

J.C. Ryle:

Without Christ

"You were without Christ" (Eph. 2:12).

The text which heads this message describes the state of the Ephesians before they became Christians. But that is not all. It describes the state of every man and woman in England who is not yet converted to God. A more miserable state cannot be conceived! It is bad enough to be without money or without health or without home or without friends. But it is far worse to be "without Christ."

Let us examine the text this day, and see what it contains. Who can tell but it may prove a message from God to some reader of this message?

1. Let us consider when it can be said of a man that he is "without Christ."

The expression "without Christ," is not one of my own invention. The words were not first coined by me, but were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were used by Paul when he was reminding the Ephesian Christians what their former condition was, before they heard the gospel and believed. Ignorant and dark no doubt they had been, buried in idolatry and heathenism, worshipers of the false goddess Diana. But all this he passes over completely. He seems to think that this would only partially describe their state. So he draws a picture, of which the very first feature is the expression before us: "At that time you were without Christ" (Eph. 2:12). Now what does the expression mean?

a. A man is "without Christ" when he has no head-knowledge of Him. Millions, no doubt, are in this condition. They neither know who Christ is, nor what He has done, nor what He taught, nor why He was crucified, nor where He is now, nor what He is to mankind. In short, they are entirely ignorant of Him. The heathen, of course, who never yet heard the gospel, come first under this description. But unhappily they do not stand alone. There are thousands of people living in England at this very day, who have hardly any clearer ideas about Christ than the very heathen. Ask them what they know about Jesus Christ, and you will be astounded at the gross darkness which covers their minds. Visit them on their deathbeds, and you will find that they can tell you no more about Christ than about Mohammed. Thousands are in this state in country parishes, and thousands in towns. And about all such people but one account can be given. They are "without Christ."

I am aware that some modern divines do not take the view which I have just stated. They tell us that all mankind have a part and interest in Christ, whether they know Him or not. They say that all men and women, however ignorant while they live, shall be taken by Christ's mercy to heaven when they die! Such views, I firmly believe, cannot be reconciled with God's Word. It is written "This is life eternal, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3). It is one of the marks of the wicked, on whom God shall take vengeance at the last day, that they "know not God" (2 Thess. 1:8). An unknown Christ is no Savior. What shall be the state of the heathen after death; how the savage who never heard the gospel shall be judged; in what manner God will deal with the helplessly ignorant and uneducated—all these are questions which we may safely let alone. We may rest assured that "the Judge of all the earth will do right" (Gen. 18:25). But we must not fly in the face of Scripture. If Bible words mean anything, to be ignorant of Christ is to be "without Christ."

b. But this is not all. A man is "without Christ" when he has no heart-faith in Him as his Savior. It is quite possible to know all about Christ, and yet not to put our trust in Him. There are multitudes who know every article of the belief, and can tell you glibly that Christ was "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." They learned it at school. They have it sticking fast in their memories. But they make no practical use of their knowledge. They put their trust in something which is not Christ. They hope to go to heaven because they are moral and well-conducted, because they say their prayers and go to church, because they have been baptized and go to the Lord's table. But as to a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ—a real, intelligent confidence in Christ's blood and righteousness and intercession—they are things of which they know nothing at all. And of all such people I can see but one true account. They are "without Christ."

I am aware that many do not admit the truth of what I have just said. Some tell us that all baptized people are members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Others tell us that where there is a head knowledge we have no right to question a person's interest in Christ. To these views I have only one plain answer. The Bible forbids

us to say that any man is joined to Christ until he believes. Baptism is no proof that we are joined to Christ. Simon Magus was baptized, and yet was distinctly told that he had "no part or lot in this matter" (Acts 8:21). Head-knowledge is no proof that we are joined to Christ. The devils know Christ well enough, but have no portion in Him. God knows, no doubt, who are His from all eternity. But man knows nothing of anyone's justification until he believes. The grand question is: "Do we believe?" It is written, "He that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." "He that believes not shall be damned" (John 3:36; Mark 16:16). If Bible words mean anything, to be without faith is to be "without Christ."

