



THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

John Bunyan
AD 1678

Explanatory Notes by
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The Author's Apology for His Book

When at the first I took my pen in hand
Thus for to write, I did not understand

That I at all should make a little book
In such a mode: nay, I had undertook
To make another; which, when almost done,
Before I was aware I this begun.

And thus it was: I, writing of the way¹
And race of saints² in this our gospel-day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory³
About their journey, and the way to glory,
In more than twenty things which I set down
This done, I twenty more had in my crown,
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
Nay, then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove ad infinitum,⁴ and eat out
The book that I already am about.
Well, so I did; but yet I did not think
To show to all the world my pen and ink

1. It is not known which book Bunyan is referring to here. It may be his autobiographical work *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* or *The Heavenly Footman*.

2. Bunyan may have in mind the words of Paul: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." (1 Cor. 9:24)

3. The literary form of allegory uses symbolic fictional characters and places that represent something else. In the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the people and places serve as symbols for those things in reality.

4. Latin: "again and again in the same way forever"

5. John Bunyan explains that he shared the book with others to see whether it was worth publishing.

In such a mode; I only thought to make
 I knew not what: nor did I undertake
 Thereby to please my neighbor; no, not I;
 I did it my own self to gratify.
 Neither did I but vacant seasons spend
 In this my scribble; nor did I intend
 But to divert myself, in doing this,
 From worser thoughts, which make me do amiss.
 Thus I set pen to paper with delight,
 And quickly had my thoughts in black and white;
 For having now my method by the end,
 Still as I pull'd, it came; and so I penned
 It down; until it came at last to be,
 For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.
 Well, when I had thus put mine ends together
 I show'd them others,⁵ that I might see whether
 They would condemn them, or them justify:
 And some said, let them live; some, let them die:
 Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
 Some said, It might do good; others said, No.
 Now was I in a strait, and did not see
 Which was the best thing to be done by me:
 At last I thought, Since ye are thus divided,
 I print it will; and so the case decided.
 For, thought I, some I see would have it done,
 Though others in that channel do not run:
 To prove, then, who advised for the best,
 Thus I thought fit to put it to the test.
 I further thought, if now I did deny
 Those that would have it, thus to gratify;
 I did not know, but hinder them I might
 Of that which would to them be great delight.
 For those which were not for its coming forth,
 I said to them, Offend you, I am loath;
 Yet since your brethren pleased with it be,
 Forbear to judge, till you do further see.

If that thou wilt not read, let it alone;
 Some love the meat, some love to pick the bone.
 Yea, that I might them better palliate,⁶
 I did too with them thus expostulate:
 May I not write in such a style as this?
 In such a method too, and yet not miss
 My end-thy good? Why may it not be done?
 Dark clouds bring waters,⁷ when the bright bring none.
 Yea, dark or bright, if they their silver drops
 Cause to descend, the earth, by yielding crops,
 Gives praise to both, and carpath⁸ not at either,
 But treasures up the fruit they yield together;
 Yea, so commixes both, that in their fruit
 None can distinguish this from that; they suit
 Her well when hungry; but if she be full,
 She spews out both, and makes their blessing null.
 You see the ways the fisherman doth take
 To catch the fish; what engines doth he make!
 Behold how he engageth all his wits;
 Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets:
 Yet fish there be, that neither hook nor line,
 Nor snare, nor net, nor engine can make thine:
 They must be groped for, and be tickled too,
 Or they will not be catch'd, whate'er you do.
 How does the fowler seek to catch his game
 By divers means! all which one cannot name.
 His guns, his nets, his lime-twigs, light and bell:
 He creeps, he goes, he stands; yea, who can tell
 Of all his postures? yet there's none of these
 Will make him master of what fowls he please.
 Yea, he must pipe and whistle, to catch this;
 Yet if he does so, that bird he will miss.
 If that a pearl may in toad's head dwell,⁹
 And may be found too in an oyster-shell;
 If things that promise nothing, do contain
 What better is than gold; who will disdain,

6. To allay concerns or satisfy

7. Bunyan's words are "dark" in that they are obscure. But they will produce "rain" and bring fruit to the reader's mind.

8. "Complain"

9. Valuable stones were believed to grow in the head of toads.

10. Bunyan tells the reader that many portions of Scripture contain types, shadows, and metaphors. The Parables of Jesus are such an example of using imagery to communicate truth.

11. Even though this book is filled with “dark and cloudy words” it communicates the truth of God. The allegory of the book is intended by Bunyan to communicate not fiction, but the truth of God as revealed in Scripture.

