

Introduction

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan

A. The universal regard for *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The ongoing world-wide esteem that history has accorded John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is certainly unsurpassed by any other English work of fiction. The closest contenders in this regard would be the acclaimed writings of Thomas À Kempis, John Milton and William Shakespeare, yet no title from these authors has achieved the sustained universal popularity which the Bedford tinker's allegory continues to maintain. No doubt English poet and literary critic, Samuel Coleridge, would agree with this estimate since he wrote that:

I know of no book, the Bible excepted, as above all comparison, which I, according to my judgment and experience, could so safely recommend as teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is, in my conviction, incomparably the best *Summa Theologiae Evangelicae* [Summary of Evangelical Doctrine] ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired.¹

1. It is second only to the Bible.

As a Christian classic, with prompting from multitudes who agree with Coleridge's assessment, it has been reverently described as "the second best book in all the world." Others have similarly regarded it with deepest affection as "the poor man's Bible." If the response is offered that the Bible is incomparable, it should be considered that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is full of the Bible, as if a seamless garment carefully tailored from matching pieces of gospel truth. So contemporary Bunyan scholar, N. H. Keeble writes, "No other seventeenth-century text save the King James Bible, nothing from the pen of a writer of Bunyan's social class in any period, and no other Puritan, or, indeed, committed Christian work of any persuasion, has enjoyed such an extensive readership."² Benjamin Franklin was of the same opinion.³

2. It is superior to philosophic literature.

In Alexander Whyte's analysis of Bunyan, as revealed in his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners*, he comments:

Macaulay we know had picked up his astonishing style out of all Greek and Latin and English literature, and out of many other such sources. But John Bunyan, who beats Macaulay at English out of all sight, picked up his astonishing style out of his English Bible and out of *Foxe's Book Of Martyrs* alone. . . . But better far for you than all Plato

¹ Roger Sharrock, ed., *Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, a Casebook*, p. 53.

² N. H. Keeble, ed., *John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. ix.

³ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography Of Benjamin Franklin*, p. 53.

and all Aristotle taken together, like Mr. Spurgeon read *The Pilgrim's Progress* a hundred times.⁴

3. It is supreme in English Puritan literature.

The Pilgrim's Progress is authoritatively regarded as the preeminent popular literary product of the English puritan era, surpassing in influence the greatest poetic works of Bunyan's contemporary, though not always orthodox, fellow patriot and Puritan, John Milton. Even George Bernard Shaw admits that Bunyan was a better character artist than Shakespeare.⁵ Indeed a contemporary college course in formative English literature simply cannot ignore the avant-garde status of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, especially with regard to the genesis of the English novel, no matter how averse the lecturer may be to its doctrinal content.

4. It is universal in its renown.

For over 300 years since its first edition in 1678, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has captivated the whole world in spite of it being militantly Protestant, uncompromisingly honest, and above all thoroughly biblical.⁶ In *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, this same conclusion is reached: “[I]t is no mere poetical figure to say, as has been said, that it [The Pilgrim's Progress] follows the Bible from land to land as the singing of birds follows the dawn.”⁷ Another Cambridge scholar, George Sampson, similarly writes:

There is no need to say anything about the book by way of criticism; for its characters, its scenes and its phrases have become a common possession. Of course in every age there has been, and there always will be, the kind of superior person who disdains it. Such people are naught. *The Pilgrim's Progress* goes on forever. Creeds may change and faith may be wrecked; but the life of man is still a pilgrimage, and in its painful course he must encounter the friends and the foes, the dangers and the despairs that Bunyan's inspired simplicity has drawn so faithfully that even children know them at once for truth.⁸

Thus Bunyan's peerless Allegory has been translated into more than 200 languages⁹ and become a matchless challenge to the imagination of innumerable artists. This enduring influence still humbles proud and boastful mankind by declaring what God has wrought through the pen of an unlearned tinker unto His praise and glory (I Cor. 1:26-29).

⁴ Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters, Bunyan Himself*, pp. 7-9. Doubtless he is alluding to Bunyan's autobiographical comment: “I never went to school, to Aristotle, or Plato, but was brought up at my father's house, in a very mean condition, among a company of poor countrymen.” John Bunyan, ed. George Offor, *The Works of John Bunyan*, I, p. 495. Elsewhere they are described as “heathenish philosophers.” *Ibid.*, III, p. 716.

⁵ Sharrock, ed., *Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, a Casebook*, pp. 116-9.

⁶ For a more detailed study of this universal appeal, refer to N. H. Keeble, : “‘of him thousands daily Sing’: Bunyan and his Reputation,” *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. N. H. Keeble, pp. 241-63; David E. Smith, *John Bunyan in America*.

⁷ A. R. Ward and A. R. Walker, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, VII, p. 177.

⁸ George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, p. 375.

⁹ Christopher Hill, *John Bunyan and his England, 1628-88*, eds. Lawrence, Owens, and Sim, p. 15.

B. The necessary attitude for studying *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

While a great proportion of modern analysis of Bunyan's masterpiece falls within the spiritually parched field of secular criticism, and occasionally quite bizarre application by those who have little sympathy with evangelical truth, this commentary takes the biblical intent of *The Pilgrim's Progress* seriously, unashamedly, and sympathetically, especially with regard to its focus upon the triune God, sin and divine grace. Our concern is not chiefly with literary excellence, as obvious as that quality is, nor universal fame, as impressive as this influence continues to be, but clear, penetrating gospel truth that is graphically portrayed with heartfelt pastoral passion.

1. Understand Bunyan's enticing purpose.

Bunyan himself was primarily concerned with the indifferent godless of this world, as well as casual and nominal believers for he desired to turn their carelessness into passionate, earnest pursuit of the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Matt. 6:33). Thus, there is cunning intent here, like unto that of a fisherman:

You see the ways the fisherman doth take
To catch the fish; what engines doth he make!
Behold! How he engageth all his wits;
Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets.
Yet fish there be, that neither hook nor line,
Nor snare nor net, not engine can make thine:
They must be grop'd for, and be tickled too,
Or they will not be catch'd, whatever you do.

This book is writ in such a dialect
As may the minds of listless men affect:
It seems a novelty, and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains.¹⁰

In other words, Bunyan the Calvinist was not averse to the use of appropriate means in gospel communication. Hence "tickling" here surely alludes to his allegorical method that is defended with solid argumentation in the introductory poem. Certainly Bunyan would not countenance the use of an unholy method for the proclamation of the gospel that is so holy in character.

2. Understand Bunyan's allegorical purpose.

Thus Bunyan wants us to move way beyond the mere enticement of his picturesque literary scenario. Rather, he desires that our fascination and admiration be transformed into the most serious quest for the righteousness of God,¹¹ even after the zealous models of Christian, Faithful, and Hopeful. To accomplish this end, which must never be lost sight of, "allegory" is employed, being synonymous here for the terms "similitude,"

¹⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 85, 87.

¹¹ Roger Sharrock comments: "*The Pilgrim's Progress* still retains the sense of personal urgency: it is his [Christian's] tremendous need to find a righteousness not his own by which to be saved that we encounter in the very first paragraph, and which is the force irresistibly driving Christian along the road to his final entry into the Celestial City." John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed., Roger Sharrock, p. 11.

