

Appendix 1: Bunyan on Power

The conversation between Faithful and Talkative, spiced with some remarks from Christian – which John Bunyan recorded in his *The Pilgrim's Progress* – must be a leading candidate for the most challenging, the most searching, part of the entire allegory. It is for me, at least.¹ The truth is, Bunyan was in reality giving us an exposition of – and, above all, an application of – Paul's declaration to the Corinthians:

The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power
(1 Cor. 4:20).

As I have explained, I am convinced that in these few words we have one of the most important of all the many gospel principles recorded in Scripture, principles such as:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water² and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: 'You must be born again'. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

Not everyone who says to me: 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me: 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them: 'I never knew

¹ The fact that librarians can stock *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the children's section, shows how little understanding of the gospel such people, in general, have.

² This is not a reference to baptism, any more than 'fire' is a reference to roasting (Matt. 3:11). See my *Infant*.

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you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matt. 7:21-23).

No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God (Rom. 2:28-29).

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Rom. 8:9).

And that's just four of them.

In the conversation between Faithful and Talkative in his *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan set out the core principle of these passages.

Let me remind you it:

Moreover, I saw in my dream, [wrote Bunyan] that as they [that is, Christian (as he was by this stage) and Faithful] went on, Faithful, as he chanced to look on one side, saw a man whose name is Talkative walking at a distance besides them; for in this place, there was room enough for them all to walk. He was a tall man, and something more comely at a distance than at hand. To this man Faithful addressed himself in this manner:

FAITH. Friend... are you going to the heavenly country?

TALK. I am going to the same place.

FAITH. That is well; then I hope we may have your good company.

TALK. With a very good will, will I be your companion.

FAITH. Come on, then, and let us go together, and let us spend our time in discoursing of things that are profitable.

TALK. To talk of things that are good, to me is very acceptable, with you, or with any other; and I am glad that I have met with those that incline to so good a work; for, to speak the truth, there are but few that care thus to spend their time (as they are in their travels), but choose much rather to be speaking of things to no profit; and this has been a trouble to me.

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FAITH. That is indeed a thing to be lamented; for what things so worthy of the use of the tongue and mouth of men on earth, as are the things of the God of heaven?

Bunyan was here drawing attention to a very common lack among professing believers; namely, an unwillingness or inability to engage in spiritual conversation. Yet this is one of the main ways in which believers grow in spirituality!³

Bunyan went on, driving home the point:

TALK. I like you wonderful well, for your sayings are full of conviction; and I will add, what thing is so pleasant, and what so profitable, as to talk of the things of God? What things so pleasant (that is, if a man has any delight in things that are wonderful)? For instance, if a man does delight to talk of the history or the mystery of things; or if a man does love to talk of miracles, wonders, or signs, where shall he find things recorded so delightful, and so sweetly penned, as in the Holy Scripture?

FAITH. That is true; but to be profited by such things in our talk should be that which we design.

TALK. That is it that I said; for to talk of such things is most profitable; for by so doing, a man may get knowledge of many things; as of the vanity of earthly things, and the benefit of things above. Thus, in general, but more particularly, by this, a man may learn the necessity of the new birth; the insufficiency of our works; the need of Christ's righteousness, *etc.* Besides, by this a man may learn, by talk, what it is to repent, to believe, to pray, to suffer, or the like; by this also a man may learn what are the great promises and consolations of the gospel, to his own comfort. Further, by this a man may learn to refute false opinions, to vindicate the truth, and also to instruct the ignorant.

FAITH. All this is true, and glad am I to hear these things from you.

TALK. Alas! the want of this is the cause why so few understand the need of faith, and the necessity of a work of grace in their soul, in order to eternal life; but ignorantly

³ See my *Priesthood; Sowed*.

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live in the works of the law, by which a man can by no means obtain the kingdom of heaven.

FAITH. But, by your leave, heavenly knowledge of these is the gift of God; no man attains to them by human industry, or only by the talk of them.

TALK. All this I know very well. For a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven; all is of grace, not of works. I could give you a hundred scriptures for the confirmation of this.

