
The Almost Christian Discovered
Matthew Mead
(Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995)
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Foreward by John MacArthur [vii]

"Matthew Mead's challenge to spurious believers is as timely today as when he wrote it in 1661. More than just a period piece, this volume offers a much-needed antidote to the shallowness and flippancy that characterizes today's Christianity. It contrasts sharply with the modern tendency to embrace as a brother or sister in the faith everyone who names the name of Christ. It sounds an alarm that few today would dare even whisper. In fact, *The Almost Christian Discovered* provides sobering proof of how far the contemporary church has slipped from the moorings of her heritage. [Today's] Christians, conditioned to accept carnality, worldliness, and compromise as part of the normal Christian experience, are certain to be shocked by Mead's admonition. We are not used to hearing truth presented in such straightforward and confrontive terms. Matthew Mead is no diplomat. He is a real preacher, and he speaks with prophetic accuracy."

MacArthur observes, "[Mead's] expose of the 'almost Christian' rips the cover away from the subtle forms of hypocrisy that lurk in all our hearts."

To the Congregation [x]

Mead's introduction from his sermon series. He tells of the difficulty in addressing this issue and grieves that he may hurt weak consciences.

To the Reader [xv]

Mead's similar introduction to those who would be reading the discourses in written form.

Introduction [1]

Mead gives his central thesis: "There are very many in the world that are almost and, yet, but almost Christians."

"Many are near heaven and, yet, are never the nearer. Many are within a litle of salvation and, yet, shall never enjoy the least salvation. They are within sight of heaven and, yet, shall never have a sight of God. It is said of the truly righteous, he shall "scarcely be saved"; and it is said of the seemingly righteous, he shall be "almost saved." "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." The righteous shall be saved with a "scarcely"; that is, through much difficulty. He shall go to

heaven through many sad fears of hell. The hypocrite shall be saved with an "almost"; that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven." [5]

"The saint may be cast down very near to hell and yet shall never come there, and the hypocrite may be lifted up very near to heaven and yet never come there." [6]

Mead contends that we ought not be shaken or discouraged by this. The warnings against falling short of God's grace are not there to wound believers, but to awaken sinners from their slumber.

Mead uses as an example, Jesus in Matthew 26: "*One of you will betray me*" and goes on to say: ". . . they that were innocent suspected themselves most and, therefore, cried out, "*Master, is it I?*" So when we also cry out from our souls: "*Is it I?*" – but we cling the more tightly to the blood stained robes of our Lord.

We look at where we stand. Solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ? Or are we trusting in ourselves? Warnings against laxity and unbelief are used by the Spirit to fuel our perseverance.

That we wrestle with these things is a sign of life, not death.

The rest of Mead's book (originally a sermon series) is guided by a series of 5 questions (the first is by far the longest section).

I. Question One [16]: "How far may a man go in the way to heaven and yet be but almost a Christian?"

A. Section I. A man may have much knowledge and much light; he may know much of God and His will, much of Christ and His ways, and yet be but almost a Christian. For, though there can be no grace without knowledge, yet there be much knowledge where there is no grace.

"To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head and heat in the heart, knowledge in the understanding and zeal in the affections. Some have zeal and no knowledge - that is blind devotion. Some have knowledge and no zeal - that is fruitless speculation. But where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian."

"It is not every knowledge of God and Christ that interests the soul in eternal life. For why, then, do the devils perish?" They have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though by their fall, they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge."

Knowledge may fill the head, but not the heart if there isn't something else. Example of the Pharisees.

B. Section II. A man may have great and eminent gifts, yea, spiritual gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"God may use a man's gifts to bring another to Christ when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ. One man may confirm another in the faith and yet himself may be a stranger to the faith. Pendleton strengthened and confirmed Sanders, in Queen Mary's days, to stand in the truth he had preached and to seal it with his blood, and yet, afterwards, played the apostate himself

Scultetus tells us of one Johannes Speiserus, a famous preacher of Augsburg in Germany in the year 1523, who preached the gospel so powerfully that divers common harlots were converted and became good Christians; and yet himself afterwards turned papist and came to a miserable end. Thus the candle may burn bright to light others in their world and yet, afterwards, go out in a stink.

A man may preach like an apostle, pray like an angel, and yet may have the heart of a devil. It is grace only that can change the heart. The greatest gifts cannot change it, but the least grace can. Gifts may make a man a scholar, but grace makes a man a believer."

C. Section III. A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead cites Jesus' words, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven." He offers Judas as an example: "What a godly profession Judas had! He followed Christ, left all for Christ, preached the gospel of Christ, cast out devils in the name of Christ, and ate and drank at the table of Christ, yet Judas was only a hypocrite."

1. Four Evidences of This Truth

a. If a man may profess religion and yet never have his heart changed nor his state bettered, then he may be a great professor and yet be but almost a Christian.

b. A man may profess religion and live in a form of godliness in hypocrisy.

c. Custom and fashion may make a man a professor; as you have many that wear this or that garb, not because it keeps them warmer or has an excellency in it more than other, but merely for fashion.

