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Studies in the Life of the Christian

Henry T. (Henry Thorne) Sell

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PREFACE

These studies consider the questions: What did Christ teach? What is the standpoint of Christianity? What is a Christian? What ought he to believe and why? How shall he regard the Bible and the church? What should be his relations to God, to his fellow men, to his home, to society, to business, and to the state?

The strength and reasonableness of the great main positions of Christian faith and service are constructively presented. Careful attention is also given to the practical application of Christian principles to the perplexing problems of modern life.

This book is for use in adult Bible classes, Bible study circles, pastors' training classes in the essentials of Christianity, educational institutions and private study.

It is uniform with the author's "Bible Studies in the Life of Christ," "Bible Studies in the Life of Paul" and his other Bible study books.

HENRY T. SELL.
Chicago.

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STUDY I

CHRIST, THE GREAT TEACHER

Scripture references: Matthew 4:23; 5:1,2; 7:29; 13:54; 26:55; 28:19,20; Mark 1:21,22; 4:1,2; 6:6; Luke 5:3; 11:1; 19:47; John 6:59; 7:14; 8:28.

THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY

The heart of the Christian religion is found in Jesus Christ. If we desire to know what Christianity is and of what elements it is composed we must look to Him and His teachings. He is the great source of our knowledge of what God, man, sin, righteousness, duty and salvation are.

Our interest in the books of the Old Testament lies in the fact that they lead up to Him. We study the books of the New Testament because of their vivid portrayal of His life, teachings, death and resurrection. With Jesus Christ a new era dawned for the world with new principles, ideas and aspirations for humanity. His teachings touch every department of human life and, where they are accepted and followed, they show their marvellous transforming power. There can be no more important study than what Jesus Christ said and did while upon this earth. "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

WHAT CHRIST TAUGHT

There are five great lines which His teachings followed; they have to do with God, man, sin, salvation and the future life.

The Right Relation of God to Man and Man to God.—How does God regard man? and, How shall man look upon God? are ques-

tions upon which the best thought of men in all ages has been expended. Upon the answers given have been founded all sorts of religious and philosophical systems.

Man in this great universe desires to know in what relation he stands to the Author of it. Is man only a creature of fate? What does God care, great as He is, for one man?

Jesus Christ recognized this desire of man to know his standing with God and He proclaimed not only the power, but the Fatherhood of God. When He taught His disciples how to pray He began His immortal prayer not with "Great God of the universe," or "Creator of all things," but "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Here was a new conception of God.

Through Christ man comes into personal relations with God as the Father (John 16:27) who cares for him as a son. Man is to love and forgive as God loves and forgives in this relation of Father (Matthew 22:37; 6:14,15). Man is to do all that he does as in the sight of his Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1-26). God is made known as supreme love (John 3:16).

The Right Relation of Man to Man.—There are many causes which divide men into classes, castes and nationalities. Once divided men begin to develop a class feeling and pride which tend to deepen and widen the gulfs which separate them from each other.

With the truth proclaimed by Christ of the "Fatherhood of God" came also the great truth of the "Brotherhood of Man." The true relation of man to man, no matter what the caste, class, employment or nationality, is that of sons who have a common father. The second great commandment given by Christ is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). When He took the example for a good neighbour He selected a Samaritan, a man of an alien race. Men are naturally inclined to do good to those who treat them well and whose help they need; but Christ, in carrying out this new law of brotherly love said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-48). It is only through this love of man for man, no matter what the class or condi-

tion, that right relations between men can ever be established and maintained.

The Right Relation of Man to Sin.—Man violates his sense of righteousness and justice. He transgresses the laws of God and his nature. Man's sin is everywhere doing its destroying work. There is individual, social, corporate and national sin (Romans 3:23). This fact of sin is not only set forth in the Bible in unmistakable terms, but every government recognizes it in its laws and courts of justice. Society puts up its bars to protect itself against the sinner, and all literature proclaims the evil results of sin.

What ought to be man's attitude to sin? Shall he make light of it and call it a necessary part of living? Shall he continue in it, although he recognizes its evil results, and draw others with him into greater and larger violations of the laws of God and man? These are practical questions. Some temporize with sin and say, "Let us lead outwardly correct lives, but within certain bounds we will do as we please"; hence arises the practice of secret sinning.

