

THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

This subject describes the life of the Apostle Paul. His life was a model of excellence. It was the life of par excellence. It was an honorable life. It was a noble life. It was an exemplary life. Truly, it was an ideal Christian life. It seems to me that there were at least four things which combined to make his life an ideal Christian life. Those four things are as follows:-----

I. The Source Of It

Christ was the source of it. His spiritual life derived its parentage from Christ. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men". "The life which was with the Father was manifested unto us." "I am the resurrection and the life." "He that hath the Son hath life." It was Jesus Christ who brought Paul into connection with the source of life eternal. He was able to do it because He bore life eternal in His own person. He said, "I am the life." The life which is distinctively Christian is always traceable to Christ Himself. Spiritual life is communicated "Through Christ as Mediator, and for His sake." Spiritual life is not promiscuously dispensed to mankind in general, but only to those who become Christians. Paul referred to Christ in Colossians 3:4 as "Our Life". That shows that Paul considered Christ the abiding source of all spiritual life. Among the factors which entered into the experience of salvation, or the entrance of Jesus Christ into the heart and life of Paul, the most important ones seem to me to be as follows:-----

1. God's love for him
2. God's sacrifice in giving His Son
3. Christ's sacrifice on the Cross
4. Christ's provision for his needs
5. A consciousness of his needs
6. A conviction of sin
7. A contrition for sin
8. A conversion from sin
9. A confession of sin
10. A cleansing from sin

Thus the new life or Christ came into the soul of Paul and his spiritual life flowed from Christ as a fountain. Therefore, we are justified in maintaining that the life of Paul was an ideal Christian life so far as the source of it is concerned since Christ was that source.

II. The Security Of It

Paul rejoiced in the security of his soul and life because when Christ came into his soul and life and he was saved the responsibility for his soul's safety passed out of his hands into God's keeping. In describing the security of the saved soul and life Paul said in Colossians 3:3 "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Thus, the bosom of the Almighty is the resting place of the life of the believer. There it is surely secure until some monster arises from somewhere and drives a dagger of death into the heart of God and lifts a flag of victory over the grave of Jesus Christ. When we like Paul have our lives hidden with Christ in God, then it is His power and not ours that does the keeping secure. In this text, Col. 3:3, we find that as Christians we have a Treasure, a Treasurer, and a Treasury.

IV. The Substance Of It.

In Philippians 1:21 Paul states that the substance of His Christian life is Christ. He says, "For to me to live is Christ." Paul here announces the principle of life so far as he is concerned. He places the personal pronoun, to me, at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. It means more than in my opinion. It is not the statement of a theory or desire but of a realized fact. He speaks with the force, not of self-assertion, but of intense personal experience. Paul is able to say that life with him has come to mean Christ, no less and no more. He lived only to serve Christ and he had no conception of life apart from Christ.

To some, the substance of life is money. They make money the center and circumference of life. Consequently, it absorbs all the interests and activities of their lives. To some, the substance of life is fame. Apart from popularity life is devitalized to them. The loss of reputation to them means the beginning of death. To others, the substance of life is pleasure. They measure life by sensation. By many it has come to be accepted that a man's main business, and indeed his only business, is to enjoy life; to get as much out of it as possible in the way of pleasure, excitement, exercise of power, recreation and material good. Yet, according to the Bible that view of life is debasing and demoralizing one. It robs life of all its dignity, and manhood of its chief excellence.

Paul thought life was but another name for Christ. His whole being and activities were the Lord's. He lived only to serve Christ. He thought of Christ as the origin, the essence, the model, the aim, the end, and the reward of life. For Paul life was summed up in Christ. He lived a life of dependence on Christ. This dependence was humble, trustful, constant and real. He lived a life of communion with Christ. This communion was cordial, habitual, private, and public. He lived a life of conformity and devotedness to Christ. He made Christ the end of his life. "For me to live is Christ." His living was Christ living. It was his to daily reproduce the Christ life. To be able to do that his life had to be marked by submission, devotion and imitation.

When Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ" he meant:--

1. The spirit of Christ is the life of my life
2. The presence of Christ is the cheer of my life
3. The love of Christ was the power of my life
4. The will of Christ is the law of my life
5. The preaching of Christ is the business of my life
6. The glory of Christ is the end of my life

When he travelled, it was on Christ's errand; when he suffered, it was in Christ's service; when he spoke, his theme was Christ; and when he wrote Christ filled his letters. So absorbed was he in Christ and His service that he lived only to incarnate his Lord and manifest Him in every word and action.

To be able thus to live marks the highest possible attainment of the Christian. Paul actually attained such a life--the reproduction of the Christ life. This text in Philippians 1:21 implies:--

1. A life of entire self-surrender
2. A life busy at God's task
3. A life of doing duty, regardless of circumstances
4. A life of service for God's glory
5. A life of fruitfulness
6. A life of readiness for death

Life with all its burdens, darkness and sorrow is, after all, a good thing when one can truthfully say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ."

"Your Life"--that is your Treasure. "Is hid with Christ"--He is your Treasurer. "In God"--that is your Treasury. Your life is hidden for security. It is the security of a trusteeship which never fails and of a union which cannot be dissolved. He who is able to save a soul and life is also able to keep them saved.

III. The Sustainer Of It

Through Christ we are born again into newness of life, and being born again, we find in Jesus the nourishment for our new life. He who feeds upon Christ will always be sustained. Christ is the support of the life He has given, nourishing it with communications from Himself. Paul expressed that very forcibly in Galatians 2:20 by saying "Christ lives in me". Christ within means refreshment, enjoyment and abiding strength for the daily life. It means victory in the battle against Satan and sin. Herein is essential Christianity. It is the very genius of our faith. It is the vital breath of every saved man's experience.

1. Ceremony is not essentially Christianity

As useful as ceremonies are, they are no more true Christianity than are band instruments music. So, one can sing, read the Scriptures, pray, attend services, be baptized, and partake of the Lord's Supper and yet it may all be an outward ceremony covering a veneer. If, on the contrary, such expression is inspired by Christ within one, then it is a joyful manifestation of a vivacious inward faith.

2. Creed is not essentially Christianity

Knowledge is important and necessary but it is not salvation. One may contend for the inspiration of the Scriptures and for the truth of the vital themes of the Bible and yet all of his arguments may be as the chattering of parrots. But if this holy knowledge is infused with the spirit of the indwelling Christ, it means the testimony will be influential in producing eternal life.

3. Culture is not essentially Christianity

Education never renewed an unregenerate human being. Environment doesn't change the human heart, but the really Christian heart in which Christ lives will always change the environment in which it lives. How sublime is the culture of one in whose heart Christ Jesus has been enthroned.

4. Conduct is not essentially Christianity

Conduct often exemplifies a rigorous rule of living. In many respects one may imitate the pattern furnished in the life of Jesus, but it is just Phariseism unless it is fed from the inward fountain of Christ within. Much outward religion is brilliant indeed, but it is blinding and blighting to spiritual religion. But if this outward spectacle of beautiful conduct is the fruit and leaf of the vital inner presence of the Indweller, who said, "I am the life", then such fruit is as luscious as divine grace, and it will abide.

Christ is the very life of the soul. He is the vine from which the vital sap circulates to all the branches. Just as the flower grows on the plant and gets nourishment and sustenance from the plant so Paul and we, who are Christians, get our life and nourishment from "Christ who lives in us." He is the great sustainer of the ideal Christian life and the sustenance of the Christian life is dependent upon Him.