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Maltbie D. Babcock





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REV. MALTBIE D. BABCOCK, D. D.

Three Whys and Their Answer

By
Maltbie D. Babcock, D. D.



United Society of Christian Endeavor
Boston and Chicago

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CONTENTS

CHAP,	PAGE
I. WHY SHOULD I BE A CHRISTIAN?	5
II. WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN JOIN THE CHURCH?	13
III. WHY SHOULD WE SPEAK FOR CHRIST?	23



Three Whys

And Their Answer

I

WHY SHOULD I BE A CHRISTIAN?

THERE is no reason why I should not be a Christian, and every reason why I should be a Christian. I live in certain relations to God, to people, and to myself. Some of the time I may get away from people; but I can never escape from God; I can never escape from myself. Then the most natural and imperial demand of my conscience is that I should be in right relations and on the best terms with people, with God, and with myself.

But how am I to know what are the right relations, what kind of life is best? Take the best you know till you find a better. The only failure in life is not to be true to the best you know.

Then I must be a Christian. There is no one better than Jesus Christ. There is no standard higher than his. Men not in sympathy with Jesus have yet been obliged to confess that he stands alone, supreme, incomparable. They said long ago, "I find no fault in him;" "Never man spake like this man;" "Truly this man is the Son of God." In our day men have said, "Higher than Jesus human thought has never gone;" "Whatever the surprises of the future may be, Jesus Christ will never be surpassed." Richard Watson Gilder has shown us that there is no dilemma even for the man who has doubts of the divinity of Jesus Christ. If he is honest and earnest, he must follow him anyway.

"If Jesus Christ is a man
And only a man, I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave alway.

“ If Jesus Christ is God,
And the only God, I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air.”

Peter's question, “ Lord, to whom shall we go ? ” is unanswered and unanswerable. Every now and then some one sings the praises of Buddhism or Zoroastrianism or Stoicism, but does any one think it would be a step forward to take up a religion of no God, or two gods, or many gods ? Christianity has the gentleness of the Buddhist, the virtue of the Zoroastrian, the love of beauty of the Greek, but without the defects which have carried two of the systems to the grave, and will bury the third also.

As a philosophy, a teaching of truth concerning God and man, life, providence, character, death, Christianity is matchless. The best modern movements of thought and action, like altruism and ethical culture, are children of Christianity, and cannot live far from home. One of the most acute of modern philosophers, no particular friend of Christianity, said that the best way to turn religion from the abstract to the concrete

was to live so that Jesus Christ would approve our life.

Am I a Christian if I believe this? Not necessarily. I may know what is right and not do it; I may see the truth and not live by it; I may recognize Christ and yet refuse him. But that is moral degradation; that is spiritual suicide. There is no peril so great as his who has light and turns his back upon it, who sees Jesus Christ and chooses Barabbas. To live in a Christian land, to go to a Christian church, to come of a Christian family, and not be a Christian, is to be in the worst kind of danger. Jesus said it would be better in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the men of Capernaum, who knew him, but would not obey him. Do not put yourself in such condemnation!

In justice to God, in justice to the world that needs Christians supremely, in justice and kindness to yourself, give yourself heartily to Jesus Christ, and walk in his light, and live his life with his help as best you can.

Look up to God, and ask yourself whether

you can do less. God loves you, and has proved his love and forgiveness past doubting at Calvary. How can you reject that forgiving love by not accepting it in Jesus Christ? You are not refusing the justice of God. That is not in your power. You are refusing the love of God. Jesus said the sin of which the Spirit of God would convict the world was "because they believe not on me." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." But "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ." Look up to God and thank him for his love. Thank him by accepting "his unspeakable gift," by giving yourself to him. You owe God the joy of having his love accepted and answered.

