

Chapter Seven

Christian Arrives at the Wicket-gate

A. He Seeks Entrance by Invitation.

So after a while *Christian* arrived at the *Wicket-gate*. Now over the gate there was written, *Knock and it shall be opened unto you.*¹ Therefore he knocked more than once or twice while saying:

May I now enter here? Will he within
Open to sorry me, though I have bin [*been*]
An undeserving rebel? Then shall I
Not fail to sing his lasting praise on high.

So *Christian* arrives at the “strait [narrow, small or wicket] gate” (Matt. 7:13-14). *Bunyan’s* earlier prison writing *The Strait Gate*, published two years prior to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (p. 19), is subtitled, “Or, great difficulty of going to heaven: plainly proving, by the Scriptures, that not only the rude and profane, but many great professors [confessing believers], will come short of that kingdom.”²

1. The gate inscription gives instruction.

“Knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7-8) presupposes the persistence of “asking” and “seeking” as well. In *The Strait Gate*, *Bunyan* explains that “this word ‘strive’ is expressed by several other terms; as (1) It is expressed by that word, ‘so run that ye may obtain’ (I Cor. 9:24-25). (2) It is expressed by that word, ‘Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life’ (I Tim. 6:12). (3) It is expressed by that word, ‘Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life’ (John 6:27). (4) It is expressed by that word, ‘We wrestle - with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world’ (Eph. 6:12). Therefore, when he saith, Strive, it is as much as to say, Run for heaven, Fight for heaven, Labor for heaven, Wrestle for heaven, or you are like to go without it.”³

2. The pilgrim repeatedly knocks.

With trembling passion, and doubts still harbored concerning his acceptance at this point on account of recent carnal unbelief, *Christian* call to the gatekeeper:

¹ Matt. 7:7-8.

² Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 362.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 368-369.

May I now enter here? will he within
 Open to sorry me, though I have bin
 An undeserving Rebel? then shall I,
 Not fail to Sing his lasting praise on high.

3. Application.

Christian is now at the very threshold of being a Christian in truth. In a booklet written by C. H. Spurgeon entitled *Around Gate The Wicket*, he urges those who, for various reasons, might delay entering “One would think that they would hasten to enter, for a free and open invitation is placed over the entrance, the porter waits to welcome them, and there is but this one way to eternal life. He that is most loaded seems most likely to pass in and begin this heavenward journey; but what ails the other men? . . . Therefore am I in terrible earnest to get my hesitating friends over the threshold.”⁴

B. He seeks entrance by *Good Will*.

At last their came to the *Gate* a grave [*dignified*] person named *Good-will*, who asked, “Who is there? From where have you come? What is your purpose in knocking?”

CHRISTIAN: Here is a poor burdened sinner who comes from the *City of Destruction*. But more importantly, I am going to *Mount Zion [the Celestial City]*,⁵ so that I may be delivered from the wrath to come. Therefore sir, since I have been informed that the way to my destination is through this *Gate*, I would like to know if you are willing to let me enter.

GOOD-WILL: I am willing with all my heart.⁶ (And at that he immediately opened the *Gate*.)

Now as *Christian* was stepping through the *Gate*, he was quite surprised when suddenly, *Good-will* pulled him through.⁷ In seeking an explanation for this forceful manner, *Christian* was told, “Just a little distance outside this *Gate*, a strong castle has been built and its captain is named *Beelzebub*.⁸ From there, both he and his army shoot arrows at those who seek entrance at the *Gate*, endeavoring to slay pilgrims before they pass through.”⁹ Then said *Christian*, “I rejoice and tremble.”¹⁰

Having striven thus far, yet *Christian* continues to persist by means of pounding on the Wicket-gate so that he might, at any cost, gain entrance. He “strives to enter” lest, as with

⁴ Spurgeon, *Around The Wicket Gate*, pp. 9-10.

⁵ I Chron. 11:4-9; Ps. 2:6; 48:1-2; Heb. 12:22-24.

⁶ The Gate will be opened to broken-hearted sinners. *Ps. 51:17*.

⁷ Jer. 31:3; John 6:44.

⁸ Matt. 12:24-27.

⁹ Satan envies those who enter the narrow Gate.

