

JOHN  
BUNYAN  
*and the*  
  
GRACE  
  
*of*  
FEARING  
GOD

JOEL R. BEEKE  
AND PAUL M. SMALLEY

John Bunyan deserves to be known for more than authoring *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War*. He wrote, after all, more than sixty volumes. His lack of a formal education may have added to the suspicion that he does not rank among the greatest theologians, but this is a grave mistake. Erudite studies of Bunyan exist that demonstrate his wide knowledge and expertise in some of the most controversial theological topics. But we are in need of an accessible summary of the man and his writings that demonstrates Bunyan's vast contribution to Reformed experiential theology. This volume fills that gap by focusing on Bunyan's understanding of the fear of God that lies at the heart of his theology. A superb achievement.

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina

We have come to expect fine introductions to the Puritans from Joel Beeke, and this book does not disappoint. Here we get to see both the life and heart of John Bunyan, and through them we enjoy a rich, sensitive, and well-applied exposition of an important and much-neglected theme: the fear of the Lord. May God use this book to stir up a new generation of Bunyans who fear God and not man.

—**Michael Reeves**, President, Union School of Theology, Oxford, England

The deep admiration of that remarkable theologian John Owen for the ministry of his fellow Puritan John Bunyan is good reason why we today need to read and treasure Bunyan, and this new overview of Bunyan's works is a very helpful guide to that end. Using the unifying thread of the fear of God—one in which the Puritans have much to teach us—Beeke and Smalley take the reader through the core of Bunyan's corpus and whet the reader's appetite to plunge afresh into Bunyan's works.

—**Michael A. G. Haykin**, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Israelite midwives exhibited it, the psalms are full of it, wisdom requires it, Jesus emphasized it, the apostles encouraged it—and yet few things are more feared in contemporary Christianity than . . . the fear of God. In this timely book, Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley show how the fear of God was, in contrast, the heartbeat of John Bunyan, one of the most loved and admired of all Christians and the author of the all-time best selling Christian book. Here is proof—if any is needed—to confirm C. H. Spurgeon’s famous comment on Bunyan: “Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.” Read these pages and you will learn the truth that “they love thee little, if at all, who do not fear thee much; if love is thine attraction, Lord, fear is thy very touch.”

—**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Dean, Doctor of Ministry program,  
Ligonier Academy of Biblical and Theological Studies, Sanford,  
Florida

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FEARING GOD

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To Michael Barrett,  
a great friend and colleague,  
the best God-fearing academic dean and OT scholar  
a seminary president could ever hope for.  
“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that  
feareth the LORD” (Ps. 128:4).

—Joel R. Beeke

To my dear wife, Dawn.  
“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

And to my three beloved children, Levi, Elizabeth, and Michael.  
“As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him” (Ps. 103:13).

—Paul M. Smalley

What a weighty and great grace  
this grace of the holy fear of God is.

—John Bunyan

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## Foreword

Few individuals have influenced this world for Jesus Christ more broadly than the renowned Puritan figure John Bunyan. In the nineteenth century, it was said that virtually every English house possessed two books: the *Authorized Version* of the Bible and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. If such a claim is even remotely true, it must be acknowledged that Bunyan exerted an extraordinary influence in that part of the English-speaking world. This far-reaching impact, though, was not restricted to his motherland. Through his gifted pen on the printed page, the spiritual legacy of Bunyan has reached around the globe.

Bunyan lived during the golden era of the Puritans, in one of the godliest generations ever assembled on the stage of human history. J. I. Packer has compared the Puritans to “California’s Redwoods,” giants in the forest of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle asserted that, in power as preachers, expositors, and writers, “the Puritans in their day were second to none.”<sup>2</sup> The Puritans were devoted men and women within the Church of England, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 11.

2. John Charles Ryle, *Facts and Men: Being Pages from English Church History, between 1553 and 1683* (London: William Hunt, 1882), xviii.

who sought to purify its doctrine and worship as well as their own lives. In a broader sense, the Puritan spirit also animated the Non-Conformist movement outside the national church. Bunyan was one of these Non-Conformist Puritans.

