

## What it Costs to be a True Christian

[J. C. Ryle](#)

The Church of England has had many bishops, some of them noble, others ignoble. Certain of them have passed away 'unwept, and unsung'. Not so John Charles Ryle, the first bishop of the new Diocese of Liverpool (1880-1900).

A man of good scholarship, sterling character, wide sympathies, and tremendous zeal, he accounted it no light thing to be entrusted with the work of organizing and advancing the cause of God and truth in a Diocese noted for its extensive industrial development and in a city of world fame. As a man of God he gave unfeigned allegiance to the plenary inspiration and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Linked with this was his determination to strive for the maintenance of the Protestant character of the Church of England as by law established in the days of the 16th-century Reformation. Doctrine, experience and practice based upon and shaped by the pure Word of God were to him the essentials of the on-going life of the Church.

In the Liverpool Diocese Ryle faced a formidable task. Called to it at the age of sixty-five, when most men contemplate the retirement from the tensions and pressures of a life-work, Ryle laboured in season and out of the season with untiring pertinacity. To present-day readers he will chiefly be known through his expository and biographical writings.

In England Ryle stands in the foremost rank of those who have held forth the Word of Life and fought the good fight of faith. He is one of the Lord's standard-bearers of the late Victorian age. The 'healthful Spirit of God's grace' was upon him. Being dead he continues to speak to our backslidden generation.

You can find this paper on "Prayer" in *Practical Religion*, printed by James Clarke: Cambridge, 1959, pp. 46-69.

Let there be no mistake about my meaning. I am not examining what it costs to save a Christian's soul. I know well that it costs nothing less than the blood of the Son of God to provide atonement, and to redeem man from hell. The price paid for our redemption was nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. We "are bought with a price." "Christ gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Tim. 2:6). But all this is wide of the question. The point I want to consider is another one altogether. It is what a man must be *ready to give up* if he wishes to be saved. It is the amount of sacrifice a man must submit to if he intends to serve Christ. It is in this sense that I raise the question, "What does it cost?" And I believe firmly that it is a most important one.

I grant freely that it costs little to be a mere outward Christian. A man has only got to attend a place of worship twice on Sunday, and to be tolerably moral during the week, and he has gone as far as thousands around him ever go in religion — All this is cheap and easy work: it entails no self-denial or self-sacrifice. If this is saving Christianity, and will take us to heaven when we die, we must alter the description of the way of life, and write, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to heaven!"

But it does cost something to be a real Christian, according to the standard of the Bible. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, an Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, a race to be run. Conversion is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict, in which it costs much to win the victory. Hence arises the unspeakable importance of “counting the cost.”

Let me try to show precisely and particularly what it costs to be a true Christian. Let us suppose that a man is disposed to take service with Christ, and feels drawn and inclined to follow Him. Let us suppose that some affliction, or some sudden death, or an awakening sermon, has stirred his conscience, and made him feel the value of his soul and desire to be a true Christian. No doubt there is everything to encourage him. His sins may be freely forgiven, however many and great. His heart may be completely changed, however cold and hard. Christ and the Holy Spirit, mercy and grace, are all ready for him. But still he should count the cost. Let us see particularly, one by one, the things that his religion will cost him.

(1) For one thing, it will cost him *his self-righteousness*. He must cast away all pride and high thoughts, and conceit of his own goodness. He must be content to go to heaven as a poor sinner, saved only by free grace, and owing all to the merit and righteousness of another. He must really feel as well as say the Prayer-book words — that he has “erred and gone astray like a lost sheep,” that he has “left undone the things he ought to have done, and done the things he ought not to have done, and that there is no health in him.” He must be willing to give up all trust in his own morality, respectability, praying, Bible reading, church-going, and sacrament-receiving, and to trust in nothing but Jesus Christ.

Now this sounds hard to some. I do not wonder. “Sir,” said a godly ploughman to the well-known James Hervey, of Weston Favell, it is, harder to deny proud self than sinful self. But it is absolutely necessary.” Let us set down this item first and foremost in our account. To be a true Christian it will cost a man his self-righteousness.

(2) For another thing, it will cost a man *his sins*. He must be willing to give up every habit and practice which is wrong in God’s sight. He must set his face against it, quarrel with it, break off from it, fight with it, crucify it, and labour to keep it under, whatever the world around him may say or think. He must do this honestly and fairly. There must be no separate truce with any special sin which he loves. He must count *all* sins as his deadly enemies, and hate every false way. Whether little or great, whether open or secret, all his sins must be thoroughly renounced. They may struggle hard with him every day, and sometimes almost get the mastery over him. But he must never give way to them. He must keep up a perpetual war with his sins. It is written — “Cast away from you all your transgressions.” — “Break off thy sins and iniquities.” — “Cease to do evil.” (Ezek. 18:31; Daniel 4:27; Isa. 1:16).

This also sounds hard. I do not wonder. Our sins are often as dear to us as our children: we love them, hug them, cleave to them, and delight in them. To part with them is as

hard as cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. But it must be done. The parting must come. "Though wickedness be sweet in the sinner's mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not," yet it must be given up, if he wishes to be saved. (Job 20:12, 13.) He and sin must quarrel, if he and God are to be friends. Christ is willing to receive any sinners. But He will not receive them if they will stick to their sins. Let us set down that item second in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man his sins.

(3) For another thing, it will cost a man *his love of ease*. He must take pains and trouble, if he means to run a successful race towards heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard, like a soldier on enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behaviour every hour of the day, in every company, and in every place, in public as well as in private, among strangers as well as at home. He must be careful over his time, his tongue, his temper, his thoughts, his imagination, his motives, his conduct in every relation of life. He must be diligent about his prayers, his Bible reading, and his use of Sundays, with all their means of grace. In attending to these things he may come far short of perfection; but there is none of them that he can safely neglect. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Prov. 13:4).

This also sounds hard. There is nothing we naturally dislike so much as "trouble" about our religion. We hate trouble. We secretly wish we could have a "vicarious" Christianity, and could be good by proxy, and have everything done for us. Anything that requires exertion and labour is entirely against the grain of our hearts. But the soul can have "no gains without pains." Let us set down that item third in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man his love of ease.

(4) In the last place, it will cost a man the *favour of the world*. He must be content to be thought ill of by man if he pleases God. He must count it no strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted, and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his opinions and practices in religion despised and held up to scorn. He must submit to be thought by many a fool, an enthusiast, and a fanatic — to have his words perverted and his actions misrepresented. In fact, he must not marvel if some call him mad. The Master says — "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

I dare say this also sounds hard. We naturally dislike unjust dealing and false charges, and think it very hard to be accused without cause. We should not be flesh and blood if we did not wish to have the good opinion of our neighbours. It is always unpleasant to be spoken against, and forsaken, and lied about, and to stand alone. But there is no help for it. The cup which our Master drank must be drunk by His disciples. They must be "despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3). Let us set down that item last in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man the favour of the world.

Such is the account of what it costs to be a true Christian. I grant the list is a heavy one. But where is the item that could be removed? Bold indeed must that man be who would dare to say that we may keep our self-righteousness, our sins, our laziness, and our love of the world, and yet be saved!

I grant it costs much to be a true Christian. But who in his sound senses can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved? When the ship is in danger of sinking, the crew think nothing of casting overboard the precious cargo. When a limb is mortified, a man will submit to any severe operation, and even to amputation, to save life. Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything which stands between him and heaven. A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity, without a cross, will prove in the end a useless Christianity, without a crown.

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