CHRISTIAN MEETS FORMALISM AND HYPOCRISY

What conclusions have you drawn thus far from Pilgrim’s Progress? It is more than a story, isn’t it? It is testimony to God’s calling and keeping power. In our previous study Christian had met Simple, Sloth, and Presumption … and even after he had left them, we notice they were still on his mind. At this point two more characters come on to the scene, Formalist and Hypocrisy.

Instead of entering the highway through the wicket gate, they had ‘taken a short-cut’ and climbed over the wall. Now, immediately, Christian is unsure of them. Previously, he had been more ‘accepting’ of the people he had met … without discovering anything about them. Here, in this section, we are being reminded how we need to be careful of the company we keep as we progress along the King’s highway. …

CHRISTIAN’S SCRUTINY

He wasn’t afraid to inform the two men their entry onto the path was illegal. They hadn’t come through the gate, as they were supposed to. They hadn’t come via the House of the Interpreter, or the Place of Deliverance. These two would-be fellow travellers were no better than thieves and robbers because they were ‘breaking in’, … they had not come the proper way.

And because their entry was illegal, they were two illegitimates! They were not ‘born again’. They had come from the land of Vainglory, and they had no right to be on the road to the Celestial City because they had by-passed the proper means of entry onto the road, and they had not come via the cross! Nevertheless, they thought they had as much right to be there as Christian had.

… They were illegals, illegitimates, and they were also ignorant … because when Christian tried to convince them how wrong they were climbing over the wall, they made no attempt to understand him for they felt their presence on the path was as justified as his. They couldn’t see what his point was! Neither were they in the slightest concerned with how they got there … They were there, and that was enough! They counted themselves as having as much right to be there as Christian, and they disregarded all he was saying! … And they were going to Mount Zion for they had heard it was a great place to have a great time … and that’s why they were going! They had no interest in meeting the King. … They were going there for ‘a good time’!

Formalist, of course, was a religious performer. He used religion because he liked the pomp, the ritual and the ceremony. …
He wasn’t interested in the condition of his heart, or any need to be made right with God. Religion was for him, and that was it! … And while Formalist was a religious performer, Hypocrisy was a religious pretender. He lived off the superficiality of the congratulations of the religious triflers. He masqueraded as a Christian, and played the role deceptively well.

… And so early-on, Christian had these two men well summed-up. He recognised their pedigree. He was a new believer, and still learning, but he was realising he needed to be careful about the company he kept. No matter how long we’re saved, we need to be careful too … For example, many nowadays speak about believing the Bible contains the Word of God, rather than being the Word of God. Many of them would agree with you that believing in Christ brings salvation, but they also fraternise with those who hold a different form of salvation. Words, - such as ‘saved’, ‘born again’, ‘converted’, ‘evangelical’ – have had their meanings changed … And we need to be like Christian, and to be careful so we don’t be taken in.

Notice also how Christian’s reading and study of God’s Word helped him to beware of these two characters. He wasn’t afraid to tell them what Jesus said, Jn. 10:1 He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. Because he knew what Jesus had said, he wasn’t going to fall foul of these two! Formalist and Hypocrisy, of course, made no secret about how they saw no need for the gate, - go through it if you want to, but really, it’s not a necessity, - that was their philosophy! Climbing over the wall shortened their journey, and made it handier, and it saved them all the bother of going the long way round to arrive at the gate. After all, they’d say, it doesn’t matter how you get there, as long as you get! … How wrong they were, and Christian did not fall foul of them … He had worked out what they were like!

It is good to be saved, and to know you are saved … and the means by which you have been saved, and how you have been instructed by the Word of God, Is. 8:20 if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

How do you know you’re saved? … Because you have been obedient to God’s Word and you have entered through the Door, Who is our Saviour (cf. Jn. 10:2). You have followed the Saviour’s instructions. You have repented of your sin and turned to Him for forgiveness and cleansing, and the Bible makes it clear, Rom. 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
You are, therefore, saved not through your own merits, but because Christ died for you on Calvary. And that is the only way to be saved, and the only way by which anyone can be saved, for Jesus said, Jn. 14:6 I am the Way ... no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. ... Christian’s scrutiny ...

CHRISTIAN’S SAVIOUR
“I walk by the rule of my Master”, - he knew what he was doing and he wasn’t ashamed of the Lord, or ashamed of the path he had been called on to. He was confident in his new walk with Christ, Phil. 1:6 that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. ... And he wasn’t afraid or hesitant in making plain to those two men, “you walk by the rude working of your fancies”! If they did know the Gospel, they weren’t living by it, nor walking according to it! (Incidentally, he was probably using the mention of the ‘thousand years’ to refer to the development of apostate religion. Apostate religion is religion that depends on ceremony and ritual, and has no time for, or true understanding of, God’s Gospel of sovereign and saving grace. ... “I’ll get to Heaven my own way, the way of good works and my church!”)

