

Excuses for Not Becoming a Christian

Sermon Written for the Sunday Oregonian by Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis, Pastor of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn.

Test—I pray these have no excuse. ANY stand upon the threshold of the Christian life and will not cross the line, because they are unwilling to assume its obligations. Their rule of life is to avoid all unnecessary responsibility. They do not wish to be fettered or trammelled. They "feel a little freer outside of the church. Then, if they make a mistake no one is injured but themselves." What? Avoid responsibility by refusing to confess it? This is a singular misapprehension! No man adds to his obligations by joining a Christian church; no man escapes them by refusing allegiance. The obligation to discipleship is based upon the moral constitution of man. The law of the pure heart, the duty to hunger and thirst after righteousness, the sin of evil thoughts and evil words, the murderous heart did not begin to be when Christ affirmed them. From the beginning of time it has been wrong to steal and kill. Being so, Christ recognized this eternal wrong. The physician does not create the laws of health. There being certain organs in the body, and gluttony and drunkenness being injurious to these organs, the physician writes against excess and teaches moderation and care. Now, do you think that when you have broken the laws of nerve and digestion and sleep and go down with nervous prostration, and reason itself trembles upon the throne, you can tell the physician and say, "What do these twinges and aches mean? I have never promised to obey the laws of hygiene. I refrained therefrom, but I might have more liberty. I do not wish to trammel myself by pledging obedience to the laws that forbid an occasional excess in eating and drinking and passion." You avoid no obligation to obey the laws of the body by declining to recognize your duty; you increase your obligation not one whit by studying books of health or joining a society for the promotion of physical well-being. He who refuses to study and obey the law of arithmetic will soon drop out of trade and commerce. He who refuses to study and obey the law of fire and wind, and water, and acids, will soon suffer irreparable wreckage of the body. He who refuses to study and obey the laws of truth and friendship, and good citizenship, will soon have no place in the social society. The artist who wishes to avoid the obligation to paint with harmonious colors, by never joining an art school and studying under a great master, has no place among those who love supreme beauty. The minister himself is under no more obligation to lead a Christian life than the man who never opens his Bible, who never crosses the threshold of a church, who never attempts to follow Jesus Christ, to study in his school of character, and pursue the higher manhood, is based upon the fact that men are men and not that they are moral teachers, or merchants, or lawyers, or believers, or worldlings. Once for all, therefore, let us end this superficial thought, that we have more license and freedom by remaining outside of the church and studying Christ's method of making the most of one's self.

they enter upon the Christian life they must give up many pleasures and many joys? What if I should ask a beggar in his rags, with his money crust of bread, to enter a mansion and become the owner of a palace and vast estate? And what if the beggar, with his thin blue lips and gaunt face, should stand hesitant upon the threshold of the great mansion, and, looking down the driveway, should shake his head wistfully and say: "Oh, but I have to give up the pleasures of feasting from house to house, and the delights of sleeping in a garret." Some things the disciple does give up: the pleasure of sin, for gluttony and ill temper and lording it over one's fellows are real pleasures. But in losing the low form of pleasure the disciple gains a thousand new and higher ones.

Excuse Based Upon Inconsistent Church Members.

Some there are who rail against Christianity by reason of the want of consistency among its members. They insist that the church has stood for ignorance, narrowness, bigotry and cruelty. One of their favorite amusements is rehearsing the story of the popes who have persecuted scholars. They remind us that one pope imprisoned Galileo, and another killed Bruno; that Calvin burned Servetus, that Torquemada ordered the Inquisition. It is insisted that the emblem of the church is the jagged, the thimble-shaped and the heresy trial, and many there are who use these statements as excuses for avoiding the Christian life. We freely grant that Peter cursed, and with vulgar oaths denied his Master. Sorrowfully we confess that Judas was a contemptible hypocrite. We grant that in the time of Galileo scheming and cunning politicians were attracted by the power and wealth of the church to get themselves elected cardinals, threatened Galileo, and threatened a thousand other Christian men who protested against the cruelty and lewdness of pope and cardinal. We confess, too, that John Calvin was simply an organized agitator, an animated argument, bloodless as a stone, with an intellect that worked like a cold lead engine, and about as lovable as a two-edged sword. But Calvin did play the traitor-like Peter, if

