

Almost a Christian

From a treatise by M. Meade 1661

THERE ARE TWO QUESTIONS of very great importance which we should every one of us put to ourselves: "What am I?" and "Where am I?" Am I a child of God or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only a hypocrite under a profession? Am I yet in a natural state, or in a state of grace? Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam, or am I in the Root, Christ Jesus? Am I in the covenant of works that ministers only wrath and death, or am I in the covenant of grace that ministers life and peace? I press this upon you that are professors, because many rest in a notion of godliness and an outward show of religion, and yet remain in their natural condition. Many are hearers of the Word and not doers of it, and so deceive their own souls (James 1:22). He that slights the ordinances cannot be a true Christian, but yet it is possible a man may own them and yet be no true Christian.

Errors in the first foundation are very dangerous. If we be not right in the main, the fundamental work, if the foundation be not laid in grace in the heart, all our following profession comes to nothing. The house built upon a sandy foundation, though it may stand for a while, yet when the floods come and the winds blow and beat upon it, great will be the fall of it. There are many things like grace that are not grace. Now it is the likeness of things that deceives. Many take gifts for grace; common knowledge for saving knowledge; whereas a man may have great gifts and no grace, great knowledge and yet not know Jesus Christ. Some take common faith for saving; whereas a man may believe all the truths of the gospel, all the promises, all the threatenings, all the articles of the creed to be true, and yet perish for want of saving faith. Some take morality and restraining grace for renewing grace; whereas it is common to have sin much restrained where the heart is not at all renewed. Some are deceived with a half-work, making many mermaid Christians, or like Nebuchadnezzar's image, head of gold and feet of clay. Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls for want of this self-search. Satan will try us at one time or other. He will winnow us and sift us to the bottom, and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair. Nay, God Himself will search and try us, at the day of judgment especially, and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

Whatsoever a man's state be, whether he be altogether a Christian or not, yet it is good to examine his own heart. If he finds his heart good, his principles right and sound, this will be a matter of rejoicing. If he finds his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound, the discovery may be in order to a renewing. If a man have a disease upon him and know it, he may send to the physician in time, but what a sad vexation it will be not to see the disease till it be past cure! So for a man to be graceless and not see till it be too late, to think himself a Christian when he is not; that he is in the right way to heaven when he is in the ready way to hell, and yet not know it till a death bed or a judgment day confute his confidence, this is the most irrecoverable misery. These are the grounds upon which I press this duty of examining our state. Oh, that God would help us in doing this necessary duty!

You will say: But how shall I come to know whether I am almost or altogether a Christian? If a man may go so far and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a Christian indeed?

Christ is a King, Priest, Prophet, and all as Mediator. Without any one of those offices, the work of salvation could not have been completed. As Priest He redeems us, as Prophet He instructs us, as King He sanctifies and saves us. Therefore the apostle says He is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness and redemption flow from Him as Priest, wisdom as a Prophet, sanctification as a King. Now many embrace Christ as a Priest, but yet they own Him not as a King and Prophet. They like to share in His righteousness, but not to partake of His holiness. They would be redeemed by Him, but they would not submit to Him. They would be saved by His blood, but not submit to His power. Many love the privileges of the gospel, but not the duties of the gospel. Now these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ; for it is upon their own terms, but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished, but they can never be divided.

But the true Christian owns Christ in all His offices. He does not only close with Him as Jesus, but as Lord Jesus. He says with Thomas: "My Lord, and my God." He does not only believe in the merit of His death, but also conforms to the manner of His life. As he believes in Him, so he lives in Him.

The altogether Christian has a thorough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of obedience. Regeneration is a whole change. All old things are done away, all things become new. It is a perfect

work as to parts, though not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties but from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. A new piece of cloth never does well in an old garment, for the rent is made worse (Matt. 9:16). When a man's heart is thoroughly renewed by grace, the mind savingly enlightened, the conscience thoroughly convinced, the will truly humbled and subdued, the affections spiritually raised and sanctified, and when the mind and will and conscience and affections all join issue to help on and with the performance of the duties commanded, then is a man altogether a Christian. Here the almost Christian fails. He does the same duties, but he does them not in the same manner. If he pray, he regards not faith and fervency in prayer; if he hears, he does not mind Christ's rule: "Take heed how ye hear." If he obey, he looks not to the frame of his heart in obedience; therefore miscarries in all he does. These defects spoil all.

The altogether Christian is much in duty and yet much above duty in regard of dependence. He lives in his obedience, but not upon his obedience. He lives upon Christ and His righteousness. The almost Christian fails in this: He is much in duty, but not above it, but rests in it. He works for rest, and he rests in his works. He cannot come to believe and obey too. If he believes, then he thinks there is no need of obedience, and so casts off that; if he be much in obedience, then he casts off believing, and thinks there is no need of that. He cannot say with David: "I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments" (Psa 119:166). The altogether Christian is universal in his obedience. He does not obey one command and neglect another, do one duty and cast off another; but he has respect to all the commandments. He endeavours to leave every sin, and love every duty. The almost Christian fails in this. His obedience is partial and piece-meal. If he obeys one command, he breaks another. The duties that least cross his lust, he is much in; but those that do, he lays aside. The pharisees fasted, paid tithes etc., but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression; they "devoured widows' houses;" they were unnatural to parents.

The altogether Christian makes God the chief end of all his performances. Now the almost Christian fails in this. For he that was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in that it stills and serves to quiet conscience. Now it is very dangerous to quiet conscience with anything but the blood of Christ. It is bad being at peace till Christ speaks peace. Nothing can truly pacify conscience less than that which pacifies God, and that is the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14). Now the almost Christian quiets conscience but not with the blood of Christ; it is not a peace flowing from Christ's propitiation, but a peace rising from a formal profession; not a peace of Christ's giving, but a peace of his own making. He silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness and so makes it give way to an undoing soul-destroying peace. He rocks it asleep in the cradle of duties, and probably never wakes more till death or judgment. Ah, my brethren, it is better to have a conscience never quiet than quieted any way but by the blood of sprinkling. A good conscience is the greatest affliction to the saints, and an evil conscience, quiet, is the greatest judgment to sinners.