

ALMOST AND ALTOGETHER.

THE testimony which God commands to be given is the same to all—to the rich and to the poor, to the learned and the unlearned,—the same Jesus is preached to all. Various as the characters of men are, before God they all turn on one point, namely, what they think of Jesus.

There is a large class of men who look upon all religion as superstition. They will tolerate it in others, or even conform to it outwardly, so long as it does not personally affect themselves. They are occupied with the world: its interests are so absorbing, that they find no time to enquire into the report which reaches their ears. This class is represented by Festus (Acts xxv. xxvi.): he thought it a foolish thing for the Jews and Paul to be disputing about "their own superstition," and quite beneath him to enquire about it, for it was "about one Jesus that was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." The men of the world saw Jesus on the cross, but they have never seen him since, nor will they till he comes in glory to judge it, then "every eye shall see him." Paul said that Jesus was at the right hand of God, but Festus did not believe that; if he had believed it, he would have been glad to take the place of Paul. What was the difference between these two, between Paul and Festus? Paul believed in Jesus, and knew that he was at the right hand of God. He knew the truth of one man being in glory, and he had peace in his soul, because he knew that this was the Son of God, and the Lamb of God; and therefore he knew present pardon and righteousness and life, because he knew that Jesus "who was dead and is alive again." Festus believed it not. The resurrection of Jesus is the turning point. If there be one man in glory, and if that one man be Jesus whom men slew, then is the whole world condemned; for he whom men slew, God hath raised up, and given him glory; and he is the only one in whom God is well pleased. And what is the message which God sends to sinners in the world now? Surely it is concerning the value, in his sight, of the death of his Son, and the life which is in him.

But there is another class not so reckless as Festus, who are represented by King Agrippa. His mind was exercised about many questions of the religion of the day. He knew it to be a more important point than it was thought by Festus, whether Jesus was alive. Paul had therefore ground to take with Agrippa which he had not with Festus. Agrippa professed to own the authority of the Scriptures,—he takes him on that ground. And this is the way in which those who profess to be Christians must be taken : the fact of having a Bible and appealing to its authority, gives to the people of this land the character of Agrippa. He knew full well the fact of the death of Jesus, but he had misgivings about the resurrection of Jesus. If he had risen, then he *was* the Christ ; then the nation of the Jews had crucified their Christ, and nothing could save them but immediate submission to him. Paul appealed to the conscience of Agrippa : “ King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” There he stopped : he was *almost* persuaded, and so there are many just at this point,—*almost persuaded*. If Agrippa had been *quite* persuaded, what would have been the difference between Paul and himself ? None : but then instead of being regarded with honour by all who surrounded him, he would have been deemed a madman. He could not believe in Jesus risen, without immediately seeing the hollowness and vanity of his worldly pomp. There are many whose consciences tell them that Christians are right, but they dare not confess Jesus before men,—their respectability or influence in the world would be injured. They cannot believe, because they receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only.

Some people think, like Agrippa, that it is possible to be *almost* a Christian : but there is no such thing. They are content to think that they are working their way towards Christ ; they believe it to be a matter of human persuasion, the taking up of a certain opinion. But to be a Christian is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as having died and risen again. It is to be *in* Christ : and there is no such thing as being *almost* a Christian. I must be quite in him or not at all. All Paul’s persuasion could not make Agrippa a Christian. It must be the power of God, the power that made the world, the power that

raised Jesus from the dead. Paul knew this ; he did not flatter King Agrippa, that there was any safety in being almost persuaded to be a Christian. But he said, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and *altogether* such as I am, except these bonds." There was no middle way, no being *almost* a Christian. Festus was persuaded Paul was mad, Agrippa almost persuaded to be a Christian ; but Paul was *fully* persuaded that Jesus, who had died on the cross, was alive. This gave him wondrous boldness. He was a prisoner in chains, yet such was his confidence in his real dignity as a Christian, that he could, from his heart, wish all his noble audience to be *altogether* as himself, except his chains. To the eyes of the world, Paul was a pestilent fellow brought out of prison to gratify the vain curiosity of Agrippa and his court. Paul does not disparage their dignity ; he says, "*Most noble Festus and King Agrippa,*" but yet wishes them to be as he is. Paul knew he had something which the world had not,—a nobility and royalty which far surpassed all before him. The pomp and splendour of Agrippa have passed away, but Paul is now with Jesus, whom he knew to be alive, waiting to be manifested in real and abiding glory.

Paul had been a Pharisee of the strictest sect. They were the religious people of the day, who thought to get to God by their own good conduct. They said prayers and did many alms-deeds, in order to be saved. But when Paul was taught to look to Jesus, he then knew that he was saved, cleansed at once from all sin by the blood of that same Jesus, whom he once persecuted ; and though he called himself the chief of sinners, still he could say to all who stood before him, I would to God you were *altogether* as I am. It is a blessed thing to be a sinner saved by grace : he can speak to others with holy boldness, whilst he pays them all due respect. Though Paul stood before a king's court, he testified of Jesus. He stood there in the consciousness of being an heir of glory. Agrippa had got earthly glory and splendour ; and he was satisfied. Paul had got a heavenly inheritance ; and he was not affected by the things around him, but he could speak as one standing in Jesus. He was *altogether* a Christian.

It is a blessed word, *altogether*. The moment a person believes in Jesus, he is as much a Christian as Paul was, being washed in the same blood. It is a fearful thing to think that

there is such a thing as being a Christian without this. We must be either *in* Christ or *out* of Christ—either *in* our sins, or *washed from* our sins: “He that believeth on Him *is not* condemned; but he that believeth not *is* condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God (John iii. 18). There is no such thing as an *almost* Christian; we must be *altogether* or not at all. The fact is, men think they are *almost* ruined sinners, but not quite: and that, therefore, Christ is an *almost*, but not an *altogether* Saviour. If Paul had allowed the *almost*, he would have gone back to Phariseeism. Every one must either be altogether unconverted, as Festus and Agrippa; or altogether saved, as Paul; that is, either a man in Adam, or a man in Christ. You may be careless as Festus, or thoughtful as Agrippa; but if you are not altogether in Christ, as Paul, you are lost. Paul knew that it was the act of a moment for either of them to be as he was. If they received his testimony to Jesus—however slow they might be in apprehending it—he knew they had all that he had—for present blessing and coming glory. They would be as certainly pardoned as he was; washed in the same blood, accepted in the same beloved One, heirs of the same glory. He could boldly say *altogether*, because he knew the value of Jesus. If there had been any progress toward complete justification, so that the person who believed in Jesus was not fully justified, he could not have said, “Altogether as I am.” The only question is, whether Jesus is every thing for pardon, life and righteousness,—then is one believer as much accepted as another. The sinner that believes the testimony unto Jesus *this day*, is *altogether* before God, as Paul stood in his day. All turns on the point of owning Jesus to be every thing—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and those who own him thus now, will be owned by him when he comes in all his glory, and be with him for ever and ever. Then will it be known that there is no almost being a Christian, but *altogether*; for all believers will be like Christ, when they shall see him as he is.

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