

# Obstinate, Pliable, The Slough of Despond

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[0:00] Well, Pilgrim's Progress is our study. Our pilgrim has a burden on his back. He got it because of the book in his hand. He saw his sin against God, had exposed him to God's wrath eternally.

And he comes to share that concern with his family. And they put him to bed thinking he'll be better in the morning. But he can't sleep. And in the morning he says he's only worse, not better at all. So we pick up the account. Now I saw upon a time when he was walking in the fields that he was, as he was known to do, reading in his book and greatly distressed in his mind.

And as he read, he burst out as he had done before, crying, what shall I do to be saved? I saw also that he looked this way and that way as if he would run.

Yet he stood still because, as I perceived, he could not tell which way to go. I looked then and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him and asked, Wherefore dost thou cry?

[1:11] He answered, Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die and after that to come to judgment. And I find that I am not willing to do the first nor able to do the second.

Then said Evangelist, Why not willing to die since this life is attended with so many evils? The man answered, Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave and I shall fall into Tophet, another name for hell.

And sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment and from thence to execution. And the thoughts of these things make me cry. Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?

He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll and there was written within, Flee from the wrath to come.

The man therefore read it and looking upon Evangelist very carefully said, Whither must I flee? And then said Evangelist, pointing his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicket gate?

[2:27] The man said, No. Then he said, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye and go up directly thereto.

So shalt thou see the gate at which when you knock, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do. Now, here is the very outset of conviction of sin and awakening to his danger.

The pilgrim is able to see his predicament. He knows he's in trouble, but he still doesn't know what to do. And it's put in these words that he's wanting to run.

He knows he's got to flee the wrath that's coming upon him, and yet he doesn't know which way to run. Where is safety? And it's in that predicament that we find him.

You see, the law and conscience reveals our sin. The law has enough light to condemn us, but it has none to save us.

[3:33] And so he knows he's lost, but he still doesn't know the way to be saved. And for this, he needs the gospel, the way to peace with God.

It reminds us of Bunyan's own testimony, doesn't it, that we saw at the outset, that when he was first convicted of his sin, he knew he was in trouble, but he didn't know what to do.

So what did he do? He became religious. But he knew nothing all that while about the righteousness of Christ or even whether there was such a one as Christ.

So God sees to it that this man hears the gospel from Mr. Evangelist who points him in the right way. He's kind of like that Ethiopian eunuch, who was going along and not understanding what he was reading.

And God brings Philip alongside of him to open the way of the gospel to him. So it is here with Pilgrim. For Bunyan himself, his evangelist was John Gifford, the pastor of the Bedford Church, who spent night after night listening and explaining the gospel to Bunyan.

[4:46] It'd be good for us just to think for a moment, who were Mr. Evangelist, Mrs. Evangelist in your life, who came to you and pointed you the way to Christ.

Perhaps a mother, a father, pastors, friends, Sunday school teacher. We need to thank God for them. God sent them to us to show us the way to Christ.

Not only thank God for them, be like them and point others to Christ. Be that Mr. Evangelist who meets up with Pilgrim. And we can learn from evangelists.

We've been studying personal evangelism, and there's much here in evangelists that we can learn for. We see his concern for people, his concern for Pilgrim. He sees, he's crying, and he says, why are you crying?

What's wrong? We need first to see people as they really are. We need to see them as Jesus sees them, as harassed and helpless, sheep without a shepherd.

[5:53] And as we see them and take an interest in them and ask them, what's wrong? An opening for the gospel may indeed follow. He asked questions to find out where he was at spiritually.

Why are you crying? Why are you not willing to die? Why are you standing still here if you know that you're in danger any moment?

And then he listened because a good evangelist must be a good listener. And then he instructs him as he is ready to receive it. He pulls this parchment roll out and gives it to him that says, flee the wrath to come.

You know, at first you might say, why does he need that? He already knows he must flee the wrath to come. He doesn't know where. But there is still this urging to him that he not procrastinate, that he not put this on the back burner, but he gives it all diligence.

And then evangelist points him to the wicked gate. The footnote in the margin is Matthew 7, 13, and 14. Because Jesus says that narrow is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life.

[7:06] And he tells us to enter through the narrow gate. Well, who is that gate? Jesus is the gate. John 10, verse 7. Jesus said, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

I am the gate, verse 9. Whoever enters through me will be saved. So evangelist, in pointing him to the wicked gate, is pointing him to Christ and conversion to Christ.

As you enter through Christ, you find yourself on the way that leads to life. But remember, when he says, do you see yonder wicked gate?

