

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Mercy or Love – Consider the Difference!

The Pastor's Letter (April 1974)

Dear Friends,

How often a word from the past makes us stop and consider the situation of the present days. Quite recently we were reading an article by the late Gardiner Spring of New York, and in the course of that article, he tells about being greatly struck by a sentence which he himself had recently read. The sentence was this; ***“When one great sinner find mercy, another great sinner is encouraged to hope that he may find mercy also.”*** Dr. Spring calls that, “A simple thought”, and then, goes on to say, “but there are states of mind in which it is unutterably precious.” He speaks about “the great mass” of convinced sinners who would sink in despair if they couldn't lay hold on such a thing – that God saves others, therefore, He may save me. ***“When one great sinner find mercy, another great sinner is encouraged to hope that he may find mercy also.”***

Now, as we say, such a glimpse into the past must surely cause us to consider the present. What place does thought of sinners lying under self-condemnation for sin and hoping that they may find mercy from God as they hear of others finding mercy, have in our Christianity today? We must surely say, very little, if any at all. Seldom do we hear of prolonged works of conviction in the hearts and minds of men and women today, and the process seems to be, superficially wounded, superficially healed. One of the major causes, of course, is the setting aside of any necessity to see the sinner brought to a knowledge of the guilt of their sin. We say “guilt” very decidedly. The accepted “orthodox” approach in counselling sinners is to turn to a few well-worn passages, and ask the person concerned to answer yes, or no, as the case might be. The process usually begins with, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”, and this is followed by the question, “do you believe ***you*** have sinned?” If the man or woman answers yes, they believe they have sinned, then it is

considered safe to move on into the accepted texts of assurance, and pronounce a new-born soul for glory.

But the one very vital feature that has been omitted right at the beginning is **guilt**. You see, it is not enough to have a knowledge of sin – to give an assent that we have committed sins (most people will readily do this - “Well, none of us is perfect” etc.) But, it is not the acknowledgement of sin that is required, it the **guilt** of sin. And when a person is brought to see their guilt of sin before their God, who is also their Righteous Judge who will condemn them for their sin, then, they come under conviction, and then, every intimation of “mercy” - even in the lives of others – is a source of eternal hope for their own soul.

Of course, that only leads us on to another question: - Where is “mercy” today? Isn't it a strange thing that we hear so little about “mercy” and yet hear so much about “love”? It is strange for this reason: when you weigh both of these things up you find that there is not a great deal of apparent difference between “mercy” and “love”. They are both “the same kind” of graces from God. And yet, the call seldom goes out for the sinner to seek mercy; he is rather to receive love. Now, why is that? Well, has it not got something to do with the lack of guilt in the sinner's hearts and minds? If there is no awareness of an awful guilt in having sinned against a Holy and Righteous God, then there is little significance in looking for mercy from a compassionate and forgiving God.

What about “love”? You say. Well, love is a very interesting concept as used in our present-day mode of preaching. In reality, the love and mercy of God cannot be rightly separated, for God's love is revealed in His mercy in giving Jesus to die for our sins – the sins of guilty sinners. But, the love of God, as presented today, is more a willingness of God's part to “wink” at the sinner's sin and view the sinner's “decision to be a Christian” as something that He is obligated to reward both in this life and in that which is to come. In other words, there is a subtle touch of reciprocation. “God saw those who were going to decide for Christ”, we are told, “and He elected them to

eternal life”. Surely then, there is just a slight hint, at least, of something lovable in the sinner after all; and love becomes the warp and woof of the gospel call. But, mercy is less popular, suited as it is to the guilty sinner; and there are few of those around today. Yet, if there is even one, reading these pages we commend you, my friend, to think and think on all the myriads of redeemed souls, even from the beginning, who have “found mercy”, and let that remembrance be the path for *your* feet. The prayer seldom varies: “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner”.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton



Sermons in Candles
By C.H. Spurgeon
(part 3)

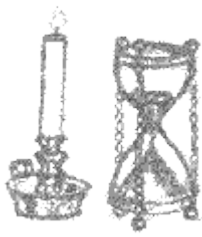


I have a candle here and I want to light it. What shall I do? Before me I see a candle burning very brightly, so I will take a light from that. But, I have not succeeded. Why is it that I have altogether failed? I cannot succeed in lighting my candle, and you are all laughing at me, and you whisper that I must be overmuch stupid to try to light a candle while an *extinguisher* is upon it. I subside. But, do you not think that very many persons go with an extinguisher on to hear a minister preach?

