

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002. (A Work in Progress)

Sinful Silence

(The Pastor's Letter November 1978)

Dear Friends,

"There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent; and if we must give an account for every idle word spoken, take care lest you have to answer for idle silence." So spoke an old father of the Church many years ago, and his words still have a ring of exhortation about them for any age of the Church - our own age included. As Mr Spurgeon had it, "Treatises in abundance have been produced upon the sins of speech; but are there not also sins of silence?" And in so many ways, the professing church of our day has become a silent church with regards to the faith once delivered to the saints. Perhaps we have now fully fallen victim to that brand of evangelicalism that places more emphasis on what a Christian *doesn't* do, than on what a Christian does. You know the early catechising of manys a new convert: "Now that you are a Christian, you must not - - - ." And the negative begins to dominate the positive instead of being a hand-maid to it, and we have a church that recedes into its shell and becomes silent under the guise of piety and Christian forbearance, when it is really "sinful silence" that is being indulged in.

Now, the condition affects both the "defensive" and the "offensive" roles of the church; and it affects us individually and collectively. The church has, most certainly, a "defensive" role to fulfil, and should ever be set for the defence of the gospel. But, strangely enough, it appears that many of those Christians and Ministers who have set themselves in positions of defending the faith of our fathers are the least involved in that occupation when it comes to speaking out in those areas where that faith is very often under attack. Remember the charge that was delivered against Edom? "On the day of thy brother's calamity ... thou stoodest on the other side." Edom refused to come to the aid of his brother, and when the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is under attack, as it most certainly is in so

many "churches" and denominational structures, it is nothing short of sinful silence merely to remain quiet in such cases.

"Bewildering events and confusing days are upon us," wrote a man not many years ago, "Bible-believing Pastors sit side by side with modernistic ministers in city ministerial associations. Evangelical Pastors stand on the same platform with modernistic ministers at conventions for the 'deepening of the spiritual life.' Evangelical bookshops handle literature written by liberalists. Professing fundamentalist church leaders are seeking to bring their denominations into the World Ecumenical Movement. Gospel organisations send out 'two' magazines and press releases - one for the liberals and one for the fundamentalists." The writer's list goes on and on. It is slightly "dated;" but that makes it all the more pointed. Those issued that only appeared as "inroads" some twenty or twenty-five years ago are now the "motorways" of the religious scene through the world.

If one sin, in particular, has helped to forge those highways it has been the refusal of those responsible to either act or speak where they ought to have acted or spoken. We often hear of "evangelical movements" within our major denominational structures. That's all we hear:- we hear of them, we seldom, if ever, hear *from* them!" There is one terribly sobering piece of scripture concerning our relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ that Isaiah the prophet sets before us in his famous fifty-third chapter: "He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." He was slighted, doubted, ridiculed, spurned; aspersions cast on His Holy Word, His Cross minimised as the only means of salvation for sinners, His sinful humanity, bodily resurrection, and coming again, flatly denied - and "we esteemed Him not." We "stood on the other side;" we were silent!

May God open many mouths in the defence of the faith, even though that defence may be in the form of a final farewell to that which offends: "Your blood be on your own head."

With regards to the "offensive" role of the church, we probably need every bit as much exhorted not to be found guilty of "sinful silence" there. By "offensive," of course, we don't mean that the church, or any Christian within the church, should "offend" or be "offensive" in the way they live before others. But to "take the offensive" is such an integral part of the church's life that we lose it at our peril. "Taking the offensive" belongs to that part of the church's testimony that sends her forth (in her totality and in her individual members) to "speak" for her Lord, none daring to make her afraid. But in this, how often we are found under the rebuke of "sinful silence? How often we hide behind the text that speaks about speaking "a word in season?" And who would deny that manys a word has probably been spoken: "out of season?" And yet, if we cared to have a good hard look at our spiritual calendars we would probably have to admit that our "winters and autumns" are disproportionally long compared to our "summers and springs"! And this can apply to us, either as churches, or as individual believers within our churches, and in those positions in life where the Lord has been pleased to place us. And again, has it something to do with that "negative" approach to things? As long as I am never found saying anything wrong, then I never have to worry about saying anything right.

