

# The Christian Life *and* How to Live It

By  
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Several years ago I published in England a little book with the title, "Royal and Loyal," consisting of addresses and Bible readings given in various places. As this book is now out of print, the addresses are here reproduced, together with two additional ones (forming chapters I and II).

The one theme running through the book is the Christian life, with its twofold attitude toward God and toward man, involving both the Lordship of Christ and the loyalty of Christians. "To this end Christ both died and lived again that He might be Lord" (Rom. 14:9); "Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13); "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

That these chapters in their new form may help every reader to experience and enjoy all that God has provided and intends for us in Christ, is the writer's prayer.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

# CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. What Is Christianity? - - - - -	7
II. What We Believe - - - - -	21
III. What Is a Christian? - - - - -	32
IV. "Here Am I" - - - - -	38
V. "I Serve" - - - - -	59
VI. Walking with God - - - - -	73
VII. The Fulness of God - - - - -	86
VIII. Peace, Perfect Peace - - - - -	100
IX. Joy and Praise - - - - -	110
X. God's Surprises - - - - -	119

# The Christian Life

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## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

"Thou art permitted to speak for thyself . . . . I beseech thee to hear me patiently."—Acts xxvi. 1, 3.

**T**HE question, "What is Christianity?" has been very prominent of late years in the minds of men. Scholars in several lands have been writing on "The Essence of Christianity." The question is a natural and necessary one, and certainly most important. What is Christianity? Not what is its irreducible minimum, not how little a man may accept, and yet be a Christian, but what are the characteristic and distinctive elements of Christianity, what must he accept if he would really profess and call himself a Christian?

One of the best ways to answer this question is to take the life, or some point in the life, of one of the finest men and truest Christians that ever lived, the Apostle Paul, and try to discover what Christianity meant to him. We may do this

in a variety of ways, but for the present we confine ourselves almost entirely to one episode in the Apostle's life, his appearance before Agrippa and Festus, as recorded in Acts xxvi. In this remarkable story we have a striking picture of St. Paul. As a man he is seen at his best. There is no constraint in his utterances; he is in his element; the subject suits him, and he yields himself to it, and the result is this magnificent *apologia*. As we listen to him, we can see something of the reality of his splendid manhood, and are reminded of the well-known words:

"The elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"

This is all the more noteworthy when we remember that the man before whom he stood was one of earth's meanest creatures. And it would almost seem as if St. Paul realised this, for, as we listen to him, we forget the first picture of Paul the man, and become wholly absorbed in the second and larger view of Paul the Apostle. He goes far beyond a mere defence of himself, and pleads for the Master Whom he loved and served. As though realising the characters and lives of Agrippa and Bernice, he proclaims the everlasting Gospel, and thus we have not simply a picture of Paul the prisoner, defending and justify-

ing himself; but chiefly a picture of Paul the advocate, proclaiming and defending his Master. Paul at the bar of Agrippa becomes merged into the far nobler scene of Christianity at the bar of the world. Christianity speaks here in the person of Paul, and in the opening words of the chapter we have the salient features of its message.

CHRISTIANITY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

"Thou art permitted to speak," said Agrippa: and if only the world allows this to Christianity, it *will* speak, for it has something to say. It has a threefold Gospel.

*The Gospel of the Resurrection.* This was the basis and burden of the Apostolic message, "Jesus and the Resurrection." "Why," said Paul to Agrippa, "should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" On the fact of the Resurrection the Apostles took their stand, and preached it everywhere. This message of the Resurrection was the cause of all the opposition they encountered, especially from the Jewish rulers, who were angered by the proclamation of the Risen One of Nazareth. Now we naturally enquire why the Resurrection should have caused such enmity and persecution. Because of that which it implied, the Godhead of Jesus Christ. The opposers knew very well that

to accept the Resurrection was to accept Christ as God, for by the Resurrection all His claims were irrefragably established. And this, too, was the reason of the prominence of the Resurrection in the Apostolic preaching, the witness it bore to the Godhead of Christ. It proclaimed Him to be God, and as God Whom the world needs; not some distant Being, Who, having created the world, is no longer intimately concerned with it; but God Who is near, approachable, available for our everyday life. Three times in one epistle St. Paul calls the Gospel "the Gospel of God," and this not only because it comes from God, but because it declares Him. God, as the Source of life and power, was proclaimed in the Resurrection of Christ, and this is the first part of that "something" which Christianity has to say.

