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The Creed of Jesus.

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Creed or Deed? — In a recent issue of the *Presbyterian* (July 31, 1924) the editor, under the heading, "Doctrines as Tests," touches upon a subject of vital present-day interest. He writes: —

"It is popular to decry doctrines as tests — whether the question, What is Christianity? or the question, *What is a Christian?* is under consideration. When a reason is given, it is usually to the effect that *doctrines are not essential to Christianity*. Some allege that Christianity consists of its facts rather than its doctrines, while others affirm that it is *life, not doctrines*. If either of these allegations is sound, it is evident that doctrines belong to that which is secondary rather than that which is primary to the Christian religion. If such is the case, the rejection of doctrinal tests merits universal approval. Unless doctrines enter into the very substance of Christianity, both as a system of thought and as a way of life, it is evident, to say the least, that doctrinal tests are inadequate.

"It is frequently said that Christianity consists of *its facts rather than its doctrines*. It is impossible, however, to have the *facts of Christianity* apart from its doctrines. Give up the doctrines, and at the same time we give up the facts. There is no sieve discoverable that will strain out the doctrines and save the facts. . . .

"It is frequently said that *Christianity is life, not doctrine*. What is meant is that doctrines are secondary in Christianity, that they are but the intellectual expression of the life that precedes them. From this point of view, doctrines are the products, rather than the producers, of the Christian life. As such they possess only a relative significance, and one set of doctrines may be as good as another. At any rate, the life is the one thing of vital importance, and as long as it flourishes, the doctrines may be allowed to take care of themselves."

The matter treated here is certainly one of weighty importance. Should doctrines serve as tests of one's Christianity? Can Christianity exist without profession of the specific Christian doctrines? Or can Christianity be built upon a code of ethics or upon deeds? The modern claim is that doctrines are not essential to Christianity. This claim is advanced not only by preachers and teachers of theology, but also by laymen. In fact, it is largely the laymen who to-day demand that Christianity be divorced from doctrine and based upon character and deeds. The following letter, addressed to one of the great newspapers of our country, is an illustration of this present-day tendency:—

"In the present controversy in religious circles there is a statement made by the so-called Fundamentalists which fails to ring true to thinking people. It is a statement which has been made in various forms by different clergymen, but the gist of it is that '*if Christianity is merely a code of ethics, it is useless and must collapse.*'

"I fail to see the force of this. Religion is a force to guide our lives and conduct far more than it is a matter of theological belief. In the present day people are realizing as never before that it is *deed rather than creed* which should be emphasized.

"The Great Teacher *preached no theology*. He taught a code of ethics which has never been surpassed as a guide of life seven days in the week. According to Him the only things that counted were the love of God (*i. e.*, reverence for the higher things of life) and the brotherhood of man (*i. e.*, going about doing good). The great influence of Jesus as a moral and ethical Guide and Teacher lies not so much in whether He was a supernatural being as in the fact that He lived a life and set an example worthy of reverence and love from any one.

"There is no point in sitting down and bemoaning the fact that the young people will not go to church. The thing which must be done is to make *religion reasonable, logical, and sound*, and they will fill our churches. Not so long ago I attended a liberal church in New York, and as I went out, I heard two young men (evidently students) remarking that at last they had found a church that taught something they could believe and use. In this, it seems to me, lies the secret of workable religion. It is time to forget one-day creed and concentrate on seven-day deeds."

This letter is significant, as it presents the issue in clear terms. The author avers that in the present day people are realizing as never before that it is deeds rather than creeds which should be

emphasized. "The Great Teacher preached no theology. He taught a code of ethics which has never been surpassed as a guide of life seven days in the week. . . . The great influence of Jesus as a moral and ethical Guide and Teacher lies not so much in whether He was a supernatural being as in the fact that He lived a life and set an example worthy of reverence and love from any one." In these words the writer virtually demands that the doctrines and religious teachings of Christ be rejected, and that men be taught merely to follow the life of Jesus as the way to salvation.

In the introduction to a lecture entitled, "The Social Teaching of Jesus Christ," the writer, a prominent theological professor in our country, says: "Jesus of Nazareth is the supreme ethical authority. When we come to receive from Him our final awards, He will not ask, . . . 'What was your doctrine of atonement? What was your mode of baptism?' But He will ask, 'What did you do with Me? Did you accept Me as your personal standard of character? Were you a practical every-day Christian?' Christian ethics will be the judgment test."

