

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine 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 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)

Walk in Faith - Not Sight

(The Pastor's Letter, May 1977)

Dear Friends,

One of the clearest marks of a valid Christian profession that the Bible sets before us is that the person who makes that profession "walks by faith and not by sight." "The justified shall live by faith," says Habakkuk the prophet; and that word is taken up by the apostle Paul himself, for, of course, it is the very essence of the religion of saving grace in whatever age it manifests itself. The degree to which we walk by faith and not by sight is displayed in, and displays, certain traits in our Christian profession. It displays our understanding of and adherence to the Word of Almighty God, and it is displayed in the amount of influence that this present evil world exerts over our individual and church lives in opposition to that Word of God.

Today we live in a tremendously "sight" age; perhaps that fact isn't appreciated by some. "Seeing is believing" is the almost total maxim of our present-day world. The "sights that dazzle" are indeed, "all around," and how easy it is for the churches of Christ and their members to imbibe and be influenced by the world's rules of interpreting things and not by the Bibles. During one of the times of persecution that the church passed through under the hand of the mighty Roman Empire, an old saint was asked, sneeringly, by Julian the Emperor, "And what is your Carpenter doing now?" His reply is the very epitome of the walk of faith, uninfluenced by all the worldly pomp and glory that the aspect of Imperial Rome set before him; "What is my Carpenter doing now?" he echoed, "building a coffin for Julian." The walk of faith is an absolute essential for the church and its members at any time in God's history, but the nurture of that walk of faith is especially essential during those times when it might appear that "The wicked do triumph all virtue confounding." In fact, such days as our own, perhaps.

Now, what is faith? If we are to "walk by faith and not by sight," then it stands to reason that we can only do this when we have some working knowledge of what faith is. And it would appear in our day that the very absence of a basic understanding of what faith is, is the very reason why the "walk" of a great many churches and their members is not by faith but by sight - the self-same sight by which this world walks and arrives at its estimation of things.

Very often faith is presented to us in the light of great deeds of "daring-do." Caleb and Joshua are often held up as examples of men of great faith, as indeed they were; but wherein lay their faith? And the impression in many minds is that because they were willing to go up and face the giants of Canaan and storm the gates of the cities, this was their faith, their great faith. Faith makes men "strong" you see; makes them carry out great exploits that all this world can see and appreciate and applaud. But the very opposite is the case, for the world has no appreciation whatsoever of true faith, when it comes to the crunch. What designated Caleb and Joshua as faithful at that point was that they were *believing what God had said*. As far as exploits were concerned, the others might have wanted to go up and fight the giants, etc., and Caleb and Joshua might not have wanted to go, and they could still have been exercising faith. How? You say; if God had told them not to go. The fact that believing God involved fighting with giants is not the issue at hand, but simply believing Go, whatever the issue involved. So, our dear old brother Paul is at the very heights of faith when he is being "let down over the wall in a basket" from the city of Damascus, or removing himself from the malice of the Jews in Jerusalem as the Lord directs him - "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem." It was not a very comely sight, of course; but "sight" was not the question on hand, but faith. And faith, my friends, is *Believing God's word*, and doing God's word, even when the believing and the doing of it sets us up as spectacles of abuse in the estimations of this worlds thinking.

So to walk by faith is to conduct our lives and the lives and the workings of our churches in accordance with the Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." And as it is impossible to please God without faith, so it is impossible to exercise faith outwith the precepts and the directives of God's word. And herein lies the awful situation of our day: what we see by carnal sight has become the interpreter of God's word to us, instead of God's word absolutely interpreting what we see by carnal sight. In other words, whatever has a good "sight" rating, this cannot be wrong, and the word of God is adapted accordingly. But the more we conduct ourselves like that, the less we are walking by faith, and the more we are walking by sight - as the world which we are aping walks.

There are two poles between which we should determine our walk of faith: - (1) Whatever "appears" to be happening for our good, or advancement - if it does not square with the Word of God, we ought to take no comfort in it as an evidence of God's smile of approval upon it. (2) On the other hand, if we substantiate our behaviour and conduct and practise on what God has clearly shown in His truth, then, we may stand unshakable, and know that God - in time or eternity - will perfect that which concerns us.

Was that not the conviction of Mr Bunyan's Valiant-for-truth when he gave his answer as to how and why he had fought with those three enemies of his faith that had set upon him? As he answered Mr Greatheart, he didn't consider that he had done anything that wasn't spiritually natural for him to do. "But here were great odds," says Greatheart, "three against one." "'Tis true," replies Valiant-for-truth, "but little or more are nothing to him that has the truth on his side."

