

## Chapter Five

### Christian Encounters Mr. Worldly-Wiseman

#### A. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's Pedigree.

Now as Christian was walking all alone, he noticed someone else in the distance on his way across the field coming to meet him. And so it happened that they met just when their paths crossed. The name of this particular gentleman was *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman* who resided in the *Town of Carnal-Policy*, a very large community not far removed from *Christian's* former home *Town*. So this man met *Christian* and acted as if he knew of his coming beforehand; the reason was that pilgrims setting out from the *City of Destruction* were usually the subject of intense gossip that spread to many distant towns. Therefore because *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman* had some inkling of his coming, he was easily able to observe *Christian's* laborious approach, his sighs and groans and the like, and thus engage him in sympathetic conversation.

Whereas the citizens of the City of Destruction were quite irreligious, even Pliable since he was merely interested in utilitarian benefits, with Mr. Worldly-Wiseman we have the attempted amalgam of God and mammon (Matt. 6:24), of heavenly and earthly wisdom (I Cor. 1:20-21; Jas. 3:13-18).

#### 1. His identification.

It is highly probable that Bunyan has a particular member of the clergy in mind in this characterization. Sharrock gives good evidence that this person was Edward Fowler, the Anglican vicar of Northill near Bedford. His book published in 1670, *Design Of Christianity*, so offended the imprisoned Bunyan that he wrote a fervent rebuttal in forty-two days entitled *A Defence Of The Doctrine Of Justification*. Fowler was latitudinarian, that is compromising and broadminded.<sup>1</sup> He conformed to the Prayer Book and saw Christianity as simply a pathway requiring moral improvement while the atonement of Jesus Christ took a secondary place.<sup>2</sup> In modern parlance, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman would be the equivalent of a liberal pastor who scorned the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ as taught in the Bible and preached social reform based upon evolutionary advance and moral influence.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a doctrinally perceptive study of "Latitudinarianism," refer to Isabel Rivers, "Grace, Holiness, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Bunyan and Restoration Latitudinarianism," *John Bunyan, Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. N. H. Keeble, pp. 45-69.

<sup>2</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, pp. 314-15.

## 2. His location.

This pastor enjoys waylaying seekers with evangelical convictions. He delights in challenging Bible-believing pilgrims so that they might jettison their unlearned fundamentalism.

- a. He is at cross-purposes with the King's Highway, that is an antagonist of the way leading to the Celestial City, who yet poses as a learned and ministerial gentleman (II Cor. 11:14-15).
- b. He is a jovial citizen of the Town of Carnal Policy (Rom. 8:5a), and sympathetic to the government and populace of the City of Destruction, even as an intervening agent.

## 3. His occupation.

This pastor is a professional, a hireling (John 10:12-13), who no doubt trained at the same seminary as did the parson of the Town of Fairspeech, Mr. Two-tongues.<sup>3</sup>

- a. He is an eager opponent of pilgrims who have been directed by Evangelist. He has a different gospel to offer and makes this his special ministry, namely the engagement of easily identified rebel citizens and their seduction (Gal. 1:6-9).
- b. He is, in contrast with the loud and vulgar doggedness of Obstinate, a far more polished and winsome persuader. Christian senses this more refined bearing as he addresses him as "Sir," and readily warms to such a sympathetic hearing.

## B. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's probing.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Hello there, my good fellow, and where are you traveling with such a burdened manner?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, it certainly is a burdened manner, and as good a one as any poor creature ever had. As to where I am going, sir, let me tell you. I am on my way toward that distant *Wicket-gate* that is just ahead; for there, I have been told, I will gain entrance into the way that will lead to the removal of my heavy burden.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Do you have a wife and children?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but I am so weighed down with this burden that I cannot enjoy them as much as was formerly the case. In fact, it now seems as if I had no family at all.<sup>4</sup>

With sensitivity and sympathy, not confrontation, William Cowper describes him as:

The man that hails you Tom or Jack,  
And proves by thumps upon your back  
How he esteems your merit.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, III, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. 7:29.

1. He enquires about Christian's condition.

"How are you today, my good friend, and where are you going with such a bowed down manner?" Christian's response suggests desperation on account of the crushing nature of his burden; he is utterly resolved to have it lifted; nothing else matters, even deceptive advice!