This only repeats the thought stated above that "religion is a force to guide our lives and conduct far more than it is a matter of theological belief," and that "it is deed rather than creed which should be emphasized."

This Attitude a Total Denial of Christianity. — This attitude of Modernists towards Christ is in direct opposition to traditional Christianity. It is, in fact, a total denial of what believing Christians in the past have regarded as the essence of Christianity. It is a substitute for Christianity, as it puts in the place of Christ, the divine Savior of the world, a human Christ, a mere teacher of morals. For the salvation by faith in the vicarious atonement of the world's divine Redeemer, it substitutes salvation by work-righteousness. This is claimed to be a superior viewpoint. In this way Modernists would fill the churches — by making religion "reasonable, logical, and sound." In view of these facts it is necessary for believing Christians to take a firm stand and to point out the utter fallacy of this position. That Christ taught a code of ethics and emphasized holiness of life each day of the week, believing Christians readily admit. However, that such teaching of ethics was the real and primary purpose of Christ's coming means to misunderstand the entire Gospel of Christ's redemption. Christ did not come to teach a new code of ethics, but "to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19, 10. His preaching was

centered in the message of repentance and faith. Mark 1, 14. 15. The key-note of His Gospel was: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel." Mark 1, 15. So striking was the teaching of Jesus that all who heard Him were amazed and said, "What thing is this? What new doctrine is this?" Mark 1, 27. Christ was a Teacher of a specific theology, and His ethical teachings were but an illustration, and His miracles a corroboration, of His creed. A brief examination of His teachings proves this beyond controversy.

The Creed of Jesus. — The creed of Jesus involved, in the first place, His own person. In clear terms He acknowledges His deity. He is God's Son, John 3, 16. 17; the Christ, the Son of the living God, John 6, 69. He is one with the Father, John 10, 30, in one undivided and indivisible essence. He commands His disciples to baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 28, 19. For Himself He demands acknowledgment of His deity and divine worship in the same sense as it is due to the Father. John 5, 23. This He requires because He is the living God in the same sense as the Father. John 5, 26. But Jesus acknowledges also the Holy Spirit as the one true God with the Father and Himself. Matt. 12, 31; for He is the Spirit of God, John 6, 63, who proceeds from the Father, John 14, 26, as well as from the Son, John 15, 26; 16, 7. Since Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, He claims for Himself not only unity of essence with the Father, but also unity of divine operation. John 5, 17. As the divine Christ, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, of the same glory and majesty, Christ demands acceptance, worship, and homage of Himself and His Word. John 5, 23. 36. 37. He sharply rebukes those who do not accept His witness. John 5, 38. Those who do not accept this witness cannot have God for their Father. John 8, 42. They are of the devil, whose lusts they would do. John 8, 44. On the other hand, God's children hear God's Word, John 8, 47, and search the Scriptures to find Christ, John 5, 39. Thus we see that Christ had a very distinct creed concerning the true God, His own deity, and His divine message. He proclaimed in terms that admit of no doubt the worship of the Holy Trinity, faith in Him as the divine Savior, and acceptance of His Gospel as necessary for salvation. Only those who accept His Word have life. Mark 16, 15. 16. That men, despite this clear testimony of Christ claim that the great Master taught no theology is a proof of the dreadful perversion and apostasy of the present generation. John 8, 44; Matt. 24, 22—24.

However, Christ's creed also embraces the reality of *sin* and the plan of *salvation* from sin. To Christ the existence of a personal devil was an incontestable reality. John 8, 44. Satan and the perverted will of men are responsible for the woeful spiritual oppression under which man is held. Luke 8, 12. Born in sin and fettered by it, man cannot see the kingdom of God except he be born again of water and of the Spirit, John 3, 3—5; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, v. 6. This new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit, consists in repentance and faith. Mark 1, 15. Only those who repent and believe on Him can worship God in Spirit and in truth. John 4, 24. 42. He, Christ, alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so that no one can come unto the Father but by Him. John 14, 6. Faith in the Son is required. John 6, 40. Only to the believer in Christ are given the unqualified promises of salvation. John 5, 24. Thus Christ clearly taught the universality and damnableness of sin and the necessity of faith in Him, the divine Redeemer, as the only way of salvation. Those who deny this and teach salvation by "deeds" reject the very essence of Christ's Gospel.

