

The Verification of Christ

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The verification of Christ's claims is essential, and the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in bringing Christ to life in our hearts, making Him real and present to us.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 16:15, John 1:12, John 14:6, John 14:26, John 16:13, Romans 8:9, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 3:14, 1 John 5:10

Topics: "Christ's Resurrection", "Christian Apologetics"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of coming to a verdict about Jesus Christ, stating that Christianity hinges on the truth of His resurrection. He highlights the significance of having right opinions about Christ, as it impacts our relationship with God, redemption from sin, and even our approach to prayer and worship. Thomas stresses the need to verify the claims of Christ and come to a definite conclusion about Him, pointing out that the ultimate criterion of Revelation lies in its ability to fulfill and accomplish humanity's destiny.

Transcript

A well-known American scholar in his early ministry many years ago preached a course of sermons on the Resurrection, in which he stated and tested the various arguments to the fullest extent of his power. There was present in his audience an eminent lawyer, the head of the legal profession in the city. He listened to the preacher Sunday by Sunday as he marshalled proofs, weighed evidence, considered objections, analyzed the stories of the Gospels, and stated the case for the Resurrection.

At length the conclusion was drawn by the preacher that Christianity must be true since Jesus was raised from the dead. At the close of the last sermon the lawyer went to see the minister and said, "I am a lawyer; I have listened to your statement of the case; I consider it incontrovertible, but this case demands a verdict. This is no mere intellectual conflict; there is life in it. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, His religion is true, and we must submit to it." The lawyer was as good as his word and became a Christian.

The same is true of our present subject; the case demands a verdict. It is no mere question of dialectic, no topic of argumentative discussion only, no matter of pure contemplation, no problem of philosophy. It is vital, essential, fundamental, and demands immediate and full attention. It claims the careful consideration of every mind, conscience, heart and will. It is not a matter of mere argument, still less of personal indifference what a man thinks of Jesus Christ. There are those who seem to think that so long as the spirit and life are right, opinion counts for very little.

This was not Christ's own view. He regarded it as of importance that men should have right opinions about Him. "Who do men say that I am?" He was above all things solicitous of training His disciples in the direction of right thoughts of Himself. There are, of course, many things in life on which we may have an open mind, and in which right opinion or wrong opinion leads to no serious results but this is not the case in regard to Christ, for it does matter very much what we think of Him and what our attitude to Him is.

What we receive from Christ will largely depend on what we believe Him to be. It is obvious that the results must necessarily be vastly different according as we regard Christ as a good man or as God manifest in the flesh. Everything we know of God, and everything we need from Him, is deeply affected by our attitude to Christ. If He be not God then fellowship with Him is an impossibility, for He is dead "in the lorn Syrian town," and we cannot get into personal contact even with His writings, for He left none.

So in regard to redemption from sin, it matters very much whether Christ is God, because our view of His death turns on this fact. If He were anyone other than God His death would differ in no respect from an ordinary death. If He be not God, then God's gift of Him, and His love in giving, would be no giving of Himself, and would have no special and unique characteristics. And even in regard to prayer and worship, if Christ be not God our approach to Him in prayer were nothing short of irreverence and blasphemy in placing Him where God alone should be.

It makes a profound difference, therefore, what we think of Christ, for no one can reasonably, honestly, and heartily trust, follow, and obey Christ if he has no definite and strong convictions as to His Deity. Verification, therefore, is the great essential, the imperative necessity. We must verify the claim of Christ and come to some definite conclusion concerning Him. And it is to this that we now call attention. What is the great, the supreme problem in connection with Christ?

It is to discover how a historical personality can become a religious fact for all men. How can a historic Person who appeared at one point of time centuries ago become the permanent religious fact and force for all time? How can One who appeared under the specific conditions and limitations of history be the universal spiritual life of millions in all ages, races, and circumstances? There have been several attempts to solve this problem. Many argue that the solution is found in reverting to the historical Christ of the Gospels, in discovering the essential features of "the inner life of Jesus," and making that the standard of our life.

"Back to Christ" has been for years the watchword of a school of thinkers with the object of recovering and realizing for today the personality of Jesus Christ. But does it really help faith and satisfy human need today to revert to the past, to picture a Christ of centuries ago, and to live solely in the light of that great Figure? We need and must have something far more real, far more definite, far more present than this. The Christ who is to be our life today must be something more than a fact, however beautiful, of nineteen centuries ago.

People told us some years ago that our views of the Gospel were inadequate, and the direction was shouted to us - "Back to Christ!" Well, we went back: and we found that they had prepared the scenery and the dresses and the manners and customs of His Palestinian environment, and they told us about the subjects of His teaching, and gave us a syllabus of His method and His views upon religious questions, and they said, "Thus and thus spake the Teacher of Galilee: in this and that group of sayings we unfold to you the mind of the Master!"