Christ came declaring that man's relation to sin should be uncompromising. He used vigorous language in regard to sin. He said, "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or feet to be cast into everlasting fire" (Matthew 18:7,8). But Jesus in thus advocating heroic treatment for sin was but doing what eminent surgeons are advising every day in regard to certain dangerous bodily diseases. Jesus also laid His finger on the source of sin when He declared, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:19). A man must think evil before he does evil, and hence the emphasis which Jesus placed upon keeping the heart clean.

The Right Relation of Man to Salvation.—Man feels his inclination to do evil and, seeing also the degradation wrought by it, desires to be saved from it. The cry has gone up from many hearts to be free not only from the power of sin but from the desire to commit sin. No man can save himself. He may succeed in a certain outward

reformation and correctness of habit and speech, but he cannot control the thoughts and inclinations of his own heart.

The special mission of Jesus Christ was to place man in the right relation of salvation from his sins and to show Himself the Saviour of Man. It was declared of Him before His birth, "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). He said at the last supper, "This is My blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). He had power to forgive sins (Mark 2:10). He said not, "I show you the way," but "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). There is here a mighty spiritual power which can save man from sin and can keep him from the desire to sin. It is only as man enters into personal relations with Jesus Christ, repenting of his sin and having faith in Him, that the burden of sin is lifted from his heart (Matthew 6:33; 11:28,30).

The Right Relation of Man to Death and the Future Life.—The facts of death and of what comes after cannot be set aside; they must be faced. All forms of religion and systems of philosophy have striven to sustain and comfort men at their trying hour of need. The trouble has been, however, to find any certain ground of the hope of a future life upon which to rest. No man has been able to do more than present a good argument, in regard to the hereafter, which might or might not be true.

But when Jesus Christ came He was able to speak with authority and power. He plainly, in His description of the last judgment scene (Matthew 25:31-46), showed the relation of man's faith and actions in this world to his state in the world to come. He declared that a man need have no fear of death or the hereafter who trusted in Him. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11:25,26). "In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). In a supreme trust in Jesus Christ all dread of death and the hereafter may be taken away and man may enter into a right relation to immortality in this life.

FORMS OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

He used many forms in placing the truth before men. He paid great regard to the timeliness and the manner of presenting what He had to teach. Upon many occasions the multitudes were so captivated by His words and works that they followed Him out into desert places.

Direct Discourse.—The Sermon on the Mount is a good example of this teaching. Here He taught plainly, (1) "The nature and constitution of the Kingdom" (Matthew 5:1-16); in itself (blessedness, vs. 1-12) and in its relation to the world (vs. 13-16). (2) The law of the kingdom (Matthew 5:17-7:12); general principles (vs. 17-20), the moral law (vs. 21-48), religious duty (6:1-18), and duty in relation to the world and the good and evil things in it (6: 19-7:12). (3) Invitations to enter the kingdom (Matthew 7:13-29).

He was equally plain in regard to His own mission. He declared Himself to be the Son of God and claimed equality with the Father (John 5:18-23). He said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). He affirmed His preexistence and that He had glory with the Father before the world was (John 17:5) and whoever had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9). At His trial, in answer to the question of the High Priest, He declared that He was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-66). After His resurrection He told His disciples, in sending them forth to their mission, that all power was given Him in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

Parables (Mark 4:2; Matthew 13:3).—Christ spoke in parables to convey and send home to the hearts of His hearers the truth, just as Nathan employed the parable of the lamb in the case of David to make him acknowledge his sin. They were adapted to the capacities of His hearers. Each parable had some great central truth.

The parables have been classified as:

1. The Theoretic, which teach general truths concerning the kingdom of God, such as, "The Sower" (Matthew 13:3-23), "The Treasure" and "The Pearl" (Matthew 13:44,45).

2. Grace, setting forth the divine goodness and grace as the source of salvation and law of Christian life, such as, "The Lost Coin," "The Lost Sheep" and "The Lost Boy" (Luke 15).

3. The Prophetic or Judgment parables, which proclaim the righteousness of God as the supreme ruler, rewarding men according to their works, such as, "The Wicked Husbandmen" (Matthew 21:33-41), and "The Ten Virgins" (Matthew 25:1-13).

