

An outdated
progress: the problem
with the pilgrim's
progress in a modern
christi...



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John Bunyan's work *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is one of the most renowned Christian books to read, but it is not in fact within Christian rules, according to the Bible, thus unveiling a logical fallacy. With careful analysis of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the New and Old Testaments, one can see that there are many contradictory factors. Excluding the sequel, where Christian's wife and children survive the apocalypse and join him in heaven, we can extrapolate that had they not been saved, Christian's sin would have led him to love the deity that doomed his children and wife to live in constant torture. The wife, children, and friends of Christian are seen as hindrances, as obstacles to God, yet in the Bible itself states " But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5: 8). The actions of Christian contradict the wishes of the Bible here, abandoning family, friends, and loved ones for individual salvation is to abandon responsibility. Noble states that Bunyan's depiction of conversion is skewed " *The Pilgrim's Progress* is at times a guide to follow in the way to God only in the sense that it is a compendium of snares to be avoided by wary pilgrims" (Noble 73). This is reacting back to the fact that perhaps John Bunyan's version of conversion is not necessarily the way a modern church would wish for it to occur. *Pilgrim's Progress* is supposedly about a grand journey in the name of salvation, but through the analysis of the texts we can see that it cannot be applicable to a modern perspective of true Christian beliefs and equality. Christian may have lost his burden at the cross near the end of the prose, but it does not forgive the sins he committed against his family and friends. His greed for his salvation and his own life surpassed that of any possible

fellow believers. Instead of attempting to convert more people to believe him, he ignored God's will in order to save his own life and get himself into heaven. " Not everyone carries a burden, but all are sinful. It is only on reading the book that one becomes aware of one's sinfulness and it becomes a burden" (James 45). If the church believes that one is not truly awake as a Christian why did Christian not fully attempt to educate his peers, and why is he let into heaven? Although his friends Obstinate and Pliable were easily persuaded not to come, Christian did not spread the word of God and save his fellow neighbours, or even his wife and children. There are many obstacles within the journey and Christian was warned, which just begs the question, did Christian not believe that his family or neighbours would pass this judgement, however perceived? " He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8: 7). Christian is shedding judgement upon his family and peers when he does not fully attempt to bring them along with him upon this journey of salvation. Christian's enlightenment is purely reliant upon him being a strong and just character, yet Christianity should never be solely about individual salvation. It is about larger issues of community and love, and giving people an opportunity to be saved and have hope in something bigger.

The point of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was to show that the burden we bear can be resolved by giving yourself to God and proving your devotion. Yet, if unaware of the apocalypse, how could any of his beloved friends and family members be able to join him within the process? Christian may have spoken emotionally of his wife and children at home, but his mind was unchanged and he felt no remorse for his decisions. Modern Christianity is about social

awareness, making the people around you understand the opportunity of God. " Social responsibility becomes an aspect not of Christian mission only, but also of Christian conversion. It is impossible to be truly converted to God without being thereby converted to our neighbour" (Stott 87), Stott proves that devotion to the Lord is not an individual mission, but a mission of community. Christian's enlightenment is shown to be very different from others' as James analyzes Hopeful's conversion through his sinning, to the realization of his wrongdoing. Hopeful cannot withstand the torture that his sins have led him into, once having met Faithful he is determined to see Jesus despite his fear that he will be turned away. After hearing his begging multiple times, Christ gives in and allows for Hopeful to be graced by God (James 50). If Hopeful had to pay for his sins through torture, why is Christian exempt? Clearly he has sinned; otherwise what would there be to fear from Armageddon? He did not have to suffer the same way Hopeful did in order for him to be saved by God. Although there are many different types of conversion or salvation, and this is just an allegorical depiction of one within fiction, the popularity of this book within the Christian community shows that it is there to motivate, to be the goal, or the ideal.

Christian does not truly change as a character. He is introduced to the reader as a frightened man who sought christianity to free himself from fears of an apocalypse. He remains frightened. He loses his burden due to fear, perhaps skewing his true understanding of giving oneself to God. Most of Christian's changes are due to a change in the author. Whether it be his arrest or his lifestyle, one comes to understand that Bunyan allows his perspective to influence everything, including his works. Diamond's perspective upon the

matter truly enlightens the argument “ Bunyan’s turn from spiritual autobiography to allegorical fiction represents the shift from introspection to character detection demanded by Congregationalist ecclesiology. The consequent change of objects-from self to other-puts pressure on the logic and intelligibility of his two-dimensional characters” (Diamond 9), criticizing the indecisive tendency of Bunyan to sacrifice the quality of his characters in order to preserve his autobiographical integrity. In Christian’s attempt to be granted into heaven one can realize that he actually did not do it himself. The assistance of many side characters allows him to accomplish his goals; Evangelist gives him the message, Help pulls him out of the Slough of Despond, Discretion feeds him, he even has guardians helping him through to salvation. This depicts that God’s children are attempting to aid Christian and help him on to his journey, yet Christian remains unchanged and still unfazed about how he left everyone behind. The desired impact that these characters would have, other than creating a more interesting storyline, is that you should have people to help you when your faith begins to be questioned, or if you are struggling with your faith. This opposes Christian’s decision at the beginning to leave everyone whom he loved to fend for themselves through the Armageddon. The more interesting characters are in fact the side-characters, as Christian is solely witnessing what the consequences of his sins would be, he is not actually experiencing the suffering itself. The main factor of Christian’s awakening was fear, and he remains fearful all throughout the works. He is afraid that if he does not give in to salvation that he will die. This is a constant state for Christian, he is made to be a character that is not easily swayed from his beliefs, although his belief in his family went quickly enough. God perceives him as worthy.

