

Chapter Two

Christian is Pursued by Obstinate and Pliable

A. Christian Runs from His Entreating Neighbors.

THE neighbors also came out to see him run;¹ and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened; and some cried for him to return. Now among those that did so, there were two that were determined to fetch him back by force. The name of one was *Obstinate*, and the name of the other was *Pliable*. Now by this time the man was a good distance ahead of them; however they were resolved to pursue him, and this they did and in a little while overtook him.

He does not in the slightest slacken his pace, nor does he look backward with second thoughts concerning his departure. But he is mistaken if he thinks that the City of Destruction has given up on him.

1. The world covets its sons.

Children of this material world are not easily relinquished by the prince or ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; I Pet. 5:8) The neighbors, with scorn, cursings and pleadings, fervently implore Christian to return, but with little effect.

2. The world pursues its sons.

- a. Two exceedingly eager citizens of the City of Destruction, namely Obstinate and Pliable, set out intending to bring Christian back, by force if necessary (Jer. 20:10). Perhaps they intended to deprogram him! This scene may recall Lot's departure from Sodom (Gen. 19:1-29).
- b. This pair represents Bunyan's first characterization couplet, followed by Passion and Patience, Formalist and Hypocrisy, Timorous and Mistrust, Pope and Pagan, Moses and Adam the first, Little-faith and Esau; cf. his characterization triplets, Simple, Sloth, and Presumption; Prudence, Piety, and Charity; Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank; Mr. Hold-the-world, Mr. Money-love, and Mr. Save-all; Faintheart, Mistrust, and Guilt.
- c. Cheever comments: "Obstinate and Pliable, are portraits of classes. Together with Christian, they constitute the representatives of most of the hearers of the Gospel, and of the manner in which they receive it; they are either hardened against it [Adam the First, Obstinate, Lord Hate-good, Atheist], or are somewhat softened

¹ They that fly from the wrath to come are a gazing-stock [*entertaining spectacle*] to the world. Jer. 20:10.

and disposed to set out [By-ends, Pliable, Talkative, Temporary], or they become real pilgrims [Christian, Faithful, Hopeful, Little-faith].”²

- d. At length Obstinate and Pliable overtake Christian who warns them of imminent hell-fire and brimstone (Mark 9:47-48; Rev. 20:15; 21:8); he also somewhat disarms his neighbor's zeal by inviting them to join him as fellow travelers.

B. Obstinate Pleads his Case for Christian's Return.

Then said the man [*Christian*], “Neighbors, why have you come after me?” They said, “To persuade you to go back with us.” But he said, “That can by no means be. You dwell in the *City of Destruction*, (the place where I also was born) as it appears, and dying there sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone.³ Be more content good neighbors, and go along with me.”

OBSTINATE: What! And leave our friends and our comforts behind us!

Alexander Whyte adds a believable gloss at this point: “[Obstinate's] father was old Spare-the-rod, and his mother's name was Spoil-the-child. . . . they doted on their only child, and gave him his own way in everything. Everything he asked for he got, and if he did not immediately get it you would have heard his screams and his kicks three doors off.”⁴

1. He is unyielding concerning worldly loyalty.

His bigotry and intolerance lead him to believe that Christian is being unquestionably foolish. However, the Apostle Paul was rigid and inflexible concerning the upholding of the gospel (Gal. 2:5), and rightly so. Hence, Obstinate's error is not so much his mulish attitude as the worldly values he so tenaciously clings to.

2. He is persuasive concerning worldly blessings.

Obstinate claims that it is senseless for Christian to leave both his friends and comforts behind. In Bunyan's *The Heavenly Footman*, in which is described how a Christian ought to run so as to “obtain” or “win” (I Cor. 9:24), he first answers several objections against running at all. “Objection: But if I should set in, and run as you would have me, then I must run from all my friends; for none of them are running that way. Answer: And if thou dost, thou wilt run into the bosom of Christ and of God, and then what harm will that do thee? . . . Objection: But if I run this way, then I shall be hated, and lose the love of my friends and relations, and of those that I expect benefit from, or have reliance on, and I shall be mocked of all my neighbors. Answer: And if

² George B. Cheever, *Lectures on The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 151.

³ *Gen. 19:24; Rev. 20:15; 21:8.*

⁴ Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, p. 22.

thou dost not, thou art sure to loose the love and favor of God and Christ, the benefits of heaven and glory, and be mocked of God for thy folly.”⁵

3. He is derisive concerning the Word of God.

Christian’s book is charged with being untrustworthy and only fit to be thrown away. However, little evidence is given to support this criticism, probably on account of ignorance and prejudice. Obstinate is pleading for trust in the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God (I Cor. 3:19), rather than the wisdom which comes from heaven (Jas. 3:17-18).