“metaphor,” “parable,” “figure,” “type,” “fable,” and “shadow,” employed in the introductory poems. Such a manner was somewhat novel for seventeenth century Puritanism. Hence the introductory poem also gives a spirited defense of this strategy. In raising the objections that his composition is “dark” and “feigned [fictitious],” as well as “lacking solidness,” Bunyan responds:

But the Bible is metaphorical.
 But the Bible solicits typological investigation.
 But the Bible is metaphorically solid.
 But allegory is like a garment that clothes the truth.
 But the Bible is at times dark, figurative, and also illuminating.
 But the critic has a dark side.
 But *The Pilgrim's Progress* edifies.¹²

3. Understand Bunyan's spiritual purpose.

Bunyan would be dismayed at any dramatic or visual representation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that diluted the biblical substance of his allegory, such as with regard to the pruning of discourse sections. Of course the exception here might be the appropriateness of simplified versions, though only for very young children. However, modern attempts in the theatrical and graphic media have generally failed for the reason that they have overly focused attention on visual impression at the expense of doctrinal substance. For Bunyan, his vivid allegorical medium was simply a means to an end, namely the saving embrace of gospel truth. Hence, while we can smile at many droll situations, yet we should have no desire to merely toy with “the outside of my [Bunyan's] dream,” such as do “boys and fools,” and detached literary analysts, and seekers after mere religious titillation! Rather, our earnest pursuit is “look[ing] within my [Bunyan's] veil” for substance and not mere shadows (Col. 2:16-17), for the flesh of concrete truth and not a bare skeleton or naked allegorical framework. For to linger too long musing over outward fancies and decorations is to be in danger of perishing outside the very gates of heaven, as did Ignorance. In such a case we remain encamped outside so as to admire the walls without pressing on to enter the citadel of Christ and thus appropriate its essential treasure and glory. Therefore, let us seriously, “turn up my metaphors,” as Bunyan puts it, and thirst to truly know the living God and His glorious Son, Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life (John 17:3).

So Bunyan commences with a cautionary explanation that invites us to actually partake of his daintily prepared gospel food and not merely be captivated with the attractive allegorical menu. Thus we are to travel with a view to arriving at the Holy Land, that is the reality of Heaven; we are to enter a dream, and yet not sleep since the heart of the matter concerns biblical truth.

Now reader, I have told my dream to thee [you];
 See if you can interpret it to me,
 Or to yourself, or neighbor: but take heed
 Of misinterpreting: for that, instead

¹² Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 86.

Of doing good, will but yourself abuse:
By misinterpreting, evil ensues.

Take heed also, that you be not extreme,
In playing with the outside of my dream:
Nor let my figure or similitude,
Put you into a laughter or a feud.
Leave this for boys and fools: but as for thee [you],
Do yourself the substance of my matter see.

Put by the curtains, look within my veil;
Turn up my metaphors and do not fail:
There, if you seek them, such things to find,
As will be helpful to an honest mind.

What of my dross you find there, be bold
To throw away, but yet preserve the gold.
What if my gold be wrapped up in ore?
None throws away the apple for the core:
But if you shall cast all away as vain,
I know not but 'twill make me dream again.¹³

But what exactly is this “substance” that Bunyan here recommends that we should strive to discover rather than “the outside of my dream”? In simple terms it is fourfold, as the following exposition of the text will make abundantly clear.

1. The gospel of the substitutionary righteousness of Jesus Christ.
2. The progressive sanctification of the authentic progressing pilgrim.
3. The vital importance of local church and pastoral encouragement.
4. The incentive of eventual arrival at the Celestial City.

C. The author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan.

John Bunyan (1628-1688), was a nonconformist, baptistic pastor, preacher, and prolific writer who ministered mostly in the regions of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, England during a tumultuous century encompassing monarchical tyranny, civil war, fire, plague, and intense conflict between establishment religion and zealous Puritanism. His boundless zeal and leadership in traveling throughout this area, and occasionally to London, eventually earned for him the nickname of “Bishop Bunyan.” George Offor provides us the following cameo characterization:

He appeared in countenance to be of a stern and rough temper; but in his conversation mild and affable, not given to loquacity [talkativeness] or much discourse in company, unless some urgent occasion required it; observing never to boast of himself, or his parts, but rather seem low in his own eyes, and submit himself to the judgment of others; abhorring lying and swearing, being just in all that lay in his power to his word, not seeming to revenge enemies, loving to reconcile differences, and make friendship with all; he had a sharp quick eye, accomplished with an excellent discerning of persons, being of good judgment and quick wit. As for his person, he was tall of stature, strong-boned, though not corpulent, somewhat of a

¹³ Ibid., pp. 87, 167.

ruddy face, with sparkling eyes, wearing his hair on his upper lip, after the old British fashion; his hair reddish, but in his latter days, time has sprinkled it with grey; his nose well set, but not declining or bending, and his mouth moderate large; his forehead something high, and his habit always plain and modest.¹⁴

1. John Bunyan's setting in English history.

His life-span from 1628 to 1688 embraced much religious turbulence. Under King Charles I, the ritualistic Archbishop Laud vigorously opposed the Protestants for their independent stance and Calvinism, so much so that 20,000 emigrants fled to the Puritan colonies in New England. Following civil war, for which Bunyan was drafted as a mere youth into the Parliamentary side, and after the execution by Parliament of Laud in 1645 as well as Charles I in 1649, there followed parliamentary rule from Westminster under the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. During this eleven year period of Presbyterian government and nonconformist influence, Bunyan was converted, baptized in the River Ouse, Bedford, and received into membership with the local baptistic congregation.

After the death of his first wife, who bore him four children, and his godly pastor John Gifford, he commenced preaching in 1655. The following year, as a result of disputes with Quakers, Bunyan's first publication was released titled *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, which included a commendatory preface by John Burton, Gifford's successor. However, his increasing influence was soon put to the test, for upon the accession of Charles II to the throne in 1660, following the brief failed leadership of Richard Cromwell, only a few months later Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned for his independency and field preaching. Charles' reign saw the London Plague and the Great Fire of London, but this restoration of the monarchy resulted in the suppression of Protestantism which had earlier killed a king and banished episcopal dominance. Once again, the bishops came to power, as did the *Prayer Book*, with the result that restrictive legislation came into force. The Uniformity Act required that the populace exclusively attend the Anglican Church or go to prison! The Conventicle Act declared that religious assemblies of five or more persons were only lawful within the Church of England. The Five Mile Act ordered that Protestant preachers must live at least five miles from a town. It was during this repressive reign, ending in 1688, that Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The following reign of King James II was short-lived since his zeal for uniting the Church of England with the Church of Rome led to the people revolting against this tyranny, so that he eventually fled to France in 1688, the year Bunyan preached his last sermon on John 1:13, and died in London of a fever following an errand of mercy. Then followed release and freedom for England under the reign of William and Mary. Their Toleration Act in 1689 guaranteed religious freedom for the Protestant dissenters.

2. John Bunyan's early life.

Born to Thomas and Margaret Bunyan in 1628, in Elstow south of Bedford, John received what he describes as a poor man's education: "I never went to school to

¹⁴ Ibid., I, pp. 64-65.

Aristotle or Plato, but was brought up at my father's house, in a very mean [lowly, shabby] condition, among a company of poor countrymen."¹⁵ Thus he learned from his father the trade of being a tinker, that is a mender of pots and pans, a metal worker and plumber, a user of hammer and forge. However Bunyan also learned a profane lifestyle, one tutor in this regard being Harry, "a young man in our town, to whom my heart before was knit more than to any other, but he being a most wicked creature for cursing, and swearing, and whoring."¹⁶ At the death of his mother following his sixteenth birthday, and the jolting rapid remarriage of his father, Bunyan was mustered into the Parliamentary army and confronted with the raw and mortal side of life. He describes how, "when I was a soldier, I with others, were drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it [thought to be Leicester in 1645]; but when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my room; to which, when I had consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot into the head with a musket bullet, and died."¹⁷

After a year or two of duty, Bunyan returned to tinkering in Elstow, and at the age of twenty married a godly young lady who was to have considerable influence upon him. He writes that they "came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt us both, yet this she had for her part, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* [by Arthur Debt], and *The Practice of Piety* [by Lewis Bayly], which her father had left her when he died. In these two books I should sometimes read with her, wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me; but all this while I met with no conviction."¹⁸

3. John Bunyan's conversion.

In spite of a profligate reputation, yet Bunyan confesses to the intrusion of prevenient grace that established conflict in his soul. So Bunyan recounts:

[A]s I was in the midst of a game at cat, . . . a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell? At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, leaving my cat [game piece] upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and was, as if I had, with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these and other my ungodly practices.¹⁹

In then attending the Elstow Anglican Church, Bunyan entered a four year period of intense turmoil and ambivalence in his soul. To begin with, he esteemed "the high place, priest, clerk, vestment service" with adoration and "a spirit of superstition."²⁰ Yet his love for social life, sports on Elstow Green and dancing, along with bell tolling in the Church belfry, only resulted in increasing conflict. On one occasion, when belching forth oaths like a madman, an overhearing loose and ungodly women was led

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 495.

