

What Is Christianity?

A Topical Sermon

SERMONS WORTH REPEATING

by David Roper

In 1958, Gayle Oler held a meeting at the Eastside congregation in Midwest City, Oklahoma. At the time I was in my third year of my first full-time work with the Village congregation in Oklahoma City and always on the edge of desperation regarding next Sunday's sermons. I was present when brother Oler presented a simple lesson on "What Is Christianity?" He took an item I had often seen as a bulletin insert and expanded it into a most practical lesson. I took notes, made a minor change here and there, shared it with the Village congregation and then with other congregations. It has become a favorite lesson with me through the years. Once when I was putting together a collection of sermons, I asked permission to include this one, but brother Oler had plans to use it in a publication of his own. Those plans did not come to fruition before his death, and recently Mary Oler gave permission to include the sermon in this series. I hope you enjoy it.

Today we want to ask a simple question, yet one that is extremely important—"What is Christianity?"

If I were to ask each of you this question. I am sure I would get some very feasible answers. One might say. "It is doing the will of the Lord." And certainly it is that. Jesus asked. "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Another might say, "It is being a member of the church." And certainly it is that. But that alone is not sufficient, for Jesus wrote to the church in Sardis and said: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead" (Revelation 3:1). Being a member of the church without *living* one's Christianity will profit nothing.

Let me suggest this definition of Christianity: *Christianity is a conviction of heart with regard to Jesus Christ that will manifest itself in every area of human activity.* In other words, Christianity is a way of life that finds expression *wherever* one may be.

I. CHRISTIANITY IN THE HOME IS KINDNESS.

The instruction of Paul is this: "And be ye *kind* one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32; italics mine).

Christianity recognizes that we are all sinful creatures and have the flaws common to mankind. Therefore, Christianity is not intolerant and impatient but *kind* and considerate toward all. Especially is this true in the *home*. The individual who, upon entering his own home, would lay aside the mantle of kindness and become impatient, unloving, intolerant, is a *fraud*, a hypocrite.

I believe it was President Wilson who said, if, because of your religion, your children, your husband or wife, your servants, and even your *house cat* do not have a better life, then there is a question as to whether you are really a Christian or not!

Has Christianity made a difference in *your* home? In the home, Christianity is *kindness*.

II. CHRISTIANITY IN BUSINESS IS HONESTY.

Hear Romans 12:17: "Take thought for things *honorable* in the sight of all men." (Italics mine.)

A Christian is *honest* in all of his dealings. What does this mean? It means all of his transactions are across the *top* of the table. It means he does not deceive or leave the wrong impression. It means he always tells the truth—whether filling out his income tax or selling automobiles or insurance.

The trouble with those who tell "little white lies" is that they soon become *color-blind*. God recognizes no shades of lying. John said: "But . . . *all* liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8; italics mine).

The *Christian* businessman does *not* believe that "all is fair in love, war, and a good business deal." He believes in Christ, who taught the pre-eminence of *truth over error* and never practiced deceit.

If you do not have the courage to be *honest* and to tell the *truth*, then just mark off the idea of going to heaven! Do not try to deceive yourself;

it cannot be done. A lying tongue can never sing the praises of God throughout eternity.

Christianity in business is *honesty*.

III. CHRISTIANITY IN PLAY IS FAIRNESS.

Some have the idea that Christianity allows no recreation or relaxation. But Jesus Himself said: "Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

In our recreation, Christianity demands that we be fair—to God, to ourselves, to others.

Let me show you what I mean. A man enjoys driving his automobile for relaxation. That is fine. But then he deranges his mind with alcohol. He goes driving down the same streets, weaving from one side of the street to the other. A policeman stops him. "But I was just having a little fun, Officer," he says. "Yes, but you can't have your fun *at the expense of others*," the officer replies. Such a man is not fair to God, to himself, or to others.

A boy gets an air rifle and goes up and down the street shooting out street lamps and windows. Someone stops him. "But I was just having a little fun," he says. "Yes," that person could reply, "but you were having it *at the expense of others*." Remember: "Your freedom ends where the other fellow's nose begins!"

Christianity demands fairness to all. "Take thought for things honorable in the sight of *all men*" (Romans 12:17; italics mine).

Sometimes members of the church say, "What I do for fun is nobody else's business!" Not so! In the church, we are so close that when one rejoices, all rejoice, and when one weeps, all weep (Romans 12:15). We are bound together. We "are one body in Christ, and . . . members one of another" (Romans 12:5). What concerns *one*, concerns all.

