In our previous study we considered the three aspects that gripped the heart of Pilgrim to move out of the City of Destruction. We saw the desperation in his soul as he wrestled with the problem of his sin. His struggle then brought him to the place where he had to make the decision, - will I stay, or will I leave and search for a way out? As he was battling within himself, he met a man called Evangelist who pointed him in a certain direction. As he began on his new journey his family and the local townspeople ran after him, calling on him to return. As he fled from the city two particular men “resolved to fetch him back by force”. These two men were called Obstinate and Pliable. They had two very different personalities, but their purpose was the same.

Before they set out on the journey, they had both already made up their minds Pilgrim was foolishly mistaken. Obstinate, of course, would not be moved from that opinion. When Pilgrim invited him to travel the same road leading out of the City of Destruction, Obstinate indicated the price was far too heavy to pay. He wasn’t willing to leave his friends and his comforts. In fact, he wasn’t even prepared to give it a moment’s consideration, “Tush! Away with your Book; will you go back with us or not?” It was a straightforward question, and he wanted a straightforward answer! Either you’re coming back with us or you’re not! … What you are reading in that Book is filling your head with nonsense! And he wasn’t too complimentary about the kind of person he considered Pilgrim to be! “Let us turn again, and go home without him; there is a company of these crazy-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.” (In other words, “They think they are the only ones that are right!”) A ‘coxcomb’, - in the olden days, - was a jester’s cap. They were professional fools! And here Obstinate was putting Pilgrim into that category, - it was definitely no compliment!

When Paul was dealing with the Corinthians, there were a significant number who ‘looked down’ on him. Nevertheless, he told them, I Cor. 4: 10 We are fools for Christ’s sake. The world is an ungodly place. It holds no love for the Christian. It tolerates us! It only has time for its own pursuits, … it has no time for God, or God’s people. In fact, to be a friend of the world is to be on the side of the enemies of God. The world’s agenda is completely separate to the agenda of God’s people. It is all very well becoming involved in social action and trying to rid various countries of famine etc, but the calling of God’s people is completely out of this world because while we are in the world, - at the same time, - like Abraham, - it is not our final destination for we are looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). Therefore, our agenda is altogether different.
So, Obstinate wasn’t prepared to facilitate Pilgrim. Pilgrim was a fool, with his ‘head in the clouds’, chasing after a ‘fancy’ that served no earthly purpose. Obstinate, though, was in pursuit of reality, - that which he could see, and feel, and touch. He only worked for things that furthered him in this present world.

Pliable was a different sort though. Originally he and Obstinate had the same goal, - to awaken Pilgrim out of his foolishness and to bring him back to the City of Destruction. After all, they both “resolved to fetch him back by force”.

The word ‘pliable’ means, of course, ‘docile’ and ‘easily led’. ‘Spin them a good yarn’ and ‘reel them in’. Pliable would have been the kind of person who agreed with everybody. He didn’t have any firm convictions of his own. On the one hand, Obstinate was prepared to accept no one else’s opinion but his own, whereas, on the other hand, Pliable was prepared to accommodate everybody. He started off agreeing with Obstinate, and within a short space of time, he was agreeing with Pilgrim. He couldn’t form an opinion of his own. He simply followed others.

Obstinate is easier to deal with because he makes his position clear, - you know where you stand with him. He doesn’t like you, and he lets you know … and that’s it! If you say ‘black’, automatically he will say, ‘white’. He doesn’t have to think about it, - he’s just plain crooked and awkward. He saw no point whatsoever in Pilgrim carrying a heavy weight on his back, and looking into a Book for the way forward. No way would he be found doing such a foolish thing! … Pliable, though, was willing to ‘give it a try’.

When Obstinate denounced Pilgrim, Pliable defended him, “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 neighbour.” “You’re both fools!” replied Obstinate. At that point Pliable is willing to give Pilgrim the benefit of the doubt, “I think he might have something, and I’m willing to give it a try … to see”. So off they both go … Pliable, and his ‘neighbour Christian’. … Yes, they are neighbours now. That’s not how this episode began … but that is how it had become. He was full of questions, “do you think that the words of your Book are certainly true? … What things are they? … Well said, and what else? … This is excellent; and what else? … And what company shall we have there? … Are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers thereof?” … And, in fact, Christian was walking too slow for him and Pliable told him to hurry up, “my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things: come on, let us mend our pace.”
Now, let’s take our time examining what is happening here, and in particular the Pilgrim’s progress. First of all, we commend him for not yielding to the cries of his family, his neighbours, and those who set out in pursuit to bring him home. … He was …

**COMMITTED** This wasn’t a ‘notion’ or a ‘flash in the pan’ decision. He had been rushing along that road out of the City of Destruction because he could stand it no more. The Holy Spirit had shown and convinced him of his need to travel towards the light and to find the wicket gate that led on to the road that would eventually bring him to the Celestial City.

