Chapter Ten

Christian Overtakes Simple, Sloth, and Presumption

A. Christian encounters three untroubled sleeping pilgrims.

I SAW then in my dream that Christian went on his way, that is until he came to the bottom of the hill. There he saw, beside the way, three men fast asleep with chains attached to their heels. The name of one was Simple, another was Sloth, and the third was Presumption.

Running downhill ever so lightly, the wide-eyed and recently unshackled pilgrim is confronted with three shut-eyed and shackled pilgrims. The contrast is intended, and the surprise to Christian is both intense and baffling.

1. Introduction.

When a young Christian pilgrim has just experienced great blessing, deliverance, and a renewed sense of joyous assurance, he is at the same time susceptible to a naive attitude toward the surrounding religious world. His expectations are very often conditioned by his own particular arena of bliss, though it is not long before a dose of harsh reality jolts his commendable spiritual idealism.

a. The enthusiasm of a novice Christian.

He runs with innocent abandon. He has few wounds because he has seen little combat, and can hardly conceive of either rejection or of indifference toward the truth he so passionately embraces. He personally knows of authentic Christianity, but it is hard for him to understand concerning the perverted or counterfeit variety such as has been graphically portrayed at the house of the Interpreter.

b. The enlightenment of a novice Christian.

Jesus Christ warned his disciples: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt. 10:16). But in addition to ravaging beasts, the inexperienced believer will also be astonished to discover sluggish snails, drowsy sloths, blind bats, silly goats, treacherous swine, turning worms, stinging adders, and stubborn mules! Such are these willfully sedated pilgrims.

2. There is Simple, representing spiritual dullness.

His drug is spiritual naiveté compounded from spiritual ignorance. His condition is self-inflicted comatose confinement.
3. There is Sloth, representing spiritual lethargy.

His drug is carnal torpor compounded from carnal indulgence. His condition is also self-inflicted comatose confinement.

4. There is Presumption, representing spiritual haughtiness.

His drug is proud confidence compounded from self-sufficiency. His condition is also self-inflicted comatose confinement.

B. Christian attempts to arouse these drowsy travelers.

Upon Christian seeing these pilgrims dozing on the ground, he approached them with the hope that he might be able to awaken them. So he exhorted them, “You are like those who fall asleep at the top of a mast, for the Dead Sea is under you, that is a gulf that has no bottom. Therefore arouse yourselves and be on the move; if you are willing, I will also help you to be relieved of your shackles.” He also told them, “If he who prowls about like a roaring lion should come by, you will certainly become prey for his teeth.”

With well intentioned concern, Christian stirs and warns these befuddled pilgrims, perhaps with the added exhortation: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5:14). No doubt he anticipates a thankful and repentant response.

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1 Prov. 23:34.
2 1 Pet. 5:8.
1. They are likened to a watch asleep at sea.

As a sailor, asleep on watch at the top of a mast in the midst of a tossing sea, is in danger of perishing (Prov. 23:24), so they are in danger of spiritual ruin as they sail on the “Dead Sea” of idleness. Therefore, Christian offers the deliverance of arousal to pilgrimage (Rom. 13:11).

2. They are warned of Satan who seeks prey to devour.

The allusion here is to 1 Peter 5:8 where, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Thus the Christian pilgrimage is more biblically and realistically portrayed as a hazardous expedition rather than a leisurely blissful pathway that offers frequent periods of pleasurable repose.

C. Christian is Scorned for His Concern and Advice.

To this they merely glanced at him and replied in the following unconcerned manner: Simple naïvely answered, “I do not see any danger.” Sloth mumbled, “Just let me have a little more sleep.” Then Presumption proudly asserted, “Every tub must stand upon its own bottom [without the need of assistance], so what else need I say?” And so they all lay down to sleep again, while Christian decided it would be better to be on his way.

He is thought worthy only of indifference and disdain; he is contemptuously regarded as an evangelical enthusiast with alarmist tendencies, and eccentric in his piety. According to these loafers who recline in their religion, Christianity calls for relaxation in fellowship, not arduous, disciplined, and sober journeying.

1. Simple sees no danger, so why should he not sleep?

Here is a character who personifies a foolish individual (Prov. 1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4; 14:15; 22:3). This simple or naive pilgrim is often youthful, ignorant, wayward, senseless, unwise, indulgent, gullible, and careless.

a. But he is danger of perishing through ignorance.