Gambling, drinking, dancing—all are wrong for you. They embarrass the church and hurt your family. Don't have your fun at God's expense, the church's expense, or your family's expense!

In play, Christianity is *fairness*.

IV. CHRISTIANITY IN SOCIETY IS COURTESY.

By "society" we do not mean the vanity of vainglory of life. Rather we simply mean the relationship of man to man. Paul said, "For none

of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7).

Truly, "no man is an island entire of itself." Each of us is constantly rubbing elbows with others. How important it is that we learn to live with others!

Once an unmannerly American told a Frenchman that French politeness was just wind. The Frenchman replied, "Neither is there anything but wind in a pneumatic tire, yet it eases wonderfully the jolts along life's highway." In the same way, a little common *courtesy* can make every pathway a little smoother and happier!

There are many reasons why a Christian is courteous. We realize, for instance, that all are made in the image of God. We must, therefore, respect one another as a part of God's creation. Again, as Christians, we are God's representatives on earth. Our conduct must be worthy of God, Christ, and the gospel. "I . . . beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Ephesians 4:1).

The story is told of President Garfield walking down the street with a friend. When they met an old black man who tipped his hat, the President tipped his hat back. "What?" exclaimed his prejudiced friend. "Does the President tip his hat to a Negro?" Garfield replied, "I never permit any citizen to be more courteous than the President." The President recognized his place in government. As Christians we have a *higher* calling. We should be the most respectful, most patient, most kind, most courteous of all people!

Did you ever hear a man say this: "I'm hoppin' mad! Just wait 'til I get a chance to tell 'em off!" Or hear a woman say, "I'm going to give her a piece of my mind!" (Incidentally, don't ever give anybody a piece of your mind—you *may not be able to spare it*.) Or hear of someone seeing someone else coming down the street and ducking into a store to keep from meeting them? Or see someone curl up their lip and snap and snarl? *Such have never learned the essence of Christianity.*

Let me ask you something: If a yellow dog came up and barked at you, would you drop to your knees and bark back? Probably you would not for at least two reasons: (1) Some would have a hard time getting back up(!), and (2) *Who wants to stoop to the level of a yellow dog?* Yet aren't we doing the same thing when we try to "get back" at people and say we will "treat others as they

treat us"? What we need is more consideration in this old world! Brother Gayle Oler said, "We have too many people that believe in a yellow-dog religion!"

Someone has defined courtesy as "love expressed in little ways." Let us have more *courtesy* in society.

V. CHRISTIANITY IN WORK IS THOROUGHNESS.

There is much work to be done, both in the church and the world. Christianity demands that if the work be good, we will *do our best*, we will be *thorough*. In the Old Testament, these instructions were given: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with [all] thy might; . . ." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). This same sentiment is echoed in the New Testament: "Whatsoever ye do, work *heartily*, as unto the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23; italics mine).

The trouble today is that after all is said and done, usually a great deal more is said than done!

Paul tells us each shall be judged according to "the things *done* in the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10; italics mine), not the things *talked* about. We have a lot of *sound brethren* in the church. The only trouble is that some are *sound* asleep and others are *all sound*. Too many are like the flock of geese around the bale of hay. They talk as if they are going to eat it up, but they are not!

Again, to the faithful, the Lord said in Matthew 25:23, "*Well done*, good and faithful servant: . . ." (Italics mine.) He did not say, "Well planned. . . ." If plans were the criterion, we would be right at the top. He did not say, "Well talked about, . . ." or "Well intentioned, . . ." If one of these were the statement, we would be in good shape. We usually have a whole stockroom of these. But it was "*Well done*"!

All of these phrases imply the idea of *carrying through* on our tasks. How we need this encouragement. We start a million projects. How many do we *carry through* on? Too many of us are like the church at Sardis. To this church, Jesus said: "Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected [*completed*] before my God" (Revelation 3:2).

So many things are *started* while nothing is *finished*!

The apostle Paul said: "One thing I *do*, . . ." (Philippians 3:13; italics mine). He did not say, "One thing I dabble at, . . ." But it was "One thing I *do*"!

And Jesus, our perfect example, said, speaking to God. "I glorified thee on the earth, having *accomplished* [*finished*, KJV] the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4; italics mine).