*The Gospel of the Kingdom.* The words of St. Paul (in verse 15) clearly show that acceptance of Christ as God carried with it the acceptance of Him as Lord and Master, and implied the acknowledgment of our position as subjects and servants. Since Christ is God, He is supreme, He is King and Ruler, and we are His subjects, and consequently, through the Acts of the Apostles, we find clear and significant reference to the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is at once present and future. Our Lord's conversations before His Ascension were concerned with it. Philip preached

it in Samaria, St. Paul at Ephesus did likewise, and the last words of the book show St. Paul at Rome "preaching the kingdom of God." These men were not afraid of the logic of their belief, the outcome of their fundamental doctrines. "Is Christ God? Then I am His subject." They realised and preached Christ, Who because He is God claims men as His own, claims to rule over their lives, not only bestowing upon them the privileges, but calling for the performance of the duties of their heavenly citizenship. The Gospel of the Kingdom is the second part of that "something" which Christianity has to say.

*The Gospel of Pardon.* This, as verse 18 shows, was also an integral part of the Apostolic preaching. Men are rebels against God by reason of sin; and rebels cannot possibly become subjects of His Kingdom until they are pardoned—until they have submitted and surrendered their lives to Him. Unless the rebellion of sin is quelled in man, there can be no entrance into God's Kingdom, no acceptance of Christ as God. And so the Apostle Paul preached everywhere the forgiveness of sins. The burden of his message was, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He preached a full, free, present, assured, everlasting pardon: and this is

the third part of that "something" which Christianity has to say.

CHRISTIANITY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY FOR ITSELF

"Thou art permitted to speak for thyself." This is what the Gospel desires, and for three reasons:

*Hearsay Evidence is often erroneous.* In this very book of the Acts we find glaring instances of the danger of hearsay. The Church was regarded as an obscure Jewish sect, with some peculiar ideas of "one Jesus." There was a smattering, a second-hand smattering of knowledge; and, unfortunately, we find the same only too prevalent to-day. There is sadly too much second-hand religion, religion gathered only from common report, ordinary conversation, and literary tradition. Very frequently the Bible is condemned without having been read, very often St. Paul's Epistles are criticised without having been studied. It is simply astounding to find error about the Gospel, and even about simple Bible facts, in many whose position and education warrant something vastly different. There is error, because there is no real knowledge; error, because hearsay evidence is so often erroneous. But we may go further and say that

*Christian Testimony is only partial.* Paul here gives his own testimony, and there can be no pos-

sible doubt that the well-known change in his life had a great effect on his hearers, and was a fact they could not get over. His conversion and subsequent life counted for something, and it was as though he said, "I experienced this; deny it, and you say that I lie." St. Paul's character was questioned by any who dared to deny the change. Yet when we have said all that we can for the power of this, it remains true that Christian testimony is only partial and incomplete. While Christians are what they are, with the old Adam still within them, there will always be slips and failures and sins, and I pity the man who takes his Christianity from Christians only. There is no doubt that we Christians ought to show much more of the Christ-life than we do, and may God pardon us for so often being stumbling-blocks instead of stepping-stones. Yet such testimony, however real, can only be partial, and this leads us to say that

*Personal Experience is always sure.* This was the goal of the Apostle; to this he was trying to lead his hearers; for this purpose he gave his own testimony. He desired Agrippa to test Christianity for himself; not only to hear of Paul's Christ, but to have his own Christ, confident that Agrippa would find Christ what he himself had found Him. The primal necessity is to get our religion direct from Christ, not to ask this man or

that man, not to follow this book or that book, but to go direct to the Book of books and find Christ for ourselves. When Nathanael questioned whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth, Philip did not preach, or argue, or denounce; he simply said, "Come and see." This is the only safe test—the test of personal experience. Read His Word for yourselves: see who He is, and what He asks, comply with His demands, surrender the life, and the result will soon be similar to that of the Samaritans: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

CHRISTIANITY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY FOR ITSELF  
WORTH HEARING

"I beseech thee to hear me." This, too, is what the Gospel asks.

*The Gospel of the Resurrection explains the enigmas of life.* What the world needs is God; without Him all is confusion. Without God there is no real life, no true happiness, no permanent satisfaction. Without God the past has no assurance, the present no confidence, and the future no hope. Without God man is a creature in the darkness and filth of sin, with nothing but gloom and despair at the end of his days. But bring in

the Resurrection of Christ, and all is changed. It reveals God as Saviour, Guide, Strength, All—it enables us to live the present, and to hope steadfastly as to the future. There is light through the Resurrection for the whole life, the light of God's presence, the joy, the peace, the power and preciousness of His presence, and the enigmas of life are solved by the Gospel of the Resurrection.

*The Gospel of the Kingdom meets all the difficulties of life.* What is the root of all man's troubles? Turn to the Garden of Eden for the answer. It was man's desire to be independent. The setting-up of self against God and instead of God—this is the essence of all sin. It means that man will not have God to rule over him, will not acknowledge and obey the law of God; but will have a law of his own as the guide of his life. And so man attempts self-government, "local self-government" in a very literal sense, and the result is abject, absolute failure. Man has had his opportunity of guiding his own life, and we know full well what has happened in the history of the world.

