

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 97 issued July 2012

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The Meaning of Words

The Pastor's Letter

(July-August 1973)

Dear Friends,

We live in an age when the meaning of words doesn't really seem to matter very much, and when the accepted meaning of terms has been so violated that it is hardly possible to tell when a person might be agreeing or disagreeing with you. Thus we find that an old-fashioned word like "obscene", which used to stand only for those things associated with sexual uncleanness, is now bandied about and applied in a hundred-and-one different contexts, so that "the housing problem," or "the famine in India," are both looked upon and expressed as being "obscene".

The devil is at work, of course, for if we learn to view almost anything as being obscene, then it will be a but a short time when we come to accept nothing as being obscene. There is nothing new, of course, in the process, but we would probably all have to acknowledge that it has become, and is becoming, more and more widespread in our own day and age.

As is sadly true in a great many areas of the church's life and thinking, what has become fashionable in the world soon becomes acceptable to the church; and this meaningless use of words and terms gathers volume, it seems, with every passing day. Again, as in the world, this is no new thing for the church, and we find even an ultra-modernist like Bultmann using phrases like "the conversion experience," and "being born again." Needless to say, his use of such terms stands in complete violation, not only to the scriptural meaning of them, but even to the historically-accepted usage of the words.

Now, at this present time, we have seen emerge one such violation and misuse of accepted terminology when people choose to describe their doctrinal position and standing as being "Reformed", or

even “Calvinistic”. It only requires a very few words of conversation with many of these professed “Calvinists” to show that they have either totally misunderstood what is meant by being doctrinally reformed, or else, that they have some motive for latching on to what appears to be the new hallmark of intellectual acceptability or “soundness”. As far as the “intellectual” part is concerned, there is, in fact, hardly another system of theology that more insults the natural mind of man. How could it do anything else? If it is as Biblical as we would claim it is, then nothing should be less acceptable to the carnal mind of man which “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,” because thy are “foolishness” to it. To embrace “Calvinism” for the sake of intellectual satisfaction is, in fact, a complete denial of its very nature which is calculated to make the wisdom of this world as foolishness in the eyes of the Lord. We wouldn’t for one minute deny the satisfaction of mind, as well as of heart, enjoyed in the great doctrines of grace, but such enjoyment is only indulged in with the “renewed mind” and has as its end only the glory of the God that the doctrines so clearly display.

Again, as far as “doctrinal soundness” goes, we would hold that the doctrines sometimes called “Calvinist” or “Reformed” are the very essence of biblical truth. But, again, we would appeal for a right and honest understanding of the *content* of the words and terms before they are ever used by Christians at large. We must be in no mistake that to refer to ourselves as “Reformed” or “Calvinist” in the historically-accepted sense of the terms is to hold a view of God, and man, and salvation, which is in complete and total contradiction to what has become the normally accepted evangelical orthodoxy of our day. Right at the centre of Reformed and Calvinist thinking and practice is a worship of God that stands at the very opposite end of the pole to the modern man-centred type of church “meeting” which is calculated to “get that decision” at any cost – either to God or His Word! The Reformed doctrine of salvation presents man as a creature who is in complete alienation to God his creator; he “fell” in Adam in such a way that he was totally robbed of any “saving” motives or desires within himself, and he is “blind”, and “deaf”, and “dead”, and unwilling and incapable of contributing one ounce to the salvation that

will make him at peace with his God. Calvinists (in the honest use of the term) believe that God – without being influenced in any way by what men would do or would not do – elected a certain number of hell-deserving sinners to eternal life in Christ His Son, and that Son died on the Cross to procure all the benefits of that election. He died only and solely for these; He didn't die for any other; He died for His Church, His Bride, His people, and when He “finished the work” that his Father gave him to do, He then sent forth the Holy Spirit Who, through the preaching of the gospel, irresistibly “calls” that elect number – purchased by the precious blood of Christ – into the glorious “embracing” of that Gospel. Once “called”, then they are “kept by the power” of this God of their salvation so that they “shall never perish” and, by the grace of God, learn to sing here below what they will eternally sing in the Glory, “Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne.”

