

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Index

1. Pastor's Letter – Pendulum of Human Nature.
2. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 55
3. George Whitefield (Part 1)
4. John Bunyan and the Poor Women of Bedford by Alexander Whyte
5. Sarah's Question – Boys and Girls Page



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- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



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Pendulum of Human Nature

The Pastor's Letter (May 1973)

Dear Friends,

There is something almost inevitable about human nature that causes it to move from one extreme to the other; like the famed pendulum of the clock, having swung to one side of a theological position it then swings to the other and finds it hard to settle in a vertical position for very long.

In recent years, we have seen a distinct movement away from what has come to be called “subjective” Christianity, and this we welcome with all our heart. Subjective Christianity is really bound up with what a person “feels” about a certain or given course of action or volume of truth. What determines the course to be taken, or the acceptability of the truth presented, is how the person is made to “feel” about the thing in question. So there has developed the formula that Christianity is “better felt than telt.” That is, the credibility of the Christian faith lies with experiencing some good feeling within one’s heart and not with the exercising of a God-given faith in the revelation of His will given to us through His Holy Word.

The latter would come under the heading of “objective” Christianity, and the difference between subjectivity and objectivity is simply illustrated in this way: some one buys a new motor car – say a black Anglia; no doubt, because he personally “feels” that’s the colour and kind of car he wants. His friends have all different ideas: one thinks it’s good to have an Anglia, another prefers to have a Morris; one thinks that black is a nice colour, another thinks black is a terrible colour. Now they are all absolutely correct as far as their subjective judgment of the car is concerned; it is a good car and it is not a good car; it is a nice colour and it is not a nice colour, in so far as each individual person’s feelings are concerned. What is collectively beyond dispute, however, is that it is a motor car! Whether it is a good motor car or not, or a nice colour or not, depends entirely on

each and every person's subjective assessment on those points, but one thing is perfectly clear the *object* before them is a motor car.

Now then, objective Christianity says that what the Lord has delivered to us in His Holy Word is an "objective" volume of truth given to us as the means of conducting our Christian life. The Word of God must not be subjected to our feelings, but our feelings must ever be subjected to the Word of God. Our feelings as to whether or not we should run our lives or conduct our churches in a certain manner will only prove to be the blind leading the blind, and the footsteps of the saints are always to be directed to what the Lord has to say in His revealed Word. Caleb and his fellow-Israelites provided a good illustration of this; remember why the ten spies wouldn't enter the land and what they did to the people? They "made the heart of the people melt," it says. They began to relate their own feelings about the "giants" and how they were but "grasshoppers" before them, and the people began to quake. But read the account of Caleb, and Joshua, too; time and time again we find Caleb using expressions like this – "as the Lord said" – "He spake" – "according to as the Lord spake" – and so on. He looked to what God had said and with objective faith in that word he conducted his life accordingly.

Now, of course, the crux of the matter comes in this way: Caleb *knew* what God was revealing to him through what He spoke, and so was able to take that word objectively. But, and essentially lazy evangelicalism has long-since ceased to search out the Word of the Lord, and a preacher who can go the rounds of the well-known gospel and "ministry" texts is immediately cast as an expositor of God's truth. Evangelicalism for years has held up the Bible, declaring that it "believes" it from Genesis to Revelation, yet hardly aware of what lies outwith John 3 verse 16 and the other well-attested grounds of orthodoxy. And it is when the whole counsel of God begins to be declared that we see also the clearest rift between the objective and the subjective in a great many people's Christianity. Don't "Tell" me what the Bible says, I know how I "feel," and that's the important thing; it can't be wrong, or else I wouldn't feel so much at peace. You get it in the silly chorus, "You ask me how I know He lives, He

lives within my heart.” Poor bereft soul! The only way we know He lives is through the *objective* truth of the resurrection revealed to us in the infallible Word of our God; “For I delivered unto you,” says Paul to the Corinthians, “that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures ... and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” No “feelings” set forth there by Paul to make the resurrection credible to him or to any one else; and any “feelings” that he might have would be deemed allowable or unallowable in so far as they squared with the objective word of scripture.