That was Caleb's and Joshua's conviction; giants or not, God had spoken. That was Paul's conviction; willing or not to face the oppositions of the Jews, God had spoken - "Make haste and get

thee quickly out of Jerusalem.” Faith is not sight; faith is not determined by sight; sight does not determine faith. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And it is only in so far as we live under the word of God that we "walk by faith" and display that mark of a valid Christian profession - whether in our individual and private lives or in the collective life of the Church of Jesus Christ of which we are called to be part.

It would appear to many that one of the great oncoming issues for the churches of Christ in our day will be, once again, the battle for the Bible. The very veracity and validity of the Word of God is coming under increasing fire within the ranks of the modern "evangelicalism" itself. Biblical criticism is no longer the exclusive domain of the "modernist" and "liberal." Be sure of this; such a development is the logical outcome for a people that have for years been declaring their belief in the whole Bible but who have, in fact, only been waving the empty covers of that Bible and ignoring what is in-between those covers as far as their churches and lives are concerned. It was that kind of "biblical belief" (If you could call it that) that was swept away when the floods of biblical criticism burst out in the last century, and there is little reason to believe that the same kind of "biblical belief" so called in our midst today wouldn't suffer a like fate.

"Now the justified shall live by faith." Pray God that we might show ourselves to be such. We are "justified by faith" - by hearing that life-giving word of God to our perishing souls. But it is then a mark and a proof that we are of the "justified" that we continue to live by that self-same faith contained in that self-same living word of God for every step of our lives until he calls or comes.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton (May 1977)

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Once, there were two boys, and they were the best of friends. Bobby and Tom were their names, and they were in the same class in school. It was coming near sports' day, and they were both competing in the same races. Tom had been the class champion last year, and he was very sure that he would be champion again this year, too. So sure was he that when Bobby suggested that they should have some practice, Tom replied, "You can if you like: you probably need to practice, but I'm quite fit." Wasn't he sure of himself!

Well soon enough the great day of the sports arrived, and there was lined up for the start of the 100 meters flat race a line of excited boys, two of which were Bobby and Tom. "Get ready, get set – Go!" cried the starter, and off raced the boys. Tom got off to a good start. "Surely I'm going to win again," he thought to himself as he raced on; but almost in that very same moment who should pass him but Bobby, who turned out to be the winner of the race.

How angry Tom was with Bobby, but mostly with himself. He realised that he had been too confident in his own ability and so, had not bothered to practice for the race so that he would be fit.

You know, boys and girls, in the Bible the Christian life is likened to a race with a prize at the end of it. That prize is everlasting life in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. We too

should prepare for the Christian race, and two of the most important things for the Christian life are these –

1. We should “feed” on the word of God each day by reading it carefully.
2. We should spend time in prayer to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we might be able to do the things that the Bible tells us to do.

These two things especially will give us strength to run the Christian race, so that at the end we may “finish” our life with the Lord Jesus Christ. Read 1st Corinthians chapter 9 and verses 24-27., and “run well.”

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 78



This is rightly entitled an instructive psalm. It is not a mere record of important events in Israelitish history but is intended to be viewed as a parable setting forth the conduct and experience of believers in all ages. It is a singular proof of the obtuseness of mind of many professors of religion that they will object to sermons and expositions upon the historical parts of scripture as if they contained no instruction in spiritual matters. Were such persons truly enlightened by the Spirit of God, they would perceive that all scripture is profitable, and would blush at their own folly in undervaluing any portion of the inspired volume.

Spurgeon

Verse 1. "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth." Inclining the ears does not denote any ordinary kind of hearing but such as a disciple renders to the words of his master - with submission and reverence of mind, that whatever is enunciated for the purpose of instruction may be heard and properly understood and nothing be allowed to escape. He is a hearer of a different stamp, who hears carelessly, not for the purpose of learning but to criticise, to make merry, to indulge animosity, or to kill time.

Musculus

Verse 2. "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old." Analogies are not only to be imagined, but are intended by God to be traced between the story of Israel and the lives of believers. Israel was ordained to be a type, the tribes and their marchings are living allegories traced by the hand of an all wise providence. Unspiritual persons may sneer about fancies and mysticisms, but Paul spake well when he said, "which things are an allegory." And the psalmist in the present case speaks to the point when he calls his narrative "a parable." The "letter" of this psalm is precious, but the inner sense is beyond all price. Whereas the first verse called for attention, the second verse justifies that call by hinting that the outer sense conceals an inner and hidden meaning, which only the thoughtful will be able to perceive.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Verses 3-4. "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord ..." Thou must not only praise God thyself, but endeavour to transmit the memorial of his goodness to posterity. Children are their parents' heirs, and it would be unnatural for a father, before he dies, to bury up his treasure in the earth where his children could not find or enjoy it. So with the goodness of the Lord; for the mercies of God are not the least part of a good man's

treasure, nor the least of his children's inheritance: they are helps to their faith, objects for their praise, and spurs to their obedience.

