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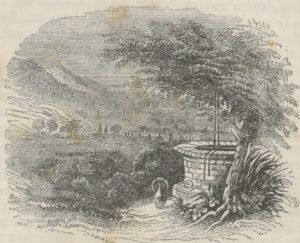
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"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

MATTHEW XXII. 42.

A QUESTION FOR ALL.



READER, what answer does your conscience return to this question? Are you among the number of those who think little or nothing at all about Christ? There are many such. A vain and sinful world engages their minds and fixes their hearts, and Christ and his redemption, Christ and his coming, Christ and his glory, are not in all their thoughts.

There are many young persons in this condition. They flatter themselves that it will be time enough for them to think of Christ by-and-by. They forget that life is uncertain, even to them, for a single day, and that duty to God and Christ is present and pressing

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, INSTITUTED 1799;
56, PATERNOSTER ROW, AND 164, PICCADILLY.

upon all. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” Eccles. xii. 1.

There are many aged persons who do not think of Christ. They are tottering on the brink of the grave and of eternity, and must soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and yet never seriously think of him. And it is not uncommon to find—for it is but reasonable to expect to find—such persons the most deeply rooted in their worldliness and insensibility to Divine things, and apparently the most dark, and incapable of any true and living thought of Christ.

Thus among all ages and classes, all ranks and conditions of men, there are multitudes who have never seriously thought of Christ. Ask them, “What think ye of Christ?” and they have no opinion, no conviction, to express on the subject; and chiefly because they have never been at the pains to form one.

Sad indeed is the state of such persons: men visited by the gospel, and yet insensible to all its glorious revelations: men to whom Christ is presented in the word as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John i. 29), but who are at no pains truly and savingly to acquaint themselves with Christ. O ye careless, thoughtless, Christless ones! surely the very least you can do is to think of him, and to study to acquaint yourselves with him whom God hath set forth as a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood, whom God has exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and forgiveness of sins, and whom God has ordained as the Judge both of the quick and the dead: see Rom. iii. 25, 26; Acts v. 31; and xvii. 31.

But perhaps, reader, you are of the number of those who, without being wholly ignorant or indifferent in regard to Christ, do not know very well what to think or what to say of him. Opinions, even among those whom you esteem for their sincerity and learning, moral

excellence and amiableness, differ so widely in relation to Christ, that your mind has been brought into a state of uncertainty on the subject, and you find it difficult to arrive at settled convictions. Perhaps your answer to the question which we are considering might be: “Think of Christ? I hardly know what to think of him. Without there are controversies, and within there are doubts and fears, which unsettle and distress me. Oh that I knew where I might find him! My soul desires the resting-place of truth, and I believe that it is to be found only in Christ, although as yet I have been unable to realize it there.”

Reader, does this at all express the state of your mind, the feeling of your heart? Then be not discouraged. The inquiries of the mind, the thirstings of the heart, after Christ, are of God’s own awakening; and he can, and doubtless will, if you seek his teaching in the way of his own appointing, resolve your doubts, scatter your darkness, and give you right thoughts and settled convictions of Christ. But suffer the word of advice and exhortation, which your somewhat peculiar, although by no means solitary, case demands.

And first of all, let it be remembered, that the authority by which your thoughts and convictions respecting Christ ought to be determined is not human, but Divine; it is not the reason or opinion of man, but the word of the Lord; not the traditions of uninspired antiquity, nor the decrees and creeds of fallible councils and churches, but the voice of God himself as recorded in Holy Scripture, when he said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” Matt. iii. 17. “Search the Scriptures,” said the Lord Jesus Christ himself to the doubting and unbelieving Jews, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me,” John v. 39. “Search the Scriptures,” is the call of Christ still, and of reason and of common sense, to all those who, having doubts and desiring light

in respect to either the person or the doctrine of Christ, believe that the Scriptures are the revelation of God respecting him. The question for the inquiring and earnest mind to consider and determine is not, What do men think of Christ? but, What saith the Lord respecting him? Men may rear the structure of human opinion on other foundations, but it is on the word of God alone, under the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, that Christian conviction, or faith, is built.

