

Christianity — What is it?

Philippians 3

We have endeavoured to hold up the Bible as the Church's supreme and all-sufficient guide, in all ages, in all climes, and under all circumstances. We now desire to hold up Christianity in its divine beauty and moral excellence, as illustrated in this well-known passage of Holy Scripture. And be it observed that, as it was the Bible itself, and not any special system of theology deduced therefrom, that we sought to present to our readers; so now, it is Christianity, and not any peculiar form of human religiousness, that we desire to place before them. We are deeply thankful for this.

We dare not enter upon the defence of men or their systems. Men err in their theology and fail in their ethics; but the Bible and Christianity remain unshaken and unshakeable. This is an unspeakable mercy. Who can duly estimate it? To be furnished with a perfect standard of divinity and morals is a privilege for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. Such a standard we possess, blessed be God! in the Bible and in the Christianity which the Bible unfolds to our view. Men may err in their creed and break down in their conduct, but the Bible is the Bible still, and Christianity is Christianity still.

Now, we believe that this third chapter of Philippians gives us the model of a true Christian — nor as one endowed with extraordinary gifts, and privileged to see unspeakable visions. It is not to Paul, the apostle, nor Paul, the gifted vessel, that we look, but to Paul the Christian (John 17). "Our citizenship is in heaven;" and we should never be satisfied to propose to ourselves any lower object than Christ. It matters not in the least what a man's position may be. He may be only a scavenger, or he may be a prince, or he may stand at any one of the many gradations between these two extremes. It is all the same, provided Christ is his real, his only object. It is a man's object, not his position, that gives him his character.

Now Paul's one object was Christ. Whether he was stationary, or whether he travelled; whether he preached the gospel, or whether he gathered sticks; whether he planted churches, or made tents, Christ was his object. By night and by day, at home or abroad, by sea or by land, alone or in company, in public or private, he could say, "One thing I do." And this, be it remembered, was not merely Paul the laborious apostle, or Paul the raptured saint, but Paul the living, acting, walking Christian — the one who addresses us in these words, "Brethren, be ye followers together of me." Nor should we ever be satisfied with anything less than this. True, we fail sadly; but let us always keep the true object before us. Like the school-boy at his copy, he can only expect to succeed by keeping his eye fixed upon his head-line. His tendency is to look at his own last written line, and thus each succeeding line is worse than the preceding one. Thus it is in our own case. We take our eye off the blessed and perfect head-line, and begin to look at ourselves, our own productions, our own character, our interests, our reputation. We begin to think of what would be consistent with our own principles, our profession, or our standing instead of fixing the eye steadily upon that one object which Christianity presents, even Christ Himself.

But some will say, "Where will you find this?" Well, if it be meant, where are we to find it amongst the ranks of Christians, now-a-days, it might be difficult indeed. But we have it in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians. This is enough for us. We have here a model of true Christianity, and let us ever and only aim thereat. If we find our hearts going after other things let us judge them. Let us compare our lines with the head-line, and earnestly seek to produce a faithful copy thereof. In this way, although we may have to weep over constant failure, we shall always be kept

occupied with our proper object, and thus have our character formed; for, let it never be forgotten, it is the object which forms the character. If money be my object, my character is covetous; if power, I am ambitious; if books, I am literary; if Christ, I am a Christian. It is not here a question of life and salvation, but only of practical Christianity. If we were asked for a simple definition of a Christian, we should at once say, a Christian is a man who has Christ for his object. This is most simple. May we enter into its power, and thus exhibit a more healthy and vigorous discipleship in this day, when so many, alas! are minding earthly things.

We shall close this hasty and imperfect sketch of a wide and weighty subject, with a line or two on *the Christian's Hope*.

This, our third and last point, is presented in our chapter in a manner quite as characteristic as the other two. The *standing* of the Christian is to be found in Christ; the *object* of the Christian is to know Christ; and the *hope* of the Christian is to be like Christ. How beautifully perfect is the connection between these three things. No sooner do I find myself in Christ as my righteousness, than I long to know Him as my object, and the more I know Him, the more ardently shall I long to be like Him, which hope can only be realized when I see Him as He is. Having a perfect righteousness, and a perfect object, I just want one thing more, and that is to be done with everything that hinders my enjoyment of that object. "For our conversation [or citizenship, (Gr) not (Gr) Phil. 3:20], is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

Now putting all these things together, we get a very complete view of true Christianity. We cannot attempt to elaborate any one of the three points above referred to; for, it may be truly said, each point would demand a volume to treat it fully. But we would ask the reader to pursue the marvellous theme for himself. Let him rise above all the imperfections and inconsistencies of Christians, and gaze upon the moral grandeur of Christianity as exemplified in the life and character of the model man presented to our view in this chapter. And may the language of his heart be, "Let others do as they will, as for me, nothing short of this lovely model shall ever satisfy my heart. Let me turn away my eye from men altogether, and fix it intently upon Christ Himself, and find all my delight in Him as my righteousness, my object, my hope." Thus may it be with the writer and the reader, for Jesus' sake.