

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Weekly Sermons preached by Pastor G. S. Marley.
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham.
- Podcasts on Various Subjects.
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Seeking God's Way in Every Good Counsel

Dear Friends,

In the 18th chapter of the book of Exodus there is a nice “human” incident that shows us that we are not simply to look for *good* ideas, but for God’s ideas, when it comes to certain courses or procedures that we are to follow in the Christian life. The incident occurs during the time that Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, comes to visit Moses after the deliverance of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. The first day of that visit is a model of how to fellowship in the works and ways of the Lord towards His people, and the whole evening closes with a sacrifice and offering being made under the very shadows of Sinai itself, and in a fellowship meal for Moses, and Jethro, and Aaron, and all the elders of Israel. It’s on the next day, however, that the incident in question takes place.

Jethro rises the next morning. No doubt, it would have been still fairly early in the morning; but, already, Moses was at his work of “judging” the various cases and problems that were constantly being brought to him. In all probability, Jethro didn’t think much of that; after all, Moses was the one whom God had appointed to lead that people and to guide that people in all ways, so he was simply doing his job. As the day wore on, however, the line of people waiting to see Moses didn’t seem to decrease any, so that by evening, Moses was still judging and still hearing the cases presented to him. Verse 13 – “And it came to pass on the morrow that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.”

Now, Jethro had been around a long time. Moses himself was no stripling, of course, and had already celebrated his 80th

birthday. But Jethro his father-in-law could still give him a few years, and by reason of that, could still have a word or two in his ear; which he did. Here is what he said – verse 14, “And when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?” Moses tells him why, in the next verse, “Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: when they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.” There then follows Jethro’s good assessment of the situation, his good advice that he offers in the light of that assessment and his good qualifying word, which lifts his words beyond the place of mere good advice and good procedure.

This is how he assesses the situation; “The thing that thou doest,” he tells Moses, “is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to bear it thyself alone.” Classical statement; “Thou shalt surely *wear away*.” Moses had taken in hand to do absolutely everything within that nation of Israel, and the simple fact was that no one man could cope with all that growing concern, and its growing concerns. It was just beyond him, and Jethro saw that, and realised that if Moses did not take on some others to help him in the work, then he was bound to break, or bow down once too often in the work and never rise up again. So, he gives him his advice, and his words of counsel. They come in verse 19 and following “Hearken now unto my voice, and I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee; Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover, thou shalt provide

out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge so, shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.”

So runs Jethro’s advice, and what it is, of course, is one of those great foreshadowing’s of the Word of God of that “body” concept of the Church that would come into its fulness in the New Testament scriptures. There are “many members,” Jethro is telling Moses, and “all members have not the same office.” If he continues to endeavour to be a one-man body, then he will soon find that he will “wear out” and the body with him.

It’s very important to realise, of course, that in that advice that Jethro is giving to Moses he is not simply thinking about the welfare of his son-in-law, but about the welfare of that people of God of old. His first concern, in verse 18 – “Thou wilt surely wear away, ***both thou, and this people that is with thee.***” Jethro wasn’t simply concerned that Moses should be able to spend more time at home with his wife, Jethro’s daughter; although there would have been no harm in that! What Jethro was concerned about was the total good of the total people of God, whom God had now delivered to be a people to the praise of His name. So, his conclusion to the whole thing, in verse 23 of the chapter – “If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, ***and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.***” The sharing of that whole work of the Lord in the nation of Israel is for the good of the nation of Israel. Moses will have his peculiar tasks, as under the Lord, and as under his calling from the Lord; but there are to be “many

members.” It was good advice, indeed, and wholesome advice, indeed, that Jethro offered to Moses on the evening of that day when he saw him in danger of killing himself and those who were with him. It was a “good idea;” an excellent idea, that Jethro set before his son-in-law in that outline of devolved administration for the people of God. **But** it wasn’t to commend itself to Moses, or the people, on the grounds of it being a good idea, but on entirely different grounds that were to be sought out and ascertained.