Thus we get rid of some of the difficulties which present themselves to inquiring minds, those namely which arise from the diversity of opinion in respect to Christ which obtains among men. It is a very possible, and by no means an uncommon thing, to entertain very exaggerated and even false notions in reference to such diversity, and to make use of it as an excuse for our own indolence and unbelief. In point of fact, there is a remarkable agreement among true Christians as to all essential points of truth relating to Christ; as, for example, his Divinity, and his atonement for sin by the sacrifice of himself in our nature, and in our stead. But granting, to the fullest extent, the diversity of opinion which obtains among men as to Christ, why should this disturb or hinder the inquiring soul in its investigations and conclusions? What is the mere opinion of men to you? You are not responsible for it. It is no rule to you. You are responsible to God for your own convictions; for them only—for them certainly. And the rule by which you are bound in duty to act in relation to Christ, his person, his doctrine, his gospel, is, not the shifting standard of human opinion, not the fallible standard of human reason, but the word of the Lord, which abideth for ever.

But again, in seeking to know Christ in the light of Scripture, see that you are faithful to that light. Whilst renouncing the supreme authority of others in matters of faith, see that you act not as the slave

of your own will, and insist on bringing Christ down, contrary to Scripture, to the level of your own understanding and the measure of your own ideas. It is not our province, it is not in our power, to explain and master everything. To the spiritually enlightened mind Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, but to the natural mind he is foolishness; for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” 1 Cor. ii. 14. Impious and vain is the attempt, then, to bring Christ down to the level of the human understanding or the measure of human ideas: human reason cannot fathom him. And yet Divine faith receives him, and the heart of man welcomes and rejoices in him, as the image of the invisible God,—Christ the way, and the truth, and the life.

It is with a humble and a teachable spirit, therefore, that we must search the Scriptures for the saving and sanctifying knowledge of Christ. We must come to this study, not in the spirit of the judge, but in that of the disciple. Yea more, we must come to this study and prosecute it in humble dependence upon, and with earnest prayer for, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration the Scriptures were written, and whose province it is to receive of the things of Christ and show them unto us, John xvi. 13, 14.

Thus renouncing a false confidence in human wisdom and authority, and asking wisdom of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, let the inquiring soul sit down at the feet of the inspired writers of Scripture to learn of Christ, and it will soon have cause to rejoice in that knowledge of him which is saving and sanctifying. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth,” Hosea vi. 3.

Let the promised joys and satisfactions of that season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord encourage you, reader, against settling down in a state of uncertainty as to the momentous question to which your attention is here invited, and prompt you to prayerful diligence in your endeavour after full scriptural convictions in respect to the adorable Jesus, and your own personal relation to him. The vision of the Holy One unfolded to us in Scripture is only dark to those who are blind, and wedded to their blindness. To the simple and the teachable it is so plainly written "that he may run that readeth it." There is no safety in a state of uncertainty and indecision as to Christ and our relation to him; and we might appeal to the reader's own experience, and ask, Is it a state of peace and comfort? "This," said the Lord himself, "is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The saving, satisfying, sanctifying knowledge of God the Father is implied in that of Christ the Mediator. And all experience confirms the testimony of the word of God, that apart from the knowledge of God in Christ which is derived from the Scriptures, there is no resting-place or consciousness of safety and of hope to the guilty and tempest-tossed soul of dying man. Let none, then, who have had inquiries after truth and aspirations after God and eternity stirred within them give sleep to their eyes or slumber to their eyelids, until, taught by God as the truth is in Jesus, they confess with the Samaritans of old, "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," John iv. 42.

But perhaps, reader, you are of the number of those whose thoughts of Christ are orthodox, but whose hearts are not won by his beauty and excellency, and not sanctified by his Spirit. Alas! there are many

such. Many there are, and even within the bosom of the professing church of Christ, who entertain right and orthodox thoughts of Christ, but who are not animated and actuated by spiritual and lively affections towards him. Their state of mind in reference to the blessed Saviour and adorable Son of God may be described as one of admiration without love, conviction without confidence or reconciliation, light without life, a faith without its witnessing fruits of truthfulness, devotion, and obedience.

