

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 61 issued June 2006

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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

Internet Edition 61 of The Wicket Gate Magazine - A Continuing Witness

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Depravity of Man and The Failure of Evangelism

My dear friends,

It is a fairly accepted fact that until we find the cause of an ailment it is unlikely that we will ever come near to finding a cure. "Wrong notions about a disease always bring with them wrong notions about a cure," as Bishop Ryle put it. As we examine the ineffectiveness of the Church's work today in the light of the small number of men and women and young people who are added "permanently" to the Church of Christ we must, surely, conclude that somewhere along the line we have lost the "cure" for saving souls and healing the wounds of sin in the lives of the sinners. And yet, would it not be more correct to say that, first and foremost, we appear to have lost the "cause?" In other words, we have failed to appreciate the nature of the one who is going to be saved and so, have ceased to appreciate the nature of the gospel that is going to be necessary to save him.

You see, when Charles Darwin began to expound his theory of the evolution of man it was embraced by many within the churches as the answer to the true nature of man. Man was, in fact, evolving and was getting "better" with every passing year. This teaching, sad to say, didn't pass by the evangelical church, or leave its ranks unscarred, but a new interpretation of man's nature entered into the evangelical church and along with it, a new type of gospel remedy to suit that new interpretation.

Of Course, the new evangelicalism wouldn't have agreed with the evolutionists that man was "getting better," but, perhaps – the new thought began to run – perhaps man wasn't really as bad by nature as the old hard line Calvinists had made him appear. His Will was "free", after all, and, surely, he could choose salvation of his own free will if only it was set before him with sufficient zeal and enticement.

So began the era of "decisionism" Christianity – a gospel to suit the new doctrine of man's sinnership which had become accepted orthodoxy in the evangelical church. Today's situation, we say, less than a hundred years after this Darwinistic fundamentalism, is a sad and sobering indictment, both of our views of salvation, and of our views of sin.

Now, where have we gone wrong? Well, for one thing, we have ignored the Word of God and what the Holy Spirit of God has to say to us about this sinner on whom salvation must work its perfect work. We have conducted our gospel preaching and teaching as though the Lord had never painted the nature of the natural man for all to see. Permit one analogy alone, but one of the most vivid that the Apostle Paul by the Holy Spirit ever set before us. "And you hath he quickened," it says in the first verse of Ephesians chapter two, "who were dead in trespasses and sins. Wherein in time past ye walked," It says, "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air ... and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And those last two statements alone regarding man's nature should be proof enough of the supernatural work that is going to be necessary to save his soul and reconcile him to God. He is, by nature, under the devil's control and under God's wrath.

But it is the first statement that conjures up the most vivid picture of all when we enquire regarding the status of men and women outside of grace. "And you hath he quickened (made alive)," says the Lord's Holy Spirit, "who were dead in trespasses and sins..."

What a staggering statement that is, my friends, and if you for one moment doubt it, then here is what you must do – you must stand in a pulpit and preach, or speak to an unconverted man or woman about their soul's salvation, and you will immediately find this: you will find that you are preaching or speaking in a "graveyard" – a spiritual graveyard! You are speaking to a corpse – a man, or a woman, or a young person "dead in trespasses and sins." May as well hope to raise the physically dead by the power of human persuasion than raise the spiritually dead to do themselves spiritually good.

Now, this is the one basic truth that modern-day evangelicalism has ignored. "Oh yes," many will say, "we believe that men are sinners, but they must take the first step in their salvation and then, Christ will do the rest." But, let us look at that dead man – the physically dead man. Supposing he could take the "first step" out of his grave so that a doctor by the graveside could apply his skills and make him whole again; where would the miracle lie? With the doctor? Or with the corpse? Surely, with the corpse, for it performed the miracle, did it not, of making itself alive again? Ah, my friends, here is the blight on our gospel today, it has enthroned the "corpse", and the Great Physician of men's souls has been relegated to an accessory after the fact of salvation.

Don't you see that old mummified figure of the corpse of human nature? There it sits, exalted on the throne of modern-day gospel preaching where the blessed Prince of Life alone should reign.

