an image and not a Saviour.

Yours sincerely,
W.J. Seaton (July 1969)

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Elizabeth Heywood

*Christian Wife
And
Mother*

"(Elizabeth Heywood!) Thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee: she is a fen of stagnant waters..."

Elizabeth Heywood was the wife of Oliver Heywood. She was born in 1634 and died May 26th, 1661 – just one year before the Ejection Sunday. Although "absent from the body and present with the Lord"

before that fateful day of '62 her spirit pervaded the manse as Coley in Yorkshire still, and her dying counsels are found in those words of stern resolve that fell from those lips of Oliver Heywood.

"She could read some of the hardest chapters in the Bible when but four years of age," Oliver Heywood tells us in his memoirs of her; "and at six years of age she was able to write down passages of sermons she had heard, in church, by continual us, in process of time she arrived at great perfection, so that she could repeat a sermon very methodically and distinctly. This evidenced not only her natural genius, but that 'by reason of use, she had her senses exercised to discern both good and evil.'" How significant that last phrase! Elizabeth Heywood was "exercised" in the things of the Lord and could readily read "the signs of the times" in which the church of Christ existed.

She was a godly woman given to much prayer, and yet, "the Lord's ways are in the seas," and from her earliest days she was afflicted with bodily ill-health. As her earthly life drew to a close she began to set her "house in order." "She bought no clothes but for present use," her husband records in his diary, "because, as she said, she was shortly to take her leave of us all. She provided necessaries for us, that we might have nothing to buy for some time." But it was her "SPIRITUAL" provision that was to see her family through the dark days that were to come. "Two things she particularly urged on me," says her husband; "first, that I would be much in secret prayer, and look chiefly to the frame of my heart therein; secondly, that I would never pray without mentioning the church of God, 'if it be but,' said she, 'in two or three words, yet let Jerusalem come into your mind.'"

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How much the thought of Christ's church lay on Elizabeth Heywood's heart at this time. "Keep close to God and his truths," she told her husband and her father as she lay on her deathbed; "Do not forsake him," she urged them both; "and he will not forsake you. Do not fear men, but choose the greatest affliction before the least sin: if you should be put to the hardest trial, and if they should take away your lives, it will but send you sooner to your reward, and that will be no injury to you. If God do suffer those lordly-spirited men to afflict his church for a time, I believe it will not be long: the church is dear to our Lord, and he will not suffer it always to be trampled upon. O sirs, let the church of God lie near your hearts; it lies near God's heart: 'They shall prosper that love Zion;' prefer Jerusalem before and above your chief joy."

And to her children she spoke: "Labour to be real christians," she told them; "it is not to go to church, and to hear, and come away, and no more: but, if you would be christians indeed, you must hide the Word in your heart, meditate upon it, and get the sweetness out of it...Labour to watch over the heart, pray for grace, and spend time well."

"That night she poured out her soul to God," we are told; "O what heart-melting expressions did she use for that purpose! Then she prayed for me...she prayed for her dear father and the ministers of the gospel (her father was also ejected in '62 and suffered greatly for the testimony of Christ)...then for the family... and then for the church of God, that the Jews might be converted, and that the gospel might be preached to the remainder of the Gentile nations."

She died just as the storm clouds were gathering for the Lord's servants. "Mr. John Harrison of Ashton, who preached our marriage sermon," Oliver Heywood tells us, "preached also her funeral sermon on that ext of which she had felt the sweetness and which she desired might be taken – "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Being dead, " Elizabeth Heywood "yet spoke." The "victory" - even in the foreboding days ahead – reside in Christ the Lord of His Church. She spoke, though dead, in that manse from which her dear husband was expelled; surely she speaks to any with a christian conscience in these dark days in which we live.

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GLEANINGS IN THE PSALMS (Psalm 20)

This Psalm has been much used for Coronations, thanksgivings, and fast sermons; and no end of sickening flattery has been tacked thereto by the trencher-chaplains of the world's church. If kings had been devils, some of these gentry would have praised their horns and hoofs; for although some of their royal highnesses have been very obedient servants of the prince of darkness, those false prophets have dubbed them "most gracious sovereigns", and have been as much dazzled in their presence as if they had beheld the beatific vision.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 1. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble..." And who is there among the sons of men to whom a "day of trouble" does not come? A "day of trouble" is the heritage of every child of Adam. How sweet the wish, then, "The Lord hear thee in a day of trouble". It is the prayer of another on behalf of some troubled one; and yet, it implies the troubled one himself has also prayed – "The Lord hear thee;" i.e. "The Lord hear and answer thine own prayer."

