

Chapter Eight

Christian is Instructed at the House of the Interpreter

A. Introduction.

THEN he went on till he came to the house of the *Interpreter*, where he knocked at the entrance over and over again. At last someone came to the door and asked, "Who is there?"

CHRISTIAN: Sir, I am a traveler who was advised by an acquaintance of the good man of this house to call here for my benefit. Therefore I would like to speak with the master of this house.

So the man at the door called for the master of the house, who soon came to *Christian* and asked him what was the reason for his visit.

CHRISTIAN: Sir, I am a man who has come from the *City of Destruction* and am on my way to *Mount Zion*. I was told by one *Good-will* at the *Wicket-gate*, the commencement of this narrow way, that if I called here you would show me excellent things that would be of help to me in my journey.

INTERPRETER: By all means come in, and I will certainly show you things that you will find beneficial.¹

So he commanded his helper to light the candle² and then invited *Christian* to follow him.

1. Here is a classic within a classic.

When regeneration, by means of the Holy Spirit, illumines a formerly darkened soul, there is a resultant sense of wonderment (John 9:25). The new child of God is amazed at what is now understood. The gospel is seen in its unveiled glory, and in contrast, the shameful and tawdry nature of the world is comprehended for what it really is. So as *Christian* arrives at the house of the *Interpreter*, a similar unveiling takes place. Cheever remarks: "It would be difficult to find twelve consecutive pages in the English language that contain such volumes of meaning, in such beautiful and instructive lessons, with such heavenly imagery, in so pure and sweet a style, and with so thrilling an appeal to the best affections of the heart, as these pages."³ These seven choice vignettes are as follows:

¹ Matt. 13:10-11; I John 2:20, 27.

² Illumination. Ps. 119:105.

³ George Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 164.

- a. The portrait of the godly pastor.
 - b. The distinction between the law and the gospel.
 - c. The virtue of patience contrasted with passion.
 - d. The grace of Christ conquers the assailed heart.
 - e. The persevering, valiant pilgrim.
 - f. The despairing reprobate in the iron cage.
 - g. The warning of the final day of judgement.
2. Here is necessary truth for new pilgrims.

God does not cast his family truth as pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). Rather, He chooses to reveal much kingdom truth only to children of His kingdom (Matt. 13: 10-15). Hence, Interpreter first investigates Christian, and having found that he is a genuine pilgrim through the direction of "the Man that stands at the Gate," only then is a candle lit. Here Bunyan emphasizes the essential role of the illumination of the Spirit of God with regard to the comprehension of the truth of God, otherwise a person may study the Bible and yet remain in darkness (I Cor. 2:14-15). Further, this illumination is related to the Son of God who "sends the Helper, . . . that is the Spirit of truth" who will "bear witness of Me" (John 15:26). Here it is Good-will, or Jesus Christ, who sends Christian to Interpreter, or the Holy Spirit, for illumination.

3. Here is the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The truth of Jesus Christ is only more fully revealed to those who have come to him as the door of the sheepfold (John 10:7, 9), or with the obedience of faith at the entrance of the narrow way (Matt. 7 13-14). To legitimate entrants is given the promised Comforter or Helper, the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit, who teaches concerning the person of Christ (John 7:37-39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Cheever explains:

This good man of the house, the Interpreter, we are without doubt to take as the representative of the Holy Spirit with his enlightening and sanctifying influences on the heart. He is our Comforter, Guardian, and Guide through all our pilgrimage; our instructor to take of the things which are Christ's and show them to our souls; our Sanctifier to lead us into all truth and to make it the nourishing food of our souls, and with it and in it bringing Christ before us continually, to fasten our affections upon him, and make him, of God, unto us our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.⁴

⁴ Ibid.

B. The Portrait of the Godly Pastor.

1. The priority of the portrait.

Bunyan teaches us here just how highly he regarded the necessity of a new believer coming under the pastoral care of a true under-shepherd as distinct from a hireling (John 10:11-13). For a new authentic pilgrim, such ministry is of primary importance, hence he explains that, "I have showed you this picture *first*, because the man who it portrays is the only man who the *Lord* of the *Celestial City* has authorized to be your guide in all of the difficult situations that you may encounter along the way." From Bunyan's own experience he expresses, through the Interpreter, his concern, "lest in thy Journey, thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee right, but their way goes down to death." Such already have been Obstinate and Pliable, and Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, and such will be Formalist and Hypocrisy, Timorous and Mistrust, Talkative, By-ends, Demas, Vain-confidence, Ignorance, the Flatterer, and Atheist.

- a. Most likely this character is a portrayal of John Gifford, pastor of the independent church at Bedford, who both counseled and ministered to Bunyan during those crisis years when he wrestled with his own salvation and state. This former Royalist major in the King's army, who had escaped hanging for some crime, was himself once a great profligate. This may well be the reason why he, following his own period of spiritual wrestling prior to his conversion, was so very able to help another profligate such as the tinker from Elstow. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan describes his first meeting with Gifford as follows:

I began to break my mind to those poor people [Christians he admired] in Bedford, and to tell them my [miserable] condition: which, when they had heard, they told Mr. Gifford of me, who himself also took occasion to talk with me, . . . he invited me to his house, where I should hear him confer with others about the dealings of God with the soul: from all which I still received more conviction, and from that time began to see something of the vanity and inward wretchedness of my wicked heart.⁵

This encounter may parallel Christian's early meetings with Evangelist.

- b. However, following Bunyan's conversion described in *Grace Abounding*,⁶ he immediately explains how:

At this time, also, I sat under the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose doctrine, by God's grace, was much for my stability. 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 reality thereof, and set us down therein, by his own Spirit, in the Holy Word; for, said he, if you do other wise when temptations come, if strongly, you, not having received them with

⁵ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 77, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §§ 115-116, pp. 19-20.

evidence from heaven, will find you want [lack] that help and strength now to resist as once you thought you had.⁷

It is this period of instructive ministry which most likely parallels Christian's learning experience at the house of Interpreter immediately following his conversion.

2. The description of the portrait.

Now *Interpreter* led the pilgrim into a private room, and there he ordered his man to open a door. Then did *Christian* see the picture of a very grave [*serious, important*] person hanging against the wall,⁸ and its features were as follows. This man had his eyes directed up toward *Heaven*, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back; he stood as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold hung over his head.⁹

- a. It is noteworthy that the main public monument to Bunyan in Bedford, a bronze statue executed by J. E. Boehm, presented by the Duke of Bedford in 1874, is at the same time a depiction of this pastoral portrait, though with a substitute body. However, the tinker was a worthy successor to his mentor.
- b. He is a serious person, that is temperate, sober, dignified, venerable, earnest (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 2:2), not flippant, jocular, entertaining, or frequently talking about himself. So Bunyan was described as, "never to boast of himself, or his parts, but rather seem low in his own eyes, and submit himself to the judgment of others."¹⁰
- c. His eyes are lifted toward heaven, for there is his future home, his Lord, his delight and priority; this man's ministry is God-centered (I Cor. 15:8; II Cor. 5:1-2; Phil. 3:20; I Pet. 1:4).
- d. He has the best book in his hands, namely the Bible, for he is a man of one book, God's book (Acts 20:32), even as John Wesley declared: "At any price, give me the Book of God. I have it; here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri!"¹¹ In Bunyan's time, the full authority of the Bible, or its complete inerrancy and truthfulness as we would qualify it today, was virtually undoubted. However, in 1684 or four years before the death of the famous Bedford pastor, there was born in France, Dr. Jean Astruc, whose study of the Pentateuch caused him to be acknowledged as the father of the documentary hypothesis and destructive higher criticism.