It is all very beautiful and valuable: it is always educative to be made conscious of the spaces of history, and to be reminded of facts and truths which have been unduly subordinated. But has there not been all the while at our hearts a chill - a loneliness? Is not the deepest religious question, after all, for each man, this: whether there be in Christ a present Saviour, who can cover me now with the robe of His righteousness? No historic research, no exposition of the doctrines of an old-world Teacher, removes the burden of the friendlessness of my sin-stained soul in a universe ruled by a holy God.

If by your scholarship you so make to live again the classic scenes in which the Nazarene moved and taught that I am made painfully conscious of the long centuries that intervening divide Him from me: then all the more, if you would secure the abiding of my faith in Him, you must let me see how He can still reach me, and stand for me, the wings of His affluent personality outstretched to cover me. [Johnston Ross, *The Universality of Jesus*. pp. 15 ff.] Others adopt a different method of solving the problem.

They do not concern themselves with the Personality, but concentrate attention on His ideas. The real meaning and significance of Christ, on this view, lies in the principles which actuated Him, and which He taught His disciples. Love, self-sacrifice, pity, tenderness, righteousness, holiness - these and many other similar ideas are the essential things in life, and they are to be realized and lived without concerning ourselves about the Personality in which they were originally embodied.

But the question at once arises whether this method meets all the demands of the situation. It may suit the philosopher but will it satisfy the needs of the average man? There is such a thing as sin in the world and in the human heart, and ideas, however lofty, have never yet proved powerful enough to meet its terrible force. Let a man endeavor to help a fellow sinner in his need when he comes with a burdened conscience and a haunting past. Let a man work among the fallen, the degraded, the vicious.

Ideas will prove utterly powerless. Let a man face his own sin, the plague of his own heart, and try to get rid of it. Ideas will prove utterly futile and leave him more hopeless than before. Ideas in Christ were the expression and achievement of His Personality, and it is this difference of fact and experience between His life and ours that makes the burden and condemnation of sin still more real. "Ideals may charm the intellect, but cannot satisfy the heart." [Quoted in Streatfeild, *The Self-Interpretation of Christ*, p. 41.]

If men could be saved and blessed by ideas, then the disciples of Christ after those wonderful three years of His teaching would surely have enjoyed the most uplifting and transforming of experiences. But we know they were morally powerless and entirely incapable of translating those ideals into reality. Ideas have no moral dynamic, and our deepest need is not knowledge, but power - a power in life that makes for righteousness. The only God that can reveal Himself to us is one who shows Himself to us in our moral struggle as the Power to which our souls are really subject.

This is what is vouchsafed to us in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. [King, *The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life*, p. 218.] Yet again, others endeavor to solve the problem of Christ's historic Personality as a religious fact and force by laying all the stress on personal spiritual experience as something really independent of historical fact and criticism. It is argued that even if we knew little or nothing more than the fact of Christ's life on earth, we should still be able to experience His grace and power as a living personal Saviour and Friend.

The experiences of Christian men in all ages would, it is said, be a sufficient certification and guarantee that given the same conditions of personal reception and appropriation, the same spiritual results would accrue. Now there is a profound truth in the emphasis placed by this view on spiritual experience, and the

way in which it has been insisted on during recent years and the power with which it may be used in life can hardly be over-estimated. It is one of our strongholds of certitude.

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest,

Cannot confound, or doubt Him, or deny.

Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,

Stand thou on that side, for this am I."

But experience as the sole and adequate foundation for religious life is a very different matter, and those who take up this position really admit its inadequacy in being compelled to predicate some knowledge, however slight, of the historical fact of Christ's life on earth. Even the mere knowledge that He lived and died is a testimony to the need of some historic foundation. The Christ of Experience cannot be sundered from the Christ of history, and the appeal to experience is impossible unless experience is based on historic fact.

The history must guarantee the experience in the individual today just as the history has been the basis of the Church's experience in all ages. If we lose our faith in the historic fact of the Christ of the Gospels, it will not be long before we lose our faith in the experience of the Christ of today. This process of disintegration is even now being realized among those who are reducing to virtual valuelessness the Gospel records of Jesus Christ. The Christ of faith cannot be separated from the Jesus of history without our soon losing both.

If there is one thing that modern scholarship has made clear beyond question, it is that it is now impossible to deny that Jesus Christ had a unique relationship to God and a unique relationship to man, and it is this uniqueness that provides the foundation and must give the warrant for that experience of Christ today which every Christian has and enjoys. It is vain to think that by sublimating the history into a philosophy we can retain its reality and power. It is impossible even for the learned to possess for long the Spirit of Jesus if we surrender the historical Jesus, while the attempt to set aside the historical Jesus in the case of ordinary people would result in the loss of vital Christianity altogether.