But Christian wasn’t afraid to tell them, “I doubt you will not be found true men at the end of the way”. He wasn’t afraid to confront them. Sometimes we ‘go too easy’ on error, - we don’t speak out when we have the opportunity for fear it makes us unpopular, or puts us out of favour. Now, I’m not suggesting we set out to start arguments, but maybe we should be more careful if we let slip opportunities to defend the Name of Christ. We might even be showing younger Christians a poor example if we don’t stand up for the Saviour ... Christian was faithful and he was determined for the cause of Christ, as he walked uncomfortably along the road with Formalism and Hypocrisy.

It is one of the failings of some evangelicals who have become involved in the ecumenical movement, - they gradually become content to walk along the path without asking too many questions that should be asked ... They ‘shy away’ from controversy that might harm their credentials. In fact, that’s the next point we need to make ... for Christian wasn’t ashamed to make a distinction between himself and these other two travellers ...

CHRISTIAN’S SEPARATION
“There is not a lot of difference between what you believe and what we believe” ... That’s not a compliment when spoken by an enemy of the Gospel! “There’s not an awful lot of difference between you and me, at the end of the day. We all believe more or less the same thing” ... and that’s how these two
characters were trying to influence Christian. But he wasn’t so ‘slow’, - he was sure there was! The fundamental issue, - at the core of their conversation, - was whether or not you must come through the gate, or whether you could simply climb over the wall! …

Even in our evangelical churches you can meet some lovely folk, and they look and sound as if we’re all on the same road together, but as you progress it becomes increasingly evident we’re not. You are trusting in Christ for salvation, while they are trusting in a church, or on baptism, or on their parent’s profession, or something else. … To know Christ, though, is to have a personal relationship that is separate from the bare traditions of men. Christian made it very clear he was walking by the rule of the Master, and He was trusting in his Master for the present journey and the journey ahead.

He recognised he wasn’t the same as Formalist and Hypocrisy. What he had was altogether different to what they professed to have. The more they talked, the more he realised he had nothing in common with them. They lived by different criteria, while he trusted in Christ through saving and believing faith.

And not only did they sound different, they looked different. Christian wore a coat that had been given him by the Lord when he began his journey (Rom. 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus). They had no such garment … and no desire for such a garment. They were satisfied with the clothes they were still wearing from the land of Vainglory.

Furthermore, Christian was distinguished from them by the mark he had on his forehead, - the mark that proved he belonged to Christ. And he was also carrying the scroll he had been given earlier. They, on the other hand, had no coat, no mark, and no scroll! These things were precious to Christian, but they held no significance for those two men he had encountered.

But it was like talking to a ‘brick wall’ … “they gave him no answer; only they looked upon each other and laughed”. It was like “throwing pearls before swine”. They had no clue as to the differentiation he was describing to them. They were completely blind to grace and graciousness!

What more could Christian do with them? There was no point in continuing to travel with them, or even trying to have a productive conversation with them. So, he withdrew, - he separated himself, - from them. You can try your best, but there comes the time when nothing you say will prove profitable in such
company. John Bunyan recorded, “Then I saw that they went on all, save that Christian kept before, who had no more talk but with himself”. Indeed, II Cor. 6:14 what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 17Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Consider how it could so easily have harmed and demoralised Christian if he had remained in their company … As it was, he was for a time perplexed and distressed about them. Often we ask, “How can someone who attends church meetings not understand?” But, to prevent it from becoming an obstacle to Christian’s progress, he encouraged himself, “he would be often reading the roll that one of the Shining ones gave him, by which he was refreshed”

CONCLUSION
Christian’s scrutiny, Christian’s Saviour, and Christian’s separation …
We cannot be aligned with those who will not accept God’s Word in all its totality. There comes a point where we must go our separate ways for if we stay around together for too long, they would start to ‘infect’ us … and then we would start making excuses for ourselves and them also. Then, our attempts to achieve ground for Christ will result in nothing, - He doesn’t bless disobedience. …

Our priority is to faithfully uphold the honour of the Name of the One Who has called us to be obedient, and that is how the Lord will judge our efforts when we stand before Him on that great day. We are privileged to be counted among His people, and I trust we would never take our privilege for granted.

May the Lord encourage us in the study of His Word, and in our walk with Him! Amen.