The apostle Peter has a tremendously exhortative word for us in the course of his first epistle. It's the kind of exhortative word that ought to help to fire our souls with regards to the things of the Lord our God. It concerns the devil, and our attitude towards the devil and the things of the devil, and the course that we ought to take with regards to those things of the devil. "Whom resist steadfast in the faith," says Peter: and the word that Peter uses there for "resist" is actually an "active" word. In other words, Peter is not simply envisaging a situation where the devil comes attacking us and we defend ourselves against him. That is, indeed, part of our Christian calling, but not all. When Peter says, "Whom *resist*," he is speaking about our whole part as the people of God in the "pulling down of the strongholds of Satan," that Paul speaks about. When Christ says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," He is

thrusting us out, as He says in another place, "as lambs in the midst of wolves." But, "thrust out" we must reckon ourselves to be in that capacity. We can't live our Christian lives by saying, "If the devil doesn't bother me, then I won't bother him," for the Bible says in a dozen-and-one ways - bother him! "Dare to be a Daniel." Go out, bearing the sword - take a few swings at the walls of the devil's castle - shoot a few arrows into his strongholds.

When old Rowland Hill was called to minister in the East End of London in his day, the Countess of Huntingdon wrote to one of her friends, informing her, "Dear old Rowley has gone to where Satan has his seat." And if that's true, and was true in the particular in the London of Rowland Hill's day, then it is certainly true in general, for "the world lieth in the lap of the evil one."

May God be with us, then, in this matter of "sinful silence," in whichever form it takes with us. God grant us, rather, that spirit of those who "went everywhere, preaching the gospel."

Sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

*"Ahithophel put his household in order and hanged himself."
(2nd Samuel, chapter 17, verse 23)*

By C. H. Spurgeon

I desire to call your attention to the text on account of its very remarkable character. "He put his house in order and hanged himself." To put his house in order showed that he was a prudent man: to hang himself proved that he was a fool. Herein is a strange mixture of discretion and desperation, mind and madness. Shall a man have wisdom enough to arrange his worldly affairs with care, and yet, shall he be so sapless as to take his own life afterwards? Strange incongruity, he makes his will, and then because he cannot have his will, he wills to die. Marvel not at this one display of folly, for I shall

have to show you that the case of Ahithophel is in the spirit of it, almost universal.

See before you then, the portrait of *an attentive servant*. He is faithful to his employers, and fulfils well the office to which he is appointed. He is up with the lark, he toils all day, he rests not till his task is done; he neglects nothing which he undertakes. I see him among the throng, I will single him out, and talk with him. You have been engaged for years in farming. You have ploughed, and sown, and reaped, and gathered into the barn, and no one has done the work better than you; and yet, though you have been so careful in your labour, you have never sown to the Spirit, nor cared to reap life everlasting. You have never asked to have your heart ploughed with the gospel plough, nor sown with the living seed, and the consequences will be that at the last you will have no harvest but weeds and thistles, and you will be given over to eternal destruction.

Look ye now to another picture - *The prudent merchant*. I must briefly sketch him. He knows the ways of trade, studies the state of the market, is quick to perceive the opportunity of gain, has been cautious in his speculations. He prides himself in a quiet way upon the prudence with which he conducts all his worldly transactions - and, my dear friend, I am sure I am glad to see you prudent in business. But I want to ask you if you are thoughtless about religion how it is that you can be so inconsistent? Do you study how to buy and buy well, but will you never buy the truth? Do you put all that you get into a safe bank, but will you never lay up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt? You are wary in your speculations, but will you play so deep at the game of "hazard" as to jeopardise your soul? Is gold your God?

A third photograph shall now be exhibited - *The diligent student*. He seeks out the best of books to assist him in the pursuit of his branch of knowledge; he burns the midnight oil. Knowledge is sweet, and the honour of being associated with the learned is coveted. My young friend, I would not for a moment abate your zeal, but I would beg space for one consideration worthy of immediate attention. Ought the

best of sciences be left to the last? Should self-knowledge and acquaintance with God be treated as a secondary importance? Should not the Word of God be the chief volume in the wise man's library? With all your gettings, should you not get the wisdom that comes from above, and the knowledge which is the gift of God, and which will introduce you, if not among the learned, yet among the gracious?

