

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 16

ERRORS THAT KEEP PEOPLE FROM THE NARROW WAY

THE HILL OF ERROR

The Shepherds then showed the pilgrims some of the sights in these parts.

The first scene they were taken to see was a hill called Error. From the top of this hill they were asked to look down the steepest side. As they did do, they saw the bodies of several who had been killed by falling from this high place. They then inquired how these people had come to meet their end. They were told that the hill represented false or erroneous doctrine, and those whose bodies they had seen at the bottom had not endured sound doctrine, but after their own lusts, they had heaped to themselves teachers having itching ears, who had turned away their ears from the truth and had turned them unto fables of men. The result had been that they had fallen and their bodies lay unburied as a warning to all to take heed what they heard, and to prove all things and hold fast that which was good.

This hill of Error has a solemn meaning for us; for there was never a time in the history of the world when so much error was taught as in this day and age.

In fact, we are warned about this in GOD's Word, for we read, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:1-2).

Wrong doctrines seem to exercise an hypnotic spell over those who receive them. Few who have been led away by the error of the wicked one are ever recovered from its fearful grip. How careful, then, we should be, before receiving whatever is taught. All should be tested by the Bible; not by a passage in the Bible, or a text, but by the general teaching of the Word of GOD. Almost every false doctrine tries to find support for itself from some single isolated text of the Bible; but when the doctrine is tested by the general teaching of the Scriptures, it will be instantly detected, and rejected as unscriptural by the discerning Christian.

A LOOK AT SOME OF THOSE ERRORS

Let us name a few of these errors that are abroad today so as to warn of their deadly danger.

There is so-called "Christian Science," a theory that is neither Christian nor scientific. This has succeeded in deceiving great numbers of those who are ignorant of the Scriptures. This system denies the personality of GOD, the deity of CHRIST, the HOLY SPIRIT, the reality of sin and the existence of Satan. It seeks to discredit all the fundamental truths of the Word of GOD. The question may be asked, "Why are such great numbers of people swallowing this lie?" The answer is simple, and needs to be carefully noted. Those who refuse to accept the truth of GOD in the light, will believe the Devil's lie in the dark! Man must believe something. If he rejects the truth, he will, by that act, open the door of his soul to receive and believe error, and the most foolish, and nonsensical error at that!

Another fearful doctrine is that known as Russelism after its founder "Pastor Russell" sometimes known as "Millennial Dawn." This denies the essential and eternal deity of CHRIST, the eternal punishment of the CHRIST rejecter, and many other things.

Spiritism is another thing that is sweeping many into a lost eternity. Beware of this attempt on the part of the living to communicate with those who have died. In spite of a large amount of fraud, it is not all sham. Spiritism is a reality, and GOD issues solemn warnings against it. He declares, "**Regard not them that have familiar spirits [mediums] neither seek after wizards to be defiled by them . . . The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits I will even set my face against that soul**" (Leviticus. 19:30; 20:6). In view of these warnings, beware of Spiritism in any shape or form.

Another of these errors is so-called "Higher Criticism."

Under the guise of honest scholarship, it attempts to undermine the foundations of the faith.

There are unsaved men, occupying pulpits on every hand, who are paid to preach the Word of GOD; but Judas-like, are seeking to steal away the precious faith of those who sit under their ministry.

- They belittle the Bible, and ridicule those who earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

- They deny the full inspiration of the Scriptures, and substitute for it what they are pleased to term, "the assured results of modern scholarship."

Beware of any man however polite and well educated, who seeks to discredit the Word of GOD, "**Let God be true and every man a liar.**"

A Bible that is not true is no foundation for any man's faith, but that GOD, it is true! We are assured that "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, [or mature] thoroughly furnished unto all good works**" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Space fails to mention the many other evil doctrines that surround us in these days. The Christian would be well advised to get good sound books and pamphlets dealing with these false cults, so as to be better prepared to

meet them with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of GOD.

MOUNT CAUTION

The Shepherds next took them to a hill called Mount Caution, from the top of which they looked into a valley beneath and saw several men walking up and down amongst some tombstones. Apparently they were blind, for they did not seem to know where they were going, but stumbled over the tombs and could not find their way out from the cemetery. At this, Christian and Hopeful inquired who these men were, and how they came to be amongst the tombs.

