**THE SECURITY OF DIVINE ELECTION**

Christian had managed to reach the entrance of the Palace Beautiful, where the Porter Watchful questioned him with regard to his arrival. Watchful asked him where he had come from, where he was going, what his name was and … why he was so late! … Christian took all the questions well though. Many another traveller would not have had as much patience. They would have demanded entrance … “Look, I’ve made a great effort to be here. Now, open the door and let me in!” That was not Christian’s attitude though. He answered the questions honestly and respectfully. Yes, he was privileged to have reached this far. … Others hadn’t made it … and he wouldn’t have made it either but for the grace of God at work in his life.

We have seen many come and go in the work of the Lord. We have seen some depart from the faith that has really surprised us. They used to come to the prayer meeting and pray the most beautiful and sincere prayers … They used to attend all the meetings, and they were a pleasure to speak with concerning the things of God, but today they are nowhere with Him. You cannot mention His Name to them. They are as hard as hard can be! … What happens to make them like that? Were they truly saved in the first place? Why was it they stopped following the Lord?!

It is hard to answer the questions that arise, except to acknowledge something got in between them and God … and they left off from following. If they were true believers they will not lose their salvation, and we trust that God will one day restore them … But sadly, there are many who have demonstrated all the qualities but possessed nothing of the real thing. That was why Watchful had to be so stringent regarding who he would allow into the Palace Beautiful.

He wasn’t altogether sure of Christian. It was niggling in his mind, “But how doth it happen that you came so late? The sun is set”. Perhaps Watchful had been caught out before, and he was careful because he did not want to be caught out again! He took his calling tremendously seriously to guard the entrance … and that was why he was the Porter, - he could be trusted by “the Lord of the hill”. Therefore, he probed a little further …

**CHRISTIAN’S ALLEGIANCE**

He felt the need of the shelter in Palace Beautiful because it was already dark … But what was a faithful child of God doing roaming about in the dark?! Men love darkness rather than light (Jn. 3:19,20) … so Watchful had to discover why Christian was so late in the evening! … Was he a false professor?
Christian gave a good and honest answer. Yes, he was in the dark, because he was caught out! He had slept when he should not have! He should have arrived earlier. He had no excuses to make and he had no reason to be caught out in the dark. I’m sure Watchful detected Christian’s regret in his voice.

To his credit, Christian admitted his error of falling asleep on the journey … His frank confession revealed his genuine sorrow concerning his temporary backsliding. … Only a true believer can backslide … To slide back you need to have gone forward. Yes, Christian was a true believer. His eyes were fixed on the Celestial City. His heart longed to be there. He had been to the cross, and he was longing to reach the City … And his Bible, - His scroll, - yes, he had it on him now! Previously, he had mislaid it … That was what kept him so late for he had to go back for it because he knew as a Christian he could not progress without God’s Word. If it had not meant as much to him he would have bothered going halfways down the hill to retrieve it, - he would have tried to go on without it. And so, it shows Christian’s allegiance …

At this point Watchful called for a second opinion. It’s interesting he called for a woman’s second opinion. Good women in a church are a real blessing. Often they have an insight many men struggle to find. It is good to see the men and women working together … and it is both their responsibilities to ensure the Lord’s house is kept intact because that is what the Palace Beautiful signifies, - the Lord’s house, His local church. Pheobe (Rom. 16:1) would have been a great asset in the church in Rome … and Priscilla (v.3), and Mary (v.6), and Tryphena and Tryphosa (v12) … and no doubt others. The Lord Jesus also treasured the company of the women during His earthly ministry. … And so Christian was directed to the “grave and beautiful damsel, named Discretion”.

You will notice it was her purpose to introduce Christian … to bring him “into the rest of the family, according to the rules of the house”. It reminds us God’s family lives according to rules as does every other good institution. Rules are no bad thing, - they maintain order and discipline. The rules of God’s family are not built upon what a committee draws up, or some kind of a leader … The rules of God’s family are built upon His Word. How refreshing it would have been for Christian to go with this young girl Discretion.

By the way, was John Bunyan justifying a female pastoral ministry here? No, he certainly wasn’t; he was using the imagery of Discretion, - along with her sisters Prudence, Piety, and Charity, - as the picture of a Biblical church … using the language of Paul, Eph. 5:27 that he might present it to himself a glorious
church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. … And so she investigated with even greater detail … We have noticed **Christian’s allegiance**, we then read of …

**CHRISTIAN’S ASSURANCE**  Discretion begins by probing for further detailed information concerning Christian’s experiences thus far on his journey. It’s similar to how interviewees for membership of the fellowship are required to give an account of the hope that lies within them. It is needed, - to guard the body of God’s people, - to press a person concerning their walk with the Lord. If they are genuine believers, they will understand and they will actually welcome it … it encourages them and causes them to consider how blessed they are. It also requires those who are not sure where they stand to examine their own position in the spiritual light of God’s Word as to their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Discretion was rightly exercising caution, - she was taking great care who she would admit into the Palace Beautiful. It was precious to her … and so she guarded it!