¹⁶ Ibid., § 43, p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., § 13, p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid., § 15, p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., § 22, p. 8.

²⁰ Ibid., § 16.p. 16.

to declare Bunyan to be, “the ungodliest fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life,” and thus “[he was] able to spoil all the youth in a whole town.”²¹ Following this humiliation, John began to read his Bible. Some outward reformation did result for about a year and many were impressed. However, one day on overhearing a group of godly women earnestly conversing about the joy of their new birth and their sinful state by nature, Bunyan was deeply convicted and shaken in his heart. Their godly testimony, though unsolicited, continued to haunt and challenge him so that he began to seek the company of “these poor people,” as he describes them.²²

Now Bunyan searched his Bible as never before, even as represented by Christian earnestly reading his book in the City of Destruction. With intensifying enquiry he wrestled with countless questions that arose from his investigation, though now his interest moved from an earlier study of the Gospels to the Epistles of Paul. Did he have saving faith? Could he perform a miracle? Was he one of God’s elect? He relates in *Grace Abounding* how, at this time, a memorable dream convinced him of his lost condition and the hope of his deliverance. He was on the dark side of a valley separated by a wall, with a narrow gap, from the opposite sunny side of a mountain. By striving, Bunyan squeezed through to the comfort of the sunny side of the valley. Thus he interprets: “The mountain signified the church of the living God; the sun that shone thereon, the comfortable shining of his merciful face on them that were therein; the wall, I thought, was the Word, that did make separation between the Christians and the world; and the gap which was in this wall, I thought, was Jesus Christ, who is the way to God the Father.”²³

Breaking off friendship with a depraved acquaintance, yet he wondered if he was too late to receive mercy and grace from God. Nevertheless, he adds, “I continued for a time, all on a flame to be converted to Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Then did godly friends introduce Bunyan to John Gifford, the pastor of a baptistic Bedford meeting, who took time to give personal counsel and encouragement. Other Christians offered pity and advice, yet sensitivity to personal corruption only increased. “I was never more tender now; I durst [dare] not take a pin or a stick, though but so big as a straw, for my conscience now was sore, and would smart at every touch. . . . I found myself as on a miry bog [like the slough of despond?] that shook if I did but stir.”²⁵

Again he feared that he was a reprobate. Then blasphemous thoughts and inward uncleanness plagued him. Satan attempted to “sift him as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Scriptural comfort was but fleeting, that is, until the conversion he sought became a reality. He describes this experience as follows:

But afterwards the Lord did more fully and graciously discover himself unto me; and, indeed, did quite, not only deliver me from the guilt that, by these things, was laid upon my conscience, but also from the very filth thereof; for the temptation was removed, and I was put into my right mind again, as other Christians were. I remember that one day, as I was traveling into the country and musing on the wickedness and blasphemy of my heart, and considering the enmity that was in me to God, that Scripture came in my mind. He

²¹ Ibid., § 26, p. 9.

²² Ibid., § 37-41, pp. 10-11.

²³ Ibid., §§ 53-56, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ Ibid., § 73, p. 14.

²⁵ Ibid., § 18, pp. 15-16.

hath ‘made peace through the blood of his cross’ (Col. 1:20). By which I was made to see, both again, and again, and again, that day, that God and my soul were friends by this blood; yea, I saw that the justice of God and my sinful soul could embrace and kiss each other through this blood. This was a good day for me; I hope I shall never forget it.²⁶

Did this mean that Bunyan had reached a plateau of stability? By no means, for *Grace Abounding* indicates that a degree of instability remained for approximately two years hence. Then came a further revelation of the substitutionary, imputed, perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that did result in a more settled state.

Now Christ was my all; all my wisdom, all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption. Further, the Lord did also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God, that I was joined to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, and now was that a sweet word to me in Ephesians 5:30. By this also was my faith in him, as my righteousness, the more confirmed to me; for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person.²⁷

Only after this post-conversion experience was Bunyan received into the Bedford church as a member. Refer to Chapter 6 in this author’s separate volume entitled *The Pilgrim’s Progress, Themes And Issues*, where a more detailed explanation of Bunyan’s distinctive conversion experience is provided.

4. John Bunyan’s doctrinal distinctives.

As far as essential doctrinal convictions are concerned, Bunyan was a classic Puritan insofar as that title is more comprehensively used, an experiential Calvinist, and a zealous pastor and preacher of separatist persuasion. Though lacking even an adequate secondary education, let alone formal theological and pastoral training, yet his quest for truth was so intense that, chiefly with his English Bible, he attained a breadth and depth of biblical and theological knowledge that is impressive by any standard.²⁸

However, it should not be overlooked that, shortly following his conversion experience, Bunyan began to regularly sit under the profitable ministry of John Gifford in Bedford. Other than being a Royalist, Gifford had a conversion experience similar to that of Bunyan, especially insofar as the resulting change produced great pastoral ability. A warm relationship developed between these two, so that Bunyan comments:

This man made it much his business to deliver the people of God from all those false and unsound rests that, by nature, we are prone to take and make to our souls. He pressed us to take special heed that we took not up any truth upon trust - as from this, or that, or any other man or men - but to cry mightily to God that he would convince us of the

²⁶ Ibid., §§ 114-115, pp. 19-20. In support of the fact that this experience appears to be Bunyan’s conversion, that occasion when he passes through the gap from the dark side to the sunny side of the mountain, it should be noted that George Offer titles paragraphs 37-116, “The conversion and painful exercises of mind, previous to his joining the church at Bedford.”

²⁷ Ibid., §§ 232-3, p. 36.

²⁸ The fact of Bunyan’s lack of formal education should not lead us to conclude that he did not profit from zealous self-education, as was the case with C. H. Spurgeon. In George Offer’s edition of Bunyan’s *Works*, there are references, usually in passing, to Ainsworth, Augustine, Baxter, Bayly, Bilney, Calvin, Campian, Cranmer, Dent, Foxe, Hooper, Hus, Luther, Melancthon, Owen, Penn, Ridley, Socinianism, Tyndale.

reality thereof, and set us down therein, by his own Spirit, in the holy Word; for, said he, if you do otherwise when temptations come, if strongly, you, not having received them with evidence from heaven, will find that you want [lack] that help and strength now to resist as once you thought you had.²⁹

Also note that this significant role of Gifford, immediately following Bunyan's conversion, is paralleled by the Portrait of the Godly Pastor in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Here the priority of this first of seven scenes revealed to Christian in the house of Interpreter, is indicative of Bunyan's belief in the importance of pastoral nurture which immediately follows after conversion at the Wicket-gate.

a. As a Puritan.

Although Bunyan thoroughly identified in general with this English Protestant movement renowned for its precise biblicist faith, fervent piety, and strict moral scrupulousness, yet at the same time he could never be characterized as miserably straight-laced and a most unrelenting judge somberly dressed in black! To the contrary, such writings as *The Pilgrim's Progress* often contain what can only be described as serious wit or droll wisdom.

However, his Puritan convictions did lead him to believe that a local gathering of God's people, that is the confessing membership, ought to be, insofar as it is biblically reasonable to detect, "pure" or genuine, and not a mixed multitude of wheat and tares or believers and unbelievers such as the Church of England manifested. In Bunyan's *An Exposition On The First Ten Chapters Of Genesis*, concerning the ministry of Noah to a wicked generation while maintaining separation with God's people, he comments: "The first great quarrel therefore that God had with his church, it was for their holding unwarrantable communion with others. The church should always 'dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.' The church is 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.' Therefore the work of the church of God, is not to fall in with any sinful fellowship, or receive into their communion the ungodly world, but to shew forth the praises and virtues of him who hath called them out from among such [Anglican Church?] communicants into his marvelous light [I Pet. 2:9]."³⁰

b. As a Calvinist.