Herein lies the root of the problem of our day; herein lies the answer to our superficial cures for sinners; we have forgotten what the sinner is and that he "must be born again."

Good George Whitefield was once asked why he preached so much on that blessed verse. "Mr. Whitefield," he was asked, "Why do you preach so much on 'Ye must be born again'? "Because," said he, "Ye must be born again." Yet, scarcely is there a more neglected and misunderstood text in the whole of the Bible today. You see, our Lord wasn't telling Nicodemus, in those words, that the way to enter the Kingdom of heaven was by making a decision to be "born again." Of course not! What our Lord was telling Nicodemus about was the necessary process that must take place in a sinner's soul before he can be a fit subject for the everlasting Kingdom of Jehovah. The sinner must receive a "new nature," as it says in another place – he MUST be "born again." He is born with the "old" nature that lies "dead in trespasses and sin," and this old nature, as the Bible says, "cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God," and so, there must be a "new birth" – a "new creation" – a "quickening" from the grave to life eternal in Christ. And this isn't the corpse's work! This is the work of the Sovereign Spirit of the Sovereign God. Can't you hear our Lord rebuking evangelicalism today as He rebuked old Nicodemus in the darkness of that night so long ago? "Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things?" And then, that irrevocable word of instruction that settles for us once and for all whose is the power in salvation and therefore, whose should be the glory: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." No man ever became his own father in his natural birth – when he was born "of the flesh." No more will any sinner ever become his own "spiritual" father, for to be "born of the spirit" requires the Spirit's regenerating power and that truth lays the "corpse" where it belongs – in the dust, beneath the Sovereign's feet.

How we need to see the King upon His Throne in our preaching and witnessing and thinking again. How we need to see our sin – and the sin of all men as "exceeding sinful," for once we begin to see the depth and depravity of the iniquity of the natural man towards his God, then we will, once more, begin to see the glories of the work of Christ that saves his soul.

Yours sincerely, W.J. Seaton (Pastors Letter June 1970)



THOMAS BOSTON. Time was when almost all the houses of Scotland numbered among their most prized possessions two books apart from God's Holy Word itself. Seated on that place of honour by the ingle nook with the fire's reflection dancing on its covers reigned the true Word of God itself – the Bible. But in subordinate grandeur beneath the living truth of God sat those two princes – John Bunyan, and Thomas Boston.

Thomas Boston was born on 17th March 1676 and died on 20th May 1732; but like so many before him – and like the "immortal tinker of Bedford" who shared that place of subordinate honour with him – being dead, he was to speak to many generations through the pages of his works. Born on 17 March 1676, indeed, but "born again" by the Holy Spirit of God in the summer of 1687. And it was this "second" birth that was to make many in his time – and after – rise up and call him blessed. Like Matthew Henry of the last issue, the young Thomas Boston was to be greatly influenced by his earthly father, a man who had known the prison cell for his non-conformity. And Thomas knew it, too, for many a time as a young boy, he tells us, he lay with his father in Duns' jail "to keep him company". However, in that summer of 1687 the pleasant air of religious liberty was once more being breathed in Scotland, and it was a thankful old John Boston who took his young son Thomas by the hand to attend on the ministry of good Henry Erskine, father of the famous Ralph and Ebenezer. The text that was preached that day was the very warp and woof of the gospel of God's saving grace, "Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world", and young Thomas Boston "beheld" and believed that that precious "lamb" had been slain for him. "I was like one amazed with some new and strange thing," he recalls in his life story, and thereafter he was set himself to the task of exhorting others to "behold the lamb of God" that they might be "amazed", as well, at this gift of God's abounding grace.

