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Why I am a Christian No. 1

John Allen Chalk

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Why I Am A Christian

Part I

Listen to an aged soldier of the cross of Jesus speak the conviction of his life and the comfort of his death. “Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God; who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, whereunto I was appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher. For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed: for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day” (II Timothy 1:8-12).

These words poured out of a heart that knew great purpose and power in life. They expressed the mature reflection of a life so action-filled that an entire world had heard about this man's Savior during his lifetime (Colossians 1:23). We do not hear the embittered moans of one who has outlived his reason for living. This is the confident confession of a Christian.

Let's contrast this confession with one made in the twentieth century. In a book of his essays Bertrand Russell presents what one of his friends has called, “an uncompromising affirmation of the secularist viewpoint.” The title of the book and also the title of the first chapter is “Why I Am Not A Christian.”

First delivered in England on March 6, 1927, and republished as late as 1957, this essay by such a well-known unbeliever has attracted much attention. Russell correctly sees in his “Preface” to the book that “the great religions of the world,” including Christianity, make such claims that “as a matter of logic . . . not more than one of them can be true” (p. v, Why I Am Not A Christian). But then he proceeds to illogically reject all religions as both untrue and impractical. In the essay, “Why I Am Not A Christian,” this secular humanist defines a Christian as one who accepts “a whole collection of creeds” and all the institutional denominationalisms of present-day churches (pp. 3, 4, ibid). Here Mr. Russell commits the fallacy of rejecting a caricature of Christianity rather than accepting the religion of Jesus Christ as it is presented in the New Testament. Here I want to pause and say that this weekly program is committed to no human forms of professed Christendom, to no man-created institutional and ecclesiastical machinery, but rather to New Testament Christianity. (An entire series of radio lessons was presented in July of 1966 in explanation of this unique plea we make. You may still receive free copies of those lessons by writing to the address that will be given in a moment and requesting Herald of Truth radio sermons, numbers 754-757.)

But back to Mr. Russell and his reasons “Why I Am Not A Christian.” Unfortunately, the very “open hearts and open minds” that he says the world needs represent the opposite approach Russell himself makes in (1) failing to understand what true Biblical Christianity is, and then (2) swiftly destroying his own self-contrived, imagined, and very unreal picture of the Christian life.

For this and other reasons I want to seriously share with you my reasons “why I am a Christian.” Would you honestly and seriously listen for the next few minutes?

I am a Christian because I believe in the personal, living God. Indelibly stamped on my being and deeply ingrained in my nature is a “sense” or an “awareness” that
calls for God. Something about me in my subconscious and conscious states cries out for fulfillment and knows only frustration without a God who can be known personally, and who involves Himself in my life. When we read in Genesis 1, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:...” I begin to understand this striving of my soul. As a human being, I have been created “in the image of God.” It is “Jehovah God” that “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). God’s life according to God’s plan is the sustaining principle of my human life.

A spiritual thirst that nothing else will quench wells up within my soul. The Psalmist records a universally real but sometimes unrecognized longing of humanity, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1,2). In my moments of despair and loneliness, when I am “cast down and disquieted,” according to the same writer, it is time to “Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance” (Psalm 42:5).

My environment, even the universe in its immenseness that increases with every advance of man’s understanding of space, shouts for my acceptance of God and His reality. Ungodly men experience a great plight because, as Paul explains in Romans 1, “that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them” (Romans 1:19). Notice the words, “manifest in them,” meaning that the need for God is deeply woven into the fabric of man. He then further clarifies this universal testimony to God’s presence. “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Those last words haunt the unbeliever, “that they may be without excuse.” In the verses that follow, verses 21-25, Paul shows how lack of genuine faith in God ultimately creates confusion, immorality, and futility (Romans 1:21-25). I am a Christian because I believe in the personal, living God. To the supernatural, to the intellectual, to the arrogant humanist, to the honest doubter, Paul speaks as he did to the Doctors of Philosophy in Athens, “The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24,25).