Bunyan's perspective of God was lofty with regard to holiness, grace and power, as is evident in his *A Treatise Of The Fear Of God*:

When God comes to bring a soul news of mercy and salvation, even that visit, that presence of God is fearful. When Jacob went from Beersheba towards Haran, he met with God in the way of a dream, . . . and heard him speak unto him, not threateningly; not as having his fury come up into his face; but in the most sweet and gracious manner, saluting him with the promise of goodness after promise of goodness. . . . Yet I say, when he awoke, all the grace that discovered itself in this heavenly vision to him could not keep him from dread and fear of God's majesty. 'And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and

²⁹ Ibid., §§ 117-119, p. 20.

³⁰ Ibid., II, p. 460.

I knew it not; and he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28:10-17).³¹

His assessment of man was one of spiritual impotence born of Adam's inherited (original) sin that has resulted in universal and thorough depravity, as reflected in *The Excellency Of A Broken Heart*:

Man, take him as he comes into the world, as to spirituals, as to evangelical things, in which mainly lies man's eternal felicity, and there he is as one dead, and so stupefied, and wholly in himself, as unconcerned with it. Nor can any call or admonition, that has not a heart-breaking power attending of it, bring him to a due consideration of his present state, and so unto an effectual desire to be saved.

1. Man is dead, and must be quickened. 2. Man is a fool, and must be made wise. 3. Man is proud, and must be humbled. 4. Man is self-willed, and must be broken. 5. Man is fearless, and must be made to consider. 6. Man is a false believer, and must be rectified. 7. Man is a lover of sin, and must be weaned from it. 8. Man is wild, and must be tamed. 9. Man disrelishes the things of God, and can take no savor in them, until his heart is broken.³²

Consequently he preached and taught that the repentant sinner's only hope was the initiative, offer, and application of God's particular and sovereign grace with regard to God's elect, as indicated in *Saved By Grace*.

Now this 'saving' of us arises from six causes. 1. God hath chosen us unto salvation, and therefore will not frustrate his own purposes (I Thess. 5:9). 2. God hath given us to Christ; and his gift, as well as his calling, is without repentance [on his part] (Rom. 11:29). 3. Christ hath purchased us with his blood (Rom. 5:8-9). 4. They are, by God, counted in Christ before they are converted (Eph. 1:3-4). 5. They are ordained before conversion to eternal life; yea, to be called, to be justified, to be glorified, and therefore all this must come upon them (Rom. 8:29-30). 6. For all this, he hath also appointed them their portion and measure of grace, and that before the world began; therefore, that they may partake of all these privileges, they are saved and called, preserved in Christ, and called.³³

Though earlier troubled as to whether he was of the elect or nonelect,³⁴ yet following his conversion the truth of particular election was strongly asserted. He writes not only against keeping company with "Quakers, Ranters, Freewillers,"³⁵ but also in his *Reprobation Asserted*, the authenticity of which is questioned by many modern scholars,³⁶ he positively commends the doctrine of particular election:

³¹ Ibid., I, p. 438.

³² Ibid., pp. 702-3, 709.

³³ Ibid., pp. 339, 357.

³⁴ Ibid., §§ 58-61, p. 13.

³⁵ Ibid., III, p. 383.

³⁶ Richard Greaves explains: "Bunyan's principal biographer, John Brown [first edition, 1885], argued that the book was pseudonymous. Subsequent critics have been divided on the issue: Henri Talon and G. B. Harrison [more recently Paul Helm] rejected Brown's arguments and instead affirmed Bunyan's authorship, whereas Roger Sharrock [who Greaves cautiously supports], while rejecting Brown's arguments as inconclusive, decided after a more intensive analysis that the work was, in fact, not Bunyan's," *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity*, p. 185. Refer to Chapter 9, "Sovereignty, Election, and Free Will" in this author's *The*

Now as touching the elect, they are by this decree [concerning their set destiny] confined to that limited number of persons that must amount to the complete making up the fullness of the mystical body of Christ; yes so confined by this eternal purpose, that nothing can be diminished from or added thereunto: . . . This being thus, I say, it is in the first place impossible that any of those members should miscarry, for 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?' . . . Nay further, that all may see how punctual, exact, and to a tittle this decree of election is, God hath not only as to number and quality confined the persons, but also determined and measured, and that before the world, the number of the gifts and graces that are to be bestowed on these members in general; and also what graces and gifts to be bestowed on this or that member in particular: He 'hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings - in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.'³⁷

Elsewhere in *The Work Of Jesus Christ As An Advocate*³⁸ and *A Confession Of My Faith*³⁹ this same truth is clearly taught.

c. As a pastor.

As a shepherd of souls and preacher under “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), Bunyan was equaled by few. Four years after the commencement of preaching in 1655, his reputation had become considerable. But then in 1660, as if cut off in his prime, he began that testing and infamous twelve year period of imprisonment for the cause of conscience. Yet undaunted during that period of incarceration, he preached to crowded prison gatherings, wrote over twelve books and pamphlets including *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, composed a map or chart of salvation and damnation, and meagerly supported his family by making shoe-laces.

Over the years, Bunyan developed a close friendship with the former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, Puritan scholar and pastor, Dr. John Owen. This led to his preaching annually in Owen's church in Moorfields, London, before an aristocratic congregation that included relatives of Oliver Cromwell. It is recorded that the learned Dr. Owen was once asked by King Charles II, “how a courtly man such as he could sit and listen to an illiterate tinker?” To this Owen humbly replied: “Had I the tinker's abilities, please your Majesty, I would most gladly relinquish my learning.”⁴⁰ Another close acquaintance was the goldsmith and Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Shorter; as a result Bunyan was unofficially named “his lordship's chaplain.”⁴¹

Yet like any faithful pastor, Bunyan was not without being subject to the snare of what might be called an “innocent indiscretion.” When single Agnes Beaumont, aged 21, urgently needed a ride from her brother's farmhouse to a nonconformist

Pilgrim's Progress, Themes and Issues, in which he sides with Paul Helm concerning the probability that Bunyan was indeed the author of *Reprobation Asserted*.

³⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, II, pp. 341-342.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 163-164.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 598-599.

⁴⁰ John Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 225-257.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

church meeting east of Bedford, on seeing Pastor Bunyan ride up, she pressed for a seat on the back of John's horse. After much entreaty, he reluctantly agreed. However, Agnes' father was enraged when he espied the manner of his daughter's riding away and so locked her out of his house that evening. Even so, upon agreeing not to attend any further meetings at which John ministered, she was soon received back home, though within a week Agnes' father suddenly died. As a result, opponents of Bunyan started rumors concerning a poisoning and adultery. Eventually John was fully cleared, though he must have regretted giving that ride to begin with.⁴²

With regard to church government and the ordinances, Bunyan was decidedly an independent and nonconformist, supporting congregational rather than Presbyterian or Episcopal rule. He was more baptistic than Baptist, though with qualification, he definitely aligned himself with the Anabaptist movement.⁴³ Yet he repudiates any sectarian title except that of "Christian."⁴⁴ Concerning baptism, he was immersionist upon profession of faith,⁴⁵ though according to John Brown, three of his children were sprinkled as infants according to Anglican parish registers.⁴⁶ However, Bunyan entered into considerable controversy when he taught that baptism, whatever mode might be considered, was not a requirement for local church membership. He believed that baptism was chiefly a testimony to the person being baptized. Membership solely required a good confession of faith and life. What counted most was one's baptism in and by the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, many Baptists vigorously opposed him including Paul D'Anvers and William Kiffin. However his tracts, *A Confession Of My Faith*, *A Reason Of My Practice*, and *Differences In Judgment About Water Baptism No Bar To Communion*,⁴⁷ are especially enlightening in this regard.