Like many preachers both before and after him, however, Thomas Boston had some self-directed notions as to how he was going to conduct this ministry of

calling men and women to Christ. Thus we find him full of complaints when the Lord places him in his very first charge in the parish of Simprin: "The Lord has brought about for me what I was most against," he records. The stipend was small, the manse was large and dilapidated, and the Lord's true people were few and far between. What a transformation, though, when "the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" was beheld anew by preacher and people alike. "The Lord has brought about for me what I was most against," the new young minister complains at the beginning of that ministry in that place; "Simprin!" he concludes his work there, "O blessed be He for His kindness at Simprin; "The lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

After almost eight years in that place Thomas Boston removed to the parish of Ettrick. As we think of Bunyan and Bedford, and McCheyne and St. Peter's, and Rutherford and Anwoth, so it is Boston and Ettrick, for it was here that the one who had beheld "the lamb of God" spent his life's labours. And labours they were! For eight whole years Boston exalted Christ in all His saving power, and yet, not one soul appears to have "beheld" the lamb of God" in that time. Immorality, and all manner of sin was rampant in the area, and even some of those that Boston thought to have been "praying persons", as he says, turned out to be "horrid swearers" when the occasion arose. "My heart is alienated from this place," he told his wife; and when an invitation from another church arrived Thomas Boston was ready to flee from Ettrick. But the Lord's ways are "in the seas", and to Boston's amazement, the news of this possible departure from Ettrick threw the whole parish into penitence before the Lord. Now, "the lamb" was to be beheld in that place as he had never been before – and indeed, all Scotland would glory in the exalted Christ as God took up His servant. From the pulpit of Ettrick one message flowed from the lips of the one who stood before the people – "Behold the lamb of God". When illness struck so that he could no longer stand, but had to sit in the pulpit to address the congregation, the message was the same. And from the window of the bedroom where his soul took its flight to be with the Lord, the same message proceeded; the same message recorded on the pages of that book nestling in the ingle nook: "Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Sweet Notes From The Song of Songs (Part 5)

Chapter 2, verse 4. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." What a glorious sight those banners of war must have been

as they hung from the rafters of the banqueting house of the king of Israel as he sat down to eat with his young bride. How many great and glorious victories must have been inscribed upon those velvet flags of honour! But above the head of the young bride of the Song of Songs was stretched out in her imagination a far more glorious banner than Israel could ever boast, and that was the banner of "Love" that Solomon had woven for her and had inscribed with his own undivided attention. And what a banner flies above the heads of the Lord's Elect. And how many victories are woven into the fabric of the flag of our redemption. As soon as it was unfurled in that manger at Bethlehem "the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord, and against His anointed," for Herod would "seek out the young child to destroy him." The articles of war had been issued many hundreds of years before in that Garden of Eden when enmity was declared between the seeds of the woman and the serpent; and it wasn't long until our Redeemer had entered into hand-to-hand combat with the prince of this world.

Three names are especially emblazoned upon the banner of the Lord.

The Battle of Gethsemane is there, where Christ must needs enter into combat with the justice of His Father in Heaven, and take the way of salvation for man that God had ordained. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But it wasn't possible, and Christ entered into the fray and gained the victor's crown.

The Battle of Gabbatha is there also. How many unholy alliances were forged that day against the Prince of Life at that "place of the pavement?" Herod and Pilate making common cause; the Jews and the Romans; the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Yet, the victory was the Lord's.

The Battle of Golgotha shines brightly there, as well. How black it seemed when the battle commenced that day on that hill that was called Calvary! See how the Captain of our salvation even wilts and falls under the blows of Divine wrath. But the blood of His veins is only to dye the banner of our redemption a crimson hue that the golden letters of our Father's love might be plain for all His children to read.

"Inscribed upon the Cross I see,
In shining letters – 'God is Love'".

Truly: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love."

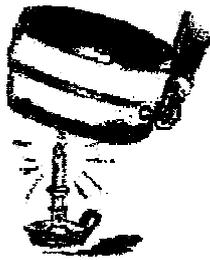


Sermon in Candles

By
C.H. Spurgeon



(Part 5)



Let me set before you an admirable illustration, which is not one of my own, but comes from the great Master of assemblies. Here is a candle, and, of course, we have brought it with a view to its giving light, but the absurd action that I am bent upon is to cover it up with a bushel. It would be a very ridiculous thing to be at the pains of providing a lighted candle and then to hide it under a bushel. Yet I do so to make the folly apparent to you all.

