

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Pastor's Letter (June 1971)

- The Men of the Awakening - The Where, The Method, The Purpose and Content of their Preaching

My Dear Friends,

In this issue of the magazine we conclude our short series on the “Men of the Awakening” with a brief sketch of William Grimshaw of Haworth. Like the other men of that time of revival in the 18th century the one thing that most characterised William Grimshaw was his love of preaching and his desire to make known the glorious gospel of his God and Saviour Jesus Christ. In place of our usual letter for this month we turn to J. C. Ryle’s estimation of this most vital aspect of these men’s work, with the prayer that God might revive such a love of proclaiming His truth in all our hearts again. For those who feel that they have no part in any of the “regular” forms of ministry, we ask you to read “witnessing,” or “speaking,” or “telling to those around” in place of “preaching.” “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets.”

“The instrumentality by which the spiritual reforms of the eighteenth century carried on their operations was of the simplest description. It was neither more nor less than the old apostolic weapon of *preaching*. The sword which St. Paul wielded with such mighty effect, when he assaulted the strongholds of heathenism eighteen hundred years ago, was the same sword by which they won their victories.

“*They preached everywhere.* If the pulpit of a parish church was open to them, they gladly availed themselves of it. If it could not be obtained, they were equally ready to preach in a barn. No place came amiss to them. In the field or by the roadside, on the village-green or in the market-place, in the lanes or in alleys, in cellars or in garrets, on a tub or on a table, on a bench or on a horse-block, wherever hearers could be gathered, the spiritual reformers of the eighteenth century were ready to speak to them about their souls.

“*They preached simply.* They rightly concluded that the very first thing to be aimed at in a sermon was to be understood. They strove to come down

to the level of the people, and to speak what the poor could understand. To attain this they were not ashamed to crucify their style, and to sacrifice their reputations for learning. They carried out the maxim of Augustine, - 'A wooden key is not so beautiful as a golden one, but if it can open the door when the golden one cannot, it is far more useful.'

“They preached fervently and directly. They cast aside that dull, cold, heavy, lifeless mode of delivery, which had long made sermons a very proverb for dullness. They proclaimed the words of faith with faith, and the story of life with life. They spoke with fiery zeal, like men who were thoroughly persuaded that what they said was true, and that it was of the utmost importance to your eternal interest to hear it. They threw heart and soul and feeling into their sermons, and sent their hearers home convinced, at any rate, that the preacher was sincere and wished them well. They believed that you must speak ***from*** the heart if you wish it speak ***to*** the heart, and that there must be unmistakable faith and conviction within the pulpit if there is to be faith and conviction among the pews.

“But what was the substance and subject-matter of the preaching which produced such wonderful effect in the eighteenth century? I will not insult my readers’ common sense by only saying that it was ‘simple, earnest, fervent, real, genial, brave, life-like,’ and so forth; I would have it understood that it was eminently doctrinal, positive, dogmatical, and distinct.

“For one thing, then, the spiritual reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly ***the sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture.*** The Bible, whole and un mutilated, was their soul rule of faith and practice. They accepted all its statements without question or dispute. They knew nothing of any part of Scripture being uninspired. They never flinched from the asserting that there can be no error in the Word of God; and that when we cannot understand or reconcile some part of its contents, the fault is in the interpreter and not in the text. In all their preaching they were eminently men of one book. To that book they were content to pin their faith, and by it to stand or fall.

“Furthermore, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly ***the total corruption of human nature.*** They knew nothing of the modern notion that Christ is in every man, and that all possess something good

within, which they have only to stir up and use in order to be saved. They never flattered men and women in this fashion. They told them plainly that they were dead, and must be made alive again; that they were guilty, lost, helpless, hopeless, and in imminent danger of eternal ruin. Strange and paradoxical as it may seem to some, their first step towards making men good was to show them that they were utterly bad; and their primary argument in persuading men to do something for their souls was to convince them that they could do nothing at all.

“Furthermore, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly that ***Christ’s death upon the cross was the only satisfaction for man’s sins***; and that, when Christ died, He died as our substitute – ‘The just for the unjust.’ This, in fact, was the cardinal point in almost all their sermons. They loved Christ’s person; they rejoiced in Christ’s promises; they urged men to walk after Christ’s example. But the one subject, above all others, concerning Christ, which they delighted to dwell on, was the atoning blood which Christ shed for us on the cross.

“Furthermore, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly the great doctrine of ***justification by faith***. They told men that faith was the one thing needful in order to obtain an interest in Christ’s work for their souls ... Justification by virtue of church membership – justification without believing or trusting – were notions to which they gave no countenance. Everything, if you will believe, and the moment you believe; nothing, if you do not believe, - was the very marrow of their preaching.