Take political life as an illustration. There have been several forms of government seen through the ages, but all incomplete and, in themselves alone, really useless. Once autocracy was tried, but found pernicious through tyranny. Then came aristocracy, but this alone was also found

unsatisfactory. Now some who ridicule aristocracy are trying plutocracy, government by money, but this is proving itself infinitely more dangerous. And others are trying democracy, and we shall see how this fares. It matters not what may be the form, man was never intended to be independent. Democracy alone has in itself the elements of a terrible tyranny, and it is not preaching the politics of earth, but the politics of Heaven, to say that, though there are elements of good in autocracy, aristocracy, plutocracy, and democracy, each and all of these must be guided, held, and controlled by Theocracy, government by God. De Tocqueville well says that "men never so much need to be theocratic as when they are most democratic." What the world needs, what each man needs, is the Absolute Monarchy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Man needs the laws, rules and sanctions of Christ's Kingdom, for these would permanently settle all the difficult problems of individual and social life. Just as the demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, London, England, years ago were settled by an appeal to Crown rights, to the claim of the Crown over that area, so in like manner any difficulties through sin, the "demonstrations" of sin, individual or corporate, can be quickly settled by claiming and acknowledging the Crown rights of the Lord Jesus. Only let Christ reign supreme

in heart and life, and the difficulties of life are met by the Gospel of the Kingdom.

*The Gospel of Pardon satisfies the needs of life.* The chief need of man is pardon, freedom from a troubled conscience. The old question, "Canst thou not minister to the mind diseased?" again and again recurs. We have a sense of guilt and unrest, a sense of bondage and weakness, a sense of defilement and separation from God, which nothing can touch. And it is only in the Gospel of pardon that these needs can be satisfied. It is only when Christ says: "Peace, be still," "Come out," that the spirit of evil loses its power; it is only when He reveals Himself that the schism in our nature is healed, and the needs of life satisfied by the Gospel of pardon. These are the reasons why Christianity is worth hearing.

**CHRISTIANITY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY FOR ITSELF  
WORTH HEARING PATIENTLY**

"I beseech thee to hear me patiently," said Paul. So says the Gospel. Why?

*It concerns our Highest Interests.* It has to do with life here and life hereafter. It claims to touch life at every part, to solve all its problems, to minister to its most important needs. It therefore deserves and demands our most careful at-

tention, for if it is all true, it is terribly true, and no one can reject it without peril.

*It speaks to our Whole Nature.* Not to the mind only to interest it with mere speculation; not to the heart only to indulge it with mere sentiment; not to the conscience only to frighten and terrify it; not to the imagination only to entrance it with ephemeral visions; not to the will only to make it headstrong and self-centred; but to the whole nature in every part, to guarantee a real, complete, and balanced nature and character. And may God help that man who is closing any part of his nature to the Gospel of Christ, who, like Felix, is allowing sin to keep him back, or who, like Festus or Agrippa, is cynically indifferent to it. No one can close mind and heart against Christ with impunity. It is a sad confession of Darwin that, through long usage of his faculties in the direction of physical science, he had lost all taste for music and the fine arts, and had become so far mentally atrophied. And it is terribly true that a man may suffer moral atrophy and spiritual deadness by misuse or disuse of any faculty in relation to the Gospel.

*It calls for the use of All our Powers.* It asks openness of mind, truthfulness of heart, and loyalty of life. It appeals to us to put away prejudice and preconception, and to listen carefully to what it has to say. It has an A B C first, and then,

arising out of that, higher and fuller knowledge. It asks that the truth may be received with that openness of mind and that willingness to learn which form the basis of all wisdom. Then it asks that the truths accepted by the mind should be yielded to in loving confidence by the heart, and lived out day by day in the conduct.

This Gospel message comes to us now as it came to Agrippa, asking only a personal test. With courtesy it asks for candor, patience, and thoroughness, and given these, all the demands of our complex life will be satisfied.

"O, make but trial of His love,  
Experience will decide,  
How blest are they, and only they,  
Who in His truth confide."

Our defilement will be cleansed by the salvation of the Gospel; our weakness made strong by its grace; our roughness made smooth by its power; our anxiety assured by its reality; our doubt removed by its truth; our tempest calmed by its peace; our darkness illuminated by its light; our sorrow alleviated by its comfort; our misery relieved by its joy; our defencelessness surrounded by its protection; our coldness warmed by its love; and our emptiness filled by its fullness. The whole circumference of our need will be forever met and perfectly satisfied in the treas-

ures of the Gospel of the living, present, Divine, glorious Christ. And, therefore, comes now to each one of us the simple message, the old familiar invitation, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."