c. But I have yet one thing more to say. A man is "without Christ" when the Holy Spirit's work cannot be seen in his life. Who can avoid seeing, if he uses his eyes, that myriads of professing Christians know nothing of inward conversion of heart? They will tell you that they believe the Christian religion; they go to their places of worship with tolerable regularity; they think it a proper thing to be married and buried with all the ceremonies of the church; they would be much offended if their Christianity were doubted. But where is the Holy Spirit to be seen in their lives? What are their hearts and affections set upon? Whose is the image and superscription that stands out in their tastes and habits and ways? Alas, there can only be one reply! They know nothing experimentally of the renewing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. They are yet dead to God. And of all such only one account can be given. They are "without Christ."

I am well aware that few will admit this. The vast majority will tell you that it is extreme and wild and extravagant to require so much in Christians, and to press on everyone conversion. They will say that it is impossible to keep up the high standard which I have just referred to, without going out of the world, and that we may surely go to heaven without being such very great saints. To all this, I can only reply, "What says the Scripture? What says the Lord?" It is written, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "He that says he abides in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (John 3:3; Matt 18:3; 1 John 2:6; Rom. 8:9). The Scripture cannot be broken. If Bible words mean anything, to be without the Spirit is to be "without Christ."

I commend the three propositions I have just laid down to your serious and prayerful consideration. Mark well what they come to. Examine them carefully on every side. In order to have a saving interest in Christ, knowledge, faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit are absolutely necessary. He that is without them is "without Christ."

How painfully ignorant are many! They know literally nothing about religion. Christ and the Holy Spirit and faith and grace and conversion and sanctification are mere "words and names" to them. They could not explain what they mean, if it were to save their lives. And can such ignorance as this take anyone to heaven? Impossible! Without knowledge, "without Christ!"

How painfully self-righteous are many! They can talk complacently about having "done their duty," and being "kind to everybody," and having always "kept to their church," and having "never been so very bad" as some, and therefore they seem to think they must go to heaven! And as to deep sense of sin and simple faith in Christ's blood and sacrifice, it seems to have no place in their religion. Their talk is all of doing and never of believing. And will such self-righteousness as this land anyone in heaven? Never! Without faith, "without Christ!"

How painfully ungodly are many! They live in the habitual neglect of God's Sabbath, God's Bible, God's ordinances and God's sacraments. They think nothing of doing things which God has flatly forbidden. They are constantly living in ways which are directly contrary to God's commandments. And can such ungodliness end in salvation? Impossible! Without the Holy Spirit, "without Christ!"

I know well that at first sight these statements seem hard and sharp and rough and severe. But after all, are they not God's truth as revealed to us in Scripture? If truth, ought they not to be made known? If necessary to be known, ought they not to be plainly laid down? If I know anything of my own heart, I desire above all things to magnify the riches of God's love to sinners. I long to tell all mankind what a wealth of mercy and loving-kindness there is laid up in God's heart for all who will seek it. But I cannot find anywhere that ignorant and unbelieving and unconverted people have any part in Christ! If I am wrong, I shall be thankful to anyone who will show me a more excellent way. But until I am shown it, I must stand fast on the positions I have already laid down. I dare not forsake them, lest I be found guilty of handling God's Word deceitfully. I dare not be silent about them, lest the blood of souls be required at my hands. The man without knowledge, without faith, and without the Holy Spirit, is a man without Christ!