Christian says, no. Pilgrim couldn't see it. He doesn't know enough yet even to be converted. You know, people are in that state. We must not just assume that people know enough even because they go to church and even because you've talked to them several times and maybe even laid the gospel message clearly before them.

It doesn't mean that they see it. It doesn't mean that they get it. And so here is Pilgrim. He still doesn't get it. He doesn't see the gospel. And so, what are we to do with people in that condition?

[8:20] Just walk away and say, well, I guess you're not one of the elect? No. Do you see yonder light? The shining light. Are you getting any help from the word of God?

And he says, I think so. The footnote there is Psalm 119, verse 105. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

1 Peter 1.19 as well. A light. We have this word as a light shining in a dark place. Do you see any light as you read the scriptures? Follow that light in the scriptures.

Keep that light in your eye and go directly there too and so shall you see the gate. So evangelist is wisely pointing him to Christ through the scriptures.

There's a footnote in the margin where Bunyan says, Christ and the way to him cannot be found without the word. So he's reminding us and he's teaching us in this allegory that it is the scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

[9:33] That's where he's revealed. Seek him there. So point people to Christ in the word of God. So he directs him to flee at once to Christ to knock at his door for further direction and help.

He doesn't help him with his burden take his burden off for him. He sends him to Christ for the removal of his burden. Again, wise advice from evangelists.

Now we're going to meet evangelists at least two more times throughout this pilgrim's journey. and it just tells us that he's one who comes back and checks up on that one that he's witnessing to.

He plants the seed and then he goes away and prays for God to water it. And he comes back and checks how are you doing? What are you doing here?

We'll see him saying why are you like this? And giving him more light and pointing him onward to Christ line upon line as he's able to receive it. Well, so I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

[10:42] Remember, he saw some light and he began to run after the light that he saw in scriptures. Now he had not run far from his own door but that his wife and children perceiving it began to cry after him to return.

But the man put his fingers in his ears and ran on crying life, life, eternal life. So he looked not behind him but fled toward the middle of the plain.

The neighbors also came out to see him run and as he ran some mocked, others threatened and some cried after him to return. Now among those that did so there were two that were resolved to fetch him back by force.

The name of the one was obstinate, the name of the other pliable. Now by this time the man was got a good distance from them but however they were resolved to pursue him which they did and in a little time they overtook him.

Then said the man neighbors wherefore are you come? They said to persuade you to go back with us but he said that can by no means be.

[11:48] You dwell in the city of destruction the place also where I was born I see it to be so and dying there sooner or later you will sink lower than the grave into a place that burns with fire and brimstone.

Be content good neighbors and go along with me. What? said obstinate and leave our friends and our comforts behind us? Yes, said Christian for that was his name because that all which you shall forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that that I am seeking to enjoy and if you will go along with me and hold it you shall fare as I myself for there where I go is enough and despair come away and prove my words.

Obstinate what are the things you seek since you leave all the world to find them? I seek an inheritance incorruptible undefiled and that fadeth not away and it is laid up in heaven and safe there to be stowed at the time appointed on them that diligently seek it.

Read it so if you will here in my book. Tush said obstinate away with your book will you go back with us or not? No not I said the other Christian because I have laid my hand to the plow.

Come then neighbor pliable said obstinate let us turn again and go home without him. There is a company of these crazed headed coxcombs that when they take a fancy by the end are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.

[13:27] Then said pliable don't revile if what the good Christian says is true the things he looks after are better than ours my heart inclines to go with my neighbor. Obstinate what?

More fools still? Be ruled by me and go back who knows whether such a brain sick fellow will lead you go back go back and be wise Christian nay but do thou come with me neighbor pliable there are such things to be had which I spoke of and many more glories besides if you believe not me read here in this book and for the truth of what is expressed therein behold all is confirmed by the blood of him that made it pliable well neighbor obstinate I begin to come to a point I intend to go along with this good man and cast my lot in with him but my good companion do you know the way to this desired place?

Christian I am directed by a man whose name is evangelist to speed me to a little gate that is before us where we shall receive instructions about the way pliable come then good neighbor let us be going then they went both together obstinate said and I will go back to my place I will be no companion of such misled fantastical fellows so he begins to run he's running and remember it's an allegory in real life this man does not leave his wife and children and we err if we think he does no he's leaving them spiritually that's all he used to live like them he was one with them he was their companion in sin he lived like they do for the world for friends for things in the city of destruction but now he's forsaking his sins he's forsaking this world and they don't like it and so they're trying to convince him to return to his former way of life in other words his family is discouraging him from becoming a