⁷ Ibid., § 117, p. 20.

⁸ Christian sees a picture of bravery [courage in conflict].

⁹ Mal. 2:4-7.

¹⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 64.

¹¹ John Wesley, *Works*, V, pp. ii-iii.

- e. He speaks the law of truth, not fables, smooth talk, nebulous platitudes, high litergy, or the formularies of the Book of Common Prayer (Acts 19:8-10; 20:20).
- f. He has put the world behind his back rather than in front of his heart. This is not a justification for monastic isolationism, but rather an indication of his renunciation of the world while yet living in and witnessing to the world (John 17:11, 14-18; I Cor. 5:9-11; I Pet. 5:2; I John 2:15-17).
- g. He pleads with men to “be reconciled to God” (II Cor. 5:20). He is in earnest concerning the souls of men, appearing guileless, while ministering with gentleness, fond affection, yet bold, serious appeals (I Thess. 2:5-12).
- h. He has a crown of gold over his head representing that prospective reward of recognition for his faithfulness (II Tim. 4:7-8). While the world may deride such a “narrow-minded minister,” or “fundamentalist” in today’s terminology, yet we have here God’s high estimate of him.



The Boehm Statue
Portrays John Bunyan
as the godly pastor

3. The explanation of the portrait.

CHRISTIAN: What then does this mean?

INTERPRETER: The man in the picture which you see is one in a thousand, who can beget children,¹² travail in birth with children, and nurse them himself when they are born.¹³

And just as you see him with his eyes looking up toward *Heaven*, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth written on his lips, this is to show you that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners.

Similarly, just as you see him stand as if he pleaded with men, and also you notice that the world is cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head, this is to show you that, in slighting and despising the things of the present, on account of his love and devotion to his *Master's* service, he is sure to have glory for his reward in the world to come.

Now I have showed you this picture first, because the man who it portrays is the only man who the *Lord* of the *Celestial City* has authorized to be your guide in all of the difficult situations that you may encounter along the way. Therefore pay attention to what I have showed you, and carefully weigh in your mind what you have seen lest, in your journey, you meet with some that pretend to lead you along the right path, while in reality their way leads to death.¹⁴

Dr. J. I. Packer writes that this profile represents the Puritan ideal of the Christian preacher. It involves four axioms:

First, belief in the primacy of the intellect. . . . Second, belief in the supreme importance of preaching. . . . Third, belief in the life-giving power of Holy Scripture. . . . Fourth, belief in the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

a. This man begets children.

He is uncommon as pastors in general go, that is "one of a thousand," who is instrumental in the birth of children of God because of his gospel preaching (I Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 1:10; Philem. 10).

b. This man nourishes babes as a nurse.

He is a spiritual midwife, skilled in nurture, who does not merely seek for a quick delivery and then abandon the newborn to the satanic elements of this world (Gal. 4:19; I Thess. 2:7-12).

¹² I Cor. 4:15.

¹³ Gal. 4:19; I Thess. 2:7.

¹⁴ Prov. 14:12.

¹⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godlines*, pp. 277-284.

- c. This man ministers the truth to sinners.

He brings light to the darkness of unbelievers by expounding, with earnestness and patience, “the word of life” (Phil. 2:14-16) by means of the vehicle of his own renewed life.

- d. This man despises the world in serving his Master.

He spurns the transient and glib perspective of this present world in serving Jesus Christ. Thus he will receive glory in the world to come. He is not a pulpit clown and dandy! He probably suffers the criticism of being too precise, scrupulous, and serious.

- e. This man is authorized to guide through difficulties.

He alone, not establishment archbishops and bishops, has been ordained of the Lord of heaven to be a guide for pilgrims through the difficult places along the way (Heb. 13:17). Counterfeit ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15) and hirelings (John 10:12-13) are to be avoided.

C. The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel.

1. The parlour room scene described.

Then *Christian* was taken by the hand and led into a very large parlor [*living room*] that was full of dust having never been swept. Now after he had observed this scene for a little while, *Interpreter* called for a man to commence sweeping. As a result, the dust began to fly about so overwhelmingly that *Christian* was nearly choked to death. *Interpreter* immediately spoke to a gracious lady standing nearby, “Bring some water here and sprinkle this room.” The lady having done this, the parlor was then easily swept and cleansed.

Although *Christian* has, through the grace of the gospel, left behind the accusatory thunderings of Mt. Sinai, yet as a novice pilgrim he is especially susceptible to legalistic assaults that cause him to grieve over the condition of his heart. Hence, he needs to appreciate the sanctifying and healing effects that result when the gospel is constantly applied to the smitten soul.

- a. The room of dust.

This sitting-room, or chief place of household activity, is full of dust having never been swept.

b. The sweeper of dust.

The Interpreter calls for a man to sweep, at which the dust is aroused and fills the air, with the result that Christian almost chokes.

c. The sprinkler of water.

The Interpreter then calls for a young lady to settle the dust by means of sprinkled water, at which the room is then swept and cleansed with ease.

2. The parlour room scene interpreted.

CHRISTIAN: What does this mean?

INTERPRETER: This parlor is the heart of a man who has never been sanctified [*regenerated and justified*] by the sweet grace of the *Gospel*. The dust is his original [*Adamic*] sin and inward corruptions that have thoroughly defiled the whole man. He who first began to sweep is the *Law*; but the gracious lady who brought water and sprinkled the room is the *Gospel*.¹⁶

Now while you saw, as soon as the man began to sweep, that the dust so swirled about the room that it became even more difficult to cleanse, and you were near choked to death, this is to show you that the *Law*, instead of it effectively cleansing the heart from sin, does in fact arouse, give greater strength to, and cause sin to flourish in the soul.¹⁷ And this result is in spite of the fact that the *Law* both uncovers and condemns sin, for it does not have the power to subdue.

Furthermore, as you saw the gracious lady sprinkle the room with water, at which it was very easily cleansed, this is to show you that when the *Gospel* comes with its sweet and precious influences indwelling the heart, then, just as you saw the lady settle the dust by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the heart made clean, through the faith of that soul; and consequently that same soul is then made a suitable place for the *King of Glory* to inhabit.¹⁸

For Bunyan, the distinction between law and gospel, sin and grace, and Moses and Christ was of fundamental importance. Thus he writes in *The Doctrine Of The Law And Grace Unfolded*, that

so long as people are ignorant of the nature of the law, and of their being under it, that is under the curse and condemning power of it, by reason of their sin against it - so long they will be careless, and negligent as to the enquiring after the true knowledge of the gospel.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ezek. 36:25-27.

¹⁷ Rom. 5:20; 7:6; I Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:19.

¹⁸ John 15:3, 13; Acts 15:9; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 5:26.

¹⁹ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 493.

- a. The room is man's polluted heart.

Here that private citadel of the soul is portrayed as thoroughly corrupt. It is a pervasively sinful morass comprised of shameful and perverse depths (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-18).

- b. The dust is original sin that defiles every crevice.

Thus man is corrupt in every part of his being, or totally depraved, due to his inheritance of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12). The comprehensive result is the sinful infection of the whole human race (Rom. 3:9-18).

- c. The sweeper is the law arousing corruption.

Here Bunyan illustrates the biblical answer to Paul's question, "Why the Law then?" (Gal. 3:19).

- (1) As the sweeper causes the swirling and stimulation of the dust, so the Law of God, especially though not exclusively that of Moses (Rom. 3:20), encourages the arousal of latent sin (Rom. 5:20; 7:6-13; I Cor. 15:56). In other words, the codified righteousness of God awakens, excites and illuminates unrighteousness wherever it settles (Rom. 3:20).