¹⁰ Ps. 2:11.

some enquirers, acceptance be denied (Luke 13:24). Whyte adds: "With all his goodwill the grave gatekeeper could not say that the way to the Celestial City was other than narrow, stringent, and a heart-searching way. . . . Our Lord in as many words tells us all that. Strive, He says, strive every day. For many shall seek to enter into the way of salvation, but because they do not early enough, and long enough, and painfully enough strive, they come short, and are shut out."¹¹

1. Christian is investigated.

The brief investigation by *Good Will*, namely "Who are you? Where have you come from? and why are you seeking entrance?", suggests that only those who are rightly qualified may enter.

a. He is addressed by grave *Good Will*.

- (1) Who is this gatekeeper? None other than *Jesus Christ* portrayed here by *Bunyan* in one of several contrasting roles. In Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, when *Christiana* and the four sons along with *Mercy* are instructed by *Great-heart* at the house of the Interpreter, they are told: "The pardon that you and *Mercie* and these boys have attained, was obtained by another, to wit, by him that let you in at the *Gate*: And he hath obtained it in this double way. He has performed Righteousness to cover you, and spilt blood to wash you in."¹²
- (2) However, the appearance of *Good Will* is sober and grave. Why is this so? *Whyte* explains: "The gravity of the gatekeeper was the first thing that struck the pilgrim. And it was the same thing that so struck some of the men who saw most of our *Lord* that they handed down to their children the true tradition that He was often seen in tears, but that no one had ever seen or heard Him laugh. . . . To be a man without sin, a man hating sin, and hating nothing else but sin, and yet to have to spend all His days in a world lying in sin, and in the end to have all that world of sin laid upon Him till He was Himself made sin, - how sad a task was that! Great, no doubt, as was the joy that was set before our *Lord*, and sure as He was of one day entering on that joy, yet the daily sight of so much sin in all men around Him, and the cross and the shame that lay right before Him, made Him, in spite of the future joy, all the Man of Sorrow Isaiah had said He would be, and made light-mindedness and laughter impossible to our *Lord*, - as it is, indeed, to all men among themselves who have anything of His mind about this present world and the sin of this world, they also are men of sorrow, and of His sorrow."¹³

¹¹ Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, p. 70.

¹² John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. 209.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 64-65.

- b. He confesses to be a poor burdened sinner.

This declaration qualifies rather than disqualifies *Christian* (Rom. 4:5). Though limited in spiritual understanding, yet through spiritual conviction (John 16:7-11) he knows who he is, namely a wrath-deserving sinner, and where he desires to go, that is *Mt. Zion*, the heavenly *Jerusalem* (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1).

- c. He seeks deliverance from coming wrath.

This pilgrim differs from many modern counterparts who respond to religious appeals so that they might obtain improvements in their self-image, more harmonious human relationships, and relief from discomfort. But *Christian* has learned of the wrath of *God* in his book and from *Evangelist* (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 5:9; I Thess. 1:10). His fundamental concern is with regard to his status with *God* and not mankind in general.

- d. He desires entrance to the way of life.

However, the final determinant in admittance is the will of the gatekeeper, and *Christian* readily acknowledges this truth (John 1: 12-13). But given this willingness on *Good-will's* part, this point of authentic conversion, secure though it certainly is, is but the commencement of the way of life that leads to *Mt. Zion*. In *The Strait Gate*, *Bunyan* comments: "Salvation to the full is to be enjoyed only there in the heavenly Jerusalem], and . . . there only is eternal safety; all other places and conditions are hazardous, dangerous, full of snares, imperfections, temptations, and afflictions."¹⁴

2. Christian is snatched through the gate.

The ready willingness of *Good Will* to open the *Wicket-gate* is but a reflection of *Jesus Christ's* eagerness to welcome burdened sinners to his bosom (Luke 15:20). In his *Come And Welcome To Jesus Christ*, *Bunyan* writes: "Coming sinner, I have now a word for thee; be of good comfort, 'He will in no wise cast out.' Of all men, thou art the blessed of the *Lord*; the *Father* hath prepared his *Son* to be a sacrifice for thee, and Jesus Christ, thy Lord, is gone to prepare a place for thee (I John 1:29; Heb 10). . . Coming sinner, the Jesus to whom thou art coming is lowly in heart, he despiseth not any. . . . He will bow his ear to thy stammering prayers, he will pick out the meaning of thy inexpressible groans; he will respect thy weakest offering, if there be in it but thy heart (I Cor. 1:24; Rom. 8:28; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 4; Ps. 19:3; 27:5-6; Job 9:4; John 17:2; Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:28; Jas. 2:19)."¹⁵

¹⁴ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 365).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

- a. *Good Will* delivers from the enemy.

