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CHRISTIAN in TROUBLE

AS I WALKED through the wilderness of the world, I came to a place where there was a den. There I lay down to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. In my dream I saw a man clothed with rags, standing by a path with a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. His face was turned from his own house, which stood nearby. I saw him open his book and read, then begin to weep. No longer being able to control his feelings, he broke out with a mournful cry, saying, “What shall I do?”

In this condition he went into his house. Drying his tears, he restrained himself as best he could so that his wife and children might not know of his distress. But he could not be silent long, for his trouble increased. At length he began to tell his wife and children: “Oh, my dear wife and children, I, your father and companion, am undone by reason of an awful burden that lies heavily upon my heart. I am surely warned that this our city shall be burned with fire from heaven, in which terrible destruction all of us shall surely perish unless some way can be found whereby we may be delivered.” His family were amazed—not that they believed what he was saying was

true, but they thought he was losing his mind. Since night was falling, they hurriedly put him to bed, hoping that sleep would settle his nerves and relieve him of his dreadful fears. But he spent the night in sighing and tears.

When the morning came, they asked him how he felt. "Worse, and worse," he replied. When he began talking again of his condition, his family became impatient and rude. After hearing his mournful words for a while, they tried to drive away his pitiful mood by harsh, surly treatment—sometimes chiding, sometimes scolding, and sometimes ignoring him completely. Then he withdrew to his own room to lament his misery, and to pity and pray for his family. He would also walk alone in the field, occasionally reading from his book, and praying aloud. One day, in deep meditation while walking in the field, he burst out, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?" He looked this way and that, as if he would run; yet he stood still, for he could not decide which way to go.

Meets Evangelist

Then I saw a man approach him, and heard him say, "My name is Evangelist. May I ask why you are so disturbed?"

He answered, "Sir, I understand from this book I hold in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment. And I am not willing to do the first nor able to do the second."

"Why not willing to die," asked Evangelist, "seeing this life is attended with so many evils?" The man answered, "Because I am afraid this burden on my back will sink me lower than the grave, that I shall fall into Hell. And if I am not prepared to die, I am not ready for judgment, and to go from there to execution. The thoughts of these things make me weep."

"If that is your condition," said Evangelist, "then why do you stand here?"

“Because I do not know where to go.”

Then Evangelist gave him a scroll which had these words written within: “Flee from the wrath to come.”

Having read these words, the man looked earnestly at Evangelist and asked, “But where must I go?”

Pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Evangelist said, “Do you see that little gate yonder on the far side of the field?”

“No,” he said.

“Then do you see that tiny shining light?”

“I think I do,” he answered.

“Now keep your eye on that light, and you will go straight to the little gate, at which, when you knock, you will be told what you must do.”

Leaves City of Destruction

Now I saw in my dream that the man began to run. He had not gone far from his house when his wife and children came crying out after him to come back. But he put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, “Life! Life! Eternal life!” He did not look back, but increased his speed toward the middle of the plain.

Pursued by Obstinate and Pliable

His neighbors came out to see him run and, as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some called after him to return. Among those who did so were two men who resolved to go after him and bring him back. The name of one was Obstinate, and the name of the other was Pliable.

Now by this time the man had gotten quite a distance away. But the two men were good runners, with strong resolution, and they soon overtook him.

Then said the man, "Neighbors, why have you come?"

"To persuade you to return with us," they answered.

He said, "That can never be. You dwell in the City of Destruction, the place where I also was born, and all those who die there will sink lower than the grave into a place that burns with fire and brimstone. Be convinced, good neighbors, and go along with me."

"What!" exclaimed Obstinate. "And leave all our friends and comforts behind?"

"Yes," said Christian (this was his name), "for all that you forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that which I seek to enjoy. If you will go along with me and keep in this way, you shall fare as well as I; because where I go, there is enough for all and to spare. Come with me and prove my words."

OBSTINATE: And what are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

CHRISTIAN: I seek an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that will never fade away, safely laid up in Heaven, to be bestowed at the appointed time on all who diligently seek it. Read it, if you will, right here in my book.¹

OBSTINATE: Oh, bosh! Away with your book! Will you go back with us or not?

CHRISTIAN: No, because I have now put my hand to the plow.

OBSTINATE: Come then, Pliable, let us go back without him; there is getting to be a lot of these crazy fools, who, when they take a fancy to a thing, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men who can give a reason.

