

# HOPEFUL'S CONVERSION

JOHN BUNYAN (1628-1688)

*Taken from THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS  
(available from Chapel Library), wherein two  
pilgrims converse about salvation in Christ as they journey from this world to that which is to come.*

CHRISTIAN. Then Christian began, and said, I will ask you a question. How came you to think at first of so doing as you do now?

HOPEFUL. Do you mean, how came I at first to look after the good of my soul?

CHRISTIAN. Yes, that is my meaning.

HOPEFUL. I continued a great while in the delight of those things which were seen and sold at our fair; things which, I believe now, would have, had I continued in them still, drowned me in perdition and destruction.

CHRISTIAN. What things were they?

HOPEFUL. All the treasures and riches of the world. Also I delighted much in rioting, revelling, drinking, swearing, lying, uncleanness, Sabbath-breaking, and what not, that tended to destroy the soul. But I found at last, by hearing and considering of things that are Divine, which indeed I heard of you, as also of beloved Faithful, that was put to death for his faith and good living in Vanity Fair, that "the end of these things is death" (Rom 6:21-23). And that for these things' sake, "cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph 5:6).

CHRISTIAN. And did you presently fall under the power of this conviction?

HOPEFUL. No, I was not willing presently to know the evil of sin, nor the damnation that follows upon the commission of it; but endeavoured, when my mind at first began to be shaken with the Word, to shut mine eyes against the light thereof.

CHRISTIAN. But what was the cause of your carrying of it thus to the first workings of God's blessed Spirit upon you?

HOPEFUL. The causes were, 1. I was ignorant that this was the work of God upon me. I never thought that by awakenings for sin, God at first begins the conversion of a sinner. 2. Sin was yet very sweet to my flesh, and I was loath to leave it. 3. I could not tell how to part with mine old companions, their presence and actions were so desirable unto me. 4. The hours in which convictions were upon me, were such troublesome and such heart-affrighting hours, that I could not bear, no not so much as the remembrance of them upon my heart.<sup>1</sup>

CHRISTIAN. Then, as it seems, sometimes you got rid of your trouble?

HOPEFUL. Yes, verily, but it would come into my mind again, and then I should be as bad, nay, worse than I was before.

CHRISTIAN. Why, what was it that brought your sins to mind again?

HOPEFUL. Many things; as,

1. If I did but meet a good man in the streets; or,
2. If I have heard any read in the Bible; or,
3. If mine head did begin to ache; or,
4. If I were told that some of my neighbours were sick; or,
5. If I heard the bell toll for some that were dead; or,
6. If I thought of dying myself; or,
7. If I heard that sudden death happened to others;
8. But especially, when I thought of myself, that I must quickly come to judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> Here you see, as our Lord says, "It is the Spirit who quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). Our carnal nature is so far from profiting in the work of conversion to Christ, that it is at enmity against him, and opposes the Spirit's work in showing us our want of him, and bringing us to him. Man's nature and God's grace are two direct opposites. Nature opposes, but grace subdues nature, and brings it to submission and subjection. Are we truly convinced of sin, and converted to Christ? This is a certain and sure evidence of it—we shall say from our hearts, Not unto us, nor unto any yieldings and compliances of our nature, free-will, and power, but unto thy name, O Lord, be all the glory. For it is by thy free, sovereign, efficacious grace, we are what we are. Hence, see the ignorance, folly, and pride of those who exalt free-will, and nature's power, &c. Verily they do not know themselves, even as they are known—(Mason).

CHRISTIAN. And could you at any time, with ease, get off the guilt of sin,<sup>2</sup> when, by any of these ways, it came upon you?

HOPEFUL. No, not I, for then they got faster hold of my conscience; and then, if I did but think of going back to sin (though my mind was turned against it), it would be double torment to me.

CHRISTIAN. And how did you do then?

HOPEFUL. I thought I must endeavour to mend my life; for else, thought I, I am sure to be damned.

CHRISTIAN. And did you endeavour to mend?

HOPEFUL. Yes; and fled from not only my sins, but sinful company too; and betook me to religious duties, as prayer, reading, weeping for sin, speaking truth to my neighbours, &c. These things did I, with many others, too much here to relate.

CHRISTIAN. And did you think yourself well then?

HOPEFUL. Yes, for a while; but, at the last, my trouble came tumbling upon me again, and that over the neck of all my reformations.

CHRISTIAN. How came that about, since you were now reformed?

HOPEFUL. There were several things brought it upon me, especially such sayings as these: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal 2:16). "When ye shall have done all those things, say, We are unprofitable" (Luk 17:10); with many more such like. From whence I began to reason with myself thus: If ALL my righteousnesses are filthy rags; if, by the deeds of the law, no man can be justified; and if, when we have done ALL, we are yet unprofitable, then it is but a folly to think of heaven by the law. I further thought thus: If a man runs a hundred pounds into the shopkeeper's debt, and after that shall pay for all that he shall fetch; yet, if this old debt stands still in the book uncrossed, for that the shopkeeper may sue him, and cast him into prison till he shall pay the debt.