These devout Puritans were first given their name in the early 1560s as a term of derision. They were so labeled because of their efforts to purify the Church of England according to the standard of Scripture. Moreover, they sought to purify their personal lives in every area of their existence. The Puritans distinguished themselves by their unwavering loyalty to the supreme authority of Scripture. They insisted that the beliefs and practices of every believer and each church must yield to the high ground of biblical truth. As they followed in the footsteps of the Reformers, the Puritans became the new champions of *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone.

John Bunyan was one of the most Bible-saturated Puritans of this period. The Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, aptly called Bunyan “a living Bible,” describing him as one who bled out of every pore of his being “Bibline.”<sup>3</sup> Bunyan was a prolific author, not only writing *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but penning many other Christian classics, including *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. It should also be noted that the Bedford tinker was a preacher par excellence. In the pulpit, he was a force for God, unleashing the power of Scripture in his biblical expositions. Though he was untrained and unlettered, his preaching ministry was attended by supernatural unction from on high.

At first, the authorities were fairly tolerant of Bunyan, withholding his arrest and imprisonment. But Bunyan knew that being indicted for preaching without a government-approved license was imminent. Nevertheless, he preached. He was apprehended and taken to the county jail in Silver Street, Bedford, where he was held

3. H. J. Harrald, ed., *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, vol. 4, 1878–1892 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892), 268.

for most of twelve years. Afterward, Bunyan became pastor of the Bedford church, only to be arrested and taken into custody again for preaching without a license. Though he was imprisoned, the Word of God was not imprisoned with him, as he remained ever active in his writing and preaching ministry. Eager crowds gathered outside his jail cell to hear him expound the Scriptures. It was said by the renowned Puritan John Owen that he would give up all his impressive learning if he could preach like the tinker from Bedford.<sup>4</sup>

The evangelical church today stands in dire need of recapturing the influence of John Bunyan. In a day when many churches possess the mere façade of external religion, the story of Bunyan needs to be retold and his spirit recaptured. Here is one solitary individual who, though weak in himself, was mightily empowered when the church stood in great need of spiritual awakening. Despite the centuries that have since passed, Bunyan remains as relevant today as when he lived and served the Lord.

Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley are to be commended for giving us a compelling look into the spiritual life and gospel ministry of John Bunyan. They trace a golden thread through Bunyan's experience and teaching: *the fear of the Lord*. Few themes are as neglected today as the fear of God. Such fear is often viewed as psychologically harmful instead of as a delightful and energizing force for obedience. Bunyan stands as a preeminent example of the Puritan quest to find release from the guilty fear of God's wrath through the saving righteousness of Jesus Christ and to bow joyfully before God with a childlike fear. In their exposition of fear in Bunyan's life and doctrine, Beeke and Smalley open a window into the soul of true godliness—that reverent love for God's glory that is fed by the doctrines of God's sovereign grace.

Who better to introduce us to this stalwart Puritan than these two authors? Whether you are already familiar with this pivotal

4. See John Brown, *John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work* (London: Hulbert, 1928), 366.

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figure or are simply desiring an initial introduction, you will want to devour and digest these pages. Properly researched and skillfully written, this volume will be a dose of strong medicine for the spiritual health of your soul.

Let me encourage you to read this book carefully. Be inspired by its story. Internalize its substance. Each one of us needs to personally experience the same depth of sanctifying work that God performed in this outstanding Christian leader, John Bunyan.

Steven J. Lawson  
President, OnePassion Ministries  
Dallas, Texas

## Note on Abbreviations and Sources

### Abbreviations

Luther, *Galatians*      Martin Luther, *A Commentarie of Master Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians* (London: George Miller, 1644).

ODNB      *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Works      *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor, 3 vols. (1854; repr., Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1991).

Works (1692)      *The Works of that Eminent Servant of Christ Mr. John Bunyan, the First Volume* (London: William Marshall, 1692).