As Christ taught salvation by grace through faith alone, so He also rejected the doctrine of work-righteousness. Man, being totally perverted by sin, cannot work out his own salvation. John 3, 6. No one can come to Christ except the Father which sent Him draw him. John 6, 44. If any man would come to Him, it must be given to him of His Father. John 6, 65. The self-righteous Pharisee, who trusted in his works and despised others, went down to his house unjustified. Luke 18, 14. All self-righteous Pharisees are blind guides, who strain at gnats and swallow camels; who make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within are full of extortion and excess; who appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Matt. 23, 24—28. They are serpents, a generation of vipers, who cannot escape the damnation of hell. Matt. 23, 33. Rejecting Christ and building their hope of salvation upon work-righteousness, they will perish in their sins. John 8, 21. 24. In these words Christ most emphatically condemns the pharisaic doctrine of justification by works.

Since man is utterly lost, the purpose of Christ's coming was to work out for sinful mankind a sure and universal redemption and to invite sinners to partake of it freely. John 6, 51. He came into this world that sinners might have life, John 10, 10; 15, 13, giving His life for the sheep as the Good Shepherd, John 10, 11. Of Himself He laid down His life. John 10, 18. That was the

work which He had come to finish. John 4, 34. He must accomplish all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, mocked, spitefully entreated, spitted upon, scourged, and put to death. Luke 18, 31—33. All this was accomplished on the cross, where He cried out with a shout of victory, "It is finished!" John 19, 30. Certainly Christ's creed embraced the vicarious atonement. Faith only in the Redeemer who died for man is the sinner's way of salvation. John 17, 3. To Him all that labor and are heavy laden must come for rest. Matt. 11, 28. Those who come to Him He will in no wise cast out. John 6, 37.

Again, the creed of Christ contains clear statements on the efficacy of the means of grace. All nations are to be baptized, made disciples, by *baptism* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 28, 19. In *Holy Communion* He gives His body and blood for the remission of sins, Matt. 26, 26—28. His *Word* is the means of sanctification. John 17, 17. Whoever believes His Word has eternal life. John 6, 40; 6, 63; Luke 8, 21. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it. Luke 11, 28. He that hears His Word, and believes on Him that sent Him, has everlasting life. John 5, 24. His words are words of eternal life. John 6, 68. He that is of God heareth God's Word. John 8, 47. He that rejects Him and receives not His Word hath one that judgeth him: the Word that He hath spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day. John 12, 48. If men continue in His Word, they are His disciples indeed, and they shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free. John 8, 31. 32. Thus Christ, in His creed, has taught the efficacy of the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments.

Furthermore, Christ, in His creed, has clearly defined the true members of His Church, His kingdom. They are not subjects in an external, worldly kingdom. John 7, 24. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." Matt. 7, 21. The subjects of Christ's kingdom enter in at the strait gate and walk the narrow way, that leadeth unto life. Matt. 7, 13. 14. They do the will of His Father, that is, they believe His Word. Matt. 12, 50. They believe on Him whom God has sent. John 6, 29. They hear His voice and follow Him. John 10, 27. They walk in His light. John 8, 12. Thus, according to Christ's teaching, true repentance and faith in Christ determine those who are true members of His Church. Unbelievers die in their sins,

John 8, 24, and are judged already, John 3, 18; and great is their damnation: they perish, John 3, 15. They shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them. John 3, 36. Blessed, however, are all believers: they have everlasting life, John 3, 16; they shall be with Christ in the mansions of the Father, John 14, 3. In this life their conduct is characterized by love and by the keeping of His commandments, John 14, 15; and though they are hated by the world, John 15, 18, they nevertheless have peace and joy, John 14, 27. 28. As branches of the true Vine, Jesus Christ, they bear much fruit, wherein the Father is glorified. John 15, 5. 8. They have the love of the Father, John 17, 26, and abide in Christ's love, John 15, 10.