5. John Bunyan's imprisonment.

After the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, an increasing popular desire for a return to monarchy and episcopacy was fulfilled in 1660 when Charles II returned to England from exile. And one of the first to suffer under this revival of church-state tyranny was John Bunyan. Because in conscience he would not agree to conform to the state Church of England structure and ministry that is embodied in exclusive rule by Bishops and the order of the *Prayer Book*, he was imprisoned for twelve years in Bedford county jail with but few intermittent releases. This epic confinement commenced on the 12th of November, 1660, when at a farmhouse some 13 miles south of Bedford, in the midst of

⁴² Ibid., pp. 225-227, also Bunyan, *Works*, I, §§309-312, pp. 45-46; John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock, pp. 176-80.

⁴³ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 383.

⁴⁴ Ibid., II, pp. 648-649.

⁴⁵ Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan*, p. 143; Brown, *Bunyan*, pp. 236-8. Also consider "the bath sanctification" at the Palace Beautiful in Part Two, though Offer is doubtful as to whether this refers so water baptism, Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 189n.

⁴⁶ Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 219-25. Concerning the question of two of Bunyan's children being christened after he became a member of the Bedford congregation, refer to Joseph D. Ban, "Was John Bunyan A Baptist?" *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXX, No. 8, October, 1984.

⁴⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, II, pp. 591-647.

a small meeting, Bunyan was arrested for pastoring an unlawful assembly or “conventicle.” When asked the next day at a preliminary investigation as to his authority for preaching, he replied that it was given by the Apostle Peter when he wrote: “As every man hath received the gift, even so let him minister the same” (I Pet. 4:10).⁴⁸ Taken to Bedford jail, he awaited trial till January, 1661, before five magistrates, being indicted for, “devilishly and perniciously abstaining from coming to [an Anglican] church to hear divine service, and for being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the King.”⁴⁹ It should be noted that the auditors of Bunyan at such an “unlawful” gathering would also suffer harsh penalties. John Brown records the following representative incident of “distraining,” that is the seizing of personal goods as compensation for an imposed fine.

They passed into Peter’s Parish to the house of Mrs. Mary Tilney, widow, a gentlewoman, well descended, and of a good estate, who was fined twenty pounds; and to make her exemplary in suffering for that offence Mr. Foster himself, being attended by his Public Notary, will see the fine effectually levied upon her goods; and indeed the same was effectually done; for (a cart being provided for that purpose) they distrained and carried away all the goods in her house they thought worth their labors, as tables, cupboards, chairs, irons, feather-beds, blankets, the very hangings of the room, and sheets off her bed, insomuch that the widow was forced that night to borrow sheets of her neighbors to lie on, being not willing to lodge out of her own house, though invited by her friendly neighbors.⁵⁰

When asked concerning his ignoring of the Prayer Book, Bunyan replied that for his part he could pray very well without it. As to the unlawful meetings, he testified that if it was a sin to meet together to seek the face of God and exhort one another to follow Christ, then he would continue to be a sinner. Consequently, his initial judgment was three months in jail, and if he did not then recant, banishment from the realm would follow. If he should then return illegally, he would be hung by the neck! Several appeals followed, though perhaps none were as brave as that of Elizabeth, Bunyan’s second wife. Pleading before an angry Judge Twisdon who stated concerning her husband that, “his doctrine is the doctrine of the devil,” she courageously replied: “My Lord, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil.”⁵¹

Thus the lay preacher languished in confinement for twelve years. Some minor compensation did follow such as visits from his wife and children, the availability of books and writing materials, as well as the company of other nonconformists. But Bunyan writes that, “the parting with my wife and poor children [four] hath oft been to me in this place as the pulling the flesh from my bones, and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of those great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child [Mary], who lay nearer to my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardships I

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 52.

⁴⁹ Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 135, 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁵¹ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 61.

thought my blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.”⁵² At any time Bunyan could have been set free if only he would agree not to preach in public. Yet even the appeal of Dr. Owen was to no avail.⁵³ However, that indefatigable spirit born of true gospel liberty would not yield. So in his *Prison Meditations*, a poem of seventy stanzas, he boldly writes:

I am, indeed in prison now
 In body, but my mind
 Is free to study Christ, and how
 Unto me he is kind.
 For though men keep my outward man
 Within their locks and bars,
 Yet by the faith of Christ I can
 Mount higher than the stars.
 Their fetters cannot spirits tame,
 Nor tie up God from me;
 My faith and hope they cannot lame,
 Above them I shall be⁵⁴.

Eventually, on September 14, 1672, a pardon was issued from Westminster on account of the Declaration of Indulgence issued by King Charles II, it being a confession of the failure of twelve years of religious repression. That same year, a license was granted to John Bunyan as an independent [non-Anglican] preacher. Yet following three years of liberty, a further period of six months imprisonment ensued. However, the supreme irony of this supposed restraint upon such an insignificant human vessel, that is from a worldly perspective, is the glorious confounding of human wisdom that resulted when such a spiritual treasure as *The Pilgrim's Progress* was born of this confinement. While John Brown has argued for the writing of this peerless allegory during the added six month period, hence the first half of 1677,⁵⁵ yet Roger Sharrock seems to gather more convincing and recent proof that the period of composition was the latter part of the twelve year imprisonment.⁵⁶

6. John Bunyan's literary works.

Of approximately fifty-nine books, tracts, and manuscripts attributed to Bunyan, according to the George Offor edition, twelve were written while the author was in prison. Such became his fame that even several forgeries were given his name. The variety of his writings was quite broad and reflective of his diverse pastoral gifts. His *A Book For Boys And Girls*, is a delightful collection of poems of varying quality, intended to attractively communicate spiritual truth under the guise of natural emblems, such as an egg, a frog, a snail, a spider, or a candle. With more graphic flair is his *A Map Shewing the Order & Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, which is not unlike a much earlier chart published by William Perkins. Pastoral polemics are frequent, including *Differences In Judgment About Water Baptism No Bar To*

⁵² Ibid., I, para. 327, p. 48.

⁵³ Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 241-241.

⁵⁴ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 64.

⁵⁵ Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 239-248.

⁵⁶ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, pp. xxix-xxxv.

Communion, also *A Case Of Conscience*, in which the role of women in church life is discussed, and *Questions On The Nature And Perpetuity Of The Seventh-day Sabbath* which differs from the standards of the *Westminster Confession*.

However, most frequent is that recurring theme of the exceeding greatness of God's grace toward even the most vile sinner in terms of the gospel, as well as continuing mercies for the persevering saint. Such examples would be, *The Greatness Of The Soul; Justification By Faith In Jesus Christ; Justification By An Imputed Righteousness; Saved By Grace; The Doctrine Of The Law And Grace Unfolded; The Work Of Jesus Christ As An Advocate; Come And Welcome To Jesus Christ; Christ A Complete Savior In His Intercession; The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; and The Saint's Knowledge Of Christ's Love*. So Greaves rightly concludes in his doctrinal analysis: "Bunyan's thought as a whole was based on the doctrine of the grace of God revealed in Christ—a concept which permeated the whole of his writings and which was the focal point of his preaching and thinking."⁵⁷

Apart from Bunyan's magnum opus, three other well-known works are worthy of particular mention. *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners*, also written in prison in 1666, though prior to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, describes with great penetration the author's spiritual travail during those years preceding and following his conversion. His wrestling with a great sense of personal depravity, internal assaults by spiritual powers, and ambivalence between depths of gloom and heights of bliss, yet qualified him as a true allegorist of human nature. Whereas *Grace Abounding* is intensely individualistic and somber, by way of contrast *The Pilgrim's Progress* is universal and colorful. As Charrock states: "The good and evil presences haunting the depths of his [Bunyan's] consciousness in *Grace Abounding* put on flesh in the allegory."⁵⁸ However, this contrast notwithstanding, *Grace Abounding* is probably the greatest key to unlocking the meaning of the order of events and the distinctive experiences of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.⁵⁹ *The Holy War*, likewise a classic in its own right, is also an allegorical representation of that conflict that runs unabated between God and Satan over the possession of the human soul. Thus the town of Mansoul, with its Ear-gate, Eye-gate, Mouth-gate, Nose-gate, and Feel-gate, though initially captured by Diabolus, yet is regained by the assault of King Shaddai through the obedience and victorious campaign of his son Emmanuel. In *The Life And Death Of Mr. Badman*, Bunyan commences by indicating that this allegory was intended as a contrasting sequel to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Not surprisingly, it is doleful in nature describing the sinful career and descending pilgrimage of Mr. Badman toward the infernal realms of perdition. His wickedness is, no doubt, a reflection of the particular corruption of seventeenth century England. Its style, at times sordid, is less colorful than *The Pilgrim's Progress*, chiefly because of the prolonged dialogue, rather than changing scenes, between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive.

