

THE NEGLECTED GOSPEL
OF
JOHN BUNYAN
IN
THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS



BY

BARRY E. HORNER

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In hosting seminars on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the second most widely circulated piece of English literature after the English Bible, on several occasions participants have confessed their ignorance or confusion concerning the exact identity of John Bunyan and his writings. For instance some have suggested that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was an account of the Pilgrim Fathers' journey from Europe to America. Other have confused John Bunyan with Paul Bunyan, the American folklore hero!

From another perspective, many misunderstandings have arisen today that have led to abysmal ignorance concerning what the English tinker's most famous allegory really intended to convey. To begin with *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not primarily written for children, even though it well adapts to their understanding and love for an adventure story. It certainly was not written for the titivation of academics, particularly University specialists found in history and English departments. Nor was it designed as a simple evangelistic tract, notwithstanding its clear presentation of the biblical gospel. And it was not intended to be a non-doctrinal novel that merely commended abstract ethics. Rather John Bunyan purposed to communicate, in a beguiling manner, four vital biblical truths. First, concerning the saving substitute righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ obtained through faith alone. Second, the progressive sanctification of the saved sinner. Third, the vital importance of fellowship in an authentic local church under faithful pastoral leadership. Fourth, the incentive that a vision of reaching heaven provides for progressing pilgrims. The first of these emphases will now be the focus of our attention, and especially the more biblical character of the gospel that Bunyan so passionately proclaimed in the light of superficial modern day evangelism.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN BUNYAN

Of all the emphases concerning the truth of God incorporated in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, none is equal in importance to Bunyan's multifaceted representation of the authentic Christian gospel. In these days of spiritual declension as the twentieth century concludes, this foundational evangelistic thrust in allegorical form is of crucial importance since the contemporary presentation of the gospel has become so diluted of truth, and as a consequence so anemic, as to be in many cases utterly disqualified. Yet on the other hand, it needs to be understood that the predominant concern of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is with regard to sanctification rather than salvation, thus an apparent though unreal contradiction seems to arise. The gospel is of supreme importance in the allegory, yet sanctification is the major thrust of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The explanation is this, that while the gospel is foundational to *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a whole, it is also of the essence of initial salvation and the ground of resultant sanctification. This formal distinction between salvation and sanctification on the one hand, and the inseparable relationship between salvation and sanctification on the other, is one which not only the sixteenth century Reformers upheld, but also their seventeenth century descendants. In this regard Bunyan was no exception. He explains this vital matter most clearly when, through the animated

¹ Much of this material is derived from the author's volume *The Pilgrim's Progress, An Evangelical Apologetic, Themes & Issues*, which more comprehensively deals with these and other doctrinal matters related to the matchless allegory and other writings of John Bunyan.

response of Christian to Ignorance, he yet expresses his own conviction concerning the gospel, both its root and fruit, very dogmatically:

Ignorance is thy name, and as thy name is, so art thou. . . . Ignorant thou art of what justifying righteousness is, and as ignorant how to secure thy soul, through the faith of it, from the heavy wrath of God. Yea, thou art also ignorant of the true effects of saving faith in this righteousness of Christ, which is, to bow and win over the heart to God in Christ, to love his name, his Word, ways, and people, and not as thou ignorantly imaginest.²

Hence, throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress* the gospel is a pervasive saving and sanctifying reality that manifests itself according to three related and important perspectives.

The Pilgrim's Progress is Christocentric

Comprehensive proof of this assertion is provided elsewhere by the author.³ Furthermore, even a cursory review of the contents of Bunyan's *Works* will only reinforce the pervasive aspect of this claim. One might say, to coin an expression derived from Spurgeon, that if the tinker's "blood was bibline," then it circulated by means of a Christ animated heart. Of course the Christ that Bunyan worshiped was truthfully and explicitly revealed in the totality of the New Testament including both the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* he is most frequently designated as the "Lord of the Hill," that is the sovereign Savior of that hill called Calvary where full atonement for sinners was made.⁴

To begin with, like Bunyan's own experience recorded in his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Christian's early vision of Christ was ever so dim, and even at the Wicket-gate, which he was formerly unable to see. Thus his initial perception of the gospel was, although effectual, yet very basic. But following the revelation of the grace of Christ at the house of Interpreter and the Place of Deliverance, the pilgrim's accelerated passion is to "see him alive that did hang dead on the cross,"⁵ that is to "see him as he is" (I John 3:2), and this glorious goal he confesses to the enquiring inhabitants of the Palace Beautiful.

The Pilgrim's Progress is atonement centered

The pre-eminence of Christ for Bunyan is not measured simply in terms of perfectly wedded deity and humanity, not his divine incarnate person only but also his saving work and atoning sacrifice. Further, granted that Christ has come to deliver man from his overwhelming predicament, his hopeless bondage to sin and consequent judgment, more specifically the allegorist considered it of crucial importance as to how it is possible for a holy God to maintain His integrity and at the same time save the sinner. In simple terms, how could a just God pardon the ungodly? This was not so much a concern of the Latitudinarians and Quakers of Bunyan's day who stressed an inward and gradual work of renovation in cooperation with grace that Christ's atonement provided, resulting in justifying works. The Roman Catholic view of justification was virtually identical at this point.