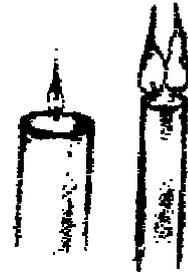
I notice you laugh; and well you may. You may use a bushel and use a candle; but by putting the candle under the bushel you use neither of them, but MIS-USE both. I am sure none of you would be guilty of such an absurd action. And can it be that even a single person here would be so profane as to believe that the All-wise God would do that which we all condemn as folly? And yet, when those of you who have grace in your hearts profess to believe that you are placed where you can do no good, you virtually charge the Lord with lighting a candle and putting it under a bushel. Yonder is my respected brother...hear what he has to say. "My dear Mr. Spurgeon, you cannot expect me to be doing any work in the church, for my daily labour leaves me no time for anything else. I am willing but quite unable to do a hand's turn for my Lord." Yes, yes, I see: you have to complain of a bushel that hides your light. God has lighted you, and then has put you where your light is condemned to be unseen. God has given you the light of His grace, and has then deliberately placed a great golden bushel over the top of you! Do you feel sure that it is so? Is there not a still, small voice which whispers that there is something wrong?

In the next similitude you have a simpler reminder of the imperfections to which men are liable. A candle needs SNUFFERS. And men need chastisements; for they are both of them subject to infirmity. In the temple of Solomon there were snuffers and snuff dishes; but **THEY WERE ALL OF GOLD**. God's rebukes are in love, and so should ours be: holy reproofs in the spirit of love are snuffers of gold. Never



use any other, and use even these with discretion, lest you put out the flame which it is your aim to improve. Never reprove in anger. Do not deal with a small fault as if it were a great crime. If you see a fly on your boy's forehead, don't try to kill it with a sledge-hammer, or you may kill the boy also. Do the needful but very difficult work of reproof with the kindest and wisest style, so that the good you aim at may be attained.

Here is a very important looking candle. You expect great things from so PORTLY an illuminator. Look at the size of it. But when I light it the illuminating power is very small. We have here the maximum of tallow and the minimum of light. The fact is that only a little of the fat just near the centre ever gets melted. Partial consecration is a very doubtful thing; and yet how much we have of it! What is wanted is grace "more abundant," to fuse the whole man and make every part and parcel of him sub-servient to God's great design of light-giving.



I was present at a meeting where a truly solid and instructive speaker succeeded in mesmerising us all, so that in another half a minute we should all have been asleep. His talk was as good as gold, and as heavy. He was followed by a gentleman who was "all there," what there was of him. He was so energetic that he broke a chair, and made us all draw in our feet, for fear he should come down on our corns. How the folks woke up! He was like the second candle in our woodcut – the cobbler's candle with TWO WICKS. His blaze was very large in proportion to the material which sustained it.

Master Bunyan gives us a word of thought in the doggerel rhyme with which I end this lesson.

Man's like a candle in a candlestick,
Made up; of tallow and a little wick;
And as the candle is before 'tis lightened,
Just such be they who are in sin benighted.
Nor can a man with grace his soul inspire,
More than can candles set themselves on fire.
Candles receive their light from what they are not;
Men, grace from Him, for Whom at first they care not.

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 25 verses 1 to 7)

Verse 1. "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my Soul". It is but mockery to uplift the hands and the eyes unless we also bring our souls into our devotions.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verses 2 and 3. "O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed ... Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed ..." David prays in verse 2 "Let not ME be ashamed," but as if conscious that his prayers are too restrictive and narrow, he enlarges the bounds of them and builds them on a broader bottom, "Yea, let NONE that wait on thee be ashamed." Our devotions must not be pent or confirmed to our own private good, but extended to the benefit of all God's servants in whatever conditions they are.

Andrew Fuller

Verse 4. "Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths." There are the "ways" of men, and the "ways" of God; the "paths" of sin and the "paths" of righteousness; there are "thy ways" and there are "my ways"; THINE the ways of truth, MINE the ways of error; THINE which are good in THINE eyes and, MINE, which are good in mine eyes; THINE which lead to heaven, and MINE which lead to hell. Therefore, "Shew my THY ways, O Lord; teach me THY paths," lest I mistake mine own ways for thine; yea, lead me in the truth and teach me, lest I turn out of thy ways into mine own. "Shew me thy ways," by the ministry of thy Word; "teach me thy paths," in the guidance of thy Spirit.