⁵⁷ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, p. 159.

⁵⁸ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. xxxiv.

⁵⁹ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

D. The structure and emphases of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Although John Bunyan was released from prison in 1672, having completed the greater part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at that time, Sharrock suggests that the reason for the six year delay in publishing his allegory may be the conflicting opinions of friends.⁶⁰ Whatever the case may be, with the probable encouragement of Dr. Owen, the first edition was published in 1678 by Owen's own publisher, Nathaniel Ponder, costing one shilling and sixpence. Bunyan was now 50 years of age, and during the remainder of his life, *The Pilgrim's Progress* would pass through eleven editions and reach a circulation of approximately 100,000 copies,⁶¹ a remarkable figure for those times. However, that final ten year period of his life would see some refinement and expansion of the original composition. Not until the third edition in 1679 was the composition as we know it virtually complete, that is with the addition of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman and his legalistic seduction, By-ends' long discourse, the monument to Lot's wife, Giant Despair's wife Diffidence, etc.

1. The essential concept of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Religious literature in Bunyan's century, George Offor points out, was not short of the general concept of "progress in pilgrimage," quite apart from the added component of "allegory."⁶² One significant example would be Arthur Dent's *The Plain Man's Pathway To Heaven*, this being one of two volumes which Bunyan's first wife shared with her seeking husband.⁶³ Here is dialogue on various doctrines and practical issues between Theologus a Divine, Philagathus an Honest Man, Asunetus an Ignorant Man, and Antilegon a Caviller (petty disputant). Then, of course, even during the Protestantism of Cromwell's Protectorate, the pilgrimage idea of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, however objectionable its doctrine might seem, would nevertheless have been widely known. However, in spite of this common literary form in Bunyan's day, it is proposed that the predominant source of Bunyan's concept of "progress in pilgrimage" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the Bible rather than secular models.

While this subject is dealt with in more detail in this writer's *The Pilgrim's Progress, Themes and Issues*, Chapter 4, it is sufficient here to consider the pilgrimage models of Abraham and other Old Testament patriarchs (Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16), and David (Ps. 23:2-4). There are also the frequently used pilgrimage terms of Bunyan such as "walk" (Eccles. 10:3; Isa. 40:31; 43:2; 57:1-2; Hos. 14:9), "highway" (Isa. 35:8; 49:10-11; Jer. 31:21), and "way" (Ex. 32:8; Ps. 2:12; Prov. 14:12; Jer. 31:21; Matt. 7:13-14). Then add to this Paul's exhortation to "run" (I Cor. 9:24), which verse is the basis of The Heavenly Footman.⁶⁴ Concerning this further allegorical work, Sharrock comments: "Gradually, as if Bunyan cannot help himself, the metaphor turns from a cross-country race to a long journey."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. xxx-xxxii

⁶¹ Brown, *John Bunyan*, p. 444.

⁶² Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 44-45.

⁶³ Ibid., I, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., III, pp. 381-394.

⁶⁵ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. xxxii.

2. The definitive text of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

From the time of the publication of the first edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678, until the death of John Bunyan in 1688, a total of eleven editions of Part One of the classic allegory were released. It has generally been accepted that these eleven editions represent the best textual repository from which the definitive and most accurate text might be derived. Undoubtedly this text must now be that which James B. Wharey compiled, being subsequently edited by Roger Sharrock as his successor in this work. It is now published as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Second Edition of 1960, by Oxford (Clarendon). It is an exhaustive and meticulous product that deserves careful attention. It contends, as a basic principle, that the first edition of 1678, because it has the least amount of editorial correction by the publisher, must still be regarded as the foundational text to which later modifications and additions, upon being accepted as authentic, are attached.⁶⁶ As already mentioned, not until the third edition of 1679 were all of the narrative incidents included as we know them. Subsequent editions only make minor modifications. The first edition of Part Two published in 1684 and the second edition in 1686 and 1687 are almost identical, and thus complete the basis of the Wharey and Sharrock text.

3. The two part structure of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Part One, published in 1678, describes the adventure-filled journey of Christian as he flees from the City of Destruction and determines, in the face of fearful trials and encouraging blessings, to go on pilgrimage so that he might obtain release from his burden of sin and ultimately be received as a citizen of the Celestial City. Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not published until 1684. It reverts back to Christian's family, his wife Christiana and four sons still endangered in the City of Destruction, as they awaken to their peril concerning the truth formerly spurned and thus press on as pilgrims toward the Celestial City, experiencing circumstances that are both familiar and new to the reader. Bunyan's motive in composing Part Two was not so much born of his spontaneous desire for a sequel. Rather he responded, as his introductory poem makes clear, to several spurious attempts at writing a sequel that were intended to add some improvement.

4. The primary emphases of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

In terms of general emphasis, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is saturated with the Bible, and for the obvious reason that its author himself was so full of the Word of God. Spurgeon comments: "Why, this man [Bunyan] is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows through him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God."⁶⁷

More specifically, this spectacular montage of illustrated biblical truth has a solid doctrinal foundation about it that adds substantial authority to the surface appeal of its allegorical style. The several discourse sections, frequently ignored by superficial students, reveal a depth and precision concerning essential theology that is astonishing.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. xcii-xcvi.

⁶⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, IV, p. 268.

It is for this reason that Dr. J. Gresham Machen referred to *The Pilgrim's Progress* as, "that tenderest and most theological of books."⁶⁸ Often, in these deeper discussions, a critical distinction is made between truth and error that enables us to discern between the authentic child of God and the masquerading apostate. Herein lies the timeless quality of *The Pilgrim's Progress* because, in causing us to smile at ourselves, it yet portrays the truth of God in a way that devastatingly exposes man's religious indifference, petty excuses, and preoccupation with worldly trivia. Here is the literary prophet cutting down to the decaying marrow of the souls of men; here is Bunyan declaring, with surgical penetration, eye-opening clarity, and smarting conviction, the jolting rebuke of a Nathan to countless Davids, namely, "You are the guilty and imperiled ones!" (II Sam. 12:7).

The following primary emphases indicate not only the balance of truth which Bunyan so masterfully portrays, but also the not altogether surprising fact that these same Bible truths are those which so desperately need proclaiming to this spiritually impoverished, modern generation.

- a. The foundational role of the Word of God, obtained both by means of personal study and faithful pastoral ministry, for progress in pilgrimage.⁶⁹

From the beginning of his journey, Christian is a man with "a [truthful, inerrant] book in his hand,"⁷⁰ from which he is rarely separated. When almost overcome by Apollyon, yet it is Christian's sword (Eph. 6:17), recovered through fervent prayer,⁷¹ which turns near defeat into victory (Deut. 4:8-9; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-2; 119:23-24, 97; Matt. 4:4; John 5:39; 15:3; 17:17; II Tim. 2:15; 3:15-17).

- b. The gospel of the free, substitutionary, imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ as the believer's ground of justification, sanctification, and resultant assurance.

This objective, perfect righteousness of Christ is received through faith alone in his satisfactory atonement; it is a cloak, dress, or imputed sin covering, that is, a grace garment from God that provides acceptance by God (Isa. 53:4-6; 61:10; Mic. 7:9; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:17; II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9; I Pet. 2:24).

- c. The progress or advancement of Christian in his earthly pilgrimage as the expected consequence of authentic conversion portrayed by entrance through the Wicket-gate.

While the first 10.5% of the text of Part One is concerned with Christian's unconverted state up to his entrance through the Wicket-gate, yet the remaining 89.5% focuses upon Christian's advance, while being tempted to retreat, and

⁶⁸ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ Bunyan's understanding of the inspiration of the Bible, as well his hermeneutic, equates with that of the sixteenth century Reformers and the seventeenth century Puritans. Refer to U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress And Traditions In Puritan Meditation*, pp. 25-41; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, pp. 97-105; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 51-59.

