

# The Wicket Gate Magazine

## A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 173 May issued May 2025

### Index

1. Beware of Frames and Duties—Christ Alone is Sufficient. W. J. Seaton.
2. Some Final Flowers from a Puritan's Garden. Manton/Spurgeon.
3. Gleaning in the Psalms – Psalm 104.
4. The Winter is Over – Letter from Mrs Seaton to the Boys and Girls.
5. Bunyan's Four Shepherds.
6. Living Before God: True Conversion and Uncompromising Holiness



At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine [www.wicketgate.co.uk](http://www.wicketgate.co.uk) you will also find the following recordings:

- 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 N. Needham, W. J. Seaton, and Pastor G. S. Marley
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Archive of Audio Sermons.

# ***Beware of Frames and Duties***

## ***Christ Alone is Sufficient.***

Dear Friends,

I was reading just recently the death-bed scenes of Ebenezer Erskine and was struck by the balance of one of his replies to a friend who had come to visit him. “Are you not afraid of your sins?” his friend asked him; “indeed no,” he answered, “ever since I knew Christ I have never thought highly of my frames and duties, nor am I *slavishly* afraid of my sins.” There is a tremendous equilibrium in that answer, and the maturity of it should not be lost on any of us.

The devil normally employs two tactics with us to get our eyes off the all-sufficiency of Christ’s redeeming work for our souls. On the one hand, he endeavours to get us all caught-up with our “frames and duties,” while on the other, he endeavours to get us all cast-down with our sins and shortcomings.

When he gets us all caught up with our frames and duties, of course, it is not long before he is leading us by the nose on to the boggy ground of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. What he has caused us to do in that case is to apportion a good part of our hope and trust in how we *feel* - our frames; or in what we *do* – our duties.

This doesn’t mean, of course, that we are not to “feel.”  
Indeed, no:

“True religion’s more than notion,  
Something must be known and felt.”

Nor does it mean that we must ever rest on a faith that is not productive of good works and efforts to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. But both our feelings and our works – our “frames” and our “duties” – must never be viewed or estimated outwith the shadow of the Cross of Calvary.

The same thing also applies when it comes to our sins and shortcomings. There is nothing more dangerous or debilitating for a Christian’s well-being and usefulness than the inability to rise above their sin to the place of forgiveness in Jesus Christ the Lord. It is one thing to sin; and we all sin, and fall short of the glory of God, on numerous occasions. But it must always be remembered that there is no sin more sinful than the sin of refusing to take God’s means of forgiveness for our sins through the sufficiency of our Redeemer’s blood. “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ...”

For professing Christians to labour under the guilt of sin when God has provided a ready means of forgiveness is to simply ape their unregenerate days when they refused that means of forgiveness in the first place. It is a sad thing when the “principle” of Christ’s words to the unbelievers can be applied to His own people as well – “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life!”

Old Ebenezer Erskine was right in refusing to think over-highly of his frames and duties; and he was just as right in refusing to be slavishly cast down and afraid of his sins. His good duties never brought him near *to* God, in the first place, nor need his bad duties (his sins) necessarily keep him *from* God, all the days of his life. He knew himself “accepted in the beloved”

from the beginning to end, and was of the same mind as Mr Luther before him – “Beware, not only of thy sins, but of thy good duties.” Beware of **anything** that takes your eyes off the all-sufficiency of Christ.

Beware of those “frames and duties” that would erode in your thinking even by a fraction, the total necessity that we have of Christ to bring us to God. Beware of the bondage of sins committed that would erode in your thinking, even by a fraction, the total willingness that we have in Christ to bring us back to God.

We might well pray – “**Lord**, forbid that I should think that I have done so well, or feel so well, that I don’t need Christ so much in my life: **Lord**, forbid that I should think that I have done so bad, or feel so bad, that I can’t have Christ any more in my life.”

Yours sincerely,  
W. J. Seaton (August 1983)

***Some Final Flowers from a Puritan’s Garden.***



Charles Haddon Spurgeon tells us that "While commenting upon the One Hundred-and Nineteenth Psalm," he was "brought into most intimate communion with Thomas Manton." This is not surprising, for the great Puritan preached no less than one hundred and ninety sermons on the one hundred and seventy six verses of that

psalm, and these sermons occupy three-and-a-half volumes in the 22 volumes of his Complete Works.

