

"WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?"

"Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" Deuteronomy 33:29
"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts 11:26.

This first text should stir and thrill our hearts. It takes the life that is lived for God, or to express it in terms of the gospel, the life in Christ, and lifts it up before the eyes of the world, and says, "There---can you beat that?" It takes a life which God has redeemed and regenerated and blessed and holds it high and challenges the world to produce anything like it. It says to the world, "Bring out your best and highest---and see how that Christ-redeemed life will dwarf it! For there, in the humblest soul on which God has set His seal, is something that you simply cannot achieve, cannot even touch---and never shall." "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?"

Certainly, this is a vast and sweeping claim. It is a daring challenge. Let us look into it. Let us come down to particulars and ask: In what specific ways does the Christian life beat all the rest? Just how is it superior to any other type of life? I want to suggest at least five points wherein the Christian life surpasses every other. These points will answer the question. Why be a Christian? Everyone should be a Christian because the Christian life is -----

I. A Hard Life

But some critic will say, "Do you mean that it is hard to live a Christian life?" I always thought Christianity was easy, that any one could be a Christian, almost without any difficulty whatever. I thought one just signed his name, accepted a creed, attended church occasionally, and uttered a prayer now and then. That was my conception of the Christian life. Harder? Will you tell me, then, what your religion is costing you? Take the past week, the past month, the past year----- in what way has professing Christ made things harder for you?"

That is the challenge. We must admit there is some cause for it. For there is a type of character which turns to Christ's religion for shelter and comfort--- and for nothing else. It is possible to worship Jesus without obeying Jesus---like the one who will attend dozens of religious meetings and yet be irritable at home. It is possible to sing,

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest."

without having once asked ourselves if there are not things in our lives and characters that His holy presence would burn to shreds. Don't sentimentalize religion. Don't make the name of Jesus of Nazareth sweet or sickly. Don't taint His strong religion with unreality. One day when Jesus was going down the street, a woman cried after Him, "Blessed be she who bore Thee, and the breast where Thy head lay!" But Jesus turned around at once, and rebuked the sentimental speech. He said, "Nay, say rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and do it."

A decadent religion may be easy; but the real Christian life is definitely harder than any other. Some of our Christian brethren in Europe today have been proving

that: for bitter beyond words have been the sacrifices they have had to face through their brave refusal to acknowledge any King or Head of the Church but Jesus Christ.

But we do not need to go so far for examples. Every person who is taking Jesus seriously knows that this is a fact. It is sometimes very difficult to do the genuinely Christian thing. Take Him seriously, and you are in for the hardest life in the world.

Then, someone says in astonishment, "That is a queer reason for recommending Christianity! A strange answer to the question, Why be a Christian? It is a first-rate reason for not being a Christian!" I wonder. Sometimes the very difficulty of a task is its most magnetic appeal. The fact that it is a hard life in itself makes it a challenging life.

II. A Holy Life

The word "holy" is a word for which many people today have but little liking. Ask the average young person if he or she would care to be known as a "holy" person, and probably the reaction will be one of two things. Either he will laugh at you, or else he will be horrified at you. "Holy? No, thank you. Anything you like but that!"

But wait a moment. The word in popular parlance may have lost caste; but it is worth while going behind it to its original meaning. What was that? Wholesome, healthy, Holiness means inward health. It means healthy instincts, healthy emotions, every part of life in a disciplined, balanced, wholesome condition. It means an integrated personality. Is not that the greatest need of thousands today--something to pull life together and integrate it, to deal drastically with the inward conflicts that damage spiritual health so seriously; something to eliminate the discords and dangerous complexes, and to bring everything into the harmony and unity of strong, clean, vigorous health, emotional and moral; something to make them holy?

And why was Jesus ever called the Great Physician, if not because He alone can produce this kind of vital health? He does that in two ways. He gives life a new purpose. And He fills life with new power. A purpose: that is, a sense of direction, the grip of a great ideal which gathers up all the soul's scattered, turbulent energies, focusing them on one thing---the Kingdom of God. And a power: a vitalizing, supernatural strength flooding a man's being, and sending him out like a conqueror to smash his most stubborn besetting sin. With that purpose and that power, Christ integrates a personality. In Christ, he is a whole man now. Emotional health, moral health, and spiritual health are all his. He is "holy."

III. A Happy Life

The Christian life is the happiest life in the world. However, there are some who would question that statement. There are some Christians who, by the dreariness and apparent joylessness of their religion, its lack of spirit and radiance, are betraying the Master they are pledged to serve and giving Christ a bad name among men. To you I would say, "Don't judge Jesus, the King of joy, by these gloomy caricatures of Christianity. Try the real thing, make friends with Jesus. Listen to the music of His voice, answer His challenge, rise and follow Him, and you will find it the happiest life on earth. The Christian life is happier than any other.

IV. A Helpful Life

1. It pays in a business way.

Occasionally someone will remark, "Well, I notice that men of the world prosper more than Christians." But look at them and see how they turn out. It pays to be a Christian from every standpoint. It pays in dollars and cents; it pays in peace of soul: it pays in joy of living.

2. It pays in an ethical way.

It is right. We owe it to God to be Christians in view of what He has done for us. We owe it to our nation also. We owe it to our families. It is right.

3. It pays in a social way.

I am a Christian because the sweetest, dearest fellowship of this world comes to me through the church. Strong and noble are the ties that bind old soldiers together, uplifting and cheerful are the bonds of fraternal societies, but stronger and more noble are the ties which bind the children of God together. Well did the poet say,

"Blest be the tie that binds,
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds,
Is like to that above."

I cannot understand how it is possible for a person to selfishly enjoy all of God's mercies and then reject the best of all God's gifts, even the Christ.

V. A Hopeful Life

While every other life is bounded by this little world, Christianity has all the windows open towards immortality. It sweeps the horror of darkness from the soul and stands facing out towards eternity. There are some who would banish from our hearts every gleam of glory from the world beyond. They know not what they are doing. Take the eternal hope away, and you have no evangel left. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

I thank Him for a salvation which gives me a better and happier life here and guarantees me a more perfect and glorious life hereafter.