That have an inkling of it, there to look,
 That they may find it. Now my little book,
 (Though void of all these paintings that may make
 It with this or the other man to take,)
 Is not without those things that do excel
 What do in brave but empty notions dwell.
 “Well, yet I am not fully satisfied
 That this your book will stand, when soundly tried.”
 Why, what’s the matter? “It is dark.” What though?
 “But it is feigned.” What of that? I trow
 Some men by feigned words, as dark as mine,
 Make truth to spangle, and its rays to shine.
 “But they want solidness.” Speak, man, thy mind.
 “They drown the weak; metaphors make us blind.”
 Solidity, indeed, becomes the pen
 Of him that writeth things divine to men:
 But must I needs want solidness, because
 By metaphors I speak? Were not God’s laws,
 His gospel laws, in olden time held forth
 By types, shadows, and metaphors?¹⁰ Yet loth
 Will any sober man be to find fault
 With them, lest he be found for to assault
 The highest wisdom! No, he rather stoops,
 And seeks to find out what, by pins and loops,
 By calves and sheep, by heifers, and by rams,
 By birds and herbs, and by the blood of lambs,
 God speaketh to him; and happy is he
 That finds the light and grace that in them be.
 But not too forward, therefore, to conclude
 That I want solidness—that I am rude;
 All things solid in show, not solid be;
 All things in parable despise not we,
 Lest things most hurtful lightly we receive,
 And things that good are, of our souls bereave.
 My dark and cloudy words they do but hold
 The truth, as cabinets inclose the gold.¹¹

The prophets used much by metaphors
 To set forth truth: yea, who so considers
 Christ, his apostles too, shall plainly see,
 That truths to this day in such mantles be.
 Am I afraid to say, that holy writ,¹²
 Which for its style and phrase puts down all wit,
 Is everywhere so full of all these things,
 Dark figures, allegories? Yet there springs
 From that same book, that lustre, and those rays
 Of light, that turn our darkest nights to days.
 Come, let my carper to his life now look,
 And find there darker lines than in my book
 He findeth any; yea, and let him know,
 That in his best things there are worse lines too.
 May we but stand before impartial men,
 To his poor one I durst adventure ten,
 That they will take my meaning in these lines
 Far better than his lies in silver shrines.
 Come, truth, although in swaddling-clothes, I find
 Informs the judgment, rectifies the mind;
 Pleases the understanding, makes the will
 Submit, the memory too it doth fill
 With what doth our imagination please;
 Likewise it tends our troubles to appease.
 Sound words, I know, Timothy is to use,
 And old wives' fables he is to refuse;¹³
 But yet grave Paul him nowhere doth forbid
 The use of parables, in which lay hid
 That gold, those pearls, and precious stones that were
 Worth digging for, and that with greatest care.
 Let me add one word more. O man of God,
 Art thou offended? Dost thou wish I had
 Put forth my matter in another dress?
 Or that I had in things been more express?
 Three things let me propound; then I submit
 To those that are my betters, as is fit.

12. Another term for the Bible, the Holy Scriptures

13. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Timothy 4:6-7)

It also shows you how he runs, and runs,
 Till he unto the gate of glory comes.
 It shows, too, who set out for life amain,
 As if the lasting crown they would obtain;
 Here also you may see the reason why
 They lose their labor, and like fools do die.
 This book will make a traveler of thee,
 If by its counsel thou wilt ruled be;
 It will direct thee to the Holy Land,¹⁶
 If thou wilt its directions understand
 Yea, it will make the slothful active be;
 The blind also delightful things to see.
 Art thou for something rare and profitable?
 Or would'st thou see a truth within a fable?
 Art thou forgetful? Wouldest thou remember
 From New-Year's day to the last of December?
 Then read my fancies; they will stick like burs,
 And may be, to the helpless, comforters.
 This book is writ in such a dialect
 As may the minds of listless men affect:
 It seems a novelty, and yet contains
 Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains.
 Would'st thou divert thyself from melancholy?
 Would'st thou be pleasant, yet be far from folly?
 Would'st thou read riddles, and their explanation?
 Or else be drowned in thy contemplation?
 Dost thou love picking meat? Or would'st thou see
 A man i' the clouds, and hear him speak to thee?
 Would'st thou be in a dream, and yet not sleep?
 Or would'st thou in a moment laugh and weep?
 Would'st thou lose thyself and catch no harm,
 And find thyself again without a charm?
 Would'st thou read thyself, and read thou know'st not what,
 And yet know whether thou art blest or not,
 By reading the same lines? O then come hither,
 And lay my book, thy head, and heart together.

16. The Promised Land of the Old Covenant was a type of the greater glory of the heavenly kingdom. In this book, Bunyan will call the heavenly kingdom the "Celestial City."

BOOK 1



Chapter 1: The First Stage

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den,¹ and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man² clothed with rags,³ standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand,⁴ and a great burden upon his back.⁵ Isa 64:6; Luke 14:33; Psalm 38:4. I looked and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled;⁶ and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, “What shall I do?” Acts 2:37; 16:30; Habak 1:2,3.