Those concluding words of Jethro provide the great “rider” for all of this advice now offered to Moses; “If thou shalt do this thing,” he says, “and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.” “If thou shalt do this thing and **God command thee so.**” And with those words, Jethro tells Moses – “to look beyond that he here **commends**, to what God may be pleased to **command!**”

In other words, Jethro is simply saying to Moses, “Look, Moses, this seems like a good idea to me; I’m sure it would work out all right for you and for this people who are with you; but you better confirm it from the lips of the Lord Himself! I offer the advice sincerely; I offer the advice as sensible – but he is sure to see what the Lord says, and what the Lord has to say on the whole affair.” “If thou shalt do this thing, and **God command thee so, then. ...!**” Moses, as the Mediator of those people at that time in their life, had access to the will and to the mind of God for that people. It is to the will and mind of God that Jethro directs Moses to go. It is, indeed a “good” idea; is it God’s “idea” as far as His people and His nation at that time is concerned? That is what will determine the implementations, or otherwise, of that course proposed.

When it comes to our courses and procedures within the churches of Christ, or in our individual believing lives, let us not rest on how *commendable* a thing is, without taking time and effort to enquire from the word of God how *commanded* a thing is. By all means, let us explore all means that would seem to promote the good of the church and the glory of the Lord's name amongst us, but let us always go further. The church, and our own lives, are not to be run on what appear to be simply *good* ways, but on *God's* ways, and those ways are revealed, by way of precept or principle, in God's Word. Jethro was telling Moses, not simply to adopt his way, but to ascertain God's will. Let us endeavour always to do the same, through God's grace granted to us.

Yours sincerely,

W. J. Seaton (February 1984)



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 107

Division. The psalmist commences by dedicating his poem to the redeemed who have been gathered from captivity, verses 1 to 3. He then likens their history to that of travellers lost in the desert, verses 4 to 9; to that of prisoners in iron bondage, verses 10 to 16; to that of sick men, verses 17 to 22; and to that of mariners tossed in a tempest, verses 23 to 32.

In the closing verses the judgment of God on the rebellious, and the mercies of God to his afflicted people are made the burden of the song, verses 33 to 42; and then the psalm closes with a sort of summing up, in verse 43, which declares that those who study

the works and ways of the Lord shall be sure to see and praise his goodness.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verses 1-7. “O give thanks unto the Lord ... Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath gathered out of the lands. They wandered in the wilderness ... they cried unto the Lord ... and he led them forth by the right way”

In these words, it is not easy to ascertain the persons immediately referred to. But this is a circumstance not to be lamented; it is even an advantage, for it leads us to a more spiritual and evangelical interpretation of the subject. For the people of God are “*redeemed*,” – redeemed from the curse of the Law, the powers of darkness, and the bondage of corruption. They are “*gathered*” – gathered by his grace out of all the diversities of the human race; “out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues.” Whatever this world is to others, they find it to be a “wilderness,” where they are often tried. But their trial urges them to prayer, and their prayer brings them relief. And being divinely *conducted*, they at length reach their destination; for this is the conclusion of the whole – and it applies to each and all of them – “He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”

William Jay

Verse 7. “... a city of habitation,” It is not a city of *inspection*. Many will “look in,” as it were, and there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth when they see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and themselves shut out. It is not a city of *visitation*. Christians shall not only enter, but abide there. They shall go out no more. The Christian is now a traveller, then he will be a resident; he is now on the road, then

he will be at home; “There remaineth a rest for the People of God.

William Jay

Verse 9. “For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the longing soul with goodness.” Martin Luther advises us to treat the verses of scripture like so many “boughs” on a fruit tree. Shake them in turn, he tells us, so that some fruit may drop down to you. If your soul really hungers, he says, the spirit of the Lord will not send you empty away; you will at last find in one, he says, and perhaps only a short vers of the Bible, such abundance of delicious fruit that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade.

Verse 21. “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” It is well said that “the reason why so little praise is given for such great mercies is because men do not see the lovingkindness of God in them; and they see not his lovingkindness in them, because they have not wisdom to observe.” It is not the possession of a library that makes a scholar, but wisdom to observe and gather the choice notions out of many books in it. And no one is short of mercies to bless God for. Divine providence is a large volume – a library in itself – written thick with mercies from one end of our life to the other. But few, alas! seem to have a heart to read in that volume; and fewer still seem to have wisdom to collect the choice passages out of it that would lead them to praise God aright.