". . . but when religion suffers, then its confessors are no more than its converts, for custom makes the former, but conscience the latter. He that is a professor of religion merely for custom's sake, when it prospers, will never be a martyr for Christ's sake when religion suffers. He that owns the truth to live upon it will disown it when it comes to live upon him." [26]

d. If many may perish under a profession of godliness. then a man may profess religion and yet be but almost a Christian.

"In St. Matthew, you read of some who came and made boast of their profession to Christ, hoping that might save them. "Lord," say they, "have we not prophesied in Thy name, cast out devils in Thy name, done many wonderful works in Thy name?" Now what does our Lord Christ say to this? "Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me."

Mark, here are they who prophesy in His name and yet perish in His wrath; in His name cast out devils and then are cast out themselves; in His name do many wonderful works and yet perish as wicked workers. The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing than calling a ship the Safeguard or the Good-Speed will keep her from sinking. As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts, so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths. Now, then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then a man may be a high professor of religion and yet be but almost a Christian." [27]

"Hypocrites may be professors, but the martyrs are the true confessors. Profession is swimming down the stream. Confession is a swimming against the stream. Now, many may swim with the stream like the dead fish that cannot swim against the stream with the living fish. Many may profess Christ that cannot confess Christ; and so these, notwithstanding their profession, yet are but almost Christians." [28]

D. Section IV. To come yet nearer, a man may go far in opposing his sin and yet be but almost a Christian.

- 1. Conviction may be rational as well as spiritual.**
- 2. Convictions may be worn out.**
- 3. Many take conviction of sin to be conversion from sin and so sit down and rest in their convictions.**
- 4. True mourning for sin must flow from spiritual convictions of the evil, vileness, and damnable nature of sin.**
- 5. True mourning for sin is more for the evil that is in sin than the evil that comes by sin; more because it dishonors God, wounds Christ, grieves the Spirit, and makes the soul unlike God than because it damns the soul.**

"Many will confess sin, but it is only under extremity; that is not free and voluntary. Pharaoh confessed his sin, but it was when judgment compelled him." [32]

"Mr. Torshel tells a story of a minister he knew that would often be drunk and, when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly. Yet no sooner was he out of the pulpit but he would be drunk again, and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades." [32]

- 6. open sins may be deserted and yet secret sins may be retained.**
- 7. A man may forsake sin but not as sin, for he that forsakes sin as sin forsakes all sin.**
- 8. A man may let one sin go to hold another faster.**
- 9. A man may let all sin go and yet be a sinner still; for there is the root of all sin in the heart though the fruit is not seen in the life.**

"A man may forsake the life of sin and yet retain the love of sin. Now, though leaving sin makes him almost a Christian, yet loving sin shows he is but almost a Christian. It is less evil to do sin and not love it than to love sin and not do it, for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace, but to love sin argues strength of lust. "What I hate, that I do." Sin is bad in any part of man, but sin in the affection is worse than sin in the conversation; for sin in the conversation may be only from infirmity, but sin in the affection is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy." [36]

- 10. All sin may be chained and yet the heart not changed.**

E. Section V. A man may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"It is true that there is a hatred of sin which is a sign of grace, which flows from a principle of grace, and is grace." Yet,

1. A man may hate sin for the shame that attends it more than for the evil that is in it.

2. A man may hate sin more in others than in himself.

"So does the drunkard - he hates drunkenness in another and yet practices it himself The liar hates falsehood in another but likes it himself. Now, he who hates sin from a principle of grace hates sin most in himself. He hates sin in others, but he loathes most the sins of his own heart." [36-37]

3. A man may hate one sin as being contrary to another.

F. Section VI. A man may make great vows and promises; he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

The greatest purposes and promises against sin will not make a man a Christian, for:

1. Purposes and promises against sin never hurt sin.

2. Troubles and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future.

"Many covenant against sin when trouble is upon them and then sin against their covenant when it is removed from them. It was a brave rule that Pliny, in one of his epistles, gave his friend to live by, "We should continue to be such when we are well as we promise to be when we are sick." Many are our sickbed promises, but we are no sooner well than we grow sick of our promises." [38-39]

3. Purposes and resolves against sin for the future may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the present.

4. Nature unsanctified may be so far wrought on as to make great promises and purposes against sin.

"First, a natural man may have great convictions of sin from the workings of an enlightened conscience. Second, he may approve of the law of God. Third, he may have a desire to be saved. Now these three together, the workings of conscience, the sight of the goodness of the law, and a desire to be saved, may bring forth in a man great purposes against sin and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purposes." [39]

G. Section VII. A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"There, the strife is between the will and the conscience; conscience enlightened and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, that is against sin; the will and affection, not being renewed, are for sin. And this causes great tugging and combats, many times, in the sinner's heart. Thus it was with the Scribes and Pharisees. Conscience convinced them of the divinity Christ and the truth of His being the Son of God, and yet a perverse will and carnal affections cry out. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" [41-42]

"OBJECTION. But is it not commonly taught that desires of grace are grace? Nay, does not our Lord Christ make it so? "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

ANSWER. It is true that there are some desires of grace which are grace, as:

1. When a man desires grace from a right sense of his natural state; when he sees the vileness of sin and the woeful, defiled, and loathsome condition he is in by reason of sin and, therefore, desires the grace of Christ to renew and change him, this is grace. This some make to be the lowest degree of saving faith.
2. When a man joins proportionable endeavors to his desires not only wishes for grace, but works for grace, such desires are grace.
3. When a man's desires are constant and incessant, that cease not but in the attainment of their object, such desires are true grace."

