

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible With the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
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- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



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The Plague of Indwelling Sin

(The Pastor's Letter January 1974)

By the time this particular issue of the Wicket Gate reaches your hands, we will be far enough into the days of this new year to have discovered that, in spite of the newness of the year, we are still, nevertheless, presented with many of the old problems that confronted us this time last year, and which will, in the natural run of things, do battle again with us when the next twelve months have elapsed.

This is particularly true of the issue of sin still remaining, and still very much alive and active, within the heart and the mind of the believing child of God. The very idea of “New Year Resolutions,” although invariably pointless after the first few days of the new year, would seem to underlie some kind of natural inclination to “turn over a new leaf” on the part of many men and women. But, the believing child of God, especially with a right estimation of the nature of sin and salvation from it, is only too well-aware of the fact that when he “would do good, evil is present,” with him. Be that as it may, the problem of sin remaining and recurring – in spite of what time of year it is – is a problem that has very often sent the believing people of God off into one of two unhealthy positions – either to minimize or disregard the dregs of sin remaining in them, or else to be driven into a pitiable condition where they are of little real use to themselves or anybody else. The first direction would appear to be the one most likely to be taken today, for it would appear that there is a very low concept of what sin really is in the thinking of a great many professing people. Yet, there are some tender souls who find themselves bearing sin burdens beyond their capacity, and lapsing into a forgetfulness to “cast their burden upon the Lord.” In between the two, of course, are very many Christians who find themselves ever being called on to grapple with the problem from day to day, and for them, there must be a constant reminder of some of the basic facts contained in the problem of indwelling sin in the believer. Now old John Bunyan probably comes as close as anyone to a real “heavenly-minded-down-to-earth” approach to the problem of that sin which still rears its ugly head – sometimes when we least expect it.

The scene is set in the City of Mansoul in Bunyan's Holy War. The Holy War is an allegory which sets forth man in the form of a city called Mansoul. Mansoul, Bunyan tells us, was once "a fair and flourishing metropolis," and was ruled over by a great King called El-Shaddi. There came a day however, when the city of Mansoul "fell" under the siege of an evil prince by the name of Diabolos, and this Diabolos "killed off all the chief citizens" of Mansoul, locking old Mr. Conscience (whom he couldn't kill outright) away in a deep dungeon, where his voice couldn't be strongly heard. At an appointed time, however, another "siege" took place on this Mansoul of John Bunyan's. This siege was led by El-Shaddi's Son – the Prince Immanuel – and through many vivid pages, John Bunyan sets forth this siege, and the final conquest, and re-establishment of El-Shaddi's government in the city of Mansoul again. As we come to the closing pages of the Holy War, we find John Bunyan, relating for us the Prince Immanuel's closing address to Mansoul before He returns to the Courts of El-Shaddi again; and in the course of this address, we find the Immortal Tinker taking up the problem of indwelling sin yet remaining in the redeemed soul of man – in the now liberated City of Mansoul. "Dost thou ask at me," the author makes Immanuel say, "Dost thou ask at me why I and my Father have seen it good to allow the dregs of thy sinfulness still to corrupt and to rot in thine heart?" He then gives five reasons – (i) "To humble thee, he says; take knowledge, take warning, and take forethought. To make thee humble, and to keep thee humble." (ii) "To keep thee wakeful ..." (iii) "to teach thee to war also ..." (iv) "To try thy love also ..." (v) "To extol and exalt the grace of God ...".

"Oh, yes," says someone, "but that is only John Bunyan." But, it is not only John Bunyan, for Bunyan is only vividly illustrating what the whole word of God continually sets forth with regards to this crippling mystery of how and why sin still dwells in our mortal flesh. Remember that fearsome struggle that the apostle Paul had over that "thorn in the flesh"? What that thorn actually was in reality we are never told in the Word of God, but the "permission" and "purpose" of it, the great apostle himself makes clear for us. It was "a messenger of

Satan”, he says, “sent to buffet me.” God had permitted such an infirmity to cling to Paul – aye had permitted the devil himself to attach it to the great apostle. But when the purpose of its remaining with him, in spite of his fervent prayers that it might be removed, was revealed to him the whole issue took on a different light. “Here’s what I have discovered,” he concludes, “God knows me better than I know myself. He knows I have a great big tendency to glory in myself. And so, He has sent me this thorn, this messenger of Satan **lest I be exalted above measure.**”

