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## CHRISTIAN ARRIVES AT THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

BUNYAN PLACES the House Beautiful or the church, at the top of the Hill Difficulty. At least two times we are reminded that this place was “built by the Lord of the hill for the relief and security of pilgrims.” Here we have a most excellent example of the admitting process into the fellowship of the church and the kind of expectations for church membership during the seventeenth century in sectarian and dissenting-type assemblies.

When Christian confronts the lions he is encouraged by the porter, whose name is Watchful, that the beasts are chained and no harm would come to him. Watchful is the pastor, the one who watches after the souls of his membership. After Watchful’s questioning, others come and enter into serious discussion regarding the details of Christian’s departure from the City of Destruction and how he arrived at the House Beautiful.

Spurgeon points out that there actually was this kind of exchange between Bunyan, as he sought entry into the church at Bedford, and the pastor, John Gifford:

Well John [said Gifford], I am glad to find that you are converted, but I could not take upon myself the responsibility of receiving you into fellowship; I must ask one of my elders or deacons to see you. Someone must be appointed by the church to converse with you, and report to the rest of the members whether you should be received or not.

Those who come and speak with Christian are Discretion, Piety, Prudence and Charity. This does not necessarily mean that it takes this many persons to examine a candidate for church membership, but what is suggested both by the names of these four and the kind of questioning directed to the Pilgrim is that these Christian graces ought to be evident in the ones examining a candidate for membership in order to discern the true applicant from the false.

Further, it is important to see that the questioning deals with biblical knowledge and doctrine only in a superficial manner and instead centers in upon a close examination of the religious affections and all the components regarding personal piety. At the core of all this is the searching for a credible testimony of the reality of one’s Christian experience in order to gain affiliation with a local body of believers.

After supper, which must be the ordinance of communion, Christian is taken into the study to review the records of those who had done mighty deeds in the past. He is also taken into the armory and given protection for his journey, and finally, he is taken to the top of the House Beautiful and given a distant view of the Delectable Mountains and Immanuel’s Land.

Bunyan means to tell us that the gathered assembly of God’s people provides distinct advantages to the one on the way to the Celestial City, which could not be received through any other association on Earth.

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