4. He is abusive concerning Christian’s resolve.

Because he has met another just as implacable as he, Obstinate resorts to virulent language. Such pilgrims are “craz’d-headed coxcombs” (pompous and silly as cocks strutting with their extended head plumage), “fools, . . . brain-sick . . . misled, fantastical fellows.” Frustrated in his arrogance, he vainly commands, “Be ruled by me, and go back.” But he has lost the argument, notwithstanding his attempt to use, or rather misuse, the very Word of God he has condemned (Prov. 26:16).



Obstinate, Pliable, and Christian

⁵ John Bunyan, George Offor, ed., *The Works of John Bunyan*, III, p. 379.

C. *Christian* Pleads His Case for Pressing Forward.

CHRISTIAN: Yes (now claiming the pilgrim name of *Christian*),⁶ because all of that which you cling to, and should forsake, is not worthy to be compared with a little of that which I am seeking to enjoy;⁷ and if you will go along with me and persevere, you shall obtain even as I myself; for where I go there is more than enough to spare.⁸ So come away with me and prove my words.

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

CHRISTIAN: I seek an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and does not fade away; and it is laid up in *Heaven*,⁹ being secure there,¹⁰ ready to be bestowed at the appointed time upon those that diligently seek it. Read about it, if you will, in my book.

OBSTINATE: Tush [*nonsense*], put away your foolish book. Tell me whether you will return with us or not.

CHRISTIAN: No, not for a moment, because I have laid my hand to the plough [*and will not look back*].¹¹

OBSTINATE: Come then, neighbor Pliable, let us turn about and go home without him. He represents those crazy-headed coxcombs [*pompous and silly strutting cocks*] who, when possessed by some blind passion, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men who can offer a reason.

Unconverted though he be, this determined pilgrim seems to have received a measure of “prevenient grace” (the particular grace of God that precedes conversion) that enables him to bravely withstand satanic discouragement, though he possesses only a limited knowledge of the Word of God.

1. He is a Christian pilgrim.

Up to this point, Bunyan’s pilgrim has simply been generically identified as a “man,” though from later information we also know that his proper name as a citizen of the City of Destruction was “Graceless.”¹² Yet for the first time, our traveler is now called. “Christian,” and that well before his conversion at the Wicket-gate. What then is Bunyan’s intention here? There are two possibilities:

- a. The name of “Christian” given to “Graceless” before his conversion speaks of God’s elective decree which will, according to appointed means, certainly effect

⁶ *The pilgrim claims to be a Christian before entering the Wicket-gate.*

⁷ *Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:18.*

⁸ *Luke 15:17, that is enough grace and mercy.*

⁹ *I Pet. 1:4.*

¹⁰ *Heb. 11:16.*

¹¹ *Luke 9:62.*

¹² *Ibid., III, p. 106.*

the conversion of this sinner (Eph. 1:4). Undoubtedly Bunyan believed in this aspect of the sovereignty of God.

- b. The name of “Christian” given to “Graceless” before his conversion is a reflection of Bunyan’s own experience, namely that, like many today, he regarded himself as a Christian in a nominal sense, as did others, even though he was in fact not a biblical Christian. This is the more likely reason for Bunyan’s order here, especially when his pre-conversion church involvement is considered as described in *Grace Abounding*. Such activity included attending church twice a day, veneration of ceremony, bell ringing, self-reformation including abstinence from swearing and dancing. He explains: “I fell into some outward reformation, both in my words and life, and did set the commandments before me for my way to heaven; . . . Thus I continued about a year; all which time our neighbors did take me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man, . . . though yet I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope.”¹³

2. He is a Christian pilgrim seeking superior heavenly glory.

A mere small portion of that great, consummate, future glory that awaits committed pilgrims shall be incomparably superior to all of the glory of this present world (Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:16-18). This is a fundamental principle of Bunyan in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, namely that the Christian’s anticipation of his future heavenly citizenship enables him to presently endure, as was the case with Christ (Heb. 12:1-2). This “other-worldly” aspect of biblical Christianity is either scorned or neglected in Western evangelical Christendom.

- a. There is an abundance of glory for all who persevere and strive to obtain (Matt. 10:22; Luke 13:24; 15:17). So Christian gives an invitation to his two concerned neighbors to also become pilgrims.
- b. There is a promise to all genuine pilgrims of, “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (I Pet, 1:3-4; Heb. 11:16).

3. He is a Christian pilgrim with a trustworthy guidebook.

Here is the source of Christian’s newfound truth and hope (Tit. 1:2). So often prior to conversion, a man will find himself absorbed with the Bible, even though it disturbs him. But the more he reads, the more ignorance and error are dispelled, especially concerning himself. Obstinate seems to have at best only lightly read that which he so strongly condemns (Matt. 22:29).