PLIABLE: Don't revile. If what the good man says is true, he is wiser than we are; the things he hopes to gain are much better than what we have. I am inclined to go with him.

1. 1 Peter 1:4

OBSTINATE: What, more fools still? You had better listen and go back with me. Who knows where this unbalanced fellow may lead you? Be wise, and go back with me.

CHRISTIAN: No, come with me, Pliable. There are such things to be gained as I spoke of, and many more very wonderful things besides. If you do not believe me, read it here in my book; and the truth expressed in it is all confirmed by the blood of Him who wrote the book.

PLIABLE: Well, neighbor Obstinate, I am making my decision. I am going along with this good man; I cast in my lot with him. But now, good Christian, do you know the way to this delightful place?

CHRISTIAN: I was directed by a man whose name is Evangelist to hurry on to a little gate that is before us, where I shall receive instruction about the way.

PLIABLE: Then, let us be going.

OBSTINATE: And I will go back to my house. I will not be a companion of such deceived, fantastic fools.

Now, I saw in my dream that after Obstinate departed, Christian and Pliable went on together across the plain.

CHRISTIAN: Neighbor Pliable, tell me about yourself. I am glad that you have decided to go with me. If Obstinate had felt what I have felt of the power and terrors of that which is yet unseen, he would not have so lightly turned back.

PLIABLE: Now, since we are alone, tell me further, Christian, what these things are where we are going, and how they are to be obtained.

CHRISTIAN: I can conceive of them with my mind better than tell of them with my tongue; but, 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, indeed; for it was written by Him who cannot lie.

Describes Heaven

PLIABLE: Well, then, what are they?

CHRISTIAN: There are crowns of glory to be given and bright garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven.

PLIABLE: That is marvelous. And what else?

CHRISTIAN: There shall be no more sorrow nor crying, for He who is owner of the kingdom will wipe away all tears.

PLIABLE: And what companions shall we have there?

CHRISTIAN: We shall be with seraphim and cherubim, dazzling beings to see. There also we shall meet with thousands and tens of thousands of the redeemed of this earth who have gone on before us to that happy land, all of them pure and good; everyone walking in holiness, and enjoying the presence of the King forever. In a word, there we shall see the elders wearing their golden crowns; and the holy virgins with their golden harps; and there will be the transformed men who by the world were cut in pieces, or burned in flames, or fed to wild beasts, or drowned in the sea, because of their love for the Lord of the kingdom—all well and clothed with immortal bodies as with a spotless garment.

PLIABLE: The hearing of these things is enough to enrapture one's soul. But are they to be enjoyed by us? How shall we get to be sharers in them?

CHRISTIAN: The Lord, the Ruler of that country, has recorded it here in His book, the substance of which is this: If we really want Him and His kingdom and are willing to receive Him as our Lord and Savior, He will grant our wish freely.

PLIABLE: Well now, my good companion, I am glad to hear of these things. Come, let us make better time.

CHRISTIAN: I cannot go as fast as I would, because of this load on my back.

Falls into Slough of Despond

Now, I saw in my dream that just as they ended this conversation they came near a miry slough that was in the middle of the plain. Being careless, they both fell into the bog, which was called the Slough of Despond. Here they floundered for a time in the mud. Soon Christian, because of his burden, began to sink.

Then said Pliable, “Ah, good Christian, where are you now?”

CHRISTIAN: Truly, I do not know.

At this Pliable became offended, and angrily criticized his fellow traveler: “Is this the happiness you have been telling me about? If we have such miserable misfortune as this at the beginning of our journey, what may we expect before we reach our journey’s end? If I can but get out of this mess alive, you may have the heavenly country and all its glories, and enjoy it all alone, so far as I am concerned.” With that, he gave a desperate lunge and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was toward his own house. So away he went, and Christian saw him no more.

Christian, left to flounder in the slough alone, struggled on toward the far side—toward the Wicket Gate. But, though he struggled with all his strength and skill, he could not get out, because of his burden. Then I saw a man come to him whose name was Help, and he asked him, “What are you doing out there?”

CHRISTIAN: Sir, I was told to go this way by a man named Evangelist, who directed me to yonder gate that I might get rid of my burden and escape the wrath to come, and as I was going there, I fell in here.