FAITH. Well, then, said Faithful, what is that one thing that we shall at this time found [base] our discourse upon?

TALK. What you will. I will talk of things heavenly, or things earthly; things moral, or things evangelical; things sacred, or things profane; things past, or things to come; things foreign, or things at home; things more essential, or things circumstantial; provided that all be done to our profit.

Faithful was greatly impressed with his companion:

Now did Faithful begin to wonder; and stepping to Christian (for he walked all this while by himself), he said to him (but softly): ‘What a brave companion have we got! Surely this man will make a very excellent pilgrim’.

But Christian was not taken in:

CHR. At this Christian modestly smiled, and said: ‘This man, with whom you are so taken, will beguile, with that tongue of his, twenty of them that know him not’.

FAITH. Do you know him, then?

CHR. Know him! Yes, better than he knows himself.

FAITH. Pray, what is he?

CHR. His name is Talkative; he dwells in our town; I wonder that you should be a stranger to him, only I consider that our town is large.

FAITH. Whose son is he? And whereabouts does he dwell?

CHR. He is the son of one Say-well; he dwelt in Prating Row; and he is known of all that are acquainted with him, by the name of Talkative in Prating Row; and notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow.

FAITH. Well, he seems to be a very pretty [fine] man.

CHR. That is, to them who have not thorough acquaintance with him; for he is best abroad; near home, he is ugly enough. Your saying that he is a pretty man, brings to my

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mind what I have observed in the work of the painter whose pictures show best at a distance, but, very near, more unpleasing.

Christian took Faithful aside, gave him some home truths by telling him plainly the kind of man he was dealing with; namely, that while Talkative said one thing, he did another; that while he knew how to talk about spiritual things, and could do so with eloquence, in truth he knew nothing of them by felt, inward experience. It was all chat; or, more precisely, mere chatter. Talkative was a fully paid-up member of the chattering class. He would have been a star performer on any TV chat show today, especially one of a religious flavour: a professional chatterer.

FAITH. Say you so! then am I in this man greatly deceived.
CHR. Deceived! you may be sure of it; remember the proverb: 'They say, and do not' (Matt. 23:3). But 'the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power' (1 Cor. 4:20). He talks of prayer, of repentance, of faith, and of the new birth; but he knows but only to talk of them.

This is the key moment, the crunch or biting point, in the episode; or, as my American friends would say, this is where the rubber hits the road: 'The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power' (1 Cor. 4:20).

Faithful, being convinced, wanted to know how he could best stop Talkative's chatter, and be rid of him:

CHR. Take my advice, and do as I bid you, and you shall find that he will soon be sick of your company too, except God shall touch his heart, and turn it.

FAITH. What would you have me to do?

CHR. Why, go to him, and enter into some serious discourse about the power of professed Christianity;⁴ and ask him plainly (when he has approved of it, for that he will) whether this thing be set up in his heart, house, or conversation [that is, his way of life, not merely his talk]?

⁴ Original 'religion'. This note, or its equivalent, applies throughout my book.

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Faithful took his friend's advice:

FAITH. Then Faithful stepped forward again, and said to Talkative, Come, what cheer? How is it now?

TALK. Thank you, well. I thought we should have had a great deal of talk by this time.

FAITH. Well, if you will, we will fall to it now; and since you left it with me to state the question, let it be this: How does the saving grace of God reveal itself, when it is in the heart of man?

TALK. I perceive then, that our talk must be about the power of things. Well, it is a very good question, and I shall be willing to answer you. And take my answer in brief, thus: *First*, Where the grace of work of God is in the heart, it causes there a great outcry against sin. *Secondly*...

FAITH. No, hold, let us consider your first point before we go any further.⁵ I think you should rather say: It shows itself by inclining the soul to abhor its sin.

TALK. Why, what difference is there between crying out against, and abhorring of sin?