William Gurnall

Verse 8. "And might not be as their fathers ..." The warning is taken from an example at home. He does not say. That they might not be as the *nations* which knew not God, but that they might not be "as their fathers." Domestic examples of vice are much more telling than foreign ones. Let us learn from this verse, that it is not safe in all things to cleave to the footsteps of our fathers.

Musculus

Verse 9. "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Why? What is the matter? So well armed, and yet so cowardly? This seems strange! But read the preceding verse, and you will cease from wondering, for they are called there, "a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." Let the armour be what it will - yea, if soldiers were in a castle whose foundations were rock and walls brass - yet, if their hearts be not right to their prince, an easy storm will drive them from the walls, and a little scare open their gate, which hath not this belt of sincerity to hold it fast.

William Gurnall

Verse 13. "He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters stand as an heap." God did not wish altogether to take the sea from the gaze of the Hebrews, but to interrupt and divide it that it might stand like a wall on either side of them: First, that the miracle might be evident; Second, that the people might have greater joy at the sight of so great a work; Third, that in their whole passage they might learn to depend upon the providence of God; Fourth, that the people might pass over the more rapidly, since they knew not how long God wished the miracle to last.

Thomas Le Blank

More Precious Notes from Moody Stuart

Dr A. Moody Stuart was the Edinburgh preacher under whose ministry Robert Murray McCheyne spent his student days.

Many lose the words they once have found. God's children often lose the help provided for them against the dark and cloudy day, by forgetting the words of the Lord once brought home with power to their souls. Sometimes, in the abounding joy of salvation, they know not all the value of the precious words sealed to them by the Spirit of Life. They fondly fancy that they can have them again in the same abundance whenever they choose, and they keep not carefully the words of power spoken to them from on high. It is good indeed not to look on things behind but on things before; otherwise the soul will feed on pastures that have been grazed before, and are no longer green or fresh. Yet the Lord will have none of His words wasted or forgotten; He remembers all that He has ever spoken to us by His Spirit; and He takes it ill if we forget His words of life and love. If it has been given us to hear, let us make sure to keep the words of our God and Saviour.

If you are a follower of Christ, your life will be full of greatness and of interest. Grace is great, and it abounds towards you; heaven is great, and it is your own sure inheritance. Great sorrow, great joy, great fear, great hope in your own heart, with great works of the Lord wrought on your behalf - all these belong to your course on earth, and yours, therefore, is not mean or common life. Yet much depends on your *pondering* the ways of the Lord with you: for the old saying holds true; that to those who are given to observation, things happen that are worth observing.

In the first reception of the great salvation through Jesus Christ, of the full forgiveness of sin, the free gift of the Spirit, and the heritage of eternal life, we are apt to conclude that all labour, conflict, and darkness are over, and that we have nothing to do for the future but to rejoice and praise. But Christ soon sends us into spiritual toil and wrestling, perhaps into spiritual darkness and difficulty. After we have had faith to eat and to distribute the Bread of Life, there follows the trial of *obedience* - whether we are willing to go at Christ's word into duty, and toil without any visible success. Many who begin well turn aside at this trial. They are willing to take the joys of salvation, but not its conflicts; they will not consent to the truth that "through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom;" and they are either make shipwreck of the faith, or at least turn out but sorry soldiers of the Cross.

Every command of Christ contains a secret promise - the promise of strength to fulfil it, and the promise of blessing when fulfilled.

"As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise." But neither Christ's extolling of His Church universal, nor His personal commendation of the saint, over hurts the child of God. The praise of man injures man. The praise of the world injures; the praise of the Church even injures. But none is injured either by seeking or obtaining the praise that cometh from God only.

Other friends will fail you, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Other friends may mistake you, but He knows His sheep. Other friends may be estranged from you, but "whom he loveth he loveth to the end."

Without providential teaching, a man is but a half-taught minister of the Word. Even if he have both grace and gift, he will yet lack one great branch of that knowledge with which the people require to be daily fed.

Let us also remember that the utmost honour man can render to God on earth is the well-kept vineyard of his own heart and life, and that the greatest benefit he can bestow on his fellow-men is to set before them the example, the warning, the attraction, the encouragement, and the holy provocation of his own vineyard well-kept. Well walled, well watched, well watered, well dug, well weeded, well planted, well pruned - a vineyard bearing through Jesus Christ by the Spirit, "much fruit" to the Great Husbandman, even the Father.

Snippets ***(Quotes from a Bygone Age)***



Samuel Rutherford:

"Alas, that so many are carried with the times! As if their conscience rolled upon oiled wheels, so that they go the way the wind bloweth them."