Look out into the world. What does it need so much for its sin and trouble and strife, misunderstanding and hopelessness, as the spirit of Christ's brotherhood? The light and hope of the world is the kind of life Jesus led. Be one of his brothers. See him in little children, in the sick and discouraged, in the prisoner, in the poor, in the

overworked and underpaid, in any one you can help. The world needs some one like you to show right where you live how to be loyal to duty, victorious in temptation, brave in trial, loving in every human relation. You owe it to the society in which you live, and which has given you your opportunities, that it should have your best life in Christ for its upbuilding and purifying. "Ye are the light of the world;" "ye are the salt of the earth." You owe it to your fellow men to live Christ's life among them and for them.

Look into your own heart. You know you must be yourself forever. Can you save your self-respect, your conscience, your character, yourself, when you know that you are untrue to the best, when you are living a life of unbelief and disobedience and self-indulgence? Tendencies petrify; character crystallizes. Every choice away from God hardens your heart.

"Forever round the mercy-seat
The guiding lights of love may burn
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet
Should lack the will to turn?"

You have Christ's word for it that, if you are not for him, you are against him. Can you let another day steal away its share of what interest you have to-day, what protest of conscience, what sense of sin, what longing to be better, what prodigal's homesickness? Turn your face to your Saviour now. Give yourself to him now and forever. Let nothing prevent you.

Matthew did not know much about Jesus, but he heard the words, "Follow me," and he began to follow. Peter was impulsive and over-confident; Thomas was a natural-born doubter; James and John had fiery tempers; but they followed Jesus, and gradually knew him better, and through him got the victory over themselves. You owe it to yourself to be your best self in Christ's name, to be Israel, not Jacob; Peter, not Simon; Paul, not Saul. Jesus Christ by his Spirit to-day can give you victory over your besetting sins, can make self-development and self-devotion follow self-mastery, and at last give you a new name as a gift and secret of love to him that overcometh.

Do you say now, "I give myself to thee,
my Saviour"? Hear his words: "And him
that cometh to me I will in no wise cast
out."

And didst thou leave thy home above
To tell me of my Father's love,
To give eternal life to me,—
And can my heart say, "No" to thee?

And didst thou go to Calvary,
And suffer there, O Lord, for me,
Dying that thou mightst set me free,—
And can I turn away from thee?

And dost thou wait with hands outstretched
To me, with endless doubtings vexed,
With sins and fears and cares oppressed,—
And can I spurn thy promised rest?

And dost thou say, if I neglect,
If I thy dying love reject,
That I thy glory shall not see,—
And dare I turn my back on thee?

* * * * *

I cannot, dare not, thus refuse ;
Thee for my Saviour now I choose ;
And since, Lord, thou hast died for me,
Help me in love to live for thee.



II

WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN JOIN THE CHURCH ?

IF you are a follower of Jesus Christ, there is no reason why you should not join the church, and every reason why you should. If you have not joined yourself in faith and fidelity to your Saviour, under no consideration join the church. If, as you know your own heart, you cannot say, "I know whom I have believed, and he knows that I have given myself to him forever," then do not deny him by confessing him. But if you do trust him, and are trying to be true to him, then do not deny him by not confessing him. How can you refuse, if you are his, to acknowledge him as your Saviour, to enter his school as a disciple, to enlist under his banner as a soldier of the cross, to come to his table as a child at home ?

You would not have your Christian hope at all to-day if others had done as you are doing. Your knowledge of Christ, every Christian influence that blesses you, has come through the church. But there would have been no church if Christians had not confessed Christ by calling themselves by his name, banding themselves together for Christian worship and education and work. If it is right for you to-day to cherish a secret hope in Christ and not publicly confess him, then you must admit that it is right for some one else to do so. What, then, becomes of the church if others should follow your example ?

You are *robbing the church* of the help you owe it. The church was a body because those who first trusted Christ joined themselves as members of a body to him as their head ; and it exists to-day because those who trust Christ still unite themselves to him in public loyalty as well as personal love. Paul put it plainly when he said that the Macedonian Christians "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God," first joining the Lord, and then the

Lord's. So the thousands on the day of Pentecost confessed their Saviour by being baptized, and were added visibly to the church. So did the jailer at Philippi and the Ethiopian, Lydia and her family, Stephanas and his household. Do you think that, if they were living to-day, they would hesitate about joining the church of their God and Saviour? How is it that you can know in your heart that you are forgiven and made an heir of God, and yet, by not joining the church, say as plainly as words could put it, "I do not care whether the church of Christ survives"? Are you not robbing the church when you receive from it your Christian faith and hope, and will not set yourself as a living stone in its walls, and do your best to perpetuate and strengthen it?