Spurgeon tells us that while he worked his way through Manton's sermons he was struck with his selective use of similes, or illustrations, and he hit on a plan for a small book; it would consist of a collection of these similes and metaphors, etc., with additional comments by Spurgeon himself. He tells us that in doing this it is not his intention to "rob" the great Puritan of what is rightly his; "I am simply clearing his house of all his pictures," he says, "and hanging them up in new frames of my own." We thought we might give a few of Manton's pictures in Spurgeon's new frames. The title of the small book that ensued was – Illustrations and Meditations, or Flowers from a Puritan's Garden. Distilled and Dispensed by C.H. Spurgeon.

We have in earlier editions of our Magazine reproduced some sections from Spurgeon's small book but here are a few more.

First, we have Manton's illustrations, or simile, and then, Spurgeon's comment.

**Manton**: As a lute that is not played upon, but hangs by the wall, soon grows out of order for want of use; so, if we do not constantly and diligently exercise ourselves in godliness, our hearts grow dead and vain.

**Spurgeon**: It would seem that there is no worse abuse of a good thing than to abstain from its use. While it lies idle it lies ill. Grace must be exercised towards God in devout contemplation, wrestling prayer, or adoring praise; and it must be exercised among our fellows in patience, zeal, charity, and holy example; or like an arm which has been long bound by a man's side, it will

become withered. Some of the Children of Israel's enemies were left in Canaan for the sole reason that the armies of Israel might not forget the art of war. To return to our author's figure – are we like a lute upon the wall? Are the strings all out of order? Tune us, Lord, and then bring music out of us. Why should a single instrument in the whole concert be silent when the Lord is to be praised?

**Manton**: Many die of inward bleeding as well as by outward wounds.

**Spurgeon**: Every surgeon can give many instances of such deaths. Not one abrasion on the skin was visible; the dying man had neither gash, nor cut, nor even a pin's prick, and yet his life oozed away in secret. This it is that without an open fault, a man's soul may perish. If wrath rages within, it is fatal, even though no revengeful act is perpetrated; if lust be burning in the heart, the man is lost, though he has never advanced to a lascivious deed; if unbelief proves an inward enmity against God, the man is condemned already, though no blasphemous word has crossed his lips. Sin is a bleeding at the heart. It is a disease which destroys the true life within, as well as the fruit of it without; therefore, let every man beware of flattering himself that he is right with God because no glaring vice is manifest in his daily conversation.

**Manton**: Men in a tempest are sometimes cast upon a place of safety which they had not made for by intention or foresight.

**Spurgeon**: Happy mariner who is forced into port! Blessed is that wave which throws the drowning sailor upon the rock of safety! Such forces are abroad at times, and especially in the spiritual world. We mean not to exclude the agency of the will

when we speak of certain compulsions which have driven men and women into a happiness for which they had not looked. “Had I not lost my eyes,” said one, “I had never seen my Saviour.” Another attributed his spiritual riches to the fact that he lost all his property, and so was driven to God for consolation. When we reach the heights of glory we shall ascribe our felicity, not to our own will or merit, but to those sweet forces which drew us to heaven; and also, perhaps, to certain ruder agencies, which beat like hurricanes upon our pride, and sank our self-confidence in the floods – wrecking us into rest, and destroying us unto salvation.

**Manton**: It was a fashion, in the primitive persecutions, to clothe the martyrs in bears’ skins, and then to bait them as bears; and it is a usual practice of Satan and his agents, first to blast the reputation of the godly, and then to persecute them as offenders.

**Spurgeon**: It is written of the worthies of old that “they had trial of cruel mockings.” Tertullian says that in the primitive times the saints were called herds of asses, vile fellows, the disciples of a man crucified, eaters of men’s flesh, etc. The heathen painted the God of the Christians with the head of an ass, and with a book in his hand, to signify that, though Christians pretended to knowledge, they were a company of fools. The like custom remains still. Good men are first slandered and then censured. They lay to our charge deeds that we never dreamed of, and then they pile on the adjectives of denunciations. But thanks be to God, a saint in a bear’s skin is none the less a saint. The Lord knows the wolf in the sheep’s skin, and the sheep in the bear’s skin.

**Manton**: The devil is called “the prince of the power of the air.” Infected air is drawn into the lungs without pain, and we get a disease before we feel it, and so die from a pestilential air.

**Spurgeon**: Thus, doth Satan injure and destroy men’s souls by an influence so subtle and painless that before a man is aware of it, he is inflicted with error or iniquity, and falls a victim to the evil. Whole cities have been carried off by plagues arising from causes which the sick ones never suspected, and whole classes of men perish from wild passions which only the devil could have excited to such a pitch. No gas is so penetrating, so all-pervading, so deadly, as the influence of Satan. In these days it is not polite to speak of him; the common doubt of his existence is a proof of his powerful cunning.