However, for Bunyan the moral issue concerning God's holy character (Is. 6:1-3) was vital since, to deal rightly with sin, satisfaction of His offended righteousness was absolutely necessary. Thus Richard Greaves comments:

The necessity of an atonement was based by Bunyan upon the assumption that grace could only be extended to the sinner in a way which was not contradictory to divine justice, hence the rhetorical

² John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed., George Offor, III, p. 158.

³ Barry E. Horner, *The Pilgrim's Progress, An Evangelical Apologetic, Themes & Issues*, pp. 172-83.

⁴ The expression "Lord of the Hill" is used on eight occasions and in context refers to that Hill where Christian looked at the cross and was released of his burden, Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 105-7, 109-10, 143.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

question was asked: ‘If the Promise, and God’s grace without Christ’s Blood would have saved us, wherefore then did Christ die?’ For Bunyan there could be no thought of even the theoretical possibility that God could be gracious and merciful to sinners without an atonement for their sins.⁶

Hence in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* this penal, satisfactory, substitutionary understanding of the atonement is of pervasive importance, just as it is in *Grace Abounding*.

Of course, as with Luther and the other Reformers, the doctrine of Paul in particular was of crucial significance here. Concerning his own experience, the Bedford pastor relates in his autobiography:

One day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; and methought withal, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was adoin, God could not say of me, He wants [lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away.⁷

Hopeful also tells of the advice he received from Faithful: “He told me, that unless I could obtain the righteousness of a man that never had sinned, neither mine own, nor all the righteousness of the world, could save me. . . . He bid me say to this effect, God be merciful to me a sinner, and make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ; for I see, that if his righteousness had not been, or I have not faith in that righteousness, I am utterly cast away.” Finally revelation from Christ breaks through as he confesses: “From all which I gathered, that I must look for righteousness in his [Christ’s] person, and for satisfaction for my sins by his blood. . . . And now was my heart full of joy, mine eyes full of tears, and mine affections running over with love to the name, people, and ways of Jesus Christ.”⁸

The Pilgrim’s Progress is Justification Centered

When Christian’s clothing of filthy rags, being representative of his shabby righteousnesses (Isa. 64:6), is taken away at the Place of Deliverance and replaced with a free coat, all of this being as a result of his look of faith at the crucified Christ, Bunyan graphically portrays the essential truth of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. Christian further explains to Formalist and Hypocrisy: “As for this coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go; and that . . . to cover my nakedness with. And I take it as a token of his kindness to me; for I had nothing but rags before.”⁹

The Latitudinarian, Edward Fowler,¹⁰ a future Bishop, with whom Bunyan strenuously disputed over this matter in his *Defense Of The Doctrine Of Justification*, maintained that justification before God was a cooperative work whereby the sinner and internal grace produced justifying works. This synergistic gospel, being much like that of Roman Catholicism, meant that man was saved through gradual moral improvement. To this, and in stark contrast, Bunyan upheld an objective rather than a subjective atonement whereby the believing sinner, by looking

⁶ Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan*, p. 36.

⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, I, §§ 229-230, pp. 35-36.

⁸ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 154-156.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁰ Christopher Hill describes “Latitudinarians” as “liberal, rational, middle-of-the-road men.” He explains that in Edward Fowler’s *The Design of Christianity*, this Anglican moderate not only rejected the doctrine of imputed righteousness, but also propounded that, “a holy and a moral life was possible for everyone, because the principles of such a life were written in the hearts of all men.” *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, p. 130.

to Christ's complete and satisfactory sacrifice, was justified and accredited with Christ's perfect righteousness. Pieter de Vries is right when he comments: "Bunyan was a staunch advocate of the forensic nature of justification. God clothes us with the righteousness that lies altogether outside ourselves and resides solely in the person of Christ. . . . The grounds of salvation lie in the work of Christ *for* us and not in that of the Holy Spirit *in* us."¹¹ In contrast, Fowler maintained that cooperation with infused and subjective grace was the ground of human works that obtained progressive justification. On the other hand, for Bunyan, faith in objective grace, that is the Calvary atonement outside of the sinner, was also works based, but these works were exclusively those of Christ's doing and dying.