"OBJECTION. But is not that a note of sincerity and truth of grace, to tremble at the Word? Does not God say, "To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word?"

ANSWER. There is a two-fold trembling:

1. One is when the Word reveals the guilt of sin and the wrath of God that belongs to that guilt.
2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the majesty of God speaking in His Word.

This is only found in true believers, and is that which keeps the soul low in its own eyes."

"A man may delight in the Word and ordinances of God and yet be but almost a Christian. They take delight in approaching God. And it is said of that ground, that it "received the Word with joy", and yet it was but "stony ground." [45-46]

"OBJECTION. But is it not made a character of a godly man to delight in the Word of God? Does not David say, "He is a blessed man that delights in the law of the Lord!"

ANSWER. There is a delighting in the Word which flows from grace and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He that delights in the Word because of its spirituality is a Christian indeed.
2. When the Word comes close to the conscience, rips up the heart, and reveals sin, and yet the soul delights in it. notwithstanding, this is a sign of grace.
3. When delight arises from that communion that is to be had with God there, that is from a principle of grace in the soul.

But there may be a delight in the Word where there is no grace.

- 1) There are many who delight in the Word because of the eloquence of the preacher . . .
- 2) There are many who delight to hear the Word who yet take no delight to do it. So God said of them, "They delight to hear My words, but they do them not."

H. Section VIII. A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges and yet be but almost a Christian.

I. Section IX. A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"A man may hope for heaven and yet not cleanse his heart nor depart from his secret sins. That hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification is a vain hope. A man may hope for heaven and yet be doing the work of hell. He may hope for salvation and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences. This is the case of many." [50]

J. Section X. A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the Word, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Examples Mead gives include: Saul; Simon Magus.

"Not every change makes a man a Christian. Indeed, there is a change that makes whoever is under it a true Christian. When a man's heart is so changed that it is renewed; when old things "are done away and all is become new"; when the new creature is wrought in the soul; when a man is "turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God;" when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly, then a man is a Christian indeed." [51-52]

"I do not speak this to discountenance any change short of that which is spiritual, but to awaken you to seek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly renewed, but it is better to be inwardly renewed. I know how natural it is for men to take up with anything like a work of conversion, though it is not conversion, and, resting in that, they eternally perish." [53]

"A man may go far in an outward change and yet not be one step nearer heaven than he who was never under any change. Nay, he may be, in some sense, further off. Christ said the Scribes and Pharisees were further from heaven with all their show of godliness than publicans and harlots in all their sin and uncleanness. Resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change. There is nothing more common than to mistake our state and, by overweening thoughts, misjudge our condition and so perish in our own delusions. The world is full of those foolish builders who lay the foundation of their hopes of eternal salvation upon the sand." [53]

"Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven and perish in a delusion? Would you not be found fools at last? For none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls and for eternity? Oh, then, labor after, and pray for, a thorough work of conversion. Beg God that He would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be altogether Christians. All other changes below this saving change, this heart-change, make us but almost Christians." [54]

K. Section XI. A man may be very zealous in the matters of religion and yet be but almost a Christian.

Eight Kinds of Counterfeit Zeal

1. There is a blind zeal, a zeal without knowledge.

The Jews have a zeal, but not according to knowledge. "This was the zeal of Paul while he was a Pharisee. "I was zealous towards God, as ye are dl this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death." [56]

2. There is a partial zeal; in one thing.

3. There is a misplaced zeal fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionate objects.

4. There is a selfish zeal that has a man's own end for its motive.

5. There is an outside zeal. Such was that of Scribes and Pharisees.

6. There is a forensic zeal that runs out upon others; like the candle in the lantern that sends all the heat out at the top; or, as the lewd woman Solomon mentions. whose "feet abide not in her own house."

7. There is a sinful zeal.

"All the former may be called sinful from some defect, but this I call sinful in a more special notion because it is against the life and chief of religion. It is a zeal against zeal that flies not at profaneness, but at the very power of godliness; not at error, but at truth; and is most hot against the most spiritual and most important truths of the times." [59]

8. There is a scripture-less zeal that is not butted and bounded by the Word, but by some base and low end.

L. Section XII. A man may be much in prayer. He may pray often and pray much and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the Pharisees whom yet our Lord Christ rejected for hypocrites.

1. Nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship.

2. A man may pray in pretence for a covering to some sin.

3. A man may pray and yet love sin.

4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things; and such are the prayers of most men.

5. A man may pray and yet be far from God in prayer:

6. A man's prayer may be a lie.

7. Affliction and the pressure of outward evils will make a man pray and pray much.

M. Section XIII. A man may suffer for Christ in his body, in his name, and in his person, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"Every man that bears Christ's cross on his shoulders does not, therefore, bear Christ's image in his soul." [64]

N. Section XIV. A man may be called of God, and embrace this call, and be but almost a Christian.

"Though God calls all those that shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calls. Every man under the gospel is called of God in one sense or other, but yet every man under the gospel shall not, therefore, be saved, for "many are called, but few are chosen". There is a twofold call of God: internal and external." [66]

O. Section XV. A man may have the Spirit of God and yet be but almost a Christian.

"There is a having the Spirit which is a sure mark of saintship: where the Spirit is an effectual prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart; where the Spirit is a potent worker helping the soul's infirmities; where the Spirit is so as to abide forever. But, now, every man that has the Spirit does not have the Spirit in this manner. for:

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly.
2. A man may have the Spirit and yet not be born of the spirit.
3. A man may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of bondage.
4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him. and yet it may be resisted by him.
5. A man may have the Spirit and yet sin that unpardonable sin."