In this plight, therefore, he went home, and restrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind⁷ to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them: “O, my dear wife,” said he, “and you the children of my bowels, I, your dear friend, am in myself undone by reason

1. This is a reference to the prison in which Bunyan wrote much of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

2. The man is not given a name here. Later in the book, we learn that Christian’s name, before his conversion, was “Graceless.”

3. This symbolizes the man’s sinful condition.

4. The Bible

5. The debt of sin

6. The right response to our sins is to weep and tremble for God’s judgment. But we must then look to the Savior Jesus Christ for salvation from the debt and corruption of sin.

7. “Brake” means to open his mind. The man decided to speak to his wife and children.

8. The man was undone by his sinful condition and could not remain in this condition any longer. He had to find a solution to his condition.

9. The “City of Destruction” lies under the judgment of God. Because all men are fallen in sin and guilty for their sins, we all, by nature, live in the City of Destruction. “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Eph. 2:3)

10. “Greatly amazed”

11. “A feverish illness”

of a burden that lieth hard upon me;⁸ moreover, I am certainly informed that this our city will be burnt with fire from heaven; in which fearful overthrow, both myself, with thee my wife, and you my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin,⁹ except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered.” At this his relations were sore amazed;¹⁰ not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some frenzy distemper¹¹ had got into his head; therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed.¹² But the night was as troublesome to him as the day; wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears.¹³ So when the morning was come, they would know how he did. He told them, “Worse and worse:” he also set to talking to them again; but they began to be hardened.¹⁴ They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriage¹⁵ to him; sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they would quite neglect him. Wherefore he began to retire himself to his chamber to pray for and pity them, and also to condole his own misery; he would also walk solitarily

12. The man’s wife and family did not believe his words. They thought he had gone crazy. Unfortunately, they did not see their own sinful condition and their need for salvation. Unless the Lord opens our eyes to our sinful condition and the way of salvation in Jesus Christ, we will not be able to see.

13. The man was under the conviction of sin. He understood the curse that lay upon him because of his sin. “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” (Gal. 3:10)

14. Rather than being softened to the truth, the man’s family were hardened against the truth. The Word of God will either soften or harden the heart. In Bunyan’s treatise *On the Fear of God*, he says “Take heed of hardening thy heart at any time, against convictions or judgments. I bid you before to beware of a hard heart; now I bid you beware of hardening your soft heart.”

15. “Harsh, bad-tempered, and unfriendly speech”

in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying: and thus for some days he spent his time.

Now I saw, upon a time, when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont) reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, “What shall I do to be saved?”¹⁶ Acts 16:30,31.

I saw also that he looked this way, and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still because (as I perceived) he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist¹⁷ coming to him, and he asked, “Wherefore dost thou cry?”

He answered, “Sir, I perceive, by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment, Heb. 9:27; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, Job 10: 21,22, nor able to do the second.” Ezek. 22:14.

Then said Evangelist, “Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils?” The man answered, “Because, I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet.”¹⁸ Isa. 30:33. And Sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry.”

16. The man repeats the question asked by the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-31). At this point, the man does not know the salvation of sin found in Jesus Christ. He is under the conviction of sin, but has not yet seen the solution.

17. Evangelist symbolizes the preacher of the gospel. The word “evangelist” refers to one who proclaims the gospel (Greek evangelion), the “good news” of Jesus Christ. So far, the man was under the conviction of sin and had no solution, but now the entrance into the “narrow way” through the wicket-gate is proclaimed by Evangelist.

18. The word “Tophet” refers to hell. In the prophet Jeremiah, we learn that Tophet was a place where many abominable sins were committed. Jeremiah warns that God will turn Tophet into a place of judgment. “And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place.” (Jer. 7:31-32)

19. The parchment contained not only this warning, “fly from the wrath to come,” but it also contained God’s promises because we find Christian comforting himself in the reading of the parchment roll later in the narrative. These promises of God were personally applied, giving Christian assurance of His salvation.

20. The gate is the entrance into the narrow way of salvation. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:...” (Matt. 7:13)

21. The light represents the Word of God, which gives light to the Christian’s path.

Then said Evangelist, “If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?” He answered, “Because I know not whither to go.” Then he gave him a parchment roll,¹⁹ and there was written within, “Fly from the wrath to come.” Matt. 3:7.