In the detailed dispute between Christian and Ignorance on the Enchanted Ground, this objective/subjective conflict concerning the atonement is at the heart of their disagreement. Ignorance declares: "I believe that Christ died for sinners; and that I shall be justified before God from the curse, through his gracious acceptance of my obedience to his law. Or thus, Christ makes my duties, that are religious, acceptable to his Father, by virtue of his merits; and so shall I be justified."¹² To this Christian responds:

Thou believest with a false faith; because it taketh justification from the personal righteousness of Christ, and applies it to thy own. . . . This faith maketh not Christ a justifier of thy person, but of thy actions; and of thy person for thy action's sake, which is false. . . . [T]rue justifying faith puts the soul, as sensible of its lost condition by the law, upon flying for refuge unto Christ's righteousness, which righteousness of his is not an act of grace, by which he maketh, for justification, thy obedience accepted with God; but his personal obedience to the law, in doing and suffering for us what that required at our hands; this righteousness, I say, true faith accepteth, under the skirt of which, the soul being shrouded, and by it presented as spotless before God, it is accepted, and acquit from condemnation.¹³

In response to this, Ignorance recoils with the objection, "What! Would you have us trust to what Christ, in his own person, has done without [outside of¹⁴] us? This conceit would loosen the reigns of our lust, and tolerate us to live as we list; for what matter how we live, if we may be justified by Christ's personal righteousness from all, when we believe it?"¹⁵ Such a response is not unlike that of Paul's unidentified opponent in Romans 6:15.

THE SCENES OF THE GOSPEL

During the course of *The Pilgrim's Progress* there are numerous areas of focus where the content of the gospel is portrayed with distinctive emphasis. When this truth is considered as a whole, it can be concluded with the greatest certainty that the biblical gospel has abiding significance for the Christian; it is not merely initiatory, but perennially glorious.

Evangelist directs Christian to the Wicket-gate

While reading the Bible in the City of Destruction causes Christian to experience an increasing load of guilt, it is Evangelist who first directs him to the gospel by way of his exhortation to flee toward the Wicket-gate, even though at that stage the distressed pilgrim is too

¹¹ Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, pp. 147, 148.

¹² Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bunyan's meaning of "without" means the more archaic "external to" rather than the modern "exclusive of." Refer to *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Further support for this meaning is found in Bunyan's *Gospel Truth's Opened* where he distinguishes between a subjective and an objective atonement, even though in this instance he is opposing Quaker doctrine. "The new, false Christ, is a Christ crucified within, dead within, risen again within, and ascended within, in opposition to the Son of Mary, who was crucified without, dead without, risen again without, and ascended in a cloud away from his disciples into heaven without them (Acts 1:9-11)." *Works*, II, pp. 134-5.

¹⁵ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 158.

dim of sight to identify this entrance into the narrow way. However, it is “yon shining light,” or “a lamp shining in a dark place” that shows the way ahead to Jesus Christ, “the morning star” (II Pet. 1:19). Upon his arrival at the Wicket-gate, the burdened pilgrim is confronted with a gospel montage, that is Jesus Christ as the door (John 10:9), the way (John 14:6), and Good-will (Luke 2:14). Thus his course is set and a short way ahead, at the Place of Deliverance, the clarity of the gospel of free grace through an imputed righteousness results in assurance that his sin has been borne away (Ps. 103:12). As Christian travels onward, numerous incidents cause him to recall his hope in a crucified Christ. These include boasting about his coat to Formalist and Hypocrisy, the supper at the Palace Beautiful, and his subsequent victory over Apollyon when he is strengthened by eating bread and drinking from the bottle of wine given to him by his former companions, Discretion, Prudence, Piety, and Charity.

Evangelist Rescues Christian From a False Gospel

The seduction of Christian by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman is countered by the genuine pastoral interest of Evangelist who exposes this charlatan’s fraudulent gospel. Such a deceitful evangel, supposedly offering burden relief by means of Legality at the Village Morality just beyond a “high hill,” is in fact encouragement to attempt what is humanly impossible, that is the scaling of Mt. Sinai so as to attain its demands of a perfect righteousness (Gal. 5:3). Thus Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, while denouncing Christian’s book as well as free grace through the cross, is a proclaimer of “justification by the works of the law” (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Further, this false gospel or “administration of death” (II Cor. 3:7-11) only results in condemnation. Nevertheless Evangelist redirects Christian toward Christ at the Wicket-Gate with words of encouragement: “[Y]et will the man at the gate receive thee, for he has good-will for men.”¹⁶

Christian’s Encounter With the Wicket-gate

Although the apparent disjunction between the Wicket-gate and the Place of Deliverance is a reflection of Bunyan’s particular experience, explained in detail in Chapter 6, it ought to be understood that biblically speaking, and the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* would heartily agree here, this entrance is the great gospel transition point from darkness to light, from condemnation to justification, from the broad road leading to destruction to the narrow road leading to eternal life (Matt. 7:13-14). Entrance requires a felt load of guilt before God and an earnest response to the gospel invitation (Matt. 7:7); this is simple though earnest faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation and reconciliation with God (Matt. 11:28; John 14:6). The gospel, when seriously approached, is not complex, but it does demand the prerequisite of a “broken and a contrite heart” (Ps. 51:17). Furthermore, in progressing beyond this gate, this same gospel retains ongoing importance since entrance through the Wicket-gate has become the fundamental insignia of a bona fide pilgrim, and by this means the illegitimacy of Formalist and Hypocrisy, and Ignorance, is identified.

