The Pilgrim’s Progress

Chapter 1: Christian Begins His Journey, Part 3
• Christian fled from the City of Destruction after coming under conviction for his sins.
• He met Evangelist who pointed across a wide field to a wicket-gate and to the light.
• Christian fled toward the light while his wife and children pleaded with him to return.
• Two neighbors were determined to bring him back by force: Obstinate & Pliable.
From the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), we have a complete definition of the word *obstinate* which helps us understand the character Bunyan has described:

**Obstinate**: Firmly adhering to an opinion or chosen course of action despite argument, persuasion, or entreaty; inflexible, resolute, stubborn, self-willed. Usually with pejorative connotation.
Bunyan’s *Obstinate*

- With Pliable, he **pursued** Christian in order to persuade him to come back to the City of Destruction with them.
- He **rejected** Christian’s invitation to come with him to the Celestial City, refusing to abandon his friends and comforts.
- He **cannot grasp** that there could be anything important enough for Christian to leave everything behind.
Obstinate’s Reasoning

• Notice how Obstinate refuses to use sound principles of argument in order to persuade Christian to return: “No way; throw your book away!”

• What Obstinate does not say is as important as what he does say. He does not say, “What book?” “What kind of a book is it?” “What are the book’s claims?” “Can you trust it?”
• “A man who makes an assertion puts forward a claim – a claim on our attention and to our belief...a man who asserts something intends his statement to be taken seriously” (Stephen Toulmin, The Uses of Argument, Cambridge).

• “The obstinate man does not hold opinions, but they hold him” (S. Butler, Genuine Remains).
An ad hominem Attack

Obstinate uses an *ad hominem* attack (a phrase applied to an argument or appeal founded on the preferences or principles of a particular person rather than on abstract truth or logical cogency) with Pliable: “There are a number of these *crazy dreamers* who are wiser in their own eyes than seven men who can give a reason.” “You don’t have any idea where this *idiot* will lead you.” Later, “*mislead dreamer.*”
Obstinate’s Return

Obstinate turns away from Christian and Pliable, and makes his way back to the City of Destruction.

Great Chicago Fire of October 8-10, 1871
- At least 300 dead
- 100,000 homeless
- $200 million in property damages
The OED defines *pliable* as “flexible in disposition or character; easily influenced or directed; docile, compliant, adaptable, submissive; weak-willed.”
Bunyan’s *Pliable*

- The first thing we notice is that Pliable has no burden on his back.
- He probably had some slight superficial conviction.
- He longs only for the benefits of the kingdom and does not count the cost.
- He has “no sense of sin, no knowledge of his own heart, no desire after Christ, no feeling of his need of a Savior” (G.B. Cheever).
“Obstinate and Pliable are portraiture of classes. They, together with Christian, constitute the representatives of most of the hearers of the gospel, and of the manner in which they receive it; they are either hardened against it, or are somewhat softened and disposed to set out, or they become real pilgrims.”
# The Parable of the Sower

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Notes on the Parable

• The seed is the Word of God
• The ground or soil upon which the seed falls is clearly man’s heart.
• “The result of the hearing of the gospel always and everywhere depends on the condition of heart of those to whom it is addressed” (Hendriksen).
• Only 1 of the four soils is fruitful (a Christian).
6 Ways to Develop a Hard Heart

1. Neglect the reading and studying of the Word of God.

2. Feed your mind and heart with the values of the world. Ideas come in through the eye-gate and the ear-gate.

3. Redefine sin (e.g., something that doesn’t hurt someone else; God wants me to be happy; a mistake, etc.)
6 Ways to Develop a Hard Heart

4. Rationalize your behavior when it is in conflict with the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

5. Listen to the counsel of other people who are disobedient to the Word. This will fortify your position.

6. Remain unrepentant.
“Falling away from God finds its origins, development, and impetus in unbelief. Unbelief – characterized by mistrust and unreliability – first comes to expression in disobedience, which in turn results in apostasy. The signs of apostasy are hardening of the heart and an inability to repent. The following series of contrasts can be made:
Unbelief – Faith
Disobedience – Hearing obediently
Neglect – Steadfastness
Apostasy – Entrance to life
Hardening - Salvation
“Hardening is demonstrated by a refusal to hear the voice of God and a determined desire to act contrary to everything classified as faith and faithfulness. As a sly, deceptive agent of Satan, sin enters the heart of man and there causes the growth and development of unbelief, which becomes evident in hardening of the spiritual arteries.”
“There are according to Jesus only two ways, hard and easy (there is no middle way), entered by two gates, broad and narrow (there is no other gate) trodden by two crowds, large and small (there is no neutral group), ending in two destinations, destruction and life (there is no third alternative). It is hardly necessary to comment that such talk is extremely unfashionable today.
People like to be uncommitted. Every opinion poll allows not only for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, but for a convenient ‘don’t know.’ Men are lovers of Aristotle and of his golden mean. The most popular path is the *via media*. To deviate from the middle way is to risk being dubbed an ‘extremist’ or a ‘fanatic.’ Everybody resents being faced with the necessity of a choice. But Jesus will not allow us to escape it.”
The Slough of Despond

• The literal meaning of a *slough* is “a piece of soft, miry, or muddy ground; especially a place or hole in a road or way filled with wet mud or mire” (OED).

• The figurative meaning is “a state or condition (especially of moral degradation) in which a person, etc. sinks or has sunk” (OED).
Excitement & Haste

“Excitement is delusion,
and ends in disappointment.”

- Charles Bridges

“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty”

- Proverbs 21:5
“Beware of prayers which leap up like grasshoppers and are soon down again.”
Pliable was offended when he fell into the Slough of Despond.

He responded to Christian with anger and specifically mentions “happiness” – revealing his primary purpose for going along with Christian.

He struggled, got out on the side closest to his home, and Christian never saw him again.
“There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who think they are sinners and the sinners who think they are righteous.”

Blaise Pascal
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9