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, “Whither must I fly?” Then said Evangelist, (pointing with his finger over a very wide field,) “Do you see yonder wicket-gate?”²⁰ Matt. 7:13,14. The man said, “No.” Then said the other, “Do you see yonder shining light?”²¹ Psalm 119:105; 2 Pet. 1:19. He said, “I think I do.” Then said Evangelist, “Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.” So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! life! eternal life! Luke 14:26. So he looked not behind him,²² Gen. 19:17, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

The neighbors also came out to see him run, Jer. 20:10; and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; and among those that did so, there were two that were resolved to fetch him back by force. The name of the one was Obstinate²³ and the name of the other Pliable.²⁴ Now by this time the man was got a good distance from them; but, however, they were resolved to pursue him, which they did, and in a little time they overtook him. Then said the man, “Neighbors, wherefore are you come?” They said, “To persuade you to go back with us.” But he said, “That can

22. When Lot and his family fled Sodom, they were commanded not to look back. To look back would indicate that they were not willing to fully part with the city. When we turn from the world, we must not look back with any yearning for the world’s ways. Not to look back represents a whole-hearted repentance from the world’s ways.

23. Obstinate and Pliable are the first allegorical characters in the story. Obstinate symbolizes the person who refuses to change their opinion, despite being attempted to do so by others.

24. Pliable symbolizes the person who is easily persuaded (pliable).

by no means be: you dwell,” said he, “in the city of Destruction, the place also where I was born: I see it to be so; and dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone:²⁵ be content, good neighbors, and go along with me.”

Obstinate: What, said Obstinate, and leave our friends and our comforts behind us!²⁶

Christian: Yes, said Christian, (for that was his name,) because that all which you forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that I am seeking to enjoy, 2 Cor. 4:18; and if you will go along with me, and hold it, you shall fare as I myself; for there, where I go, is enough and to spare. Luke 15:17. Come away, and prove my words.

Obstinate: What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

Christian: I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, 1 Peter 1:4; and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there, Heb. 11:16, to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book.

Obstinate: Tush,²⁷ said Obstinate, away with your book; will you go back with us or no?

Christian: No, not I, said the other, because I have laid my hand to the plough. Luke 9:62.

Obstinate: Come then, neighbor Pliable, let us turn again, and go home without him: there is a company of these crazy-headed coxcombs,²⁸ that when they take a fancy by the end, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.

Pliable: Then said Pliable, Don't revile; if what the good Christian says is true, the things he looks after²⁹ are better than ours: my heart inclines to go with my neighbor.

Obstinate: What, more fools still! Be ruled by me, and go back; who knows whither such a brain-sick fellow will lead you? Go back, go back, and be wise.

25. “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8)

26. To leave the world requires the sacrifice of self-denial. Jesus teaches that all who would become His disciples must deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24).

27. An exclamation expressing disapproval or dismissal

28. “Crazy fools”

29. “Things he looks for, or searches after”

Christian: Nay, but do thou come with thy neighbor Pliable; there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides. If you believe not me, read here in this book, and for the truth of what is expressed therein, behold, all is confirmed by the blood of Him that made it. Heb. 9: 17-21.

Pliable: Well, neighbor Obstinate, said Pliable, I begin to come to a point; I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my lot with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?

Christian: I am directed by a man whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

Pliable: Come then, good neighbor, let us be going. Then they went both together.

Obstinate: And I will go back to my place, said Obstinate: I will be no companion of such misled, fantastical fellows.

Now I saw in my dream, that when Obstinate was gone back, Christian and Pliable went talking over the plain; and thus they began their discourse.

Christian: Come, neighbor Pliable, how do you do? I am glad you are persuaded to go along with me. Had even Obstinate himself but felt what I have felt of the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen, he would not thus lightly have given us the back.

Pliable: Come, neighbor Christian, since there are none but us two here, tell me now farther, what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going.

Christian: I can better conceive of them with my mind, than speak of them with my tongue:³⁰ but yet, since you are desirous to know, I will read of them in my book.

Pliable: And do you think that the words of your book are certainly true?

Christian: Yes, verily; for it was made by Him that cannot lie.³¹ Tit. 1:2.

Pliable: Well said; what things are they?

30. The glories to be revealed to the children of God are so great as to be inexpressible. The Apostle Peter says: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet. 1:8)

31. Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it must be without error. This is so because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2).

Christian: There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom for ever. Isa. 65:17; John 10: 27-29.

Pliable: Well said; and what else?

Christian: There are crowns of glory to be given us; and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven. 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:5; Matt. 13:43.

Pliable: This is very pleasant; and what else?

Christian: There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow; for he that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes. Isa. 25:8; Rev 7:16, 17; 21:4.

Pliable: And what company shall we have there?

Christian: There we shall be with seraphims and cherubims, Isaiah 6:2; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Rev. 5:11; creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There also you shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place; none of them are hurtful, but loving and holy; every one walking in the sight of God, and standing in his presence with acceptance for ever. In a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns, Rev. 4:4; there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps, Rev. 14:1-5; there we shall see men, that by the world were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love they bare to the Lord of the place, John 12:25; all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment. 2 Cor. 5:2.

Pliable: The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart. But are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers thereof?