“I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But his I know, and know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.”

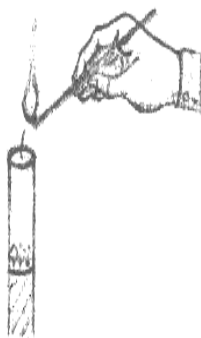
Just so! That is a very effective extinguisher. Once make up your mind to refuse a doctrine or a command, and you will not see it where God has written it as with a sunbeam. Kick against a truth, and the arguments for it will seem to have no existence. Let prejudice of any

sort wholly cover the candle of your mind, and, whatever you do, there is no likelihood of your receiving the light.



Here is an hour-glass and a candle. As the hour-glass runs and the candle burns we mark how the time passes away. In the old Puritan pulpits there used to be an hour-glass, and the preacher was expected to preach as long as the sand of the hour-glass was running; which of course, was just an hour. A witty preacher, having on one occasion only reached to “eighteenthly” when the hour-glass had run out, and having thirty points to dilate upon, turned the machine upside down and cried, “Brethren, let us have another glass!”

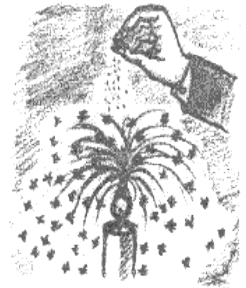
Whether we preach or hear, time is hastening on. Our sands of life will soon run out; we are being carried away by the resistless course of time. How it flies to a man of middle-age! How exceedingly fast to the aged! We may say of the hours, as of the cherubim, “Each one had six wings” If everything is made secure by faith in the Lord Jesus, we need not wish it to be otherwise; for the faster time passes, the sooner we shall be at home with our Father and our God. We feel, as we watch the decreasing candle and the falling sand, that *we* at least, have no time which needs killing. What we have is all too little for our high and holy purposes. We want not cards, and dice, and scenic displays for a pastime: our time passes all too rapidly without such aids.



This taper which I hold in my hand is in itself a poor thing as an illuminator, but it has created quite a splendour in the room by the light which it has communicated to others. Andrew was not a very great personage, but he called his brother Peter, and led him to Jesus, and Peter was a host in himself. Never mind how small a taper you may be; burn on, shine on at your best, and God bless you. You may lead on to grand results despite your feebleness. He that called Dr. John Owen is forgotten: I might also say was never known: he was a small taper, but

what a candle he lighted! Those holy women as they talked together as they sat in the sun at Bedford were a blessing to John Bunyan; but we know not the name of even one of them. Everywhere the hidden ones are used of the Lord as the means of lighting those who shine as stars in the churches.

I have a bottle here full of black material, which is to fall upon the flame of this candle. When I tell you that this bottle contains a quantity of steel-filings, you will at once prophesy that the light will be put out. Let us see what will happen! Why, well, instead of putting the candle out, I am making it disport itself as candle never did before. Here we have fireworks, which, if they do not rival those of Crystal Palace, have a splendour of their own. Do you not think that often when Satan tries to throw dust upon a Christian by slander, he only makes him shine the brighter. God grant that it may be so with us in all time of tribulation. May we turn the filings of steel into flashes of light!



Not Dismayed

Some of the “advanced” theologians away back in old Rowland Hill's day tried to shake the old man's faith by assuring him that there were really no such beings as angels, and that they were simply “Oriental metaphors.”