If the specifics of the atonement seem to be missing at this juncture, Christian is certainly pulled through the Wicket-gate by the nail-pierced hands of Goodwill, who is later identified in Part Two of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as Jesus Christ.¹⁷

The House of Interpreter

Of the seven scenes that instruct Christian, two in particular have a gospel emphasis that, being communicated by the Holy Spirit, enlarge the understanding of the new pilgrim concerning the narrow way along which he now travels.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

1. *The distinction between the law and the gospel.*

This second scene, concerning the dusty room, illustrates the distinction between the law and the gospel which Bunyan, according to the particular influence of Luther, believed to be of great importance. In simple terms, the new Christian is to understand that having been initially saved by the gospel, he will also be maintained and sanctified by the gospel, and not the law. As he puts it, unlike the gospel, “it [the law] doth not give power to subdue.”¹⁸ Elsewhere Bunyan writes:

That thou mayest know the nature of the love of Christ, . . . be much in acquainting of thy soul with the nature of the law, and the nature of the gospel (Gal. 3:21). . . . The law is a servant, both first and last, to the gospel (Rom. 10:3-4): when therefore it is made a Lord, it destroyeth: and then to be sure it is made a Lord and Savior of, when its dictates and commands are depended upon for life.¹⁹

2. *The grace of Christ conquers the assailed heart.*

This fourth scene, concerning the inextinguishable blaze, illustrates the surpassing greatness of the sustaining grace of Christ in the face of Satan’s furious attempts to douse the flaming soul that has been ignited in the first place by Christ (Rom. 5:20). As Bunyan explains, “This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart.”²⁰ In other words, gospel grace began the work in the soul, and only gospel grace can uphold that work in the soul to the end.

The Palace Beautiful

This representation of a faithful non-conformist church indicates the pastoral centrality of the gospel in a number of ways. To begin with, there is careful investigation by the Palace Beautiful inhabitants as to whether Christian has had an authentic encounter with the gospel via the Wicket-gate, and that his new affections reflect genuine conversion. In testifying that he has occasional spiritual victories, Christian points out that these are obtained through meditation on the cross and his coat.

However, it is at supper time, when the Lord’s Table is so graphically portrayed, that the gospel is seen to be of such sustaining influence for the residents. Here the details of Christ’s atonement are explained in graphic and applicatory detail as the household partakes of “fat things, and with wine that was well refined.”²¹ In conversation around the table, they discussed that he [the Lord of the hill], had been a “great warrior” involving “the loss of much blood.”²² Further, “he had stripped himself of his glory, that he might do this for the poor. . . . They said moreover, that he had made many pilgrims princes, though by nature they were beggars born, and their original had been the dunghill.”²³ Even at his departure, the strengthened pilgrim is given gospel tokens for the frequent and nourishing remembrance of Christ’s saving work.

Faithful’s Conversion and Witness

Convinced by Christian’s witness at the City of Destruction that he should go on pilgrimage, Faithful is propositioned by Wanton just outside the Wicket-gate. In resisting her, presumably he is also snatched in through the gate by Good-will as was Christian and thus savingly joined to Christ. In being at first inclined toward the seductive proposal of Old Man Adam the first, he

¹⁸ Ibid., III, p. 99.

¹⁹ Ibid., II, p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid., III, p. 100.

²¹ Ibid., p. 109.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

incurs the severe condemnation of Moses yet is delivered by the man with holes in his hands and side.

Up to this point Faithful's apprehension of Christ seems weaker than that of Christian, though strengthening seems to rapidly increase as he disputes with Talkative and witnesses at Vanity Fair. Here he explains to Hopeful in the plainest possible terms that only the saving perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, received for justification through faith alone, could save him. This gospel witness and Faithful's subsequent martyrdom made a considerable impression upon the town of Vanity, as is evident in Part Two when Christiana finds fellowship there, and the populace is reported to have become less aggressive towards pilgrims.

Hopeful's Conversion and Witness

This testimony of conversion given to Christian on the Enchanted Ground is the model presentation of the gospel in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In contrast with Christian's experience, there is no disjunction here between conversion and assurance. A summary of this testimony is as follows:

1. Worldly intoxication without guilt.
2. Conviction commences in various circumstances.
3. Self-reformation attempted with religious duties.
4. Conviction strengthens through Scripture truth.
5. Consultation with Faithful.
 - a. He needs a perfect righteousness.
 - b. The Lord Jesus is the only righteous man.
 - c. Believe on the Lord Jesus for justification.
6. Objections to Faithful's invitation.
 - a. It is presumptuous to come to Christ.
 - b. What is it to come to Christ?
7. Christ is revealed from heaven and invites.
8. Objections to Christ's invitation.
 - a. I am a great sinner.
 - b. What is it to believe?
9. Embrace of Christ as saving righteousness.
10. Confession of Christ to Christian.

The Testimony of Ignorance

The stark contrast between the gospel attested to by Hopeful and that of Ignorance subsequently discussed at the Enchanted Ground is of the highest importance to Bunyan. Described as "a very brisk lad" at his first meeting with Christian and Hopeful, Ignorance is immediately identified as an apostate since he strenuously defends his entrance into the narrow way by means of "a little crooked lane,"²⁴ and not via the Wicket-gate. He is firmly religious and intent on entering the Celestial City. When the three pilgrims are reacquainted at the Enchanted Ground some distance ahead, the ensuing detailed dispute between Christian and Ignorance may be likened to Paul's animated concern for the purity of the gospel in Galatians 1:6-9; likewise for Bunyan, at this point essential truth is at stake (Gal. 2:5).

²⁴ Ibid., p. 146.

As considered earlier in this chapter, the controversy may be reduced to a question as to whether justification is by an objective, imputed and complete work of Christ crucified outside of man, or a subjective, infused, and cooperative work with Christ within the heart of man as maintained by Roman Catholicism. Ignorance is constantly stressing his trust in what is going on within his heart, good thoughts, etc., so that he objects to the suggestion that he is a thorough sinner. Thus, he believes in a collaborative work with grace in his life whereby good works are produced that result in gradual justification before God. Christian is emphatic that faith alone must lay hold of what Christ has completed as an atonement on Mt. Calvary outside of the sinful heart. However, Ignorance is unwavering to the end in his belief in a mystical gospel, and it is significant that when he finally arrives at the entrance to the Celestial City, he declares his qualification for entrance to be, not Christ's righteousness but, "I have eat and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets [Luke 13:26]."²⁵

THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL

At this point, those today who merely have a sentimental, and broad evangelical regard for *The Pilgrim's Progress* will, when they correctly understand what Bunyan's gospel doctrine is all about, find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. Either they will have to walk away from their literary hero since their contemporary grasp of the gospel is admitted to be radically different from that portrayed in the famous allegory, or else they will have to change their understanding of the gospel in such a way that it will be likened to a theological Copernican revolution. For instance, the contemporary terminology that expresses Christian conversion as, "inviting Jesus Christ into your heart" will not mesh with Bunyan's representation of the Gospel. It is more akin to the Roman Catholic gospel where justification is by infused grace.

In this regard, another option would be a revisionist approach that attempts to contextualize the famous allegory's gospel on the grounds of modern culture, outdated theology, a political cause, or particularly an ecumenical agenda. This author recalls teaching through *The Pilgrim's Progress* to an adult Sunday School class many years ago. The participants had been provided with a paperback version published by Moody Press. In commenting on the incident in the Valley of Humiliation where Christian passes by the cave of nail-biting and decrepit Pope as well as deceased Pagan, it was discovered that the paperback edition in use, otherwise correct in its content, did not include this incident. Subsequent correspondence with Moody Press included their claim that they were ignorant of this omission. In a similar manner, the brilliantly illustrated version, *Dangerous Journey* published by Eerdmans, also omits Pope while Pagan remains alive and portrays Pope's stiff joints and frustration.

First and foremost, Bunyan was a thorough biblicist who very conscientiously sought the truth in Holy Scripture for himself without relying upon many secondary sources. Of course, he had no knowledge of the original languages, and made no pretense that he did; however in no way did he disparage those more scholarly Puritans who were of like precious faith. Nevertheless his devotion to the English Bible was primary since he openly confessed his preference for not drawing from the wells of other men. Even so, other influences did impinge upon him, all of course claiming biblical roots. These shaped his theology in a secondary sense, particularly with regard to the gospel. At the same time it must be acknowledged that Bunyan was very much his own man and not one to fall in line with a system of doctrine for the sake of loyalty and acceptance in some church association. Hence the primary influences upon Bunyan's doctrine of the gospel are now considered as follows:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

Presupposition Concerning Sin

Bunyan's understanding of sin, its historic commencement in the Garden of Eden and universal consequences, is classically biblical and orthodox. He believed in an original, historic Adam who fathered the sinful human race:

He [Adam] . . . made them [his children] sinners—"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." (Rom. 5:19). . . . [H]e [Adam] was the conduit pipe through which the devil did convey off his poisoned spawn and venom nature into the hearts of Adam's sons and daughters, by which they are at this day so strongly and so violently carried away, that they fly as fast to hell, and the devil, by reason of sin, as chaff before a mighty wind."²⁶ Elsewhere he writes of a person presently being, "under the wrath of God because of original sin (Rom. 5:12)."²⁷

Thus he believed in the doctrine of original or congenital sin whereby even from birth and the cradle sin is inherently present.

Furthermore, "[sin] is that which hath stupified and besotted the powers of men's souls, and made them even next to a beast or brute in all matters supernatural and heavenly (II Pet. 2:12). For as the beast minds nothing but his lusts and his belly, by nature, so man minds nothing but things earthly, sensual, and devilish, by reason of iniquity."²⁸ This pollution is not only universal but thorough and has resulted in man being infected in all of his faculties, intellect, will, and affections, so that every individual can only move with the freedom of this corrupt nature. "[Sin] has alienated the will, the mind, and affections, from the choice of the things that should save it, and wrought them over to a hearty delight in those things that naturally tend to drown it in perdition and destruction (Col. 1:21)."²⁹ Consequently, man retains no inherent ability to take pleasure in and obey the righteousness of God, such as via "free-will."³⁰ Any holy response on man's part, even saving faith, can only be generated by particular grace sovereignly imparted (Eph. 2:8).³¹

Martin Luther

It is not difficult to understand Bunyan's feelings of spiritual kinship here with the great Reformer Martin Luther. As a tinker, newly married, he became increasingly aware of his own inner ungodliness; the misery was excruciating. Moreover he then read a book that described this struggle and at the same time prescribed the remedy with great animation and jealous regard for the supremacy of free and sovereign grace. Hence, it is not surprising that Bunyan wrote in *Grace Abounding* concerning Luther's *Commentary On Galatians* that, "I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart. . . . I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."³²

Of course, as an Augustinian monk, Luther had faced the same struggle concerning his inward corruption and the great question as to how reconciliation might be made with a righteous God. So it seems that Bunyan felt forever indebted to Luther for his ministrations of gospel truth, especially its description in Pauline terms of the free, objective, substitutionary

²⁶ Ibid., I, p. 505.

²⁷ Ibid., II, p. 166.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 512.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "[I]t is no error to say, that a man naturally has Will, and a Power to pursue his will, and that as to his salvation [his own way]. But it is a damnable error to say that he hath will and power to pursue it, *and that in God's way* [emphasis added]." Ibid., p. 241; cf. also pp. 312, 756.

³¹ Ibid., p. 134.

³² Ibid., I, §§ 129-130, p. 22.

“righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17), that is “the gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:15), or “the righteousness which is by faith” (Rom. 9:30). To illustrate this dependence on Bunyan’s part, consider the conclusion of that turbulent period of over two years following his conversion when he came to a point of immediate enlightenment and stability. In *Grace Abounding* he writes:

[S]uddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, *Thy righteousness is in heaven*; and methought withall, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness. . . . Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away; . . . So when I came home, I looked to see if I could find that sentence, *Thy righteousness is in heaven*; but could not find such a saying, wherefore my heart began to sink again, onely that was brought to my remembrance, *he of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*; by this word I saw the other Sentence true (I Cor. 1:30).³³

Now compare Luther’s *Lectures on Galatians* where he comments on, “For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness” (5:5):

I conclude that perfect righteousness has been prepared for me in heaven. . . . in this hope I am strengthened against sin and look for the consummation of perfect righteousness in heaven. . . . [Devout Christians] know that they have eternal righteousness, for which they look in hope as an utterly certain possession, laid up in heaven, when they are most aware of the terrors of sin and death; and that they are the lords of everything when they seem to be the poorest of all.³⁴

Thus it is the Reformer from Wittenberg rather than Calvin from Geneva who made such an indelible impression, and there is general agreement that this influence persisted throughout the length of the tinker’s ministry. Although Bunyan was a strong predestinarian, there was a doctrinal motif that guided him which was far more influential than divine determinism, namely the reign of grace. Richard Greaves describes this dominion of gospel grace as follows:

The influence of Luther on Bunyan’s concept of the nature of God can be seen especially in Bunyan’s view of God fundamentally in terms of the wrath–grace dichotomy rather than in terms of the Calvinist emphasis on the sovereign will of God. The controlling motif in Bunyan’s theology was not the more philosophical principle of the divine will exercising supreme control in the universe, but the more personal and experiential conflict which raged in both the convicted sinner and the converted pilgrim who sensed on the one hand the dread of God whose wrath could not be mitigated because of the wrong done to his holiness and justice, and on the other hand the all-sufficient grace of a God whose love and mercy had triumphed in the salvation of his elect.³⁵

How then does this perspective find its outworking in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*? It is evidenced in a consideration of the far greater degree to which sin and grace find emphasis in contrast with the sovereignty of divine will. Of course this is not an either/or situation but rather a matter of primacy, and in this respect, beyond doubt, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* does manifestly give greater place to that sovereignty of grace which is greater than all our sin (Rom. 5:20). It is the grace of *sola scriptura, sola christos, sola fide*, of free justification, of imputed righteousness.

Law and Gospel

This emphasis clearly confirms the dominant influence of the German Reformer over the Bedford pastor, and as Hill points out, along with the impact of John Foxe, John Owen, and William Dell.³⁶ For Luther, law and gospel were antithetical, reactive, though both in necessary tension. Law, as the declaration of God’s perfect righteousness, thunders against incapacitated sinful man. More than that, it magnifies and arouses sin in whatever crevice it hides. It offers no

³³ Ibid., I, §§ 229-30, p. 72.

³⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 27, pp. 22, 27. Cf. a similar comment on 2:15-16, p. 225.

³⁵ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, p. 155.

³⁶ Hill, *A Tinker And A Poor Man*, pp. 157-160.

extenuating circumstances, no middle ground, no relativity, no truce, only relentless and accusatory demand.

On the other hand grace rightly quenches and satisfies and has dominion over all that the law requires. It justly pardons sinners and thereby silences the condemnatory voice of the law. Whatever the law is able to arouse and terrify through guilt, grace is able to cleanse, quench and bring peace through pardon. The law, as represented by Moses, is a ministry of condemnation and death while grace, as embodied in Jesus Christ, is a ministry of free righteousness and life and peace (John 1:17; Rom. 5:1, 17-21; II Cor. 3:7-18).

So in *The Pilgrim's Progress* there are several indications of the major importance of this truth for Bunyan. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman counsels Christian to lose his burden at the Village of Morality just beyond "yonder high hill."³⁷ However, this representation of Mt. Sinai only thunders at the pilgrim's attempt to scale the impossible heights of the law. Then at the house of Interpreter, the second scene there is a precise portrayal of the opposite roles of law and grace. The dusty room is man's thoroughly polluted heart which the sweeper only magnified. But then the damsel sprinkles the settling and cleansing influences of the gospel.

Further on Faithful is inclined to heed Old Man Adam the first. For this reason Moses mercilessly and repeatedly beats him down until Christ comes to the rescue and drives away the accuser. Surprisingly, although Bunyan deals with this whole doctrinal matter in great detail in his *The Doctrine Of The Law And Grace Unfolded* published in 1659,³⁸ and that in modified covenantal terms when he refers to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, yet he declines to use these covenantal designations in any way in *The Pilgrim's Progress* later published in 1678, as well as Part Two in 1684. This may well have been for the purpose of not involving his readers with more intricate terminology.

Calvinism

In consideration of more exact doctrinal definitions, while it is unquestionably true that Bunyan was a strict Calvinist, yet to be far more precise he was really a predestinarian as was Luther, probably being more familiar with the German's *Bondage Of The Will* than the Frenchman's *Institutes Of The Christian Religion*. Bunyan's Works express no regard for Calvin that is comparable to his confessed reliance upon Luther. In this vein Greaves explains:

On this Lutheran foundation Bunyan built an essentially Calvinistic superstructure with the ideas which he assimilated from the writings of Bayly and Dent,³⁹ the teaching of Gifford and Burton, his ministerial association with men such as Owen [and Dell], and his contact in general with the recurrent and often controversial discussion of basic Christian principles which absorbed the minds of so many in the seventeenth century. . . . In the Westminster Confession and the writings of Owen, to use two obvious examples, predestination was a doctrine derived from the prior principles of the absolute sovereignty of the divine will and the concomitant decrees pronounced by that will, whereas in the writings of Bunyan the doctrine of predestination originated primarily in a soterio- logical concern, with men being predestined more on the basis of foreknowledge [forelove, not prescience?] and gracious love than as the result of abstract philosophical principles. In order that predestination be accomplished there had to be the effectual and irresistible calling of those predestined to glory, and in stating this doctrine Bunyan continued to draw upon his Calvinist mentors and associates. The remainder of his soteriology manifested consistent if not especially noteworthy Calvinist influence.⁴⁰

From a twentieth century perspective, Bunyan would undoubtedly be regarded as a thoroughgoing, five point baptistic Calvinist rather than a Lutheran, and especially with regard to

³⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 94.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 492-575.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, pp. 156-157.

church structure and the ordinances. His belief in unconditional particular election, and rejection of free will as popularly understood, would mark him out as very different from the broad stream of evangelical Christendom.⁴¹ Greaves also indicates that Bunyan seems to have professed belief in a limited or definite atonement while not writing at length on this issue as did his friend John Owen.⁴² Refer to Chapter 9 for a more detailed consideration of this matter of sovereignty, election, and free will.

However, when we come to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the author, while dealing with issues related to the sovereignty of God in many instances, yet causes his tone in most cases to be mellow and winsome rather than direct and dogmatic as in his other writings. This bares out the comment of Samuel Coleridge that, "Calvinism never put on a less rigid form, never smoothed its brow and softened its voice more winningly than in *The Pilgrim's Progress*."⁴³ However, what are these more gentle representations of a gospel that exalts in the truth that salvation is wholly of the grace of God? There is the simple expression, "But as God would have it," which explains the ability of Christian to regain his lost sword, though almost vanquished, and give Apollyon a deadly thrust.⁴⁴

Likewise following the martyrdom of Faithful, Bunyan relates, "But he that overrules all things, having the power of their rage in his own hand, so wrought it about, that Christian for that time escaped them, and went his way."⁴⁵ Then there is the despairing Reprobate in the Iron Cage, portrayed in the house of Interpreter, who explains that, "God has denied me repentance. His Word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, himself hath shut me up in this iron cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out. O eternity! eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity!"⁴⁶ The Shepherds declare to Christian and Hopeful, concerning the status of the way ahead, that it "is safe for those for whom it is to be safe; but transgressors shall fall therein (Hos. 14:9)."⁴⁷

However, with more specific regard to the gospel, Bunyan makes it quite clear that a saving understanding of this message is only possible by means of sovereign revelation from heaven. When Hopeful seeks counsel from Faithful in Vanity, he is told to go to Christ, at which Christian asks of his companion on the Enchanted Ground, "And did the Father reveal his Son to you?" Hopeful responds, "Not at the first, nor second, nor third, nor fourth, nor fifth; no not at the sixth time neither." Then, having related how he eventually believed, Christian responds, "This was a revelation of Christ to your soul indeed."⁴⁸

In the succeeding incident, when Christian disputes with Ignorance, at the conclusion of this encounter Hopeful interrupts with the question as to whether "he [Ignorance] ever had Christ revealed to him from heaven." Ignorance is offended at such a doctrinal emphasis to which Hopeful responds: "Why, man! Christ is so hid in God from natural apprehensions of the flesh, that he cannot by any man be savingly known, unless God the Father reveals him to them."⁴⁹ To Bunyan then the grace of God and His uncompromised sovereignty are inseparable elements (Rom. 11:5-6). He portrays the gospel in *The Pilgrim's Progress* as being strongly urged upon all

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 51-61.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 41-45.

⁴³ Roger Sharrock, ed., *Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, A Casebook*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 155, 156.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 155, 158.

men, yet the authentic embrace of this saving message will ultimately and only be the response of those, “as God would have it.”

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that John Bunyan’s preaching, teaching, and writing had a vibrant quality about them, not unlike the animation and intensity one senses when reading the writings of Luther. Such a style was both infectious and captivating insofar as his hearers were concerned. And it is important to ask why? For instance, consider Bunyan’s concluding exhortation in his *A Few Sighs From Hell*, based upon an exposition of Luke 16:19-31 concerning the destiny of Dives and Lazarus:

Reader, here might I spend many sheets of paper, yea, I might upon this subject write a very great book, but I shall now forbear, desiring thee to be very conversant in the Scriptures, ‘for they are they which testify of Jesus Christ’ (John 5:39). The Bereans were counted noble upon this account: ‘These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily’ (Acts 17:11). But here let me give thee one caution, that is, have a care that thou do not satisfy thyself with a bare search of them, without a real application of him whom they testify of to thy soul, lest instead of faring the better for they doing this work, thou dost fare a great deal the worse, and thy condemnation be very much heightened, in that though thou did read so often the sad state of those that die in sin, and the glorious estate of them that close in with Christ, yet thou thyself shouldst be such a fool as to lose Jesus Christ, notwithstanding thy hearing, and reading so plentifully of him.⁵⁰

Such Pauline earnestness demonstrates a vital, heartfelt compassion that is to be found in all of Bunyan’s writings, and yet sadly is so rare today. Greaves provides some help in our search for the reason for this fervency. It provokes careful thought concerning what ought to be at the heart of our gospel proclamation at this needy hour:

Because grace was [Bunyan’s] dominating motif, his thought retained a personal element which was often lacking in the writings of many Calvinists, notably those of Owen and the *Westminster Confession*. This sense of personal contact and vibrancy was, however, perhaps due more to the style of his writing than to his concern with grace; yet the concept of grace must be considered an important contributing factor to this personal element which pervaded his writings, since grace per se lent itself to a more personal treatment than did, for example, the more abstract concepts of sovereignty and will which were the basic principles of contemporary Calvinist theology. It was precisely this personal and living quality which made his sermons and writings so popular, for through the spoken and the printed word he made the workings of divine grace come alive.⁵¹

In conclusion, consider but another impassioned plea whereby Bunyan exudes the dominance of this divine grace in his life and ministry.

Coming sinner, the Jesus to whom thou art coming is lowly in heart, he despiseth not any. It is not thy outward meanness, nor thy inward weakness; it is not because thou art poor, or base, or deformed, or a fool, that he will despise thee: he hath chosen the foolish, the base, and despised things of this world, to confound the wise and mighty. He will bow his ear to thy stammering prayers, he will pick out the meaning of thy inexpressible groans; he will respect thy weakest offering, if there be in it but thy heart (Matt. 11:20; Luke 14:21; Prov. 9:4-6; Isa. 38:14-15; S. of S. 5:15; John 4:27; Mark 12:33-34; Jas. 5:11). Now, is not this a blessed Christ, coming sinner?⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 709-710.

⁵¹ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, pp. 159-160.

⁵² Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 297.