2. He enquires about Christian's family.

It is really a subtle accusation, for Mr. Worldly-Wiseman agrees with rumors that have come to his ears about Christian's shameful neglect. He subtly charges: "If, as you say, nothing else matters insofar as my burden is concerned, then obviously you could not have a wife and children. Is that so?" However, in reply Christian adamantly upholds the priority of his concern for the true worship of God over the worship of his family (I Cor. 7:29). In fact he suggests that his burdened condition detracts from his fulfilling his proper role as a father.

### C. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's proposal.

His tone is that of offering discriminating advice; it has allurements and charm that in fact disguises treacherous error (II Cor. 11:3; II Pet. 2:1-3).

1. His counsel of riddance.

He commences at a point of agreement with Christian, yet a subtle addition of heresy should be noted. "I would advise thee then, that thou with all speed get thy self rid of thy burden." But Christian is inattentive, just as he was at the Slough of Despond!

- a. Be rid of your burden.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Then will you listen to me if I give you good advice?

CHRISTIAN: Certainly I will, provided it is good, for I am in great need of wise counsel.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Then I would advise you to get rid of your burden with all possible speed; for you will never have peace of mind until then: nor will you be able to enjoy the benefits of the blessing that *God* has bestowed upon you until such a time.

CHRISTIAN: What you describe is certainly what I am seeking after, namely to be rid of my burden. But I cannot get relief by myself, nor do I know of a man in our country who can lift it off from my shoulders. So for this reason I am heading in this direction, as I told you, so that I may be rid of my burden.

In striking a harmonious and sympathetic note, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman appears to have Christian's best interests at heart. So he exhorts:

---

<sup>5</sup> William Cowper, *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, p. 407.

## (1) Gain peace of mind.

This man obliquely testifies to his own supposed contentment, like many a sweet-talking modern guru peddling his esoteric mysteries. In reality, he stalks unstable souls, as if accumulating spiritual scalps for personal aggrandizement (Gal. 6:12-13). He is the quintessential religious huckster.

## (2) Gain the blessing of God.

Here is language that Christian has read about in his book, “the blessing of God,” even though this charlatan’s teaching can only reap God’s curse (Gal. 3:10). It is this ambiguity of religious terminology here that especially seems to hook Christian.

## b. Be rid of Evangelist.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Who directed you to go this way so as to be rid of your burden?

CHRISTIAN: A man who appeared to me to be a very great and honorable person; his name, as I remember it, is *Evangelist*.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: I most certainly beshrew [*condemn*] him for his advice, for there is not a more dangerous and troublesome way ahead in all the world than that into which he has directed you; and you will prove this to be so if you submit to his guidance. Indeed, you appear to have experienced some of this trouble already, for I notice dirt on you that surely comes from the *Slough of Despond*.

Yet that *Slough* is but the beginning of your sorrows, even as other pilgrims experience along the same way. Listen to me, since I am older than you! As you proceed along the way ahead, you are likely to experience wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and in a word, death, and what else? These things are certainly true since they have been confirmed by the testimonies of many pilgrims.<sup>6</sup> So why should a man so carelessly place himself in danger by paying attention to the advice of a stranger?

CHRISTIAN: Why, sir, this burden on my back is more terrible to me than all of those things that you have mentioned. No, to give careful thought, I don’t care what I meet with in the way as long as I can eventually be delivered from my burden.<sup>7</sup>

This man despises plain-speaking heralds of God’s judgment upon sin, and provision of pardon for repentant sinners. No doubt he has been inwardly smitten concerning his own personal guilt, yet he has stubbornly continued in his refusal to humble himself, and thus has increasingly calloused his heart and consequently acquired the abandonment of God.

<sup>6</sup> I Cor. 15:30-32; II Cor. 11:23-27.

<sup>7</sup> The frame of the heart of young Christians.

- (1) His advice is dangerous.

Therefore, “I beshrew [condemn] his guidance.” Furthermore, “ consider an older and wiser head who is your friend and knows much more about the narrow way than you do. Why listen to a stranger such as Evangelist? He takes the Bible literally and is quite ignorant of modern scholarship!”

- (2) His advice is soiling.

Evangelist’s way is dangerous, already evidenced by the grime that still clings to Christian. Yet further ahead are toil, pain, hunger, nakedness, the sword, lions, dragons, darkness, death, etc. (II Cor. 11:23-27). And how certainly true is this description (I Cor. II Cor. 4:7-10). But notice that Christian regards these trials as yet less troublesome than his burden. This causes Mr. Worldly-Wiseman to change the direction of his attack.

