CHRISTIAN’S TESTIMONY, Part II

As Christian approached the Palace Beautiful, - symbolising the church and the fellowship of believers, - he was first of all met by Watchful the Porter. He was then met by Discretion, - the ‘grave and beautiful damsel’ (p.63), - who introduced him to Prudence, Piety, and Charity who invited him into their home, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; this house was built by the Lord of the hill on purpose to entertain such pilgrims in”. Obviously, he had demonstrated a sufficient decree of belonging … otherwise, he wouldn’t have got past Watchful. Another sign of his progression in the faith is expressed by how Prudence, Piety, and Charity happily welcomed him, and how they sat him down “and consented together that, until supper was ready, some of them should have some particular discourse with Christian”.

Their conversation concentrated about his acceptability to come to their table and share in their meal. Remember that John Bunyan belonged to the Puritan era, and they laid great emphasis on practical holy living. It wasn’t enough to say you were a Christian … you also had to show it. This supper that was being prepared related to the Lord’s Supper, and the preparation that was expected … and before they considered sharing in the meal they began to speak with Christian concerning his faith. It is a reminder of the responsibility of God’s people as to who comes to the Table. It is not our Table, but yet we should guard it so that it is not abused or draws insult to the Name of Christ.

Bunyan would have been familiar with the practice of many Grace Baptist churches today, - and indeed it was the practice of ‘Particular’ Baptists since their inception, - that to come to the Table you would be a true believer, baptised, and an accepted member of the fellowship. That is how it was until the ‘General’ Baptists confused the issue so that nowadays basically anyone can come to the Table. It wasn’t always so though, since New Testament times.

As we have previously considered, Piety began by exploring how the Lord had taken Christian out of the City of Destruction and had been leading him towards the Celestial City. Prudence, then, continued the ‘interview’. She had five particular and well-chosen questions:

1. Do you not think sometimes of the country from whence you came?
2. Do you not yet bear away with you some of the things that then you were conversant withal?
3. Do you not find sometimes as if those things were vanquished, which at other times are your perplexity?
4. Can you remember by what means you find your annoyances at times as if they were vanquished?
5. And what is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?

We are told to I Pet. 3:15 be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. … You should always keep your testimony with you and up-to-date for you never know when you will be asked for it! … And Prudence showed great care and diligence in each of her questions. It’s not that she wanted to ‘catch Christian out’, but she wanted to make sure none got any further if they were not fitted to be in that place!

What great care we need to take when we are interviewing candidates for membership! It is not that we are some kind of clandestine or select club that puts obstacles in people’s way … but we have a duty, - a duty that John Bunyan also addressed, - to guard that which the Lord has entrusted to us. Too often, we can be so relaxed and keen to see new members that we lay aside clear Biblical principles necessary to guard the fellowship of God’s people. … Remember how Jude spoke about those who crept in unawares (v.4) and would cause dissension and havoc … Prudence lives up to her name and, here, she illustrates the discerning qualities that’s needed today, as in previous days.

Firstly, she asked Christian about his HOME
“Do you not think sometimes of the country from whence you came?”
He didn’t have to think long and hard. Of course, he often thought of his wife and children, - he loved them and he missed them. Back in his hometown, he had everything worked out … he knew what he would be doing from day to day. But, no matter how ‘settled’ he seemed to be in the City of Destruction, an overwhelming dissatisfaction had descended upon his soul. And for that reason, he had to leave.

Along the road he had met Obstinate and Pliable who would have had him return. Even lately … if he had listened to Timorous and Mistrust, it would have been so easy to have gone back with them. Especially at the beginning, - but even sometimes when you are well into the journey, - the devil would cast up before you how it might be of advantage for you to turn back. … Take your hand off the plough … Look round and remember. … “Do you not sometimes think of the old country?” Yes, to my ‘shame and detestation’, sometimes I do … and many a time, I’ve been given the opportunity to return!
What kept him going, though, was the confidence that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6) He had a better country in his sights … and he wasn’t going to stop until he reached it. Such is the perseverance of the true saint!

Secondly, she asked Christian about his **HABITS**

“Do you not yet bear away with you some of the things that then you were conversant withal?” [Do you not still carry with you some of the things that you were familiar with there?]