As *Christian* moves to cross this threshold which divides two worlds, he is suddenly hauled across by means of the clutching hand of a concerned gatekeeper. This dramatic illustration of sovereign initiative not only portrays a pilgrim being effectually drawn with strong cords of mercy (Jer. 31:3; John 6:44), but also the militant rescue of *Jesus Christ* in the face of anticipated intervention.

- b. *Good Will* describes the enemy.

Close by is an enemy castle directed by *Captain Beelzebub* (Matt. 12:24-27), the prince of devils, who, with his hosts, assails pilgrims so that they might be rendered incapable of entering the *Wicket-gate*. This artillery of “flaming missiles” (Eph. 6:16), especially discouraging suggestions, includes many weapons that are tailored to suit a pilgrim’s particular weaknesses. Spurgeon describes some of the debilitating “fiery arrows” as follows:¹⁶

- (1) The suggestion of the vileness of our sins; that they are too many, too frequent, and too hideous to be forgiven.
- (2) The suggestion that it is too late to be saved; the day of grace is past since many gospel invitations have been refused.
- (3) The suggestion that the *Holy Spirit* has been too resolutely resisted following earlier religious involvement.
- (4) The suggestion that a pilgrim is not one of *God's* elect; therefore his entrance is impossible
- (5) The suggestion that the unpardonable sin has been committed, and that a pilgrim has now been abandoned by *God*.
- (6) The suggestion that to trust in *Jesus Christ* is presumptuous; he is too great and pilgrims are too insignificant.
- (7) The suggestion that suicide presents the best way of escape from sin, guilt, and despair.

3. *Christian* is converted.

Concerning the problem of *Christian's* conversion here and the relationship of this event to *Christian's* subsequent experience at the *Place of Deliverance*, refer to a detailed explanation of this seeming paradox in Chapter 6 of *Themes and Issues*.

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Pictures From Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 67-76.

- a. A problem resolved.

That *Christian's* passing through the *Wicket-gate* portrays his conversion is beyond question when *Bunyan's* writings as a whole are considered. Certainly this pilgrim's burden continues to remain with him beyond this point, that is until further ahead when he reaches the *Place of Deliverance*. However, the key to resolving this problem concerns the understanding of the fact that the conversion of *Christian* here is a representation of the conversion of *Bunyan*. A detailed study of *Grace Abounding* will amply prove this proposition. In *The Strait Gate*, *Bunyan* further comments at this point: "The straitness of this gate is not to be understood carnally, but mystically. You are not to understand it, as if the entrance into heaven was some little pinching wicket; . . . This gate is wide enough for all them that are truly gracious and sincere lovers of *Jesus Christ*, but so strait, as that not one of the other can by any means enter in,"¹⁷ In other words, the *Wicket-gate* is *Jesus Christ*, the door (John 10:7, 9), the only way (John 14:6), while as we have already seen, *Good Will* himself also represents *Jesus Christ*.

- b. A pilgrim renewed.

This convert does not have an extensive understanding of the doctrine of *Christ* or the atonement or the gospel. But he does confess the misery of his burden, and he does hear and respond to the invitation of *Good Will* to enter the *Wicket-gate*, that is, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37, cf. Matt. 7:13). Hence, upon entry *Christian* "rejoices and trembles" (Ps. 2:11), for he has passed from death unto life (John 5:24).

C. He finds fellowship in the narrow way.

The ground of Christian fellowship is with "the *Father*, and with His Son *Jesus Christ*" (I John 1:3). So this newly converted pilgrim first has fellowship with *Good Will*, that is *Jesus Christ*, the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:11).

1. *Good Will* gives encouragement.

So when the pilgrim was fully inside, *Good-will* asked him, "Who directed you to come this way?"

CHRISTIAN: *Evangelist* exhorted me to come this way and knock at the *Gate*, just as I did. He further told me that you, sir, would tell me what I must do next.

GOOD-WILL: An open door is set before you, and no man can shut it.¹⁸

CHRISTIAN: Now I begin to reap the benefits of my hazards.

GOOD-WILL: But how is it that you have come alone?

CHRISTIAN: Because none of my neighbors saw their danger as I saw mine.

¹⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 366.

¹⁸ Rev. 3:8.

His opening declaration presents both comforting sovereign assurance concerning the security of the way, and an exhortation to fulfill personal responsibility by means of pressing forward along the way.

- a. The way is open before him.