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

CHRISTIAN: Fear took possession of my mind, and I took the nearest way.

Then said Help, "Give me your hand." So he pulled him out, placed him on solid ground, and showed him the path that led to the little gate.

Then I went to the man who pulled him out and asked, "Sir, since this is the way from the City of Destruction to yonder gate, why has this place not been mended, that poor travelers might go to the gate of hope with more security?"

And he replied: "This miry slough is such a place that cannot be mended. It is the low ground where the scum and filth of a guilty conscience, caused by conviction of sin, continually gather, and for this reason it is called the Slough of Despond. As sinners are awakened by the Holy Spirit and see their vile condition, there arise in their souls many doubts and fears and many discouraging apprehensions, all of which merge and settle in this place; and that is the reason for this marshy slough.

"It is not the pleasure of the King that this place should remain so foul. His laborers, by the direction of His surveyors, have been employed for more than sixteen hundred years to improve this swamp, and it has swallowed up at least twenty thousand carloads of solid truth, and tons and tons of wholesome instructions, which have been brought at all seasons from every part of the kingdom—and those who know say that the best materials have been brought to make good ground of this place—but it is the Slough of Despond still, and it will so remain after they have done what they can.

"It is true," he continued, "that some good and substantial steps have been placed through this slough by order of the Lord of salvation, but at times this marsh spews out a lot of filth, and in times of changing weather the steps are hardly seen. Even if the steps are visible to a normal person, here a man's head often becomes so dizzy that he cannot see the

steps; then he staggers to one side and mires down in the slime. Nevertheless, the steps are there. However, the ground is firm beyond the little gate.”

Now, I saw in my dream that Pliable had gotten home with his family. His neighbors had come in to visit him. Some said he was a wise man for coming back; some called him a fool for hazarding his life with such a person as Christian; and others mocked at his cowardice, saying, “Surely, if I had begun to venture, I would not have been so weak and worthless as to give up and turn back because of a few difficulties.”

Pliable sat sheepishly among them, but finally he gained courage enough to talk. Then they all turned on Christian and slandered him behind his back.

Joined by Worldly Wiseman

Now as Christian was walking alone, he saw one coming across the field toward him. This was Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who lived in the town of Carnal Policy, a town not far from Christian’s home. He had heard of Christian’s leaving home in search of an unseen country, and had an inkling of who he was. When they met, Mr. Worldly Wiseman began the conversation: “How are you, my good fellow? Whither bound in this burdened manner?”

CHRISTIAN: Burdened indeed, as much as any poor creature can be. And since you ask, I am going to that little gate yonder before me; for there, I am informed, I shall be directed in the way to be rid of my burden.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Do you have a wife and children?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but I am so troubled of late that I cannot enjoy them as I once did, and I feel as if I had none.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Will you listen if I offer my counsel?

CHRISTIAN: If it is good, I will; for I need good counsel.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Then I would advise you to assert yourself and throw off that burden at once, for you will never be settled in mind until you do; nor can you ever enjoy the blessings God has given you as long as you carry that burden.

CHRISTIAN: Well, that is what I am seeking—to be rid of this heavy burden—but I cannot get it off my mind. And there is no one in my country who can take it off for me. Therefore I am going this way, as I told you, that I may be rid of it, and be happy and free.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Who told you to go this way to find deliverance from your burden?

CHRISTIAN: A man who appeared to be a wise and good person. His name is Evangelist.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Evangelist! I hope he's punished for such advice! There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than this way into which he has directed you. Evidently you have met with misfortune already. I judge from your appearance that you have been in the Slough of Despond. And that slough is only the beginning of the sorrows that come to those who travel this road. Hear me, since I am older than you. You are likely to meet with pain, poverty, hunger, perils, dangers, lions, dragons, and even death, and you are sure to be weary and lonesome much of the time, trudging your way in darkness. This is most certainly true, having been confirmed by many who have gone this way. And why should a good and intelligent man so carelessly throw his life away, following the instructions of a crank?

CHRISTIAN: Sir, this burden on my back is more terrible than all these things which you have mentioned. I feel I do not care what happens to me, if I can only find relief from my burden.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: How did you come in possession of your burden in the first place?