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Christian is meant to be a simple man, a man of courage and dedication. His burden can be perceived as anything, yet we are aware of the fact that he did in fact sin badly enough to believe that he would go to hell for his actions during Armageddon. Christian is using his fear to steer his decisions, and his interest in religion would not have been so swiftly found if it had not been for said discovery, leading to the possibility that without fear of death that Christian may not have embarked on this journey at all. This would not be permitted in a modern church, no one is supposed to convert to christianity out of a fear of threat upon their livelihood.

There are many articles upon feminist interpretations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The role of a woman during Bunyan's time was to be submissive, she was to be perceived as less intellectual and less important than a man, and obedient towards her husband. Throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress* women are constantly seen as therapeutic, less religious than men, and distracting. At the beginning we are introduced to Christian's wife, who rejects the idea of just leading her family into danger and abandoning their home, sensibly. Yet with this action she portrays herself as a shirker, or not as religiously devoted as her husband. This leaves an impression on the reader that the female was not intelligent enough to believe in God and journey with her husband, that she is disobeying him, which in Bunyan's time was a sin. If you marry you are to obey your husbands wishes. Later on in the novel, Christian visits the Palace Beautiful; where the four radiant women feed and wash Christian and ask him questions about his life in attempt to hear him, to engage with him. They provide him with armour, and send him on his way to his next task. These women do not perform any duty that a man was able to

do during those times, they did not fight along with him, save him from anything treacherous, all they were seemingly capable of doing was cooking and cleaning for him. These were the times that John Bunyan was living in, but the changes in Christianity have adapted to ensure that women's rights are included in religious matters. The women that do show up in Bunyan's writing are interesting characters, although stuffed to the brim with stereotypes, "The burden on the back of Christian's back at the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the product of centuries of unequal society" (Tinker 377), this quote explains that Bunyan's views whether political or personal were brought through the character of Christian; as the journey that he goes through is meant to be an autobiographical approach to Bunyan's conversion. These perceptions of women do not correlate with that of the modern-day church. Some chastise Bunyan for wanting an ideology that would silence women's voices and leave women in submission. It is difficult to argue with N. H. Keeble's evaluation that Bunyan "welcomes women on pilgrimage... as persons in need of especially solicitous ministerial care and guidance" (453 Johnson). *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a story about a man, not a woman, finding his way to God within the wishes of Christ, and Bunyan at the time was attempting to influence the male dominance within the church, asserting his personal desires clearly in his writing. John Bunyan's wondrous quality of writing is exposed by his prejudiced ideals. The 1600s were John Bunyan's time, we can see how different a wife's role would be in religion and in a marriage, yet religion set up rules and protected women to some extent. It was a time of a lack of freedom, religious and otherwise. This creates an understanding of Bunyan's perspective, but it does not make it right, as we witness other authors write about women during that time we <https://assignbuster.com/an-outdated-progress-the-problem-with-the-pilgrims-progress-in-a-modern-christian-context/>

realize it is an interpretation. Of course Bunyan is permitted to have his own view, but it does not correlate with the ideals of the modern church. Women are seen as equals in the eyes of god and so are gay men, which during Bunyan's time would be unheard of. It is all a biased interpretation of a man's salvation within the Church.

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan does not apply to modern Christianity or equality. In Christianity, John Bunyan did use a multitude of biblical references and guidelines yet ignored some sins that his own character himself commits. Christian, a male protagonist whose expectations of religion and women are irresponsible and in reality quite unachievable. He is a generally unintelligent character who simply follows along with what every supporting character instructs. This dissolves the faith that one has in Christian as a strong character, witnessing his weaknesses that were not perceived as such during Bunyan's time. this may perhaps lead to a better understanding of his humanity, yet with such revelations it should no longer be a religious book. Having such high popularity within the Christian community, being one of the top rated Christian works to ever exist is outdated and classic. The relevance of this works should not be used for conversion, it should be used for classes about literature and religion. An educational tool to show wonderful writing that perhaps does not share the values currently held by society, but the way it is written is the beauty. John Bunyan allowed his prejudices to impact his life, especially during his jail time, and his beliefs were strong enough to inspire millions. He also has neglected to treat half of the population with equality. The sexist impression that Bunyan left with the world was not solely from The Pilgrim's Progress,

but his other works too. The belief in god was meant to be inspiring, it was meant to make you love thy neighbour, not leave them behind. Bunyan's perception of conversion is much more of an individual focus, as though Christian were chosen by God to pursue the journey. In a person's life they are given the opportunity to believe in God as they see fit, but in Bunyan's time it was seen as a way of living, an outlet for hope and dreams and beliefs to be supported, which it still remains to be, although now the religion supports everyone equally.

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