- (2) Illustrations.

(a) The Law does not cleanse; it encourages and strengthens sin, like a park bench sign that warns about wet paint; it goads the sinful inclination of the heart.

(b) The Law is like an X-ray machine that can reveal hidden depths; it is like a scalpel that can cut, probe, and lay bare deep-seated corruption; it is like a magnifying glass that can enlarge concealed disorders; it is a stick that can stir up sediment in a seemingly clear glass of water.

(c) The Law is diagnostic rather than remedial. Only a physician with spiritual medication can offer the prospect of a spiritual cure for a spiritual malady (Rom. 8:3-4).

- (3) Thus the Law exhorts, discovers, arouses, stimulates, forbids, and condemns (II Cor. 3:7, 9), but it has no ability to vanquish sin and produce righteousness. The Law judges, but it cannot justify (Gal. 2:16). The Law is an excellent and admirable ethic that proclaims the perfect righteousness of God. But it is impotent in that it has no dynamic, no saving power (Rom. 7:12; 8:3-4).

- d. The damsel is the cleansing gospel messenger.

- (1) She portrays the virtuous evangelist who adorns the evangel that is proclaimed (Tit. 2:10).

- (2) As the dispenser of the gospel, she effects what the impotent Law could not accomplish (Heb. 7:18-19).
- (3) The cleansing influences of the gospel both subdue sin and make the heart fit for habitation by the King of Glory (John 15:3; Acts 15:9; I Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13; 5:26). The law has no cleaning ability.
- (4) The gospel alone has the power to vanquish sin and produce righteousness in the human heart (John 15:13; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:24-26; 7:4; 16:25-26). This truth involves both initial conversion and ongoing sanctification. The believer is saved and kept by the gospel (Gal. 2:2).



The cleansing of the parlor room

D. The Virtue of Patience Contrasted with Passion.

1. The two children, Passion and Patience, are observed.

Moreover, I saw in my dream that *Interpreter* again took *Christian* by the hand and led him into a very small room in which there sat two little children, each one on his chair. The name of the elder was *Passion* and the other *Patience*.²⁰ *Passion* seemed to be very discontented while *Patience* remained calm and quiet. Then *Christian* asked, "What is the reason for *Passion's* unrest?" *Interpreter* replied, "The *Governor* of these children would have him wait for the best things that are to be bestowed at the beginning of the next year. But he wants to have his inheritance now, while *Patience* is quite willing to wait."

Then I saw a person come to *Passion* and bring him a bag of treasure that was immediately poured out at his feet. At this the elder child rejoiced and at the same time scornfully laughed at *Patience*. However, I noticed that very soon *Passion's* wealth wasted away, with the result that he found himself left with nothing but rags.

- a. Many a carnal Christian attempts to straddle two worlds by claiming a future inheritance (I Pet. 1:4) while at the same time desiring present material stimulation and enjoyment. However, the Word of God exhorts believers not to be as a "double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:8). Rather, he is to "persevere under trial" for the present, until God grants him "the crown of life" (Jas. 1:12). The world madly craves for instant indulgence, but the Christian, like the farmer, is to patiently wait for the reward of harvest time (Jas. 5:1-11).
- b. The elder child, called Passion, though seated appears restless, agitated, discontented, with an anxious countenance.
- c. The younger child, called Patience, also seated appears at rest, quiet, unruffled, with a calm countenance.
- d. Both children have the promise from their Governor of great treasure in the future, that is provided they are prepared to wait in accord with his timing.
- e. Passion is anxious to have his inheritance immediately, while his companion, Patience, is content to wait till the next year as instructed.

²⁰ Acts 14:15; Jas. 5:8.

2. The temperament of Passion explained.

CHRISTIAN: Explain this matter to me more fully.

INTERPRETER: These two lads are figures [*portrayals*] of the men of this world. Now *Patience* represents those men who are prepared to wait for that which is to come. On the other hand you will notice that *Passion* must have all of his inheritance now, this very year, that is in this present world. So are the men of this world: they insist on having all of their good things now and cannot possibly wait till next year, that is in the world to come, for lasting treasure. That proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush", is of more authority with them than all of the *Divine Testimonies* [*Scripture accounts*] of the good things promised in the world to come. But as you saw, *Passion* quickly wasted away all that he had so that he ended up having nothing but rags. And so it will be with all like men at the end of this age.

CHRISTIAN: Now I see that *Patience* has superior wisdom, and that for several reasons. 1. Because he is willing to wait for the best things. 2. And also because the glory of his inheritance will last when that of *Passion* has long ago been reduced to rags.

Alexander Whyte perceptively defines the root problem of Passion here as "self-love." He writes that

it is out of self-love that all our other evil passions spring. . . . The whole fall and ruin and misery of our present human nature lies in this, that in every human being self-love has taken, in addition to its own place, the place of the love of God and of the love of man also. . . . All that God is doing with us and for us in providence and in grace, in the world and in the church, - it is all to cure us of this deadly disease of self-love.²¹

- a. He is a rebel concerning the Governor's will.

Because of his agitation, he is permitted to have brought to him a certain type of treasure that is suitable for this present world (Matt. 6:31-32; Luke 16:25). He is like Israel in the wilderness yearning for the onions, leeks, and garlics of Egypt (Num. 11:1-6).

- b. He is the temporary possessor of material treasure.

Thus he rejoices for a season, but finds that his fleeting delights begin to corrode and waste away so that eventually he is left only with bare rags. Through obsolescence, the passing of fashions, and the innate dissolution of matter, his most valuable possessions become as a handful of sand passing through his fingers (Prov. 20:21).

- c. He is the scorner of those who patiently wait for lasting treasure.

²¹ Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, p. 93.

Like the rich man in his sumptuous estate who disregarded the pauper Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21), so Passion mocks those who lack worldly initiative and success. He ridicules those who, like Abraham (Heb. 11:8-10), focus upon making provision for the world to come.

- d. He is a child of this world rather than that which is to come.

His motto is, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." His philosophy is, "Let's have the goodies here and now, not pie in the sky when you die by and by!" However, his pleasure is short lived (Ps. 37:7-11; 73:3-9, 18-20; I John 2:17).

- e. He is a sensual man urgently seeking indulgent gratification.

His walk is by sight rather than faith, by feeling rather than future promise, by substance rather than spirit, by time rather than eternity, by the words of men rather than the Word of God.



Patience and Passion

3. The temperament of Patience explained.

INTERPRETER: Yes, and you may add another reason as well. It is that the glory of the next world will never wear out while the good things of the present decay and then suddenly are gone. Therefore *Passion* did not have a very good reason for laughing at *Patience* even if he did have his good things first; the reason is that *Patience* will have the last laugh because he eventually receives the best things that last eternally. For he who is first must yield to he who was last, because the last must have his time in the future, while the first must make way for nothing because his good things vanish!²²

Therefore he who has his inheritance first, uses and spends it in time; but he who receives his portion last, has it for all of eternity! Therefore it is said of *Dives [the rich man]*, "In your life you received the good things, and likewise *Lazarus [the beggar]* received evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented."²³

CHRISTIAN: Then I understand that it is not good to covet things that are now, but to wait for the best things that are to come.

INTERPRETER: You certainly speak the truth. For the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal.²⁴ However, though this be so, yet since present things and our fleshly desires are such close neighbors, one next to the other; and again, because things to come and our carnal appetite are such strangers [*so opposed*] to one another: therefore it is that the first of these [*present things and fleshly desires*] so quickly establish friendship, and that distance is maintained between the second [*eternal things*].²⁵

Again Alexander Whyte shows great discernment in recommending "self-patience" to the impatient Christian.

