

# Confirmation - Part 2

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*Confirmation is a vital part of the Christian life, emphasizing the importance of understanding and living out the Christian faith.*

**Scripture:** Joshua 24:15, John 14:14, Ephesians 1:13, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:7

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Personal Commitment"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the significance of Confirmation, emphasizing the full understanding and personal commitment to the Christian faith. He highlights the two aspects of the Christian life: surrendering to God and receiving God's grace. The sermon delves into the importance of repentance, trust in God, and obedience to His Word as essential components of personal Christianity. It also stresses the need for prayer, daily Bible reading, and participation in the Holy Communion as means of receiving God's grace and staying connected to Him.

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## Transcript

Section 4. Suggested Methods of Teaching.

I. The Meaning of Confirmation (Lesson 1).

The following is necessarily only a bare outline, but it may suggest material for further study.

1. Start by indicating the emphasis placed by our Church on the full understanding of the meaning of Confirmation. See the title, "Years of discretion".
2. Show that at baptism we were designated, or dedicated to, and introduced into, the privileges and opportunities of the Christian community after prayer and sponsorial promises to teach what personal Christianity really meant.
3. Confirmation implies that we have been taught this, that we realize its meaning and intend to follow it for ourselves.
4. The Christian life may be summed up in two ways. (a) "I give myself to God" (Josh. 24:15, 1 Kings 18:21, Matt. 6:24, 2 Cor. 6:14-16). (b) "God gives Himself to me" (Luke 11:9-13, John 14:14, 16, 26; Phil. 4:13, 19).

5. Nothing less than this is personal Christianity, and it must be faced clearly. Then, when we are right with Christ, we enter into a true relation to Christians. (a) In the Church of England Confirmation is the gateway to full membership and all privileges. (b) Baptism may be illustrated by the soldier's enlistment, and then, after the necessary training and discipline, Confirmation may be likened to his putting on his regiments, when he confesses Whose, and what he is.

## II. The Confirmation Service (Lesson 2).

### 1. Part I. The human, or active side.

(a) The opening address, with special reference to "Hereafter," "Openly," "Mouth and consent".

(b) The Bishop's question, specially emphasizing "Ratify and confirm".

(c) The candidate's answer, noticing, "audibly," and "I do" (not "we do").

(d) The summary of this part is: "I promise"; "I give myself to God."

### 2. Part II. The Divine, or passive side.

(a) The Bishop's reminder; "Our help is in the Name of the Lord."

(b) The call to prayer. Every prayer, including a petition for the Holy Spirit. The titles of God should be noted: "Almighty and everliving God," or "Almighty and everlasting God."

(c) The implication of the prayers; "Who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these Thy servants"; a definite work of grace already assumed.

(d) The meaning of the laying on of hands carefully stated; "To certify them by this sign".

(e) The summary of this part is, "I receive"; "God gives Himself to me."

## III. The Christian Life; Divine Side (Lesson 3).

1. The Church Catechism: Our name (individuality); when given (baptism).

2. The Catechism beautifully and helpfully starts from the Divine, not from the human side (God first).

3. Three blessings are offered.

(a) "Member of Christ." Forgiveness and life. Sin separates, Christ unites (John 5:24, John 15:5; 1 John 1:7).

(b) "Child of God." Grace and strength. Arising out of the former blessing (John 1:12, Gal. 3:26, 2 Cor. 6:17-18, Eph. 3:14-16).

(c) "Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." Protection and preservation. Present and future. Grace and glory. (Eph. 1:13-14, Phil. 4:19, John 14:2-3, 2 Cor. 5:1, 1 Peter 1:4.)

4. Observe the completeness of these blessings. Covering past, present, and future. All possible circumstances provided for. Nothing beyond these.

5. All these are ours because of God's love. The three circles of love: (a) the world (John 3:16), (b) the Church (Eph. 5:25), (c) the individual (Gal. 2:20).

6. And all become ours when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord. In Him all gifts and blessings are included.

7. Dwell wholly in this lesson on the Divine side and not at all on the human. This will encourage and inspire. Give Isaiah 41:10 as a Confirmation motto.

#### IV. The Christian Life; Human Side. (1) Repentance (Lesson 4).

1. Now comes the question, How are these three gifts to be enjoyed as our own?

2. The Catechism teaches three ways: "Renounce," "Believe," "Keep". Repentance, Trust, Obedience.

3. The meaning of "renounce" - "to give up," "to have nothing to do with".

4. What are we to renounce? Everything that is sinful, or liable to lead to sin. Three special enemies:

(a) The enemy above us: the author of all evil tempts direct by suggestion, especially to unbelief and pride (Gen. 3:1-5, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9). Note that all Bible temptations of Satan are against believers, not against people of the world. Satan has no need to tempt them. This should keep us from discouragement when we are tempted by him.