I am a Christian because I now know God in Jesus Christ. At a definite point in history a young virgin “conceived...of the Holy Spirit” and gave birth to Jesus, “for it is he,” Matthew records the angel of God to have said, “that shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20,21). One of Jesus’ early disciples, Philip, told his friend Nathanael, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

One of the most significant characteristics of the New Testament Gospels is their lack of any specific attempt to prove that Jesus existed. All the historical facts are “a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled;” the specification of which enrollment under Quirinius, governor of Syria; and the full listing of all political figures in Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth. Even the Christian apologists of the second century never found it necessary to argue the historical existence of Jesus, it was accepted by friend and foe alike. Josephus, the Jewish historian of Jerusalem’s destruction; Pliny, the Roman official who wrote so copiously to his Emperor Trajan; Tacitus, the venerable historian of Rome; and Suetonius, biographer of the Caesars, all wrote within a few years of the life of Jesus and all accepted His historical existence.

You can understand my shock at hearing a man of Bertrand Russell’s learning say, “Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one” (p. 16, ibid). My friends, to doubt the existence of this Jesus of Nazareth is to question the historical reality of Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius, much less the Christian writers of the second and third centuries who were still in touch with eyewitness testimony to Jesus.

I am a Christian because Jesus did live. But even more certainly, I am a Christian because this Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. No greater witness to this truth could be produced than the Roman officer who conducted the crucifiction. Matthew records the pagan soldier’s reaction to Christ’s death, a confession that has never been successfully repudiated. “Now the centurion, and they that saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

Jesus Christ came to “reveal the Father” to all who would accept Him in obedience (Matthew 11:27; John 12:49,50). He lived in continual subjection to His Father’s redemptive scheme being worked out in His life and death (John 4:34; 17:14). His one abiding purpose was the revelation of God to man. I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me,” He taught (John 14:6). “If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also,” He instructed His followers (John 14:7). When Philip requested a vision of God, the Father, Jesus replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). To know Jesus is to know God. He was the Son of God. He came proclaiming God’s will for man. He emphatically taught that man could know God in no other way. “Arrogant?” you ask about such a claim. Don’t forget what He did to demonstrate its truth. He gave Himself on the cross!

I am a Christian because of Christ’s complete identification with me. When His disciples argued over position and prestige, he said, “Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28). Don’t ever get the idea that His death was a sudden accident! He walked the path of the cross from the first day of His ministry.

Not only was Jesus a servant in the sense that we must also be servants, but He was also a common man. A peasant from Nazareth, the report went out from Philip to Nathanael (John 1:45). So ordinary was that little community of Nazareth that Nathanael’s first reaction to Jesus was “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

He came as a man. The virgin birth properly reminds us of His divinity, a reality that becomes undeniable in His adult life. But the virgin birth reminds us of His real humanity. When Matthew talks about “the birth of Jesus Christ” in his Gospel, he talks of “his mother Mary” and her betrothal to Joseph (Matthew 1:18). Unashamedly, Matthew and the other New Testament evangelists talk about Mary’s “conception of the Holy Spirit” and the son “she shall bring forth” (Matthew 1:20,21). The Gospel of Mark is noted for the splendid and detailed portrayal of Christ’s warm humanity. He was a real man who lived at a definite time in history.

As a servant, peasant, and man, He came to suffer and die. Immediately following Peter’s famous confession of Christ’s divinity and Sonship, Jesus explained to the disciples, “that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up” (Matthew 16:21).
Following the resurrection and on the day of His ascension, Jesus instructed the apostles in the Old Testament prophecies which taught “that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24: 45-47).

The author of Hebrews concludes that as Christians we have “a great high priest” in Jesus Christ. And this is the reason, “For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:16). He is my friend and counselor. He lived like I live. He experienced my pains, disappointments, and sorrows. He knew the thrill and joy of living. He also faced the worst possible death that man could know. Yes, I’m a Christian because of Christ’s complete identification with me and my life.

This is why Paul can say, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). So completely have I given my life into His care and so completely does His will govern my life that, again in Paul’s words, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Christ calls for my faith in Him as the Son of God. Upon carefully considering His claims in New Testament records, I believed in Him (Romans 10:17).

He teaches me the necessity of a complete change of my life and thought. This is the repentance explained in the New Testament (Luke 13:3).

Having heard His promise to confess me to His Father upon my confession of Him before men, I publicly affirmed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Lord of my life” (Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9).

In His final instructions to the apostles He told them to baptize all who would so believe in Him, repent of their sins, and confess Him publicly (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). According to New Testament teaching, at this point I received "remission of my sins" (Acts 2:38), I became “a new creature” (Romans 6:3, 4; II Corinthians 5:17), and I was adopted into God’s family (Galatians 3:26, 27). You can enjoy the same wonderful blessings by coming to the same Savior, surrendering in the same manner to the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville’s Young Man of the Year in 1963.

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