he was intellectually so proud and so determined to have his own way that he would not simply expel as a heretic one who did not think as he thought, but would hunt him at the stake, does his colossal egotism and recency make right your refusal to imitate Jesus Christ? You will not join a church because of inconsistent church members? Consistency then is the word you wish to emphasize. Very well. Here is the world of trade and commerce. Tomorrow merchants will adulterate their goods, will tamper with their weights and scales, will water their milk, drapers will sell cotton for silk, clerks will steal money from the bank, and the whole kingdom of trade stand for hypocrites and lies. Since you do not care to associate with hypocrites, withdraw yourself from business and pledge yourself never again to enter the kingdom of commerce. If inconsistent members keep you out of the church, why do not inconsistent members keep you out of business? Here is the kingdom of law. Tomorrow lawyers will be tricksters, they will be sly witnesses, they will conceal evidence, they will deal in subtleties. But because some lawyers are unprofessional, will that compel you to stand aloof from the study of Jurisprudence? Here is the kingdom of love and marriage. Tomorrow some man will play false to his marriage vow, and some woman will profane the holiest sanctities, and those who have solemnly pledged themselves to the law of love will stand forth as hypocrites with a vengeance. But does their inconsistency mean that you can never find your true mate, that you can never stand at a marriage altar and never swear fealty in the name of an eternal friendship? There are spots on the sun, but we need the sun for harvest. To be consistent, you must give up the Venus de Milo, because there is a flaw in the marble. We must pull down the Parthenon because there are stains on the columns. Something is wrong in the man who refuses allegiance to the church because of inconsistency, but turns around and gives allegiance to a hundred other institutions, in the very face of greater inconsistencies. The time has come forever for men to plead the bigotry and bad lives of the unworthy disciples of a Master who confessedly is worthy.

Peter and Judas misrepresented their Master, but in that hour of misrepresentation they ceased to be disciples and became hypocrites, those who dislike hypocrisy leave the company of Judas and Peter, and join the ranks of the other ten. There are many poor pupils in schools and colleges, but when you find some youth who is far from being the ideal scholar, do not rail against the college and the university. The poorer the scholar, the more necessary the maintenance of the school in which he studies. Not otherwise, if men in the church are sinful and weak, and full of error, it is the more necessary to strengthen the church, that manhood later may be strengthened. Unconsciously, he who urges the inconsistency of Christians, and rails against their errors, has forged a weapon that turns against himself.

These Excuses Ungenerous.

How ungenerous are all these excuses, as well as how wicked! We live in God's world. He hath fitted up this world as no prince hath ever fitted up the halls of a palace. We breathe his air, are warmed by his Sunbeams, we feed upon his harvests, we are pilgrims who stoop and drink at his fountains. The angel of his providence goes before us to prepare life's way; the angel of his mercy follows after us to recover us from our transgressions. And how shall men meet such overflowing generosity, save with instant obedience? What mark across the page of memory so black as the mark of ingratitude? How unworthy those who trade upon the instincts of the generous! What if you are trading on God's generosity? What if you are thinking of getting all the good out of life that now is, and banking on things turning out all right in another world? What if you are trading on the generosity of the "good son"? What subterfuge! What artful evasion! How have you made merchandise of God's generosity! Surely every consideration that makes for honor asks you to fling away these selfish motives. Put down the animal within and give ear to the angel that stands calling you upward toward Christ and God. Every hour in life is a crisis, and every hour when you stand hesitant between the past and the future is an hour big with destiny. There are moments in a campaign when the general depends upon a single decision of the General, and the greatest battlefield in history is the battle for the city of man's soul, and the moment has come when you have long stood hesitating, halting between heaven and earth. Oh, be wise! Desire, and also decide. Dedicate the whole life to loyal obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ, and being wise for your own manhood in the life that now is, be wise also toward the life eternal.

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS.

Sunday Services in the Portland Churches

Baptist.