Does the reader's conscience recognise this distinction and radical defect in his own case? Acknowledging Christ as a teacher, the Great Teacher sent from God, do you seek in all things to obey his word? or is your life a mournful and manifest denial of its power? Confessing that Christ is the Divine Author and founder of a religion which is most gloriously adapted to the wants and necessities of fallen, guilty man, is it the labour of your life and the prayer of your heart that the knowledge of the gospel should be conveyed to those at home and abroad who are living and dying in ignorance of it? or do you sit at ease and leave that honourable work and high Christian duty to others? Having some true conception of the mediatorial office of the only begotten Son of God, who appeared in our nature, and by the sacrifice of himself made an infinite atonement for sin, are you brought nigh unto God by him, so that you can say of him with the apostle, Ephes. i. 7, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;” or, notwithstanding all your knowledge and convictions, are you still far off from God by wicked works, and a stranger to the spirit of adoption whereby believers cry—Abba, Father? Admiring in Christ, the most beautiful and instructive pattern of all Divine and human excellence, praising him for his benevolence and charity, patience and humility, tenderness and forgiveness, self-denying devotedness

to God and to the interests of mankind even unto death, have you taken up the cross of self-denial, and do you follow Christ in his pure and unselfish walk? or are you still living to the world, and not to God; to yourself, and not to advance the interests of sinful and dying human beings? Christ is a Saviour you say, but is he yours?—a King, but do you bow to his sceptre and obey his commandments? Or might not Christ say to you as God said to the Jewish priests of old, “If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?”

Peculiarly guilty is the state of such a man. To have true thoughts of Christ, and yet no right affections to him, oh, what an inconsistency is that! Great is the guilt of that man who refuses to think of Christ at all; but is not he still more guilty who professes to think well of him, and yet does not love him? They who know their Master's will, and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; but do not they expose themselves to a like aggravated condemnation who have seen, and who acknowledge somewhat of the infinite excellence and glory of Christ, and yet withhold from him the homage of their hearts and lives? And, alas, what multitudes are in this condition! How many are there whose judgments are convinced, but whose hearts go after their covetousness; of whose intellect Christ commands the homage of a confession, but in whose hearts and in whose conduct he is daily put to the pain and the shame of a denial! Miserable and most guilty condition! Reader, if it be thine, rest not in it. Be not satisfied with the hope that you think well of Christ, so long as you are a drudge to the world and the slave of sin. Will Christ be satisfied with such cold and uninfluencing thoughts of him as yours? No; Christ seeks thoughts of him which make the heart burn with love to him, and to the casting down of all idols. Is it a formal, unsanctifying conviction of the truth, however orthodox, which Christ requires, and

which by his Spirit he works in the hearts of his people? No; it is a faith which works by love, purifies and elevates the desires and affections of the heart, and produces the fruits of holy and obedient living; for, as the apostle James teaches, all other faith is dead, being alone. Is conscience satisfied whilst you keep back your heart from Christ? No; even now it condemns you for a manifest and grievous inconsistency and wrong—wrong to Christ and to your own soul. And what may you expect its language to be at the great day of account, when every heart shall be revealed, except you repent? “I thought well of Christ; why then did I not confide in him and love him with all my heart? I acknowledged and felt his religion to be Divine and of infinite importance; why then did I not embrace it, profess it, practise and propagate it with all my might? Why did I, how could I, allow the world to come between my soul and the Saviour whom I acknowledged to be Divine? How could I allow the vain and sinful pleasures of a few passing years to come between my precious undying soul and that eternal weight of glory which the gospel revealed to me?” There will be many bitter regrets and loud lamentations in the day of the Lord, but surely most of all on the part of those very men who think very well and very truly and scripturally of Christ, but who give him neither the love of their hearts nor the devotion of their lives.

But, blessed be God, there are those whose thoughts of Christ are not only scriptural but spiritual; not only orthodox but experimental; not being merely the cold and barren conviction of the intellect, but the faith of the heart—warm, cordial, and operative, even the gift of the Holy Spirit. Is the reader of the number of such?—one of those who have been truly taught and regenerated from above, to whom Christ is really and infinitely precious, and whose life is hid with Christ

in God? If so, what is your reply to the question which we have been considering? “What think ye of Christ?”