CHRISTIAN: By reading this book in my hand.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: I thought so. It has happened to you as to other weak men. Some meddle with things too deep for them and suddenly find themselves in your condition, which not only unnerves men but also causes them to go on desperate ventures to obtain they know not what.

CHRISTIAN: I know what I want to obtain—to be free from this burden.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: But why do you seek for ease in this way, seeing it is filled with trouble and danger? Now, I can direct you (if you have the patience to hear me) into the way of obtaining what you desire, without your becoming exposed to these dangers and trials you will find in the road you are on. Yes, and relief is at hand. Besides, I will add, instead of perils and suffering, you shall find much safety, friendship, and contentment.

CHRISTIAN: Sir, that is what I want. Will you please give me the secret?

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Yes, in yonder village (the name of the village is Morality) there lives a man whose name is Legality, a very judicious man of good reputation, who has the skill to relieve one of such burdens as you carry. Yes, and to my knowledge, he has done a great deal of good in this way. Besides, he can cure those who have become somewhat unbalanced, carrying their burdens. To him you may go and be helped immediately.

His house is not quite a mile from this place; and if he should not be at home himself, he has a handsome young son, whose name is Civility, who can do quite as well as the old gentleman himself. There you may be eased of your burden; and if you do not wish to go back to your former dwelling place (which I would not advise), you may send for your wife and children and live in the village of Morality. There are vacant houses there now, one of which you might buy at a reasonable price; provisions there are plentiful, low-priced,

yet good; and you certainly will have honest neighbors—everything to make your life pleasant.

For a moment Christian was somewhat undecided, but soon he concluded, “If what this gentleman has said is true, my wisest course is to take his advice.” Having reached this conclusion, he said to Mr. Worldly Wiseman, “Sir, where does this man live, and how can I find his house?”

WORLDLY WISEMAN: Do you see that high hill yonder?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, I do.

WORLDLY WISEMAN: You go close by that hill, and the first house you come to is his.

Comes to Mount Sinai

So Christian turned out of the way to follow the road to Mr. Legality's house for help. But when he came near the hill, it seemed very high, and the cliff next to him appeared to extend out over the road. Christian was afraid to venture any closer lest the cliff should fall on him. There he stood, not knowing what to do. His burden seemed heavier now than before. Also, flashes of fire came out of the hill, which made him sweat and tremble. He was sorry that he had taken Mr. Worldly Wiseman's advice.

Rejoined by Evangelist

Then he saw Evangelist coming toward him, and he felt ashamed. Evangelist had a very stern look and began to reprove him.

“What are you doing here, Christian?” Christian did not know what to say. He was speechless. Then said Evangelist, “Are you not the man I found crying outside the wall of the City of Destruction?”

CHRISTIAN: Yes, sir, I must confess I am.

EVANGELIST: Did I not direct you to go to the Wicket Gate?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, brother, you did.

EVANGELIST: How is it then that you have so soon turned aside? For you are now far out of the way.

CHRISTIAN: Well, as soon as I had gotten out of the Slough of Despond, I met someone who led me to believe that I would find a gentleman in the village on the far side of the hill who could remove my burden.

EVANGELIST: Whom did you meet and what kind of person was he?

CHRISTIAN: He seemed like an honest man, and he reasoned much with me, and at last persuaded me to take his advice. So I came here, but when I saw this threatening hill, jutting out over the road and sending forth fire and smoke, I stopped, for fear I should perish.

EVANGELIST: What did the man say to you?

CHRISTIAN: He asked me where I was going, and I told him.

EVANGELIST: And what did he say then?

CHRISTIAN: He said I should throw off my burden at once. I told him that it was relief I wanted. And, I said, I am going therefore to a certain little gate for further instruction on how to find the place of deliverance. Then he said he would show me a better way—a way not so full of difficulties as the way in which you had directed me. And, since I had fallen into the Slough of Despond, I was inclined to listen to his counsel, for he said, “This way will lead you to a gentleman’s house who has skill in relieving people of their burdens.” Since I realized I had gotten no relief in the way I was traveling, but rather more trouble, I believed him and turned out of the way into this way, thinking I might soon find deliverance. But when I came to this hill and saw how dangerous it would be to go on, I stopped for fear of losing my life. Now I do not know what to do.

Then said Evangelist, “Wait just a moment, that I may give

you the Word of God.” Christian stood trembling under his burden.