Is that not simply what Bunyan was saying in the closing address to Mansoul? What is the purpose of any of the dregs of sin remaining in the believer? “To humble thee,” said Immanuel, “... to make thee humble and to keep thee humble.” Ah, my friends, no matter how strange or paradoxical the issue might appear to our natural eyes and thinking at times, the purpose of God permitting the assaults of sin and Satan still to rage within us, is for our own good and the ultimate praise of His name. Remember one of the glorious offices of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is this – His Priestly Office.

What is entailed in that Priestly Office? The old Catechism gives a good answer: “Christ executeth the Office of a Priest,” it says – in the first place, “in His once offering up of Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and reconcile us to God,” and – in the second place, “in making continual intercession for us.” In other words the Saviour performed only one part of His Priestly work when He died on the cross for our sins, making the perfect sacrifice in Himself. This was how it was in Israel where the Priesthood was ordained of God to show forth the great fulfilment in Christ. The Priest offered the blood of sacrifice for the people, **and then**, once God had accepted the offering that was made, the Priest could begin to make intercession on behalf of the people. This was his second work, or the second part of his work. So with Christ. On the cross, He made the perfect, acceptable offering for our sin, but now – at this very present time – He makes Intercession for us as we come before Him with our sins – those sins that still break forth within our mortal frames.

Surely, it is the apostle John who sets the true course for our feet in this issue of indwelling sin – a course that clearly avoids both of those dangerous roads that we mentioned at the beginning. To minimise or disregard remaining sin in our selves is to deceive ourselves, he says; and to “bottle-up” the plague of our hearts instead of applying to the great Physician of our souls is to set an affront before the faithfulness of our gracious God. “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” So many believers have it in their heads that the purpose of “the throne of grace” is to change God’s mind on some matter so that everything works out for our favour. The very first purpose of that throne of grace, according to the Word of God, is very far different from that. Says the apostle Paul, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, **that we might obtain mercy ...**” Here is the primary purpose of that throne, says Paul; at that throne, we obtain mercy. What? But, surely Paul obtained mercy on the Damascus road? Yes, he did. But he had many “infirmities” yet. And what could he do about those infirmities? He could take them to the throne of grace, because at that throne of grace there stood a great High Priest Who was able to be “touched with the feelings of those infirmities.”

Strange and all as it may seem, my friends, we are driven more and more back to the fact that God is a Sovereign God. May as well ask why was there ever sin in the first place, as to ask why is sin permitted to remain in me. Had there been no sin there would have been no cross – no gracious and glorious sacrifice at the hands of the church’s Great High Priest. But, were there no remaining sin, then there would be no purpose for that other, and continual side of that Great High Priest’s work. What did Mr. Bunyan begin with? “To humble thee,” he said. And what did he finish with? “To extol and exalt the grace of God.” That’s what he said. On those two poles must be set the problem of indwelling sin in the believer, until that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect is come.

Sincerely
W. J. Seaton



Bunyan's Concluding Reflections

The following are the seven conclusions that John Bunyan draws at the end of his life story – “Grace Abounding.”

1. Of all the temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and truth of His gospel is the worst, and the worst to be borne; when this temptation comes, it takes away my girdle from me, and removeth the foundation from under me: Oh! I have often thought of that word, Have your loins girt about with truth; and of that, when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?
2. Sometimes, when after sin committed, I have looked for sore chastisement from the hand of God, the very next that I have had from Him, hath been the discovery of His grace. Sometimes, when I have been comforted, I have called myself a fool for my so sinking under trouble. And then again, when I have been cast down, I thought I was not wise, to give such way to comfort; with such strength and weight have both these been upon me.
3. I have wondered much at this one thing. That though God doth visit my soul with never so blessed a discovery of Himself, yet I have found again, that such hours have attended me afterwards, that I have been in my spirit so filled with darkness that I could not so much as one conceive what that God and that comfort was, with which I have been refreshed.
4. I have sometimes seen more in a line of the Bible, than I could well tell how to stand under. Yet, at another time, the whole Bible hath been to me as dry as a stick; or rather, my heart hath been so dead and dry unto it, that I could not conceive the least dram of refreshment, though I have looked it all over.