You are *robbing the Lord* if you live a life better, purer, stronger, because of his help, and yet will not acknowledge by public confession that he is your helper. By as much as your life through Christ's help is better than the life of others, you are keeping from him the glory due to his name, by refusing

to join his church. He founded the church, which he purchased with his blood, to be the "pillar and ground of the truth," a reservoir and channel of blessing, your spiritual mother and nurse and teacher; so that not to belong to the church is to rob not merely the church, but Christ himself. It is his household of faith, his body, his bride. He has identified himself with it in such wonderful intimacy that, when Saul struck at the church, Jesus said, "Why persecutest thou me?" There is no escaping the fact that, when you withhold your public allegiance from the church of Christ, your name from its roll-call, your loyalty and sympathy and interest and strength from its service, you are robbing the Redeemer of the church. It is the church of Christ, and bears his name in the world, and what you do to the church is done to Christ, and what you refuse the church you refuse Christ.

Let men see you living Christ's kind of life outside the church, and they will conclude that a man can be a good Christian and not belong to the church. Why should they join it when you do not think it necessary?

The church, like the Bible, is in many parts and ways divided, yet one; with different denominations, yet called by one supreme name. No one denomination may suit you perfectly. (The reverse is also true.) Choose the one that on the whole best represents Christ to you, in which you can best worship him and work for him; and as a member of that church make it more Christlike and the name of Christ more winsome and glorious because you bear it. Devotion to the church is loyalty to its Head, and neglect of the church is disloyalty to its Head. You rob not the church alone by not belonging to it, but the Saviour himself.

And how much you are *robbing yourself* of peace and power, you never will know till you confess your Saviour as he has bidden you. A duty undone, like a sin unconfessed, as David said, turns dew to drought. It is not for our sake, but for the child's sake, that we say, when a gift is received without a word, "And what do you say?" Even the poor woman in the crowd, sensitive and shy, the Lord would not let go away till she

had made her acknowledgment. She never could have "gone in peace" if her blessing had been half stolen. Let your own sense of unrest and unhappiness tell you that the "redeemed of the Lord" are expected to "say so," and that he who will not confess his Saviour neither shall he enjoy him.

And as for power, believe me, there is nothing for it like commitment. Let a boy go to college, and hesitate to fly his flag as a Christian and let the men know where he stands, and he is ten times more liable to be tempted and to yield. It is an immense safeguard to be classified. A Hindoo merchant ran up a flag with the words on it, "For Christ." It may have increased his persecution, but it diminished his temptation. Every college pin, Mason's symbol, political badge, national flag, proves the strength of inward agreement and outward acknowledgment. Fly your flag for your Captain. You will have a happier heart and a stronger arm. Do not rob the church of the loyalty you owe it, nor your Lord of the honor that belongs to him, nor

yourself of the peace and power that await confession of your Lord.

As for excuses, they are only explanations of the circumstances under which we did not do our duty. There is no excuse for a Christian's not doing what his Lord commands. Wellington told an officer to do something, and, when the answer came, "It is impossible," replied, "I did not ask for your opinion, but your obedience." Let us remember this: Jesus Christ our Lord does not ask for our opinions, but our obedience. How long would our excuses last in his presence? What do they really amount to before the bar of our sober judgment?

"There are inconsistent and even hypocritical church members." "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Nowhere do we allow the abuse of life, health, truth, language, business interests, anything, to destroy our confidence in their right use. A counterfeit dollar is the tribute paid to a good one. Join the church and set a good example. Try to be John, no matter who is Judas.

