

## Chapter Twelve

### Christian Ascends the Hill Difficulty

#### A. The Three Pilgrims are Confronted with Three pathways.

NOW I understand that they all continued on till they came to the foot of a *Hill*, at the bottom of which was a spring. At this same place two other ways joined with the straight way coming from the *Wicket-gate*; one turned to the left hand and the other to the right at the bottom of the *Hill*. However, the narrow way continued straight up the *Hill*, its name being *Difficulty*.

While the narrow way ahead is straight, yet it ascends and descends in a manner that is designed to sorely test persevering pilgrims. Here the Hill Difficulty represents those toilsome trials that distress and restrict travelers, especially those who protest at being discomforted. However, pilgrims who seek alternative level detours will not be disappointed, though they may be disqualified (Luke 14:25-33)!

1. There is first a refreshing spring for all to drink from.

This is a clear reference to Isaiah 49:10-11 where Israel is encouraged with the promise: "They will not hunger or thirst, neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; for He who has compassion on them will lead them, and will guide them to springs of water. And I will make all My mountains a road." So God provides the means of grace whereby pilgrims may be enabled to conquer difficulties, though with regard to the new-found alien company, Christian alone drinks here and then commences to sprint up the Hill. It would seem that Formalist and Hypocrisy have no-thirst for enabling grace.

2. The narrow pathway leads straight up the Hill Difficulty.

This way offers right direction and it leads to life (Matt. 7:14), yet it also requires increased exertion and commitment. The choice here for pilgrims is principally concerned with righteousness quite apart from any thought of personal ease. Likewise with Jesus Christ; it was the primacy of righteousness, that is the will of the Father (Luke 22:42), that led him to confront great difficulty and shun less troublesome pathways (Matt. 27:40-42).

3. Another circumventing level pathway is named Danger.

However, it deviates to the left from the straight way (Ps. 125:5). It represents a distinctive, beguiling, and soothing philosophy that is opposed to the other two pathways. In today's world, this "leftward" direction could easily represent the great variety of socialist philosophies that claim Rousseau and Marx for their champions.

4. Another circumventing level pathway is named Destruction.

However, it deviates to the right from the straight way (Is. 59:7-8). It represents a distinctive, beguiling, and soothing philosophy that is opposed to the other two pathways. In today's world, this "rightward" direction could easily represent the great variety of secular conservative philosophies that are represented by fascism, laissez-faire capitalism, and the materialistic selfishness of social Darwinism and Ayn Rand.

## B. The Three Pilgrims make Three Decisions.

So *Christian* first drank at the spring for refreshment,<sup>1</sup> and then commenced to climb up the *Hill*, saying:

This *Hill*, though high, I covet to ascend,  
 The difficulty will not me offend:  
 For I perceive the way to life lies here;  
 Come, pluck up, heart; let's neither faint nor fear:  
 Better, though difficult, the right way to go,  
 Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.

Thus *Formalist* and *Hypocrisy* also came to the foot of the *Hill*. Here they saw that it was steep and high, and that there were two alternative ways for them to go along which, they imagined, would later join in with the way of *Christian* beyond the *Hill*. So they decided to follow what appeared to them to be the easier routes;<sup>2</sup> the name of one was *Danger*, and the name of the other *Destruction*. So one proceeded along *Danger* which led him into a great wood; the other went along *Destruction* which entered a wide field full of dark mountains, and there he stumbled and fell never to rise again.<sup>3</sup>

The attitude of a pilgrim toward prospective difficulty is of prime significance here. Kelman comments:

Formalist and Hypocrisy may be a ridiculing and persecuting religion - never a suffering one. It is, however, striking that while formerly they took a short cut to avoid the Cross, here they have to take a way round about to avoid the hill; which things are also for an allegory - many of the longest wanderings in life have been begun to avoid a very little hill.<sup>4</sup>

However, with *Christian* we see great determination in the face of temporary difficulty on account of his living hope (I Pet. 1:3-7).

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 110:7; Isa. 49:10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 14:12.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. 13:16.

<sup>4</sup> John Kelman, *The Road*, I, p. 84.

1. Christian drinks and ascends the Hill Difficulty.

Feeling weary for the journey, yet strengthened by grace (Is. 49:10), Christian commences to soar up the hill like an eagle (Is. 40:30-31), even singing as he goes. His song perfectly expresses genuine pilgrim motivation; it also indicates how tribulation is productive of rejoicing, hope, and proven character (Rom. 5:3-4).