Miracles (John 3:2; 2:23; 6:2; Mark 1:32-34).—Christ appealed to His works as an evidence of His divine mission (John 10:38). Miracles are possible, probable and credible, when we believe there is a personal God, who is the Supreme Ruler of the universe and that He cares for man.

The thirty-six miracles of which an account is given in the four gospels have been divided into three classes; their teaching is important:

1. The Nature miracles show the divinity of Christ. The feeding of the five thousand men (Matthew 14:15-21) reveals His creative power, and the stilling of the storm on the Lake of Galilee (Matthew 8:23-27) His divine command over Nature and its forces.

2. The Healing miracles reveal not only His divinity but His humanity and compassion. They set forth the one being who loves the human race with His whole heart. This class of miracles shows the mission of Jesus to be the extinction of sin and disease, and the redemption of man, body and soul.

3. The Moral miracles are the life of Christ and its effect upon the world.

Example of Living and Dying, the teaching of which is elaborated in the Acts and Epistles (Acts 1:8; 2:31-41; 13:23-42; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-20).

HOW CHRIST TAUGHT

With Authority (Matthew 7:28,29; Mark 1:22).—He declared that "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). He did not quote precedents but said, "I say unto you."

With Persuasiveness and Love (Matthew 11:28-30; 19:13,14; John 3:17; Luke 9:56).—People of all classes gathered about Him, in the

marketplaces, in the fields and by the seaside. They followed Him into desert places to hear the gracious words that fell from His lips.

With Originality (John 12:46).—He taught a new philosophy of sorrow and suffering, a new law of self-sacrifice and a new law of love for fallen humanity.

With Promise (Matthew 28:20; John 14:12-19; 16:1-14; Acts 1:4-8).—His work He declared was not to end with His resurrection and ascension, but was to continue. He promised to endue His disciples with power from on high in their task of converting a world. This promise of divine help was also extended to all His disciples in their effort to lead pure and righteous lives.

QUESTIONS

What can be said about the Founder of Christianity and His teachings? What did Christ teach; about the right relation of God to man, man to man, man to sin, man to salvation and man to death and the hereafter? What can be said of the forms of Christ's teaching; direct discourse (give examples), parables (give the teaching of the three classes), miracles (give the teaching of the three classes) and example of living and dying? How did Christ teach? What can be said of His authority, persuasiveness, originality and promise?

STUDY II

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD

Scripture References: Genesis 1:1; 17:1; Exodus 34:6,7; 20:3-7; Deuteronomy 32:4; 33:27; Isaiah 40:28; 45:21; Psalm 90:2; 145:17; 139:1-12; John 1:1-5; 1:18; 4:23,24; 14:6-11; Matthew 28:19,20; Revelation 4:11; 22:13.

WHO IS GOD?

How Shall We Think of God?—"Upon the conception that is entertained of God will depend the nature and quality of the religion of any soul or race; and in accordance with the view that is held of God, His nature, His character and His relation to other beings, the spirit and the substance of theology will be determined." When one man says, "I believe in God" he may have in mind an entirely different conception of God from another man who uses the same expression. There is a Christian idea of God and there are many non-Christian ideas about God; it is the latter which keep men from heartily engaging in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wrong Conceptions of God. — Some of these are:

1. That He is a blind fate or unknowable force. Personality is denied, and it is asserted that this great force neither sees, cares nor even knows what men do or do not do.

2. Even if this great force be personal, and knows what is going on amongst men, He is perfectly indifferent to right or wrong actions.

3. God knows and sees all that is going on, but He has wound up this universe like a great clock. To help or succour any man in his distress would disarrange the whole system. Natural law must have its course; it is useless to pray.

4. God is revengeful or weak; in the first place men seek to keep out of His way, in the second they do not care.

When men adopt these wrong ideas of God and cherish them they are fashioned after them in life and character. Here are the stumbling-blocks which need to be removed before men, who think this way, can be brought into sympathy with the Church of Christ. Man can never come into personal loving relations with a Universal Substance or Force, no matter how mighty it is.

Right Conceptions of God are necessary for the true worship of the Almighty, for the exercise of proper conduct to our fellow men and for the upbuilding of our own spiritual life. Never was there a time when the great fundamental positions of the Bible, in regard to God, needed to be more plainly stated than to-day. When men stand firmly upon these positions a whole host of perplexities and anxieties will take their departure.