FAITH. O! a great deal. A man may cry out against sin of policy, but he cannot abhor it, but by virtue of a godly antipathy against it. I have heard many cry out against sin in the pulpit, who yet can abide it well enough in the heart, house, and conversation [life]. Joseph's mistress cried out with a loud voice, as if she had been very holy; but she would willingly, notwithstanding that, have committed uncleanness with him (Gen. 39:15). Some cry out against sin, even as the mother cries out against her child in her lap, when she calls it slut and naughty girl, and then falls to hugging and kissing it.

TALK. You are trying to trap me, I perceive.

FAITH. No, not I; I am only for setting things right. But what is the second thing whereby you would prove a revelation of a work of grace in the heart?

TALK. Great knowledge of gospel mysteries.

FAITH. This sign should have been first; but first or last, it is also false; for knowledge, great knowledge, may be obtained in the mysteries of the gospel, and yet no work of grace in the soul (1 Cor. 13). Indeed, if a man have all knowledge, he may yet be nothing, and so consequently be

⁵ Original 'consider of one at once'.

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no child of God. When Christ said: 'Do you know all these things?' and the disciples had answered: Yes; He adds: 'Blessed are you if you do them'. He does not lay the blessing in the knowing of them, but in the doing of them. For there is a knowledge that is not attended with doing: 'He that knows his master's will, and does it not'. A man may know like an angel, and yet be no Christian; therefore your sign of it is not true. Indeed, to know is a thing that pleases talkers and boasters; but to do is that which pleases God. Not that the heart can be good without knowledge; for without that the heart is naught. There is, therefore, knowledge and knowledge. Knowledge that rests in the bare speculation of things; and knowledge that is accompanied with the grace of faith and love; which puts a man upon doing even the will of God from the heart: the first of these will serve the talker; but without the other the true Christian is not content. 'Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart' (Ps. 119:34).

At this stage, Talkative could see the writing on the wall: he was being shown up as one who could talk about spiritual matters, but knew nothing of them by felt experience. And it was embarrassing. And so he bridled.

TALK. You are trying to trap me again; this is not for edification.

FAITH. Well, if you please, propound another sign how this work of grace reveals itself where it is.

TALK. Not I, for I see we shall not agree.

FAITH. Well, if you will not, will you give me leave to do it?

TALK. You may use your liberty.

FAITH. A work of grace in the soul reveals itself, either to him that has it, or to bystanders. To him that has it thus: It gives him conviction of sin, especially of the defilement of his nature and the sin of unbelief (for the sake of which he is sure to be damned, if he does not find mercy at God's hand, by faith in Jesus Christ) (John 16:8; Rom. 7:24; John 16:9; Mark 16:16). This sight and sense of things works in him sorrow and shame for sin; he finds, moreover, revealed in him the Saviour of the world, and the absolute necessity of closing with him for life, at the which he finds hungerings and thirstings after him; to which hungerings,

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etc., the promise is made (Ps. 38:18; Jer. 31:19; Gal. 2:16; Acts 4:12; Matt. 5:6; Rev. 21:6). Now, according to the strength or weakness of his faith in his Saviour, so is his joy and peace, so is his love to holiness, so are his desires to know him more, and also to serve him in this world. But though I say it reveals itself thus unto him, yet it is but seldom that he is able to conclude that this is a work of grace; because his corruptions now, and his abused reason, make his mind to misjudge in this matter;⁶ therefore, in him that has this work, there is required a very sound judgment before he can, with steadiness, conclude that this is a work of grace. To others [than the man himself], it is thus revealed: 1. By an experimental confession of his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10; Phil. 1:27; Matt. 5:19). 2. By a life answerable to that confession; *to wit*, a life of holiness; heart-holiness, family-holiness (if he has a family), and by conversation-holiness in the world; which, in the general, teaches him, inwardly, to abhor his sin, and himself for that, in secret; to suppress it in his family, and to promote holiness in the world; not by talk only, as a hypocrite or talkative person may do, but by a practical subjection, in faith and love, to the power of the word (John 14:15; Ps. 1:23; Job 42:5, 6; Ezek. 20:43). And now, sir, as to this brief description of the work of grace, and also the revelation of it, if you have anything to say by way of objection, object; if not, then give me leave to propound to you a second question.