This, then – if words mean anything at all, and are to be used with any degree of honesty at all – is what is meant by “Reformed” or “Calvinist”, or indeed, “the Doctrines of Grace.” We are reminded of what E. J. Poole-Connor wrote with regards to the old Liberalism of his day that was beginning to take up the terms of evangelicalism, for the principle of his statement holds good in the present context; “For latecomers,” he wrote, “to take up a word consecrated by long association to a particular form of teaching and to give to it a meaning wholly at variance with its original content, is not only ethically improper, but lays the offender open to the suspicion of seeking to disguise his own belief. Let there at least be frankness.” With that we absolutely concur.

If a person has no real heart or mind for those things which are at the very basis of the Reformed and Calvinistic doctrine of salvation, then, let him not take the words, terms, and phrases and use them and abuse them to his own ends. One of the disturbing elements that has also emerged is this, that whereas, it used to be stigma enough to be classified as “A Calvinist”, it seems that the new term of abuse for those who simply hold what the Bible teaches with regards to God and man will be “*Hyper-Calvinists.*” We are not ignorant of the same

devilish process, however, as mentioned earlier concerning the corruption of words in general: when there was but a handful preaching and teaching the Biblical doctrines of salvation, it was enough for the devil to have them branded as “Calvinists.” Now that “Calvinism” has gained somewhat, he must adopt another ploy, so he will make “all the Lord’s people Calvinists,” and drum up a new stigma for those who will preach the truth as it is in Christ Jesus the Lord – namely, “*Hyper-calvinists*.” “Oh yes, we are all Calvinists,” says the average evangelical thinking today, “but” ‘these others’ are ‘*Hyper-calvinists*’.” How sad to see the Lord’s people employed as the devil’s dupes as he turns his stigmatising wheel once again in our own day.

But, the course is clear; if it be *Hyper-calvinist* to hold to those things already mentioned, then hyper-calvinist we will be and gladly accept the term. We will preach hyper, pray hyper, and govern our church hyper, for we perceive that this new hyper-calvinism is only the old ordinary calvinism under the new stigma given to it, and that the old calvinism was only the old gospel of a glorious and Sovereign God.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton



Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 56

Verse 1. “Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up ...” The same words concerning man’s actions are applicable to the situation and circumstances of David pursued by his enemies; of Christ, persecuted by the Jews; of the Church, afflicted in the world;

and of the soul, encompassed by enemies, against whom she is forced to wage perpetual war.

George Horne

Verse 3. “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” David tells God that he will make so bold of His house as to step into it when overtaken in a storm; and he doth not question his welcome. Indeed, all saints are taught the same lesson: (i) To renounce their own strength, and rely on the power of God; (ii) their own policies, and cast themselves on the wisdom of God; (iii) their own righteousness, and expect all from the pure mercy of God in Christ. This act of faith is so pleasing to God, that such a soul shall never be put to shame.

William Gurnall

Verse 3. “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” There are times when some graces may be out of use, but there is no time when Faith can be said to be out of use. Faith is the “eye”, or the “mouth”, or the “hand”, and one or other of these is in use all the day long. Faith is the eye to see, the hand to receive or work, the mouth to eat; and a Christian should be seeing, or receiving, or working, or feeding, all the day long. Let it rain, let it blow, let it thunder, let it lighten, a Christian must still believe. So, says the good man, “At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”

John Bunyan

Verse 4. “... I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” In the compass of six verses in Matthew ten, our Saviour commands us three times not to fear man; for if thy heart quail at man, how wilt thou behave thyself in the war against Satan, whose little finger is heavier than man’s loins? The Romans had practice weapons, or cudgels, with which they trained before they progressed to the sharp. But, if thou canst not bear a bruise in thy flesh from man’s cudgels and blunt weapons, what wilt thou do when thou shalt have Satan’s sword in thy side? God counts Himself reproached when we fear sorry man.