The Christian Conception of God has been thus expressed, "God is the Personal Spirit, perfectly good, who in holy love, creates, sustains and orders all." The essential matters covered in this statement are:

1. The nature of God. He is the Personal Spirit (Exodus 3:14; John 4:24) who can enter into personal relations with man, and who hears and answers prayer.

2. The character of God. He is perfectly good, pure and holy (Psalm 25:8; Nahum 1:7; Romans 2:4). Man may have perfect confidence, however matters may seem to him to go wrong with his imperfect vision of the world and the happenings in it, that there is a good God who governs all in the interest of righteousness (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

3. The relation of God to all other existences. He creates, sustains and orders all (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19).

4. The motive of God in His relation to all other existence; it is holy love (1 John 4:8).

Supreme power, personality, intelligence and perfect goodness are then the great revealed truths which the Bible presents to us as the proper conceptions which we should have of God.

But if it is desired to know what God is like we look at once to Jesus Christ. He is supreme intelligence. He has power over nature and men and He uses all with the motive and purpose of a holy love. We know that He controlled nature, when on earth, and not nature Him. He taught the great love of God for man. He made it plain that men were not in a relation as atoms of matter in a whirlpool of action, but as sons to a loving father.

GOD IS SUPREME

God's Attitude to the Universe.—The Scriptures are consistent in the statement, many times made, that God is the source of all things. He brings all things into being and sustains all by the word of His power. His is a work of perpetual administration. But God is not wholly occupied in conducting the affairs of the universe, neither does it exhaust His possibilities (Psalm 8:1; 148:13). He is greater than the universe. God, says Dr. Clarke, in his "Outline of Christian Theology," is like the spirit of a man in his body, which is greater than his body, able to direct his body, and capable of activities that far transcend the physical realm. God is a free spirit, personal, self-directing, unexhausted by His present activities. This statement affirms both the immanence and the transcendence of God. By the immanence of God is meant that He is everywhere and always present in the universe, nowhere absent from it, never separated from its life. By His transcendence is meant—not as is sometimes represented—that He is outside and views the universe from beyond and above, but that He is not shut up in it or limited by it, not required in His totality to maintain and order it. By both together is meant that He is a free spirit inhabiting the universe, but surpassing it, immanent as always in the universe, and transcendent, as always independent of its limitations and able to act upon it.

God's Attitude to Man.—God has not only placed man at the head of the animal world, but has endowed him with qualities which make him its lord and master. God is more than the Creator of man. He is his Father, Saviour and Friend.

God comes to man in the attitude, of The Supreme Spiritual Being, approaching a spiritual being who is of priceless value. Jesus

Christ makes this truth very plain. He everywhere teaches the great worth of the life of a man and that God is seeking to come directly into touch with this life which is so precious in His sight (John 3:16; Matthew 10:30,31). This life is not the physical but the spiritual which is the real life of a man. "Not what one has, but what one is, gives the true measure of a man." He said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36,37). "Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?" (Matthew 6:25). "In harmony with this view of the worth of life," Professor Stevens in "The Theology of the New Testament," says, "Jesus taught that the most humble and insignificant person, on whom men set no value, is precious in the sight of God. These little ones, be they children or humble believers, are not the despised (Matthew 18:10). The least important person who goes astray from goodness excites the pity and solicitude of God, and He seeks him and brings him back as the shepherd, leaving his ninety-nine sheep, goes into the mountains in eager search after the one that has wandered away" (Luke 15:14).

The hope of everlasting life is bound up with the recognition by man of the priceless value of the spiritual life and of the necessity of his coming into harmony (in thought, will and action) with God's plans for him (John 17:3; Luke 12:16-21; John 1:4; 3:15,34-36; 6:35,47; 14:6).

"GOD IS THE PERSONAL SPIRIT"

"God is Spirit," these words of Christ, uttered to the Samaritan woman (John 4:24), have reference to the nature of God and show us how we are to think of Him. He is not limited to a particular place of worship, but is to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).

When we speak of a spirit we mean a being who has intelligence and will; one who thinks, feels and wills. God the great intelligence and will can enter into communication with man who, while he has a body, has also a spirit possessing intelligence and a will. We need not define the difference between God and matter, "if only we give