Then Evangelist said to him, “See that you refuse not Him that speaks; for if they did not escape who refused him that spoke on earth, much less shall we escape, if we turn away from Him who speaks from Heaven.”² He also said, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”³ Evangelist then applied the words by saying, “You are a man running into trouble. You have begun to reject the counsel of the Most High, and to draw back your feet from the way of peace, almost to the hazarding of your soul.”

Then Christian fell at his feet, crying, “Woe am I, for I am undone.”

Evangelist took him by the right hand, saying, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. . . . Be not faithless, but believing.” Then Christian revived and stood before Evangelist.

EVANGELIST: Now give more earnest heed to the things I tell you. I will show you who it was that misled you, and also who it was to whom he sent you. The man who met you on the plain is one Mr. Worldly Wiseman. He is rightly so named, because he is wise in the wisdom of this world but knows nothing about the life to come and because he loves the doctrine of this world best, for it shields him from the cross. Therefore he always goes to the town of Morality to church. Because he is carnally minded, he seeks to pervert the truth of your book. Now, there are three things in this man’s counsel you must utterly abhor:

1. His turning you out of the right way.
2. His laboring to render the cross odious.
3. And his setting your feet in the way that leads to death.

2. Heb. 12:25

3. Heb. 10:38

First, you must abhor his turning you out of the way of truth—yes, and abhor your own consenting to it, for this was rejecting the counsel of God for the counsel of an unregenerate man. Jesus, your Lord, says, “Strive to enter in at the narrow gate.⁴ For narrow is the gate that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”⁵ From this little gate, and from the way that leads to life, this wicked man turned you into the way that almost brought you to your destruction. Therefore hate his turning you out of the way, and despise yourself for being so easily led from the right way.

Second, you must detest his laboring to render the cross repulsive to you, for you are taught to prefer the cross before the treasures of Egypt. Besides, the King of Glory has told you that he who seeks to save his life shall lose it. Therefore, the teaching that the right way—without which we cannot have eternal life—is the way of death, is destructive indeed. You must therefore hate this doctrine.

Third, you must also consider him to whom he sent you, and how unable that person is to deliver you from your burden and eternal condemnation. This man Legality, to whom he sent you, is the son of the Bondwoman, who is in bondage with her children and, in a figure, is the same as this high hill, Mount Sinai, you were afraid would fall on you. Now, if she with all her children are in bondage, how can you expect any of them to set you free? This Legality, who was born on Mount Sinai, is unable to set you free from your burden. He has never freed anyone from his burden of sin, and never will.

You cannot be justified by the works of the law; for by the deeds of the law no man can be cleansed from his sin, or relieved of his burden. Therefore, Mr. Worldly Wiseman is an alien, and Mr. Legality is a cheat; and, as for his son Civility,

4. Luke 13:24

5. Matt. 7:14

notwithstanding his simpering looks, he is a sham, and cannot help anyone. Believe me, there is nothing in all this noise you have heard about these stupid men but a design to beguile souls and lead them away from salvation. This they have attempted to do to you by alluring you away from the way in which I sent you.

After this, Evangelist called aloud to the heavens for confirmation of what he had spoken. And with that there came fire and words out of the mountain under which they stood which made Christian's hair stand up. The words were loud and clear; "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."⁶

Now, Christian expected nothing but death, and he began to cry in a pitiful voice, even denouncing the time he met Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and calling himself a stupid fool for following his counsel. He also declared that he was deeply ashamed to think that this man's arguments had had enough influence with him—though they were only products of a carnal mind as to cause him to forsake the right way and follow the way of the world. This done, he applied himself again to Evangelist's words of wisdom, spiritual instruction, and complete devotion to the King of Heaven.

CHRISTIAN: Sir, what do you think? Is there any hope for me? May I now go back, take up where I left off, and go on to the Wicket Gate? Or shall I be abandoned for this unfaithfulness, and sent away from the gate in shame? I am sincerely sorry that I heeded this worldly man's counsel and turned away from the right path, but may my sins be forgiven?

6. Gal. 3:10

EVANGELIST: Your sin is very great. It involves two evils: you forsook the right way, and you walked in a forbidden path. Yet, the Man at the gate will receive you, for He has great mercy, and goodwill for all mankind. Only take heed that you do not turn aside again lest you “perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.”⁷

7. Ps. 2:12