Most difficult and most dangerous, but most necessary of all patience, we must learn how to be patient with ourselves. . . . We should all be with ourselves as God is with us. He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust. He shows all patience toward us. He does not look for great things from us. He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.²⁶

a. He is submissive to the Governor's will.

Because, like Moses, he "endure[s] ill-treatment with the people of God, [rather] than the passing pleasures of sin," he is "looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:24-25).

²² Matt. 20:16.

²³ Luke 16:25.

²⁴ II Cor. 4:18.

²⁵ Gal. 5:16.

²⁶ Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, II, pp. 107-108.

He has been called to be a sojourner in this world rather than a citizen (I Pet. 2:11; Phil. 3:20), an ambassador in foreign territory (II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 5:15-16).

- b. He does not esteem temporary material treasure.

There is good reason for this since material things are temporal while spiritual things are eternal (II Cor. 4:18). However, while we presently live in the flesh which gravitates toward carnal things, yet are we to appreciate that the flesh and the regenerate human spirit are at enmity with each other (Gal. 2:20; 5:16-17).

- c. He quietly waits for his treasure in the face of ridicule.

His benefits may be deferred, yet having finally received them they shall be his forever. But the mockery shall only be temporary. Better this than temporary benefits that are ultimately replaced with eternal remorse (Ps. 37:35-36; Gal. 5:5).

- d. He is a child of the eternal world to come, not the present.

His vision, though dim and clouded, is focused, as is to be that of Christian, upon the Celestial City. It is this vista which Bunyan so frequently upholds as the pilgrim's supreme hope (Phil. 3:8-14; I Thess. 2:19).

- e. He is a wise man who will inherit superior glory.

According to the promise of the Governor, his treasure, implicitly a gift, shall be vastly superior in glory to that which Passion covets for himself (Rom. 8:18; I Cor. 2:9). This glory shall never fade or tarnish (I Pet. 1:4; 5:4).

E. The Grace of Christ Conquers the Assailed Heart.

1. The outward description of the inextinguishable blaze.

Then I saw in my dream that the *Interpreter* took *Christian* by the hand, and led him to a place where there was a fire burning against a wall. In front of this fireplace was a man continually casting buckets of water on the fire in an effort to extinguish it. Nevertheless, the fire continued to burn higher and hotter.

Because this scene draws us from the external perception of Christian vitality to its internal generation, undoubtedly Bunyan relates here from his own experience. In *Grace Abounding* he testifies:

Then hath the tempter come upon me, also, with such discouragements as these – You are very hot for mercy, but I will cool you; . . . many have been as hot as you for a spirit, but I have quenched their zeal; . . . I will cool you insensibly, by degrees, by little and little. What care I, saith he, though I be seven years in chilling your heart if I can do it at last? Though you be burning hot at present, yet, if I can pull you from this fire, I shall have you cold before it be long.” Depressed at this, he then describes what happened a short while later. “One day as I was sitting in a neighbor’s house, and there very sad at the

consideration of my many blasphemies, and as I was saying in my mind, What ground have I to think that I, who have been so vile and abominable, should ever inherit eternal life? that word came suddenly upon me, 'What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?' (Rom. 8:31). That, also, was an help unto me, 'Because I live, ye shall live also' (John 14:19).²⁷

a. The quenchless burning fire.

In another room Christian is shown a fire fiercely burning in a fireplace. The blaze is vigorous, inviting and warming with its influence.

b. The quenching waves of water.

Yet a man who opposes the fire attempts to extinguish it by dousing it with repeated drenchings with water. However, as he does so, Christian is amazed to see that the fire burns higher and hotter!



The grace of Christ conquers the assailed soul

²⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, I, §§ 110, 113, p. 19.

2. The outward interpretation of the inextinguishable blaze.

CHRISTIAN: What does this mean?

INTERPRETER: This fire is the work of grace that has been ignited in the heart. He who casts water upon it, so as to extinguish this blaze, is the *Devil*.²⁸ Even so, in that you see the fire burn higher and hotter, let me now show you the reason for this mystery.

The previous scene introduced the prospect of opposition from the world, such as when Passion mocked Patience. How then shall the pilgrim yet persevere when assailed by scorn that is intended to cool his inflamed soul, his holy zeal?

a. The blaze of grace in the believer's heart.

The fireplace is the heart of a true child of God. While it previously contained only black and lifeless embers, now it supports a blazing spiritual fire, that is the work of grace kindled in that heart by means of the gospel (II Cor. 4:6-7).

b. The assault of the Devil upon the believer's heart.

The man who persists in attempting to extinguish the fire with water is the Devil. As the enemy of godly enthusiasm, he douses the lively Christian with all sorts of flame retardants such as worldiness, fleshly indulgence, rationalism, scholasticism, etc. so as to induce indifference, lukewarmness, lethargy, slothfulness, etc.

c. The triumph of grace in the believer's heart.

What Christian perceives at this point is a mystery; it is the outward perspective of an inward confrontation between sin and grace, flesh and spirit, doubt and faith, in the heart. When Satan "buckets" a pilgrim, how does this Christian ever stand? How could Bunyan himself endure unjust imprisonment for twelve years while his impoverished family suffered? The fact revealed here is that the grace of God preserves and even causes triumph in the midst of seeming tragedy. But the "how" of this conquering grace has yet to be revealed.

²⁸ Bunyan describes this experience in *Grace Abounding*, § 110.

3. The inward interpretation of the inextinguishable blaze.

So *Interpreter* took *Christian* behind the wall and the fireplace; there the pilgrim saw a *Man* with a container in his hand, from which he cast oil upon the fire, though secretly.²⁹

Then said *Christian*, "What does this mean?" Hence *Interpreter* replied, "This is *Christ*, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by this means, notwithstanding what the *Devil* attempts to do, the souls of his people still prove to be gracious.³⁰ And in that you saw that the *Man* stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, this is to teach you that it is hard for those who are tempted to understand how this work of grace is upheld in the soul."

For a Puritan such as Bunyan, the doctrine of "the perseverance of the saints" was a cardinal truth involving both responsible cultivated action and sovereign preservation. For while the believer is exhorted, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," yet he is also comforted by the assurance that, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). It is this sovereign perspective of persevering grace that is now explained.

a. The secret that is behind the wall.

Christian is taken behind the fireplace where he sees a man holding a vessel of oil which he secretly throws upon the fire causing it to blaze. Here is spiritual warfare in action at its very roots (II Cor. 10:3-4).

b. The secret that is the oil of Christ.

- (1) The Interpreter declares this behind-the-scenes person to be the Lord Jesus Christ who, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work of grace begun in the heart (II Cor. 12:9). This grace of Christ is also the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11).
- (2) Illustration. Charles Wesley, composer of over 5,500 hymns, has graphically written of this blazing spiritual fire in the believer's heart that needs both guarding and stimulation.

O thou who camest from above,
 The pure celestial fire to impart,
 Kindle a flame of sacred love
 On the mean altar of my heart!
 There let it for Thy glory burn
 With inextinguishable blaze,
 And trembling to its source return
 In humble prayer and fervent praise.

²⁹ Zech. 4:11-14.

³⁰ II Cor. 12:9.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
 To work and speak and think for Thee;
 Still let me guard the holy fire,
 And still stir up Thy gift in me.

- c. The secret that is difficult to comprehend.