But, and with this we briefly close, in swinging the pendulum from the subjective to the objective, let us not run the hazard of imagining that we are to abandon “heart” religion. An objective faith in the Word of God that does not warm the heart is no faith at all.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton



Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 55

Subject. It would be idle to fix a time, and find an occasion for the Psalm with dogmatism. It reads like a song from the time of Absalom and Ahithophel. Altogether, it seems to us to relate to that mournful era when David was betrayed by his own trusted counsellor. The spiritual eye, however, sees the Great Son of David and Judas, and the chief priests appearing and disappearing upon the glowing canvas of the Psalm.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Verse 1. “Give ear to my prayers, O God.” From the Great Elder Brother down to the very least of the Divine family, all of them delight in prayer. They run as naturally to the Mercy-Seat as the little chickens to the hen in the hour of danger. But note well that it is never the bare act of prayer which satisfies the godly; they crave an audience with heaven, and answer from the throne, and nothing less will content them. “And hide not thyself from my supplications,” says David. When a man saw his neighbour in distress, and deliberately passes him by, he was said to hide himself from him; and the psalmist begs that the Lord would not so treat him. In that dread hour when Jesus bore our sins upon the tree, his Father did hide Himself, and this was the most dreadful part of all the Son of David’s agony.

P. H. O.

Verse 6. “And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest.” When the Gauls had tasted the wine of Italy, they asked where the grapes grew, and would never be quiet till they came there. Thus may you cry, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest.” A believer is willing to *lose* the world for the enjoyment of grace; and he is willing to *leave* the world for the fruition of glory.

William Becker

Verse 9. “Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues ...” After our Lord was betrayed, His accusers’ tongues were truly destroyed and they themselves divided, for the testimony of the two false witnesses agreed not together, and the soldiers who had kept the sepulchre contradicted one another about what had taken place at the time of the resurrection.

J. M. Neale

“Verse 12. “For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it.” It is remarkable that the Lord, who endured the other unspeakable sorrows and agonies of His passion in perfect and marvellous silence, allowed His grief at this one sorrow to escape Him, bewailing Himself to His disciples that one of them should betray Him.

Verse 16. “As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me.” For my own part, since first my unbelief was felt, I have been praying fifteen years for faith, and yet am not possessed of more than *half a grain*. You smile, sir, I perceive, at the smallness of the quantity; but you would not if you knew its efficacy. Jesus, who knew it well, assures you that a single grain, and a grain as small as a mustard seed, would remove a mountain. So, half a grain may remove a mountain-load of guilt from the conscience, a mountain-load of trouble from the mind, a mountain-load of care from the heart.

John Berridge

Verse 17. “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray ...” A thousand prayers! Who ever offered so many? You have during the last year, if you have kept the resolution of the psalmist: “Evening, and morning, and noon, will I pray ...” There are more than a thousand prayers.

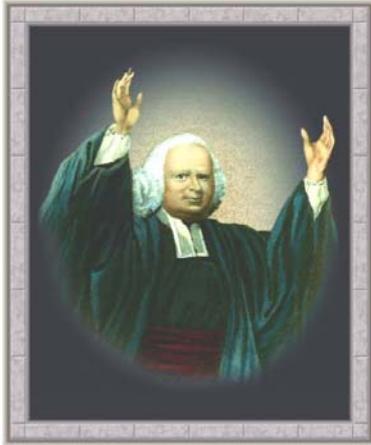
Anon.

Verse 19. “... Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.” Because they find all things going on in the old ways of providence, therefore, they go on in the old ways of sinfulness, and “they fear not God.” Intimating that ... if the Lord would but change, and toss, and tumble them about, by various troublesome dispensations, surely they would fear him.

Joseph Caryl

Verse 22. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord ...” Men do not avail themselves of the riches of God’s grace, they love to nurse their cares and seem as uneasy without some fret as an old friar would be without his hair shirt. They are commanded to cast their cares upon the Lord ... but think it meritorious to walk burdened. They take God’s ticket to heaven, and then put on their baggage on their shoulders, and tramp the whole way there on foot.

H. W. Beecher



George Whitefield (Part 1)

One of the difficulties in trying to deal with something of the life of George Whitefield is the uniqueness of the times in which Whitefield's life was set. He was born in Gloucester in the early part of the eighteenth century, and it was that century that was to see one of the greatest revivals of religion that the world had probably ever seen since the very days of Pentecost itself.

The very term “Revival of Religion” appears to have sprung from that period, and seems to have been first coined by the greatest of all the American theologians, the mighty Jonathan Edwards. He it was who ministered in that small town of Northampton in the historically Puritan state of New England, where, it was said in those days, that to ride through the very streets of that town as a passing stranger was but to invite the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God upon your head in converting grace and power. It was Edwards who stood with a lighted candle in one hand, and his massive theological sermons in the other, simply “reading” the words that he had before prepared and written, until the people in his church grabbed hold on their pews “lest they should tumble into hell at that very moment.”