2. What is the actual condition of a man without Christ? This is a branch of our present subject that demands very special attention. Thankful indeed should I be if I could exhibit it in its true colors. I can easily imagine some reader saying to himself, "Well, suppose I am without Christ, where is the mighty harm? I hope God will be merciful. I am no worse than many others. I trust all will be right at last." Listen to me and, by God's help, I will try to show that you are sadly deceived. "Without Christ," all will not be right, but all desperately wrong.

a. For one thing, to be "without Christ" is to be without God. The Apostle St. Paul told the Ephesians as much as this in plain words. He ends the famous sentence which begins, "You were without Christ," by saying, "You were without God in the world." And who that thinks can wonder? That man can have very low ideas of God who does not conceive Him a most pure and holy and glorious and spiritual Being. That man must be very blind who does not see that human nature is corrupt and sinful and defiled. How then can such a worm as man draw near to God with comfort? How can he look up to Him with confidence and not feel afraid? How can he speak to Him, have dealings with Him, look forward to dwelling with Him, without dread and alarm? There must be a mediator between God and man, and there is but one that can fill the office. That One is Christ.

Who are you to talk of God's mercy and God's love separate from and independent of Christ? There is no such love and mercy recorded in Scripture. Know this day that God out of Christ is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Merciful He is, beyond all question rich in mercy, plenteous in mercy. But His mercy is inseparably connected with the mediation of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. It must flow through Him as the appointed channel, or it cannot flow at all. It is written "He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father which has sent Him." "I am the way, the truth and the life no man comes unto the Father, but by Me" (John 5:23; 14:6). "Without Christ" we are without God.

b. Moreover, to be "without Christ" is to be without peace. Every man has a conscience within him, which must be satisfied before he can be truly happy. So long as this conscience is asleep or half dead, so long, no doubt, he gets along pretty well. But as soon as a man's conscience wakes up, and he begins to think of past sins and present failings and future judgment, at once he finds out that he needs something to give him inward rest. But what can do it? Repenting and praying and Bible reading, and church going, and sacrament receiving, and self-mortification may be tried, and tried in vain. They never yet took off the burden from anyone's conscience. And yet peace must be had!

There is only one thing can give peace to the conscience, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on it. A clear understanding that Christ's death was an actual payment of our debt to God, and that the merit of that death is made over to man when he believes, is the grand secret of inward peace. It meets every craving of conscience. It answers every accusation. It calms every fear. It is written "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace." "He is our peace." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (John 16:33; Eph. 2:14; Rom. 5:1). We have peace through the blood of His cross: peace like a deep mine—peace like an ever-flowing stream. But "without Christ" we are without peace.

c. To be "without Christ" is to be without hope. Hope of some sort or other almost everyone thinks he possesses. Rarely indeed will you find a man who will boldly tell you that he has no hope at all about his soul. But how few there are that can give "a reason of the hope that is in them"! (1 Pet. 3:15). How few can explain it, describe it and show its foundations! How many a hope is nothing better than a vague empty feeling, which the day of sickness and the hour of death will prove to be utterly useless, impotent alike to comfort or to save.

There is but one hope that has roots, life, strength and solidity, and that is the hope which is built on the great rock of Christ's work and office as man's Redeemer. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). He that builds on this corner-stone "shall not be confounded." About this hope there is reality. It will bear looking at and handling. It will meet every enquiry. Search it through and through, and you will find no flaw whatever in it. All other hopes beside this are worthless. Like summer-dried fountains, they fail man just when his need is the sorest. They are like unsound ships, which look well so long as they lie quiet in harbor, but when the winds and the waves of ocean begin to try them, their rotten condition is discovered and they sink beneath the waters. There is no such thing as a good hope without Christ, and "without Christ" is to have "no hope" (Eph. 2:12).

d. To be "without Christ" is to be without heaven. In saying this I do not merely mean that there is no entrance into heaven, but that "without Christ" there could be no happiness in being there. A man without a Savior and Redeemer could never feel at home in heaven. He would feel that he had no lawful right or title to be there; boldness and confidence and ease of heart would be impossible. Amid pure and holy angels, under the eyes of a pure and holy God, he could not hold up his head; he would feel confounded and ashamed. It is the very

essence of all true views of heaven that Christ is there.