“Furthermore, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly ***the universal necessity of heart conversion and a new creation by the Holy Spirit***. They proclaimed everywhere to the crowds they addressed, ‘Ye must be born again.’ Sonship to God by baptism – sonship to God while we do the will of the devil – such sonship they never admitted.

“Furthermore, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly ***the inseparable connection between true faith and personal holiness***. A true Christian, they maintained, must always be known by his fruits. ‘No fruits, no grace,’ was the unvarying tenor of their preaching.

“Finally, the reformers of the eighteenth century taught constantly, as doctrines both equally true, ***God’s eternal hatred against sin, and God’s love towards sinners***. Both about heaven and about hell they used the utmost plainness of speech. They never shrunk from declaring, in plainest

terms, the certainty of God's judgement and of wrath to come, if men persisted in impenitence and unbelief; and yet, they never ceased to magnify the riches of God's kindness and compassion, and to entreat all sinners to repent and turn to God before it was too late.

“Such were the main truths which the English evangelists of those times were constantly preaching.”



Men of the Awakening

William Grimshaw

The little village of Haworth on the howling Yorkshire moors is, perhaps, most readily associated in the average person's mind with the birth and life of the famed Charlotte Bronte, and not with the labours and preaching of a rustic old evangelical of the 18th century awakening. Such is the way of life; and whereas the world is inclined to embalm its heroes and heroines, the Church of Christ is more apt to neglect her's while they live, and forget them when they die. This would seem to be the case with William Grimshaw, Minister of the gospel at Haworth for twenty-one years, and one of the most used of that army of preaching giants that made the 18th century ring with the affirmations of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Born in Brindle in Lancashire in 1708, William Grimshaw was ordained to the work of the ministry of grace twenty-three years later in 1731. His first two charges at Rochdale and Todmorden found him “a blind leader of the blind” for he had neither lot nor part in the things of salvation. During his stay in the latter parish, however, he began to enter into some troubles concerning the state of his soul before the Lord. At this time, there was “no eye to pity” him, however, and he continued under a sense of sin for almost two years, neither able to find relief for himself nor to impart it to others. “Put away these gloomy thoughts,” he once told a woman who came to him burdened under the knowledge of her sin, “Go into merry company,” he told her, “and all will be well at last.”

Soon, however, the counsel of William Grimshaw to needy souls was to take up a different note, and the work which was begun in his soul at Todmorden was also established in that place, and “the full corn in the ear” was to be bountifully displayed during the years of harvest at Haworth.

Like the other men of the 18th century awakening in England, William Grimshaw was a fervent preacher of the gospel and had an overwhelming desire to see men and women brought into a knowledge of sins forgiven through Christ the Lord. But, there, the similarity between many of these men very often ended. George Whitefield is as different to John Wesley as Wesley is to old Rowland Hill, and William Grimshaw is probably different to all of them put together. Holding strong views as we do on the “independent” nature of the church, and knowing nothing in our doctrines of “parish ministries,” we find it hard to endorse on scriptural grounds many of the practices of the good vicar of Haworth.

However, who can but be impressed by the zeal of the man who would announce the opening psalm at his morning service and then, stick in hand, go out into the village and drive in the loiterers to hear the sermon? John Newton tells of a friend of his who was passing through Haworth on the Lord’s Day, and, in passing one of the public houses “saw several persons making their escape out of it, some jumping out of the lower windows, and some over a low wall.” The friend was at first alarmed, says Newton, believing the premises to be on fire; but “upon inquiring the cause of the commotion, he was only told that they saw the parson coming.” Whenever he suspected some of his church members of being really hypocrites at heart, he would occasionally dress himself as a tramp and go to the person in question to beg some bread. If he were refused the kindness, he counted it as a vindication of his first suspicions. Being doubtful of the sincerity of the profession of an old woman whose eyesight had badly failed, he went to her house one day and with his stick began to prod her on the leg. He went on in this fashion until the old woman, believing it to be some children playing a trick on her, she broke out into a fit of swearing, and again, Grimshaw’s fears were confirmed.

And let us remember that: they were genuine “fears” that he had for his people. Fears that they had less than the real thing in salvation; fears that they had not the root of the matter in their souls; fears that they would, at the last, be found wanting. So, what was a little eccentricity in practice and preaching if he could detect the true state of the souls of his parish and

then apply the right kind of medicines for the good of those souls? It is this, probably, above all others that most distinguish the ministries of the past from those of our own day. It was the eternal state of the souls of men that was uppermost in the thought of the Lord's servants regardless of the temporal upsets or disturbances that were caused.