5. Of all fears, they are best that are made by the blood of Christ; and of all joy, that is the sweetest that is mixed with mourning over Christ. Oh! It is a goodly thing to be on our knees, with Christ in our arms, before God: I hope I know something of these things.
 6. I find to this day seven abominations in my heart. (1) Inclining to unbelief. (2) Suddenly to forget the love and mercy that Christ manifesteth. (3) A leaning to the works of the Law. (4) Wanderings and coldness in prayer. (5) To forget to watch for that I pray for. (6) Apt to murmur because I have no more, and yet ready to abuse what I have. (7) I can do none of those things which God commands me, but my corruptions will thrust in themselves. When I would do good, evil is present with me.
 7. These things I continually see and feel, and am afflicted and oppressed with, yet the wisdom of God doth order them for my good. (1) They make me abhor myself. (2) They keep me from trusting my heart. (3) They convince me of the insufficiency of all inherent righteousness. (4) They show me the necessity of flying to Jesus. (5) They press me to pray unto God. (6) They show me the need I have to watch and be sober. (7) And provoke me to pray unto God, through Christ, to help me, and carry me through this world.
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How Joseph Hart viewed sin as follows:

How sore a plague is sin,
To those by whom 'tis felt!
The Christian cries, Unclean! Unclean!
E'en though released from guilt.

How long, dear Lord, how long
Deliverance must I seek;
And fight with foes so very strong,
Myself so very weak?

I'll bear the unequal strife
And wage the war within;
Since death, that puts an end to life,
Shall put an end to sin.



Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 52

Title: “A Psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech.” The incident referred to is found in the twenty-second chapter of the first book of Samuel where Doeg slew the eighty-five priests of the city of Nob. What follows is an account of the consequences of his blood-thirsty crime; although apparently unscathed and prosperous for a time the Lord would yet “root him out of the land of the living.”

Verse 1. “Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O Mighty Man?” Doeg had small matter for boasting in having procured the slaughter of a band of defenceless priests. A “mighty man” indeed to kill men who never touched a sword! He ought to have been ashamed of his cowardice. He had no room for exaltation! Honourable titles are but irony where the wearer is mean and cruel. **But**, “The goodness of God endureth continually,” If priests be slain, their Master lives. If Doeg for a while triumphs, the Lord will outlive him, and right the wrongs which he has done.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 1. “Why boastest thou thyself in mischief ...” By “mischief” is to be understood, not simply what evil he had done, but the prosperity which he now enjoyed, obtained through the mischief. He had been the chief of Saul’s shepherds (1st Samuel 21 verse 8) but by that wicked destruction of the priests of God he had obtained the chief place next to the King.

Hermann Venema

Verse 2. “Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.” The smooth, adroit manner of executing a wicked device neither hides or lessens its wickedness. Murder with “a sharp razor” is as wicked as murder with a meat-axe or a bludgeon. A lie very ingeniously framed and rehearsed in an oily manner, is as great a sin – and in the end will be seen to be as great a folly – as the most bungling attempt at deception.

William Plumer

Verse 3. “Selah.” Let us “pause” and look at the proud blustering liar. Doeg is gone, but other dogs bark at the Lord’s people. Saul’s cattle-master is buried, but the devil still has his drovers, who fain would hurry the saints like sheep to the slaughter.

Charles Hadden Spurgeon

Verse 5. “God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.” There are four words the psalmist makes use of to denote the utter vengeance that awaited this deceitful and bloody wretch, all of them having a very strong meaning. “**Destroy**” signifies to **pull down** and break utterly in pieces, as when an altar is demolished. “**Take thee away**” signifies utterly to sweep away anything like dust or chaff; not just “sweep thee away from thy tent,” but to sweep thee away that thou may no longer be a tent – thyself, thy family, thy fortune shall be wholly and entirely swept away and dissipated for ever. “**Pluck thee out,**” signifies to twist anything, or pluck it up by twisting it round and round, as trees are sometimes twisted up. “**Root thee out of the land of the living.**” Answers to the former. So, it is impossible that words could express a more entire and absolute destruction.