An open way has been set before *Christian* (Rev. 3:8), that is free access to the secured narrow way ahead with the guarantee that it cannot be closed by human assaults.

- b. The way provides its first benefits.

Christian now experiences initial delight in the assurance of sovereign protection born of his conversion. This confidence will grow substantially, yet he can presently sing with *Augustus Toplady*:

A sovereign protector I have,
Unseen, yet for ever at hand,
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.
He smiles and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend;
And walls of salvation surround
The soul He delights to defend.

2. *Christian* reviews his pilgrimage thus far.

This account in retrospect, unlike the others with *Evangelist*, *Obstinate* and *Pliable*, and *Mr. Worldly-wiseman*, has a new gospel orientation. He is especially enamored with the mercy of *Evangelist*, as well as the gracious favor of *Good Will*, or “my *Lord*,” who has granted him entrance into the way of life.

- a. Concerning family discouragement.

GOOD-WILL: Did any of them know of your coming?
CHRISTIAN: Yes, my wife and children were the first to notice my departure, and they called out for me to return home.

His wife and children had not only refused to flee from the *City of Destruction*, but sadly they had made vociferous entreaties to dissuade *Christian* from going on pilgrimage. Indeed, on account of their persuasive appeal to his flesh, He found it necessary to plug his ears so that he might focus on the way ahead.

b. Concerning neighborly discouragement.

Also some of my neighbors cried out as a group for me to come back. But I put my fingers in my ears and continued on my way.

GOOD-WILL: But did none of them follow you to persuade you to go back?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, both *Obstinate* and *Pliable*. But when they realized that their arguments had not been successful, *Obstinate* turned back in a rage, though *Pliable* did come with me for a short while.

GOOD-WILL: But why did he not persevere even to this place?

CHRISTIAN: Quite frankly, we did press on together, that is until we came to the *Slough of Despond* into which we both suddenly tumbled. At that point, my neighbor *Pliable* was immediately discouraged and refused to go any further. As a result, he drew himself out of the mire on that side which was nearest to his house; he then told me that I would possess the brave country alone on his behalf. So he went back in the direction of *Obstinate* and I proceeded forward to this *Gate*.¹⁹

GOOD-WILL: How sad it is concerning *Pliable* in that he had such little appreciation of the heavenly glory to come, so much so that he did not consider it worth encountering a few hazards and difficulties to obtain it.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, this account concerning *Pliable* is sadly true. Though the truth with regard to myself is really no different. It is a fact that *Pliable* returned to his own house. But I also carnally yielded to the persuasive arguments of *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman*, and consequently turned aside toward the way that leads to death.²⁰

GOOD-WILL: Oh, did he prey upon you as well? Did he beguile you by offering relief and ease by means of *Mr. Legality*? You know they are both cheats. But did you pay attention to his advice?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, I went ahead as far as I dared to find *Mr. Legality*, that is until I feared that the mountain that lies beside his house would fall upon my head. And so for this reason I was forced to stop.

GOOD-WILL: That mountain has been the death of many, and will be the death of many more. It is just as well you escaped lest it dash you to pieces.

Obstinate and *Pliable*, the *Slough of Despond*, and especially *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman* have all attempted to thwart *Christian* from possessing the “brave country,” that is that land where only valiant pilgrims are spiritually courageous enough to gain entrance. In reflecting *Jesus Christ*, *Good Will* commends the incomparable heavenly glory to come and at the same time denounces the whole legalistic charade of *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman*. However, notwithstanding *Christian’s* confession of failings as a novice pilgrim, yet he is encouraged concerning the progress he has made thus far.

¹⁹ A pilgrim may have company when he first sets out for Heaven, and yet later find that he travels alone.

²⁰ Christian accuses himself before Good-will.

c. Concerning *God's* rescuing mercy.

CHRISTIAN: Why, to be truthful, I do not know what would have become of me there had not *Evangelist* arrived at just the right time when I was feeling sorry for myself and so miserably depressed. But it was the mercy of *God* that he came to me again, for otherwise I would never have come to this place. Nevertheless, I have come, unworthy as I certainly am, and am more deserving of death by means of that mountain than the privilege of standing before my *Lord* to talk with him. But oh, what a gracious privilege it is for me to gain entrance here.