What, then, is the true solution of this all-important problem? There is essential truth in all the foregoing contentions, but none of them singly is anything like the whole truth. The solution is found in taking the truths in all these three suggested solutions, and uniting them and making them effective for life by means of that which is the unique feature of Christianity as a Divine revelation. What this is will be evident from an incident. Some time ago a thoughtful French pastor expressed to the writer great perplexity in the face of the fact that while scholars often spent years in arriving at adequate conclusions about the Jesus of the Gospels, unlettered Christian people became convinced of the reality of Jesus Christ through experience, with scarcely any difficulty.

He could not understand the reason for these very different results. "May it not be due," he was asked, "to the Holy Spirit?" "How so?" he replied, "the Holy Spirit does not witness to a man's heart that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, lived at Nazareth, worked at Capernaum, and died in Jerusalem." "No," was the answer, "but the Holy Spirit is admittedly the Spirit of Truth and the fact that He does witness to Jesus and does make Him real to the soul, and that He does not do this in regard to Mohammed, or Buddha, or Plato, is surely a proof that the facts about Jesus are true, or the Holy Spirit would not witness to them."

"I never thought of that" he said; "I believe this will resolve my difficulty." Is it not in this way that the problem of the personality of Christ as a religious fact for today is to be solved? Jesus Christ said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you." Bishop Thirlwall once said that "the great intellectual and religious struggle of our day turns mainly on this question, Whether there is a Holy Ghost." Observe how this works out.

Historical criticism may send us back to Christ, may insist on our concentrating attention on the Jesus of the Gospels, and may produce for us what it regards as the true picture of that Personality. Then the Holy Spirit will take the irreducible minimum which criticism has left, and has been compelled to leave simply because it is irreducible, and will use it to impress, convince, and inspire the soul with its picture of a unique, sinless, perfect, Divine Figure. In the same way the ideas which philosophy finds in such fullness and fruitfulness in the historic Jesus will be taken by the Holy Spirit and made real and vital to the soul.

For Christian life and character it is not possible to dwell much on mere ideals, for they are matters of philosophy rather than of religion. Ideals must be realized if they are to be of value for life, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to make these ideals of Christ real in the souls of His followers. It is for this reason that neither the Example of Christ nor His ideas are of special practical value if considered alone. *Imitatio Christi* is but a small part of the truth: *Repetitio Christi* is nearer the whole.

Christ is not full set before us when He is regarded simply as an external Object to imitate, and when His ideas and ideals are to be produced in us by imitation. The true life is that which comes as the result of the Holy Spirit glorifying Christ in the heart and working in us that life and those ideals. And this has already brought us to the central truth of Christianity, that the Holy Spirit brings to bear on our hearts and lives the presence and power of the living Christ, and thereby links together the Christ of History and the Christ of Faith.

The Holy Spirit, in a word, is God active in the soul for man's salvation, and the purpose and method of His activity is the revelation of Christ to heart and life. The Holy Spirit is thus no impersonal influence, but God Himself in contact with the spirit of man. In the abysmal depths of personality He is at work, and what He does is simply this: He makes Christ real to the soul. And thus the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ is the very heart of Christianity, and by means of it the antithesis between past and present, history and experience, objective and subjective, is, if not reconciled, at any rate transcended, and God and man meet in Christ for life and fellowship, character and conduct, holiness and service.

Christianity, in a word, meets and hallows our broadest views of nature and life. It receives the testimony of universal history to the adequacy of its essential teaching to meet the needs of men. It reaches with unfailing completeness to the depths of each individual soul. The Person of Christ includes all that belongs to the perfection of every man. The Spirit of Christ brings the prayer through which each one can reach his true end. Christianity, in a word, to sum up what has been said already, offers us an ideal and offers us strength to attain it. [Westcott, *The Gospel of Life*, p. 110.]

We end, therefore, where we began, by saying that Christianity is Christ, and we add thereto the complement - Christ becomes Christianity for us by the Holy Spirit of God. In these two truths are found essential Christianity and the simple though sufficient secret of its verification and proof. It follows, therefore to present our conclusion under another aspect, that the ultimate criterion, the adequate verification, of Revelation to man, in its parts and in its completeness, lies in its proved fitness for furthering, and at last for accomplishing, his destiny. ...

This character belongs perfectly, as we affirm, to the Gospel. If it could be shown that there is one least Truth in things for which the Gospel finds no place; if it could be shown that there is one fragment of human experience with which it does not deal; then, with whatever pathetic regret it might be, we should confess that we can conceive something beyond it - that we still look for another. But I can see no such limitation, no such failure in the Gospel itself, whatever limitations and failures there may have been and may still in man's interpretation of it.