The Shepherds told them that this was the end of By-path Meadow, and that these men had climbed over the stile to avoid the difficulties of the narrow way. They had been caught by a giant named Despair, who, after keeping them in his castle for a time, had put out their eyes and then turned them loose amongst the tombstones to wander for the rest of their lives so that the saying of the wise man might be fulfilled which says, "**He that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead**" (Proverbs 21:16).

When they heard this, Christian and Hopeful looked at one another with tears in their eyes, but they did not tell the Shepherds of their acquaintance with Despair. They realized, with thankful hearts, what a wonderful escape had been theirs from such a cruel fate.

There are many Christians today who through wandering from the right path have had the light of their testimony for CHRIST put out by that awful trio of evil, despair, doubt, and distrust. Instead of confessing their sins, and judging themselves in GOD's sight, and thus being delivered from their doubts; they have allowed their unjudged and unconfessed sins to produce such despair of soul that the light of their testimony is darkened. They now wander amongst the spiritually dead, bringing shame and disgrace to the name of CHRIST. They are stumbling blocks in the way of those who are still dead in their trespasses and sins, and an offense to the Gospel they once professed to believe. People look at them and argue that if this is Christianity, then they want none of it, and thus GOD's name is blasphemed because of them.

The longer one remains in Doubting Castle, the greater will be the danger of being robbed of this greatest of all boons - spiritual vision. If any reader is still there let him bestir himself lest the fate of these men be yours.

THE SIDE DOOR TO HELL

The pilgrims were next conducted to a door in the side of a hill. The Shepherds opened the door and bade them look in. They looked therefore, and perceived that it was a most dreadful place, for there was a smell of burning and brimstone. They saw also the fearful flames of judgment, and heard the piteous cries of those who were within that flame, weeping, wailing and gnashing their teeth.

With awed voices they inquired, "What place is this?"

They were told that this was the side door to hell, the way the hypocrites go in at, such as Judas and others who had a show of pilgrimage, who outwardly appeared to be on the heavenly highway; but who lacked the one thing needful for entrance to the Celestial City; namely, the regenerating power of the HOLY Spirit of GOD. They had discovered, too late, that there was a vast difference between an outward form and an inward reality.

We may well pause at this solemn scene and ask ourselves, each one for himself, "Am I truly a child of GOD, born again by His blessed HOLY SPIRIT, and therefore a new creature in CHRIST JESUS; or am I simply deceiving myself, and mistaking a profession of CHRIST for a possession of CHRIST? Do I really know my sins forgiven? Have I peace with GOD through faith in the Lord JESUS CHRIST; or is my feeling of security based on a wrong foundation that will not stand the test of eternity? Am I showing by my unworldly life and godly character that I have indeed passed from death unto life, and from the power of Satan unto GOD?"

These are good questions to ask ourselves, for it would be a terrible thing to discover too late that we have been deceived. It is tragically possible for a person to deceive himself, and live in a fool's paradise of his own making, and at last open his eyes, too late, to realize that he has mistaken the shadow for the substance, religion for regeneration, churchianity for Christianity, profession for profession and ritual for reality. May it be the heart confession of each reader to be able to say,

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than JESUS' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on JESUS' name.
On CHRIST the solid ROCK I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

Let us make sure that we are resting only in the finished work of CHRIST for our salvation, and the infallible Word of GOD for our assurance.

A GLIMPSE AT THE CELESTIAL CITY

After this, the Shepherds had them look through a telescope, for the Celestial City was visible from those mountains through this means. Though both Christian and Hopeful looked through it, what they had recently seen had so worked upon them that they could not see anything clearly. They thought, however, that they saw something that looked like a gate, and also some of the glory of the place, and this gave them much encouragement. Then one of the Shepherds gave them a note of the way. Another bade them beware of the flatterers. The third warned them not to sleep on the Enchanted ground, while the last bade them God-speed.

After the pilgrims had thanked the Shepherds for their kind hospitality and counsel, they went on their way singing,

"Thus by the Shepherds secrets are revealed
Which from all other men are kept concealed;
Come to the Shepherds then, if you would see
Things deep, things hid, and that mysterious be."

Presently they came to a dark lane where they met a man whom seven demons had bound with seven strong cords, and who was being carried to the side door to hell. Then did Christian and Hopeful tremble, and as the man passed, Christian looked to see who it was, for he thought it might be a man named Turn-Away from the town of Apostasy; but as the man hung his head he could not recognize him plainly, but he saw on his back a card on which was written, "Wanton professor and dreadful Apostate."