Christian: The Lord, the governor of the country, hath recorded that in this book, Isaiah 55:1,2; John 6:37; 7:37; Rev. 21:6; 22:17; the substance of which is, if we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely.³²

Pliable: Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things: come on, let us mend our pace.³³

Christian: I cannot go as fast as I would, by reason of this burden that is on my back.³⁴

32. The gospel is God's free grace bestowed on undeserving sinners. We receive God's free gift of salvation by faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:..." (Eph. 2:8)

33. "Improve or speed up our pace"

34. Pliable is not conscious of the burden of sin. Christian, however, senses this burden, and it weighs him down.

35. A slough is an old English term for “swamp” or “bog.” This “Slough of Despond” could also be called “the swamp of despondency.” The word “despond” means to “become dejected and lose confidence.”

36. Both Christian and Pliable were covered with a great deal of mud from the swamp.

37. The burden of sin continues to weigh down Christian and he begins to sink because of the despondency that sin produces.

38. “Slow speed”

39. Pliable was easily persuaded to join the pilgrimage with Christian. But just as he was easily persuaded to come (as his name implies) he was easily persuaded to give up at the first sign of difficulty.

40. Christian was driven by fear and this led to his falling into a state of despondency. God has not called us to fear, but to faith.

Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk, they drew nigh to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain: and they being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond.³⁵ Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed³⁶ with the dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.³⁷

Pliable: Then said Pliable, Ah, neighbor Christian, where are you now?

Christian: Truly, said Christian, I do not know.

Pliable: At this Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed³⁸ at our first setting out, what may we expect between this and our journey’s end? May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone for me. And with that he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and Christian saw him no more.³⁹

Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone; but still he endeavored to struggle to that side of the slough that was farthest from his own house, and next to the wicket-gate; the which he did, but could not get out because of the burden that was upon his back: but I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help, and asked him what he did there.

Christian: Sir, said Christian, I was bid to go this way by a man called Evangelist, who directed me also to yonder gate, that I might escape the wrath to come. And as I was going thither, I fell in here.

Help: But why did not you look for the steps?

Christian: Fear followed me so hard⁴⁰ that I fled the next way, and fell in.

Help: Then, said he, Give me thine hand: so he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, Psalm 40:2, and he set him upon sound ground, and bid him go on his way.

Then I stepped to him⁴¹ that plucked him out, and said, “Sir, wherefore, since over this place is the way from the city of Destruction to yonder gate, is it, that this plat is not mended,⁴² that poor travellers might go thither with more security?” And he said unto me, “This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended: it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore it is called the Slough of Despond; for still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there arise in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: and this is the reason of the badness of this ground.”⁴³

“It is not the pleasure of the King that this place should remain so bad. Isa. 35:3,4. His laborers also have, by the direction of his Majesty’s surveyors, been for above this sixteen hundred years⁴⁴ employed about this patch of ground, if perhaps it might have been mended: yea, and to my knowledge,” said he, “there have been swallowed up at least twenty thousand cart loads, yea, millions of wholesome instructions, that have at all seasons been brought from all places of the King’s dominions, (and they that can tell, say, they are the best materials to make good ground of the place,) if so be it might have been mended; but it is the Slough of Despond still, and so will be when they have done what they can.

“True, there are, by the direction of the Lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps,⁴⁵ placed even through the very midst of this slough; but at such time as this place doth much spew out its filth, as it doth against change of weather, these steps are hardly seen; or if they be, men, through the dizziness of their heads, step beside, and then they are bemired to purpose,⁴⁶ notwithstanding the steps be there: but the ground is good when they are once got in at the gate.” 1 Sam. 12:23.

Now I saw in my dream, that by this time Pliable was got home to his house. So his neighbors came to visit him; and some of them called him wise man for coming back, and some called him fool for hazarding himself with Christian: others

41. The narrator (Bunyan) makes a rare appearance in the narrative in order to ask Help about the slough’s existence.

42. A “plat” is a patch of ground.

43. The slough of despond cannot be mended because when a man comes under the conviction of sin, it necessarily produces fears, doubts, and discouragement. Unless a man apprehends God’s mercy in Christ, he will slip into despondency. Our sinful condition is hopeless unless God brings us out of the “miry bog” and makes our steps secure (Ps. 40:1-2).

44. At the time Bunyan wrote, it had been around 1,600 years since the birth of Christ.

45. The way out of the despondency that comes with the conviction of sin is the promise of God’s salvation. It is by these “steps” that one can come out of this despondency.