**Manton**: Take a mirror and put it towards heaven; there you shall see the figure of heaven, the clouds, and things above. Turn it downwards towards the earth, you shall see the figure of the earth, trees, meadows, men. So doth the soul receive a figure from the things to which it is set.

**Spurgeon**: Are our thoughts and our affections full of worldliness? Let us make good use of Manton’s figure, and turn the looking-glass the other way. Our mind will readily enough reflect divine things if we turn it in that direction. Let us see if it be not so. Reach down the Bible, look at the biography of a holy man, or some lively book of devotion, and see if the heart be not filled with heavenly images. This turning of the mind upward is half the battle. We cannot expect the mind to reflect that to which it is not turned. Those who mind earthly things are earthly, those who set their affections on things above are heavenly. Paul shows us that the way to live “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,” is by “looking for



that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” We may well cry concerning this matter, “Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned.” He who would behold the sun at his rising must not look to the west!



## ***Gleanings in the Psalms***

### ***Psalm 104***

**Division:** After ascribing blessedness to the Lord, the devout Psalmist sings of the light and the firmament, which were the work of the first and second days of creation. (Verses 1 to 6). By an easy transition he describes the separation of the waters from the dry land, the formation of brooks and rivers, and the uprising of the green herbs, which were the produce of the third day. (Verses 7 to 18). Then the appointment of the sun and the moon to be the guardians of day and night commands the poet's admiration, and so he sings of the fourth day. (Verses 19-23). Having already alluded to many varieties of living creatures, the Psalmist proceeds, (Verse 24 to verse 30) to sing of the life with which the Lord was pleased to fill the air, and sea, and the land; these forms of life were the peculiar produce of the fifth and sixth days. We may regard the closing verses (31-35) as a Sabbath meditation, hymn, and prayer. The whole psalm lies before us as a panorama of the universe viewed by the eye of devotion – a poet's version of the beginning of Genesis. O for grace to render due praise unto the Lord while reading it.

*Spurgeon*

**Verse 1** “**Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great ...**” with what reverence and holy awe does the psalmist begin his meditation! “O Lord my God, thou art very

great.” It is the joy of the saints that he who is their God is a great God.

*Matthew Henry*

It is this psalm that lies at the back of the hymn – “O worship the King all glorious above.” The imagery is unmistakable:-

“Oh, tell of His might! Oh, sing of His grace!  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,  
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.”

**Verse 2. “Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.”** In comparing the “light” to a robe, the psalmist signifies that though God is invisible, yet his glory is manifest. When it is said that the heavens are a “curtain,” it is not meant that under them God hides himself, but that by them his majesty and glory are displayed, being, as it were, his royal pavilion.

*John Calvin*

**Verse 3. “... who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind.”** In these words – “he walketh upon the wings of the wind” – there is an unequalled elegance. It is not – he *fleeth*, or *runneth*, but he *walketh*; and that on the very “wings of the wind” – the most impetuous element raised into the utmost rage, and sweeping along with incredible rapidity. We cannot have a more sublime idea of the Deity; serenely walking on an element of inconceivable swiftness, and as it seems to us, uncontrollable impetuosity!

*James Hervey*

**Verses 6-9. “Thou coverest (the earth) with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away ...”** All this is referring to that commanding voice of God that made the mountains rise out of the waters and divided the waters from the dry land in the days of creation. John Gill makes note of the great “precipitance” and “haste” with which those waters fled at the beginning, when God but spoke; and he applies the principle of that event for the good of the believer’s heart. “This is an instance of the mighty power of Christ,” he say, “and by the same power He:-

- 1) Removed the waters of the deluge, when they covered the earth and the tops of the highest hills.
- 2) Rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry land.
- 3) Drove back the waters of Jordan for the Israelites to pass through.
- 4) Rebuked the Sea of Galilee when his disciples were in distress.

With equal ease” he says, “can he, and does he:

- 1) remove the depth of sin and darkness from his people at their conversion.
- 2) Rebukes Satan, and delivers out of his temptations when he comes in like a flood.
- 3) Commands off the waters of affliction when they threaten to overwhelm.

(To be continued.)



## ***Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls***

Dear Boys and Girls,

The winter over and now we see so many things coming to life in the world around us.