(b) The enemy around us: the world. Everything evil, or likely to lead to it, in persons and things around us. We have no difficulty about what is actually evil, only about what is doubtful. How are we to know what is "worldly"? One test will settle almost everything. Either, What would Jesus have done? Or, still better, What would He wish me to do (Rom. 12:2, 1 John 2:15-17)?

(c) The enemy within us: the flesh. Everything in our own hearts. Thoughts and desires. Distinguish carefully between temptation and sin. We cannot prevent thoughts coming, but we can prevent them staying. Luther wrote to his son that we cannot prevent the birds from flying around our heads, but we can prevent them from building their nests in our hair (Rom. 8:5-8, Gal. 5:17-21). On this occasion, but only quite generally, make pointed references or allusions to sins of the flesh. The subject should be dealt with more in detail under the seventh commandment.

5. Strong emphasis on the true meaning of repentance. Not penitence, or sorrow for sin, but, "Whereby we forsake sin." This is the key to the Christian position. Without repentance, no blessings of Christ are possible.

#### V. The Christian Life; Human Side. (2) Trust (Lesson 5).

1. "Articles of the Christian Faith," means particular points of the Christian belief. These are found in the Bible as a whole and yet are summarized conveniently in the Creed.

2. Three parts: belief in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Dwell upon all these sections without undue detail.

3. Words to be explained: "Holy," "quick," "Catholic Church," "Communion of Saints".

4. Belief is not everything that is required. From belief of articles, we have to ascend to trust in a Person. We "chiefly learn" personal trust. Not belief in facts about God, but trust in God Himself (Heb. 11:3, 6; Acts 15:31. James 2:19, John 1:12).

5. Emphasize the necessity of personal trust: faith is found essential in every department of life. So in religion, it is the only answer to God's revelation if there is to be any connection between Him and man.

6. Observe in the Catechism the three circles. The world as made by the Father. Mankind as redeemed by the Son. The Church as being sanctified by the Spirit.

7. See especially in each point the emphasis on "me".

VI. The Christian Life; Human Side. (3) Obedience (Lesson 6).

1. What is obedience? The expression and proof of our repentance and trust.

2. What is the standard of obedience? The Bible as the Word of God.

3. What is the summary of that standard? The ten Commandments.

(a) Observe the outline. God and others.

(b) Note the completeness. Covering thoughts, words, and deeds in relation to God and our neighbour.

4. Call special attention to the beautiful interpretation of the Commandments in "Our Duty," laying stress on the positive as well as the negative side.

5. Observe the motive of obedience. "Which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Redemption is the reason for obedience.

6. Avoid overmuch detail in dealing with these Commandments which are presumably pretty familiar. Strive to impress the principles involved without going too much into specific applications.

7. On the subject of purity the following suggestions may be made for work amongst boys and young men.

(a) Let every clergyman join the Alliance of Honour. The Secretaries at Leysian Buildings, City Road, London, E.C., will give all particulars of membership.

(b) Obtain for personal reading The Cry of the Boys, by B. M. Barbour, to be obtained from the author, 37, Thomas Street, Banbury (1d.).

(c) Obtain for circulation, wherever necessary, In Confidence: To Boys, by the Rev. H. Bissek (Alliance of Honour, as above, 2d.).

VII. The Christian's Need of Grace. (1) Prayer (Lesson 7).

1. What prayer is. Trustfully telling God what we need, and asking Him for it according to His will. Illustrations of prayer: the telegraph, telephone, microphone.

2. Encouragements to prayer. (a) The promises in the Bible. (b) Examples of men and women of prayer.

3. Stated times of prayer. (a) Regular. (b) Stated.

4. Ejaculatory prayer. Prayer that "darts" up to God like an arrow. Illustrations from the Bible; e.g. "Lord, save me." "Lord, help me."
5. The model prayer: the Lord's Prayer, with its (a) Three petitions for God's glory. (b) Three (or Four) petitions for our needs.
6. Special attention to the "Desire" as an almost perfect illustration of what the Lord's Prayer means.
7. In all our lesson on prayer make the matter quite simple, easy, and natural, as the expression of our spiritual life.

#### VIII. The Christian's Need of Grace. (2) The Bible (Lesson 8).

1. There is no reference to the Bible in the Catechism as one means of grace, because it covers everything and includes all means, since grace rests upon Divine revelation.
2. The uniqueness of the Bible. The only Book revealing (a) God's love, (b) deliverance from sin.
3. This is due to Christ the Living Word as (a) God's revelation, (b) God's power.
4. To be read primarily for ourselves and not for others; see the examples, promises, warnings, precepts, hopes. "What saith my Lord unto His servant?"
5. To be read with prayer. Prayer and the Bible are the two sides of communion. Our talking to God and God talking to us.
6. To be read with definite personal application to our own needs day by day. This is the meaning of meditation.
7. To be read daily. Food is needed regularly for the body, and this is the food for the soul. Even five minutes will suffice if we cannot spare more. Quality, not quantity, is to be insisted on.
8. This method of daily personal Bible meditation is the supreme safeguard against all backsliding. The Bible is the mirror in which we see ourselves (James 1:23-25), the water to cleanse ourselves (Eph. 5:26-27), and the food to strengthen ourselves (Jer. 15:16).
9. The value of regular systematic reading in connection with a Bible Union. The Scripture Union is in many respects the best because of its brevity and simplicity of choice. Invite candidates to become members and offer to get cards.
10. In all this teaching on the Bible, try as far as possible to make it novel and fresh in treatment.