46. “Really stuck in the mire”

47. Pliable was ashamed because of the mockery of his neighbors.

48. “By chance to meet”

49. Mr. Worldly Wiseman symbolizes the legalist or moralist who believes that the good life can be attained through moral living, apart from the grace of God. The moralist sees no need for Christ’s work on the cross. For him, the grace of God is unnecessary. In contrast to such a view, the Bible declares: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” (Gal. 3:10)

50. “Worldly calculation”

51. “Close by”

52. Christian is still laboring under his heavy burden of sin.

again did mock at his cowardliness, saying, “Surely, since you began to venture, I would not have been so base as to have given out for a few difficulties:” so Pliable sat sneaking among them.⁴⁷ But at last he got more confidence, and then they all turned their tales, and began to deride poor Christian behind his back. And thus much concerning Pliable.

Now as Christian was walking solitary by himself, he espied one afar off come crossing over the field to meet him; and their hap was to meet⁴⁸ just as they were crossing the way of each other. The gentleman’s name that met him was Mr. Worldly Wiseman:⁴⁹ he dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy,⁵⁰ a very great town, and also hard by⁵¹ from whence Christian came. This man then, meeting with Christian, and having some inkling⁴ of him, (for Christian’s setting forth from the city of Destruction was much noised abroad, not only in the town where he dwelt, but also it began to be the town-talk in some other places)—Mr. Worldly Wiseman, therefore, having some guess of him, by beholding his laborious going,⁵² by observing his sighs and groans, and the like, began thus to enter into some talk with Christian.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: How now, good fellow, whither away after this burdened manner?

Christian: A burdened manner indeed, as ever I think poor creature had! And whereas you ask me, Whither away? I tell you, sir, I am going to yonder wicket-gate before me; for there, as I am informed, I shall be put into a way to be rid of my heavy burden.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: Hast thou a wife and children?

Christian: Yes; but I am so laden with this burden, that I cannot take that pleasure in them as formerly: methinks I am as if I had none. 1 Cor. 7:29.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: Wilt thou hearken to me, if I give thee counsel?

Christian: If it be good, I will; for I stand in need of good counsel.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: I would advise thee, then, that thou with all speed get thyself rid of thy burden; for thou wilt never be settled in thy mind till then: nor canst thou enjoy the benefits of the blessings which God hath bestowed upon thee till then.

Christian: That is that which I seek for, even to be rid of this heavy burden: but get it off myself I cannot, nor is there any man in our country that can take it off my shoulders; therefore am I going this way, as I told you, that I may be rid of my burden.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: Who bid thee go this way to be rid of thy burden?

Christian: A man that appeared to me to be a very great and honorable person: his name, as I remember, is Evangelist.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: I beshrew him for his counsel!⁵³ there is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than is that into which he hath directed thee; and that thou shalt find, if thou wilt be ruled by his counsel. Thou hast met with something, as I perceive, already; for I see the dirt of the Slough of Despond is upon thee: but that slough is the beginning of the sorrows that do attend those that go on in that way. Hear me; I am older than thou: thou art like to meet with, in the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and, in a word, death, and what not.⁵⁴ These things are certainly true, having been confirmed by many testimonies. And should a man so carelessly cast away himself, by giving heed to a stranger?

Christian: Why, sir, this burden on my back is more terrible to me than are all these things which you have mentioned: nay, methinks I care not what I meet with in the way, if so be I can also meet with deliverance from my burden.⁵⁵

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: How camest thou by thy burden at first?

Christian: By reading this book in my hand.

53. “Curse him for his advice”

54. Worldly Wiseman is right about this: the Christian life is attended with many sufferings. As Acts 14:22, we must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations.

55. All the perils of the Christian life are worth it because it is the way of salvation. It is the only way that Christian can be free of the burden of sin.

56. Worldly Wiseman offers a much easier solution to Christian to get rid of his burden. But Christian will find that Worldly Wiseman lied to him.

57. Worldly Wiseman tells Christian that the way to get rid of his sin burden is to go to Legality. In other words, Worldly Wiseman tells Christian that by obeying God's commands and by being a moral person, he will remove his burden. Yet, according to Scripture, none of us can be justified (righteous in God's sight) by obeying the works of the law. Our sins need to be covered. As Hebrews 9:22 says, there is no remission (forgiveness of sins) without the shedding of blood.

58. Worldly Wiseman suggests that Christian and others like him are "crazed in their wits" over their burdens. In other words, Christian is taking the conviction of sin too seriously. Legality wants to help him by convincing him the burden was not very significant after all. Legality wants to try and ease Christian's conscience.

59. Christian will have a good reputation and be well thought of by his neighbors in the Town of Morality.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: I thought so; and it has happened unto thee as to other weak men, who, meddling with things too high for them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions; which distractions do not only unman men, as thine I perceive have done thee, but they run them upon desperate ventures, to obtain they know not what.