The last of my crayon sketches is one which may concern many; it is that of *the outward religionist* who yet is regardless of his own soul. It is the oddest and strangest of all facts that there should be such people. You are like those builders who probably helped Noah to build the ark and then were drowned. You keep God's Sabbaths, and yet you will not enter into his rest. You sing Christ's praises, and yet you will not trust him. You bow your heads in prayer, and yet you do not really pray. You are even anxious sometimes, and yet, that which would end all your anxiety - namely, submission to the gospel of Christ - you will not yield to. Why is this? Wherefore this strange behaviour? Will you bless others and curse yourselves?

I speak to the whole of you who as yet have not believed in Jesus - what is it that you are destroying your souls with? Every unbeliever is an eternal suicide; he is destroying his soul's hope. What is your motive?

You may be very wise, and you may arrange your business cleverly - but for all that, you are no wiser than the great fool of my text, who "set his house in order, and hanged himself. "God teach us to be wise, before this year is yet gone."

Amen.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

There was once a young boy who was caught in a great storm as he was out walking in the wild, hilly countryside. As the thunder and lightening got worse and worse, he noticed a kind of ruined building. So, taking shelter in it, he sat down in a corner and tried to keep himself warm. He sat there feeling very depressed and frightened, and thinking how hopeless his state was. Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a little beast carrying a grain of corn on its back. It was a little ant! The grain was much bigger than the ant, and what was more, the ant was carrying it up the side of a wall! Just imagine the sight of this little beastie and the big burden on its back. The boy was fascinated, and as he watched, would you believe it, the grain fell to the ground, but the little animal started all over again. This happened sixty-nine times! But the ant persevered on, and the seventieth time the ant reached the top.

Well, the boy was so pleased with the ant's success, that he opened his mouth and cheered. And as he cheered, he felt better and took courage himself, and his fears left him. He waited patiently for the storm to finish, and then made his way back down the hill and home.

You know, boys and girls, isn't all that God has created - even down to the little ant - just quite marvellous? God "reveals" Himself and His power in His creation. Many times we can take courage when we are frightened by remembering that God who made all this world of ours is still in control of it. Nothing can happen that He doesn't know about.

However, boys and girls, over and above, even God's creation is God's Word. God especially reveals Himself to us through His Word, the Bible. So when we have troubles or fears, not only can we look around us to all that God has made, but also we can look *into* the Bible, and find out all that God has to say to us there. Let us banish our fears by believing all that God has to say to us.

Love,
Mrs Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 84 (Concluded)



Verses 5-7. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them." Having spoken of the blessedness of those who *reside* in the house of God, the psalmist now speaks of those who are favoured to visit it at appointed seasons, going upon pilgrimage with their devout brethren.

He is not, however indiscriminate in his eulogy, but speaks only of those who *heartily* attend to the sacred festivals. The blessedness of sacred worship belongs not to half-hearted, listless worshippers, but to those who throw all their energies into it. Neither prayer nor praise nor the hearing of the Word will be pleasant or profitable to persons who have left their hearts behind them. A company of pilgrims who had left their hearts at home would be no better than a caravan of carcasses, quite unfit to blend with living saints in adoring the living God. "Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools." Traversing joyfully the road to the great assembly, the happy pilgrims found refreshment even in the dreariest

part of the road. As men meet around a well and converse cheerfully after their journey, so even in the vale of tears - or any other dreary glen - the pilgrims to the skies find sweet solace in brotherly communion and in anticipation of the general assembly above, with its joys unspeakable. "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." So far from being wearied, they gather strength as they proceed. Each individual becomes happier, each company becomes more numerous, each holy song more sweet and full. We grow as we advance if heaven be our goal. If we spend our strength in God's ways we shall find it increase. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God," says the psalmist. This was the end of the pilgrims' march; the centre where all meet; the delight of all hearts. Not merely to be in the assembly, but to appear before God was the object of every devout Israelite.

Would to God it were the sincere desire of all who in these days mingle in our religious gatherings. Unless we realise the presence of God we have done nothing: the mere gathering together is worth nothing.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verse 9. "Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed." We cannot always say, *look* on us; but we may always say, *look on Him*. In deepest sorrow through conscious failure, or in trials and difficulties, we can ever plead with God what Christ is. God is ever well pleased with Him - ever occupied with Him as risen from the dead and exalted to His own right hand in heaven, and He would have us also to be occupied with Him as the heart's exclusive object.