CHRISTIAN. Well, and how did you apply this to yourself?

HOPEFUL. Why, I thought thus with myself: I have, by my sins, run a great way into God's book, and that my now reforming will not pay off that score; therefore I should think still, under all my present amendments, But how shall I be freed from that damnation that I have brought myself in danger of, by my former transgressions?

CHRISTIAN. A very good application; but, pray, go on.

HOPEFUL. Another thing that hath troubled me, even since my late amendments, is, that if I look narrowly into the best of what I do now, I still see sin, new sin, mixing itself with the best of that I do; so that now I am forced to conclude, that notwithstanding my former fond conceits of myself and duties, I have committed sin enough in one duty to send me to hell,<sup>3</sup> though my former life had been faultless.<sup>4</sup>

CHRISTIAN. And what did you do then?

HOPEFUL. Do! I could not tell what to do, until I brake my mind to Faithful, for he and I were well acquainted. And he told me, that unless I could obtain the righteousness of a man that never had sinned, neither mine own, nor all the righteousness of the world, could save me.

CHRISTIAN. And did you think he spake true?

HOPEFUL. Had he told me so when I was pleased and satisfied with mine own amendment, I had called him fool for his pains; but now, since I see mine own infirmity, and the sin that cleaves to my best performance, I have been forced to be of his opinion.

CHRISTIAN. But did you think, when at first he suggested it to you, that there was such a man to be found, of whom it might justly be said, that he never committed sin?

HOPEFUL. I must confess the words at first sounded strangely, but after a little more talk and company with him, I had full conviction about it.

CHRISTIAN. And did you ask him what man this was, and how you must be justified by him?

HOPEFUL. Yes, and he told me it was the Lord Jesus, that dwelleth on the right hand of the Most High. And thus, said he, you must be justified by him, even by trusting to what he hath done by himself in the days of his flesh, and suffered when he did hang on the tree. I asked him further, how that man's righteousness could be of that efficacy to jus-

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2 Not the evil of sin in the sight of God, but the remorse and fear of wrath, with which the convinced sinner is oppressed, and from which he, at times, seeks relief by means which exceedingly increase his actual guilt. Nothing but a free pardon, by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, can take away guilt; but the uneasiness of a man's conscience may be for a time removed by various expedients—(Scott).

3 In modern editions, this has been altered to "sin enough in one day." But in any period of time, selecting that duty in the discharge of which we have felt the most pure, there has been a mixture of sin. "For there is not a day, nor a duty; not a day that thou livest, nor a duty that thou dost, but will need that mercy should come after to take away thy iniquity"—(Bunyan's *Saints' Privilege*, vol. 1, p. 679). These are solemn, humbling reflections—(Offor).

4 Thus, you see, in conversion, the Lord does not act upon us as though we were mere machines. No, we have understanding; he enlightens it. Then we come to a sound mind; we think right, and reason justly. We have wills; what the understanding judges best, the will approves, and then the affections follow after; and thus we choose Christ for our Saviour, and glory only in his righteousness and salvation. When the heavenly light of truth makes manifest what we are, and the danger we are in, then we rationally flee from the wrath to come, to Christ the refuge set before us—(Mason).

tify another before God? And he told me he was the mighty God, and did what he did, and died the death also, not for himself, but for me; to whom his doings, and the worthiness of them, should be imputed, if I believed on him (Heb 10; Rom 4; Col 1; 1Pe 1).

CHRISTIAN. And what did you do then?

HOPEFUL. I made my objections against my believing, for that I thought he was not willing to save me.

CHRISTIAN. And what said Faithful to you then?

HOPEFUL. He bid me go to him and see. Then I said it was presumption; but he said, No, for I was invited to come (Mat 11:28). Then he gave me a book of Jesus, his inditing, to encourage me the more freely to come; and he said, concerning that book, that every jot and tittle thereof stood firmer than heaven and earth (Mat 24:35). Then I asked him, What I must do when I came; and he told me, I must entreat upon my knees, with all my heart and soul, the Father to reveal him to me (Psa 95:6; Dan 6:10; Jer 29:12-13). Then I asked him further, how I must make my supplication to him? And he said, Go, and thou shalt find him upon a mercy-seat, where he sits all the year long, to give pardon and forgiveness to them that come. I told him that I knew not what to say when I came. And he bid me say to this effect, God be merciful to me a sinner, and make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ; for I see, that if his righteousness had not been, or I have not faith in that righteousness, I am utterly cast away.<sup>5</sup> Lord, I have heard that thou art a merciful God, and hast ordained that thy Son Jesus Christ should be the Saviour of the world; and moreover, that thou art willing to bestow him upon such a poor sinner as I am (and I am a sinner indeed), Lord, take therefore this opportunity, and magnify thy grace in the salvation of my soul, through thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen. (Exo 25:22; Lev 16:2; Num 7:89; Heb 4:16).