Gurnall

Verse 4. “... I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” One of the arguments put forward in an effort to make the martyr Hooper recant and acknowledge his “heresy” was the fact that “life is sweet, and death is bitter.” “I know thaw well,” was his reply, “but eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death more bitter.” “Fear not them that only kill the body, but cannot harm the soul, but fear rather Him that can cast both soul and body into hell.”

Verse 5. “Every day they wrest my words ...” So it has been from the beginning, for Satan “wrested” the Lord’s words in the green garden of Eden – “Yea, hath God said?” His children did it with the Saviour – “This fellow said ...” And they have been doing it ever since where the truth didn’t suit their palates.

Verse 8. “... put thou my tears into thy bottle ...” The custom of putting tears into the lachrymatory, or tear bottle, so well known among the Romans, seems to have been more anciently in use in Asia, and particularly among the Hebrews. These tear bottles were placed on the graves of the deceased as a memorial of the affection and sorrow of their surviving relations and friends. So, David will have the Lord remember his tears which have been “meat unto him, both in the day and night.” “Put thou my tears into thy bottle.”

From The Biblical Museum

Verse 8. “... put thou my tears into thy bottle ...” It is the witty observation of one, that God is said in Scripture to have a “bag” and a “bottle,” “My transgression is sealed up in a bag,” Job 14:7. That is, God takes every sin we commit and secures it in a bag until the day when that bag shall be opened. So, he has a bag for our sins, and a bottle for our tears. But, we should be more careful to fill the bottle with our tears than the bag with our sins.

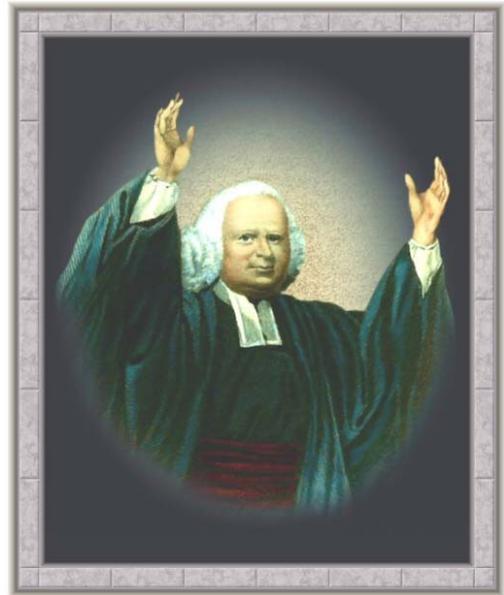
Adapted from John Trapp

Verse 10. “In God will I praise his word ...” My dear friends, the next regret of a dying man ... concerns the new view which comes to him of the study of God’s Word. Of the many things he wishes he had done, and would do otherwise, if he were recalled from his half-open

grave, this is the most important. Ah! He certainly says then: How differently I ought to have acted with regard to the Word of God! How much more I ought to have studied it! How much better I ought to be acquainted with it, in order for the more to live it out, and communicate it to others.

From Adolphe Mond's Farewell

GEORGE WHITEFIELD (part 2)



The attempts of George Whitefield to reform himself through an abundance of religious acts and duties were brought to a sudden and shattering end in the pages of “that excellent treatise,” as he later called Henry Scougal’s book, “The Life of God in the Soul of man.” “I never knew what true religion was,” he recalls, “until God sent me that excellent treatise.”

From the reading of the book, two things impressed themselves most firmly on the young George Whitefield; the absolute inability of man to create saving grace in his soul through the fulfilling of religious works, and the absolute necessity of being born again of the Spirit of God in order to give us a right and proper standing before the God with whom we have to do. The anecdote has been related time and time again over the years how that Whitefield was asked by a woman one evening why he preached so often on, “Ye must be born again;” “because, madame,” came his now famous reply, “ye must be born again.” The seeds of that reply, and the fact of his continual preaching

on the subject of the new birth, were sown in his heart and mind as he made his way through the pages of that book that God had “sent” him. “At my first reading it,” he says, “I wondered what the author meant by saying, ‘That some falsely placed religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbours.’ Alas! Thought I, if this be not religion, what is? God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that ‘true religion was a union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us,’ a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and, from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature.” That piece of information and knowledge, of course, didn’t make him a new creature, but from that period onwards the work of grace became evident in his life and his conversion is placed in the year 1735.