Barton Bouchier

Verse 1. "...the name of the God of Jacob defend thee". This is a beautiful allusion to the history of the patriarch Jacob. Jehovah had appeared for him, when he fled from his brother Esau, at Bethel, and Jacob said to his household in Genesis 35:3, "Let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an alter unto God, WHO ANSWERETH ME IN THE DAY OF MY DISTRESS, and was with me in the way which I went".

John Morison

Verse 1. "...the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." A papist once told me that if a priest would but give him one drop of holy water, and make a circle with it around a field of wild beasts, it would defend him and the beasts would not harm him. I retired in disgust, but thought, what a fool I am that I cannot put such a trust in my God as this spoor deluded man puts in his priest and a drop of holy water! O brethren, get encircled with covenant engagements, and covenant blood, and covenant grace, and covenant promises, and covenant securities.

John Irons

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Verse 2. "Send thee help from the sanctuary..." Here we see the nature of true faith, that it causes us to see help in heaven, and so pray for it when there is none to be seen on earth. As the holy martyr Stephen, when his enemies were ready to burst with anger, and gnash at him with their teeth, looked stedfastly into heaven, and saw Christ standing at the right hand of God ready to defend him. So faith in the promises of the Word doth see help in heaven ready for us, when there are no means on earth.

Nicholas Bownd

Verse 3. "The Lord ... Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifices." This may be referred to Christ; "All thy offerings:" the humiliation that brought Him from heaven to earth; the hard manger; the ox and ass for courtiers; the weary flight into Egypt; the poor cottage in Nazareth; the doing all good and bearing all evil; the being called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. "And accept thy burnt sacrifice:" The thorny crown on His head; the nails in His hands and feet; the reproaches that filled His ears; the gloating multitude on whom His dying gaze rested; the vinegar and the gall; the evil odours of the hill of death and corruption. "REMEMBER" them now, O Father; call to mind for us sinners, and for our salvation all these "offerings"; accept, instead of our eternal punishment, His "burnt sacrifice", who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.

J. M. Neale

Verse 5. "...our banners..." Will you know the STAFF, the COLOURS, and the FLAG or STREAMER of this ensign? The STAFF is the Cross; the COLOURS are blood and water; and the STREAMER is the Gospel.

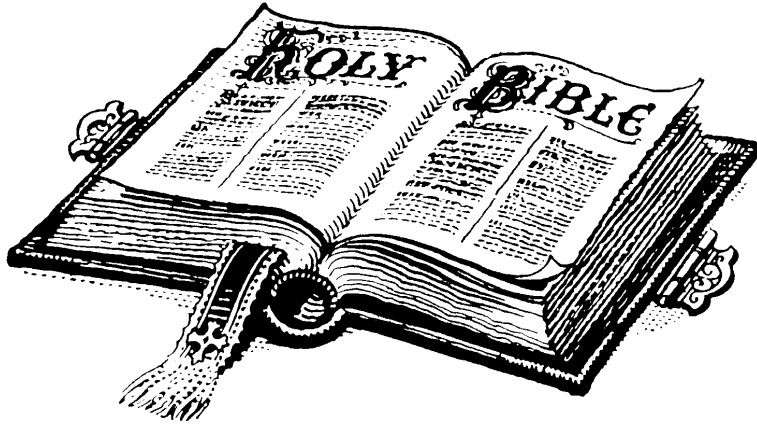
Mark Frank

Verse 7. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God". It is easy to persuade papists to lean on priests and saints, on old rags and painted pictures; but it is hard to get a Protestant to trust in the living God.

William Arnot

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AN OLD BOOK

THE BIBLE

THIS BOOK CONTAINS: - the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers.

ITS doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

READ IT to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy.

