

THE CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST

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The Christianity of Christ by Robert F. Coyle

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ROBERT F. COYLE

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PREFATORY NOTE.

The sermons in this little volume are issued only at the urgent request of those who heard them. They were written amid the pressure of duty that belongs to a busy pastorate, and make no pretension to either homiletic or literary excellence. Their only value is in the precious truth they embody. The "Christianity of Christ" is a great field from which but a few small sheaves are here gathered. For whatever help the author has received, directly or indirectly, by suggestion or otherwise, in the preparation of these discourses, he makes grateful acknowledgment. In sending them forth he humbly prays that their reading may establish some in the "faith once delivered to the saints," and lead others to embrace it.

R. F. COYLE.

OAKLAND, CAL.,
December, 1891.



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[Introductory Sermon.]

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to *do* and *teach*.”—*Acts 1:1*.

TO learn what the religion of Christ is and what it requires, we must turn from the traditions of men to what Jesus himself did and taught. This we have very simply and beautifully recorded in the Gospels, the first three of which are accepted as genuine by skeptics and Christians alike. There is no respectable scholarship anywhere that presumes to discredit the historical testimony of Matthew, Mark and Luke; and it is to the last of these that our text refers when it speaks of the “former treatise.”

We have the Christianity of Calvin, and the Christianity of Arminius; the Christianity of Luther, and the Christianity of the Papacy; we have Christianity ritualized as among the High Church people of England, and Christianity rationalized as among the skeptics of Germany; we have it in a great variety of forms, bearing in every case the impress of the human

molds in which its raw material has been cast. I do not undertake to criticise any of these forms. That is something for which I am utterly incompetent, even if I had the self-assurance to attempt it. This, however, may be safely said that in so far as these different varieties of Christianity abide by that which has been revealed, they are true; and, in so far as they have been infiltrated with human speculation and tinctured with human prejudice, they contain more or less of error.

What I desire, let me say specifically, is to bring to your attention and write anew upon your hearts and mind the City of Christ as he himself has set it forth in precept and parable, in word and deed. Instead of drinking of the waters far down from their source, where they have been somewhat mixed and contaminated with alien streams, we are to go directly to the Fountain Head, flowing clear as crystal from the everlasting Rock, and quench our thirst there. Of course, in entering upon this study I cannot go into all the details of our Lord's life and sayings, but shall select for consideration that which He has made most salient and upon which He has laid most emphasis. In favor of this method it may be said, in the first place, that—

It will serve to direct our thought to Christianity in its *purity and simplicity*. In a recent number of one of the reviews that come to my study-table a story is told of a certain spring which for generations supplied an unfailling abundance of clear, sweet water to the

people of its neighborhood. The owner was justly proud of it; but many years ago he thought to make a shade near the spot, and so planted a tree close to the spring. The tree grew, and its shadow fell far and wide, and those who came on a summer noon to take a draught from the refreshing waters were sheltered from the fierce heat.

But, alas, the roots of the tree penetrated to the fountain, and the whole was tainted, and now the spring is neglected and its waters forsaken.

So men have often spoiled the truth as it is in Jesus by attempting to improve it. Instead of accepting it as it is in all its native plainness, unadorned and unalloyed, they have sought to subtract from it here and add to it there, and thus have either robbed it of its strength and glory, or turned thirsty souls from it altogether.

Some have endeavored to convince themselves and their fellow-men that there is really nothing to fear, that things are going to come out all right by-and-by, that the infinite goodness of the Almighty will somehow or other throw itself about every wanderer, and woo him safely home at last. They have planted the tree of a broad and easy salvation hard by the Fountain of Life, and the result has been that the roots of that tree have reached the spring, and have tainted its healing waters for multitudes of people. They can no longer endure a pure gospel, but must have it diluted and weakened and softened by human infiltrations.

God is love, and God's love is the arch that under-

lies the whole superstructure of Christianity, but that arch itself rests upon the two pillars of justice and mercy. The God who will allow men to plunge into all sorts of iniquity, and then weep over them and sweep them into heaven on the full and resistless tide of His compassion, regardless of any change of heart or character, is not the God of the Bible. A God too weak, too yielding, too sentimental to maintain the integrity of His own moral government, must surely sit upon a tottering throne. Let not man think that God's word can be made sweeter, more comforting and more attractive by planting trees of human speculation and philosophy on its margin. It is best just as it is,—best for comfort, best for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,—to make the man of God perfect, "thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" and to attempt to modify it, to add to it, or take from it, is to invite the plagues that are written therein. As no work of art can improve on the simplicity of nature, as no astronomy can add one beam to the sun, so no cleverness of human scholarship, no acuteness of human genius, can improve on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We turn, therefore, from human cisterns to drink out of the wells of God.

Passing from the vestibule with its jangling voices and clashing creeds, we shall enter the temple and walk and talk with Jesus. We go, not to the scribes, not to those who sit in Moses' seat, not to those who have been trained to look through glasses of a certain shade, and who are prone to see everything from a

certain ecclesiastical angle, but to the Great Teacher, to the ultimate Authority, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This will take us out of the haze and confusion, out of the blinding dust stirred up by opposing schools, into the clear shining of the Sun of Righteousness. It will lead us to the original sources, and give us our knowledge of "the old, old story" at first hand, and knowledge so obtained is always fresh and stimulating. Too much of our knowledge of the Gospel is like fruit long since plucked and labeled and put away upon the shelf. The rich flavor, the delicious taste, the juiciness it once had, are gone; but in this study I ask you to come with me and help me to shake the sweet and luscious grapes from the vine. Too long we have been content to take from this and that basket; but now we are to gather them in the very garden of the Lord. Here in the city we must get our apples and peaches and pears from the fruit-dealers as best we can, after they have come through half a dozen hands, perhaps, and we often have to pay high prices for a very poor article. But those of us who have lived in the country know how delightful it is to go back to the old farm, and, wandering out to the orchard, reach up and help ourselves, without money and without price. Well, something like that is what we propose to do in turning our attention to the Christianity of Christ.

A second thing that may be said in favor of this study is that it will give us *something connected and*