William Gurnall

Verse 41. “Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction ...” How High? Above the reach of the curse that shall never touch him; above the power of Satan which shall never ruin him; above

the reigning influence of sin which “shall not have dominion over him;” above the possibility of being banished from God’s presence, for “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” This is the way God sets his people on high, instructing them in the mysteries of his word and giving them to partake of the joys containing therein.

Joseph Irons

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 off 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 1:25.)

God's Means of Speaking

By

Thomas V. Moore

The history of the Church is the history of God's revelations of Himself to Man. Prophecy, in some form, must co-exist with all history so that God's will may be known and performed by man. Hence we find prophecy existing in some form in every stage of the history of redemption.

There are three great divisions of this history that are obvious on its surface, in which we will find the form of God's revelation of Himself to vary with each successive stage. These divisions are the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian dispensations, or developments of the covenant of grace. Each of these is characterised by a distinct and different mode of God's manifestations.

The Patriarchal dispensation may be characterised as – ***Theophanic***; that is, God revealed Himself ***immediately***, by visible appearances, or “theophanies.” The Mosaic as – ***Theopneustic***; that is, God revealing Himself mediately, by inspired men. The Christian dispensation is characterised as – ***Theologic***; that is, God revealing Himself permanently, by inspired writings.

As the dispensations overlap and make the transition gradually from one to the other, so also do these characteristics. But the several dispensations have obviously these characteristics and hence a form of the prophetic gift peculiar to each.

(1) *The Patriarchal Dispensation was Theophanic*; that is, it was characterised by direct appearances of God (theophanies,) either in bodily form or by immediate visions.

It is a striking fact that we find no miracles wrought by men in the Patriarchal era. All the miracles are wrought by God directly, without any human intervention; and the communications made by God were made by direct utterance, usually.

The *theophanic* character of the Patriarchal period would make the prophetic gift of rarer occurrence than in the next dispensation, because God would usually speak *directly* to those whom He would address, and not use the intervention of prophetic men. Hence we do not find the name “prophet” occurring in the whole history of the Patriarchal dispensation, except in a single case (Genesis 20:7) which is only an apparent exception.

(2) *The Character of the Mosaic Dispensation was Theopneustic*: that is, a revelation of God by *inspired men*.

Here we first find God begin to draw Himself from direct communication with man, and manifest Himself through living human instrumentalities. He now works miracles, not so much by direct exertions of power as through the agency of Moses, Joshua, and other inspired men. He speaks not directly, but at the request of the people themselves, through the lips of Moses and his successors. Hence also, the majority of those prophets were not *writing* prophets, but *acting* prophets. It was not until about one-half of this dispensation had passed that the prophets began to *write* their prophecies. Even then, the prophets writing was a secondary duty, having reference, as we are expressly told in the New Testament, not to their own age, but to the age that

should follow; “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things that are now reported unto you.” (1st Peter 1:12.)

(3) *The Christian Dispensation, However is Theologic:* that is, a revelation of God by *inspired* or *divine writings*.

Hence the will of God is made known in the Christian dispensation not by direct appearances (theophanies,) nor by inspired men; but by divine writings – or the living *word*, that liveth and abideth forever. It is in *this form* that prophecy meets us now. Not the prophetic *gift*, nor the prophetic *office*, but the prophetic *word*.

This characteristic of the Christian era furnishes a complete reply to the cavil of the new Infidel school that is rising about “Bibliolatry” – worship of the Bible. The fact which they charge on the Christian world is the very charge that ought to characterise it in view of this feature of the dispensation. To leave the Word and fall back on the revelations of the Spirit, supposed to be granted to inspired men (today) would be to reproduce the essential characteristic of the *Mosaic* dispensation.

Hence this pretended “advance” in putting the Spirit above the “letter,” as they term it, or the inspired man above the inspired Word (if such man-inspiration were conceded,) would be a retrogression rather than a progression. The present form of prophetic utterance in *the inspired word* is the only one that can be really universal, and therefore the only one adapted to the final form of the covenant of grace until Christ shall come.

The Written Word of God.