"I am not good enough." But what is

the church for but to help you to be good? You are not saved by your goodness, but by Jesus Christ and his love. Your intention and attempt to obey and serve him are the effect, not the cause, of your salvation. The church is to help you to know him better, and to be more like him. Do you really want to be good? Then you are good enough to enter the church. You might as well say you do not know enough to go to school, or are not strong enough to go to a gymnasium, or cannot swim well enough to learn to swim! The church and all its services, like the Bible, are meant to help you to be good.

“But I do not understand the doctrine of the church.” You are not asked to as a beginner, nor compelled to at any time. Jesus did not say, “It is the way,” but, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” I—not any creed, any symbol or confession—“I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” And Paul said, “I know *whom* I have believed.” If you know Christ as your Saviour, you have eternal life, and have a right to enter through the gate into the

heavenly city. How much more have you the right to enter the school, the family, the church, of the Christian beginners here on earth!

“I might dishonor my Lord.” Yes, and no one is more wanted in the church than the one who really dreads doing this. No one is expected to accomplish perfection, but to attempt it; and no one would walk or talk or dare enter any business or profession if he did not mean through mistakes to learn not to make them. “I write unto you that ye sin not;” and that we make our fixed purpose. “But, if any man sin, we have an Advocate;” and so we have God’s pity and help and restoration.

“I will sometime.” To-day is some time, and the only real time. Resolve now that you will unite with the church the next communion. “To-morrow is the road to never.” No decision was ever made to-morrow. There is no such day. What you ever did was done in a to-day. If you are trusting Christ to-day as your Saviour, trying to please him to-day as your Master, resolve to-day that at your first opportunity you

will be true to him by confessing him before his people, and obeying the command that calls you to his table, "This do in remembrance of me."



III

WHY SHOULD WE SPEAK FOR CHRIST?

THIS question follows two others, “Why should I become a Christian?” and, “Why should I become a member of the church?”

But it seems to be a question practically answered at the start. If I have become a Christian and confessed my Saviour, can I be natural, be like myself in every other relation of life, if I never speak of my Saviour? What does not concern me or interest me, I naturally and sensibly keep still about; and, if Jesus Christ were nothing to me, or if he troubled my conscience and I did not want to admit it, there would be nothing strange about my silence. But, if I really believe that he is my Saviour, that he has brought me God’s forgiveness, driven away my ignorance and fears, helped

me to conquer sin, given me clear views of the meaning of this life and glorious hopes for the life to come, and yet I never say a word about him to any one, is it not most unnatural ?

I admit there is no matter harder to speak about than our inmost religious experience. There are ways of speaking that seem like professions of superior virtue, and we feel that silence is one with humility ; that it is better to live our convictions than to speak of them ; that, if there is anything good about us, we are not the people to announce it. But this is talking about ourselves, not speaking of Christ—quite another matter. Speaking of Christ is consistent with all humility and tender and delicate feeling.

It is supremely natural. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. We naturally speak of that which interests us. So true is this that silence suggests unreality. Of course it would not be natural for us to speak of our Saviour to everybody, nor to talk about him much of the time ; but not to speak to anybody of anything that Jesus Christ has been to us is so un-

natural as to imply that he has been nothing to us at all.

Could the fishermen of Galilee have had their lives brightened and blessed by the friendship of Jesus, and never have said a word about him to any one? Could the blind have had their eyes opened, the deaf have recovered their hearing, and lepers have been made clean, and never have spoken of him who made life beautiful to them? And what of Paul? Can you imagine him saying never a word about the One who so turned his life about from restlessness to peace, from unhappiness to gladness? All that can be said about natural reticence applied as much to those people as to us, but it would have been most unnatural reticence if they had been silent. It would have been rightly inferred that unreality, not reality, was at the root of such silence.

Peter and John said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." What lay back of that word "cannot"? Their gladness to have had such a friend as Jesus, their experience of his

power, and their human, brotherly concern that other men should know such a Saviour, and such new hope and joy and power. For them never to have spoken of Christ would have been most unnatural, to say the least, and we should have had good reason to conclude that there was little or no friendship, after all, between them and Jesus Christ.

