The Pilgrim’s Progress

Chapter 21: Christian & Hopeful Discuss Conviction & Backsliding
Ignorance hobbled behind while Christian and Hopeful continued their journey. Christian’s first words to his companion are full of compassion: “I feel sorry for this poor man. In the end he will have a very difficult time.”

Christian was not only speaking about the pains and trials of old age, but of Ignorance having to face eternity without Christ’s righteousness.
The Difficulty of Growing Old

• “I never wake up in the morning without finding life a little more devoid of interest than it was the day before. But what saddens me most is remembering my life as it was twenty years ago and then suddenly coming back into the present” (Jonathan Swift, letter of 1729).

• “I have not the least wish to put my toys away. I hate the idea of going” (H.G. Wells, 1940, age 70).
“I loathe the hardness of old age. I feel it coming. I creak. I am embittered.”

- Virginia Woolf, 1940, age 58
The Difficulty of Growing Old

• “It is extraordinary business, Charles, growing old” (Winston Churchill).

• “Yes, autumn is really the best of the seasons: and I’m not sure that old age isn’t the best part of life. But, of course, like autumn it doesn’t last” (C.S. Lewis, in a letter to George Sayer).
Famous Last Words

• “O Lord, help me, O Christ, help me. Stay with me; it is hell to be left alone” (Thomas Paine, 1737-1809, who wrote *The Age of Reason*).

• “I am suffering the pains of the damned” (Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, French Statesman, 1754-1838).

• “I am abandoned by God and men. I shall go to hell. O Christ, O Jesus Christ” (Voltaire, 1694-1778).
“This is no dream, Will. If this is death it is inexpressibly sweet. Earth is receding, heaven is opening, God is calling and I must go.”

- D.L. Moody, to his son as he was dying

1837-1899
“I had been feeling quite good until recently....When I came back from Chicago, I went to the doctor and had a number of tests. And the bottom line of that is that they diagnosed liver cancer...A number of you have asked what you can do...Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God.”
Hopeful makes the observation that whole families and entire streets in Vanity Fair hold to Ignorance’s values and beliefs. “What do you think of such men?” he asked Christian. “Do you think they never experience conviction for their sins and consequently do not have fears that their personal situation is dangerous?”
What Is Conviction?

- **Conviction, n.** The proving or finding a person guilty of an offence with which he is charged before a legal tribunal; legal proof or declaration of guilt; the fact or condition of being convicted: sometimes including the passing of sentence.

- **Theological usage:** The fact or condition of being convicted or convinced of sin. *Under conviction* means to be in the state of awakened consciousness of sin.
• Christian maintains that unbelievers may experience conviction for their sins but desperately try to suppress it.

• Paul writes: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).
“The Greek word for *suppress* means not merely “to hold” but “to hold down,” thus to suppress, to prevent the truth from exerting its power in the heart and the life. The truth is not merely quietly held while men go on in immorality, for it is the nature of truth to exert itself, make its power felt; it is held down so that it shall not exert itself.”
“...all men, due to the sin within them, always and in all relationships seek to ‘suppress’ this knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18). The natural man is such a one as constantly throws water on a fire he cannot quench...Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker.”
Revelation 3:17

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”
The Right Kind of Fear

• A fear that rises up within a person when he is brought under conviction of his sin.
• A fear that drives the soul to lay hold of Christ for salvation.
• A fear that creates and establishes in the soul a great reverence for God, his Word, and his ways. Right fear keeps the soul tender and makes it afraid to turn away from him.
Martin Luther said that God uses sex to drive a person to marriage, ambition to drive a person to service, and fear to drive a person to faith.”
“I know why logs spit. I know what it is to be consumed.”

- Winston Churchill

On sitting by a fireplace and staring into the flames

1874-1965
How Right Fears Are Suppressed

- Unbelievers believe right fears are produced by the devil, rather than brought about by God. They tend to believe that these fears are given in order to destroy them.
- They believe these fears will ruin their faith. So they harden their hearts to these fears.
- They assume they should not have any fear.
- They believe these fears tend to take away their miserable old self-righteousness.
Introducing Temporary

• He lived in Graceless near Vanity Fair, about 2 miles from Honesty, and was one of the outstanding religious leaders.

• He lived next door to Turn-back, a man who, at one time, was spiritually alive and had some awareness of his sins and their consequences.

• He often came to Hopeful in tears.
Introducing Temporary

• Temporary had planned to go on a pilgrimage, but became acquainted with a man named Save-self.
• Hopeful didn’t see much of him after he forged a relationship with Save-self.
“Association with inconsistent Christians has been the downfall of many young believers. The devil delights to use God’s own birds as a decoy for his nets.”

“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals” (I Cor. 15:33).
Four Reasons People Backslide

• Their minds have not been changed (repentance). Guilt fades and they turn back to their old ways.

• Oppressive fears of other people overpower them. They don’t want to run the risk of losing everything.

• Shame becomes a barrier to them. In their pride and arrogance, religion has little value.
Four Reasons People Backslide

• It is burdensome for them to experience guilt and to meditate on the reality of hell. So they avoid all thoughts of guilt and terror. After they get rid of their awareness of the wrath of God, they harden their hearts and choose the ways that will harden them more and more.
How People Backslide

1. They try to forget all they can about God, death, and the judgment to come.
2. They gradually begin to neglect their private duties.
3. They avoid the company of enthusiastic and sincere Christians.
4. They grow cold to sacred ordinances.
5. They begin to criticize those who are godly.
6. They begin to associate with, and spend more time with, worldly, loose, and perverse people.
7. They give in to worldly and perverse conversations in secret.
8. They begin to openly sin.
“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments” (Ps. 119:176)

“For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (I Peter 2:25).
“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”