"The true believer has so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that sin. "He that is born of God sins not"; to wit, that "sin unto death," for that is meant. The carnal professing sinner cannot sin that sin because he is carnal and sensual, having not the Spirit. A man must have some measure of the Spirit that sins this sin. so has the hypocrite. He is said to be a "partaker of the Holy Ghost", and he only is capable of sinning the sin against he Holy Ghost." [69]

P. Section XVI. A man may have faith and yet be but almost a Christian.

1. The faith of most is but a temporary faith.

"It endures for a while and then dies and perishes. True saving faith, such as is the faith of God's elect, cannot die. It may fail in the act but not in the habit. The sap may not be in the branch but it is always in the root. That faith that perishes, a man may have and perish." [71]

2. There is a faith that lies only in generals, not in particulars.

3. There is a faith that is seated in the understanding but not in the will.

4. There is a faith without experience.

5. There is a faith that is without brokenness of heart, that does not avail to melt or soften the heart, and, therefore, is not true faith;

6. There is a faith that does not transform the heart;

Q. Section XVII. A man may go further yet. He may possibly have a love to the people of God and yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead answers objections to this proposition:

"To this I answer that there is a love to the children of God which is a proof of our being the children of God. For instance, when we love them for that very reason, as being the saints of God; when we love them for the image of God which appears in them, because of that grace and holiness which shines forth in their conversation. This is truly commendable. to love the godly for godliness sake, the saints for saintship. This is a sure testimony of our Christianity. The love of grace in another is a good proof of the life of grace in ourselves. There can be no better evidence of the Spirit of Christ in us than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth, a sinner cannot love a saint as such. "An Israelite is an abomination to an Egyptian." There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds, between the children of the world and those whom the Father in His eternal love has chosen out of the world." [74-75]

"[The genuine believer] cannot love a sinner as a sinner: "In whose eyes a vile person is condemned." He may love him as a creature; he may love his soul, or he may love him under some relation that he stands in to him. Thus, God loves the damned spirits as they are His creatures; but, as fallen angels, He hates them with an infinite hatred." [75]

- 1. A man may love a child of God for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converses.**
- 2. A man may love a saint for his outward greatness and splendor in the world.**
- 3. A man may love a child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place.**

R. Section XVIII. A man may obey the commands of God, yea, many of the commands of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.

"OBJECTION. But is it not said, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father; and I will love him, and manifest Myself unto him?"

I answer, there is an obedience to the commands of Christ which is a sure proof of our Christianity and friendship to Christ. This obedience has a threefold property: 1. Evangelical; 2. Universal; and 3. Continual.

First, it is evangelical obedience both in the matter and manner, the ground and end.

In the matter of it; and that is what God requires; "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."

In the manner of it; and that is according as God requires: "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

In the ground of it; and that is, "a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith unfeigned."

In the end of it; and that is the honor and glory of God: "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Second, it is a universal obedience which extends itself to all the commands of God alike.

Third, it is a continual obedience, putting the hand to God's plow without looking back.

Yet,

"A man may obey the law and yet have no love to the Lawgiver. A carnal heart may do the command of God, but he cannot love God and, therefore, cannot do it right; for love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience." [79]

S. Section XIX. A man may be sanctified and yet be but almost a Christian.

"Every kind of sanctification does not make a man a new creature, for many are sanctified who are never renewed. You read of those who "count the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing." [80]

"To this [objection] I answer, you must know there is a two-fold work of sanctification spoken of in Scripture. One is common and ineffectual, the other is special and effectual." [80]

"That work of sanctification which is true and effectual is the working of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, to the obeying of every command, "to walking with God in all well-pleasing." Now, whoever is thus sanctified is one with Him that sanctifies. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren, for they are "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone."

But, then, there is a more common work of sanctification which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin but not to mortify sin. It may lop off the boughs but it does not lay the axe to the root of the trees. It sweeps and garnishes the room with common virtues but does not adorn it with saving graces, so that a man is but almost a Christian, notwithstanding this sanctification." [81]

On page 83, Mead thus comes to his "one great conclusion:"

T. Section XX. A man may do all as to external duties and worship that a true Christian can and, when he has one all, be but almost a Christian.

"You must know that all the commands of God have an *intra* and an *extra*. There is the body and soul of the command. Accordingly, there is an internal and an external worship of God. Now, the internal acts of worshiping of God are to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, etc. The external acts of worshiping of God are by praying, teaching, hearing, etc. Now, there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship. There is such a difference that they distinguish the altogether from the almost Christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor. Indeed, in this very thing the main difference between them lies." [83]

1. Internal acts of worship are good.
2. Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external.
3. They better the heart and magnify the degrees of a man's holiness. (External duties do not always do this.)
4. There is such an excellency in this internal worship that he who mixes it with his external duties is a true Christian when he does least; but, without this mixture, he is but almost a Christian that does most.