We not only need initiative in the church, we also need "finish-iative"! Christianity in work is *thoroughness*.

VI. CHRISTIANITY TOWARD THE FORTUNATE IS "CONGRATULATIONS."

How human it is to be jealous and envious! We say, "You have a better house than I have" or "You are more popular than I." Too many of us are like the old farmer in hard times who said, "I ain't got a grain of corn in my crib, but, one thing I'm thankful for—*no one else has either!*"

Throughout God's word, godly men in less fortunate circumstances never wished on others their own situation. Job did not wish *his* woes on *others*. And Paul said to *rejoice* with them that *rejoice*.

Christianity *rejoices* when others are blessed. Christianity toward the fortunate is *congratulations*.

VII. CHRISTIANITY TOWARD THE UNFORTUNATE IS HELPFULNESS.

Jesus set the unselfish example. Matthew 20:28 says, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, . . ."

In Luke 10, Jesus told the story of "The Good Samaritan" to impress this lesson (vv. 30-37).

The priest and the Levite represented the religionists and leaders of Christ's day.

The priest came by. Can't you see him standing over that man saying: "Oh, friend, I feel so sorry for you. I could weep a bucketful of tears! *I'll send you a get-well card*. Bless you brother." "And . . . he passed by on the other side" (v. 31).

Too often we salve our consciences by little acts that do not lift any loads. An Indian man was once reported as saying, "You are always bidding me 'Godspeed,' but you never give me anything to speed on." So it is too often with our so-called "acts" of helping.

Next the Levite came by possibly saying, "I wonder who he is? Well, he's not a member of

our congregation. Good enough for him anyway—he certainly didn't use good judgment in bringing his possessions out in this robber-infested wilderness. Wonder why his folks haven't taken care of him? Or the Chamber of Commerce? Or the government? Or the Community Chest? Or the Boy Scouts? I surely would like to help you, brother, but I have my own family to think about, and I have to go take care of my job. Maybe someone else will come along."

Finally, along came the Samaritan. He was a "cross-breed"—a rejected kinfolk of the Jews. He was from "the wrong side of the tracks." The Jews wouldn't even let their kids play with Samaritan kids. He could easily have justified his doing nothing, but he saw this as his opportunity. And *he did what he could*.

Jesus said: "*Go, and do thou likewise!*" (Luke 10:37; italics mine).

Toward the unfortunate, Christianity is *helpfulness*.

VIII. CHRISTIANITY TOWARD THE OFFENDER IS FORGIVENESS.

Too many of us, when offended, run to the phone and see just how quickly we can tell the most people about what has happened to us. But listen to Matthew 18:15: "And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault *between thee and him alone*: . . ." (Italics mine.) In other words, if you are not big enough to go to the offender, *then keep your mouth shut!*

Brother Gayle Oler said, "I used to be very sensitive. I wore my feelings on my cuff. But then I read Matthew 18:15 and now you couldn't offend me if you wanted to. I have a hide like an elephant. Why? Because if I get offended by you, I can't have the pleasure of telling the preacher,

the elders, the deacons, or *even my wife*, until I go to *you*. So you just can't offend me!"

If you are offended, don't advertise—*minimize and localize!*

Jesus would have us learn *to forgive* those who sin against us. Remember that He teaches us that if we do not forgive those who sin against us, then neither will God forgive us (Matthew 6:15)!

Christianity toward the offender is *forgiveness*.

CONCLUSION

Other areas of life could be mentioned, but these areas will show you what we mean by: "Christianity is a conviction of heart with regard to Jesus Christ that will manifest itself in *every* area of human activity."

Christianity in the home is kindness. Christianity in business is honesty. Christianity in play is fairness. Christianity in society is courtesy. Christianity in work is thoroughness. Christianity toward the fortunate is "congratulations." Christianity toward the unfortunate is helpfulness. Christianity toward the offender is forgiveness.

Let me challenge you today to take a little inventory. *Are you truly a Christian in every sense of the word?* Once a little boy asked his father what a "Christian" was. The father replied, "Well, a Christian is one who has given his life to Jesus and who is thus kind, honest, fair, courteous, thorough, not jealous, helpful, forgiving [all the things we have mentioned]." The little boy thought about it awhile and then asked, "*Daddy, have I ever seen one?*" Let us put it this way—when someone looks at us, at our hearts, and our lives, *have they seen Christians?*

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