“Very well, then,” said the old man, “then it was a company of Oriental metaphors that sang at the birth of Christ; and it was an Oriental metaphor that slew 185,000 of Sennacherib's army in a single night and it was an Oriental metaphor that appeared to Peter in prison and knocked the chains of his hands, and led him through the streets. “Truly,” said he, “these Oriental metaphors are wonderful things.”

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1st Corinthians chapter 1 verse 25)

Gleanings from the Psalms

(Psalm 62)



Verse 1. “Truly my soul *waiteth* upon God ...” There was a time when I used greatly to wonder at these words of Luther: -

“Bear and forbear, and *silent* be,
Tell to no man thy misery;
Yield not in trouble to dismay,
God can deliver any day”

I wondered because we feel the outpouring of grief into the heart of a friend to be so sweet. At the same time, he who talks much of his troubles to *men* is apt to fall into a way of saying to little of them to God; while, on the other hand, he who has often experienced the blessed alleviation which flows from silent converse with the Eternal, loses much of his desire for sympathy of his fellows. It appears to me now as if spreading out our distress *too largely* before men served only to make it broader; and hence the proverb, “Talking of trouble makes it double.” “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.”

Augustus Tholuck

Verse 3. “How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ... as a bowing wall ye be ...” A wall, when ill-built bulges out in the centre, presenting the appearance of nearly twice its actual breadth: but, as it is hollow within, it soon falls to ruins. The wicked, in like manner, are dilated with pride, and assume in their consultations, a most formidable appearance. But David predicts that they would be brought to unexpected and utter destruction, like a wall badly constructed and hollow in the interior, which falls with a sudden crash, and is broken by its own weight into a thousand pieces

Verse 5. “My soul, wait thou only upon God ...” How quickly the soul of the faithful returns again to the God of its confidence. He spared a moment to admonish the ungodly, but like the dove of Noah he returns to the ark.

Robert Hawker

Verse 5. “My soul, wait thou only upon God ...” They trust not God *at all* who trust Him not *alone*. He that stands with one foot on a rock, and the other foot upon a quicksand, will sink and perish, as certainly as he that standeth with both feet upon a quicksand. David knew this, and therefore calleth earnestly upon his soul to trust *only* upon God.

John Trapp

Verses 6-7. “He only is my rock, and my salvation ... my defence ... my glory ... my refuge ...” If my “refuge”, what enemy can pursue me? If my “defence”, what temptation can wound me? If my “rock”, what storm shall shake me? If my “salvation”, what melancholy can deject me? If my “glory”, what abuse shall defame me?

J. Donne

Verse 8. “... pour out your heart before him ...” Pour it out as *water*. Not as milk, whose colour remains. Not as wine, whose savour remains. Not as honey, whose taste remains. But as water, for when it is poured out nothing remains. So let sin be poured out of the heart, that no colour of it remains in external marks, no savour in our words. No taste in our affections.

Thomas Le Blanc

Verse 11. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.” How can God speak but *once* and we hear Him *twice*? There are several renderings and interpretations of the words, but that which to me seems most intended is ... when God spoke His Word but once I heard it speedily and I heard it *believingly*. That is, as soon as the word came to me I received it; and I received it with *my ear* and also with *my heart*. That is a blessed way of hearing;

and they who hear what God has to say when He **first** says it, may be said to hear **twice** that which God speaks but once.

Joseph Caryl

Verse 11. “God hath spoken once” etc. How God speaks: - “Once.” Plainly, powerfully, immutably, etc. How we should hear: - “Twice.” Continually in heart, as well as in ear; observantly in practice, as well as in letter.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 12. “Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.” Learn to admire the grace of God in rewarding your works. It is much that He **accepts** them in the first place; and what is it then that He **rewards** them? It is much that He does not damn you for them, seeing they are all defiled, and have something of sin cleaving to them. And what is it then that He crowns them? - He gives you grace to perform them, and then, rewards the performance in His mercy.

Edward Veal

Boys and Girls

Dear boys and girls,

We are going to be thinking today of two very special trees. One is called the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, and the other is called the “tree of life”.