Christian Bunyan is reminding us that sometimes a Christian's enemies will be those in his own family there is a sword of division that cuts right through families sometimes when one or two set out and follow Christ others resist and so he's acknowledging in his allegory the strength of family ties and the difficulty it is to overcome their pressures his footnote is Luke 14 26 if anybody comes to me and does not hate his father and mother his wife and children his brother and sisters yes

even his own life he cannot be my disciple so how many husbands have been hindered from coming to Christ because of their wife or vice versa I'm waiting for my wife

I'm waiting for my husband I once worked with a fellow as I sought to witness to him he kept putting me off in the end by just saying well I'm waiting for my wife she doesn't want to have anything to do with the gospel and church so I'm waiting for her and I wonder I haven't seen him for years and years I wonder if he's still waiting for his wife or if he's even concerned at all about it anymore you know convictions come and go sometimes like the dew in the morning that's not our pilgrim when he has pressures coming from wife and family and relatives he puts both fingers into his ears in other words he's not listening to their cries that's what Bunyan's telling us he's listening to another voice it's the voice that comes from scripture that holds before an eternal life and so that's the thing that has captured his heart and he cries life life eternal life he looked not behind him as if to say he's burned his bridges he's not going back it's forward from this point on do you remember someone who did look back and scripture goes on record to say that that was her undoing and Jesus says in the New

[18:05] Testament remember Lot's wife what is there to remember about her but just this that she looked back she started running with Lot and then she thought of what she was leaving and turned back to look showing that her heart was still in Sodom and she turned into a pillar of salt Bunyan's playing on that picture and he says our pilgrim wasn't looking back he looked not behind him well soon after this his neighbors began noticing a difference in his life first the immediate family they live with him but now his neighbors he's not perhaps as gruff with them we don't know what all they saw the fruit of the spirit in his life or these changes at least coming over him the world when they see changes for religion toward religion toward

God are generally not kind especially if they've been old companions in sin who now are leaving the party you can read about that in 1st Peter chapter 4 they think it's strange that you no longer plunge in with them like you used to into all sorts of dissipation and folly and so they abuse you Peter says and so some mocked some threatened Others opposed him to actually go out after him to lay hold of him and bring him back obstinate and pliable it tells us that there's an enemy of the soul that when one starts to take an interest in the things of Christ the enemy does not so easily let loose of one of his slaves but he sends two good runners after him now they're opposite as opposite as can be pliable and obstinate and yet they join together in this mission to reclaim pilgrim to dissuade him from running after

Christ but again instead of giving in to them he seeks to persuade them to join him on his journey and we see in that a good sign of grace that when someone is dead in earnest about running after eternal life they become concerned for family and neighbors that they would join him so we find the first fella obstinate what a name what does that name mean what are the words synonyms that come to your head stubborn yeah mulish was a word that Alexander White gave them they scorn others they fight to get their own way they must have it their way Alexander White extends the allegory a bit to say that this obstinate was born and raised in the city of destruction and his father was old spare the rod and his mother's name was spoil the child and he says that whenever obstinate kicked or complained he got what he wanted they never said no to his greed his lies his anger his selfish ways and then he reminds us that all that he was in the nursery in the home in the classroom he was in an aggravated way as a grown man obstinate did not just wake up one day and become stubborn and muleish he had been trained as a child to get his way and to be angry and throw fits if he didn't get it and so he was reinforced it's a warning to us who were parents and not to be forming an obstinate character well that's just by the way by

Alexander White but obstinate despises anyone who interferes with his worldly interests when he's asked to go along what does he say what and leave our friends and comforts behind us he can't see beyond beyond the things of this world and when pilgrim tells him of superior blessings of an eternal tush away with your book in other words the bible has no authority with obstinate it carries no weight with them he's never been brought to tremble at god's word like pilgrim had his own opinions mean more to him than the bible and so he says are you coming back with us or not no not I because I've laid my hand to the plow that's a rather unusual statement unless you know Jesus words in luke 9 62 no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of god I have put my hand to the plow I'm heading for Christ and the kingdom of God and no one who turns back once having put their hand to the plow is fit for the kingdom so obstinate meets his match you see pilgrim is just as obstinate in the way of holiness in the way of seeking Christ the narrow way as

obstinate is in the way of sin and so since obstinate can't win the argument intellectually against our pilgrim he turns to ridiculing him calls him a crazed headed cox comb a brain sick fellow and misled fantastical fellow again when they could not resist the wisdom and power by which Stephen spoke they started throwing stones at him well pliable is the other fellow what sort of a man is he it's a good word what does that mean pliable easily persuaded you think of something that's pliable it's not stiff and brittle it's easily bent easily persuaded this way that he's a drifter just depends which way the wind is blowing which way the waves are tied is pushing the company that he keeps he's molded by those around him

[24 : 42] Spurgeon says he is more of a jellyfish than a man because he lacks firmness backbone and at first we find him following the strong opinion of friend obstinate yeah let's go out and bring him back he says and off he goes with obstinate but when he hears the stirring words of pilgrim he bends the other way and now he's ready to go with pilgrim and leave obstinate to go home alone and that's exactly what happens now I saw in my dream that when obstinate was gone back Christian and pliable went talking over the plain and thus they began their discourse Christian come neighbor pliable how do you do I am glad you're persuaded to go along with me and had even obstinate himself but felt what I have felt of the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen!