Of course, such behaviour left William Grimshaw an easy butt for slander and criticism. "Mad Grimshaw," he was most often called. But, "He that winneth souls is wise." And regardless of how any might view some of his more "outlandish" methods in his daily tasks, none can gainsay the sincerity of the man, nor the influence of his work upon the souls of men.

The following account is a typical record of his life and labours in and around Haworth. "With a slice of bread and an onion for his day's provision, he would trudge over the moors from dawn to summer-dusk in search of sheep in the wilderness, and after a night's rest in a hayloft would resume the work. In one of his weekly circuits he would think it no hardship to preach from twenty to thirty times. When he overtook a stranger on the solitary road, if riding, he would dismount and talk to him, and rivet his mind with a pathetic exhortation and word of prayer." On one of these journeys, he came across an old woman who was finding the road long and weary as she made her way across the moors. He began to sympathise with her in her trials, but was soon told that she was going to "hear Grimshaw" and that, seeing her heart was there already, she would soon make the body follow. Without hesitation he hoisted her on to the back of his horse and both set off together to "hear Grimshaw".

The heart of the man was very large, indeed, and when friends would come to stay with him, he always made a practice of being up well before them in the mornings and personally cleaning and polishing their muddy boots. Like the others of his day, he preached "everywhere" "... a room, a barn, a field, a quarry, or by the roadside." He saw many "sons brought to glory" during his lifetime and even after death was the instrument that God used to the conversion of his own son after the flesh. This fact may well serve as a comfort to those of the Lord's people eagerly seeking the conversion of their children and loved ones, yet up to this point, seeing no fruits for their labours. John Grimshaw only survived his father by three years, but during that time passed from death unto life in spiritual things. Shortly after his father's death he was accustomed to ride the horse on which his father used to traverse the countryside preaching the gospel. When this was remarked upon he was always heard to say, "Yes, it once

carried a great saint, but now it carries a great sinner.” The knowledge of his sinnership soon became more than “head” knowledge, however, and John Grimshaw died in peace, believing in the God of his Godly father. Just before he died, he remarked to his friends, “What will my old father say when he sees I have got to heaven?” No doubt, he would say, “Hallelujah,” as he had done so often over sinners repenting at Haworth.

A WOMAN OF THE AWAKENING

Mrs Alice Cross

Regardless of how great the outstanding “Men” of the great awakening of the eighteenth century were, we should never under-estimate the zeal and labours of many of the average believers of those days, especially the women-folk, as these incidents from the life of one, Alice Cross show.

“At Booth Bank, in the parish of Rostherne, Cheshire, Grimshaw’s services used to be held in the house of John and Alice Cross. Alice was a woman of great spirit and intrepidity, and a heroine in Christ’s service. Her husband was a quiet sober man, but for some time after her conversion he remained in his old ways. When going out to worship, with her straw hat in one hand and the door-latch in the other, she would say to him, ‘John Cross, wilt thou go to heaven with me? If thou wilt not, I am determined not to go to hell with thee!’ John yielded at last; a pulpit was fixed in the largest room of their house at Rostherne, and the messengers of God were made welcome to their fare and farm.

When beggars came to the door she told them of the riches that are in Christ Jesus, and, kneeling by their side, commended them to the grace of God, and then sent them away, grateful for her charity, and impressed by her earnestness in seeking their souls’ good.

Nor were the more honourable of the land beyond the reach of her reproofs. On one occasion she stopped the Cheshire hunt, when passing her house, and addressed the horsemen, especially Lord Stamford and Sir Harry Mainwaring, who listened to her warning and rode on.

When the expected preacher did not come, thought the pulpit was not occupied, the congregation did not go away empty. Alice Cross herself, in her simple and earnest way, dealt out the bread of life.”

(Quoted in “Five Christian Leaders”.)



Gleanings In the Psalms (Psalm 40)

Verse 1 “**I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.**” The saviour’s prayers among the midnight mountains and in Gethsemane expounded this verse. The “Son of David” was brought very low, but He rose to victory; and here He teaches us how to conduct our conflicts so as to succeed after the same glorious pattern of triumph. Let us arm ourselves with the same mind; and panoplied in patience, armed with prayer, and girt with faith, let us maintain the Holy War.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verse 3 “**And he hath put a new song in my mouth ... many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.**” The terms “fear”, and “hope” (or “trust”), do not seem at first view to harmonise; but David has not improperly joined them together, for no man will ever entertain the “hope” of the favour of God but he whose mind is first imbued with the “fear” of God.