Robert Mossom

"Verse 5. "Lead me in thy truth ..." Do what you know, and God will teach you what to do. Do what you know to be your PRESENT duty, and God will acquaint you with your FUTURE duty as it comes to be present.

Samuel Annesley

Verse 5. "... on thee do I wait all the day." We must wait ALL the day.

(1) Though it be a LONG day; though we be kept waiting a great while, quite beyond our own reckoning; though when we have waited long, we are still put to wait longer, and are bid with the prophet's servant, to go "yet

seven times" before we perceive the least sign of mercy coming – "wait all the day."

(2) Though it be a DARK day; yet let us wait upon God "all the day."

Though while we are kept waiting for what God will do, we are kept in the dark concerning what he is doing and what is best for us to do, yet let us be content to wait in the dark ... for though what God doeth we know not now, yet we shall know hereafter.

(3) Though it be a STORMY day; yet we must wait upon God "all the day."

Though the wind be contrary and drive us back; nay, though it be boisterous and the church be tossed with tempests, and ready to sink ... Christ is in the ship ... and why are ye fearful?

Matthew Henry

Verse 6. "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses; for thy have been EVER OF OLD." Let the ANTIQUITY of divine love draw up our hearts to a very dear and honourable esteem of it. Ancient charters, how careful we are to preserve them. How then should the great charter of heaven, so much older than the world, be had in everlasting remembrance, and the thoughts thereof to be very precious to us. For that which is from everlasting shall be TO everlasting; if the root be eternal, so are the branches.

Elisha Coles (on God's Sovereignty)

Verse 7. "Remember not the sins of my youth ..." It was these words that floated across the raging Solway floods one May morning during the "killing times" when the fields and rivers of Scotland ran red with the blood of the faithful. Two stakes had been erected in the bed of the Blednoch Burn "which fills with Solways from the sea when the swift running tide comes in." The one furthest from the shore was for old Margaret MacLachlan, at seventy-two, called to be a Covenant martyr; the other for young Margaret Wilson, now denied the right of seeing her eighteenth summer on this fair earth. The floods go over the older Margaret first. "What do you think of her now?" the young martyr for Christ is asked as she is directed to the struggling form. "Think!" she triumphantly echoes across the rising waters as they come nearer and nearer her own chest; "I see Christ wrestling there," she says: "Think ye that we are sufferers? No; it is Christ in us, for He send none a warfare at their own charges" And then, her dying song –

"My sins and faults of youth
Do thou, O Lord, forget;
After thy mercy think on me,
And for thy goodness great."

"Remember not the sins of my youth ... according to thy mercy remember thou me."

(Continued next edition)

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

By Mrs Seaton

Dear Boys and Girls,

Here is a story for you about Big Ben and Big Tom. I wonder can you guess who they are. Well they are two big bells, or chimes, or striking clocks. You have heard them perhaps over the radio. I have heard Big Ben. I am not sure if I have heard Big Tom. Big Tom is not so well know as Big Ben. Big Ben is a big bell that hangs high up in a big tower in the city of London. It is in the tower of the Houses of Parliament. It keeps good time just like a good clock should. It is the largest striking clock in the world and is also the world's most accurate clock. That is better than being big. A little watch that keeps good time is better than a big clock that is always wrong.

But what about Big Tom? Who is he? Big Tom is a church bell. He has his home high up in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. A few years ago when Big Ben was to be cleaned, for only a clean clock can keep good time, Big Tom broadcast the time in his place. I wonder if Big Tom kept good time? I am sure he would or else he would get all the watches and clocks in Great Britain going wrong every day.

After all the one thing we want when we have a clock or a watch is that it will keep time. We want to depend on it. If it is slow we might be late for school, or for the church or we might miss a train or bus. No, we want a clock to tell the exact time.

And this is what we want in people, in boys and girls. We want to be able to depend on them. We want them to keep their word and to keep their promises. This is what the Bible calls trust. Can we trust God? Yes indeed. He will not fail us. "Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord is an everlasting Rock." Can God Trust us? Can He trust me? Can he trust you?

Let us ask Jesus to give us strength and help each day so that He may trust us for whatever task He has for us to do.

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