Discretion means being vigilant, being wise, being watchful, having discernment … How these characteristics are so necessary today to maintain the witness and testimony of God’s people … when there are the many who would creep in unawares and try to cause all kinds of havoc … but Christian was proving he wasn’t not one of them. He opened up his heart to them concerning his desire to enter the Celestial City.

It is amazing the last question she asked him would probably have been the first question we would have asked, - she asked him his name. She was being tremendously careful though. She had to find out what kind of a person she was speaking with.

And as he spoke with her, she could make out how his desire to lodge overnight in the Palace Beautiful increased … These were the kind of people he wanted to be with! These were the kind of people who loved the same as he loved, and who spoke the same as he spoke. Even though they began from different places, here at the entrance of the Palace Beautiful they met in ever-increasing harmony. … And she asked him his name … “It is Christian”, he said … and more than ever he wanted to lodge with these people!

Yes, they had an affinity, - the tears were in her eyes as she spoke with him. They had their faith in common … and yet, there were a few more issues still needing to be assessed. So, she invited him in for further conversation. …
She could see his allegiance and his assurance beaming on his face! She called for her sisters, - Prudence, Piety and Charity, - and they all met him on the threshold of the door, and invited him, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord”.

Yes, it does remind us of how important we must guard true Christian fellowship and church membership. It is not belonging to a club where you pay your dues and turn up when it suits … Church membership is the duty of the believer … It is a responsibility that impinges upon believers for the good of the upbuilding of God’s people, and for the Name of the Lord.

Here in this narrative John Bunyan shares with us some very important teaching with regard to being members of the Body of Christ, in the local fellowship. And so he has portrayed Christian’s allegiance and Christian’s assurance; we are now shown …

**CHRISTIAN’S ACCEPTANCE**

“Then he bowed his head, and followed them into the house”. He bowed his head as he entered amongst them, - it shows his humility … his privilege to be there in the Palace Beautiful. Isn’t it a privilege to be saved? Isn’t it a privilege to be counted among God’s Redeemed? … They sat down together, and prepared themselves to speak more about the Lord.

Christian fellowship is necessary if you are a believer. You will want to be in the company of those who love the Lord … even though we are all different. But John Bunyan is also highlighting a further development, - church membership … belonging to the local expression of God’s people. Church membership is a serious business. It is serious for the one who recommends the person (“Watchful”, - the Porter at the door). It is also serious for those who have to make the decision about whether or not they would admit the person further into their company.

… And you see too how it is not simply a matter of someone saying they are a Christian … so you let them in immediately, without examination. No, there is a process so as to guard the, - as it were, - the Palace Beautiful. This was the way John Bunyan was admitted into the church pastored by John Gifford … and it was the way he also admitted people into the fellowship of which he became pastor. He wrote in his manual when he began pastoring the Bedford church, “that such persons as desire to joyne in fellowship, if upon the conference of our friends with them . . . our saide friends be satisfyed of the
truth of the worke of grace in their heartes . . . they shall desire them to come
to the next church meeting, and to waite neare the place assigned for the
meeting, that they may be called in”.

Yes, it’s a Biblical principle to carry out God’s work decently and in order (I
Cor. 14:40). Paul told Timothy, I Tim. 6:13 I give thee charge in the sight of God,
who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus … 20 O Timothy, keep that which
is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings.

And once they were all inside, they sat at the table and there was a Godly
harmony at that table as they each had genuine fellowship with each other.
Their conversation would have centred round the journey, and how they have
been kept on the journey, and how they were trusting they would safely arrive,
- one day, - in the Celestial City.

And so Christian gained entrance … and stayed there overnight. He was with
people who were there for the same reason he was … Their conversation was
not anything like the conversations he had previously with Timorous and
Mistrust, Formalist and Hypocrisy, nor with Simple, Sloth and Presumption.
The conversation he had with Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity was
God-glorifying and encouraging to the saints.

It’s a beautiful picture of how pleasant it is for God’s people to dwell together
in unity (Ps. 133:1). It is an attraction that testifies to the world God’s people
share the same Father in Heaven. You know what I’m speaking about … Even
when you are in another region of the Scotland or the United Kingdom …
even where you are abroad and you search out the local believers … you
immediately have an affinity with them because,- like you, - they love and
serve the Lord.

I trust it is the aim we have in our meetings to dwell together in unity, for the
glory of God. Sometimes it needs to be worked at for we are all different, but
we do it for the Lord’s sake … that His Name is glorified amongst us, as we
seek to encourage each other on our way home to Glory. Amen.