
OBSTINATE & PLIABLE

AFTER Evangelist points Christian to the way that he must go in order to find eternal life, Christian encounters Obstinate and Pliable. It is as true in the allegory as it is in reality that the seeking soul cannot but discover that others are watching who are full of sympathies, concerns, comments and criticisms. It is often the case, as many can relate, when a local town scoundrel becomes converted, or a relative once given over to alcohol or another vice comes into the kingdom of Heaven, the general gossip is that "so-and-so has found religion." The world cannot understand "if any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Bunyan shows us at least two kinds of reactions to true biblical conversion with Obstinate and Pliable, both of whom run after Christian and attempt to cause him to reconsider his actions.

Obstinate is a mulish, stiff-necked, highly opinionated individual who is an obstacle not only to his own salvation but also to others who would attain it. Nonetheless, we must all exercise caution here lest we think that an obstinate heart is only the possession of a certain segment of humanity. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). Everyone possesses a significant measure of obstinacy within us by virtue of our relationship to our father, Adam. Obstinate expresses

itself in an ongoing act of rebellion against our Maker whereby an inherent hostility and animosity is generated toward a good and gracious God. Alexander Whyte tells us, "There is a sullenness in some men's minds, a gloom, and a bitter air that rises up from the unploughed, undrained, unweeded, uncultivated fens of their hearts that chills and blasts all the feeble beginnings of a better life." Only when the self-willed individual bows the knee to the will of Another does the obstinate one become submissive, humble and yielding. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature."

On the other hand, Pliable becomes temporarily persuaded by Christian's argument and decides to accompany him along the way. Pliable wants to talk about Heaven, an endless kingdom, crowns of glory, angelic hosts, a place where there is no more crying or sorrow, and then he also wants to hurry up to get there. The only things Pliable can think of are the benefits to be received and rewards to be collected. However, he totally misses the point. Christian reminds him, "Had Obstinate himself but felt what I have felt of the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen, he would not thus lightly have given us the back." Christian can't hurry because he has a burden on his back. Pliable has no burden but owns a shallow heart. He precisely fits the words of Jesus in the parable of the soils, "He has no root in himself, but endures only for a while" (Matthew 13:21, NKJV).