But their silence would have been more than unnatural; it would have been absolutely disloyal. The Lord told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses. Jesus did not distribute books. He trained followers. He did not write, but he taught for publication. The goodness he brought was not to be seen on the pages of a book, but read in the lives and heard from the lips of his friends. "Ye shall be witnesses for me."

What is a witness? One who knows, and tells what he knows. "Testimonials" is a word that has been much abused, but it represents everywhere the beginnings of human interest. Testimony calls attention to something. It makes people look in a new direction. It sets them thinking and

experimenting. We speak of a new book or a new doctor, a new kind of camera or a pleasant place to go in summer, and we are witnessing, speaking of something that interests us; and our friends get interested and investigate for themselves.

This is perfectly natural. We do it dozens of times a day, bear witness or receive witness, testify or hear testimony. Because this is so natural, Jesus Christ makes it his chosen way of extending his kingdom. "Come and see"; know for yourself; then "go and tell"; your knowledge is for others.

The Gospel of John is full of witnessing. Jesus said he came himself to tell us what he knew, to bear witness of the Father, of the truth, of eternal life. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus. John and Andrew and Philip said, "We have found; come and see." The Samaritan woman said, "Come and see," and her friends came, and afterwards said, "Now we know for ourselves." The blind man told what he knew of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to Mary, "Cling not to me, but go and tell," and associated all his

disciples in infinite dignity with the Spirit of truth when he said, "He shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness."

It is clear, then, as noonday that our Master expects his followers to speak to others about him. "Go ye into all the world, and tell of your Lord's salvation," ranges from the word of a friend to a friend—Philip's to Nathanael, or a woman's to her neighbors, like the Samaritan's—to the missionary's message carried to the ends of the earth at the risk of his life. The church has always grown "through the living voice," as Papias said. We are of all men most unnatural if we do not speak of him who is our Friend beyond all others, and we are of all servants most disloyal and disobedient.

It certainly is not always speaking of him by name. It may often be speaking in his spirit, talking of life and people and events in his way. When we are bidden to "do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus," it does not mean that we are to speak the name of Christ every time we do anything, but we are to make his name our motive, and what his name stands for, the measure

and standard of our life. So no small part of witnessing for Christ is speaking as he would, as he did. The book of Esther does not mention God by name, but it is a witness for God, for it shows his thoughtful and powerful protection. The most Christian preaching is not always that which uses the name of Christ most frequently.

Whenever you speak of God's fatherly care and goodness, of his forgiving love, of the life of sonship he wishes us to live towards him and of brotherhood towards one another, you are speaking Christ's message, though you may not always have used his name. To say, "Thank God," instead of talking about luck and fortune and stars and chance; to say about your future plans, "If the Lord wills" or "God willing"; to speak of any evidence of Christ's spirit, of his triumph, that we see in literature, or government policy, or the lives of men; to refer to a book or a speech or a sermon as it counts for or against all that Christ stands for; to rebuke a wrong or signalize the right as he would do; to confess our faults to one another, speaking of the hatred of

our own weakness and sinfulness, and our desire to live more worthily of our Lord; to judge gently the faults of others, and be quick and gracious to forgive; to talk away from gossip and slander, and against it if necessary; to speak of the good we see in others, and to try to draw it out; this, whether we always speak of our Lord by name or not, is part of our Christian witnessing. This is conversation that is to the glory of God, that is according to the name of the Lord Jesus, a true witness to what that name means.

Whenever we as Christians speak to one another of our Saviour, we are witnessing for him. To utter his name in conversation with one another may seem but a slight confession of him, but it is a real one. Why should we hesitate to speak to one another of him and of distinctively Christian things? We speak of hundreds of trifles, of things that interest us but for the moment. Why should we not leave the shallows, and launch out into the deeps? Those deeps belong to us. Why should we fear to explore them? We have the weather in com-

mon, and what we eat and drink and wear, and the latest news in the papers, and what our neighbors are doing ; but why should we belittle and impoverish our lives by talking only of such things ? Things that are pure and of good report we are told to think on ; why should we not excite new thoughts, and clearer and happier, by speaking of them ?