In the following year, George Whitefield was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England. His very first sermon was due to set the pattern of his life’s work; “Last Sunday, in the afternoon, I preached my first sermon in the church of St. Mary-le-Crypt, where I was baptized, and also first received the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Curiosity, as you may easily guess, drew a large congregation together upon this occasion. The sight at first a little awed me. But I was comforted with a heartfelt sense of the divine presence. As I proceeded I perceived the fire kindled, till at last, though so young and amidst a crowd of those who knew me in my childish days, I was enabled to speak with some degree of gospel authority. Some few mocked, but most seemed for the present struck, and I have since heard that complaint was made to the Bishop that I drove fifteen mad the first sermon! The worthy prelate wished that the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday.” That same bishop sent for a copy of Whitefield’s sermon and after reading it, decided to keep it and send Whitefield £5 instead, saying that he had split it into two sermons which he would preach to his own congregation the following week!

The reputation of Whitefield began to grow more and more as it became apparent that God was beginning to call out men fitted for the times which He had in His will and purpose. Few buildings could be found adequate to hold the congregations which gathered to hear the Word of the Lord. At some times it was estimated that a man could have walked across the heads of the people they were so closely packed together, and at another time, a Bristol church was so crowded that the heat caused steam to form and drop like rain on those gathered. And yet, in His own unsearchable way, the Lord saw fit to call Whitefield from these scenes and send him on his first trip across the Atlantic. This was a journey he was to make on thirteen different occasions.

We are given a fair specimen of such an undertaking in the following words; “Day after day, ploughing her way through the terrific seas, the good ship has shuddered in the grip of the gale. The sailors were at their wits’ end: the sails were torn to ribbons and the tackling was all strained and broken. George Whitefield has been drenched through and through twice in one night. The ship has been so buffeted and beaten that nearly three months have passed before the Irish coast is sighted. Rations have been reduced to famine fare. Today, however, there is a lull in the storm. The seas have moderated and the sun is shining. In the afternoon, Mr. Whitefield assembles the passengers and crew, and conducts a service on the deck ... standing on the hatchway, with a coil of rope at his feet, he announces his text: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” That scene is typical and was more than once repeated, but in this year of 1737, Whitefield is making his first crossing to America and the land and its people would greatly endear themselves to his heart and soul. His preaching, however, was without compromise, and invariably revolved around that great and eternal theme of salvation by grace alone.

The treatment of the Negro slaves laid a great burden upon him and he felt constrained to write an open letter to the slave owners of Maryland and Virginia etc. The central appeal of this letter is full of instruction, for Whitefield chooses to dwell, not on the “equal rights”

of all men before God, but on the equal sinner-ship of all men. The children of the households and the slaves of the households are all equally born in sin and, therefore, all equally necessary of being born again of the Spirit of God. Here is how he finishes a sermon on The Lord our Righteousness; “Here, then, I could conclude; but I must not forget the poor negroes: no, I must not. Jesus Christ has died for them, as well as for others. Nor do I mention you last, because I despise your souls, but because I would have what I shall say make the deeper impression upon your hearts. O that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness! Who knows but he may be found of you? For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free; even you may be the children of God if you believe in Jesus. Did you never read of the eunuch belonging to the queen Candace? A negro, like yourselves. He believed. The Lord was his righteousness. Go home, then, turn the words of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to be *your* righteousness...”