Whenever we see the Word of God presenting a certain thing to us in a whole variety of ways, then we are to understand that it is a very important thing that we are being told about.

This is especially true of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and whether or not anyone has ever calculated the number of “figures” and titles, etc., by which Christ is presented to us in the Bible, I cannot say, but they must be legion. Isaac Watts, in one of his very extended hymns, makes some attempt along this way:- “Is He compared to Wine or Bread?” “Is He a Tree? The church receives.” “Is He the Head? Each member lives.” “Is He a Fire? He’ll purge my dross.” Is He a Star? He breaks my night;” and so on for eighteen verses of priceless poetry concerning Christ. But he begins his hymn with his conclusion:-

“The whole creation can afford
But some faint shadows of my Lord.”

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is so important to our never-dying souls, so the Word of God presents Him to us in every conceivable way possible, in order that we might realise the sufficiency of Christ for us in all things.

Now, the *written* Word of God is exactly the same, and this is not surprising because “these are they which testify of Him.” So, we find that the Bible itself speaks of itself in a whole variety of ways – each and every one of them calculated to meet some aspect of our spiritual life, in the course of the life we are called to live. As another hymn expresses it:-

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.”

So, the Word of God is presented to us, as a Lamp, and as a Light, and as Armour, and as a Sword, and as Meat, and as Milk – and on, and on, and on. As another verse of that hymn says:-

“In every condition – in sickness, in health,
In poverty’s vale, or abounding in wealth.”

“In every condition;” that is a tremendous expression of absolute confidence in the Word of the living God; to believe that there is not one condition, or circumstance, or occurrence that overtakes me in this life, but that the Word of God cannot supply the required tool, or ingredient, or weapon, or sustenance necessary for that event.

The old (as so far as we know, anonymous) summary of what the bible does, and performs, and so forth cannot be bettered, and we simply repeat it here for the consideration of us all. May the Lord make it rich to our souls.

The Bible reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are unchangeable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy.

It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter.

Here paradise is restored, Heaven is opened, and the gate of Hell disclosed. *Christ* is its Grand Subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labour, and condemns all who trifle with its holy contents.

Dear reader, if these things of “Jesus and His Word” be “for us” who can be “against us?”



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

Dear Boys and Girls,

Once upon a time, there was a group of little boys all playing happily in a field. In the field there was a large tree and perched on one of the branches was a little bird. One of the boys, called Barney, picked up a stone and was just about to throw the stone at the little bird, when suddenly the bird began to sing its bird song.

Guess what happened? The boy dropped the stone. One of his friends said, “Why did you not throw the stone, Barney?” “Well, it started to sing,” he said, “and I just couldn’t do it.” And

do you know, boys and girls, not one of those other boys said anything, or laughed at him, because you see, they all felt the same way. The bird's song had softened their hearts and helped them to do right.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, once said to some of his friends, "Let's sing a hymn and defy the devil." Sometimes, boys and girls, when we feel tempted to do wrong, it is good to sing a few lines of one of our favourite hymns; it is amazing how it can help us to overcome temptation. Any hymn might do, but there is one about temptation, which is a good one to sing.

It begins like this:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you,
Some other to win."

And then the chorus of the hymn goes on like this:

"Ask the Saviour to help you,
Comfort, strengthen, and keep you;
He is willing to aid you,
He will carry you through."

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

Timely Words from the Past

We recently came across two individual statements from two very individual men of the past history of the church in the world.

Both were very dissimilar in many of their views and backgrounds, but each spoke a word that it would do us all good to weigh at the present time. The first statement comes from General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army; the second is from B. B. Warfield, the great theologian of the Reformed Faith in America.

General Booth, said – “I consider the chief dangers that confront the coming century (The 20th century) will be Religion without the Holy Ghost; Christianity without Christ; forgiveness without God; and heaven without hell.”

B. B. Warfield’s words – “No one will doubt that Christians of today must state their Christian belief in terms of modern thought. Every age has a language of its own and can speak no other. Mischief comes only when, instead of stating Christian belief in terms of modern thought, an effort is made, rather, to state modern thought, in terms of Christian belief.”

Perhaps a third word, from another saint now gone to glory, Gresham Machen, might round the whole thing off: “At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of the consciousness of sin.”