### Sources

Seventeenth-century books may be viewed on Early English Books Online (EEBO). We have used the third edition of *The*

*Pilgrim's Progress* (1679) because it is the first one that contains the full story as we know it today. In citations of old sources, we have adjusted spelling to modern American standards, changed archaic grammatical forms such as verbs ending in -eth, and replaced the "thou" forms with "you" except in direct address to God or in Scripture quotations, but have otherwise left the words unchanged. Modern editions are cited alongside seventeenth-century books for ease of reference. Thus, beside each citation of Bunyan we also refer to the corresponding pages in the Offor edition of Bunyan's *Works*, reprinted by The Banner of Truth, as this is the most accessible edition today.

## John Bunyan's Pilgrimage to Peace

John Bunyan (1628–1688) lived in fearful times.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of his six decades spanning the middle of the seventeenth century, England was visited by deadly plagues and torn apart by civil wars. The land seethed with social unrest; some even tried to bring in the kingdom of God by fomenting an uprising to overthrow the government. England's Stuart kings often tried to rule without Parliament, and one of these kings perished at the hands of the state. A historian remarks that Bunyan saw “the most turbulent, seditious, and factious sixty years of recorded English history.”<sup>2</sup> Bunyan himself lost his first wife and spent more than twelve years in prison. His personal life was full of hardship, persecution, and suffering.

However, Bunyan was not a man who was shaken by current events or personal sorrows, but one who had learned “to live upon

1. For a summary of Bunyan's biography, see Richard L. Greaves, “Bunyan, John,” in *ODNB*, 8:702–11. Portions of these first two chapters adapt some material from Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 101–12.

2. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 4.

God that is invisible” (see Heb. 11:27).<sup>3</sup> His endurance in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ prompted a recent biographer to give him the title of “Fearless Pilgrim.”<sup>4</sup> Like Christian in his famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan persevered past all the spiritual lions and giants on his way to the Celestial City. Yet one writer has criticized Bunyan severely for his “fear-dominated theology.”<sup>5</sup> Another writer wrote less critically, “If we single out the predominant tone of Bunyan’s sermons, we would have to give priority to fear.”<sup>6</sup> Which was he: fearless or fear-dominated? In reality, Bunyan believed that Christian courage and fear were inseparable. In many ways, he was like his own fictional character Mr. Godly-fear, whom he described as “a man of courage, conduct, and valour.”<sup>7</sup>

Who was Bunyan? How could he be a man of such courage and yet of such great fear? To answer these questions, we must go back nearly four hundred years to a village in England.

### The Beginnings of an Unlikely Pilgrim

John Bunyan was born in 1628 in the village of Elstow, near Bedford, to Thomas and Margaret (Bentley) Bunyan. John was baptized on November 30, 1628, in the local parish of the Church of England. It does not appear that his parents brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, for as a youth he scarcely knew how to talk without using profanity.<sup>8</sup>

At the time, King Charles I ruled Britain (r. 1625–1649). William Laud had risen to be bishop of London (later to become archbishop

3. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 8th ed. (London: Nath. Ponder, 1692), 164; see *Works*, 1:48.

4. Faith Cook, *Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2008).

5. Alfred Noyes, quoted in *ODNB*, 8:710.

6. E. Beatrice Batson, “The Artistry of John Bunyan’s Sermons,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (Winter 1976): 180.

7. John Bunyan, *The Holy War, Made by Shaddai upon Diabolus . . . Or, the Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul* (London: Nat. Ponder, 1696), 283; see *Works*, 3:351.

8. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 13; see *Works*, 1:9.

of Canterbury), and those holding to Reformed doctrine and piety found themselves in ever-increasing disfavor in church and state as a result of the rise of Laud's high-church Arminian party. In 1620, the Separatists of the "Pilgrim Fathers" had sailed for the New World, and in 1630, John Winthrop led the beginnings of a major Puritan exodus to New England.

Bunyan's family, however, living in a village more than fifty miles north of London, may have felt removed from such political and ecclesiastical conflicts. Though their ancestors in the sixteenth century had been landowners in the manor of Elstow, declining fortunes had left them relatively poor. His father was a tinker—a brazier or tinsmith who repaired vessels made of soft metal, such as cooking pots and pans. Bunyan learned to read and write but otherwise was not well educated.