By the time Whitefield completed his first tour of America and returned to England in the autumn of 1738, the work of the religious awakening had taken a much firmer grip; but, so too, had the spirit of opposition. “The bulk of the clergy,” we are told, “were no longer favourable to him, and regarded him with suspicion as an enthusiast and a fanatic. They were especially scandalized by his preaching the doctrine of regeneration or the new birth ... the number of pulpits to which he had access rapidly diminished. Church wardens who had no eyes for drunkenness and impurity were filled with intense indignation



about what they called ‘breaches of order ...’ In short, from this period of his life, Whitefield’s field of usefulness within the Church of England narrowed rapidly on every side.”

It is at this point, then, that the familiar gowned figure of the preacher of the fields begins to emerge.

It was to the miners at Kingswood colliery near Bristol that Whitefield first turned with his open-air preaching in February of 1739. His own description

of the scene speaks of the men being greatly affected so that the tears that ran down their blackened faces made “white gutters” to appear on their cheeks. The die was cast for the 18th century awakening, and soon, vast crowds were gathering, such as the thirty thousand that seemed to hang on every word at Kennington Common. No place seemed to be deemed unsuited for the preaching of the Word. Where churches and chapels were made available these were gladly used, but a table or chair, a horseblock and even on top of a coffin on one occasion at a hanging, proved an acceptable pulpit.

As the work of the awakening spread, of course, so the opposition to the work and the workers also increased in volume and spite. In the year 1740 William Seward one of Whitefield’s closest friends was stoned to death. But, the words of Whitefield himself, more or less, summed up the philosophy of most of the men that the Lord was deigning to use: “I endure all things for the elects’ sakes, he said, “ ... want to leave my seventy years, I long to be dissolved and be with Christ. I do not fear dying suddenly, or being dispatched by a poignard, or a pistol to make a passage for my soul to flee to Christ.” In fact, that never happened, although on more than one occasion – and especially once in the city of Dublin – he was brought right to the very brink of martyrdom itself. Be that as it may, however, Whitefield was obliged to live out his life in the midst of slander, and abuse, and opposition from day to day. He was even accused of being a “secret Roman Catholic”! “If I am a Roman Catholic,” he commented, “the Pope has certainly given me a large dispensation!” Even his personal appearance didn’t escape the tongues and pens of “outrageous strife,” and a “turn” in his right eye earned him the nickname of Dr. Squintum.

A pamphlet of the times gives us some indication of the type of abuse that Whitefield was often subjected to; herein is the title page. “The Crooked Disciple’s Remarks upon the Blind Guide’s Method of Preaching for some years. Being a collection of the principal words, sayings, phraseology, rhapsodies, hyperboles, parables, and miscellaneous incongruities of the Sacred and Profane, commonly, repeatedly, and peculiarly made use of by the Reverend Dr. Squintum

... A work never before attempted ... whereby the honesty of this preacher's intentions may be judged of from his doctrine." These things failed to move him, however and Whitefield preached his doctrine still.

(To be continued.)

The Parable of the Trees

One of the most spiritually privileged counties in the whole of Scotland in a bye-gone day was the county of Ross-shire, where the Lord appeared to be pleased to raise up faithful preachers and hearers of His Word for many successive years on end. Among the most faithful of the preachers was Mr. John Porteous of Kilmuir, and among the most faithful of Mr. Porteous's hearers was a woman by the name of Elizabeth Munro.

One Saturday evening, while visiting the manse at Kilmuir, the good woman was afforded, by way of a parable and illustration, a conducted tour of the congregation of which Mr. Porteous was minister. He had informed her that his whole congregation was in his garden, and then, proceeded to "prove" this by showing her that the various types of Christians that were under his care were represented in the various trees that surrounded the old manse.

First stop was a tree that stood almost in the middle of the garden and which was well-laden with sweet and delicious apples which it seemed to bear almost every year without fail. This reminded the old man of a Christian such as Grissel MacKenzie whose one son had become an eminent minister of the gospel at Tongue and whose other son had been the faithful catechist of Creich. She herself had been descended from the Pope's Legate who had been sent to Scotland to suppress the Reformation, but who had been converted through the gospel that he had once laboured to destroy. She herself went on bearing precious fruit under the name of the family that the Lord had been so pleased to bless and own.