- c. Be rid of the Bible.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: How then did you come by your burden in the first place?

CHRISTIAN: By reading this book in my hand.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: I thought so. It has happened to you in the same way that other weak men, in meddling with things that are too high for them,<sup>8</sup> have suddenly fallen into the same bewilderment that you presently suffer. Now this confusion not only humiliates men, even as I observe that you have suffered, but it also causes them to pursue desperate causes, and so seek that which they know little about.

As a modernist/liberal, this man is both shrewd and perceptive. He has observed other cowering pilgrims, all with a morbid sense of their own esteem, and they are all private students of the Bible. Hence, such a fundamentalist approach to Christian’s book, as encouraged by Evangelist, is clearly dangerous. Therefore, unlearned delving in the Bible must be discouraged. It causes burdens to arise. Hence, no Bible, no burden!

- (1) It is not for the weak and unlearned.

They who proudly claim they understand the Bible while being untaught, are “meddling with things too high for them” (Ps. 131:1). When on trial before a Mr. Justice Foster at the commencement of his prolonged imprisonment, Bunyan was accused of taking the Bible literally, like the Catholics, and being ignorant of the original Greek.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Worldly-Wiseman does not like that men should be serious in reading the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 53.

- (2) It is for the scholarly and approved.

As modernism would have the layman bow before the “assured results of higher criticism” as well as the tyranny of ecclesiastical pronouncements, so Mr. Worldly-Wiseman exhorts Christian not to be so presumptuous concerning his own amateur study of the Bible; he may end up promoting fanaticism based upon ignorance. In spite of this put-down, Christian sharply retort that nevertheless, he is committed to the obtaining of release from his burden! Again, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman changes the direction of his attack.

2. His counsel of redirection.

Christian's mere mention of his desire for “ease” from his burden immediately suggests a new and ultimately successful approach for Mr. Worldly-Wiseman.

- a. It is a way of comfort.

CHRISTIAN: Well, I know what I want to obtain, and that is relief from my heavy burden

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: But why do you seek for ease with regard to your present way seeing that it involves so many dangers? If you had but patience enough to listen to me, I would advise you how to obtain what you desire, only without the perils that you are certain to encounter if you follow the way ahead. Yes, and further, the remedy I would suggest is close at hand. Besides, I will offer yet more, for instead of dangers you will meet with much safety, friendship, and content.

Mr. Worldly-Wiseman is a consummate salesman since he claims to offer the same product at a cheaper price. He can arrange for the release of Christian's burden without the attending trials incorporated in the narrow way.

- (1) This blessing and prosperity gospel is void of unhappiness and full of “safety, friendship, and content.” If Pliable had come further, how he would have drooled at such a prospect.
- (2) Thus Christian is effectively enticed and asks for new directions. If only he had sought advice from his book (I Cor. 3: 18-20). But he has been temporarily numbed to such an idea. Like countless seekers today, Christian is distracted and detoured by another gospel, which is not another, whose messengers are accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

- b. It is a way to the Village of Morality.

CHRISTIAN: Pray sir, do explain to me this secret.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Why a short distance away is the *Village Morality*, in which there lives a gentleman whose name is *Legality*.<sup>10</sup> Now he is a very judicious man of the highest reputation, and as such he is well able to assist men with the removal of burdens from their shoulders such as you have. In fact to my knowledge he has been a great help to many pilgrims in this regard. Yes, and besides this, he is most skillful in curing those who are plagued with anxiety concerning their burdens. To him you should go right now for immediate help. His house is less than a mile from here, and if perhaps you should not find him at home, then he has a very pleasant son named *Civility* who is able to give the same assistance as his father.

As I have said, there you can be relieved of your burden, and should you then prefer not to return home, as I would indeed recommend, you can then send for your wife and children to come to this *Village*. There you will also find suitable empty houses available that are reasonably priced. Living standards and food, while being inexpensive, are of a very high quality. Added to this enjoyable environment would be the company of honest neighbors who maintain financial security and an attractive lifestyle.

“Why a short distance away is the *Village Morality*, . . .” envisages Mr. Worldly-Wiseman pointing in a specific and alternative direction. Here then is the offered ethic of this “other” gospel, though the enabling dynamic is conspicuous by its absence. In fact, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman assumes human ability insofar as reaching “Morality” is concerned. Biblical Christianity intends that sinners attain unto biblical morality. But the dynamic means is redeeming grace through faith in Christ Jesus rather than human righteousness and the works of the law (Eph. 2:8-10).