Bunyan soon displayed the evils of his sinful heart. He later wrote, "It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil at his will (2 Tim. 2:26), being filled with all unrighteousness . . . from a child that I had but few equals . . . both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God."<sup>9</sup> That is not to say that he had nothing to rebuke or restrain his run into ungodliness. Death was always near in the seventeenth century—in 1636, the plague visited England again, killing thirty thousand people or more. When he was nine or ten years old, nightmares and spasms of conscience frightened him and made him wish that there was no such thing as hell, but he quickly cast off these fleeting religious impressions. He became "the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company in all manner of vice and ungodliness."<sup>10</sup>

In 1642, the kingdom was plunged into turmoil when conflict between King Charles I and Parliament erupted into civil war.

9. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 2–3; see *Works*, 1:6.

10. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 4; see *Works*, 1:6–7.

Tragedy also struck at Bunyan's home. At age sixteen, he experienced "shock and misery," for his mother and sister died a month apart.<sup>11</sup> His father quickly remarried. John joined the Parliamentary forces in 1644, later organized as the New Model Army under Oliver Cromwell. He served in the garrison at Newport Pagnell, a unit that was "chronically behind in its pay and poorly equipped."<sup>12</sup>

On one occasion, God spared his life in a remarkable manner: "When I was a soldier, I, with others, were drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it; but when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my room; to which when I consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot into the head with a musket bullet, and died."<sup>13</sup>

He may have heard the gospel preached by Puritans and the more radical sectarians among soldiers. It is also possible that Bunyan had been exposed to Baptist teachings as early as 1642, when Benjamin Coxe was preaching in Bedford. Coxe was later a signatory of the 1644 London Confession of Faith, an early Particular Baptist confession.<sup>14</sup>

Civil war would break out again in 1648, but, in 1647, Bunyan left the army and returned to the life of a tinker. His portable stake anvil was discovered in 1905 with his name and the year 1647 inscribed on it. Like the pilgrim of whom he wrote, he understood what it meant to carry a burden; the anvil weighs sixty pounds.

In January 1649, Charles I was put on trial, condemned, and executed as a traitor. England suspended its monarchy and became a commonwealth. That same year, Bunyan married; we do not know his bride's name. Further trials arrived for the new family when

11. Jay Green, "Bunyan, John," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Gary G. Cohen (Marshalltown, DE: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2:221.

12. ODNB, 8:702.

13. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 6; see *Works*, 1:7.

14. Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 62; Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, vol. 2 (London: for the author, 1814), 14.

their first child, Mary, baptized on July 20, 1650, was born blind.<sup>15</sup> Three more children would follow.

Here, then, we have a young man in his early twenties with a history of irreverence and rebellion. He had suffered the death of mother and sister and had seen the horrors of war while yet a teenager. He was a man with little education who worked with his hands—a “mechanic,” in the language of his day. He might have lived and died in obscurity, with a dirty mouth and a dirty soul. For such a man to become a godly Christian pastor seems unlikely, and to become a premier Christian author seems almost impossible. There is a powerful lesson for us in the early life of Bunyan. The apostle Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 1:26–27: “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” John Bunyan is a shining example of God’s sovereign freedom to choose whom He pleases. One of the first steps in the fear of the Lord is recognizing that God is God and that we are not.

The Lord delights to turn human expectations upside down. He does this for a noble purpose: “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:29). Instead, Christ is everything to believers—“wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (vv. 30–31). If you have faith in Christ and love for His people, then give thanks to God (see Eph. 1:15–16). If you have gifts and abilities, do not boast in yourself, but boast in the Lord, for your talents are the gracious gifts of Christ (see Eph. 4:7). Furthermore, as we look at other people, let us judge no man according to the flesh (see 2 Cor. 5:16). God can take anyone, even the chief of sinners, and make that person into a useful servant of Jesus Christ. Yes, even if you have cursed God all your life and seen tragedy and

15. Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 57, 59.

violence, God can make something beautiful of your life through Jesus Christ. But it must begin in the heart, as it did with Bunyan.