"The almost Christian can pray but he cannot love God. He can teach or hear but he cannot take delight in God. Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite: "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" Will he take pleasure in God?" Ah, no! He will not, he cannot!" [85]

"Why, then, should any saint of God be discouraged when he hears how far the almost Christian may go in the way to heaven? Whereas, he who is the weakest true believer, who has the least true grace, goes further than he, for he believes in and loves God. Should the almost Christian do less as to matter of external duties; yet, if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved. Should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he does, yet, had he not faith in Christ and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected." [85]

"Oh, therefore, let not any weak believer be discouraged, though hypocrites may out-do them and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in hypocrisy, but your faith and love to God in duties is a proof of your sincerity!" [85]

"Pray much, but then believe much too. Hear much, read much, but then love God much too. Delight in the Word and ordinances of God much, but then delight in the God of ordinances more." [86]

"The professor rests in duties, and so is but almost a Christian; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ. This is the way to be altogether Christians for, if you believe, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." [86]

Mead concludes this first great section:

"Thus, I have answered the first query - How far may a man go in the way to heaven and yet be but almost a Christian?"

1. He may have much knowledge.
2. He may have great gifts.
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the word.
7. He may delight in the word.
8. He may be a member of the church of Christ.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great and visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer.
13. He may suffer for Christ.
14. He may be called of God.
15. He may, in some sense, have the Spirit of God.
16. He may have some kind of faith.
17. He may love the people of God.
18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.
19. He may be, in some sense, sanctified.
20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true Christian can, and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

II. Question Two [88]: "Why is it that many men go so far that they come to be almost Christians?"

A. First, it may be to answer the call of conscience – though few men have grace all men have conscience (this is how far conscience may go in this work)

1. Conscience owns a God, and that this God must be worshiped and served by the creature

2. Know this, that natural conscience is capable of great improvements from the means of grace

"Sitting under the ordinances may exceedingly heighten the endowments of conscience. It may be much regulated though it is not at all renewed. It may be enlightened and convinced, yet never savingly converted and changed. You read in Hebrews 6:4 of some who once were enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. What work shall we call this? It could not be a saving work, a true change and conversion of state for, notwithstanding this enlightening, tasting, and partaking, they are said to fall away, verse 5. Had it been a true grace, they could never have fallen away from that. A believer may fall but he cannot away. He may fall foully but he cannot fall finally, for underneath are the everlasting arms. His faith is established in the strength of that prayer of Christ that eternal life which He gives from which we shall never perish.

This work, then, here spoken of cannot be any saving work because it is not an abiding work, for they that are under it are said to fall away from it. But though it is not a saving grace, yet it is a supernatural work. It is an improvement made by the Word upon the consciences of men through the power of the Spirit. Therefore, they are said to taste the good Word of God and to be made partakers of the Holy Ghost. They have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly, but striving with them and working upon them convincingly to the awakening and setting conscience to work. And conscience, thus stirred, may carry a man very far in religion and the duties of the gospel and yet be but a natural conscience.

A common work of the Spirit may steady a man very much in the duties of religion, though it must be a special work of the Spirit that steads a man to salvation." [88-89]

3. The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble

"God sometimes sets the Word home upon the sinner's conscience and applies the terrors of the law to it, and this fills the soul with fear and horror of death and hell. Now, in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties merely to fence trouble out of conscience." [90]

4. Natural conscience, enlightened by the Word, may reveal to a man much of the misery of a natural state; though not effectually to bring him out of it, yet so as to make him restless and weary in it

"It is said that when Adam and Eve 'saw they were naked, they sewed fig- leaves together, and made themselves a covering.' So, when once the sinner sees his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin, whereas he should run to Christ, close with Him, and beg His righteousness for a covering that the shame of his nakedness does not appear, he rather runs to a life of duty and performances; and profession. without Christ truly embraced and conscience at all renewed."
[91]

III. Question Three [93]: "If a natural conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners and a renewed conscience in believers? Or, how may I know whether the working of my conscience is the working of nature only or else of grace wrought in it?"

A. "ANSWER. I grant that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other, and the difficulty has a two-fold rise:

1. It arises from the hypocrisy that is in the best saints

"The weakest believer is no hypocrite, but yet there is some hypocrisy in the strongest believer. Where there is most grace there is some sin, and where there is most sincerity they is some hypocrisy." [93]

2. It arises from that resemblance there is between grace and hypocrisy; for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace without substance, the likeness of grace without the life of grace

B. Marks of a natural conscience

1. If a natural man's conscience puts him upon duty, he usually bounds himself in the work of God

2. If a natural man's conscience checks or accuses for sin, then he seeks to stop the mouth of it but not to satisfy it

3. The natural man seeks to still the noise of conscience rather than to remove the guilt. The believer seeks the removal of guilt by the application of Christ's blood and then conscience is quiet of itself

"Now, then, if, when conscience accuses for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience; and if, thereupon, conscience is still and quiet, then this is but a natural conscience. But if, when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with anything but the blood of Christ and, therefore, I use duties to bring me to Christ; and if I beg the sprinkling of His blood upon conscience and labor not so much to stop the mouth of it as to remove guilt from it, then this is a renewed conscience." [95-96]