Who are you that dreams of a heaven in which Christ has no place? Awake to know your folly. Know that in every description of heaven which the Bible contains, the presence of Christ is one essential feature. "In the midst of the throne," says St. John, "stood a Lamb as it had been slain." The very throne of heaven is called the "throne of God and of the Lamb." "The Lamb is the light of heaven, and the temple of it." The saints who dwell in heaven are to be "fed by the Lamb," and "led to living fountains of waters." The meeting of the saints in heaven is called "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 5:6; 22:3; 21:22, 23; 7:17; 19:9). A heaven "without Christ" would not be the heaven of the Bible. To be "without Christ" is to be without heaven.

I might easily add to these things. I might tell you that to be "without Christ" is to be without life, without strength, without safety, without foundation, without a friend in heaven, without righteousness. None so badly off as those that are without Christ!

What the ark was to Noah, what the Passover lamb was to Israel in Egypt, what the manna, the smitten rock, the bronze serpent, the pillar of cloud and fire, the scapegoat, were to the tribes in the wilderness—all this the Lord Jesus is meant to be to man's soul. None so destitute as those that are without Christ!

What the root is to the branches, what the air is to our lungs, what food and water are to our bodies, what the sun is to creation—all this and much more Christ is intended to be to us. None so helpless, none so pitiable as those that are without Christ!

I grant that if there were no such things as sickness and death, if men and women never grew old and lived on this earth forever, the subject of this message would be of no importance. But you must know that sickness, death and the grave are sad realities.

If this life were all—if there were no judgment, no heaven, no hell, no eternity—it would be mere waste of time to trouble yourself with such inquiries as this tract suggests. But you have got a conscience. You know well that there is a reckoning day beyond the grave. There is a judgment yet to come.

Surely the subject of this message is no light matter. It is not a small thing, and one that does not signify. It demands the attention of every sensible person. It lies at the very root of that all-important question, the salvation of our souls. To be "without Christ" is to be most miserable.

1. And now I ask every one who has read this message through to examine himself and find out his own precise condition. Are you without Christ?

Do not allow life to pass away without some serious thoughts and self-inquiry. You cannot always go on as you do now. A day must come when eating and drinking and sleeping and dressing and making merry and spending money will have an end. There will be a day when your place will be empty, and you will be only spoken of as one dead and gone. And where will you be then, if you have lived and died without thought about your soul, without God, and without Christ? Oh, remember, it is better a thousand times to be without money and health and friends and company and good cheer than to be without Christ!

2. If you have lived without Christ hitherto, I invite you in all affection to change your course without delay. Seek the Lord Jesus while He can be found. Call upon Him while He is near. He is sitting at God's right hand, able to save to the uttermost everyone who comes to Him, however sinful and careless he may have been. He is sitting at God's right hand, willing to hear the prayer of everyone who feels that his past life has been all wrong, and wants to be set right. Seek Christ, seek Christ without delay. Acquaint yourself with Him Do not be ashamed to apply to Him. Only become one of Christ's friends this year, and you will say one day, it was the happiest year that you ever had.

3. If you have become one of Christ's friends already, I exhort you to be a thankful man. Awake to a deeper sense of the infinite mercy of having an almighty Savior, a title to heaven, a home that is eternal, a Friend that never dies! A few more years and all our family gatherings will be over. What a comfort to think that we have in Christ something that we can never lose!

Awake to a deeper sense of the sorrowful state of those who are "without Christ." We are often reminded of the many who are without food or clothing or school or church. Let us pity them, and help them, as far as we can. But let us never forget that there are people whose state is far more pitiable. Who are they? The people "without Christ!"

Without Christ

Have we relatives without Christ? Let us feel for them, pray for them, speak to the King about them, strive to recommend the gospel to them. Let us leave no stone unturned in our efforts to bring them to Christ.

Have we neighbors without Christ? Let us labor in every way for their soul's salvation. The night comes when none can work. Happy is he who lives under the abiding conviction that to be in Christ is peace, safety, and happiness; and that to be "without Christ" is to be on the brink of destruction.