Chapter Eleven

Christian Converses with Formalist and Hypocrisy

A. Christian Catches Sight of Two Irregular Pilgrims.

Now as Christian reflected on this disturbing encounter, he noticed two men come tumbling over the Wall on the left-hand side of the narrow way; and they hurried along to catch up with him. The name of one was Formalist, and the name of the other Hypocrisy. So, as I mentioned, they drew near and Christian commenced a conversation with them.

CHRISTIAN: Gentlemen, from where have you come, and what is your destination?

FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY: We were born in the land of Vain-glory and are going to Mount Zion for the purpose of receiving praise.

The fact that Christian is troubled as he muses concerning Simple, Sloth, and Presumption, may lead us to conclude that their abnormal behavior identifies them as fellow-citizens with the now appearing Formalist and Hypocrisy. Both groups seek personal gratification rather than reconciliation with a holy God.
1. The suspect qualifications of Formalist and Hypocrisy.

Christian’s recent naivety seems now to have been supplanted by caution born of experience. There will be much more opportunity in the future for him to hone his faculty of judgment with regard to questionable pilgrims.

a. Their entry is illegitimate.

In tumbling over the wall called Salvation, these intruders signify that they have not come by way of the Wicket-gate, the house of the Interpreter, or the Place of Deliverance. They are religious raiders, interlopers, and squatters.

b. Their breeding is illegitimate.

Having been born in the land of Vainglory, they believe this connection to be a desirable prerequisite, a pilgrim badge rather than in fact a serious hindrance. No doubt they appear supremely confident, and unburdened as well.

c. Their motivation is illegitimate.

They are intent on going to Mt. Zion so as to receive praise rather than give praise! They esteem themselves as having sufficient merit so as to be worthy of earning God’s applause. Their relative lack of interest in the King of Mt. Zion, in contrast, is conspicuous.

2. The distinctive characteristics of Formalist and Hypocrisy.

It is significant that in Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners Bunyan frankly describes himself, prior to his conversion, as having the essential marks of both of these individuals.

a. Formalist is a religious performer.

Alexander Whyte comments:

Look at the religious formalist at family worship with his household gathered round him all in his own image. He would not on any account let his family break up any night without the habitual duty. He has a severe method in his religious duties that nothing is ever allowed to discharge or in any way to interfere with. As the hour strikes, the big Bible is brought out. He opens where he left off last night, he reads the regulation chapter, he leads the singing in the regulation psalm, and then, as from a book, he repeats his regulation prayer. But he never says a word to show that he either sees or feels what he reads, and his household break up without an idea in their heads or an affection in their hearts. He comes to church and goes through public worship in the same wooden way.¹

¹ Alexander Whyte, Bunyan Characters, I, pp. 132-133.
(1) He personifies external religion.

His prime religious interest is in outward form, religious pomp, ritual, vestments, gorgeous ceremony, pageantry, architectural atmosphere, set prayers, sacerdotalism, icons, complex material symbolism, etc. quite irrespective of the greater importance of the condition of the heart (Luke 20:46-47).

(2) He personifies unconverted Bunyan.

In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan describes his dead formality thus:

I fell in very eagerly with the religion of the times; to whit, to go to church twice a day, and that too with the foremost; and there should very devoutly, both say and sing as others did, yet retaining my wicked life; but withal, I was so overrun with a spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things, both the high place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, and what else belonging to the church; . . .This conceit grew so strong in little time upon my spirit, that had I but seen a priest, though never so sordid and debauched in his life, I should find my spirit under him, reverence him; yea, I thought for the love I did bear unto them, supposing they were the ministers of God, I could have lain down at their feet, and have been trampled upon by them; their name, their garb, and work, did so intoxicate and bewitch me.²

He also writes in *The Strait Gate*:

He [the formalist] is a man that hath lost all but the shell of religion. He is hot, indeed, for his form; and no marvel, for that is his all to contend for. But his form being without the power and spirit of godliness, it will leave him in his sins.³

b. Hypocrisy is a religious pretender.

Alexander Whyte comments:

The perfect and finished hypocrite is not your commonplace and vulgar scoundrel of the playwright and the penny-novelist type; the finest hypocrite is a character that art cannot touch. 'The worst of hypocrites,' Rutherford goes on to say, 'is he who whitens himself till he deceives himself. It is strange that a man hath such power over himself. But a man's heart may deceive his heart, and he may persuade himself that he is godly and righteous when he knows nothing about it.'⁴

(1) He personifies counterfeit religion.

His religious charade involves feeding on the superficial recognition and congratulations of religious triflers, while he remains essentially irreligious. He masquerades as a Christian, and often plays the role deceptively well, while being unashamedly ungodly off-stage (Matt. 6:2, 5; 23:1-33).

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³ Ibid., I, p. 136.
(2) He personifies unconverted Bunyan.