Things New and Old

Verse 10. "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand ..." The least good look that a man has from God, and the least good word that a man hears from God, and the least love letter and love token that a man receives from God - these things are exceedingly precious to that man who has God for his portion. The comparison of all things

with God's things is like this: One day in thy courts is better than a thousand days elsewhere.

From T. Brooks

Verse 10. "... I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Some read it - "I would rather be fixed to a post in the house of my God, than live at liberty in the tents of the wicked;" alluding to the law concerning servants, who as they would not go out free, were to have their ear bored to the doorpost, Exodus 21 verses 5 and 6. David loved his Master, and loved his work so well, that he desired to be tied to this service for ever; to be more free to it and in it, and never to go out free from it; to be in bonds to duty rather than at liberty in sin.

Matthew Henry

Verse 11. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Note the words - "sun ... shield ... grace ... glory." The "sun," which among all inanimate creatures is the most excellent, notes all manner of excellency, provision, and prosperity; and the "shield," which among all artificial creatures is the chief, notes all manner of protection whatsoever. Under the name of "grace," all spiritual good is wrapped up: and under the name of "glory," all eternal good is wrapped up, and under the last clause - "no good thing will he withhold" - is wrapped up all temporal good. Put all together, and it speaks out God to be an all-sufficient portion for us His people.

Thomas Brooks

This is an immense fountain; the Lord fill all the buckets of our hearts at such a spring and make our souls as large to receive as His hand is liberal to give.

From Thomas Adams

John's Preface

By

B.B. Warfield

**"In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God."
(John 1:1)**

John's gospel does not differ from the other gospels as the gospel of the divine Christ in contradistinction to the gospels of the human Christ. All the gospels are gospels of the divine Christ. But John's gospel differs from the other gospels in taking the divine Christ as its starting-point. The others begin on the plane of human life. John begins in the inter-relations of the divine persons in eternity.

It is interesting to observe how the brief prefaces of the several gospels reflect the tone and chief engrossment of the gospel to which each is affixed. Luke, the scholarly historian, begins his gospel with a series of finely turned clauses, designed to inspire confidence in the exactness of his information and the accuracy of the narrative in which he recounts the life-history of the founder of Christianity. Mark, the man of action in a single brisk line, presents his as an account of how the great religious movement in which he was bearing his part took its rise in an intervention of God in Palestine. Matthew opens his by casting his eye back on Israel's past and tracing the continuity of the history he is narrating with the whole divinely guided course of Israel's development. These all begin with the man Jesus, whom they set forth as the Messiah in whom God has visited his people; or rather, as himself, God came to his people according to his promise. The movement in them is from below upward; from the man of God's appointment to the King of all the ages. The movement in John, on the contrary, is from above downwards. He takes his start from the Divine Word, and descends from him to the human Jesus in

whom he was incarnated. This Jesus, say the others, is God. This God, says John, Became Jesus.

The fundamental purpose of the preface which John has prefixed to his gospel is, in a word, to account for Jesus Christ. In undertaking to spread before his readers the life-story of this wonderful man, he feels that the marvel of it requires some preliminary statement about his real nature, so that the drama he is to unroll may not distress and puzzle the reader. He says, in effect, that the man Jesus - what he was, what he taught, what he did - is to be understood only by bearing in mind, from the beginning, that he was God manifested in the flesh. Those who looked upon him, listened to him, companied with him, and watched his going in and out among men, saw in him a glory as of an only-begotten from the Father; and John would fain depict him as they saw him, that his readers, too, may believe. He must, then, begin by telling them plainly who and what this marvellous man was. From this starting-point only will the story he has to tell develop itself smoothly, without entailing numerous pauses for explanation or justification. From this starting-point only can it be read without doubts and hesitation.

Precisely what John, in this preface to his gospel, presents Jesus as really being, we repeat, is God manifested in the Flesh. His interest is not in what Jesus once was so much as in what Jesus continuously was. His purpose is to prepare his readers for the manifestations of deity which they will meet in the story of Jesus' life and teaching; to make these things seem natural in this man, and thus to enable them to read about them simply and without shock of surprise. He, therefore, wishes to tell them plainly at the outset that this Being of whose life on earth they are to read is no mere man, but just God manifest in the flesh.