First, the White Temple, Twelfth and Taylor streets, Rev. J. Whitcomb Taylor, pastor—Morning service, 10:30; sermon by pastor on "Let us be true to the Holy Spirit"; Bible school, 12:30 P. M.; interesting opening exercises; music by orchestra; Young People's service, 6:30 P. M.; leaders, W. D. Christianson and W. Wetterberg; popular evening service, 7:30 P. M. opened by baptism. There will be two addresses, Dr. Anna Shanon on "Ought Women to Vote?" followed by Dr. Brougher on the topic, "If I were a Woman." Music by orchestra and chorus.

Misconception Concerning Pleasure and Denial.

Other hesitant ones stand upon the threshold because of a misconception regarding pleasure. They think that the Christian life involves giving up most of life's best things, and the ascetic ideal. They are thinking of Simon Stylites, climbing his pillar in the desert. They are influenced by the thought of Francis of Assisi, wearing rags, eating crusts, rolling himself in the dust and sleeping on a slab of stone. They remember Pascal, who was disturbed lest he loved his sister too much. Something of the Puritan strain is in the thought of these ascetics; men of oak and granite, strong enough to hew away the excesses and destroy the political wrongs of feudal ages, but narrow men! The pattern of the Christian life is not the ancient or the modern ascetic. The pattern is Jesus Christ. What characteristic of Christ so striking as his all-rounded manhood. He followed the law of the human race. He is indeed the cosmic culture. Nothing that concerned his fellows was foreign to him. He loved Nature, the grass, the wild poppy and watched the flight of birds. He loved the mountain-top and the wind-swept moors, and, standing on the Mount of Olives, studied the silent stars, and questioned the beating heart of the beyond those stars. He loved the home, and lent sanctity by his presence to the marriage tie. He loved the poor and weak, and his cup of cold water was itself a spring of innumerable reforms to slave and serf and prisoner. His emphasis of childhood stands back of all schools, colleges and universities. His influence upon the human race appears in a single fact that the masterpieces of painting have him as a subject, the masterpieces of music breathe his spirit, and chant his praise, and the masterpieces of architecture were erected for his worship.

Christian Advocate.

First, Second street, between Hall and Lincoln streets—Sunday school at 10:30 A. M.; preaching at 11:30 A. M. and 7:30 P. M.

Christian Science.

First Church of Christ, Scottish Rite Cathedral, Morrison and Lowndale streets, services 11 A. M. and 8 P. M.; Necromancy, Meditation and Hypnotism; sermon at close of morning service. Wednesday evening meeting, 8 P. M.

Congregational.

First, Madison and Park, Rev. E. L. House, D. D., pastor—Morning service with sermon on "Success Is Measured by Sacrifice," by Daniel Staver, 10:30 A. M.; afternoon service, "Atonement and Story," by Balmer's Kaffir Boy, 2:30 P. M.; admission charged, 7:30 P. M.; Sunday school, 11 A. M.; W. D. Scott, superintendent; T. P. S. C. E. at 6:30; leader, Louis Rice, 7 P. M.

Evangelical Association.

First German, Teath and Clay streets, Theo Schauer, pastor—Sunday school, 9:30 A. M.; sermon by Bishop William Horn, D. D., of Cleveland, at 10:45 A. M.; W. M. Sunday school, 10 A. M.; N. P. A., 7:35 P. M.

Holiness Association.

Services at 3 P. M. in the Christian Missionary Alliance Chapel, Sixth street, near Main, Rev. Guy F. Phelps will preach. Everybody invited.

Latimer-Day Saints.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Hall 400 Alisky building, Third and Morrison streets, 11:30 A. M. and 7 P. M.; Sunday school, 10 A. M.

Episcopal.

Trinity, Nineteenth and Everett, Rev. Dr. A. M. Morrison, pastor—Holy communion, 8 A. M.; morning service, 11 A. M.; evening, 8 P. M.; Sunday school, 9:30 A. M. Strangers cordially invited.

Methodist Episcopal.

Central, Russell and Kerby—At 9:45, the morning class; sermon, 10:30; Epworth League devotional meeting, 6:30; men's vesper prayer, 7:30 P. M.; chorus choir. Central, Russell and Kerby—At 9:45, the morning class; sermon, 10:30; Epworth League at 8:45 P. M.; subject of the address at 7:45, all invited.