In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan describes his deceptive religious posturing thus:

I continued about a year; all which time our neighbours did take me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man, and did marvel much to see such a great and famous alteration in my life and manners; and, indeed, so it was, though yet I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope; . . . I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and, indeed, I did all I did, either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of, by man.\(^5\)

Later in *Christian Behavior* He warns:

Wherefore take heed of being painted fire, wherein is no warmth; and painted flowers, which retain no smell; and of being painted trees whereon is no fruit. ‘Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain.’ Prv. 25:14.\(^6\)

In *A Book for Boys and Girls* he illustrates:

The hypocrite is like unto this frog,
As like as is the puppy to the dog.
He is of nature cold, his mouth is wide
To prate, and at true goodness to deride.
He mounts his head as if he was above
The world, when yet ‘tis that which has his love.
And though he seeks in churches for to croak,
He neither loveth Jesus nor his yoke.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Ibid., II, p. 550.

\(^7\) Ibid., III, p. 758.
CHRISTIAN CONVERSES WITH FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY


CHRISTIAN: Then why did you not enter at the Wicket-gate which is located at the beginning of this way? Don’t you know that it has been written, “He who does not enter in by the door, but climbs up some other way, that same person is a thief and a robber?”

FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY: That may be so; however our countrymen have all agreed that this entrance or Wicket-gate you mention is too far away. Rather they prefer to take a short cut and climb over the Wall at this point, just as we have done.

CHRISTIAN: But will not your custom be regarded as a trespass against the Lord of the Celestial City to which we are headed, and thus a violation of his revealed will?

FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY: Well, don’t you trouble yourself about that. The reason is that their manner of entry has become a long established custom; in fact many witnesses would testify that it has been accepted as an established route for over a thousand years.

CHRISTIAN: Nevertheless, will your practice stand up to investigation in a court of law?

FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY: We believe so. Our tradition has been accepted for so long, that is for well over a thousand years, that it would doubtless be admitted as a legal ordinance by any impartial judge. However, practically speaking, we are now in the way; so what does it matter how we got in? If we are in, then we are in. As we understand it, you are in the way having entered through the Wicket-gate; and we also are in the way by means of tumbling over the Wall. So how is your present condition any different from ours?

In recalling his earlier instruction from Evangelist, as well as the illegitimacy of Pliable and the foolishness of Simple, Sloth, and Presumption, this novice pilgrim is learning not to take the initial stance of fellow travelers at face value. In today’s polyreligious climate, shall we say more devious than in Bunyan’s time?, how all the more necessary it ought to be to investigate professing pilgrims and not immediately accept their easy verbal profession. Since many biblical terms have today become hackneyed, such as being “saved,” “converted,” “born again,” etc. ought we not carefully probe and investigate as Christian does here? We will soon discover that had not Christian been cautious here, he may well have perished.

1. Do not only thieves and robbers enter illegally?

This time Christian has consulted his book, specifically John 10:1. The deceitful response is that custom and convenience have established truth. There is no absolute necessity for the Wicket-gate (cf. Luke 24:26; John 14:6). Many of their countrymen

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8 John 10:1.
9 Those who do not enter the way by the Wicket-gate yet think that they can vindicate their practice of illegitimate entry.
have come this way, like ill-destined lemmings! However, their shortened route will not ultimately prove to have saved them trouble, but rather obtain for them eternal damnation.

2. Will not the Lord of the city ahead disqualify them?

Not if longstanding tradition has any significance. For a thousand years pilgrims from the Land of Vain-glory have taken such short cuts. But Christian has perceived the heart of the problem, namely disobedience against God’s gospel. Keeble suggests this thousand year period is that medieval age of spiritual declension under Roman Catholicism which the Puritans perceived of as preceding the Protestant Reformation.¹⁰

3. Will their testimony stand up to a trial by law?

Though an untruth is an untruth whether it be a day or a thousand years old, yet the delusion of truth established by consensus, not righteous revelation from God, is propounded. Arguments for the righteousness of democratic promulgation, tradition, and culture, based upon human precedent, are similarly fallacious. The voting patterns, conventions, and behavioral norms of Vain-glory will not save its citizens from the righteous judgment of God. However, argue these intruders, our geographical status is identical, irregardless of which way we entered the King’s highway. Therefore, “If we are in, we are in!” Even so, though that foul fiend Apollyon will defiantly straddle the way in the not too distant future, yet his correct position will in no way deliver him from final judgment. Many who travel the King’s highway are alien citizens.

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¹⁰ N. H. Keeble ed., The Pilgrim’s Progress, p. 269.
C. Christian Distinguishes Between Himself and These Odd Pilgrims.

While Formalist and Hypocrisy claim that there is little difference between themselves and their new acquaintance, yet Christian makes it clear that in fact there are several differences that make a radical difference.