Christian I can better conceive of them with my mind than speak of them with my tongue but yet since you are desirous to know I will read of them in my book pliable and do you think that the words of your book are certainly true yes verily for it was made by him that cannot lie well said what things are they there is an endless kingdom to be inhabited an everlasting life to be given us that we may inhabit that kingdom forever well said and what else there are crowns of glory to be given us and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven this is very pleasant and what else there shall be no more crying nor sorrow for he that is owner of the place shall wipe our eyes and what company shall we have there there we shall be with seraphim and cherubims creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them there also you will meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place none of them are hurtful but loving and holy everyone walking in the sight of

God and standing in his presence with acceptance forever in a word there we shall see men that by the world were cut in pieces burnt in flames eaten of beasts drowned in the seas for the love that they bear to the Lord of the place all well now and clothed with immortality as with a garment the hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart said pliable but are these things to be enjoyed how shall we get to be sharers the country have recorded that in this book the substance of which is if we be truly willing to have it he will bestow it upon us freely well my good companion glad am I to hear of these things come on let's mend our pace I cannot go so fast as I would said Christian by reason of this burden that is on my back what was it that tipped the scale and persuaded pliable to go along with

Christian Jim the glorious things that he could see where now in the future in heaven alright so it was it was the prize of heaven that in the end tipped the scales for pliable enjoyments of heaven obstinate was satisfied with things of earth he had them bird in the hand is worth two in the bush I've got real pleasures here and now don't talk to me about this pie in the sky but pliable says it sounds like a better deal than what I've got maybe he didn't have so much in this earth and so he says I'll give it a try now how does this contrast with pilgrim's reason for setting out for the wicket gate what tipped the scale for pilgrim raj what was that burden that caused pilgrim to leave then and to set out on the journey it was the burden of what conviction of sin and guilt and judgment that was coming that he had sinned against

God he was not at peace with God and so he by reason of his burden set out on the journey Spurgeon comments you perceive that pliable had no burden on his back as as Raj said he had no burden on his back as Christian had this is this was one of the proof that he was not a true pilgrim that which brings men to Christ is a sense of their need of him albeit the sense of sin is not a qualification for salvation yet it is the only motive that ever leads men to trust in Jesus it is the impetus which divine grace uses when it is drawing or driving men to the Savior so to have no sense of his need of a Savior is a very serious defect and yet he sets out to live the Christian life because he thinks that if he does heaven is waiting for him at the end but notice it's heaven not correctly perceived!

[30 : 45] was a merely materialistic perception of heaven! The Bible has no heart for the spiritual realities of heaven! Spurgeon again they really think that heaven is literally what the book of

Revelation says it is figuratively they never get at the kernel of the inward sense it's the husk of the outward meaning that attracts them streets of gold pearly gates all these things that dazzle us but as for Christ being with him being without sin having eternal riches an everlasting inheritance!

forgiveness of sins fellowship with the Savior those things are not desired here they're not pursued! here and so they're not the things that draw him to run there so he's anxious to get going to hear more about these things and he wants to speed up the pace now I saw in my dream that just as they had ended their talk they drew nigh to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain and they being heedless both fell suddenly into the bog the name of the slough was despond and here therefore they wallowed for a time being grievously bedaubed with the dirt and Christian because of the burden that was on his back began to sink in the mire then said!

pliable! Ah! neighbor to his fellow is this the happiness you've told me all this while of if we have such ill speed at our first setting out what may we expect this and our journeys in may I get out again with my life you shall possess the brave country alone for me and with that he gave a desperate struggle or two and got out of the mire on that side of the slough when growing up that often overflowed its banks during the wet spring and it would soak the field and turn it into a marshy bog a slough and that's the picture that Bunyan uses here and he says it's a slough of despond a bog of despond of despondency of discouragement of losing heart depression and we're told that both of them fell in because they were both heedless they walked along and it's in the slough that the real differences between

Christian and pliable become all the more pronounced and obvious pliable he's not despondent because of his sin he had none but he is simply despondent because of the difficulty of the way that is met with them and he's offended and angry it's just the first trial on the way you you've read the book some of you and Christian will persevere through every one of them to the end this is just the first one and pliable struggling and hopping and he's out back to to the city of destruction just as easily persuaded to end the journey as he was to begin the journey pliable is rightly his name Jesus had pliables in his day he talks about them in that parable of the soil the rocky ground that the one who received the seed that fell on rocky ground is the man who hears the word and at once receives!