IT CONTAINS light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

IT IS the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter.

HERE, heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

CHRIST is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end.

IT SHOULD fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet.

READ IT slowly, frequently, prayerfully.

IT IS a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure.

IT IS given you in life, will be opened at the judgement, and will be remembered for ever.

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IT INVOLVES the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

L.A. Fryar

been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Waiting for a Son

Dear Boys and Girls,

Mr and Mrs Matthews' oldest son was in the army. Every day they looked for him to come home. "I'll be home on leave in just a few days" his telegram had said. Every day Mr and Mrs Matthews left a light in the window. Even in the middle of the night, when everything was dark, this lamp continued to shine. Finally their boy came home. As he walked up the street he saw the little light in the window. Mr and Mrs Matthews had been waiting for their son. They expected him and looked for him every day. They were prepared for his coming.

The Lord Jesus tells us in his word that He is coming. He said "I will come again". Christian people are ready for Christ's return. They are looking for Him, just as Mr and Mrs Matthews looked for their son. But some people do not seem to care about the Lord's coming. When Jesus comes they will be left behind, for they will not be ready for Him. Unless people are saved when Jesus comes they will be left behind.

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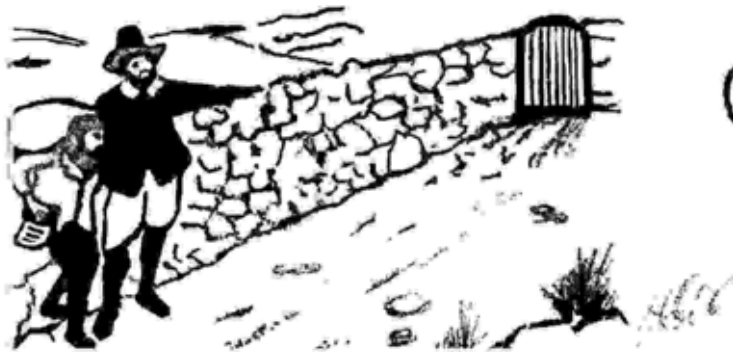
Jesus warned us to be ready, for He is coming at a time when the world will not expect Him. If Jesus should come today, would you be ready to go with Him. The only way to be ready is to have Him as your Saviour.

Boys and girls just think to yourself: "If Jesus were to come before this day is finished, will I be ready to go with Him?" What an important question that is, and what would your answer be? I trust that all of you as you think of this question will earnestly consider where you stand with regard to Jesus and His free gift of Salvation for those who ask for it.

Here is a verse from the Bible for you to memorise and I trust take as a promise from Jesus –

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also"

Regards,
Mrs Seaton



pictures
from
pilgrim's
progress.

We come now to our last few Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress. As we said in the first few illustrations that we drew from John Bunyan's great classic, we would only be able to pinpoint a very few of the many hundreds of spiritual truths that the book sets before us, and we have endeavoured to do this, simply as a guideline to interpreting the "similitudes" that Bunyan uses to speak of our

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own "pilgrim's progress". We take one more illustration in particular in this edition – and a few, in general, as we finish off our series.

Bunyan informs us that the way to the Celestial City lay through a town in which a great fair was kept. Every Pilgrim, he tells us, must pass through this place, or else "must needs go out of the world". If you happen to spend a Saturday afternoon in the city centre of Inverness, or any other sizable city, you should have a reasonable illustration of just what this place was like. It was called "Vanity Fair"; and in the side shows of Vanity Fair Bunyan opens our gaze. In the Pilgrim's Progress, we have a vivid picture of this world and the believer's place in this world. If you have an illustrated edition of the Pilgrim's Progress you will see how vividly some of the artists have committed Bunyan's words to pictures.

Vanity Fair is a place where sin reigns supreme, and nothing is hidden away that will find a ready market in the promotion of that sin. "At this fair," we are told, "there are all such merchandise sold as houses, lands, trades, places, honours, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures; and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not. And moreover, at this fair, there are at all times to be seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves and rogues, and that of every kind. Here are to be seen too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red colour".