Thus ended the history of a man who had once professed Christianity, but who proved he had never been born again by turning back and opposing the Gospel. It seems that for such there is little hope, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of GOD afresh, and put Him to open shame. We need ever to remember that not all who say unto JESUS "Lord, Lord" shall enter in to the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father. The proof of true discipleship is continuance. **"If ye continue in my word,"** said CHRIST, **"then are ye my disciples indeed."**

THE MISFORTUNE OF LITTLE-FAITH

Soon they came to a place in this dark lane where another road called Dead Man's Lane entered it from Broadgate Road. Then Christian told his companion of an incident that had occurred at this place some time previously, for this spot was one of the most dangerous places of the pilgrim's journey.

He recounted the story of a man named Little-Faith from the town of Sincere who, when he came to this place, lay down and slept. As he awakened, three brothers named Faint-Heart, Mistrust and Guilt, the worst scoundrels in the countryside came upon him and demanded his money. Faint-Heart demanded, "Deliver thy purse."

As Little-Faith, terrified, hesitated to do so, Mistrust ran up to him and thrusting his hands in his pocket robbed him of his bag of silver. Then Little-Faith cried out, "Thieves! Thieves!"

At this, Guilt struck him a blow on the head, and he fell bleeding and unconscious to the earth.

The robbers, hearing someone coming along the road, and fearing that it should be one named Great-Grace, of the city of Good-Confidence, took to their heels, and left poor Little-Faith lying robbed, bleeding and senseless on the road.

When Little-Faith came to himself and discovered that he had lost nearly all his spending money for the journey, he was inconsolable. But he discovered that his most treasured and precious possession, several beautiful jewels, were still safe.

He was, however, forced to get his way along for the rest of his journey, for he could not sell his jewels.

Many a day he went hungry, and was so swallowed up with his loss that he could think and talk of nothing else for the remainder of his pilgrimage. He could have easily secured a fresh supply of spending money from the Lord, but his loss so filled his mind that it blinded him to everything else. He was so taken up with his misfortune that nothing would console him. He spent all his time relating the story of the riches he once possessed, and of the poverty he now suffered. He thus dwelt continually in the past and sought no power for the present.

Little-Faith is a picture of a person, who though truly saved, yet through a faint heart in GOD's cause, and a mistrust of GOD's truth, gets a guilty conscience which robs him of his joy in the Lord, the peace of GOD, and the assurance and satisfaction of the Gospel. Instead of joyfully treading the pilgrim pathway as GOD intended he should, he becomes the very picture of misery, and is always sighing and complaining about his loss and the sadness of his condition.

THE SEVEN JEWELS OF LITTLE-FAITH

These Little-Faiths can always be distinguished by the fact that they are continually dwelling on past experiences.

- They speak of the good times they "used to have years ago";
- of the service they "used to render,"
- of the joy that "once they had."

This is a sad condition for any Christian to get into; but it is good to know that the jewels, the essential things of the Christian life are still there.

Every Christian has seven precious jewels that can never be lost. They have been well stated by another as follows,

- "The Christian has a life that cannot be forfeited (John 10:28);
- a relationship that cannot be broken (Galatians 3:26);
- a righteousness that cannot be tarnished (II Corinthians 5:21);
- a peace with GOD that can never be disturbed (Ephesians 2:14);
- an acceptance that can never be questioned (Ephesians 1:6);
- an inheritance that can never fade (I Peter 1:4),
- and a title that can never be disputed (Revelation 5:9)."

Peter had an experience like Little-Faith.

He was knocked down and robbed, and even denied his Lord with oaths and curses; yet CHRIST had prayed for him that his faith would not fail, and he was restored from his backsliding.

Unlike Little-Faith he did not waste time bemoaning the failure of the past, but drew from that store of all sufficient grace a fresh supply of "spending money," and went on to glorify the Lord in his life.

Is any reader in the condition of Little-Faith? Then let him confess his sin in having had a faint heart in GOD's cause, a mistrust of His promises and a consequently guilty conscience. Instead of bemoaning his lot and making other people miserable by the oft recital of his miserable and wretched condition; let him return in humble repentance to that work he neglected, that Bible he failed to study.

GOD has promised, "**I will restore unto you the years that the locust hath eaten . . . and ye shall eat in plenty and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you**" (Joel 2:25-26).

Do not any longer allow these three robbers to strip you of your joy, but "**forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**" You will then be a happy, useful, and contented Christian.

~ end of chapter 16 ~