Christ in the fullness of His Person and of His Life is the Gospel. Christ in the fullness of His Person and of His Life is the confirmation of the Gospel from age to age. [Westcott, *The Gospel of Life*, p. 112.] The crowning proof of the revelation of the Christ of the Gospels and of experience is that He is capable of being reproduced by the Holy Spirit in the lives of His followers. The culminating evidence of the Godhead of Christ is that He is able by the Holy Spirit to bestow His Divine life on the lives of all who are willing to receive Him.

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12). He thus assures us at once of the certainty of human access to God and of Divine approach to man. All other views of Christ fail either on one side or the other. A human Christ would be unable to satisfy us as to access to God, while a Christ who is not directly in touch with God could not assure us of any direct approach of God to man. Like Jacob's ladder, which was set up on earth with top reaching to heaven, Jesus Christ in His human life is a solid foundation, and in His Divine life is a sure guarantee for every soul that wishes to come to God by Him and to commune with God through Him.

We see, then, that for human life Christ is essential, Christ is fundamental, Christ is all. We may, like some, reject Him. We may, like others, be impressed and attracted without definitely yielding to Him. Or we may be intellectually convinced and yet try to evade Him. But the one thing we cannot do is to ignore Him. "What think we of Christ?" is a question that has to be answered. "What shall I do with Jesus?" is a question that cannot be avoided. The question is far too serious to be ignored even if we could do so.

The remarkable fact about Christ is that, unlike every other founder of religion, He cannot possibly be overlooked. Even the attempt to ignore Him is in reality a confession of an opinion about Him. Indifferentism is possible about many things, but absolutely impossible about Christ. Christ's call to the soul is fourfold: Come unto Me, Learn of Me, Follow Me, Abide in Me. Come unto Me as Redeemer; Learn of Me as Teacher; Follow Me as Master; Abide in me as Life. And all that is required of us is the one sufficient and inclusive attitude of soul which the New Testament knows as faith.

This attitude and response of trust, self-surrender, dependence, is the essential attitude and response of the soul of man to God. Every sincere man knows full well the impossibility of realizing his true life in isolation, apart from God. Faith as man's response to God forever puts an end to the spiritual helplessness and hopelessness of the solitary man. It introduces him to a new relationship to God in Christ, and opens the door to the coming of the Holy Spirit of light and life.

It is the means whereby the needed strength, satisfaction, and security come to the soul from fellowship with God. Faith introduces the soul into a new world of blessed fellowship, uplifting motives, satisfying experiences, and spiritual powers, and from the moment the attitude of trust is taken up the Holy Spirit begins His work of revealing Jesus Christ to the soul. He brings into the heart the assurance of forgiveness and deliverance from the burden of the past, He bestows on the soul the gift of the Divine life, and then He commences a work that is never finished in this life of assimilating our lives to that of Christ,

working in us that Christlikeness which is the essential and unique element of the Gospel ethic.

In the deep and dim recesses of our personality the Holy Spirit works His blessed and marvelous way, transfiguring character, uplifting ideals, inspiring hopes, creating joys, and providing perfect satisfaction. And as we continue to maintain and deepen the attitude of faith the Holy Spirit is enabled to do His work and we are enabled to receive more of His grace. "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). By every act of trust and self-surrender we receive ever larger measures of the life of Christ, and all the while we are being changed into the image of Christ "from glory to glory" by the Spirit of the Lord.

Immortal love, forever full,

Forever flowing free,

Forever shared, forever whole,

A never-ebbing sea.

Our outward lips confess the Name

All other names above;

Love only knoweth whence it came,

And comprehendeth love.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps

To bring the Lord Christ down;

In vain we search the lowest deeps,

For Him no depths can drown.

And not for signs in heaven above

Or earth below they look,

Who know with John His smile of love,

With Peter His rebuke.

In joy of inward peace, or sense

Of sorrow over sin,

He is His own best evidence -

His witness is within.

No fable old, nor mythic lore,

Nor dream of bards and seers,

No dead fact stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years;
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.
The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press
And we are whole again.
O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine.
Our thoughts lie open to Thy sight;
And, naked to Thy glance,
Our secret sins are in the light
Of Thy pure countenance.
Apart from Thee all gain is loss,
All labour vainly done;
The solemn shadow of Thy Cross
Is better than the sun.
Alone, O Love ineffable,
Thy saving Name is given;
To turn aside from Thee is hell,
To walk with Thee is heaven.
We faintly hear, we dimly see,

In differing phrase we pray;
But, dim or clear, we own in Thee
The Light, the Truth, the Way.
- Whittier.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-verification-of-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net