Have you noticed how many lessons there are in the Bible about God's creation, and God's creatures? The rainbow, the sheep, the flowers, the ant, the eagle – to name just a few. I'm sure you can think of many more yourselves.

I remember reading a story about a bee, and a great lesson a little boy learned from it. I don't remember the boy's name, but we will call him Bobby.

One day bobby was playing outside his house in the garden, when suddenly, right over his head and buzzing madly was a big bee. Bobby was sure that it was going to sting him, and so, he ran as fast as he could to his mother. "Mummy, mummy," he called, "it's going to sting me!"

Bobby's mother immediately put her arms around her little boy, and just as she did so, the bee stung her on the arm, and then fell to the ground and crawled away.

She pointed to the bee on the ground: "Look bobby," she said, "that bee can't harm you any longer; you could even play with it. It can't sting you now, for a bee has only one sting, and it has stung me instead of you, so you are quite safe. I'm happy

to have taken the sting instead of you, Bobby, and to have felt the pain instead of you.”

Wasn't that very kind and loving of bobby's mother, boys and girls? But I'm sure you all know of One even more loving and kind than that, at least I hope you do. That One, of course is the Lord Jesus Christ, who took the pain of death on the cross for every one who would believe on His name and be saved. The Bible says the “He bore our sins in his own body on the cross.” When we know that, then how thankful we ought to be, and try to please Him at all times.

Yours sincerely,  
Mrs Seaton



## ***John Bunyan's Four Shepherds***

***From Pilgrim's Progress.***

Introduction. When Christian and Hopeful finally escape from Giant Despair in Doubting Castle, they eventually find themselves on a range of hills which John Bunyan calls the Delectable Mountains.

The Delectable Mountains are a place of refreshing for the two pilgrims, and present on these hills are four Shepherds whose names are, Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere.

Bunyan's relating of the Shepherds' behaviour, questioning, instruction, and parting counsel to the two pilgrims not only makes classical reading on any score, but is full of spiritual value for all time – because, of course, Bunyan's four Shepherds are meant to typify what should be found in and sought after in every true Pastor and Minister of God's Word. So the account occurs:-

Now, there were on the tops of these mountains shepherds feeding their flocks, and they stood by the highway-side. The Pilgrims, therefore, went to them, and, leaning upon their staves, (as is common with weary pilgrims when they stand to talk with any by the way), they asked, "Whose delectable mountains are these, and whose be the sheep that feed upon them?"

Shepherds. These mountains are Emmanuel's land, and they are within sight of His city; and the sheep also are His, and He laid down His life for them. (John 10: 11-15).

Christian. Is this the way to the Celestial City?

Shepherds. You are just in your way.

Christian. How far is it thither?

Shepherds. Too far for any but those who shall get thither indeed.

Christian. Is the way safe or dangerous?

Shepherds. Safe for those for whom it is to be safe; but transgressors shall fall therein. (Hosea 14:9)

Christian. Is there in this place any relief for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way?

Shepherds The Lord of these mountains hath given us a charge not to be forgetful to entertain strangers (Hebrews 13:2), therefore the good of the place is before you.

I also saw in my dream, that, when the shepherds perceived that they were wayfaring men, they also put questions to them (to which they made answer as in other places) as, “Whence came you?” and “How got you into the way?” and, “By what means have you so persevered therein? For but few of them that begin to come hither, do show their faces on these mountains.” But, when the shepherds heard their answers, being pleased therewith they looked very lovingly upon them and said, “Welcome to the Delectable Mountains!”

The shepherds, I say, whose names were Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere, took them by the hand, and had them to their tents, and made them partake of what was ready at present. They said moreover, “We would that you should stay here awhile, to be acquainted with us, and yet more to solace yourselves with the good of these Delectable Mountains.” They then told them they were content to stay. So they went to rest that night, because it was very late.

Then I saw in my dream, that in the morning the shepherds called up Christian and Hopeful to walk with them upon the mountains. So they went forth with them and walked a while, having a pleasant prospect on every side. Then said the shepherds one to another, “Shall we show these pilgrims some wonders?” So, when they had concluded to do it, they had them first to the top of the hill called Error, which was very steep on the farthest side, and bid them look down to the bottom. So Christian and Hopeful looked down, and saw at the bottom several men dashed all to pieces by a fall they had had from the top. Then said Christian, “What meaneth this?” Then the shepherds answered, “Have you not heard of them that were made to err, by harkening to Hymeneus and Philetus, as concerning the faith of the resurrection of the body?” (2<sup>nd</sup>

Timothy 2:17-18). They answered, “Yes.” Then said the shepherds, “Those you see lie dashed in pieces at the bottom of this mountain, are they; and they have continued to this day unburied, as you see, for an example to others to take heed how they clamber too high, or how they come too near the brink of this mountain.”