⁷⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 89. When Pliable enquires as to whether "the words of your book are certainly true?" Christian responds, "Yes, verily, for it was made by him that cannot lie (Tit. 1:2)." *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 120.

growth in grace. Hence it is an erroneous notion that *The Pilgrim's progress* is, in purpose, simply an evangelistic tract (Hos. 6:3; Eph. 4:11-13; Phil. 1:6; 3:12-14; II Tim. 4:18; II Pet. 3:18).

- d. The nature of true conversion as evidenced by a profound view of personal sin, a repudiation of human works as saving merit, and a cleaving to God's saving grace.

This divinely wrought work, according to particular revelation from heaven, which includes a necessary sense of fear, guilt, and wrath, leads to a rejection of all works righteousness for justification, a yielding to the sovereignty of grace, an embrace of the centrality of the atonement, and a resultant manifest godly transformation (Rom. 3:9-26; 5:21; 6:17-18; 7:8-13; Gal. 2:16; 6:14; Eph. 1:3-7; 2:1-10).

- e. The distinction between true faith and its counterfeit in the midst of deceptive circumstances.

In the face of beguiling confessions, seductive testimonies, and even biblical spouting from the mouth of a Talkative or Temporary, yet genuine faith, even if "little," results in notional orthodoxy giving birth to holy orthopraxy. Satan's emissaries appear as ministers of righteousness, but their fruit is bitter and poisonous (Matt. 7:15-23; II Cor. 11:14-15; Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:17-24).

- f. The perseverance of the true believer in the face of adverse circumstances, even though faith may at times be weak.

Though genuine faith may falter, yet it does not abandon hope or utterly despair; though it flicker and fade, yet it is not totally extinguished, but flames again. Though progress is at times slow, nevertheless there is advancement heavenward. Even temporary regression brings forth repentance and renewed vigor in pressing forward once again (Isa. 42:3; Mark 9:24; John 6:67-68; 8:31-32; 21:15-17; Phil. 3:13-14).

- g. The seductive and treacherous nature of this world, through which enemy territory all pilgrims are required to pass.

The allurements, stupefying proposals, and disarming assaults call for both military preparedness and constant vigilance. Those who neglect to walk circumspectly will fall into the snare of the wicked (Prov. 29:5-6; Matt. 4:1-11; II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 5:15; 6:10-17; I Tim. 6:12; I John 2:15-15).

- h. The reality of spiritual defeat and victory on pilgrimage that result from unending encounters with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Defeat, due to the neglect of watchfulness and weakness in fortification, leads to humiliation, rebuke, discipline, and newfound wisdom. Victory, due to the courage of faith using the weapons of warfare, brings joy, assurance, and sometimes misplaced confidence (Matt. 26:41; I Cor. 10:12; 15:57; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:15-16; 6:10-17; I Pet. 5:8-9).

- i. The vital role of both individual and corporate fellowship for the believer that results in edification.

The blessings of true Christian friendship, and the edification that similarly results from the life of a faithful local church, are as indispensable for the pilgrim as is an oasis for a weary traveler in a desert wilderness. Pilgrims who attempt a solo passage lose stature and run foul of the Devil (I Cor. 11:23-29; Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:23-25; I John 1:3, 7).

- j. The glory and incentive of Christ's future consummate kingdom in contrast with the alternative of destruction and judgment.

To regress is assuredly to face destruction and judgment, but the narrow, Spartan pilgrim way ahead offers frequent and stimulating glimpses of the radiant City of God, and the jubilant hope of reward and blissful citizenship in that glorious place.

- k. The subsidiary role of singing while on pilgrimage as a means of expressing both praise and soul contemplation.

The redeemed pilgrim has an inclination to sing a new song because he has been released from captivity. Authentic pilgrimage should manifest fellowship in song that reflects biblical truth and experience (Ex. 15:1-21; Deut. 31:30-32:44; Ps. 33:1-3; 96:1-6; 98:1-6; Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

E. The timeless challenge of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

"As I walked through the wilderness of this world,"⁷² so read the opening words of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. They immediately establish, not a flight into fictional fancy, but an encounter with the harsh reality of seventeenth century human life! To be sure, fashions may have changed, physical pain is more easily relieved, and our appliances today may work better. But the heart of man has not fundamentally changed; new fashions, advanced medical technology, and labor-saving electronic gadgets have not enhanced man's moral stance before God. His heart is still naturally darkened on account of sin; he is simply a more sophisticated sinner and refined rebel. This being true, then is it not reasonable to consider that this tinker's remedy, so effectual in his own life, is also our remedy today? What is needed today is not the palliative temporal relief of social engineering and psychological readjustment, but rather the inward renewal of the heart, its cleansing and enlightenment, which only the gospel of the grace of God promises (II Cor. 4:6). This is the gospel concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is God's gospel (Rom. 1:1), Paul's gospel (Gal. 1:11-12), Bunyan's gospel, the only gospel for our time.

1. *The Pilgrim's Progress* spoke to yesterday.

During the seventeenth century, John Bunyan ministered in a time when oppressive, monarchical state religion clashed with the scrupulous lifestyle and vitality of staunch,

⁷² Ibid., III, p. 89.

though at times legalistic and stodgy, evangelical puritanism. Not that Bunyan himself, who often causes us to smile, should be characterized as lacking luster. Nor, for that matter, could John Owen be described as Spartan in appearance when we are told that he wore, “for the most part, sweet powder in his hair, sets of points at his knees, boots, and lawn boot-hose tops, as the fashion then was for young men.”⁷³ However, whatever failings the Puritans evidenced at that period, yet their massive success was with regard to their passion for the authoritative priority of Scripture in all areas of life. Of course this was a legacy they had taken up from the previous Reformation century. So Bunyan addressed his age, certainly not with any congratulatory emphasis regarding whatever successes Protestantism may have gained, for he had also witnessed the demise of Presbyterian government from Westminster. Rather, with rare pastoral insight, he focused on the unchanging, albeit fallen characteristics of human nature.

Using the still surging power of the printed page, Bunyan spoke to his day with a beguiling literary cloak that quickly unveiled the superficial religion, sensuality, and materialism that surrounded him, of which he had earlier been a part. He was confronted daily with nominal and notional belief, as well as raw ungodliness, that called for honest unmasking. Further, he empathized with those genuine Christians who struggled against Satan’s subtle devices; they needed to know how to wrestle and fight rather than trust in false rests or passively capitulate. Yes, Bunyan spoke mightily and appropriately to his age. But on the other hand, could it be said that this present twentieth century still needs to hear this allegorical message? Have not times changed?

2. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* speaks to today.

Now while it is readily admitted that the outward circumstances of modern times have changed, yet we would strenuously assert that, at its root, human nature has not changed. And for this reason we believe that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* speaks appropriately to this present age. John Marshall makes this point as follows: “While then the age in which Bunyan lived was very different from our own—it was the age of Cromwell, Owen, Baxter and their fellows [Goodwin, Howe, Charnock, Manton, Poole, etc.]—yet in some ways it was very like our own. Bunyan’s later life was lived during the Restoration [of the monarchy], a time noted for its hedonism and profligacy.”⁷⁴

If any further doubt remains as to the suitability of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* for these times, then let that person browse over a selection of the names of the various characters that Bunyan casts for his literary production. Consider Mr. Worldly-wiseman, Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Two-tongues, Mr. Facing-bothways, Mr. By-ends, Mr. Money-love, Mr. Love-lust, Lady Feigning, Lord Fair-speech, Atheist, Ignorance, Talkative, Obstinate, Pliable, Giant Despair, Little-faith, Temporary, Timorous, Madam Wanton, Save-self, Formalist, Hypocrisy, Prudence, and Great-grace, etc. Are not these citizens still living with us? And are there not Christians and Faithfuls and Hopefuls with us today who encounter the same Vanity Fair and Doubting Castle? And is not the gospel Wicket-gate, which Bunyan portrayed and had himself entered, the identical entrance to peace with God and eternal life that the Bible mandates for men and women of whatever age?