It may be impossible for you to express your convictions, your faith, in respect to his person, character, and offices, in language more orthodox than that which is employed by those who, although they think well of him, have never truly felt his love in their hearts. They may profess to believe in his Divinity, his atonement, his intercession and advocacy with the Father as our great High Priest within the veil, his kingly state and glory as Head over all things to his church, which is his body, and his second glorious coming as the Judge both of the quick and of the dead, of the good and of the bad; and higher than this in respect to Christ you cannot go in the way of mere profession. These points involve the very mystery of godliness. But this you can do,—you can say that what others profess they think Christ to be, by the grace of God, I have found and I know him to be. In him I have found God my Saviour. Through his blood I have found redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, Eph. i. 7. In him I have found reconciliation unto God, so that in his name I can draw near to the eternal Father with the confidence of adoption, Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 5. In him I have found a merciful and faithful High Priest, one ready to sympathize with me, and able to succour me in every season of trial and under every variety of temptation, Heb. ii. 17, 18; iv. 15, 16. And him I have found a King almighty to reign over and to defend me, one under the shadow of whose protection I can rest safely and peacefully in the midst of danger, and whose powerful grace is sufficient, by the Holy Spirit, to subdue and keep in check the tyrant lusts which war against the soul, Isa. xxxii. 1, 2; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

All this, and far more than all this, have you found in Christ, “if so be that ye have heard him, and

have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.’ And with you it is no mere formal confession, but the spontaneous utterance of a Spirit-wrought faith and consciousness, when in answer to the question—

“What think ye of Christ?” you reply in the words of Thomas, when, ashamed of his doubts, he exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!”

And how can you sufficiently express your sense of Christ’s love—that love to the souls of men, that love to you, which brought him from heaven to earth, yea, from the throne of God to the cross of Calvary? When you revert in solemn and believing thoughtfulness to those scenes in the Saviour’s life and humiliation which impressively teach and remind us of his conflict and his love: the wilderness of Judea, where he was tempted of the devil that he might know how to sympathize with and succour all those who are tempted; the Garden of Gethsemane, where his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; the judgment hall of Pilate, where he was condemned, and mocked, and spit upon, and buffeted; the cross of Calvary, where he died, an all-atoning sacrifice for our sins;—when your hearts are truly open to the impression of these solemn scenes, these scenes of such love and suffering, of such a conflict and such a victory, “What think ye of Christ?” was there ever love like unto his love?

And what think ye of him when you recall some of the events of your own personal experience and consciousness: the mercy and tenderness of Christ, when first, as a poor and helpless and most guilty sinner, you cast yourself at his feet: his faithful friendship, unwearied patience, powerful advocacy, and well-timed deliverances ever since, and in all your journey through the wilderness? Think of him! you may well reply: no human thought can fully comprehend his infinite glory and grace, and the warmest affection of the Christian heart is but a faint response to that love which Christ bears to his people.

Is this, reader, the language of your heart? Then let your life correspond with it. Extol the Lord with your lips and in your life, by proclaiming his glory, imitating his example, doing his will. Let his love assure your heart in God. Let it speak to you in the sweet and powerful accents of reconciliation. And let it urge you to all loving and holy obedience, that you may say with Paul, “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again,” 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

In vain do we profess to entertain high and true thoughts of Christ, if in life we deny him. “Ye are my friends,” said Christ, “if ye do whatsoever I command you,” John xv. 14. It is not light from heaven which leaves the heart untouched and the lips unsanctified. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts,” Gal. v. 24.

See to it then, reader, that your thoughts of Christ are true and scriptural. You are responsible for that. And see to it, also, that the genuineness and vitality of your affections, and the character of your life, keep pace with the orthodoxy of your thoughts. You are certainly responsible for that. Alas! it is not always that men’s thoughts and lives correspond. The head is right, often, whilst the heart is wrong. The thoughts true, the affections false. Be not satisfied, then, with the mere profession of a faith, however orthodox and approved, but strive in faith and prayer after the full possession of the in-dwelling Spirit of light and liberty and love.

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