3. There is no natural man, let him go never so far, let him do never so much in the matters of religion, but still he has his Delilah, his bosom-lust

4. A natural man prides himself in his duties. If he is much in duty, then he is much lifted up under duty

- a. Example of the Pharisees
- b. Example of a believer

"But, now, take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are highest, then his heart is lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul. He was much in service, 'in season, and out of season', preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness; and yet very humble, in a sense, of his own unworthiness under all. 'I am not worthy to be called an apostle. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.' And again, 'Of sinners I am the chief.' Thus a believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in humility. Duty puffs up the hypocrite, but a believer comes away humbled. Why? Because the hypocrite has had no visions of God. He has seen only his own gifts and parts, and this exalts him. But the believer has seen God, and enjoyed communion with God, and this humbles him. . . . Now, then, if I pride myself in any duty and am puffed up under my performances, then I have not seen nor met with God in any duty. But, on the other hand, if when my gifts are highest my heart is lowest; if when my spirit is most raised my heart is most humbled; if, in the midst of all my services, I can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness . . . my performances are from a renewed conscience. . . . So when all man's duties terminate in self, self is the principle of all."
 [Matthew Mead, *The Almost Christian Discovered*, 97-98]

5. Look what that is to which the heart secretly renders the glory of a duty, and that is the principle of the duty

"So when all man's duties terminate in self, self is the principle of all." [98]

6. Though a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presses to the attainment of holiness

7. And lastly, if a natural conscience is the spring of duty, why, then, this spring runs fastest at first and so abates and, at last, dries up

Question. Why does that man abate and languish in his duties that does them from a natural conscience more than he that does them from a renewed conscience? Answer - because they grow upon a fallible, decaying root.

AND THAT IS THE ANSWER TO THE MAIN QUERY, NAMELY, "HOW IS IT THAT MANY MEN GO SO FAR THAT THEY COME TO BE ALMOST CHRISTIANS?" IT IS TO ANSWER THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE.

C. Second, it is from the power of the Word under which they live

1. It is a discerning, discovering power

2. The word has the power of a law

3. It has a judging power

D. Third, a man may go far in this course of profession from affection of applause and credit and to get a name in the world

E. Fourth, it is from a desire of salvation

IV. Question Four [105]: "How is it that many are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far? What is the cause of this?"

It is for lack of right and sound conviction:

"If a man is not thoroughly convinced of sin and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be, yet he will be sure to miscarry. . . . Rational conviction is that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature by the help of those common principles of reason that are in all men. This is the conviction you read of in Romans 2:14-15. . . . But then there is a spiritual conviction, and this is that work of the Spirit of God upon the sinner's heart, by the Word, whereby the guilt and filth of sin is fully discovered and the woe and misery of a natural state distinctly set home upon the conscience to the dread and terror of the sinner while he abides in that state and condition. And this is the conviction that is a sound and thorough work. Many have their convictions, but not this spiritual conviction." [105]

A. Question Answered

Question. Now you will say, "Suppose I am at any time under conviction; how shall I know whether my convictions are only from a natural conscience or whether they are from the Spirit of God?" Answer. I should digress too much to draw out the solution of this question to its just length. I shall, therefore, in five things only lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

- 1. Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins, sins against the light of nature, for natural conviction can reach no further than natural light**
- 2. Natural convictions deal only with a man's conversation, not with his state and condition; with sins actual, not original**
- 3. Natural convictions carry the soul out to look more on the evil that comes by sin than on the evil that is in sin. So that the soul under this conviction is more troubled at the dread of hell, wrath, and damnation than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin**
- 4. Natural convictions are not durable; they are quickly worn out**
- 5. Natural convictions make the soul shy of God. Guilt works fear and fear causes estrangedness**

"Thus it was with Adam; when he saw his nakedness, he ran away and hid himself from God. Now, spiritual convictions do not drive the soul from God, but unto God. Ephraim's conviction was spiritual, and he ran to God. 'Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned.' So that there is, you see, a great difference between conviction and conversion; between that which is

natural and that which is spiritual; that which is common and that which is saving. Yea, such is the difference that, though a man has never so much of the former, yet, if he is without the latter, he is but almost a Christian.

"True conversion begins in convictions and true convictions end in conversion. Till the sinner is convinced of sin, he can never be converted from sin. Christ's conning was as a Savior to die for sinners, and the Spirit's coming is to convince us as sinners that we may close with Christ as a Savior. Till sin is thoroughly revealed to us, interest in the blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us. Nay, as long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought." [109]

"Second, and this has a near relation to the former, it is for lack of a thorough work of grace first wrought in the heart." [110]

V. Question Five [113]: "What is the reason that many go no further in the profession of religion than to be almost Christians?"