### The Work of God in the Heart

Bunyan's godly wife came from a poor family, but she brought him a dowry of two books. One was *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* by Arthur Dent (1553–1607), a devotional classic that presents the gospel and Christian life through a conversation shared by four men. The other was *The Practice of Piety* by Lewis Bayly (c. 1575–1631), another classic describing God, heaven, hell, and the cultivation of piety as a way to prepare for Christ's return. Bunyan and his wife sometimes read these books together, and she told him about the holy lifestyle of her father.

Bunyan responded to these Christian influences with an outward show of religion and superstitious regard for the priests and ceremonies of the Church of England. His pastor, Christopher Hall, preached a strong sermon against breaking the Sabbath, but Bunyan ignored it and played his usual games on the Lord's Day. However, his conscience struck him, and he began to wonder if he was damned beyond all hope. This despair hardened him further, and he "went on to sin with great greediness of mind," until a woman, herself with a very poor reputation, rebuked him for swearing and cursing so much that she feared he would corrupt all the youth of the town. This rebuke so shamed Bunyan that he broke off his habit of perpetual swearing. He also began to read his Bible and reform his morals with an outward keeping of God's commandments, yet he remained ignorant of Jesus Christ and His saving work.<sup>16</sup>

This was a time of Puritan ascendancy in England. At the Battle of Worcester (Sept. 3, 1651), Oliver Cromwell led the New Model Army to defeat Royalist forces, causing Charles II, son of the executed monarch, to flee England for France. From 1653 to 1658,

16. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 10–14; see *Works*, 1:8–9.

Cromwell ruled England as the lord protector. This decade was a period of multiplication of religious sects of many kinds. However, it was also a time when the Puritans, committed to Reformed evangelical truth and godliness, could gather in freedom and worship God according to their consciences. Bunyan would meet such people, and by their example and witness God changed his life.

One day, Bunyan's work as a tinker took him to Bedford, and he came across "three or four poor women sitting at a door, in the sun, talking about the things of God." Considering himself quite a religious man by now, he went to talk with them. However, what he heard shook him.

I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above, out of my reach: their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature; they talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted and supported against the temptation of the devil. . . . They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, their unbelief; and did contemn, slight and abhor [despise and hate] their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good. And I thought they spoke, as if joy did make them speak.<sup>17</sup>

He simultaneously found his hypocrisy exposed and a desire stirred in his heart to have what these women possessed. They introduced him to their pastor, John Gifford, who led the Independent (Congregational) church in Bedford. Gifford had been a major in the king's army and then an apothecary or pharmacist in Bedford, living an immoral life until his conversion through reading a book by the Puritan Robert Bolton (1572–1631). The church was organized in 1650

17. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 17; see *Works*, 1:10. The original says, "me-thought they spake."

and chose Gifford, one of the founding members, as their pastor. In 1653, he also was appointed the rector of the parish of St. John the Baptist in Bedford, where he served until his death on September 21, 1655. The qualifications for membership in the Independent congregation consisted simply of “faith in Christ and holiness of life.”<sup>18</sup> Gifford invited Bunyan to his home to hear discussions “about the dealings of God with the soul,” which deepened his convictions of sin.<sup>19</sup>

Bunyan entered into a season of great questioning and searching that lasted perhaps as late as 1658.<sup>20</sup> He encountered the Ranters, a pantheistic, antinomian movement associated with sexual immorality and social upheaval, but he rejected their radical teachings.<sup>21</sup> Far more significant for Bunyan were his intense struggles with doubt, guilt, fear, despair, and temptations to blaspheme God. The Bible alternately terrified him with divine wrath and offered him divine grace in what has been called “the battle of the texts” within Bunyan’s mind.<sup>22</sup> During this time, he found comfort in his growing understanding of the death of the incarnate Lord Jesus to satisfy God’s justice and give sinners peace with God (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:20; Heb. 2:14–15). He received much help from “the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose doctrine, by God’s grace, was much for my stability.”<sup>23</sup>

Bunyan was also blessed by reading the commentary of Martin Luther (1483–1546) on the epistle to the Galatians, in which he found his own experience “largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my own heart.”<sup>24</sup> Luther’s commentary (1535)

18. Quoted in Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 63. On Gifford, see J. S. Macauley, “Gifford, John,” in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Brighton, UK: Harvester, 1983), 2:9.

19. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 36–37; see *Works*, 1:15.

20. *ODNB*, 8:702.

21. On the complexities of understanding the Ranters, see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 67–74.

22. Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 66–68.

23. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 56; see *Works*, 1:20.

24. Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan*, Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 18.

was first translated from Latin into English in 1575 and reprinted at least seven more times through 1644, showing its popularity in Britain. Its editor addressed the opening epistle, “To all afflicted consciences which groan for salvation.”<sup>25</sup> Luther taught that “the true way to Christianity” is to acknowledge yourself to be a sinner for whom it is impossible to do any good work commanded by the law, and, instead of seeking salvation by works, to trust that God sent His only begotten Son to die for sinners and give them life.<sup>26</sup> Bunyan’s experience would have resonated deeply with Luther’s words: “God must therefore have a strong hammer, or a mighty maul to break the rocks . . . that when a man by this bruising and breaking is brought to nothing, he should despair of his own strength, righteousness and holiness, and being thus thoroughly terrified, should thirst after mercy and remission of sins.”<sup>27</sup> And Bunyan no doubt found hope in statements like this: “Faith takes hold of Christ, and has him present, and holds him enclosed, as the ring does the precious stone. And whosoever shall be found having this confidence in Christ apprehended in the heart, him will God account for righteous. . . . Wherefore God does accept or account us as righteous, only for our faith in Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

The real breakthrough came when Bunyan grasped the truth that Christ’s righteousness is imputed or credited by God to every believer. While Bunyan was walking through a field one day, God revealed Christ’s righteousness to his soul and brought him to assurance. Bunyan wrote of that unforgettable experience,

One day, as I was passing in the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul: *Your Righteousness is in heaven*; and I thought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand, there,

25. Luther, *Galatians*, A2r.

26. Luther, *Galatians*, fol. 62v–63r [on Gal. 2:16].

27. Luther, *Galatians*, fol. 166v [on Gal. 3:23].

28. Luther, *Galatians*, fol. 65v–66r [on Gal. 2:16].

I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a-doing, God could not say of me, "He wants [lacks] my righteousness," for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my afflictions and irons, my temptations also fled away. . . . Now I went also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God. . . . I lived, for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. O I thought Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes.<sup>29</sup>

Bunyan found peace when he was enabled to look outside himself and rest his heart on Christ. With Christ as his righteousness, he need not fear the righteous judgment of God. As Luther wrote, "Therefore when the law accuses and sin terrifies him, he looks upon Christ, and when he has apprehended him by faith, he has present with him the Conqueror of the law, sin, death, and the devil: who reigns and rules over them, so that they cannot hurt him."<sup>30</sup>

The tinker of Bedford would face tremendous trials in his Christian pilgrimage. At times, he struggled with depression. Yet he persistently demonstrated remarkable spiritual strength, courage, and endurance. As one forgiven of his wickedness and declared righteous by God, he was enabled to live out Proverbs 28:1: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." God dug deep into his heart to lay a rock-solid foundation that would endure much tribulation in days to come.

We need lions for the Lord today—not men and women who bite and devour each other in self-righteous hatred, but people

29. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 116–18; see *Works*, 1:35–36.

30. Luther, *Galatians*, fol. 66v [on Gal. 2:16].

humbled by God's law and made strong by Christ's righteousness. We need people who can stand up for righteousness before the rich men and judges of this world because they know that they are counted as righteous by the Judge of all the earth. Before you can serve the Lord, you must be saved by the Lord.

**H**e was the author of the best-selling Christian book of all time. His Bible-saturated works have inspired generations of believers all over the world. And yet, as influential as it is, John Bunyan's theology contains a unifying thread that is sorely neglected in the modern church: the vital importance of the fear of God.

Fearing God is seen by many as psychologically harmful—at odds with belief in a God of love. But Bunyan knew personally that the only freedom from a guilty fear of God's wrath is a joyful, childlike fear of his holiness. Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley guide us through Bunyan's life before exploring his writings to illuminate the true grace of fearing God.

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