This is but a brief statement and summary of the principal teachings of Christ regarding the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ, salvation through faith in Him, the universality and damnableness of sin, the necessity of repentance, the efficacy of the means of grace, the incompetence of work-righteousness, the Christian Church, the hope of life everlasting, and the true Christian ethics proceeding from a believing heart. The theology of Jesus embraces every statement of the Christian Creed: God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell, the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead; the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Every one that would be saved must embrace this Creed and confess Christ as the Son of the living God and Eternal Life. Only him who confesses Him before the world will He confess before His Father in heaven; but whosoever denies Him, him He will also deny before His Father in heaven. Matt. 10, 32. 33. Such confession is necessary because Christ did not come to bring peace on earth, but the sword. Matt. 10, 34. His demand is clear: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me," Matt. 10, 37; and: "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me," Matt. 10, 38. "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." Matt. 10, 39.

The Relation of Christ's Theology to His Ethics. — But Christ did not only preach a distinct creed, He also clearly demonstrated the relation between His theology and the ethics which He demands of men. They bear the same relation to each other as do cause and effect. Christian deeds have their source in the Christian Creed. To the student who carefully searches the Gospel it is clear that Christ addressed His ethical demands to *believers*. To the unbelieving Pharisees, who rejected His Word, He preached the message of repentance, pronouncing upon them damnation in case they would not heed His warning. His ethical demands, however, He addressed to that smaller circle of faithful followers who accepted His Word. This is clear from the Sermon on the Mount. St. Matthew tells us distinctly that Christ went up into a mountain when He saw the multitudes of people who followed Him. Matt. 4, 25; 5, 1. To these multitudes Jesus had preached repentance, Matt. 4, 17, and the Gospel of the kingdom, Matt. 4, 23, so that His fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those who had the palsy, and He healed them. Matt. 4, 24. Hence the multitude of people to whom He addressed the Sermon on the Mount consisted of such as believed in Him. This faith He strengthened by pointing out to them faith's blessings and promises. Matt. 5, 1—12. As believers He declared them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Matt. 5, 13, 14. To them as believers He expounds the Law, Matt. 5, 17, 47, exhorting them to be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect, Matt. 5, 48. The entire code of ethics, if we may use this term, which we find in Matt. 6 and 7, is addressed to the people as believers, as such as have accepted Christ's theology, specifically His message of repentance and faith. As believers in Him they are taught to pray the Lord's Prayer. Matt. 6, 9—13. Christ never taught the fatherhood of God in that general sense in which it is employed by Modernists to-day. He connected with this term an ethical meaning: God is the Father of men only through and in Christ. John 5, 23; 6, 44; 8, 16, 29; 10, 29. The Father loved those who believed in Him, John 16, 27; hence faith in Christ is necessary for the performance of good works. If believers abide in Christ, they bring forth much fruit. John 15, 4—10. That is the true relation between Christian ethics and Christian faith. Faith is the cause, ethics the effect. Without faith in Christ men are cast forth as branches that wither and

are cast into the fire. John 15, 6. Without Christ men can do nothing. John 15, 5. This vital fact is purposely overlooked by Liberalists, who, rejecting Christ, desire to build up a code of ethics without the creed of Christ. Christ has made it very clear that His influence lay in the fact that He is the Son of God and Savior of the world, in whom, through faith, sinful humanity has life and forgiveness, and strength to follow Him. Christ's maxim is clear: without creed no deeds that are pleasing to God; without faith no ethics; without our acknowledgment of Him no acknowledgment of us on His part, in spite of all we do. That is the great lesson of the gospels. First Christ preached the message of salvation through faith in Him, and then He commanded those of His hearers who believed on Him to walk worthy of the great salvation bestowed by grace. Only when penitent, Mary, Zacchaeus, and Peter are accepted as God's children and please Him by their ethical deeds.

However, also the miracles of Christ stood in close relation to His theology. The miracles of Christ were performed for a specific purpose. They were a means to a greater end. They were but to illustrate the paramount fact that Christ had come to save sinners. They were proofs of His love and of the truth of His theology. They were to verify the Gospel and strengthen faith in Him. When He had finished His Sermon on the Mount, He proved the truth of His message by healing the leper, Matt. 8, 1—4; the centurion's servant, Matt. 8, 5—10; the mother-in-law of Peter, Matt. 8, 14, 15, etc. St. Matthew states expressly that these miracles were accomplished in order to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." Matt. 8, 17. Bodily sickness is a part of the sorrow which sin has occasioned, and by healing bodily sickness, the Savior shadowed forth the perfect redemption which He gives to our souls by taking our place, being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It was for this very reason that Christ performed miracles only upon those who believed in Him. He wished to show by His miracles that He had power on earth to forgive sins. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Matt. 9, 6. Thus, in the last analysis, Christ's miracles served the purpose of glorifying God by proving the truth of His message. John 11, 4. All this shows that Christ had not come into the world for its social and economic improvement. He came as a divine Prophet, to preach repentance and salvation; as a divine Priest, to lay down His life for a ransom; as a divine King,