It had been no easy decision to leave his life behind … to leave his family and friends … to leave everything he had ever known. Night after night the sleep was kept from him. Day after day, - no matter what he was doing, - he could not escape the battle raging in his soul. He left the old life behind because he could stand it no more.

Consider Pliable though. He describes the type of person who is willing to be influenced by those around them. He had no firm conviction of his own. He was committed to whoever he was with at the time, - ‘all things to all men’. He would have been able to go along to the pub for a drink with his friends, or to go along to church (because I’m sure the City of Destruction had churches …). Yes, he would have been swept along by every tide. What Obstinate had in excess, Pliable was the complete opposite!

So we find him ‘changing sides’ … he was willing to ‘run with the fox, and hunt with the hounds’ … he was willing to keep the company of Pilgrim for a while. Incidentally, you will notice that Pilgrim’s name now changes to ‘Christian’. The Lord had claimed him. The Lord was working in him. He hadn’t yet arrived at that gate, but the Lord was forming within him that determination and commitment whereby he must arrive at the gate. This is the wonderful truth that when the Lord sets out to save you, nothing can hold you back! You are praying for a loved one to be saved … Keep on believing that Christ will save them, and that He is bringing them along the path that will inevitably draw them into the Kingdom. Trust in the irresistible grace of Christ to draw sinners to Himself! … Christian was challenged and claimed by the sovereignty of God, and salvation was the inevitable consequence.

Pliable, on the other hand, was not so convinced. He may have wanted to have been, but there was no commitment there. What are the pointers that indicate to us Pliable had no real commitment?
First of all, he had no map in his hand, - he had no Bible. Notice that Pliable asks, “And do you think that the words of your Book are certainly true”. He had no personal conviction that it was, - he was simply willing to go on the ‘say-so’ of someone else. Now, if Christian managed to get a Bible in the City of Destruction, Pliable should have managed it also … but he didn’t even bother looking. He wasn’t overly concerned and yet he asked Christian many questions, … but he didn’t ask him where he would find a Bible. You know, without the study of God’s Word you cannot navigate your way to Heaven. You’ll end up taking the road you think you should take … only to find it was the wrong path … Or you’ll travel down another road with friends and acquaintances to discover it leads nowhere … The Bible is the believer’s only roadmap, Ps. 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. If you don’t have the Bible, you will never find your way in the Christian path! … Christian had his Bible … Pliable was depending upon someone else, and it doesn’t work!

Secondly, we read earlier, - prior to Pilgrim meeting Evangelist, - that Pilgrim “would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying, and thus for some days he spent his time”. Now, we don’t read about Pliable having any such urgency … We don’t read about him praying. We don’t read about him crying out to God, as Pilgrim did (e.g. “What must I do to be saved?). So, not only did he not have a Bible in his possession, and neither do we find him crying out to God … and then …

Thirdly, he was depending on Christian’s experience, - he had no knowledge of his own as to why or where he was heading … and you can’t be a believer by proxy … by depending upon someone else’s faith. You must know Christ personally for yourself! However, Pliable was simply following someone else, instead of following Christ. Evangelist had directed Christian to the light away in the distance … but Pliable could see no such light. His eyes weren’t focussed. I can see him walking along with Christian, and not giving a thought to how he should also be focussed on the same destination as Christian. … He was simply following along, because he wanted to give Christian the benefit of the doubt, rather than he himself being persuaded of his need of salvation.

Pliable had no Bible, neither did he pray for God to show him the direction he should travel, he was depending on another man’s experience, and fourthly, Pliable had no concept whatsoever of the things Christian was talking about. The Celestial City was like a ‘fairy story to him’, - it didn’t hold any substantial reality for him. He had no burden on his back. He did not understand the problem of sin. The concepts Christian was explaining to him from God’s Word were completely alien, “The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart”. …
When Christian introduced the concept of “the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen”, Pliable changed the subject. You see, he had no knowledge that he was a sinner in need of salvation. He reckoned all he had to do was arrive at the door of Heaven and he would automatically be permitted to enter. He thought all he had to do was quicken his step … and he even instructed Christian, and do you notice his unfounded exuberance as he associated himself with Christian, “Well, my good companion”.

And so it was, that he lacked the inner thrust that had arrested Christian. He had no Bible, no conviction of sin, no urgency to make his way to the cross, no light ahead of him, and no wicket gate in sight. But unlike Pliable, Christian was committed to discover what God had set out before him, and because he was committed he was also …

**CONSTRAINED**  It was simply a ‘fad’, - a passing notion, - that lay at the source of Pliable’s willingness to go on the journey … but Christian, - as it were, - had no choice. In order for him to unloose the burden of sin that was so heavily laden upon his back he must go through the gate and by the way of the cross. He must heed the message given to him by Evangelist, “Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto”. You mustn’t turn back and enter again the City of Destruction. You must leave all the old paths and journey on the only way that will bring you to the destination your stirred heart requires.