As you can see, John Bunyan, in keeping with his other Puritan brethren, had a very low estimate of this world and this world's goods. "Rome and her merchandise are greatly promoted in this Fair," he tells us; and the "chief lord of the Fair", one "Beelzebub", even endeavoured to get the Prince of Princes to buy some of this Fair's goods as He passed through this Fair on the way to His Cross. But, that we might have "an example" he refused to buy of the "kingdoms of this world" when presented to Him.

When Pilgrim and Faithful arrived in Vanity Fair they caused quite a stir, Bunyan informs us; this was on account of three things.

- I. Their "strange dress". Their mode of dress was not that which was "fashionable" but that which was decent. Surely Bunyan could speak loudly in Christian circles today!

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- II. Their "speech", too, was strange to the "men who kept the "Fair", for it was the "language of Caanan".
- III. But the greatest wonderment of all was caused by the way "these pilgrims set VERY LIGHT by all the wares". "What will you buy?" they were asked. "We buy the truth and sell it not", they replied". (Proverbs 23 v 23).

Needless to say, Vanity Fair had no time for such men – as the world has no time for such believers today! They were placed in an iron cage to the gaze of all the inhabitants of that place, and then Faithful was sentenced for trial before Judge Hategood. He is condemned for his faithfulness; and no wonder; listen to some of the names of the jury that condemned him; Mr. No-good; Mr. Malice; Mr. Love-Lust; Mr. Live-Loose; Mr. Enmity; Mr. Liar; Mr. Hate-light. Faithful is burnt at the stake in Vanity Fair, but Pilgrim himself, through the power of "He who over-rules all things", is enabled to continue his travels.

What does it all mean? It means that the world hates Christ and the faith that is by Him. God will have His Church in this world and not even the world will destroy that Church of which He is builder and maker. But, where it can, the world will attack true faith and stifle its voice.

How much there is between Vanity Fair and the Celestial City. Bunyan's Pilgrim has many more people to meet and many more situations to face. We commend a study of his pilgrimage to you.

What lessons "The Immortal Tinker" has left for us even just outside the gate of Vanity Fair. There our Pilgrim meets Mr. and Mrs. By-ends. What a couple for our own day. They were always happy to "walk with religion" we are told, "when the sun shone, and it went in silver slippers", but not when it was "in rags" or "bound in irons". What a wealth of spiritual truth in the encounter with "Demas" or "The Monument to Lot's Wife". Read of Little Faith being robbed and Hopeful "swaggering".

Read on until he "treads the verge of Jordan" and ascends the steps of the New Jerusalem – his Celestial City.

A Sermon for
Parents
by
J.C. Ryle

Part Six

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

Train your children, lastly, with continual prayer for a blessing on all you do. Without the blessing of the Lord your best endeavours will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and except He touch the hearts of your children by His spirit, you will weary yourself to no purpose. Water, therefore, the seed you sow in their minds with unceasing prayer. The Lord is far more willing to hear than we are to pray; far more ready to give blessings than we are to ask; but He loves to be entreated for them. And I set this matter of prayer before you as the topstone and seal of all you do. I suspect the child of many prayers is seldom cast away.

I know well that God is a Sovereign God and doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will. I know that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, and Manasseh the son of Hezekiah and that you do not always see godly parents having a godly seed. But I know also that God is a God who works by means, and sure am I, if you make light of such means as I have mentioned, your children are not likely to turn out well.

Fathers and mothers, I charge you solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ to take every pain to train your children in the way they should go. I charge you not merely for the sake of your children's souls; I charge you for the sake of your own future comfort and peace. Children have ever been the bow from which the sharpest arrows have pierced man's heart. Children have mixed the bitterest cups that man has ever had to drink. Children have caused the bitterest tears that man has ever had to shed. Adam could tell you so; Jacob could tell you so; David could tell you so. There are no sorrows on earth like those that children have brought upon their parents.

Now, the Lord teach you all that sin is that abominable thing which God hateth. Then, I know you will mourn over the sins of your children, and strive to pluck them as brands from the burning. The Lord teach you all how precious Christ is, THEN I feel confident you will use every means to bring your children to Jesus. The Lord grant this, and then I have a good hope that you will indeed train up your children well – train well for earth and train well for heaven; train them for God, for Christ and for eternity. AMEN

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