James Hamilton:

"The wish for a new gospel is a sufficient sign that the old one is not understood."

Richard Sibbes:

"Whatever is good for God's children, they shall have it, for all is theirs to further them to heaven. If crosses be good, they shall have them; if disgrace be good, they shall have it. All is ours to serve in our main good."

Henry Martyn:

"Men frequently admire me, and I am pleased, but I abhor the pleasure that I feel."

John Bunyan:

"The death that Christ suffered has not lost its sting."

Thomas Brooks:

"These two - grace and sin - are like two buckets in a well; when one is up the other is down. The more grace thrives in the soul; the more sin dies in it.

Thomas Adams:

They that are written in the eternal leaves of heaven shall never be wrapped in the cloudy sheets of darkness. A man may have his name written in the chronicles, yet lost; written in durable marble yet perish; written on a monument equal to a colossus, yet be ignominious; written on the hospital gates, yet go to hell; written on his own house, yet another come to possess it. All these are but writings upon the dust, or upon the water, where the characters perish as soon as they are made. They no more prove a man happy than the fool could prove Pontius Pilate a saint because his name was written in the creed. But they that are written in heaven are sure to inherit.

Isaac Thoms:

An old minister, Isaac Toms, was one day speaking to his daughter in his study; "I have heard of the contentment of Dryden the poet," he told her, "of sitting under the statue of Shakespeare; and here," he went on, "you see me sitting under a portrait of good Richard Baxter. Yet, my dear," he concluded, "the most desirable situation of all and for any of us, is to be under the shadow of the Almighty and under the protection of the great Redeemer.

The Sanctuary Clock

Few, if any, human inventions, embody so much moral character, as the time-keepers. Poets and preachers have been helped to many useful truths by this device. The prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 20) made most effective use of "the dial of Ahaz," in his solemn errand to the dying Hezekiah. What force it gave to that miracle!

The passage of time has always been a favourite theme to Christian minds. Instruments to measure it, have, of course, been favourites also. On the pulpits of our Puritan fathers it was common to see an iron frame, in which stood the primitive hour-glass. Children then knew what the primer means -

"As runs the glass
Men's life doth pass."

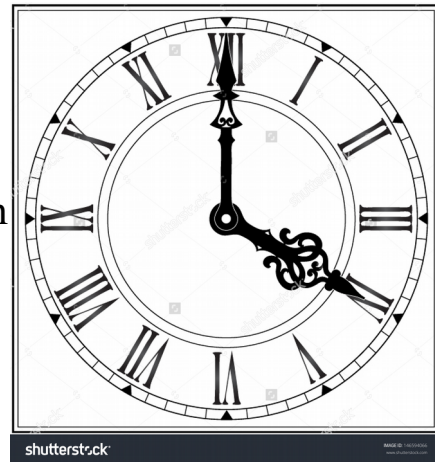


How that silent monitor of time spoke to the heart! It was a natural, forceful preacher in that solemn house where time and eternity came so near together. The falling sands were emblems of years and hours of crumbling in silent fragments into eternity.

Mechanical skill has replaced the dial and hour-glass with the more complete if less attractive, clock. But it is a fit appendage to the walls of the sanctuary also. Its iron finger, slowly but unceasingly, travels the unending circle - a meter of time - an emblem of eternity. It is an iron finger - unfeeling - almost remorseless. The young cannot cheat it, nor the old and trembling stop its ceaseless march. It ever points on: on to death, the grave, and eternity. How it preaches to dying, fading man. Each faint tick is the knell of a departed moment, bearing in its flight some soul into eternity. It is the warning concerning another moment of our lives - a dying warning - as that moment goes on to mingle with all the moments gone before in eternity. In the day of judgment, surely these measured moments will accuse those who refused to be ready for such a day. Will they not be a witness

against those "taken at unawares?" Reader, when you next hear the tick of the clock breaking your silence, think! Think what a lesson of eternity you are being given.

In one of my college years, a fellow-pupil suddenly died at a young age. On the Sabbath following his death, the Principal of the college employed the Chapel clock in the course of his sermon and spoke very forcibly to some of us. He said, "Young man, you are now strong and full of health; but I tell you, the spade that shall dig your grave may be already forged, and that clock (pointing to the one on the gallery) be counting out the moments in the last Sabbath day of your life."



He paused. It was like the stillness of the grave for a moment; but I shall never forget the tick of "that clock." It went into my soul; it seemed like the sound of the key in the door of the everlasting world. No voice or no words could have searched us out like the speech of the moments of our lives ticking away before us. Since that day, I look on the face and listen soberly to the voice of the sanctuary clock.

From the Christian Treasury (November 1845)