And what was true of Edwards at Northampton was also true of many other parts of America, and of England, and of Wales, and of Scotland, too – of Cambuslang, and Kilsyth, where the glory of the Lord was seen, and the windows of heaven were, indeed, opened up, and the blessings of the Lord poured out on many waiting heads. As far as “names” go, as well, there is hardly another period of the Church so rich in such a variety of men and women of tremendous stature in the things of the Lord: The Countess of Huntingdon and Lady Glenorchy, John Newton and Augustus Toplady, William Cowper and old John Berridge, Henry Venn and James Hervey, William Girmshaw and William Romaine, and the Welsh brethren – Daniel Rowlands and Howell Harris. Relatively speaking, “a

multitude that no man can number.” So, when it comes to looking at the life and work of this man George Whitefield it must be remembered that these were the kind of days in which he ministered the gospel, and these were the kind of people with whom he ministered the gospel, for the word of the Lord ran, and had free-course, and was glorified in those days.

And yet, in spite of the uniqueness of those days and the men of the times, the man George Whitefield seems to stand out head and shoulders above any of the rest for absolute ability and usefulness, and labour and work in the things of the gospel. Whitefield has been largely forgotten in our day, but if we look to some of the testimonials of the men and women of Whitefield’s own day we see that they all concur in giving him the chief place among those who laboured in that outstanding age. “Many have done valiantly,” they all say of him, “but he has excelled them all.”

John Newton: “As a preacher, if any man were to ask me who was second best I had ever heard, I should be at some loss; but in regard to the first, Mr. Whitefield so far exceeds every other man of my time that I should be at no loss to say.”

William Cowper, the poetic recluse of Olney:

“Paul’s love of Christ, and steadiness unbribed,
Were copied close in him, and well transcribed;
He followed Paul; his zeal a kindred flame,
His apostolic charity the same.”

John Wesley: “Have we read or heard of any person who called so many thousands, so many myriads of sinners to repentance.”

Henry Venn: “... if the greatness, extent, and success of a man’s labour can give him distinction among the children of Christ, than we are warranted to affirm that scarce any one has equalled Mr. Whitefield.”

One of Whitefield's keenest supporters was the countess of Huntingdon, a woman who "laboured with him in the gospel." With the wealth that she believed to be given her by the Lord she built numerous chapels for the preaching of the evangelical gospel, and built into many of these chapels were what she was pleased to call the "Nicodemite corners." These were areas, curtained off from the pews where the "religious leaders" – the non-evangelical Bishops etc. – could sit and listen to the word of regeneration. One such Bishop – the man who ordained Whitefield to the ministry – believed that her Ladyship had become "righteous overmuch" and expressed the opinion that he had been mistaken in ordaining the man Whitefield in the first place; "My Lord, mark my words," she countered to the defence of Whitefield, "when you are on your dying bed that will be one of the few ordinations you will reflect upon with complacency." The "prophecy" had a practical fulfilment when, as a dying gesture the Bishop sent £10 for the work.

Even outwith his own age, the testimonies to Whitefield's influence and stature abound; Murray McCheyne wrote in his diary, "Oh, for one of Whitefield's weeks in London," and Spurgeon unashamedly announced him as his preaching pattern from his earliest days: "My own model is George Whitefield," he says, "but with unequal footsteps must I follow in his glorious tracks."

This, then, in brief, is something of the man George Whitefield, and of the times in which he preached to gospel. However, it does well to remember that the days in which Whitefield preached were far-different from the days in which he was born in 1714. J.C. Ryle summarises the general religious climate of that time, "From about the year 1700," he tells us, "till about the era of the French revolution, England seemed barren of all that is really good ... Christianity seemed to lie as one dead, insomuch that you might have said 'She is dead.' Morality, however much exalted in pulpits, was thoroughly trampled underfoot in the streets. There was darkness in high places and darkness in low places – darkness in the court, the camp, the parliament, and the bar – darkness among rich and darkness among poor – a gross, thick, religious and moral darkness – a darkness that

might be felt.” We do well, as we have already said, to bear this “state of things” in mind. There is a great tendency among the professing people of God to assess the situation of their own day, pronounce it to be the worst times that ever there were and then, hide behind the fact that it must be near “the end”, and fail in their responsibility to be faithful witness in their own generation. A glance at the history of the church of Christ on earth will quickly show us that the Church has been called to pass through troubled and evil times before, and yet, God has been pleased to revive her in the very “midst” of those years. Whether revival, or quickening, or true reformation is in the mind of a Sovereign God for this age, we have no way of determining; however what our God may be pleased to do is a question that must stand separate from what He has committed His Church to do in every generation, and that is, be faithful unto Him and spread the gospel.