Again, Christian was compelled to admit that he was, - some of the old life was hanging on … just as with Paul, Rom. 7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. … 19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 21I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 22For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

As long as we are in this world we must contend with the reality of that which used to reign over us. Old habits die hard … but sometimes they are only sleeping! We failed to take due care to put them to death completely! And often the old habits can come back and haunt us. She asked him, Are you still plagued with remnants of your former life? Yes, he had to admit, he was. His former countrymen used to revel in them … and that was why he had to get out! He had to be obedient to the Scriptures, *Come out from among them* (II Cor. 6:17).

Yes, before conviction of his sin laid hold of him, he was like them … and there was no battle going on in his life. But since God began to deal with him, he realised how tumultuous was the warfare for the things he wanted to do, he found great difficulty in doing … and the things he detested were the very activities he found himself doing.

He knew though, that as long as he stayed with his friends their evil influence would be affect him … so he had to leave to quell the desire for his **habits**.

Thirdly, she asked Christian about his **HONESTY**

“Do you not find sometimes as if those things were vanquished, which at other times are your perplexity?” [Do you not sometimes find that personal carnality is vanquished when at other times it was of great trouble to you?]
Sometimes you feel you are winning, and then other times you feel as if your next step will be your last … but when you do triumph you are refreshed and you recognise God is in control and, - despite, - the many times you fall, - He will always pick you up.

I’m not trusting in my own ability, but His … for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (II Tim. 1:12). When I reach Heaven, and I am welcomed into the presence of God, I will fully realise all He has done to keep me on the pathway. I will arrive in Glory because He has kept His grip on me. I’ll not be boasting in how I got there … but I’ll be boasting in how He brought me there!

The devil can work to stop my progress to Heaven … for he will never succeed. I don’t belong to him anymore … Jesus died on the cross to purchase me, and He has my name already written in Glory … and my seat at the table of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is already booked!

Yes, Christian was honest about himself … but he was even more confident in God’s power to keep him during those times when the devil was trying him!

Fourthly, she asked Christian about his **Humility**

“Can you remember by what means you find your annoyances at times as if they were vanquished?” [When you experience these precious times in which carnal annoyances are vanquished, can you remember by what means these triumphs were obtained?]

Do you notice he never had to hesitate, and spend a long time thinking how he might answer? … He knew straightaway how to reply. I’m sure these questions Prudence asked were questions he often asked himself. She asked him, How do you come about these victories? … What a beautiful and profound answer he gave her, - he remembered the cross. “O victory in Jesus, my Saviour forever! He sought me and He bought me with his redeeming blood. He loved me ere I knew him, and all my love is due Him. He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.”

And then he looked at the clothes he was wearing … since he had been at the cross. Those garments were given to him. The three Shining Ones came to him and took off his rags, and put on the new embroidered coat. He was dressed in the garments of God’s chosen!
And he also told Prudence about the roll, - the Scriptures, - he kept next to his heart. *Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee* (Ps. 119:11). These were the things with which the Lord kept him going … and he trusted confidently in the Lord’s promises.

Fifthly, she asked Christian about his **Hope**

“And what is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?”

Again, he hadn’t to linger for an answer, “Why, there I hope to see Him alive that did hang dead on the cross. There I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me. There they say there is no death. There I shall dwell with such company as I like best. For, to tell you the truth, I love my Lord because by Him I was released of my burden, and I am weary of my inward sickness. I would much prefer to be where I shall die no more and my companions shall continually cry: Holy, Holy, Holy.”

Paul wrote to Titus about how the believer (Titus 2:12) should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; **13** Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; **14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. That was how Christian was living. He had the hope within him that one day he would leave this world … and his journey would be completed the very moment he stepped into Heaven.

What a confidence we are entrusted with! No amount of wealth could ever buy what we have been promised through faith in Christ! I’m sure Christian’s face was beaming at this point as he spoke about his personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ … and I’m sure also Piety, Prudence and Charity were all so greatly encouraged as they listened.

It’s good when we share with each other what the Lord has done for us, and is doing. … “For all the Lord has done for me, I never will cease to praise Him.”

Peter the apostle learned the hard way. With shame, he could remember how he denied Christ … and yet he came to learn, **I Pet. 3:15 be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.**

As we head towards the Celestial City we are learning all the time. No matter what terrain we cross, and no matter what individuals we encounter, it does us well to remember from where the Lord has brought us, how He is keeping us, and the home to which He will bring us some day. Amen.