Do you know where we read of these trees? That's right – in the Bible. They were both planted by God in the Garden of Eden, and they were there for a very good reason.

Let's take the first one mentioned, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". God has told Adam that he was not allowed to eat the fruit of this tree. He wanted to test Adam's love and obedience to Him, and God warned Adam that if he disobeyed, he would surely die. Now Satan – the Devil – wanted to do something against God, and so, he used this as his chance.

He put himself in the form of a serpent and came to Eve, Adam's wife, and tempted her to eat some fruit of this Tree. She looked at the fruit, picked some of it, then ate it. She also gave Adam some, and he ate it too. Adam had disobeyed God's command, and by eating the fruit he had committed the first of many many sins against God.

As soon as Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they were ashamed, and tried to hide from God! They became sinners, and God must punish sin, so Adam and Eve were punished. They were put out of the Garden, and God's warning about dying came to pass.

This dreadful punishment was not only for Adam and Eve alone. Adam was acting for all mankind, and every one is just as much to blame for this first sin as if each one of us had been there. Because of this sin, the way to the other tree – "The Tree of Life" - was now barred. This meant that people were now separated from God. However, God in His mercy, did not leave us without hope. He gave a wonderful promise of a Saviour who would save us from our sins. That Saviour is Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the *life*: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me". Jesus is the Way.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Seaton.

The Natural Man

A Quote from Thomas Boston.

The natural man is a spiritual monster.

1. His heart is where his feet should be – fixed upon earth.
2. His heel is lifted up against heaven – which his heart should be set on.
3. His face is towards hell – his back towards heaven.
4. He loves what he should hate and hates what he should love.
5. He joys for what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he ought to rejoice in.
6. He glories in his shame and is ashamed of his glory.
7. He abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor.



John Kent

A Hymn-writer of Grace

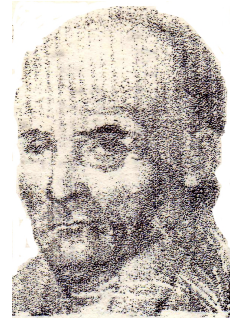
The grace of God is the only real and complete answer to the sin of man. And where sin has been deeply felt and a sense of its forgiveness received, it is unlikely that the forgiven man or woman will trace the forgiveness to any other source than God's free, unmerited grace. This process of things is, perhaps, nowhere better seen than in the hymns of an old saint such as John Kent; and nowhere better seen in all that old saint's writing than in the poem of God's dealings with him, reproduced in the next article.

John Kent was born of very humble parents in the town of Bideford in Devon, in the year 1766. As a child, he never had the advantages of a

formal education, but with the honest instruction he received from his Godly father endeavoured to improve his grasp on academic subjects, and, above all, laboured to stir up the gift that he knew, even in his young life, to be in him. From an early age he began to gather his thoughts together in verse; and as “grace well-refined his heart” in later years, there flowed from his pen such great hymns as “Sovereign Grace o'er sin abounding”, and “'Tis the Church triumphant singing”.

The first collection of Kent's hymns appeared in 1806, and from the very beginning of his hymn-writing career until the end, the subjects of his efforts never varied.

“The sovereignty of God”, we are told, “in His dealings towards a fallen and depraved world, gave him a wide scope for the exercise of his talent”. And ever the self-effacing recipient of that sovereign grace, his son tells us that he never knew his father “to choose one of his own hymns for singing, not even in the retired society of his family”. His constant appeal against any praise was, “Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me; but to thy name be all the glory”. Although stricken with blindness in his early fifties, he continued to pour forth his hymns (his young grandson taking down his words as he spoke them) and for another twenty years afterwards the Church's praise was to benefit through his ministry as a sweet psalmist in Zion.



His dying conviction was the conviction of his redeemed life, and the theme of his song continually - “I rejoice in hope”, he was heard to whisper, “I am accepted – **accepted!** My frames and feelings are not the conditions of my acceptance”, he went on, “No; blessed be God, salvation is all of grace from first to last”.