The intensity of the conflict, the attempts of Satan “to sift us as wheat” (Luke 22:31), the wrestling against “the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12), tends to obscure the greater potency of the oil of grace, the intercession of Christ (Luke 22:32), the endowment of grace gifts (I Cor. 12;; Eph. 6:11).

F. The Persevering, Valiant Pilgrim.

I also saw that the *Interpreter* took him again by the hand, and led *Christian* into a very pleasant place where a stately palace had been built; it was a very beautiful building indeed. Now the pilgrim was greatly delighted at what he saw, and particularly with the sight of several people, clothed in gold, walking around the top of the palace. Then said *Christian*, “May we go inside?”

Then the *Interpreter* led him closer to the main door, and there he noticed a large number of men who obviously desired to gain entrance, yet seemed to lack courage.

Back a little from the door there was also a man sitting at a table with a book and inkhorn [*ink container, used with a quill*] in front of him; his role was that of recording the names of those who were determined to enter the palace.³¹ But *Christian* also saw that in the very doorway there stood many armored men who were intent on employing violence and mischief to stop any man from gaining entrance. At this the eager pilgrim pondered what all this meant.

Then, while most of the men outside cowered at the thought of attempting to make a forceful entrance, *Christian* noticed one man, very resolute in appearance, stride up to the man at the desk and ask of him, “Sir, set down my name.” Immediately following this, the same man drew his sword, put a helmet on his head, and rushed toward the palace door with the men standing in the way. So the valiant entrant found himself opposed with deadly force; yet he was not discouraged, and consequently applied himself to fierce cutting and hacking of his opponents. He both received and gave many wounds to his enemies;³² nevertheless this courageous man cut his way through so that he eventually gained entrance into the palace.

Then those inside, and especially three at the top, cried out with a joyous chorus of welcome,

Come in, come in,
Eternal Glory you shall win.

³¹ Ezek. 9:1-11.

³² Matt. 11:12; Acts 14:22.

1. The incentive of Christ's glorious kingdom.

Bunyan frequently portrays his pilgrim as obtaining fleeting glimpses of the distant Celestial City at the end of the way. It is intended to convey great motivation for enduring to the end (Rev. 21:1-4).

a. It must be seen to be appreciated.

In pleasant surroundings, a stately and beautiful palace entralls Christian. On the battlements are citizens clothed with gold. This glorious and attractive setting has instant appeal for pilgrims, whether they be false or true. However, the entrance requirements will ultimately distinguish between the false and the true.

b. It must be approached with commitment.

- (1) In *The Heavenly Footman* Bunyan comments: "They that will have heaven, they must not stick at any difficulties they meet with; but press, crowd, and thrust through all that may stand between heaven and their souls. So run!"³³
- (2) A little distance from the palace gate sits a man at a table with a book and pen. He is seeking for committed palace entrants who will have the courage to register their intention.
- (3) In the doorway of the palace stands a garrison of fierce, unholy combatants in armor who are determined to restrain anyone who attempts to gain entrance.
- (4) Between the registrar and the militant gatekeepers is a company of restless, hesitant men. They are obviously desirous of entering the palace and yet at the same time, in counting the cost, are fearful of making a bold and offensive entrance.
- (5) Then one man valiantly strides up to the registrar with the plucky request, "Set down my Name Sir." This scene is reminiscent of David when he courageously committed himself to fight Goliath while his brothers cowered around him (I Sam. 17:22-26, 32).

c. It must be obtained through conflict.

Again Bunyan comments in *The Heavenly Footman*:

There is many a dirty step, many a high hill, much work to do, a wicked heart, world, and devil, to overcome; I say, there are many steps to be taken by those that intend to be saved, by running or walking, in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham. Out of Egypt thou must go through the Red Sea; thou must run a long

³³ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 381.

and tedious journey, through the vast howling wilderness, before thou come to the land of promise.³⁴

- (1) The valiant man, having donned his helmet and drawn his sword (Eph. 6:17), then makes a frontal attack against the armed gatekeepers so that he might, at all costs, gain entrance. He is so determined that he commits himself to using violence and force (Matt. 11:12).
- (2) The conflict is fierce and protracted involving much cut and thrust (Acts 14:22). The wounded valiant man, in giving more injury than he receives, eventually gains entrance.
- (3) The conqueror is then clothed with gold in the palace. At the same time his triumphant entrance is heralded with a chorus from three palace citizens on the ramparts. These are most likely Enoch, Moses and Elijah, who will later “look over the gate,”³⁵ when Christian arrives at the gate of the Celestial City. So they cried out:

Come in, Come in;
Eternal Glory thou shalt win.



The valiant persevering pilgrim

³⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

2. The disincentive of the fear of man.

Rare is the man or woman who is not interested in entering the palace described here. Most people prefer heaven to hell. However, it is intervening circumstances that present a conflict of priorities.

a. Many aspire to enter, but few obtain.

Many start out on pilgrimage, such as a Pliable or a Timorous and a Mistrust. But comparatively few arrive. Some may enter the narrow way with the offering of life at its end, initial enthusiasm (Matt. 13:20-21), but “few are those who find it [life]” (Matt. 7:14).

b. Many vacillate lacking the courage of consecration.

Many gather to talk about making an assault on the palace, yet they forever remain outside, contemplating the truth of the Bible without actually venturing forth even as that very book commands them (Luke 14:26-27, 33; John 7:37).

c. Many count the cost and hold back.

Many consider the call of God, yet they selfishly choose personal improvement through vocational ambition. Family plans, status, life-style, etc. have pre-eminence, an outward religious appearance notwithstanding. After serious reflection, they opt for being subservient to the world, even though they are within sight of the kingdom of God (Jas. 4:4).

d. Many cringe at the prospect of conflict.

Many, unlike Bunyan, yielded to Episcopal rule and state religion rather than suffer oppressive opposition. To lock horns with the clerical establishment would be to suffer discomfort and loss of reputation. Spurgeon describes these artisans of compromise as, “the good people who are in bed [and] are too fond of the warmth, and too much afraid of getting broken heads, to go downstairs and meet the burglars.”³⁶ (Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 143).

e. Application.

The present mood of evangelical Christianity is clearly mirrored by these equivocating pilgrims who hesitate to engage the enemy in combat. Some like C. H. Spurgeon and Dr. J. Gresham Machen have not flinched when faced by the enemy of arrogant liberalism. But by and large the tendency has been for evangelicalism to negotiate with the foe rather than endure mockery and disrepute. However, Isaac Watts has a timely word of rebuke and challenge for us:

³⁶ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 143.

Must I be carried to the skies
 On flowery beds of ease?
 While others fought to win the prize,
 And sailed through bloody seas.
 Sure I must fight if I would reign;
 Increase my courage, Lord!
 I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
 Supported by Thy word.

3. The discernment of Christian as a true pilgrim.

So he went in and was clothed with garments similar to those being worn by the citizens of the palace. Then *Christian* smiled and said, "I certainly know the meaning of this."

Here Bunyan prods the reader with an interpretative challenge. After all, if Christian understands this scene, as he confidently confesses, then so ought any genuine believer as well.

a. This scene describes the pilgrim's progress.

Christian's confident comment, "I think verily I know the meaning of this," is in fact a literary goad since Bunyan intentionally conceals the pilgrim's understanding. However, Christian has already learned of this palace in his book with great delight and appreciation. He has already made that commitment, "Set down my Name Sir," having decisively left the City of Destruction and entered the Wicket-gate under fire, well appreciating the onslaught of the enemy.

b. This scene encapsulates *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Here in a nutshell is the essence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The Christian life is not one of passive resignation, or as Nathaniel Hawthorne portrays it as a comfortable ride in his *The Celestial Railroad*, but rather as Bunyan titles it as a "dangerous journey"³⁷ involving high stakes. How well he portrays this fundamental truth in his famous hymn found in Part Two of this allegory.³⁸

Who would true valor see
 Let him come hither;
 One here will constant be,
 Come wind, come weather.
 There's no discouragement,
 Shall make him once relent,
 His first avow'd Intent,
 To be a Pilgrim.

³⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 168.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

Who so beset him round,
 With dismal stories,
 Do but themselves confound;
 His strength the more is.
 No lion can him fright,
 He'l with a giant fight,
 But he will have the right,
 To be a Pilgrim.

Hobgoblin, nor foul fiend,
 Can daunt his spirit:
 He knows, he at the end,
 Shall life inherit.
 Then fancies fly away,
 He'l fear not what men say,
 He'l labour night and day,
 To be a Pilgrim.

- c. This scene encourages the pilgrim's progress.

In *The Life And Death Of Mr. Badman*, which is a parallel allegory concerning a man who is on pilgrimage toward hell, Bunyan encourages those who would avoid this infernal route to recall the resolve, bravery and audacity of this valiant pilgrim.

So then, whether Mr. Badman's friends shall rage or laugh at what I have writ, I know that the better end of the staff [in quarter-staff combat] is mine. My endeavor is to stop a hellish course of life, and "to save a soul [my own] from death." And if for so doing I meet with envy from them, from whom in reason I should give thanks, I must remember the man in the dream, that cut his way through his armed enemies, and so got into the beauteous palace; I must, I say, remember him, and do myself likewise.³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., p. 592.

G. The Despairing Reprobate in the Iron Cage.

1. The caged man's darkened condition.

Then *Christian* said, "Now let me go forward." But the *Interpreter* replied, "No, you must stay until I have showed you a little more. After this you can be on your way." So he took him by the hand again and led him into a very dark room where a man sat in an iron cage.⁴⁰ Now this man seemed very sad to look upon. He sat with his eyes looking down toward the ground, his hands tightly folded together; and he sighed as if his heart would break. Then said *Christian*, "What does this mean?" So the *Interpreter* told him to talk with the man.

This despairing individual presents one of the most perplexing characterizations in all of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. However, it is necessary, yet sufficient to say here, that Bunyan's teaching must be understood as that of a thoroughly convinced and evangelistic Calvinist. Otherwise, much twisting of his teaching at this point will be necessary, even inevitable. Many appreciative commentators of Bunyan in general have yet refused to accept the plain teaching of this particular scene simply because they were unsympathetic with the author's Calvinism. Refer to this author's *Pilgrim's Progress, Themes and Issues*, pp. 221-235 for a detailed study of the doctrinal and historical roots of this problem. It is quite possible that the sorry individual here portrayed is a reflection of one of the cowardly band in the previous scene who would not boldly fight and struggle to gain entrance into the Celestial City.

a. He is without the light of hope.

In a very dark room sits a man contained in an iron cage. He is sad and bent over with hopeless sorrow. He wrings his hands and sighs over his desperate condition (Ps. 107:10-12).

b. He is distressed to the point of despair.

This man explains to *Christian* that he is locked up to despair. In Bunyan's time, to despair was to be without hope in God, as is the case here because the man is utterly abandoned by God.

c. He is caged in iron and cannot escape.

The terror of this situation is the implication that this fixed incarceration is the condition of some in this present life. Is it possible that God would withhold rescuing mercy from certain individuals? As other writings of Bunyan will indicate, this is his teaching here.

⁴⁰ Despair is like an iron cage.

- d. He is unprepared to meet with eternity.

It is this man's anxiety concerning a desolate, hopeless, endless future that is troubling him. He cries out in his vexation, "O Eternity! Eternity! How shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in Eternity?"

2. The caged man's apostate description described.

CHRISTIAN: What are you doing here?

MAN: I am what I once was not.

CHRISTIAN: What were you once?

MAN: I was once a fair [*attractive*], flourishing [*thriving*] and professing Christian,⁴¹ in the eyes of both myself and others. At one time I was convinced of being fair [*well set*] for reaching the *Celestial City*; and even had joyous thoughts of arrival at that destination.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but what are you now?

MAN: I am now a man of despair and am shut up [*captive*] to it, as this iron cage depicts. I cannot get out. Oh how miserable I am since now I cannot get out.

CHRISTIAN: But how did you come to be in this condition?

MAN: I neglected to watch and be sober; I loosed any restraint that had been on my lusts and gave them free reign; I sinned against the light of the *Word* and the goodness of *God*; I have grieved the *Holy Spirit* so that He has departed from me;⁴² I have provoked *God* to anger and He has abandoned me; I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent.

Then *Christian* spoke to the *Interpreter*, "But is there no hope for such a man as this?" "You ask him," replied the *Interpreter*.

As an apostate, or one who has departed from the true faith, his state of now being beyond recovery may still present a problem for some. After all, is not this man either a far flung backslider or an unbeliever who is a candidate for saving grace?

- a. Once he was a flourishing professor.

That is, according to his own opinion and that of others, he "professed" to be a Christian. For a time he had some assurance, joy, and delight at the prospect of entering the *Celestial City* (Matt. 13:20). He was active in local church life.

- b. Later he neglected to watch and be sober.

(1) He encouraged lustful desires and flirted with temptation as a result of neglecting to be watchful (Matt. 13:21; 26:41).

⁴¹ Luke 8:13.

⁴² Eph. 4:30.

- (2) He sinned against the clear knowledge of God's Word and goodness (Rom. 1:20-23; 2:4; 11:22).
 - (3) He so grieved the Spirit of God that He departed from him (I Sam. 10:10-11; 16:14).
 - (4) He so yielded to the overtures of the Devil that he was claimed him as one of his disciples (I Sam. 16:14).
- c. Now he is abandoned by God.
- (1) He increasingly hardened his heart, when confronted with the holy demands of God's Word, to the point where repentance became impossible (Prov. 29:1).
 - (2) He so provoked divine wrath that he found himself to be renounced and abandoned by God (Rom. 1:18, 22-24, 26, 28), and thus disqualified from receiving the gift of repentance (II Tim. 2:25).



The man in the iron cage

3. The caged man's reprobate condition described.

CHRISTIAN: Do you have any hope that you will not be permanently kept in this iron cage of despair?

MAN: No, none at all.

CHRISTIAN: But why ought that to be so? Are you not aware that the *Son of the Blessed* is very merciful and compassionate?⁴³

MAN: Nevertheless I have crucified him again by my life; I have despised his person;⁴⁴ I have despised his righteousness; I have regarded his blood as something quite unholy; I have done despite to [*spitefully opposed, insulted*] the *Spirit* of grace.⁴⁵ Therefore I have shut myself out of all of the promises of *God*; and there now remains for me nothing but threatenings, fearful prospects of rebuke, fiery indignation, and certain judgment that shall, as would some adversary, wholly consume me.

CHRISTIAN: For what reasons did you bring yourself into this sorry condition?

MAN: On account of the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world. It was in the enjoyment of these things that I promised myself increasing delight. But now they all, as it were, snap back and bite me; they gnaw at my soul like a burning worm.⁴⁶

CHRISTIAN: But can you not now repent and turn from this wretched condition?

MAN: [*No*], for *God* has denied me repentance; His *Word* gives me no encouragement to believe. Yes, He himself has shut me up in this iron cage so that even all the men in the world are unable to obtain my release. Oh eternity! eternity! How can I possibly grapple with the misery that I shall encounter in eternity?