1. The contrast in the realm of subjection.

CHRISTIAN: I walk by the rule of my Master. You walk according to the uninformed working of your imagination. You are already considered to be thieves by the Lord of the way. Therefore, I have little doubt that you will be found to be illegitimate pilgrims at the end of the way. You entered in by your own devising without his direction; and so you will leave by yourselves without his mercy.

At this they hardly offered a reply, except that they suggested that Christian should pay attention to himself. Then I saw each man move ahead, though without much conversation taking place between them. However, the two intruders did have this to say. As to laws and ordinances, doubtless they were as conscientious in obeying them as he.

So they continued, "We do not see where you differ from us in the slightest, except for the coat which you are wearing; most likely it was provided by your neighbors to hide your shameful nakedness."

The great question here is whether, in the matter of religion, man ought to subject himself to God or man, the truth from Mount Zion or the truth from Vain-glory? There are only two sorts of pilgrims here, and while materially their paths may seem to often run parallel in local church fellowship, yet in God's sight they are as different as sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-33, wheat and chaff (Luke 3:16-17).

a. Regarding Christian.

Fundamentally, he is different in his heart, that is his mind, affections, and will. His mind is renewed, his affections are holy, and his will is biased toward righteousness.

(1) He yields to the will of his Master.

He is subject to the Lord of the way, that is "under the law of Christ" (I Cor. 9:21), as well as his helpful associates such as Evangelist and other messengers.

(2) He yields to the provisions of his Master.

He is subject to several identifying features that Christ has obtained for him including a coat, a forehead mark, and a sealed roll. In addition, there is the book of directions in his hand, namely the word of his Master.
b. Regarding Formalist and Hypocrisy.

Fundamentally, they are different at heart, that is with regard to their minds, affections, and wills. Their minds are darkened, their affections are unholy, and their wills are biased toward unrighteousness.

(1) They yield to laws and ordinances.

“Laws and ordinances” (Eph. 2:15) represent legal obedience that is at best only partial, and here obviously sham conformity. As a result, they are at enmity with the Master of the way.

(2) They yield to the provisions of Vain-glory.

In claiming that their clothing and appearance, obtained in Vain-glory, is equal to that of Christian, they indicate their blindness to the free gift of imputed righteousness that is received through faith alone in Christ (Rom. 5:21). Thus they are thieves and robbers, illegitimate pilgrims who shall find themselves disqualified at the end of the way, that is if they reach it! They are ignorant of the word of the Lord of the way; they are directed by reason and consensus, not revelation.

2. The contrast in the realm of attire.

CHRISTIAN: By obedience to laws and ordinances you will not be saved since you did not enter in at the Wicket-gate.\textsuperscript{11} And as for this coat that I wear, it was given to me by the Lord of the Celestial City to which I am going. Yes, it is for the purpose of covering my nakedness, and furthermore, I accept it as a token of his kindness granted to me when I earlier wore nothing but rags.\textsuperscript{12} Besides, this garment comforts me as I travel. I muse about that time when I shall eventually arrive at the gate of the Celestial City; surely the Lord will recognize me on account of my wearing his coat, that which he freely gave me on the day when he stripped me of my rags.

Moreover, I have a mark on my forehead which you may not have noticed; it was placed on me by one of my Lord’s most intimate associates on the same day when my burden fell from off my shoulders. In addition to this I have been given a sealed scroll to be read for comfort as I continue along the way; I have been ordered to hand it in at the gate of the Celestial City as a token of my authorization to enter. However, I doubt if you desire any of these things, though you do lack them because you did not enter in at the Wicket-gate.

\textsuperscript{11} Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:15.

\textsuperscript{12} Isa. 61:10; Gal. 3:27.
Here we deal with spiritual truth that is signified by means of earthly emblems. To Christian these matters are precious, while to Formalist and Hypocrisy they are only worthy of mockery. In material terms, the differences here are not readily apparent, while from a spiritual perspective the distinctions here are radical. Such is the gulf that separates true and counterfeit pilgrims.

a. Regarding Formalist and Hypocrisy.

In laying the foundation for a vivid contrast, Bunyan here portrays the religious hopes of the unconverted man who boasts in works righteousness and derides evangelical righteousness.

(1) They boast in their intrinsic righteousness.

Their brazen claim to sufficient conformity to laws and ordinances is a futile confidence in the flesh (Rom. 8:5-8; Gal. 6:12; Phil. 3:3-7). Their corruption is not effectively concealed, notwithstanding their much vaunted wardrobe from Vain-glory.

(2) They deride Christian’s cloak of righteousness.

Their claim of parity has one notable exception. They identify Christian’s unusual coat, which is scorned, as a facade that is designed to cover his shameful nakedness. To a degree, their observation is correct, though they are blind to their own nakedness and guilty of “insulting the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29). However, it ought to be remembered that it is the Lord of the Celestial City who shall determine what is acceptable dress in his kingdom, and not these two rebels.

b. Regarding Christian.