[34:52] so enthusiastic come on let's go let's be baptized let's join the church let's follow Christ but Jesus says since he has no root he lasts only a short time when trouble or persecution comes because of the word he quickly falls away quickly on the bandwagon quickly off how many pliables there are today as well greatly moved under some preaching to make a decision for Christ to follow Christ to invite him into their life and yet when they see what the Christian life is really about when they receive hardship and trouble because of following the word they say that's not what I signed up for that's not what I want and they quickly fall away back to the world not that they were saved and lost their salvation rather what the picture of

Jesus parable is saying and what Bunyan is showing us is that they were never really saved in the first place rather for all they did in religion for as far as they went in church they never had the root of the matter in them they were never born again they were never a new creation that's that's the lesson of Jesus parable of the soils and it's the lesson of Bunyan's pliable why so many pliables in the church today I don't know what the statistics are but evangelists who hold rallies and have people come to the front and sign the card can't find but a tiny fragment of those people a year later and I'm talking less than 5% something like that why are there so many pliables that are so excited to come and follow Jesus and then immediately like pliable they're back to the world what are some contributing factors the way of the Christian life seen testimonials

I had migraine headaches but when I came to Jesus I never had another one in my life well that may be Christ may have done so but there's plenty of Christians who would testify that life is full of migraines both figuratively and literally and that the way of Christ is no insurance for an easy life what else encourages people to hop on the bandwagon seeking after Christ supposedly no preaching on sin just preaching on the pleasures that Christ gives and they have a place we ought to preach the peace that God gives the joy that God gives the love that he gives but but we ought also to preach on sin and our need for a savior what what's that over here prosperity okay there's a lot of prosperity preaching isn't there that if you follow

Jesus you will be healthy wealthy and successful anything else Ed interesting evangelist doesn't take the burden off for him but sends him to Christ to have the burden taken off we have many evangelists who are very willing to take the burden off and tell them even if you feel a burden it's a

lie from the devil you pray this prayer you're no longer a sinner you're forgiven and they take the burden off themselves and they aren't happy to have the sinner feel the weight of their sin Jim what is the Christian life like those things those good deeds that we're called to walk in they don't get a say but that's the way what's the narrow road that we're called to walk once we are saved and often it's portrayed as the broad road or it's just not portrayed at all pastor

Aaron you had some people are looking for the answer to their problems whether it's physically or financial or people live in a job just another quote there put a scheme or whatever else and then trouble comes without the name of this fellow pliable easily persuaded I want you to think for a moment of all the people in this church building today who do you think might be the most pliable most easily persuaded Tim children could this picture pliable have some important instruction with regard to evangelizing our children I think it does

[40:21] I know it does we need to be careful we can easily just pressure our children into making a decision and then pronounce them saved and baptize them so that they go through the rest of their life thinking they're a Christian when the work of God in convicting them of sin and showing them a need of a savior and true faith in the son of God and a real new birth in their heart may never have happened and so we need to be thoughtful and biblical and careful about our evangelism of children now that's not to throw a damper over evangelizing children I trust that every parent here is involved in that day in and day out and every Sunday school and Wednesday night teacher is doing that but we're doing it with our eyes open to the fact that these little ones are pliable I must be careful not just to exert by my own force some kind of decision out of them and then to stamp them pliable after he returned home became all the harder to reach for

Christ than had he never gone through that experience and that's the problem we see often with children who've made a profession and have never been converted never been born again that they often are the hardest to reach for Christ so Tim that's right another interesting thing is just Christian is just starting on his journey and is excited and immediately telling all the good things and we see that sometimes sometimes we get excited even if we're not new Christians and God is so good he does this he does this and that's right and it's true yet a lot of times the person looks at that and that's all they know of the gospel that's right yep okay excellent so yes this is a you know there's a question where is this this pilgrim

Christian's name and all where is he at the best he's a babe and so yes there's there's much for him to learn about evangelism even from evangelist himself and I think Tim's right in saying that he could have been more careful and holistic in his presentation of the gospel we've got to leave Christian in the slough to spawn what a place to leave him but we're going to have to leave him there and we'll return to that next week we're dismissed