The problem here is not simply the unwillingness of the caged man to cry out for mercy, or his perception of himself as being without hope of mercy. Rather, it is God's withholding of mercy and the grace of repentance, which to many today, is an unthinkable biblical proposition. But consider Romans 9:15-18.

a. His hard heart finds no mercy.

- (1) This calloused prisoner is petrified in his soul; his position is now absolutely hopeless since the mercy of God has passed him by! But for what reasons?
- (2) He crucified afresh, for himself, the Son of God, so bringing shame upon Him (Heb. 6:6).
- (3) He despised the person of the Lord Jesus (Luke 19:14) and his saving righteousness (Rom. 3:21-22; I Cor. 1:30).

⁴³ Jas. 5:11.

⁴⁴ Luke 19:14.

⁴⁵ Heb. 6:4-6; 10:28-29.

⁴⁶ Mark 9:48.

- (4) He treated as unholy the blood of the covenant and insulted the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:28-29).
- (5) He has, as a consequence of spurning God's promises, only the prospect of being consumed by dreadful and fearful threatenings, certain judgment, and fiery indignation (Heb. 10:27).

b. His caged heart is locked up to remorse.

But by what process did this captive condition come about, and how does he now feel about this present fruit of his labors?

- (1) He was, even as a professing Christian, in continual and hot pursuit of the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world (II Tim. 3:3-4). There were some temporary delights in this (Heb. 11:25). However, his entrenchment became increasingly rigid.
- (2) He is, even as a disqualified Christian, now stung with bitter sorrow, as if tormented by a burning worm, at the remembrance of his great folly.

c. His unbelieving heart is denied repentance.

- (1) While this man will not repent, it is also true that he cannot repent. Only the sovereignly bestowed grace of repentance will bring about a change of heart (Acts 5:31; 11:18).
- (2) For Bunyan, repentance is not a response of autonomous man, but rather an individual response wrought by the free grace of God (II Tim. 2:25-26).
- (3) When there is no divine bestowal of change in the heart that is commonly termed repentance, there can be no encouragement of that heart from the Word to believe. Such understanding comes only by means of the regeneration and illumination of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15; I Cor. 2:14-15).

4. The caged man's miserable condition as a warning.

INTERPRETER: So remember this man's misery, and let his sorry condition be a perpetual warning to you.

CHRISTIAN: Well, this is a most fearful situation. May *God* help me to watch and be sober, and pray that I may shun the cause of this man's grief. But sir, is it not now time for me to be on my way?

INTERPRETER: Wait just a little longer so that I can show you one more thing, and then you can continue with your journey.

This fearful scene is designed by Bunyan to encourage a pilgrim to watch, pray, and be sober (I Cor. 16:13; I Thess. 5:6-10; I Pet. 4:7). Otherwise, he may find himself to be as Esau who, "was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:16-17). As a young Christian, Bunyan had himself wrestled at length with the status of Esau and the sober warning that his despairing condition provided.⁴⁷ So in this manner God warns His elect so as to preserve His elect.

- a. He was an apostate in Bunyan's time.

This man was not a backslider, as some might suppose, but an apostate. Authentic backsliders must first have shown signs of genuine front sliding, notably a hunger and thirst for personal righteousness. But it was not the case with this charlatan who had experienced some arousal in self-centered religion while lacking evidence of true conversion (Matt. 12:31-32; Luke 8:13; II Pet. 2:21-22; I John 2:19).

- b. He is representative of counterfeits in our time.

Few churches today would hear such a warning as this. Yet it remains a sobering biblical truth that a man may be alive in the flesh and actively religious while at the same time being irretrievably lost in God's sight. The reason for this is that such a person has been abandoned to their inexorable folly (Matt. 8:21-22; 12:31-32; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

H. The Warning of the Final Day of Judgment.

1. The dream of the unprepared man.

So once again he took *Christian* by the hand and led him into a chamber [*bedroom*] where he observed a man getting out of his bed; and as he put on his clothing he shook and trembled. Then said *Christian*, "Why does this man tremble so much?" *Interpreter* then asked the man to explain the reason for his shaking.

This final scene calls upon Christian to examine himself (Ps. 5:1-3; II Cor. 13:5) in terms of his destiny at the final day of judgment. It is especially concerned with the solemn consignment of the wicked to hell. Preparation for that climactic period of world history is called for rather than neglect (Matt. 12:36; 1 Pet. 4:17; I John 4:17). Bunyan tells us in *The Greatness Of The Soul*: "Once I dreamed that I saw two (whom I knew) in hell, and methought I saw a continual dropping from heaven, as of great drops of fire lighting upon them, to their sore distress."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, I, §§ 141, 158, 191, 196, 205, 212-213, 216, 225-228, pp. 23, 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

a. The rending of the heavens reveals Christ as judge.

So he began and said, "This evening I was fast asleep, and at the same time I dreamed, and behold the heavens became extremely black; also the sky was laced with lightening and thunder in a manner that was terribly frightening, so much so that I was greatly distressed. Then I looked up in my dream and saw the clouds roll across the sky at an unusually swift rate, at which I heard the great sound of a trumpet and also saw a *Man* sit upon a cloud attended with thousands of heavenly beings; and they were all in the midst of flaming fire, even as the heavens were blazing with fire."⁴⁹

- (1) In another room a man rises from his bed trembling and fearful because of a dream, about which he is encouraged to describe. Though a dream within a dream, yet for Bunyan his intention here remains the communication of biblical reality.
- (2) The heavens grew black while thunder and lightening gave terrifying accompaniment. The clouds did "rack" or "move violently." Then followed a great trumpet blast (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:15-17).
- (3) Then appeared a Man seated upon a cloud attended by thousands of angels. They were clothed in flaming fire that extended to the whole heaven (John 5:28-29; II Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:11-15).
- (4) The following is part of a fifty-two stanza poem entitled *Of Judgment*, composed by Bunyan while in prison.⁵⁰

The Judge we find, in God's record,
 The Son of men, for he
 By God's appointment is made Lord
 And Judge of all that be.
 Behold ye now the majesty
 And state that shall attend
 This Lord, this Judge, and Justice high
 When he doth now descend.
 He comes with head as white as snow,
 With eyes like flames of fire;
 In justice clad from top to toe,
 Most glorious in attire.
 His face is filled with gravity;
 His tongue is like a sword;
 His presence awes both stout and high,
 The world shakes at his word.

⁴⁹ Ps. 5:1-3; Isa. 26:21; Dan. 7:10; Mic. 7:16-17; Matt. 26:64; John 5:28; I Cor. 15:51-58; I Thess. 4:16; II Thess. 1:7-10; Jude 15; Rev. 20:11-14.

⁵⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 728-729.

He comes in flaming fire, and
 With angels clear and bright,
 Each with a trumpet in his hand,
 Clothed in shining white.

The trump of God sounds in the air,
 The dead do hear his voice;
 The living too run here and there,
 Who made not him their choice.

- b. The voice of Christ calls mankind to judgment.

“Then I heard a voice calling, ‘Arise you who are dead, and come to your judgment!’ And at this the rocks shattered into pieces, the graves opened, and the dead that were in them came forth; some of them were exceedingly glad and joyously looked upward; and some sought to hide themselves under the mountains.”⁵¹

He commands, with all power having been given to him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), “Arise ye dead, and come to judgment.” The rocks rend, the graves open, and the dead come forth (Dan. 7:9-10; John 5:28-29; I Cor. 15:51-52; Jude 15).

- (1) Some are glad.