- (1) There the citizens are noble.

Both *Legality* and his son *Civility* are men of high repute within a well-behaved, orderly, and satellite community that is part of the larger metropolitan Carnal-Policy complex. The appearance of this society is that of respectability, politeness, and good order. Here lawlessness is not tolerated, while neighborliness is applauded. The inhabitants are mostly regular church-going folk.

- (2) There the burdens of pilgrims are lifted.

Oh really? But Christian has been so seduced that he does not think to ask about details concerning this new gospel. He has been temporarily blinded (II

<sup>10</sup> Here Mr. Worldly-Wiseman prefers Morality before the Straight Gate.

Cor. 4:4). There is no burden-lifting power there at all, even by means of “skill to help”!

- (a) Kelman comments about the reality of this situation: “The chances are that those who dwell in this village, and make friends of these men, will end by giving hush-money to conscience, and adopting as their moral code the one great commandment, Thou shalt not be found out.”<sup>11</sup>
  - (b) This supposed burden-lifting is in fact burden-squashing through the avoidance of any confrontation with the righteousness of God. In addition, there is the provision of burden-suppressants including tailor-made excuses, psychological guilt explanations, and the frequent reminder of compensating personal merit.
- (3) There the conditions are congenial.

The standard of living is high, the cost of living is low, and family values are extolled. A fine house stands empty and ready for occupation by Christian and his wife and children at a most reasonable rent. The neighbors are financially stable and fashionable. Yet Christian, being too enamoured with such a delightful sales pitch, is blinded to a consideration of the truth of the Word of God (Prov. 14:12).

- (a) So the house of Legality is said to be under a mile away. But Kelman rightly suggests: “He who sets out in earnest to reach Morality finds himself facing the most elastic mile in all the world.”<sup>12</sup>
- (b) It is the natural desire of men, whether they be born of the large town of Carnal-Policy where Mr. Worldly-Wiseman lives or the smaller village of Morality, to prefer an earthly world-view conceived by the desire of the flesh rather than a heavenly righteous kingdom established by the Redeemer of sinners. Man’s carnal inclination is to justify himself by the works of the flesh. God’s gracious purpose is to justify men by the merits of His Son, Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:11; Eph. 2:3-9).

Mr. Worldly-Wiseman



<sup>11</sup> John Kelman, *The Road*, I, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

#### D. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's pointing.

Now *Christian* was somewhat of two minds concerning what he should do. But he soon concluded that if what this congenial gentleman said was true, then his wisest course would be for him to take his advice.<sup>13</sup> So with this in mind, he further spoke with *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman*.

CHRISTIAN: Sir, which way is it that I should take to this honest man's house?

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Do you see a high hill<sup>14</sup> that is just ahead of you?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, very clearly.

WORLDLY-WISEMAN: Then you must go beyond that *Hill*, and the first house you will come to is that of *Mr. Legality*.

Christian ponders the crucial choice before him. However, his query, "If this be true," is not answered by searching God's book of truth, or for that matter by reconsidering the integrity of Evangelist. For this reason he capitulates to a strong and persuasive personality. He asks for direction from a blind guide (Luke 6:39). Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's response, "Do you see yonder high hill?" is an invitation to fulfill the requirements of the law (Gal. 5:3).

1. He deceives Christian with his veneer of righteousness.

This pilgrim's conclusion is that, according to appearances, congenial deportment, obvious sincerity, and personal interest, this man is truthful while, by implication, Evangelist is a deceiver (II Cor. 11:14-15). This reflection of Christian's naivety indicates how needful he is of further instruction from Evangelist, who, it would seem, is not so far away.

2. He directs Christian beyond a high hill.

With artful deception, this poor pilgrim is led to believe that passing over such a mountain is easily attainable. Little does he realize that this "high hill" is in fact as lofty as the perfect righteousness of God. Can he, with such a burden, really climb to that height?

3. Application.

When the military seeks recruits, it offers the world while purposely neglecting to tell of the rigors of training and combat. In a similar way, pseudo ministers of Jesus Christ market their false gospels offering a great variety of tasty religious delights. However, they fail to advise that, when swallowed, the temporal sweetness turns bitter. For at best these carnal improvements are transient; then follows sourness of the soul on account of unfulfilled promises, fearful bondage, and depression born of delusion.

<sup>13</sup> Christian snared by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's word.

<sup>14</sup> Mount Sinai.