CHRISTIAN. And did you do as you were bidden?

HOPEFUL. Yes; over, and over, and over.

CHRISTIAN. And did the Father reveal his Son to you?

HOPEFUL. Not at the first, nor second, nor third, nor fourth, nor fifth; no, nor at the sixth time neither.

CHRISTIAN. What did you do then?

HOPEFUL. What! why I could not tell what to do.

CHRISTIAN. Had you not thoughts of leaving off praying?

HOPEFUL. Yes, an hundred times twice told.

CHRISTIAN. And what was the reason you did not?

HOPEFUL. I believed that that was true which had been told me, to wit, that without the righteousness of this Christ, all the world could not save me; and therefore, thought I with myself, if I leave off I die, and I can but die at the throne of grace. And withal, this came into my mind, "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab 2:3). So I continued praying until the Father showed me his Son.<sup>6</sup>

CHRISTIAN. And how was he revealed unto you?

HOPEFUL. I did not see him with my bodily eyes, but with the eyes of my understanding (Eph 1:18-19); and thus it was: One day I was very sad, I think sadder than at any one time in my life, and this sadness was through a fresh sight of the greatness and vileness of my sins. And as I was then looking for nothing but hell, and the everlasting damnation of my soul, suddenly, as I thought, I saw the Lord Jesus look down from heaven upon me, and saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31).

But I replied, Lord, I am a great, a very great sinner. And he answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2Co 12:9). Then I said, But, Lord, what is believing? And then I saw from that saying, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"; that believing and coming was all one; and that he that came, that is, ran out in his heart and affections after salvation by Christ, he indeed believed in Christ (Joh 6:35). Then the water stood in mine eyes, and I asked further, But, Lord, may such a great sinner as I am, be indeed accepted of thee, and be saved by thee? And I heard him say, "And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). Then I said, But how, Lord, must I consider of thee in my coming to thee, that my faith may be placed aright upon thee? Then he said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15). "He *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:4). "He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification" (Rom 4:25). "He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev 1:5). "He is mediator betwixt God and us" (1Ti 2:5). "He ever liveth to

<sup>5</sup> Pray mind this. The grand object of a sensible sinner is righteousness. He has it not in himself; this he knows. Where is it to be found? In Christ only. this is a revealed truth; and without faith in this, every sinner must be lost. Consider, it is at the peril of your soul that you reject the righteousness of Christ; and do not believe that God imputeth it without works for the justification of the ungodly. O ye stout-hearted, self-righteous sinners, ye who are far from righteousness, know this and tremble!—(Mason).

<sup>6</sup> The true nature of faith is to believe and rest upon the Word of truth, and wait for the promised comfort. That faith which is the gift of God leads the soul to wait upon and cry to God, and not to rest till it has some blessed testimony from God of interest in the love and favour of God in Christ Jesus. But O how many professors rest short of this!—(Mason).

<sup>7</sup> As I thought my case most sad and fearful, these words did with great power suddenly break in upon me, "My grace is sufficient for thee," three times together. O! methought every word was a mighty word for me; as *my*, and *grace*, and *sufficient*, and *for thee*; they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be—(Grace Abounding, No. 206).

make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25). From all which I gathered, that I must look for righteousness in his person, and for satisfaction for my sins by his blood; that what he did in obedience to his Father’s law, and in submitting to the penalty thereof, was not for himself, but for him that will accept it for his salvation, and be thankful. And now was my heart full of joy, mine eyes full of tears, and mine affections running over with love to the name, people, and ways of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

CHRISTIAN. This was a revelation of Christ to your soul indeed; but tell me particularly what effect this had upon your spirit.<sup>9</sup>

HOPEFUL. It made me see that all the world, notwithstanding all the righteousness thereof, is in a state of condemnation. It made me see that God the Father, though he be just, can justly justify the coming sinner. It made me greatly ashamed of the vileness of my former life, and confounded me with the sense of mine own ignorance; for there never came thought into my heart before now, that showed me so the beauty of Jesus Christ. It made me love a holy life, and long to do something for the honour and glory of the name of the Lord Jesus; yea, I thought that had I now a thousand gallons of blood in my body, I could spill it all for the sake of the Lord Jesus (Gal 2:20, Luk 14:33, Mat 16:24). ❧

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<sup>8</sup> The Lord’s dealings with his children are various, but all lead to the same end; some are shaken with terror, while others are more gently drawn, as with cords of love. In these things believers should not make their experiences standards one for another; still there is a similarity in their being brought to the same point of rejecting both sinful and righteous self, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as their complete salvation—(Andronicus).

<sup>9</sup> Christ did not appear to Hopeful’s senses, but to his understanding; and the words spoken are no other than texts of Scripture taken in their genuine meaning—not informing him, as by a new revelation, that his sins were pardoned, but encouraging him to apply for this mercy, and all other blessings of salvation—(Scott).