Looking upward, they are joyful in first looking on he who they had only beheld through the eye of faith. Supremely, they exalt in their recognition of him and their acceptance by him (I Thess. 4:16-18; II Thess. 1:10).

- (2) Some are sad.

Attempting to look away in guilty shame from he who was formerly scorned, some also desire to flee from his holy gaze, though they are unable to retreat in the slightest degree. The past is now a condemning shameful record, while the future has the portent of everlasting despair (Is. 26:21; Micah 7: 16-17; II Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 6:14-17; 20:11). The present is the supreme and fearful reality, in which the past will be resurrected and the future determined!

⁵¹ Ps. 50:1-3; Isa. 26:20-21; Matt. 27:50-53; Rev. 6:12-17.

c. The voice of Christ speaks from an open book.

“Then I saw the *Man* that sat upon the cloud open the *Book*, and he commanded the world to draw near. Now on account of the fiery flame that came from his person and surrounded him,⁵² there was a necessary distance between he and those called into his presence. Similarly, in just the same way there is a necessary space between a judge and prisoners at the bar in this world. I also heard that those who attended the *Man* who sat on the cloud were ordered, ‘Gather together the tares, the chaff, and stubble, and cast them into the burning lake.’”⁵³

“At this the *Bottomless Pit* immediately opened up, and I would add, very near where I stood; out of that yawning mouth there spewed forth great billows of smoke and coals of fire, along with hideous noises.⁵⁴ To the same attendants it was also commanded, ‘Gather my wheat into my garner [*storehouse*].’⁵⁵ And with that I saw many caught up and carried away into the clouds, but I was left behind.⁵⁶

No distinction is made here between “the book of life” and “the books” (Rev. 20:11-15; cf. Dan. 7:10). However, the world is summoned to draw near without the option of declining.



Gather together the tares, the chaff, and stubble

⁵² Dan. 7:9-10; Mal. 3:2-3.

⁵³ Mal. 4:1; Matt. 3:2; 13:30.

⁵⁴ Rev. 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3.

⁵⁵ Luke 3:17; I Thess. 4:16-17.

⁵⁶ I Thess. 4:13-18.

- (1) The prisoners are gathered at the bar.

Separating Christ the judge from those on trial is a fiery chasm, a holy barrier, so that a casual attitude at this tribunal is unthinkable (Dan. 7:9-10; 9:16, 20; 10:5-8; Mal. 3:2-3).

- (2) The chaff is consigned to the bottomless pit.

This judge, who “searches all hearts” (I Chron. 28:9), has no need to be advised. Rather, he instructs his dutiful angels to “gather together the tares, the chaff, and stubble, and cast them into the burning lake” (Mal. 4:1; Matt. 3:2, 11-12; 13:30). The bottomless pit then ominously opens so closely before the trembling man that he is pierced through with hideous noises that erupt while being almost singed with roaring flame.

- (3) The wheat is consigned to the heavens above.

With the chaff removed or “blown away,” only the good grain remains. So the same angels are commanded to “gather my wheat into my garner” (Luke 3:17). Then many are “caught up” into the clouds (I Thess. 4:16-17), that is except the watching man!



Gather my wheat into my garner

- d. The eye of Christ focuses upon the smitten dreamer.

So I also sought to hide myself, but could not, for the *Man* who sat upon the cloud continuously kept his eye on me: further, my sins all came to mind and my conscience accused me from every direction.⁵⁷ At this point I then awoke from my sleep.”

No mortal look could be compared with this holy gaze. As a result, the man is so personally convicted that he vainly attempts to flee. His sins mount up before him and his conscience continually brings forth accusation after accusation upon itself (Rom. 2:14-15).

2. The distress of the unprepared man.

CHRISTIAN: But what was it that made you so afraid of this sight?
 MAN: Why, I thought that the day of judgment had come and that I was not ready for it. But this frightened me the most, that the angels gathered up several standing near me while I was left behind; also the pit of *Hell* opened its mouth near where I was standing. Furthermore, my conscience was in an agony on account of the *Judge* keeping his eyes focused on me with a look of angry disapproval.

So the man awakes, but only to the greater realization of his lack of readiness for eternity. The warning he has received, like many an earthly reminder of our mortality, is yet a gracious act of divine providence.

- a. He was not prepared for judgment.

His earthly excuses were found wanting; his procrastination was seen in clearer light as utterly foolish; his worldly irrationality had become so obvious; all of his puny defense crumbled before such a penetrating court. His ground of hope seemed as sand.

- b. He was not taken to heaven

Being left behind meant that he was not numbered with the righteous. Hell's yawning mouth, not heaven's gate, had confronted him. His soul was gripped with dismay. He had good reason for being terrified.

⁵⁷ Rom. 2:14-15.

- c. He was smitten by the indignation of Christ.

This Judge conveyed his displeasure with a withering look, even though the man had most likely claimed some allegiance to Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 13:26-27). The fact that others were subject to this same rejection gave him not the faintest sense of relief.

I. The Parting Exhortation of the Interpreter.

Then said the *Interpreter* to *Christian*, "Have you carefully considered all of these things?"

CHRISTIAN: Yes, and they confront me with both hope and fear.⁵⁸

INTERPRETER: Well, keep all of these things at the forefront of your mind so that they can goad you and arouse you to move forward in the right direction.⁵⁹ Then *Christian* began to gird up his loins [*make serious preparation*] for moving ahead on his journey. Then said the *Interpreter*, "I pray that the *Comforter* will always be with you,⁶⁰ good *Christian*, to guide you in the way that leads to the *Celestial City*."

When Christian's wife, Christiana, and their four sons pass this same way in Part Two, they are also provided with this same instruction plus many more illustrations of necessary truth for young pilgrims.⁶¹

1. Interpreter has intended to goad and arouse.

His purpose is that Christian might keep in the narrow way since there are many snares and deceptive spirits along the journey ahead (I John 4:1-6). He is a model of faithful pastoral oversight.

- a. He encourages reflective consideration.

The mind that has been initially awakened through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit is also to be continually stimulated by that same Spirit so that it might increasingly give attention to spiritual things (Rom. 8:5-8).

- b. He invokes the Comforter's presence.

His fellowship is vital for safe transit along the narrow way (John 14:16-18; 16:13-14; II Cor. 13:14), and safe arrival at the Celestial City (Phil. 1:9; Rev. 22:17).

⁵⁸ Ps. 2:11.

⁵⁹ Eccles. 12:11.

⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit. John 14:16-17.

⁶¹ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 183-190.

2. Christian has been stimulated to hope and fear.

Hope without fear may be presumptuous, while fear without hope may be depressive. But both hope and fear honor God (Ps. 2:11).

a. He girds up his loins for progress.

This picture of readiness and alertness is characteristic of active pilgrims such as the redeemed of Israel (Ex. 12:11), the speeding Elijah (I Kings 18:46), the excellent wife (Prov. 31:17), and the Christian soldier (Eph. 6:14; I Pet. 1:13).

b. He presses on with a firmer step.

It ought not to surprise us that the truth which Christian has freshly gleaned will stand him in immediate good stead. His next encounter and resultant comprehension at the Place of Deliverance will most certainly demonstrate this point.

c. He expresses gratitude to his teacher.

So *Christian* went on his way saying,
 Here I have seen things rare, and profitable;
 Things pleasant, dreadful, things to make me stable
 In what I have begun to take in hand:
 Then let me think on them, and understand
 For what purpose they appeared, and let me be
 Thankful, O good *Interpreter*, to thee.

Since Christian now knows more of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17), so he is enabled to “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13). Thus he gratefully acknowledges his newly obtained legacy of truth.