The Experiences of John Kent

(1)

Wouldst thou, my soul, attempt to trace,
The goodness of thy God to thee?
Recall to mind His acts of grace,
For they are sovereign, great and free.

How shall my pen the task surmount,
to tell the love vouchsafed to me?
Or where begin the vast account,
Unless from all eternity?

Ere time began, His love design'd
To turn my feet to wisdom's way:
In deep revolvings of the mind,
I think of that auspicious day.

Early in life, it pleased my God
Who rules the world at His control,
To send an arrow dipp'd in blood,
That pierced me to the very soul.

I felt conviction seize my breast,
I strove the troubled sea to calm.
With prayers perform'd and sins confess'd,
Without the aid of Gilead's balm.

Thus without blood my wounds were heal'd,
Or rather hidden from my view;
While in my heart there lay conceal'd
Ten thousand sins I never knew.

Deluded thus, I still went on,
Felt no corruptions rise within;
My former lusts I thought were gone,
A cage of hateful birds unclean.

(2)

Enwrapped in ignorance profound,
I deemed myself a holy soul,
And stood aloof from all around,
And vainly thought my heart less foul.

Fond of my legal doings, now
I struggled hard to merit heav'n;
Too proud to sov'reign grace to bow,
Tinctured with Pharisaic leav'n.

Hard thoughts of God my mind possess'd,
I trembled at eternal fate,
And said, "Can God, for ever bless'd,
"His Jacob love, and Esau hate?"

Thus in rebellion oft I strove
Against the God who made me man,
Kicked hard against electing love,
And scoff'd at Mercy's sovereign plan.

Yet He, whose ways are in the deep,
Beyond the reach of mortal ken,
Hedged up my way a straggling sheep,
By pricking thorns and briars, then -

By slips and falls He made me prove,
How vile my nature through the fall;
How firm His everlasting love,
That saved me through and over all.

Here, could mind eyes weep tears of blood,
To Thee that sacrifice I'd pay;
Jesus, whose side poured forth a flood,
To bear my sin and curse away.

(3)

Oft I reflect upon that day,
And Thy abounding mercies sing,
When from the pit of miry clay,
My soul arose on eagle's wing.

From vessel oft to vessel thrown,
Lest I should settle on my lees;
Till led Jehovah's will to own,
Nor strive with His profound decrees.

When led to wrestle hard with God,
I deemed myself His favourite son;
Then I could stretch my hands abroad,
Nor feared to call the world my own.

But when, alas! My fleece was dry,
Chaotic darkness veil'd my mind;
So foolish and so vain was I,
To think that God had proved unkind.

To live by faith was strange to me,
Sense had long been my only fare;
Daily caress'd upon the knee,
As Zion's favourite children are.

At length my joys declined apace,
The clouds came low'ring o'r the sky,
My God appeared to hide his face,
And every spring of comfort dry.

Blasphemous thoughts my mind assail'd,
Dressed in the very flames of hell,
My hopes gave way and fear prevail'd,
To hear their dire infernal yell.

(4)

When on my couch I sought repose,
To lose my woes in slumber there,
What horrid imprecations rose,
To sink my soul in foul despair.

And when my waking thoughts were led
The sun's returning light to see,
"Curse God and die," the tempter said,
"Twill evermore be thus with thee."

Deep call'd to deep, I trembling stood,
And said "My God remember me;
"Why o'er my head still rolls this flood
"When shall my soul deliv'rance see?"

Thus toss'd with tempests to and fro,
At last my shipwreck'd vessel drove,
Not to the gulf of endless woe,
But to the haven of his love.

Bright o'er my head broke forth the sun,
The winds were hush'd and smooth the sea;
While Jesus, with His glories on,
My sorrows did in love repay.

My hope within the veil was cast,
In His dear flesh its grip took hold;
And mourn'd my sins and sorrows past,
In tears of love and joy untold.

For all Thy love and grace made known,
To Thee, my God, I'm debtor still;
Desire to live to Thee alone,
And learn obedience to Thy will.

