
THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND is an attitude of mind and heart producing a melancholy frame that is buried in hopelessness. It is a sense of dejection and gloom that comes from the conviction of soul that God cannot be gracious to me.

It is said of Bunyan that his cottage as a young lad was situated beside a stream which would overflow its banks in the spring and pool itself into a low area, producing a basin of muck and mire. Even as the mud and slime of this slough would hold fast the unfortunate who ventured into its grasp, so also a state of despondency can hold fast the one who feels that the forgiveness of God can never be his and the promises of God were written for someone else. Although not all fall into this predicament at their conversion experience, Bunyan certainly did at his. He confesses in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* that “I saw my own vileness ... I could not believe that Christ had a love for me.” He could not bring himself to believe that there was mercy left for him because he believed his sins were too great.

The Psalmist had certainly lapsed into a Slough of Despond when he cried out to Jehovah, “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing ... O God, thou knowest my foolishness: and my sins are not hid from thee” (Psalm 69:2, 5). Even as a man after God’s own

heart, the Psalmist could find himself trapped in the mud of his sins, and a short two-second “help me” prayer just wouldn’t work for him. Serious dealings with his Maker were the only order of the day—nothing shallow, nothing trite.

It is certainly noteworthy that Pliable had also fallen into the Slough. One may wonder how someone who has no sense of burden could be held by his sins. However Bunyan, the master of character and experience, knows better. Pliable is pliable. He is one who can be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). The things of God may temporarily excite and motivate many, who frequently run far ahead of the pack, doing good works, filling the pew and sitting under sound doctrine. However, when it comes to dealing with one’s own sin, they hear and become offended. They are those discussed in the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1–23) who receive the Word with joy, but have no root and soon depart. Here is an excited enthusiasm partly rooted in a kind of religious marketing based on rewards and prosperity that claims many as their victim. The primary motive for going to Heaven in Pliable’s world was not the enjoyment of God Himself but rather was only grounded in the benefits to be received upon entering the city.