A. Reason 1. It is because they deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition. They mistake their state and think it good and safe when it is bad and dangerous

1. Five Grounds for this Mistake

a. The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man

b. This mistake arises from the pride of a man's spirit

c. Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving through that resemblance that is between them

d. Many mistake a profession of religion for a work of conversion and outside reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration

e. Lack of a home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience to reveal to a man the true state and condition he is in

"Here is his apprehension of his condition with the Word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before: 'When the commandment came, said he, then sin revived, and I died.' The Word of the Lord came with power upon his soul when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon his conscience (that is meant by the coming of the commandment, 'then sin revived, and I died'). That is, I saw the desperateness of my case and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness. Then my hope ceased and my confidence failed; and, as before I thought myself alive and my sin dead, so, when God had awakened conscience by the Word, then I saw my sin alive and powerful and myself dead and miserable." [117]

B. Reason 2. It is from Satan's cunning who, if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labors to persuade them to take up with a form of godliness

C. Reason 3. It is from worldly and carnal policy

D. Reason 4. There are some lusts espoused in the heart that hinder a hearty closing with Christ

Use of Application [121]

INFERENCE 1. Salvation is not as easy a thing as it is imagined to be.

INFERENCE 2. If many go thus far in the way to heaven and yet miscarry, oh, then, what shall be the end of those who fall short of these! If he shall perish who is almost a Christian, what shall he do who is not at all a Christian?

Use of Examination [125]

Two questions of great importance: 1) What am I? 2) Where am I?

What am I? Am I a child of God or not?

Where am I? Am I yet in a natural state or a state of grace?

Arguments to Encourage Self-Examination.

1. Because many rest in a notion of godliness and outward shows of religion, yet remain in their nature condition.

"Many are hearers of the Word but not doers of it, and so deceive their own souls. Some neither hear nor do; these are profane sinners. Some both hear and do; these are true believers. Some hear but do not do; these are hypocritical professors." [126-27]

"Whoever would trust a profession shall see Judas, a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of the gospel. He was one who cast out devils, yet cast out himself." [127]

2. Because errors in the first foundation are very dangerous.

3. Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case.

4. Satan will try us at one time or other.

5. Whatever a man's state is, whether he is altogether a Christian or not, whether his principles are sound or not, yet it is good to examine his own heart.

QUESTION. You say, "But how shall I come to know whether I am almost or altogether a Christian." if a man may go so far and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a Christian indeed?"

ANSWER 1. The altogether Christian closes with and accepts Christ upon gospel terms. True union makes a true Christian.

"Now many embrace Christ as a Priest but they do not own Him as a King and Prophet. They like to share in His righteousness but not to partake of His holiness. They would be redeemed by Him but they would not submit to Him. They would be saved by His blood but not submit to His power. Many love the privileges of the gospel but not the duties of the gospel. Now, these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their closing with Christ; for it is upon their own terms but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished but they can never be divided. But the true Christian owns Christ in all His offices. He not only closes with Him as Jesus, but as Lord Jesus. He says with Thomas, 'My Lord, and my God.' He not only believes in the merit of His death but also conforms to the manner of his life. As he believes in Him, so he lives to Him. He takes Him for His wisdom as well as for His righteousness; for His sanctification as well as His redemption." [130]

ANSWER 3. He who is altogether a Christian looks to the manner as well as to the matter of his duties; not only that they are done, but how they are done.

ANSWER 4. The altogether Christian is known by is sincerity in all his performances.

ANSWER 5. He who is altogether a Christian has a correspondence within to the law without.

"This is that which is promised in the new covenant: 'I will put my law in their hearts.'" [132]

ANSWER 6. The altogether Christian is much in duty, and yet much above duty; much in duty in regard of performances, much above duty in regard of dependence; much in duty by obeying, but much above duty by believing. He lives in his obedience, not upon his obedience, rather upon Christ and His righteousness. The almost Christian fails in this.

ANSWER 7. He who is altogether a Christian is universal in his obedience. He does not obey one command and neglect another, do one duty and cast off another, but he has respect to all the commands.

ANSWER 8. The altogether Christian makes God's glory the chief end of all His performances. If he prays, hears, gives, lasts, repents, or obeys, etc., God's glory is the main end of all.

Use of Caution [135]

The dangers of being an almost Christian . . .

"What one said of wisdom, 'Many might have been wise had they not thought themselves so when they were otherwise', the same I may say of grace. Many a formal professor might have

been a sincere believer had he not mistaken his profession for conversion, his duties for grace, and so rested in that for sincerity. That is but hypocrisy." [139]

The Dangers of Being an Almost Christian

1. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian in that this stills and serves to quiet conscience.

"Now, it is very dangerous to quiet conscience with anything but the blood of Christ." [141]

2. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian in respect of the unpardonable sin, the sin that the Scripture said can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come.

Three ingredients of the sin against the Holy Ghost: 1) It be willful; 2) It be against light and conviction; 3) It be in resolved malice.

Julian the Apostate was first Julian the professor.

3. Being but almost a Christian provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man.

4. Being almost, and but almost. Christians will exceedingly aggravate our damnation.

"The higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries. He who falls but a little short of heaven will fall deepest into hell. He who has been nearest to conversion, being not converted, shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged.. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy. She received more from God, she knew more of God; she professed more for God, and yet was not right with God. Therefore, she shall be punished more by God. The higher the rise, the greater the fall. The higher the profession, the lower the damnation. He miscarries with a light in his hand. He perishes under many convictions, and convictions never end but in a sound conversion (as in all saints) or in a sad damnation (as in all hypocrites)." [145]

Use of Exhortation [147]

The Uniqueness of the Riches of Grace.