The branches of the next tree were fastened to wooden props. “This tree,” said Mr. Porteous, “before it will yield fruit must be *drawn out* in this manner. So there are some Christians in this parish that are so retiring and diffident that nothing can be got from them without means being employed to *draw them out*.”

Another tree had ropes fastened to the tops of the uppermost branches with which to bend them down, and thereby prevent them from being overturned by high winds. “Now,” said Mr. Porteous, “I have in my congregation some Christians who have superior gifts, and are inclined to soar very high, and would be in danger of being overturned. Therefore, to keep them, and render them fruitful, the Lord keeps them lowly by personal, or mental, or family, or by relative afflictions, or other crosses in their lot.”

Another tree had its branches helped up by supporting props. “These,” said the minister of Kilmuir, “are to keep the branches from being trodden upon; they are so laden with fruit that they are bent to the ground. Some Christians in my congregation,” he went on, “are near their everlasting rest. They are so laden with the fruits of holiness, that they are bent to the dust with a sense of their utter vileness in themselves; and were it not that the great Husbandman supports them with the props of the promises, they would be utterly cast down.”

Lastly, they came to an old willow tree in a corner of the garden. “That tree,” said Mr. Porteous, “when I first came to this place appeared to be dead. It continued so for many years, but last spring, to my amazement, I saw a tender twig springing out of it. That is old Samuel Ross in Milton, who for sixty or seventy years was not only dead in trespasses and sins, but was one of Satan’s generals in wickedness. But now, in God’s sovereign and adorable grace, he has been plucked as a brand from the burning, and in his old age, some fruits of grace are seen manifesting themselves in him.”

The setting sun reminded the Kilmuir minister that that night was drawing near. “Now,” said he to his old friend, “I have spent some

hours with you here; now, go home, and spend this night and tomorrow morning at the throne of grace on my behalf, and if I am dry in the pulpit tomorrow, the blame will lie at your door.” It is said that he had uncommon liberty” on the following day.

“Zion’s a Garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot enclosed by grace
Out of the World’s wide wilderness.
Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand,
Planted by God the Father’s hand;
And all His springs in Zion Flow,
To make the young plantation grow.
Awake, O heavenly Wind! And come,
Blow on this garden of perfume!
Spirit Divine! Descent and breath
A gracious gale on plants beneath.”

(Isaac Watts)

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

**Letter from
Mrs Seaton**

Dear Boys and Girls,

This month, boys and girls, I want to tell you a short story from the Bible about a man named Nicodemus, who came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews – a Pharisee. Most of the Pharisees were very proud, and they did not believe that Jesus was the One sent from God.

Nicodemus was not like the other Pharisees. He heard Jesus teach the people who had come to worship at the Passover. “Surely Jesus is very great,” Nicodemus thought. While other Pharisees were finding fault with Jesus, Nicodemus wanted to hear more of His teachings. One night, he went to the place where Jesus stayed, to talk to Him. Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Master, we know that you are a teacher from God. No man could do the miracles you do unless God was with him.” But, Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know about the Kingdom of God, so, He said to him, “Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Nicodemus was puzzled. He asked, “How can a man be born after he is grown up? Can he become a tiny baby again?” Jesus of course, did not mean that a man must be born again in his body, but in his heart. He said, “Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Do not be surprised when I say, you must be born again. The wind blows; you hear it, and you see what it does. Yet, you do not see the wind itself. You cannot tell where the wind comes from, or where it goes to. That is the way it is with those who are born again.”

Nicodemus thought about Jesus’ words. No man could see the Spirit of God. Yet, a person whose heart was changed – who had been “born again” – would act as if the Spirit of God was in his life. And this is how we become real Christians, boys and girls. It is when God’s Holy Spirit lives in our lives, so that we love God and serve Him. Later on in the Bible, we read how Nicodemus lived to glorify Jesus.

Sincerely
Mrs Seaton.