Because it would seem strange is a good reason for beginning. The strange is good for us where the commonplace reigns. But Christian conversation will not seem strange when we get used to it. Let us cultivate it with one another. Let us not be shy and timid about speaking of the realities. Talking of Christian things builds up Christian fellowship. Malachi said that those who feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord put their names in a book of remembrance. Jesus said he would confess before his Father in heaven those who confessed his name on earth. Is not a Christless conversation a real denial of Christ, and sure to find its place in a book of forgetfulness ?

And, unless we come to speak naturally with each other about our Lord and Christian things, how are we going to speak to people who do not know him, and who care for none of these things? "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." There are our Master's orders. If we do not learn to speak of his name and what he stands for to our friends in Jerusalem and Judæa, how shall we know how to witness to the Samaritans and outsiders? The early Christians must have spoken often with one another about the comfort and joy of their Christian life, about their temptations and discouragements, their blessings and their duties. How else would their faith have been strong, their hearts full, their tongues ready to speak of their Lord to unbelievers?

The early church grew by cellular growth, one individual touching another. It was the contagion of Christian contact. One Philip found Nathanael at home, and another Philip found the Ethiopian in the desert. Each knew, and told what he knew,

and through them these men became Christ's followers. Would you have spoken of Christ to these men, a neighbor, a stranger, if the opportunity had come to you? Would you have hesitated? Would you even have thought of it? The early church grew with such rapidity because Christians did think and did not hesitate. The apostles could not possibly have won the world by preaching, any more than a battle could be won by generals. It was the rank and file who did the work. "They slew every man his man." Every one who knew Christ was interested in the one who did not. With what leaps and bounds would the church advance to-day if every one who knows Christ would think about some one who does not, would really care, would pray, would plan! The right kind of witnessing would be bound to come.

It is, after all, a question of caring. What we really care about we in some way find our chance to speak about. The man with some business project, with a story to tell, with a piece of news, with a favor to ask, sooner or later manages to introduce the

subject. He cares. Paul cared. He could not be a Christian alone. He must divide. He must tell others of what Christ could do. So he studied the Jew, the Greek, the barbarian, the weak man, the strong man, to see how he could best interest him in Jesus Christ.

We can express ourselves. We have ingenuity and imagination and opportunities. There are certainly plenty of people who are weak and unhappy and practically useless because they are Christless. They may seem indifferent, but how do you know they are so? Why should you not tell them what you know? Why not run the risk of helping them? You can study the situation. You can *care*. Then, you can ask God to guide you, and watch for your chance. A book, an invitation, a letter, an expression of personal interest, something of what has come to you through your Saviour, a change you have noticed in the life of another, may be your tap at the heart's door.

If it should happen that sometime the door does not open to you, you have only

had the experience that came to your Saviour, that came to Paul. Jesus said that, if they do not receive you, your message of peace comes back into your own heart. You have done the loving thing, and are the stronger for it, with new sympathy with your Saviour. Paul said he tried to adapt himself to everybody that he might save somebody, not everybody.

“Success” is not the word that Jesus uses, but “fidelity.” Are we faithful in the matter in the sight of our Lord? Do we watch for chances to witness? Are we ready when the time comes? Do we dare? Do we really care? “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.” Can we be obedient Christians if we are not witnessing, if we are afraid or ashamed to “speak a good word for Jesus Christ”?

“Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own his cause,
Or blush to speak his name?”

Can you be reconciled to a starless crown,
that you should be in heaven by the grace
of your Lord and no one else be there be-

cause of your sympathy and thought and love? Will you not resolve now as you read that you will acknowledge your Lord wherever and whenever it is the natural, loyal, loving thing to do; that you will watch for chances to be his "faithful witness" with the tact, the gentleness, the truth, the love, which he will give you?

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