Christian: I know what I would obtain; it is ease from my heavy burden.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: But why wilt thou seek for ease this way, seeing so many dangers attend it? especially since (hadst thou but patience to hear me) I could direct thee to the obtaining of what thou desirest, without the dangers that thou in this way wilt run thyself into. Yea, and the remedy is at hand. Besides, I will add, that instead of those dangers, thou shalt meet with much safety, friendship, and content.⁵⁶

Christian: Sir, I pray open this secret to me.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: Why, in yonder village (the village is named Morality) there dwells a gentleman whose name is Legality,⁵⁷ a very judicious man, and a man of a very good name, that has skill to help men off with such burdens as thine is from their shoulders; yea to my knowledge, he hath done a great deal of good this way; aye, and besides, he hath skill to cure those that are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens.⁵⁸ To him, as I said, thou mayest go, and be helped presently. His house is not quite a mile from this place; and if he should not be at home himself, he hath a pretty young man to his son, whose name is Civility, that can do it (to speak on) as well as the old gentleman himself: there, I say, thou mayest be eased of thy burden; and if thou art not minded to go back to thy former habitation, (as indeed I would not wish thee,) thou mayest send for thy wife and children to this village, where there are houses now standing empty, one of which thou mayest have at a reasonable rate: provision is there also cheap and good; and that which will make thy life the more happy is, to be sure there thou shalt live by honest neighbors, in credit and good fashion.⁵⁹

Now was Christian somewhat at a stand; but presently he concluded, If this be true which this gentleman hath said, my wisest course is to take his advice: and with that he thus farther spake.

Christian: Sir, which is my way to this honest man's house?

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: Do you see yonder high hill?⁶⁰

Christian: Yes, very well.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman: By that hill you must go, and the first house you come at is his.

So Christian turned out of his way to go to Mr. Legality's house for help: but, behold, when he was got now hard by the hill, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the way-side did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and wotted not what to do.⁶¹ Also his burden now seemed heavier to him⁶² than while he was in his way. There came also flashes of fire, Ex. 19:16, 18, out of the hill, that made Christian afraid that he should be burnt.⁶³ here therefore he did sweat and quake for fear. Heb. 12:21. And now he began to be sorry that he had taken Mr. Worldly Wiseman's counsel; and with that he saw Evangelist coming to meet him, at the sight also of whom he began to blush for shame. So Evangelist drew nearer and nearer; and coming up to him, he looked upon him, with a severe and dreadful countenance, and thus began to reason with Christian.

Evangelist: What doest thou here, Christian? said he: at which words Christian knew not what to answer; wherefore at present he stood speechless before him. Then said Evangelist farther, Art not thou the man that I found crying without the walls of the city of Destruction?

Christian: Yes, dear sir, I am the man.

Evangelist: Did not I direct thee the way to the little wicket-gate?

Christian: Yes, dear sir, said Christian.

Evangelist: How is it then thou art so quickly turned aside? For thou art now out of the way.

60. This hill symbolizes Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. It stands as a symbol of the law of God, which condemns all men in their sins.

61. "Did not know what to do"

62. The law of God exposes our sin and increases the conviction of sin. Paul describes this effect of the law in Romans 7: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:7-9)

63. Christian fears the torments of hell.

Christian: I met with a gentleman so soon as I had got over the Slough of Despond, who persuaded me that I might, in the village before me, find a man that could take off my burden.

Evangelist: What was he?

Christian: He looked like a gentleman, and talked much to me, and got me at last to yield: so I came hither; but when I beheld this hill, and how it hangs over the way, I suddenly made a stand, lest it should fall on my head.

Evangelist: What said that gentleman to you?

Christian: Why, he asked me whither I was going; and I told him.

Evangelist: And what said he then?

Christian: He asked me if I had a family; and I told him. But, said I, I am so laden with the burden that is on my back, that I cannot take pleasure in them as formerly.

Evangelist: And what said he then?

Christian: He bid me with speed get rid of my burden; and I told him it was ease that I sought. And, said I, I am therefore going to yonder gate, to receive farther direction how I may get to the place of deliverance. So he said that he would show me a better way, and short, not so attended with difficulties as the way, sir, that you set me in; which way, said he, will direct you to a gentleman's house that hath skill to take off these burdens: so I believed him, and turned out of that way into this, if haply I might be soon eased of my burden. But when I came to this place, and beheld things as they are, I stopped, for fear (as I said) of danger: but I now know not what to do.

Evangelist: Then said Evangelist, Stand still a little, that I show thee the words of God. So he stood trembling. Then said Evangelist, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." Heb. 12:25. He said, moreover, "Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Heb. 10:38. He also did thus apply them: Thou art the man that art running into

this misery; thou hast begun to reject the counsel of the Most High, and to draw back thy foot from the way of peace, even almost to the hazarding of thy perdition.⁶⁴

Then Christian fell down at his feet as dead, crying, Woe is me, for I am undone! At the sight of which Evangelist caught him by the right hand, saying, “All manner of sin and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto men.” Matt. 12:31. “Be not faithless, but believing.” John 20:27. Then did Christian again a little revive, and stood up trembling, as at first, before Evangelist.