S. Chandler

Verse 7. “Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches ...” Oh! ‘Tis hard to abound in riches and not to trust in them.

William Gurnall

Verses 8 and 9. “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever,” etc. Let us now observe what David says of himself. “But I am like a green olive tree” etc. But is not this egotism, boasting? By no means. When the Pharisee in the temple said, “Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are,” this arose from the spirit of self-applause, and self-satisfaction; but a good man knows that “by the grace of God” he is what he is, and has what he has. ... An olive tree is an “evergreen”; and the graces of God’s Spirit are never-dying graces. The work that God has commenced shall endure for ever. While “the outward man perisheth, the inward man is renewed day by day.” ... The apostle speaks of the “fatness” of the olive tree in his epistle to the Romans (and) there must be fruit where there is divine grace. “Herein is my Father glorified,” said our Saviour, “that ye bear much fruit.” And when David says, “I am like a green olive tree **in the house of my God,**” he plainly intimates that he was **what** he was by being **where** he was ... and that his produce arises from his position. There he was nurtured – there he was brought up – there he was trained – there he was defended.

William Jay

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

A Letter
From
Mrs Seaton

I wonder how many of you at some time have been lost! You know, Jesus was once lost – at least, Mary and Joseph thought that he was lost!

It all happened when Jesus was twelve years old. He went with his parents up to Jerusalem to pay the taxes along with lots of other people from Nazareth. What a wonderful week that must have been for Him. All the services in the Temple, all the crowds in the streets,

and the Roman soldiers marching past. All the marvellous sights to be seen, but, at last it was time to go home.

When they were all ready to start, Jesus was nowhere to be seen; but, as they were to march in a long procession with their friends and neighbours, Mary and Joseph just thought that he was with some of them, and went on their way. When it came near evening, they began to wonder why he stayed so long and so they went up and down among their friends asking if anyone had seen Jesus, (Just the same as your mummies and daddies sometimes look for you when it is tea-time).

But, no! No one had seen Jesus all day, and so, they realised that he must have been left behind in Jerusalem. What a shock for Mary and Joseph. Immediately they started off back to Jerusalem – and there they found him. Not at the fairground or at the “sweetie” stalls, or watching the soldiers! But, in the Temple – in church – listening to the ministers and asking them questions. His parents were amazed and asked him why he had not gone with the others; this is what Jesus said: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” Now, of course, he didn’t mean Joseph, who was his earthly father; he meant God, for Jesus was God’s Son.

The Bible tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”. That means that as he was growing up from a boy into a man he sought always the ways of God, and was also good and kind to those around him. What a lot Jesus can teach us, even yet, if each one of us, boy or girl – and grown-up too, just trusts in Him to be our Saviour and Guide and Friend.

“Oh dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too;
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.”

Mrs Seaton

When I was a Child Gleanings in Spurgeon's "Early Years"

I remember well, in my early days, seeing upon my grandmother's mantel-shelf an apple contained in a phial. This was a great wonder to me, and I tried to investigate it. My question was, "How came the apple to get inside so small a bottle?" The apple was quite as big and round as the phial; by what means was it placed within it? Though it was treason to touch the treasures on the mantel-piece, I took down the bottle and convinced my youthful mind that the apple never passed through its neck, and by means of an attempt to unscrew the bottom, I became equally certain that the apple did not enter from below. I held to the notion that by some occult means the bottle had been made in two pieces, and afterwards united in so careful a manner that no trace of the join remained. I was hardly satisfied with the theory, but as no philosopher was at hand to suggest any other hypothesis, I let the matter rest. One day, the next summer, I chanced to see upon a bough, another phial – the first cousin of my old friend – within which was growing a little apple which had been passed through the neck of the bottle while it was extremely small. The grand secret was out. I did not cry "Eureka! Eureka!" but I might have done so if I had then been versed in the Greek tongue.

This discovery of my juvenile days shall serve for an illustration at the present moment. Let us get the apples into the bottles while they are little ...