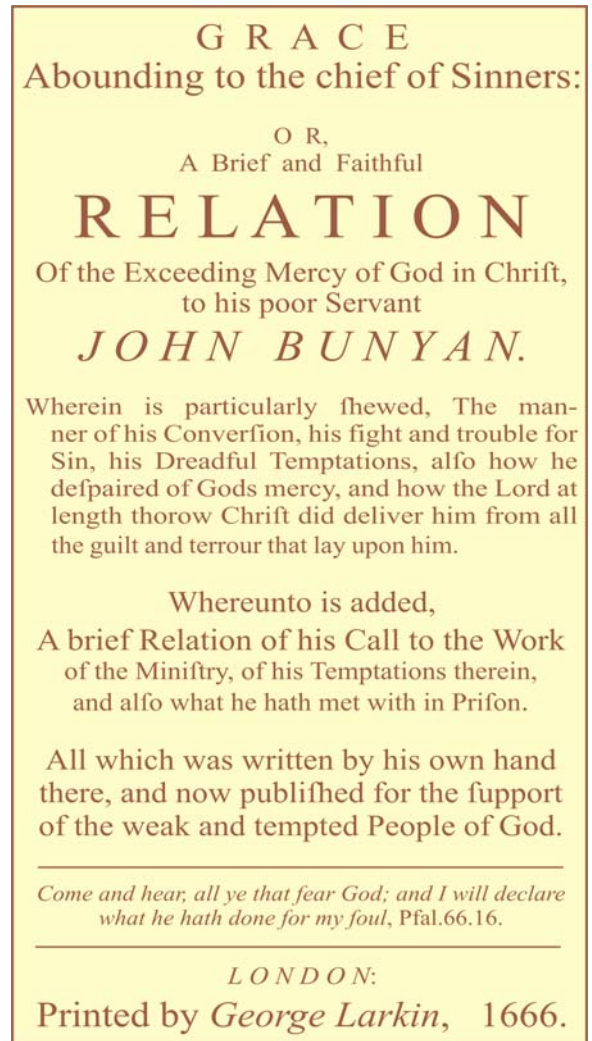
⁷³ R. Glynne Lloyd, *John Owen*, p. 88.

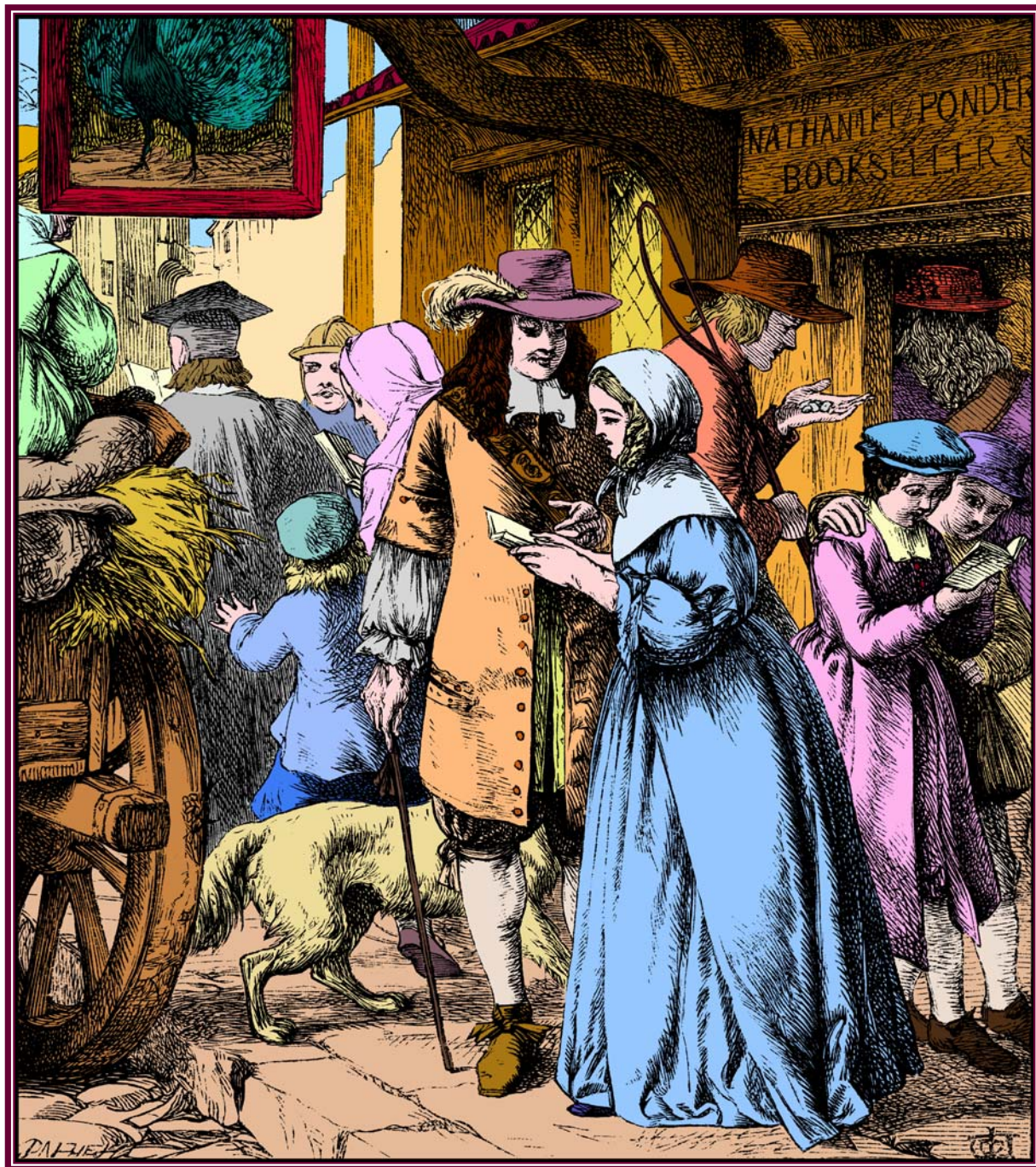
⁷⁴ John E. Marshall, *Light From John Bunyan*, p. 71

Apart from blind wishful thinking, it surely is folly to say that, in general, with regard to the key spiritual issues of our time, all is well within conservative, evangelical Christendom. Of course some will quickly charge that such pessimism, with accompanying negative criticism, is not only unwarranted, but quite counter-productive. After all, they will reply, a far more positive attitude is much more likely to challenge and stimulate rather than gloomy jeremiads! However, we would be so bold as to suggest that honest confession, or to use the more straightforward term—repentance, concerning the epidemic proportions of our present carnality, is the only way that God-pleasing and God-honoring spiritual renewal is at all possible. Certainly there are signs today of God’s authentic blessing, yet we deceive ourselves if we do not see the contrary way the overall tide is running.

Hence, we would suggest that for this dawning twenty-first century, after the Bible and the primacy of its explicit proclamation, we need to return to a serious study of “the second best book in all the world” and its faithful representation of that same Word of God. Today we have rightly been concerned about many spiritual challenges. For instance, the controversy about the full inspiration, inerrancy and truthfulness of the Bible which erupted in 1976 on account of Harold Lindsell’s timely book *The Battle for The Bible*, is a truth that ought to have been fought for at all costs. Yet while Bunyan, beyond any doubt, accepted this doctrine, he never addressed it in any detail simply because it was not a pressing seventeenth century problem. So even if there may be ground for claiming that the “Battle for the Bible” was a conflict in which the cause of God’s truth gained ground, or at least stemmed the flow of destructive biblical criticism to some degree, yet we ought to soberly reflect on the fact that, at best, we only upheld that position where Bunyan commences! What the real war is about is what the Bible means by what it says. And outside of the Bible itself, no other book can rank with *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in being such a faithful interpreter of essential doctrine, and especially the gospel of sovereign grace and the resultant life of a Christian.

Original Title Page,
First Edition





A nineteenth-century engraving by J. D. Watson depicts the popularity of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England.