Marks of Worldly Comfort.

Marks of Godly Comfort.

Why Saints are Sometimes Without Comfort.

1. Sin within.

2. Another spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit is the desertions of God, and this follows upon the former. God sometimes disappears and hides Himself from His people:

3. A third spring of that trouble and complaint that brims the Banks of the Christian's spirit is the temptations of Satan.

"If the saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without yielding, they might enjoy peace and comfort without sorrowing. This must be endeavored constantly here, but it will never be attained fully but in heaven. But yet, so tar as grace is the prevailing principle in the heart, and so far as the power of God is exercised in this life, so far the condition of a child of God is a condition of peace; for it is an undoubted truth that the fruit of righteousness shall be peace. But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life; yet:

They find it in the day of death. Grace and holiness will minister unto us then and that ministration will be peace.

Nothing makes a deathbed so uneasy and hard as a life spent in the service of sin and lust; nothing makes deathbed so soft and sweet as a life spent in the service of God and Christ. Or put the case, the people of God should not meet with this comfort then; yet,

They shall be sure to find it after death. If time brings none of this fruit to ripeness, yet eternity shall." [157-58]

CONSIDERATION 4. "What an entire resignation wicked men make of themselves to their lusts! And shall not we do so to the Lord Christ? They give up themselves without reserve to the pleasures of sin, and shall we have our reserves in the service of God? They are altogether sinners, and shall not we be altogether saints? They run and faint not in the service of their lusts, and shall we faint and not run in the service of Christ? Shall the servants of corruption have their ears bored to the doorposts of sin in token of an entire and perpetual service, and shall we not give up ourselves to the Lord Christ to be His forever? Shall others make a covenant with hell and death, and shall we not join ourselves to God in an everlasting covenant that cannot be forgotten? Shall they take more pains to damn their souls than we do to save ours? Shall they make more speed to a place of vengeance than we do to a crown of righteousness? Which do you judge best, to be saved everlastingly or to perish everlastingly? Which do you count the best master, God or the devil? Christ or your lusts? I know you will determine it on Christ's side. Oh, then, when others serve their lusts with all their hearts, you serve Christ with all your hearts! If the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil, then, much more, let the hearts of the sons of God be fully set in them to do good." [158-59]

QUESTION. But you will say possibly, "How shall I do it? What means shall I use that I may attain to a thorough work in my heart that I may be no longer almost, but altogether a Christian?"

ANSWER. Now I shall lay down three rules of direction instead of many to further and help you in this important duty, and so leave this work to God's blessing.

Direction 1. Break off all false peace of conscience. This is the devil's bond to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the peace of God, so there is the peace of Satan; but they are easily known for they are as contrary as heaven and ' hell, as light and darkness.

Direction 2. Labor after a thorough work of conviction. Every conviction will not do. The almost Christian has his convictions as well as the true Christian or else he would have never gone so far; but they are not sound and right convictions or else he would have gone further.

Three Things We Must be Convinced of:

"1. Be convinced of the evil of sin, the filthy and heinous nature of it. This is the greatest evil in the world. It wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, and it ruins a precious soul. All other evils are not to be named with this. My brethren, though to do sin is the worst work, yet to see sin is the best sight; for sin discovered in its vileness makes Christ to be desired in His fulness." [163]

2. Be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition; for, till we see the plague of our hearts and the misery of our state by nature, we shall never be brought off ourselves to seek help in another.

3. Be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of anything below Christ Jesus to minister relief to your soul in this case.

"Alas! It is an infinite righteousness that must satisfy tor us, for it is an infinite God that is offended by us. If ever your sin is pardoned, it is infinite mercy that must pardon it. If ever you are reconciled to God, it is infinite merit must do it. If ever your heart is changed and your state renewed, it is infinite power must effect it; and if ever your soul escapes hell and is saved at last, it is infinite grace must save it." [164]

"You must know that a sinner can never come to Christ, for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an enemy to God and the grace of God; but there are certain qualifications that come between the soul's dead state in sin and the work of conversion and closing with Christ whereby the soul is put into a capacity brought immediately out of his dead state and made to believe in Jesus Christ. There are some qualifications coming in between. Now, sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ; for He 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'; that is, such as see themselves sinners and, thereby, in a lost condition. So Luke exemplifies it: 'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. He is anointed, and sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn.'" [164-65]

Direction 3. Never rest in convictions till they end in conversion. This is that wherein most men miscarry. They rest in their convictions and take them for conversion, as if sin seen were therefore forgiven, or as if a sight of the lack of grace were the truth of the work of grace.

"What is it that troubles poor creatures when they come to die but this: 'I have not improved my convictions. At such a time I was convinced of sin, but yet I still went on in sin in the face of my convictions. In such a sermon I was convinced of such a duty, but I slighted the conviction; I was convinced of my lack of Christ, and of the readiness of Christ to pardon and save, but alas! I did not follow the conviction.'" [165]

Mead's closing paragraph:

"Now, therefore, has the Spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? Oh, then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last and enjoy God forever, improve these convictions and be sure you do not rest in them till they rise up to a thorough closing with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so end in a sound and perfect conversion! Thus shall you be not only almost, but altogether a Christian." [166]

THE END