4. He is a Christian pilgrim with a sense of commitment.

He has “laid his hand to the plow” (Luke 9:62), and has no intention of returning home. Thus Christian reflects the character traits of a true seeker in contrast with someone who is merely patronizing and curious about the advantages of religion and

¹³ Ibid., I, §§ 15-17, 30-35, pp. 7-10.

self-improvement. The contrast between the true and the false in this regard is another major theme that threads its way through *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

D. Obstinate and Pliable Separate over Christian's Invitation.

PLIABLE: Perhaps you are right. But don't be so critical; if what good *Christian* says is true, then the things that he seeks after are better than ours; my heart is inclined to go with my neighbor.

OBSTINATE: What! Are there more fools than one? Be ruled by me and go back. Who knows where such a brain-sick fellow will lead you? I insist, go back, go back, and be wise.

CHRISTIAN: ¹⁴Come with me neighbor *Pliable*. There are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides. If you do not believe me, then read here in my book; for assuredly the truth of what is expressed in these pages has been fully confirmed by the blood of he who wrote it.¹⁵

PLIABLE: Well neighbor *Obstinate*, I begin to come to a point [of decision]. I intend to go along with this good man, and throw in my lot with him. But, my good companion, do you know the way to this desirable place?

CHRISTIAN: I have been directed by a man whose name is *Evangelist*, to hasten toward a little gate that is before us, where we will receive further instruction about the way ahead.

PLIABLE: Come then, my good neighbor, let us be on our way. So both of them went on together.

OBSTINATE: And I will go back to my own place. I will be no companion of such misled, fantastical [eccentric] fellows.

With regard to these contrasting worldlings, Kelman makes the following perceptive comment: “[Pliable] is a man without backbone, failing in will and decision, just as Obstinate fails in intelligence and feeling. He has neither conscience nor faith nor sense of duty of his own. He is one of those feeble fellows whom R. L. Stevenson describes as ‘creatures made of putty and packthread, without steel or fire, anger or true joyfulness in their composition.’ A man like this has, properly speaking, no character at all. The spiritual vision of faith and the moral sense of duty are the secrets of a steadfast soul. They are the rudder of the ship in motion, and the anchor of the ship at rest. On the whole, Obstinate is a better and more hopeful man than Pliable. Perverse though he be, and boorish beside this other, yet there is character in him, and more can be made of him.”¹⁶

1. Pliable suggests an advance.

More of a gentleman, he is inclined to go with Christian, though as will soon be seen, not with the same degree of burden-imposed inclination, literally speaking, and earnestness as his burdened companion.

¹⁴ Christian and Obstinate in conflict over Pliable's soul.

¹⁵ *Luke 22:20*; *Heb. 9:17-28*; *13:20-21*.

¹⁶ John Kelman, *The Road*, I, p. 14.

- a. His comment, “I begin to come to a point,” wittily suggests a temporary steeling that later gives way to his usual plasticity.
- b. He would be a better companion for Temporary whose faith flexed one way and then the other (cf. Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21).¹⁷ Like many modern “Christians,” his special interest is comfortable improvement using enjoyable and entertaining means.

2. Obstinate commands a retreat.

He is enraged that his opinion and will are not prevailing. Thus, being a more bombastic individual, he resorts to force of command. Aiming to dominate, he orders: “Be ruled by me and go back. . . , Go back, go back, and be wise [through me]!” No doubt he has been used to compliance from his softer companion. Yet even “*ad hominem*” name calling is of no avail.

3. Christian pleads with Obstinate.

With a more reasonable and temperate manner, yet his heartfelt entreaty is quickly brushed aside by Obstinate. Single hearted pursuit of the truth is misunderstood as fanaticism. However Pliable’s religious lukewarmness is misunderstood as admirable qualification for going on pilgrimage.

- a. “Read this book for yourself, and consider the glories it describes.” But how irrational is unregenerate man who so vehemently spurns, with willful ignorance, the most important book in human history.
- b. “Consider the author of this book who ratifies the truth of it with his own blood” (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:17-28; 13:20-21). Yet though that same author should rise from the dead, still men will not believe (Luke 16:30-31).

4. Christian and Pliable advance in fellowship.

Pliable seeks reassurance concerning the right way to proceed, and is informed by Christian of Evangelist’s instruction to head toward the distant little gate. So they travel together, though it is significant that Pliable does not possess a guide book, nor does he indicate interest in both obtaining and personally studying one.

5. Obstinate retreats in disgust.

He is indignant that such “misled fantastical [eccentric] fellows” should ignore his impeccable advice. So he returns to his own place. Whyte concludes: “[So Christian] is first called Christian when he shows that one man can be as obstinate in good as another man can be in evil. And then the two obstinate men parted company for ever, Christian in holy obstinacy being determined to have eternal life at any cost, and Obstinate as determined against it.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 160-1.

¹⁸ Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, pp. 29-30.