John Calvin

Verse 5 “**... and thy thoughts which are to us-ward ...**” My dear brethren, if God hath been thinking thoughts of mercy from everlasting to them that are His, what a stock and treasury do these thoughts amount to. God hath studied mercies – mercies for His children – even from everlasting, and then, “He reneweth his mercies every morning.” Not that any mercies are new, but He actually thinketh over mercies again and again, and so He brings out of His treasury mercies both new and old, and

the old are always new. What a stock, my brethren, must this needs amount to.

Thomas Goodwin

Verses 6 and 7 “**Sacrifice and offering thou didst not require; mine ears hast thou opened ... Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.**” In these words an allusion is made to a custom of the Jews to *bore the ears* of such as were to be their perpetual servants, and *to enrol their names in a book*. “Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldst not have,” but because I am Thy vowed servant, saith Christ, bored with an nail, and enrolled in Thy book, “I said, Lo, I come ... I delight to do thy will.”

Joseph Mede

Verses 7 and 8 “**Then said I, Lo, I come ... I delight ... thy law is within my heart.**” We see here with what a full consent the heart of Christ rebounded to His Father’s call – like some echo that answers the voice three times over. Thus when the Father speaks to Him to undertake the work of saving poor lost man, He doth not give a bare assent to the call, but trebles it – “I come ... I delight ... I delight to do thy will ... Yea, thy law is within my heart.”

William Gurnall

Verse 8 “**I delight to do thy will, O my God ...**” There are three wills active in this world in the matter of our soul’s salvation: The devil’s will, man’s will, and God’s will. The devil’s will is to see all men destroyed; man’s will is to turn away from Christ – “Ye will not come to me,” said Jesus; but, the believer may rejoice that if he is saved at all, then he is saved by God “according to the good pleasure of *His* will,” and it was this will that Christ came and delighted to do. “I came not to do mine own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of the Father, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” Glorious and sovereign will of God!

Verses 9 and 10 “**I have preached righteousness in the great congregation ...**” Our Lord Himself is our model for preaching. (1) “I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart.” The doctrine of God’s righteousness to the sinner whereby the sinner is justified is not a tit-bit of the study, or even our own hearts, but the very warp and woof of our gospel; Justification by faith is still the watchword of the gospel church and her ministers. (2) “I have not refrained my lips.” Blessed conscience

void of offence that has not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (3) “I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation.” (4) “I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth.” “I have preached ... I have not hid ... I have not refrained ... I have declared ... I have not concealed.” When such a banner can hang from our pulpits, then, may we call ourselves ministers of God and servants of Jesus Christ.

Verses 9 and 10 “I have preached ... *Thy* righteousness etc.” The adding of “*Thy*” to every one of them is emphatic; it was *Thy* righteousness I had commission to declare, *Thy* faithfulness I had order to proclaim, *Thy* mercy I had charge to publish. Since it was *Thy* rule I declared and observed, and *Thy* glory I aimed at, disgrace not Thyself and me in reusing the petition of such a suppliant, who believes in my word which I gave out at *Thy* authority.

Stephen Pharnock

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

A Ship called Lorna

Dear Boys and Girls,

This is the story of a little ship named “Lorna.” It was given that name by its owner and called after the owner’s little girl. It was a very brightly painted little ship and always had lots of flags flying in the breeze.

One day, this little ship was sailing on the Niagara River in America. It was on its way from Chicago to New York and intended to enter the canal leading to New York. The river where the canal enters is quite safe and no fear was felt, but the “pilot” missed the entrance to the canal and sailed on down the river, thinking all the time that he would soon come to the canal. The water became swifter and swifter, but the little ship sailed gaily on and when the people along the shore, knowing the danger, tried to signal the ship, those on the little cruiser waved back cheerily and sailed on merrily down the river, unaware that they were headed for the rushing water-falls and certain death.

Suddenly a great gust of wind blew the ship on to the rocky reef at the foot of a little island. If it had sailed on ten minutes more it could not have escaped plunging over the Falls. The ship turned over on its side and the four people on board had to cling to the wreck for more than an hour before they were taken off by strong men in a rowboat who risked their lives to save them.

There is a verse in the Bible, boys and girls, which says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." The danger came for that little boat by missing the right "path", for there are paths in the water as well as on the dry land. There are paths on land and sea which lead to safe harbours, and there are paths which lead to danger and death. The pilot of the little ship "Lorna" missed the entrance to the safe water. The way he took seemed right to himself, but it was the way of tragedy.

How important, then, it is, boys and girls, that we have a "Pilot" who can safely guide us through this life and take us to heaven to be with Himself at last. There is only One who can do both these things, and that is Christ, the Son of God. Perhaps you know –

"Jesus Saviour pilot me,
Over life's tempestuous sea."

Love
Mrs Seaton