The language in which John does this is all his own. He draws an Old Testament symbolism, and tells us that what men saw in Jesus was the true Shekinah - the glory of God dwelling in the flesh of Jesus as in its true tabernacle, and visible there to every seeing eye. In somewhat less figurative language, he declares that in Jesus Christ men saw all

that God is. No one, indeed, has ever gazed directly on God; but in Jesus Christ they have had God completely unfolded to their view. Says John, it is Christ who has "declared him" - literally, has "exegeted" him to men's sight. Accordingly, he calls him not simply God - for that would express only what he is in himself, and John wishes to bring out also what he is to us; so he refers to him as "the Word," and "the Light;" God, not merely in himself, but in his manifestations - the manifested God.

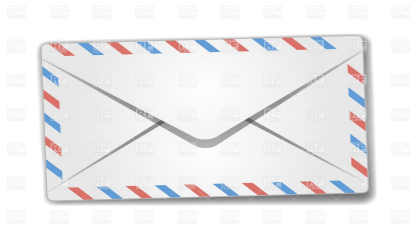
This does not mean that Jesus Christ, though standing in a high and unique relation to God, is yet something less than God. It means that he is all that God is, yet God as manifested. He is declared plainly to be God. He is asserted to have subsisted from eternity. He is announced as the actual creator of all. He is represented as the source of all the light and life that is in the world; and of all the restoring influences that play upon this sinful world. He is proclaimed finally as God only-begotten, who abides in the bosom of the Father, while yet manifesting his glory on earth.

Such is the Being whom, John tells us, we must recognise this Jesus Christ to be. Only by recognising him as God in the flesh, he tells us, can we understand the life he lived and the work he did.

This is the significance of the preface to John's gospel.

(From an article entitled "John's First Word"
found in the Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield.)

**"In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God."
(John 1:1)**



A Poignant Letter Received.

Reproduced from the December 1978
edition of the Wicket Gate Magazine.

Dear Friends,

It has never been our practice to reproduce letters that have been received over the years in connection with the Wicket Gate or under other circumstances. A countless number of these letters have been of the highest spiritual tone, and have given a great deal of encouragement to us both personally and as a church of the Lord's people. This month, however, I want to share the contents of a letter recently received. It comes from a young woman now bereft of her husband and endeavouring to face the event in the light of God's love and truth to her heart and mind. We have already read the letter in the prayer meeting of the church, and due to the fact of its sentiments finding such an echo in all our hearts, we thought it fitting to make it available to a wider circle.

The young man in question was engaged in the work of the gospel for some years. He was the father of a severely handicapped child and eventually was overtaken himself by a severe illness which left him almost completely incapacitated, finally resulting in blindness.

From that background, the young widow writes, and we feel, her letter has something to say to us.

Dear Mr Seaton,

"Many thanks for continuing to send the Wicket Gate. Please, could you note the new address, which is only temporary - as yet I have no permanent new home. I also want to let you know that my dear was taken home to the Lord.

He had been failing in health for some time, and latterly was longing to go, should it not be the Lord's will to heal him. This naturally made things easier for me, but my only and sure comfort is that he is now rejoicing in the reality of all we shared together in faith.

To know he is in the Lord's presence, free from all the handicaps, physical and spiritual, of this life, takes away all the sting and separation. The pain is still there, and the loneliness, but the Lord has proved Himself so able, and no matter how low I feel, He is still round about and underneath.

The children have coped remarkably well - an abundant answer to the prayers of many. They are quite content to know that Daddy is continuing life in another realm, free from pain and able to see again: indeed, they are fascinated by the thought, and all the Bible worthies he is now meeting!

I intend to remain in, as we have roots here, but we had to leave our previous home shortly before last acute illness, and as yet are still with a dear friend who has been a tremendous support throughout this time - another of the Lord's gracious provisions. I will notify you of our new address in due course.

Please give my best wishes to your Church. How we have appreciated your fellowship very much, and really enjoyed the tapes you sent him, particularly Adolphe Monod's Farewell. He loved to hear much of Christ.

Yours very sincerely,
P- H-.

'Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory,
through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

I trust you share our feelings with regards to the value of the contents of that note. It ought always to be a cause of rejoicing to us to see the grace of God operative in the lives of those who profess the name of His Son in our day; this is to God's glory, and to God we would give the glory. One sentence especially makes a very real mark in our hearts: - "... my only and sure comfort is that he is now

rejoicing in the reality of all we shared together in faith." God grant our sister, and all of us, to faithfully live by faith in the blessed hope and assurance of that coming reality.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton