

Module 407: John Bunyan

Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan; introduced and edited for the internet by Dan Graves.

I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to Mount Zion, that I may be delivered from the wrath to come.

Bunyan Module Introduction

John Bunyan was a hard-working family man, but poor. As a tinker, he went from town to town, mending pots and pans, he did not earn a great deal. However, his wife brought a Bible to the marriage, and reading it taught John his desperate need for salvation. He put aside the pranks of his youth and tried hard to live a good clean life, without cursing, fighting or stealing! But despite his efforts, John could not free himself from a heavy burden of guilt. Fear of eternal damnation haunted him day and night.

Overhearing some women talk, John learned that he must hand his sin over to the One who can carry the load. He believed. Once freed of the burden of guilt, he was like a new man. Nothing could stop him from sharing the good news of salvation with others. Before long, the uneducated tinker was preaching to crowds that were hungry for solid spiritual food.

In 1660, preaching outside of the official church was illegal in England. When the authorities learned of the tinker-preacher and the large crowds coming to hear him, they warned him that if he preached even one more sentence, he would be arrested. With his wife, children and congregation watching, John Bunyan stepped into the pulpit, took a deep breath and began his sermon. He chose to follow his conscience and suffer behind bars rather than cower in fear as a free man.

Once in prison, John's ministry continued in a new way. The man with little education and much personal grief found in himself a flair for writing. After completing several non-fiction books, John began the best-loved work of his life. *The Pilgrim's Progress* followed the struggle of a Christian pilgrim to stay true to his beliefs, avoid temptations, and remain on the narrow path to

heaven. Published in 1678, the book's description of Christianity as an up and down journey has impacted countless millions of people. Next to the Bible, it has been the most circulated Christian work of all time.

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

World. How now, good fellow, whither away after talk betwixt this burdened manner?

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

World. Hast thou a wife and children?

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

World. Wilt thou hearken unto me if I give thee counsel?

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

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

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

World. Who bid thee go this way to be rid of thy burden?

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

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

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

World. How camest thou by the burden at first?

Chr. By reading this book in my hand.

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

Chr. I know what I would obtain; it is ease for my heavy burden.

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

Chr. Pray, Sir, open this secret to me.

World. Why, in yonder village—the village is named Morality—there dwells a gentleman whose name is Legality, a very judicious man, and a man of a very good name, that has skill to help men off with such burdens as thine are from their shoulders: yea, to my knowledge, he hath done a great deal of good this way; ay, and besides, he hath skill to cure those that are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens. To him, as I said, thou mayest go, and be helped presently. His house is not quite a mile from this place, and if he should not be at home himself, he hath a pretty young man to his son, whose name is Civility, that can do it (to speak on) as well as the old gentleman himself; there, I say, thou mayest be eased of thy burden and if thou art not minded to go back to thy former habitation, as, indeed, I would not wish thee, thou mayest send for thy wife and children to thee to this village, where there are houses now

standing empty, one of which thou mayest have at reasonable rates; provision is there also cheap and good; and that which will make thy life the more happy is, to be sure, there thou shalt live by honest neighbours, in credit and good fashion.

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

Chr. Sir, which is my way to this honest man's house?

World. Do you see yonder high hill?

Chr. Yes, very well.

World. By that hill you must go, and the first house you come at is his.

So Christian turned out of his way to go to Mr. Legality's house for help; but, behold, when he was got now hard by the hill, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the way-side did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and wotted not what to do. Also his burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in his way. There came also flashes of fire out of the hill, that made Christian afraid that he should be burned. (Exodus 19: 16, 18.) Here, therefore, he sweat and did quake for fear. (Hebrews 12:21.)

When Christians unto carnal men give ear,
Out of their way they go, and pay for 't dear;
For Master Worldly Wiseman
can but show A saint the way to bondage and to woe.

And now he began to be sorry that he had taken Mr. Worldly Wiseman's counsel. And with that he saw Evangelist coming to meet him; at the sight also of whom he began to blush

for shame. So Evangelist drew nearer and nearer; and coming up to him, he looked upon him with a severe and dreadful countenance, and thus began to reason with Christian.

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

Chr. Yes, dear Sir, I am the man.

Evan. Did not I direct thee the way to the little wicket-gate?

Chr. Yea, dear Sir, said Christian.

Evan. How is it, then, that thou art so quickly turned aside? for thou art now out of the way.

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

Evan. What was he?

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

Evan. What said that gentleman to you ?

Chr. Why, he asked me whither I was going? And I told him.

Evan. And what said he then?

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

Evan. And what said he then?

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

Evan. Then, said Evangelist, stand still a little, that I may show thee the words of God. So he stood trembling. Then said Evangelist, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25). He said, moreover, "Know the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38). He also did thus apply them: Thou art the man that art running into this misery; thou hast begun to reject the counsel of the Most High, and to draw back thy foot from the way of peace, even almost to the hazarding of thy perdition.

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

Then Evangelist proceeded, saying, Give more earnest heed to the things that I shall tell thee of. I will now show thee

who it was deluded thee, and who it was also to whom, he sent thee. The man that met thee is one Worldly Wiseman, and rightly is he so called; partly, because he savoreth only the doctrine of this world (1 John 4:5), (therefore he always goes to the town of Morality to church) : and partly, because he loveth that doctrine best, for it saveth him best from the cross. (Galatians 6:12.) And because he is of this carnal temper, therefore he seeketh to prevent my ways, though right. Now there are three things in this man's counsel, that thou must utterly abhor.

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

First, thou must abhor his turning thee out of the way; and thine own consenting thereto : because this is to reject the counsel of God for the sake of the counsel of a Worldly Wiseman. The Lord says, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate " (Luke 13:24), the gate to which I send thee ; for " strait is the gate that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it " (Matthew 6:14). From this little wicket-gate, and from the way thereto, hath this wicked man turned thee, to the bringing of thee almost to destruction ; hate, therefore, his turning thee out of the way, and abhor thyself for hearkening to him.

Secondly, Thou must abhor his laboring to render the cross odious unto thee; for thou art to prefer it "before the treasures in Egypt " (Hebrews 11:25, 26). Besides, the King of Glory hath told thee, that he that "will save his life shall lose it" (Mark 8:35 ; John 12:25 ; Matthew 10:39). And, "He that cometh after me, and hateth not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). I say, therefore, for man to labor to persuade thee, that that shall be thy death, without which, The Truth hath said, thou canst not have eternal life; this doctrine thou

must abhor.

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

He to whom thou wast sent for ease, being by name Legality, is the son of the bond-woman which now is in bondage with her children (Galatians 4:21-27); and is a mystery, this Mount Sinai, which thou hast feared will fall on thy head. Now, if she, with her children, are in bondage, how canst thou expect by them to be made free? This Legality, therefore, is not able to set thee free from thy burden. No man was as yet ever rid of his burden by him; no, nor ever is like to be: "ye cannot be justified by the works of the law; for by the deeds of the law no man living can be rid of his burden") therefore, Mr. Worldly Wiseman is an alien, and Mr. Legality is a cheat; and for his son Civility, notwithstanding his simpering looks, he is but a hypocrite and cannot help thee. Believe me, there is nothing in all this noise, that thou hast heard of these sottish men, but a design to beguile thee of thy salvation, by turning thee from the way in which I had set thee. After this, Evangelist called aloud to the heavens for confirmation of what he had said: and with that there came words and fire out of the mountain under which poor Christian stood, that made the hair of his flesh stand up. The words were thus pronounced: "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10).

Now Christian looked for nothing but death, and began to cry out lamentably; even cursing the time in which he met with Mr. Worldly Wiseman; still calling himself a thousand fools for hearkening to his counsel: he also was greatly ashamed to think that this gentleman's arguments, flowing

only from the flesh, should have the prevalency with him as to cause him to forsake the right way. This done, he applied himself again to Evangelist in words and sense as follows:

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

Evan. Then said Evangelist to him, Thy sin is very great, for by it thou hast committed two evils: thou hast forsaken the way that is good, to tread in forbidden paths; yet will the man at the gate receive thee, for he has good-will for men; only, said he, take heed that though turn not aside again, "lest thou perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Psalm 2:12). Then did Christian address himself to go back; and Evangelist, after he had kissed him, gave him one smile, and bid him Godspeed. So he went on with haste, neither spake he to any man by the way; nor, if any asked him, would he vouchsafe them an answer. He went like one that was all the while treading on forbidden ground, and could by no means think himself safe, till again he "was got into the way which he left, to follow Mr. Worldly Wiseman's counsel. So, in process of time Christian got up to the gate. Now, over the gate there was written, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:8).

"He that will enter in must first without stand knocking at the Gate, nor need he doubt That is a Knocker but to enter in; For God can love him, and forgive his sin."

He knocked, therefore, more than once or twice, saying:

"May I now enter here? Will he within Open to sorry me, though I have been An undeserving rebel? Then shall I Not fail to sing his lasting praise on high."

At last there came a grave person to the gate, named Good-

will, who asked who was there? and whence he came? and what he would have.

Chr. Here is a poor burdened sinner. I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to Mount Zion, that I may be delivered from the wrath to come. I would, therefore, Sir, since I am informed that by this gate is the way thither, know if you are willing to let me in?

Good-will. I am willing with all my heart, said he and with that he opened the gate.

Discussion Starters:

1. What does "carnal" mean? Why is Worldly Wiseman said to live in the town of Carnal Policy?
2. What disadvantages of the road did Worldly Wiseman stress in turning Christian out of his path? Have you ever been turned from Christian action by such considerations?
3. Christians are to be holy. How does this differ from morality?
4. Why cannot the law deliver anyone from sin?
5. A wicket gate is a small gate set inside a larger gate to allow only one person admittance instead of opening the ponderous big gate. Is there symbolism here? Did Christian have any trouble entering the wicket gate when he got there?
6. By quoting so many scriptures, does Bunyan's text become a Bible commentary?

Bible verses

Exodus 19:16,18

Psalms 2:12

Matthew 6:14; 7:8; 10:39; 12:31

Mark 8:35

Luke 13:24; 14:26

John 12:25; 20:27

1 Corinthians 7:29

Galatians 4:21-27; 6:12

Hebrews 10:38; 11:25,26; 12:21, 25

1 John 4:5