God had a hold on him … and God would not let go until His purposes had been achieved in him! Ah, but Christian could have turned round and gone back … No, he couldn’t. God was determining his path. Yes, there would be times, - later on in the story, - where Christian would take a wrong road … but the Lord would always bring him back. Remember, the Lord doesn’t lose any whom He calls!

As you read and study Christian’s response to each of Pliable’s questions you very clearly understand that the driving-force within him was a supernatural desire to reach the conclusion God had revealed to his soul through His Word. … And that was what constrained him! That’s what convinced him to keep going on, and not to be deflected from his journey. Yes, he was committed, and he was constrained … The story also tells us he was …

**CONFIDENT**  He was confident, not in his own abilities, but confident in the things that he was being shown. I don’t suppose the Bible would have been a very familiar Book in the City of Destruction. I don’t suppose it would have been preached from very often. …
More than likely, the words of man would have had priority in the churches of that city. Nevertheless, Pilgrim was introduced to us with a Book in his hand and a burden on his back.

How did he know he was a sinner? The Book told him. How did he know he must leave his old ways? The Book told him. How did he know a new hope lay ahead of him? The Book told him. Even as Christians, I sometimes wonder do we underestimate the power of this Book, the Word of God. Why do many Christians consider it needs to be supported, - or complemented, - by man’s modern ingenuity? It’s as if they don’t consider it sufficient and up-to-date to do the work God has commissioned the Church to do. We need to facilitate it with modern expressions of worship in order to make an impact … but why … when for centuries, all that was preached was the Word of God, and the continued presence of Christ’s faithful Church in the world today demonstrates to us that the preaching of the Word is the means by which God upholds His people, and gathers in lost souls! It is the only means that has God’s seal of approval upon it.

Look at how Christian was so **confident** concerning the Scriptures. Remember that a short time earlier he had no knowledge of God’s Word, and yet now, he had become so engrossed to such a degree he could give an answer to every one of Pliable’s questions. He began by informing Pliable of the Gospel truth from Scripture of the reality of Hell and the judgment that awaited the citizens of his former city. He described how he sought for the “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away”. It was like a foreign language to Obstinate, but Christian held to it nonetheless … and he told Pliable about it. What a wonderful declaration he made to Pliable early in their journey, “there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glorious 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.” … Imagine, he’s speaking about the blood of Christ already! … Yes, beyond any shadow of a doubt, God was at work in this man’s heart.

It was so exciting to him that he wanted his new fellow-traveller to be excited about it too. He wanted him to feel as he did. Here is further evidence that God was at work in Christian’s life! He couldn’t help but be evangelistic as he talked to Pliable about Heaven … Don’t you want to be there with me?! … “an endless kingdom … everlasting life to be given to us … crowns of glory … garments … no more crying, nor sorrow … wipe all tears from our eyes”, and much more. Yes, notice the verses he was quoting were taken from throughout the whole of Scripture. In other words, he was being steeped in its truth. It’s a good sign God is working when the Word of God holds such a place of Divine authority! …
Indeed, Ps. 119:130 The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. And Christian had absolutely no doubts, “He will bestow it upon us freely”. As Jesus put it, Mt. 7:7 seek, and ye shall find … 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth.

**CONCLUSION**  Committed, constrained and confident. Yes, God was working! The devil was working too though … and he sent Obstinate with his brand of opposition to curtail and try and stop Christian, but he didn’t manage it. So he also had Pliable there, employing a different agenda with which to confront Christian. He tried the awkward, and then the gentle, - the ‘wolves’, and then the ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’. However, such was the definite purpose of God for Christian, neither the devil nor his companions could hinder His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself (Eph. 1:9).

And as we draw our study to a conclusion, notice a very simple little statement. When Pliable wanted Christian to move a bit faster, Christian informed him, “I cannot go as fast as I would”. No one wanted to reach that wicket gate more than Christian, but he was prepared to graciously accept the Lord would lead him there in his own prescribed time. Yes, He knoweth the way that I take (Job 23:10). He knows I’m going to arrive there, in the time that He has appointed.

But wouldn’t it have been more beautiful if Pliable had said to Christian as they set off together, “Before we go any further, let’s pray. Let’s ask for God’s blessing and guidance on our new journey”. No, instead he had an empty enthusiasm that would prove his spiritual futility, and would soon fade away. He was like the seed that fell upon the stony places, where there wasn’t much earth. Shortly after they sprung up, they shrivelled for they had no real depth.

Praise God for how He laid hold of you, as He laid hold of Christian. He brought you through … and He is bringing you through. Praise Him that He is the centre and foundation of your faith. If you have any doubts at all, examine yourself. You’re not an ‘Obstinate’ … but you don’t want to be a ‘Pliable’ either. He didn’t put any real store on the Bible or on prayer; he merely was depending on someone else’s experience, and he had no inner knowledge of what Christian was talking about.

As we journey towards Heaven, may we be following the leading of the Lord … taking great care to invest all that we are in Him and all that we have because of Him, so that He may have all the glory and all the honour, for His own Name’s sake. Amen.