to gather in the elect through the Gospel-message. For this reason He preached the theology of salvation, performed miracles to prove the truth of His theology, and admonished His followers to walk worthy of this sublime creed.

The Task of the Christian Church. — Christ thus once for all has made clear the task of the Christian Church. It has been suggested that the Christian Church must make religion reasonable, logical, and sound in order to fill the pews. In the sense in which it is offered, this suggestion is both unreasonable and illogical. Christ's theology is the most reasonable, logical, and sound religion, and withal the only reasonable, logical, and sound religion, since it alone is the truth. John 17, 17. It satisfies the needs of the soul by offering it the redemption which it needs and by restoring to it the blessings of life and salvation which have been lost by sin. At the same time this message is a divine power unto salvation. Rom. 1, 16. The Church possesses strength at the ratio in which it proclaims this divinely powerful message in its truth and purity. Only in this way can it accomplish the purpose for which God has given His Word. Is. 55, 11. It is true, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling-block to the Jew. 1 Cor. 1, 23. Nevertheless, unto those who are saved the preaching of the Cross is the power of God. 1 Cor. 1, 18. By preaching the Gospel of Christ in its purity, the Christian Church will always fill its pews with true believers and children of God. These constitute a minority, and therefore the true visible Church will ever remain relatively small. Nevertheless, the Christian Church cannot afford to deviate from the course mapped out by the great King. His great commission obtains to the end: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. 28, 19, 20. If the Church is obedient to this command, the promise of Christ: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Matt. 28, 20, will never fail her. She will be a light in darkness, a salt that arrests the moral decay of humanity. As the Church departs from this command, she herself will grope in darkness and augment the gloom of unbelief, immorality, and damnation. To make religion more reasonable, logical, and sound to the perverted mind of man by denying the Christian truths is a satanic suggestion. To preach the Word in its own sweet reasonableness and soundness as given by God means to walk in the footsteps of the great Teacher who came to seek and to save that

which was lost. Hence the task of the Church is clear: "If any man speak, let him speak as of the oracles of God." 1 Pet. 4, 11.

However, this requires both consecrated preachers and consecrated laymen. The present-day messengers of Christ's Gospel must possess all those qualities which Paul emphasizes in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, His followers and disciples. They must hold faith and a good conscience. 1 Tim. 1, 19. They must not defile themselves with anything that is contrary to sound doctrine. 1 Tim. 1, 10. They must labor and suffer reproach, trusting in the living God, who is the Savior of all men. 1 Tim. 4, 10. They must take heed unto themselves and unto the doctrine, continuing in them, for only in doing this, will they save both themselves and those that hear them. 1 Tim. 4, 16. They must withdraw themselves from all who teach otherwise and consent not to the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, who are proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness. 1 Tim. 6, 3—5. They must fight the good fight of faith, laying hold on eternal life, whereunto they are called. 1 Tim. 6, 12. They must keep that which is committed to their trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing, have erred concerning the faith. 1 Tim. 6, 20. 21. They must in meekness instruct those who oppose them, praying that God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. 2 Tim. 2, 25. 26. They must hold fast the faithful Word, that they may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. Titus 1, 9. They must affirm constantly these things that they which have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works, avoiding foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the Law, which are unprofitable and vain; and they must reject heretics after the first and second admonition. Titus 3, 8—10. Such ministers are needed by the Church of to-day, men who are faithful and true to Christ, to the charge committed to them, and to the souls entrusted to them, going forth into the world, wise as serpents and harmless as doves, preaching to men the theology of Jesus, the Gospel of Christ, and teaching them to walk in faith and

obedience. Only such preachers benefit men unto life eternal, and only such shall receive the reward granted to faithful servants. Lastly, only such preachers will bestow upon the world the blessings of sound religion and of true ethics, pleasing to God.