Then I saw that they had them to the top of another mountain, and the name of that is Caution, and bid them look afar off; which when they did, they perceived as they thought, several men walking up and down among the tombs that were there; and they perceived that the men were blind, because they stumbled sometimes upon the tombs, and because they could not get out from among them. Then said Christian, “What means this?”

The shepherds then answered, “Did you not see a little below these mountains a stile that led into a meadow, on the left hand of this way?” They answered, “Yes.” Then said the shepherds, “From that stile there goes a path that leads directly to Doubting Castle, which is kept by Giant Despair; and these men (pointing to them among the tombs) came once on pilgrimage, as you do now, even until they came to that same stile. And because the right way was rough in that place, they chose to go out of it into that meadow, and there were taken by Giant Despair, and cast into Doubting Castle, where, after they had awhile been kept in the dungeon, he at last did put out their eyes, and led them among those tombs, where he left them to wander to this very day, that the saying of the Wise Man might be fulfilled, ‘He that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead.’” (Proverbs 21:16.) Then Christian and Hopeful looked one upon another with tears gushing out, but yet said nothing to the shepherds.



Then I saw in my dream that the shepherds had them to another place, in a bottom where there was a door on the side of the hill; and they opened the door, and bid them look in. They looked in, therefore, and saw that, within, it was very dark and smokey; they also thought that they heard there a rumbling noise, as of fire, and a cry of some tormented, and that they smelt the scent of brimstone. Then said Christian, “What means this?” The shepherds told them, “This is a by-way to hell, a way that hypocrites go in at; namely, such as sell their birthright with Esau; such as sell their master with Judas; such as blaspheme the gospel, with Alexander; and that lie and dissemble, with Ananias and Sapphira his wife.”

Hopeful. Then said Hopeful to the shepherds, “I perceive that these had on them, even everyone, a show of pilgrimage, as we have now; had they not?”

Shepherds. Yes, and held it a long time too.

Hopeful. How far might they go on in pilgrimage in their day since they, notwithstanding, were thus miserably cast away?

Shepherds. Some farther, and some not as far as these mountains.

Then said the pilgrims one to another, “We have need to cry to the Strong for strength.”

Shepherds. Ay, and you will have need to use it, when you have it, too.

By this time the pilgrims had a desire to go forward, and the shepherds a desire that they should; so they walked together towards the end of the mountains. Then said the shepherds one to another, “Let us here show to the pilgrims the gate of the

Celestial City, if they have skill to look through our perspective glass.” The pilgrims then lovingly accepted the motion; so they had them to the top of a high hill called Clear, and gave them the glass to look.

Then they essayed to look; but the remembrance of that last thing that the shepherds had showed them, made their hand shake, by means of which impediment they could not look steadily through the glass; yet they thought they saw something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place.

When they were about to depart, one of the shepherds gave them a note of the way. Another of them bid them beware of the Flatterer. The third bid them take heed that they slept not upon the Enchanted ground. And the fourth bid them God-speed.

### ***Living Before God: True Conversion and Uncompromising Holiness.***

“When the word of God converts a man, it takes away from him his despair, but it does not take from him his repentance. ***True conversion*** gives a man pardon, but does not make him presumptuous. ***True conversion*** gives a man perfect rest, but it does not stop his progress. ***True conversion*** gives a man security, but it does not allow him to leave off being watchful. ***True conversion*** gives a man strength and holiness, but it never lets him boast. ***True conversion*** gives a harmony to all the duties of Christian life – it balances all duties, emotions, hopes and enjoyments. ***True conversion*** brings a man to live for God. He does everything for the glory of God - whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does. ***True conversion*** makes a man live before God – he desires to live as in God’s sight at all times, and he is glad to be there.”

“The more sin abounds in the world, the more ought the Church of God to seek after the strictest holiness. If ever there was an age that needed back again the sternest form of Puritanism, it is this age. If ever there was a time when we needed the old original stamp of Methodists, we need them now – a people separated unto God, a people that have nothing to do but to please God, and to save souls; a people that will not in any way bow themselves to the fashions of the time.”

(Both quotes from the works of C. H. Spurgeon.)