Here, as in numerous other places in The Pilgrim’s Progress and the works of Bunyan in general, we encounter what was for the author the heart of the Christian gospel, namely the free and substitutionary righteousness of Jesus Christ. Bunyan gloried in this doctrine, as did the Reformers of the preceding century.

(1) He boasts in his distinctive coat.

It is a free gift from the Lord of the way (Rom. 3:24; 5:17) which this same Master accepts as a real cover for Christian’s real spiritual nakedness as opposed to the futility of his former rags (Gal. 2:15-16; 6:14-15; Phil. 3:8-9). Thus this coat is a constant reminder of his Lord’s mercy and acceptance.

(2) He boasts in his additional distinctives.

These appear to be unrecognized by his short-sighted acquaintances. There is Christian’s forehead mark which distinguishes him as one of God’s elect (Ezek. 9:1-7). There is also his sealed roll which is kept close to his breast
(Eph. 1:13-14). Thus Christian concludes that these are truly glaring distinguishing marks that set him apart. Of course Formalist and Hypocrisy have no desire for these distinctives since they see no need. One party has made legitimate entrance into the way, the other illegitimate. Both parties are clothed, the one by heaven, the other by this world!

3. Application.

Here Bunyan stresses the basic Reformation truth of “the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 3:22; 4:5-8), which doctrine the religious world in general will constantly assail. The child of God will often be challenged, by those who are broadly religious, with the claim that his faith and deportment are little better than thousands of non-evangelical, philanthropic, selfless pious exemplars. Hence, they will deny that salvation is exclusively by grace through faith while still claiming to be Christian pilgrims. What principles then apply here concerning the perception of Christian by his religious critics?

a. The principle of blindness to grace.

Apparently Christian communicates the truth of his trust in a cloak of substitute righteousness. This distinction his associates both acknowledge and reject as being of little consequence. They are blind to the grace that justifies, except they be converted. This blindness is characteristic of all unregenerate souls (I Cor. 2:14). It is well to remember, however, that though the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus appeared similar from man’s perspective, yet one of these was clothed with a cloak similar to that of Christian!

b. The principle of blindness to graciousness.

It is a strange truth that while the unregenerate in this world are dead to God and alive to unrighteousness (Rom. 6:17; Eph. 2:1-3), yet at times they will recognize evident righteousness, at least in the privacy of their hearts (Matt. 5:16; Rom. 12:20; I Pet. 2:12). This is not to say that they will necessarily desire and openly acknowledge godliness when they see it. Even so, the reflection of the light of true Christian grace and virtue is an exhibition that the unholy darkness of this world cannot extinguish (John 1:5). Sadly, while Christian’s justification is communicated and dismissed as being inconsequential, yet his sanctification seems to have been passed by without so much as a mention!
D. Christian Proceeds Separated from these Alien Pilgrims.

To these comments they did not make a reply, except that they looked at each other and then burst out laughing. Then I noticed that they all continued to press forward, though Christian moved ahead of them on his own; so not talking with these strangers any longer, he could only muse with himself, sometimes groaning and at other times expressing contentment. For further refreshment he would often read from the scroll earlier given to him by one of the Shining Ones.

Since Christian has no true ground of fellowship with Formalist and Hypocrisy, particularly with regard to the essential doctrine of the gospel, he sees no profit in pursuing ecumenical relations (Amos 3:3; I Cor. 5:9-11; II Cor. 6:14-18).

1. Formalist and Hypocrisy foolishly laugh.

Having been soundly and deservedly rebuked, their only recourse is to feelings of amusement tinged with pity and contempt. But what shall they say when one day they stand before Him whose righteousness they regarded of little value? (Zech. 11:12-13; Heb. 2:3; I Pet. 4:18).

2. Christian has feelings of ambivalence.

While “double-mindedness” is generally to be spurned by the Christian (Jas. 1:8; 4:8), yet here this spiritual bifurcation is perfectly legitimate.

a. He sighs and groans at such blindness.

Man’s blatant perverseness and stark blindness cause him to be perplexed and distressed. Perhaps he has naively believed to this point that a clear and persuasive presentation of the gospel is bound to be gladly embraced by those who are so obviously in error. If so, then he is now forced to reconsider his position, and study his book more closely.

b. He gains comfort from reading his roll.

Perhaps he is tempted to believe that the exclusive claims of the gospel are a complete fabrication, that is if the opinions of Formalist and Hypocrisy prove to be correct. Then in his book he reads such words of comfort and truth as: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me” (Song of Sol. 7:10); and, “there is one God, and mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). Further, the author of Christian’s roll whispers words of assurance to his wavering heart (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:10).