GOOD-WILL: We do not object to any entering here, notwithstanding all that they have done in the past; in no way are they cast out.²¹ Therefore my good *Christian*, walk a little distance with me and I will instruct you about the way ahead that you must pursue. Look just ahead of you; do you see this narrow way and how it goes ahead of us? Then that is the way along which you must go. It was established by the patriarchs, prophets, *Christ*, and his apostles; it is as straight a way as it is possible to find. This is the way that you must go.

Christian feels no better than *Pliable* since he also defected along “the way of death” as he sought out *Mr. Legality*. Yet mercy alone, mediated through *Evangelist*, prevented him from being “dashed to pieces.” Now he exalts in sovereign grace, and he shall do so repeatedly as he progresses in his journey.

d. Application.

While this review of *Christian's* pilgrimage to date may seem repetitive, yet it is for the purpose of the pilgrim raising an *Ebenezer* of praise in declaring, “Thus far the *Lord* has helped us” (I Sam. 7: 12). This is exactly the thought that *Robert Robinson* penned:

Here I raise my Ebenezer,
 Hither by Thine help I'm come,
 And I hope by Thy good pleasure
 Safely to arrive at home.
 Jesus sought me when a stranger,
 Wandering from the fold of *God*;
 He, to save my soul from danger,
 Interposed His precious blood.

²¹ Christian is again comforted. John 6:37.

3. *Good Will* explains the way ahead.

CHRISTIAN: But are there no turnings or windings or detours by means of which a stranger can lose his way?²²

GOOD-WILL: Yes, there are many side paths that attach to this narrow way, and they are crooked and wide. But you must distinguish the right way from that which is wrong by observing that it is straight and narrow.²³

Then I saw in my dream that *Christian* further asked *Good-will* if he was able to help him take off the burden remaining on his back, since it seemed impossible to remove without assistance.²⁴ *Good-will* advised that he should be content to bear this load until he came to the *Place of Deliverance* further ahead; then the burden would fall from off his back by itself.²⁵

So *Christian* began to gird up his loins [*prepare himself*] and seriously pay attention to the journey before him. *Good-will* then told him that when he had traveled some distance from the *Gate*, he would come to the house of the *Interpreter*; having knocked at the door, there he would be shown excellent things.²⁶ At this, *Christian* said farewell to *Good-will* who in turn bid [*commended to*] him Godspeed [*traveling mercies*].

Notwithstanding *Christian's* hazardous journey thus far, for those who arrive at the *Wicket-gate* there is the promise, "they in no wise are cast out" (John 6:37). Rather, they shall be directed along the *King's Highway* (Is. 35:8-9).

a. It is built upon the patriarchs, prophets, and *Jesus Christ*.

In other words, this highway of redemption for a fallen human race was commenced by the patriarchs, *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob* (Ex. 2:23-24), confirmed by the prophets (Is. 51:1-3; Luke 24:27), established by *Jesus Christ* (Matt. 1:1; Heb. 13:20), and proclaimed by the apostles (Rom. 1:1-7; Eph. 2:19-20).

b. It is the strait and right way.

Alternative streets and lanes are numerous, crooked, and wide. But none of these attached detours are strait. They seem most likely to appeal to pilgrims when they murmur about the strictness of the way of righteousness, that is its earthly spartan character, its uncompromising moral demands (Num. 11:1-6; Matt. 7:14).

²² Christian is afraid of losing his way.

²³ Matt. 7:13-14.

²⁴ Christian is weary of his burden.

²⁵ There is no deliverance from the guilt and burden of sin except by the blood and death of Christ.

²⁶ The ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14.

- c. It is the way that leads to deliverance.

Further down the road, at the house of the Interpreter, *Christian* will receive foundational instruction, greater understanding as to the work of *Jesus Christ*, and then a clearer vision of the grace of his *Lord*. At this point his load shall be lifted and replaced with strengthened assurance and resultant stability (Rom. 5: 1-5).

- d. It is the way that demands earnestness.

In “girding up his loins,” *Christian* seriously prepares for the journey ahead. However, he needs more than resolve; he must be girded with truth and holiness (Eph. 6:14; I Pet. 1:13-16).

- e. It is the way that leads to the house of the *Interpreter*.

This friend of authentic pilgrims, to whom *Christian* is directed by Good Will (John 15:26), will reveal profitable and wonderful things. He is a great comforter and teacher, as is the *Holy Spirit* (John 14:26; 16:13-14). To *Christian* is now to be disclosed some of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven reserved only for authentic citizens of that same kingdom (Matt. 13:10-11).

Good Will directs
Christian to the
house of Interpreter