Untaught in the Word, and trusting in his petty understanding, he is ready to yield to the opinions of his misguided companions (Matt. 15:14). In blindly living for sensual pleasure in the present, he exposes himself to the danger of being shackled beyond remedy, and thus excluded from future residency in heaven. In becoming increasingly naive, he little realizes just how much he is being ensnared by the wiles, craft, and beguiling machinations of Satan (Eph. 4:14; 6:11).

3 If God does not open the eyes of the soul, there will be no persuasion of the truth.
b. But he is in danger of perishing through neglect.

Alexander Whyte comments concerning Simple’s neglect of the means of grace.

It was not the weakness of his intellects, nor his youth, nor his inexperience. There is danger enough, no doubt, in all these things if they are not carefully attended to. . . . In our experience of him we cannot get him, all we can do, to read an instructive book. We cannot get him to attend our young men’s class with all the baits and traps we can set for him."

2. Sloth can only think to indulge the flesh, so why not sleep?

Here is a character who personifies a lazy individual (Prov. 12:27; 15:19; 18:9; 19:24; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34). This slothful drone of a pilgrim is often unproductive, vulnerable, slack in labor, drowsy, imperiled, cowardly, and irresponsible.

a. But he is in danger of sleeping sickness.

Too lazy to study the Word and persevere in the faith, he rests upon some decision in the past which deludes him into believing that his place in heaven is secure. His perception of himself and this present world is misguided. He is mainly concerned with his own well-being and sensual contentment. This world provides a relatively harmless environment. He is undisciplined, ill-prepared, and self-indulgent. One day, when it is too late, he will finally awake to the reality of the poverty, paralysis, and misery of his soul (Prov. 29:1).

b. But he is in danger of sleeping on duty.

Alexander Whyte comments concerning Sloth’s dereliction of spiritual duty.

We have all enemies in our souls that never sleep, whatever we may do. There are no irons on their heels. They never procrastinate. They never say to their master, A little more slumber. And, if so, what have you done, what are you at this moment doing, to cast that enemy out? Have you any armor on? . . . What fort do you hold? . . . Alexander used to leave his tent at midnight and go round the camp, and spear to his post the sentinel he found sleeping."

3. Presumption needs no help, except to be left alone.

Here is a character who personifies arrogant self-sufficiency (Num. 15:30-31; Deut. 17:12; Ps. 19:13). This pilgrim with unholy confidence is often defiant, rebellious, traitorous, and disrespectful even when conscious of the very presence of God.

a. But he is in danger of self-destruction.

His comment, “Every tub must stand upon his own bottom,” is probably a quotation of the old English proverb, “Every vat [tub?] must stand on its own bottom.” In other words he replies, “But every person must paddle his own canoe.


\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 117-118.
I can take care of myself without your advice or assistance.” If only he were aware of the dangerous rapids ahead! He proudly boasts in being able to live as an island unto himself, to reject exhortation, to ignore fellowship, to resist opposition unaided. He despises the thought of submission in a local church (Heb. 13:17).

b. But he is in danger of religious delusion.

Alexander Whyte comments concerning Presumption’s taking for granted the holy saving work of Christ.

He had been at the cross with his past sin, and had left the cross to commit the same sin at the first opportunity. Presumption presumed upon pardon. He presumed upon the abounding grace of God. He presumed upon the blood of Christ. There is a reprobate in Dante, who, all the time he was repenting, had his eye on his next opportunity.⁶

D. Christian sadly awakens to the peril of neglectful pilgrims.

Even so, Christian was troubled to think that men, in such obvious danger, should so lightly regard the kindness of he who freely offered them assistance, that is by volunteering to help them be relieved of their shackles.

He is disturbed that spiritual travelers such as these sluggards could be so foolish as to reject sorely needed counsel and assistance. Even he has heeded the advice of Evangelist, Help, Good-will, and the Interpreter thus far. But at least Christian is now free from accountability regarding the mortal plight of Simple, Sloth, and Presumption (Ezek. 33:8-9).

1. They spurn being awakened.

There are none so blind as those who desire not to see, as those who desire not to be aroused from spiritual sluggishness, as those who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

2. They spurn being counseled

There are none so bigoted as those who prefer error to truth, as those who esteem the word of man above that of the Word of God, as those who cling to their opinions in spite of wise counsel (Prov. 11:14).

3. They spurn being unshackled.

There are none so captive as those who call bondage freedom, as those who call freedom bondage, as those who call evil good and good evil (Isa. 5:20), as those who are blind and yet claim to see (John 9:39-41).

⁶ Ibid., p. 119.