#### IX. The Christian's Need of Grace. (3) The Holy Communion in Scripture and Catechism (Lesson 9).

1. The teaching must be positive, not negative; spiritual and devotional, and not at all controversial.
2. The leading ideas from the New Testament. (a) a Remembrance, (b) a Picture, (c) a Promise. Distinguish between knowing and remembering. We cannot remember if we do not know, and we cannot "do this in remembrance" unless we know Christ as our personal Saviour.

3. In the New Testament observe the various aspects of Christ's work expressed in the Lord's Supper: Christ for us, in us, with us; coming.

4. Then concentrate on the first four questions of the catechism in regard to the Lord's Supper: (a) What it is: remembrance of Calvary and of its spiritual benefits; (b) What it does: strengthening and refreshing.

5. In all this teaching on Holy Communion endeavour to fix the minds of the candidates on Him, not on it.

X. The Christian's Need of Grace. (4) The Holy Communion in the Catechism and Communion Office (Lesson 10).

1. Start with the last question and answer in the Catechism, emphasizing the three requirements for those who come. This is the human side.

2. Then show how these very three requirements form the substance of the ante-Communion Service. (a) Repentance, (b) Faith, (c) Love. Hence the importance of this part of the service as a constant, thorough, and normally sufficient preparation for Communion.

3. Dwell upon the more important points in the Service needing elucidation.

(a) Read the Exhortation to communicants for a fine statement of the spiritual meaning of the ordinance.

(b) Draw special attention to the constant thought of due preparation as seen in the long Exhortation, the short Exhortation ("Ye that do truly"), followed by the Confession, Absolution, and Comfortable Words. This is how our Church "fences the Table".

(c) Dwell on the importance of joining heartily in "Therefore with angels," etc.

(d) Show carefully the meaning of the Consecration Prayer, and point out that the manual acts should be followed with open eyes in order to help the mind to "remember" Calvary. Urge especially the importance of joining in the "Amen" with which the Prayer closes.

(e) Call attention to the Words of Administration. The first part is a prayer based upon Calvary; the second is an exhortation to eat and drink in remembrance, and to feed by faith on Christ. Point out that the relation between the sign and the thing signified is one of parallelism, not of identity. There are two givers: the Lord, and the minister; two receivers: the body, and the soul; two methods: the mouth, and faith. And when we approach with a true and living faith the two acts are simultaneous; the Lord gives His grace as the clergyman gives the elements, so that we eat and drink the elements in faith, and at the same time we feed on Christ by faith.

(f) In some cases it may be necessary to suggest quite simply the importance of ungloved hands and of only a small sip of wine.

(g) After the benediction the new confirmees should be told to wait until the Service is actually over by the consumption of any of the consecrated elements that may remain over. A moment or two of quiet in their seats will be in every way reverently and spiritually helpful.

XI. After Confirmation: What? (Lesson 11).

1. Either just before, or preferably just after, the special first Communion an address should be given, showing something of what is to be expected from the confirmer.
2. The Christian life must first be emphasized: (a) On its human side of consistency; (b) on its Divine side of grace sufficient for every need.
3. Christian service must then be taught: (a) A general witness of the life, (b) some definite form of Christian work in connection with the Church.
4. Once again the endeavour should be made to put the new life at once brightly, earnestly, and definitely before the confirmeres.

## XII. Books for Clerical Use.

1. The very best as a basis is Our Confirmation Class, by Bishop Wynne.
2. For the intellectual and instructive side, Confirmation Lectures, by Canon Barnes-Lawrence; Lectures on Confirmation, by E. B. Elliott; Lectures on Confirmation, by Dean Vaughan; and Confirmation: A Manual, by L. M. Bagge.
3. For teaching the Catechism, The Church Catechism Simply Explained, by Stowell; and Lectures on the Catechism, by Bishop Rowley Hill.
4. For our work in general, Confirmation, by Canon Dyson Hague.

It has of course been impossible to do more than give the barest suggestions for Confirmation work. But it is only right before passing away from the subject to emphasize afresh in the plainest way the unspeakable privilege and great responsibility of this opportunity of coming so closely in contact with the spiritual needs of the young people of our Church and parish. The man who undertakes this work in the right spirit will often feel overwhelmed as he contemplates the solemn possibilities, and yet will find his heart rejoicing again and again in the indications of God's gracious blessing resting upon his prayerful efforts. [Perhaps it may be permissible to say that Part I of the writer's Catholic Faith was originally given in substance to his own Confirmation Classes. And it has been a great satisfaction to learn that several clergymen in England and Canada are able to use it in this way.]

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