2. Another, probably Formalist, enters the pathway named Danger.

He, like his associate, is guided by the human supposition that this route will later rejoin the narrow way. In modern terms, he is convinced of the "prosperity gospel" which offers a comfortable pathway. Instead, he is lost in a great forest where devouring beasts dwell (Ps. 104:20).

3. Another, probably Hypocrisy, enters the pathway named Destruction.

He is also guided by human supposition, except that it is contrary to the opinion of his associate. This is the inevitable result of humanism, whether it be of the liberal or conservative kind. As a consequence, he stumbles to rise no more (Prov. 4:19; Is. 59:7-10) in the midst of dark mountains (Jjer. 13:16).

4. Application.

Now we understand why it was so important for Christian not to continue in fellowship with these imposters. He may easily have been distracted from strengthening grace and led astray to his death (Matt. 15:14) by means of the allurements of sensual religion.



Christian climbs the Hill Difficulty

### C. Christian Rests at a Wayside Shady Nook.

Then I looked toward *Christian* to see just how far he had climbed up the *Hill*. It appeared that he had been reduced from running to walking, and from walking to clambering on his hands and knees because of the steepness of the incline. Now about halfway up the *Hill* was a pleasant *Arbor* [*Shady Resting-place*]<sup>5</sup> provided by the *Lord* of the *Hill* for the refreshment of weary travelers.

So *Christian* reached this shelter where he then sat down to rest awhile. Then he pulled his *scroll* out of his chest pocket and began to read it for comfort; he also took a fresh look at his new garment which was given to him as he stood before the *Cross*. Thus being pleasantly stimulated for a time, he at first snoozed and then fell fast asleep; as a result, he was detained at that place until near sunset while at the same time his *scroll* fell out of his hand.<sup>6</sup> Now as he was sleeping, someone approached and awakened him with a call, "Go to the ant, you sluggard [*loafer*], and consider her ways, and be wise."<sup>7</sup> At this, *Christian* arose with a jolt and started on his way, racing ahead until he came to the top of the *Hill*.

In contrast with the grace that imparted spiritual energy, discernment, and life at the foot of the Hill Difficulty, there is now given, in the midst of growing weariness, the grace of rest and recovery. This interlude is in no way meant to encourage either lethargy or over-confidence.

1. Running, then walking, then crawling, Christian struggles upward.

Though his hands and knees increasingly smart because of the steep grade, and thus his progress is restricted, yet he continues to head in the right direction without looking either backward or to the left or to the right.

2. Half-way up the Hill Difficulty, Christian finds a place of rest.

No doubt he has cried to the Lord of the Hill for relief from his increasing distress (Ps. 27:5, 7) with the result that a refreshing wayside shady nook providentially appears. The Spirit of God does especially minister to our infirmities (Rom. 8:26). Hence, according to Bunyan's marginal comment, this place is "a ward [place of recovery] of grace," not as Wharey and Sharrock weakly argue, an "award of grace."<sup>8</sup>

- a. He reviews his roll as earlier exhorted.

Like a lady who is engaged to be married and gains assurance by looking at the ring of promise that her prospective bridegroom has given to her, so Christian is

<sup>5</sup> A ward [place of protection] of grace.

<sup>6</sup> He who sleeps is a loser.

<sup>7</sup> Prov. 6:6.

<sup>8</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. 320.

strengthened with the token of God's irrevocable covenant love, namely His pledge of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1: 13-14).

- b. He reviews his newly acquired coat.

In other words, in the midst of a difficult and stressful situation, Christian cleaves to his only concrete ground of hope, that is the objective, perfect substitutionary righteousness of Jesus Christ that wholly covers the struggling yet believing pilgrim. H. G. Spafford wrote-of this faith as follows:

Though Satan should buffet, though  
trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless  
estate  
And has shed His own blood for my  
soul.  
  
My sin, O the bliss of this glorious  
thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no  
more;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O  
my soul!

- c. He lapses into a deep, long sleep.

In "pleasing himself," that is in becoming self-indulgent, Christian slips into the very condition he had earlier found to be so deplorable in Simple, Sloth, and Presumption. Yet, as Kelman points out, he differed from them in two essential points, "for (1) he had done something to earn repose, and (2) he repented when he was awakened."<sup>9</sup>

- d. He is awakened by a messenger and rebuked.

Perhaps it was a verbal reprimand from Evangelist. Even so, Christian is shamefully contrasted with the industrious ant (Prov. 6:6). He immediately arises with a jolt and guiltily speeds up the hill to the top. Usually in such hurried and unguarded circumstances, the believer tends to be neglectful!

---

<sup>9</sup> Kelman, *The Road*, I, p. 85.