When I was a very small boy, I was allowed to read the Scriptures at family prayer. Once upon a time, when reading the passage in Revelation which mentions the bottomless pit, I paused, and said, "Grandpa, what can this mean?" The answer was kind, but unsatisfactory, "Pooh, pooh, child, go on." The child, however intended to have an explanation, and therefore elected the same passage morning after morning, and always halted at the same verse to repeat this enquiry, hoping that by repetition the good old gentleman

would reply. The process was successful, for it is by no means the most edifying thing to hear the Mother of Harlots, and the beast with seven heads, every morning in the week, Sunday included, with no sort of alteration either of Psalm or Gospel; the venerable patriarch of the household therefore capitulated at discretion, with, “Well, dear, what is it that puzzles you?”

Now, “the child” had often seen baskets with very frail bottoms, which, in course of wear, became bottomless, and allowed the fruit placed therein to fall to the ground; here then was the puzzle – if the pit aforesaid had no bottom, where would all these people fall who dropped out at its other end? – A puzzle which rather startled the propriety of family worship, and had to be laid aside for explanation at some more convenient season. I can remember the horror of my mind when my dear grandfather told me what his idea of “the bottomless pit” was. There is a deep pit, and the soul is falling down – Oh, how fast it is falling! There! The last ray of light at the top has disappeared, and it falls on – on – on, and so it goes on falling – on – on – on for a thousand years! “Is it not getting near the bottom yet? No, you are no nearer the bottom yet; it is the **bottomless** pit. It is on – on – on, and so the soul goes falling perpetually into a deeper depth still, falling forever into “the bottomless pit” - on – on – on – into the pit that has no bottom! Woe, without termination, without hope of its coming to a conclusion!

When we used to go to school, we would draw houses, and horses, and trees on our slates, and I remember how we used to write, “House” under the house, and “Horse” under the horse, for some persons might have thought that the horse was a house. So, there are some people who need to wear a label round their necks to show that they are Christians at all, or else we might mistake them for sinners, their actions are so like those of the ungodly.

They prayer-meetings during the week were always kept up, but at certain seasons of the year grandfather and a few old ladies were all

that could be relied upon. It occurred to me in riper years to ask my venerated relative how the singing was maintained. “Why, grandfather,” said I, “we always sang, and yet you don’t know any tunes, and certainly the old ladies didn’t.” “Why, child,” said he, “there’s one common metre tune which is all, ‘Hum Ha, Hum Ha,’ and I could manage that very well.” “But what if it happened to be a **Long** or **Short** metre hymn?” “Why, then, I either put in some Hum Ha’s or else I left some out; but we managed to praise the Lord.”

The Stambourne style of singing led me into trouble when I returned to my home. The notion had somehow entered my little head that the last line of the hymn must always be repeated, and grandfather had instilled into me as a safe rule that I must never be afraid to do what I believed to be right. So, when I went to the chapel where my parents attended, I repeated the last line whether the congregation did so or not. It required a great deal of punishment to convince me that a little boy must do what his parents think to be right; and though my grandfather made a mistake in that particular instance, I have always been grateful to him for teaching me to act according to my belief whatever the consequences might be.

As a child, when asked what I was going to be, I usually said that I was going to be a huntsman. A fine profession truly! Many young men have the same idea of being parsons as I had of being a huntsman – a mere childish notion that would like the coat and the horn-blowing; the honour, the respect, the ease – and, they are probably even fools enough to think – the riches of the ministry. The fascination of the preacher’s office is very great to weak minds, and hence, I earnestly caution all young men not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit.

I once learnt a lesson, while thus fox-hunting, which has been very useful to me as a preacher of the gospel. Ever since the day I was sent to shop with a basket, and purchased a pound of tea, a quarter of a pound of mustard, and three pounds of rice, and on my way home saw a pack of hounds and felt it necessary to follow them over the hedge and ditch (as I always did when I was a boy), and found, when I reached home, that all the goods were amalgamated – tea, mustard, rice – into one awful mess, I have understood the necessity of packing up my subjects in good stout parcels, bound round with the thread of my discourse; and this makes me keep to firstly, secondly, and thirdly, however unfashionable that method may now be.

Then came a mother's prayer, and some of the words of that prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is grey. I remember, on one occasion, her praying thus: "Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ." That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience, and stirred my heart.