So, then, George Whitefield was born into such a day; and he was born into such a place as a pub! The Bell Inn in Gloucester first heard the voice that was to call many to repentance. It had been run by his father, but when he died in Whitefield’s second year the responsibility fell on the mother, and in another few years Whitefield himself was pressed into service; “I began to assist in various ways,” he tells us, “until at length I put on my blue apron and washed mops, cleaned rooms, and, in a word, became a professed and common drawer for near a year and a half.”

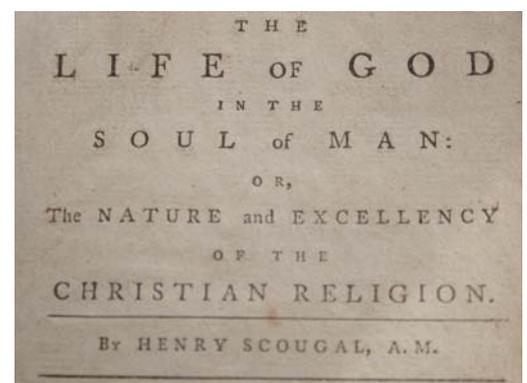
He tells us something of those early days: he had a very retentive memory, and, whereas, some would look on this as a blessing, he was keenly aware of the dangers of it, for there were many old “stories” and expressions that he found difficult to rid his mind of in later years. He had a great capacity to mimic and would act the preacher on many occasions. He was also impressionable, and followed the trends of his day; “I got acquainted,” he tells us, “with such a set of debauched, abandoned, atheistical youths that if God, by His free grace, had not delivered me out of their hands, I should long ago have sat in the scorner’s chair. I took pleasure in their lewd conversation. My thoughts of religion became more and more like theirs. I affected to

look rakish, and was in a fair way of being as infamous as the worst of them.”

The intervention of God’s “free grace”, however, was becoming apparent, and even before Whitefield left Gloucester for the University at Oxford religious thoughts were beginning to form themselves in his mind. These, of course, as is so often the case, expressed themselves in a severe and outward self-righteous approach to God, and, he tells us himself, as he had been so impressed by the bad company that he had earlier kept, so he was now completely swept overboard by his new turn of life, being much under the influence of the Wesleys and the Holy Club at the University. “As once I affected to look more rakish, so now I strove to appear more grave than I really was.” But, as one sketch of his life remarks, “this ... was like painting rotten wood: he was conscious all the time of the concealed corruption.

He tried another course. He denied himself every luxury; wore ragged, and even dirty clothes; ate no foods but those that were repugnant to him; fasted altogether twice a week; gave his money to the poor, and spent whole nights in prayer lying prostrate of the cold stones or the wet grass. But he felt it was all to no avail. He felt that there was something radically wrong in the very heart of him, something that all this penance and self-degradation could not change.”

But God’s means of changing Whitefield’s heart was close at hand; it was in the form of a book – Henry Scougal’s *Life of God in the soul of Man*. “I never knew what true religion was,” records Whitefield, “till God sent me that excellent treatise ...” His feet were now turned in the right way, and we will follow those steps next time.



John Bunyan
And the Poor Women of Bedford
By
Alexander Whyte

“But upon a day the good providences of God did cast me to Bedford, to work on my calling; and, in one of the streets of that town, I came where there were three or four poor women, sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God. And being now ready to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said. But I may say, I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above, out of my reach. Methought they spake as if joy did make them speak ...and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found another world ...”

What is that wonderful thing we call genius? And what is that other wonderful thing we call style? For when John Bunyan touches any subject whatsoever with his genius and with his style, the thing he so touches is at once made both classical and immortal. As here. We read these few simple-looking lines about those three or four poor women, and we at once know them far better than if we had lived next door to them all our days. We overhear and we understand every syllable of their Godly conversation far better than if we had sat on the same doorstep beside them.