TALK. No, my part is not now to object, but to hear; let me, therefore, have your second question.

FAITH. It is this: Do you experience this first part of this description of it? and does your life and conversation [that is, talk] testify the same? or stands your spirituality⁷ in word or in tongue, and not in deed and truth? Pray, if you incline to answer me in this, say no more than you know the God above will say Amen to; and, also, nothing but what your conscience can justify you in; 'for, not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends'. Besides, to say, I am thus, and thus, when my

⁶ Bunyan was here edging into the puritan view of assurance, coupled with the common misunderstanding of 'the wretched man of Romans 7:14-25'. See my *Assurance; False*.

⁷ Original 'professed Christianity'.

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conversation [that is, way of life], and all my neighbours, tell me I lie, is great wickedness.

Here is the precise point: ‘Do you experience this?’ Ability to chat about the gospel, to talk about spiritual matters, is one thing, but the vital matter is the experience – the felt experience – of them. A man may talk about regeneration, he may be able to chat about it ‘til the cows come home, but the question is: ‘Is he born again?’ And so on.

By this time, Talkative was finding the conversation too hot for comfort, and he could see fuel being added to the fire.

TALK. Then Talkative at first began to blush; but, recovering himself, thus he replied: You come now to experience, to conscience and God; and to appeal to him for justification of what is spoken. This kind of discourse I did not expect; nor am I disposed to give an answer to such questions, because I count not myself bound thereto, unless you take upon you to be a catechiser, and, though you should so do, yet I may refuse to make you my judge. But, I pray, will you tell me why you ask me such questions?

Faithful showed his courage by directly and personally confronting Talkative with the truth:

FAITH. Because I saw you forward to talk, and because I knew not that you had anything else but notion. Besides, to tell you all the truth, I have heard of you, that you are a man whose professed Christianity lies in talk, and that your conversation [that is, way of life] gives this your mouth-profession the lie. They say, you are a spot among Christians; and that professed Christianity fares the worse for your ungodly conversation [way of life]; that some already have stumbled at your wicked ways, and that more are in danger of being destroyed thereby; your professed Christianity, and an alehouse, and covetousness, and uncleanness, and swearing, and lying, and vain company keeping, *etc.*, will stand together. The proverb is true of you which is said of a whore, to wit, that she is a shame to all women; so are you a shame to all professors.

Talk about the last straw! Talkative had had more than enough. He was off:

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TALK. Since you are ready to take up reports, and to judge so rashly as you do, I cannot but conclude you are some peevish or melancholy man, not fit to be discoursed with; and so adieu.

Bunyan drew the conclusion:

CHR. Then came up Christian, and said to his brother: ‘I told you how it would happen; your words and his lusts could not agree; he had rather leave your company than reform his life. But he is gone, as I said; let him go, the loss is no man’s but his own; he has saved us the trouble of going from him; for he, continuing (as I suppose he will do) as he is, he would have been but a blot in our company; besides, the apostle says: ‘From such withdraw yourself’.

FAITH. But I am glad we had this little discourse with him; it may happen that he will think of it again; however, I have dealt plainly with him, and so am clear of his blood, if he perishes.

CHR. You did well to talk so plainly to him as you did; there is but little of this faithful dealing with men now-a-days, and that makes professed Christianity to stink so in the nostrils of many, as it does; for they are these talkative fools whose professed Christianity is only in word, and are debauched and vain in their conversation [way of life], that (being so much admitted into the fellowship of the godly) do puzzle the world, blemish Christianity, and grieve the sincere. I wish that all men would deal with such as you have done; then should they either be made more conformable to professed Christianity, or the company of saints would be too hot for them.

Then did Faithful say:

*How Talkative at first lifts up his plumes!
How bravely does he speak! How he presumes
To drive down all before him! But so soon
As Faithful talks of heart-work, like the moon
That’s past the full, into the wane he goes.
And so will all, but he that HEART-WORK knows.*

May God deliver us all – I begin with myself – from mere talk. May we all have a felt-experience, a heart-experience, of Christ.