Then Evangelist proceeded, saying, Give more earnest heed to the things that I shall tell thee of. I will now show thee who it was that deluded thee, and who it was also to whom he sent thee. The man that met thee is one Worldly Wiseman, and rightly is he so called; partly because he savoreth only the doctrine of this world, 1 John 4:5, (therefore he always goes to the town of Morality to church;)⁶⁵ and partly because he loveth that doctrine best, for it saveth him best from the cross,⁶⁶ Gal. 6:12: and because he is of this carnal temper,⁶⁷ therefore he seeketh to pervert my ways, though right. Now there are three things in this man's counsel that thou must utterly abhor.

1. His turning thee out of the way.
2. His laboring to render the cross odious to thee.
3. And his setting thy feet in that way that leadeth unto the administration of death.⁶⁸

First, Thou must abhor his turning thee out of the way; yea, and thine own consenting thereto; because this is to reject the counsel of God for the sake of the counsel of a Worldly Wiseman. The Lord says, “Strive to enter in at the straight gate,” Luke 13:24, the gate to which I send thee; “for strait is the gate that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Matt. 7:13,14. From this little wicket-gate, and from the way thereto, hath this wicked man turned thee, to the bringing of thee almost to destruction: hate, therefore, his turning thee out of the way, and abhor thyself for hearkening to him.

64. “Risk of your damnation”

65. We learn that Mr. Worldly Wiseman is a churchgoer who does not receive the gospel, but believes he will be saved by his good morality.

66. He does not have to receive Christ's sacrificial atonement on the cross, and he does not have to take up his own cross in following Jesus.

67. “Fleshly character”

68. Paul refers to the Law of Moses as a “ministry of death” in 2 Corinthians 3. “But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?” (2 Cor. 3:7-8)

Secondly, Thou must abhor his laboring to render the cross odious unto thee; for thou art to prefer it before the treasures of Egypt. Heb. 11:25,26. Besides, the King of glory hath told thee, that he that will save his life shall lose it. And he that comes after him, and hates not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be his disciple. Mark 8:38; John 12:25; Matt. 10:39; Luke 14:26. I say, therefore, for a man to labor to persuade thee that that shall be thy death, without which, the truth hath said, thou canst not have eternal life, this doctrine thou must abhor.

Thirdly, Thou must hate his setting of thy feet in the way that leadeth to the administration of death. And for this thou must consider to whom he sent thee, and also how unable that person was to deliver thee from thy burden.⁶⁹

He to whom thou wast sent for ease, being by name Legality, is the son of the bond-woman which now is, and is in bondage with her children, Gal. 4:21-27, and is, in a mystery, this Mount Sinai, which thou hast feared will fall on thy head. Now if she with her children are in bondage, how canst thou expect by them to be made free?⁷⁰ This Legality, therefore, is not able to set thee free from thy burden. No man was as yet ever rid of his burden by him; no, nor ever is like to be: ye cannot be justified by the works of the law; for by the deeds of the law no man living can be rid of his burden: Therefore Mr. Worldly Wiseman is an alien, and Mr. Legality is a cheat; and for his son Civility, notwithstanding his simpering looks,⁷¹ he is but a hypocrite, and cannot help thee. Believe me, there is nothing in all this noise that thou hast heard of these sottish men, but a design to beguile thee of thy salvation, by turning thee from the way in which I had set thee. After this, Evangelist called aloud to the heavens for confirmation of what he had said; and with that there came words and fire out of the mountain under which poor Christian stood, which made the hair of his flesh stand up. The words were pronounced: “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse;

69. No one can remove the debt of sin by good works. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:9, “not of works, lest any man should boast.”

70. If those who rely on works of the law are under a curse (Gal. 3:10) and are enslaved, then there is no way that Legality could help Christian get rid of his burden.

71. “A smile or gesture in a fake or hypocritical way”

for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3:10.

Now Christian looked for nothing but death, and began to cry out lamentably; even cursing the time in which he met with Mr. Worldly Wiseman; still calling himself a thousand fools for hearkening to his counsel. He also was greatly ashamed to think that this gentleman's arguments, flowing only from the flesh, should have the prevalency with him so far as to cause him to forsake the right way. This done, he applied himself again to Evangelist in words and sense as follows.

Christian: Sir, what think you? Is there any hope? May I now go back, and go up to the wicket-gate? Shall I not be abandoned for this, and sent back from thence ashamed? I am sorry I have hearkened to this man's counsel; but may my sin be forgiven?

Evangelist: Then said Evangelist to him, Thy sin is very great, for by it thou hast committed two evils: thou hast forsaken the way that is good, to tread in forbidden paths. Yet will the man at the gate receive thee, for he has good-will for men; only, said he, take heed that thou turn not aside again, lest thou "perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Psalm 2:12.