The husbands of those four poor women were away at their work, their children were off to school, their beds were all made, and their floors were all swept, and they all came out as if one spirit had moved them, and they met and sat down on a doorstep to enjoy for a little the forenoon sun. And they plunged immediately into their inexhaustible and ever-fresh subject: God and their own souls. And even when the young tinker came along with his satchel of tools on his shoulder and stopped and leaned against the doorpost, beside them they did not

much mind him, but went on with the things of God that so possessed them, I have been thinking a great deal about that great night in the third of John, said one; and she went on to tell some of her thoughts to the other three. And as she went on, they young tinker standing beside her had never before heard that there was a third of John. Not one syllable did he understand more than if she had been speaking in Hebrew. Another said that all the time when was doing up the house that morning her scripture had been a passage out of Paul. “But God,” she repeated out of Paul, “who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.” And then one, who had a sweet trembling voice made her contribution to the conversation in a few selected verses out of the 51st Psalm. “*Therefore*,” says Bunyan, “I should often make it my business to be going again and again into the company of these poor people, for I could not stay away. And the more I went amongst them the more I did question my condition.”

Another day as he was again passing by, behold the same poor women were again occupied with the same things of God. “Since last we met,” said one, “my constant song has been that faith is the gift of God.” And another answered her with the man who said, “Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.” And then the third woman took her New Testament out of her pocket – it was so old that it was ready to fall piece from piece if she did but turn it over. But she soon found the epistle she was looking for, and she read it until the Apostle himself could not have read it better ... “By these things,” adds Bunyan, “my mind was now so turned that it lay like a horse-leech at the vein, and was still crying give, give. Yea, my mind was now so fixed on eternity, and on the things of the kingdom of heaven, that neither pleasures, nor profits, nor persuasions, nor threats could loosen it, or make it let go its hold.”

From this page of John Bunyan we learn this: what and where is the true Church of Christ on the earth. The true test of a true church is its fruit. Those three or four poor women were the true tests and the true seals of a true church of Christ in Bedford ... Do you have any such poor women in your church? How many such do you know in your

Church? Do you know one? What is her name and what is her address? In what street is her doorstep? Send me her name, for I fear she is very lonely. And I would like to introduce her to one or two women like herself whom I have discovered, and with whom she could hold a conversation now and then about the deep things of God.

“Upon a day the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work on my calling.” Now, have you any such providential day in your autobiography? When was it? Where was it? How did it come about? And how did it end? Was it your overhearing a godly conversation like Bunyan? That was indeed a good providence. That was one of the very best providences that was ever cast upon him.

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

**Letter from
Mrs Seaton**

Dear Boys and Girls,

Sarah lived in a little village surrounded by woods. She hadn't many friends to play with, but this didn't worry her, as she loved to wander into the woods beside her home. In the spring and summer days she used to gather posies of flowers for her mother and for her neighbours. She would have such fun deciding which colours of flowers and which kinds of grasses to blend together.

How happy Sarah was among the trees and flowers, but gradually it became more and more difficult to find flowers to make really colourful posies. Sadly she asked her mother, “Mummy, why does God allow so many flowers to wither, and fade, and die?” Her mummy looked at her, and quietly said, “Sarah, come with me and we will take a walk into the woods.” So Sarah and mummy got well wrapped up with coats and hoods, for the days were getting colder,



and off they went into the woods. As they walked along, mummy began to point out things that Sarah had never noticed before – on the wild rose bushes, where there had been such lovely flowers, there were now shiny red bulbs, and on other little plants, little black, or green, seeds; even the ferns and grasses had little

seeds, too. Then mummy explained that soon these little seeds would fall off and bury themselves in the ground, where they would lie until spring-time had come. Once spring would come, then Sarah would be able to see little plants sprouting up through the ground where the seeds had fallen. “Even from one seed, Sarah,” said mummy, “you will be able to gather many flowers.” Sarah wasn’t sad any more, and she looked forward to the spring-time. “How loving and wise God is with the world He has made,” she said to her mother. “Yes,” replied her mummy, “but, you see, Sarah, what I have told you today about the seeds falling into the ground and dying, must remind us of what Jesus meant when He said, ‘Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.’ He was speaking about His own death, of course. He would die, and how sad that seems; but, the Bible says, because He died and rose again, then all those who believe in Him as their own Saviour will live for evermore with Him in heaven.”

Mrs Seaton.