United Evangelical.

First, East Tenth and Sherman, A. A. Winter, pastor—At 10 A. M., Sunday school; preaching, 11 A. M. and 7:30 P. M.; 3 P. M. Junior Endeavor; 6:30 P. M. K. L. of C. E. meeting; prayer meeting Tuesday evening.

Baptist.

First, the White Temple, Twelfth and Taylor streets, Rev. J. Whitcomb Taylor, pastor—Morning service, 10:30; sermon by pastor on "Let us be true to the Holy Spirit"; Bible school, 12:30 P. M.; interesting opening exercises; music by orchestra; Young People's service, 6:30 P. M.; leaders, W. D. Christianson and W. Wetterberg; popular evening service, 7:30 P. M. opened by baptism. There will be two addresses, Dr. Anna Shanon on "Ought Women to Vote?" followed by Dr. Brougher on the topic, "If I were a Woman." Music by orchestra and chorus.

Lutheran.

St. James' English, West Park and Jefferson streets, J. Albin, pastor—Services at 11 A. M. and 8 P. M. Morning subject, "Worldliness"; evening, "Some Observations on the Fifth and Sixth Chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews." Sunday school at 10 A. M. Luther League at 7 P. M., led by Miss Bohmer. Swedish Immanuel, Nineteenth and Irving streets, C. J. Renard, pastor—Services at 10:30 A. M. and 8 P. M. Sunday school at 12:15 P. M.

Norwegian.

45 North Fourteenth street, Rev. J. M. Nyring, pastor—Services at 11 A. M. and 7:30 P. M. Sunday school at 9:45 A. M.; the Young People's Mission Society will meet Tuesday evening in the basement of the church. The Ladies' Aid Society will meet Wednesday afternoon with Mrs. Thora Tonseth, Hunter Station, Mount Tabor.

Methodist Episcopal.

Taylor Street Dr. Francis Burgett Short, pastor—9:30 A. M., classes; 10:30 A. M., morning sermon, subject, "God's Appeal to the Intellect"; 12:15 P. M., Sunday school; 6:30 P. M., Epworth League; 7:30 P. M., evening sermon, subject, "Ruins of San Francisco." Western service, 8 P. M.

Epworth.

Epworth, Twelfth and Irving streets, Henry T. Atkinson, pastor—Sunday school at 10 A. M.; sermon at 11, on "The Fire on the Altar"; Epworth League, 6:45, evening service, 7:45, "A Question of Fact."

Grace, Twelfth and Taylor, Clarence True Wilson, the pastor, will preach at 10:30 A. M. and at 7:30 P. M. will complete the address started last Sunday morning on "Lessons from My Father's Life." The Epworth League will give a prelude on "Moody's Dangerous Expositions Exposed," Sunday school, 12:15; Epworth League, 8:30.

M. E. South.

First, 171 1-2 Second street, Rev. Ernest H. Moore, pastor—Sunday school, 10 A. M.; preaching, 11 A. M., by Rev. T. L. Duke; Epworth League, 7 P. M.; preaching, 8 P. M. by Rev. Carter De Lashmitt.

Millennial Dawn.

G. A. B. Hall, Northeast corner Second and Morrison streets, Services at 2:30 P. M.

New Thought.

Church of Freedom, Drew Hall, 152 Second street, near Morrison, at 11 A. M., subject, "Healing and Long Life."

Presbyterian.

Calvary, Eleventh and Clay streets, Rev. Ben-Rara Stiles Ely, Jr., D. D., pastor—Services 10:30 A. M. and 7:30 P. M.; morning subject, "In Hope of Eternal Life," evening, "The People That Do Things"; quiet under direction of H. V. Milligan, organist.

Fourth, First and Gibbs—10:30 A. M., "God's Providence"; 7:15 P. M., "The Union meeting with Christian Endeavor Society."

Spiritualist.

First Society, Artisans' Hall, Third, near Washington—Conferences, 11 A. M.; children's lyceum, 12:30 P. M.; M. & L. Club, 2:30 P. M.; lecture, 8 o'clock; subject, "Healing and Leaders," by David A. Leisk, of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Bible Society, Drew Hall, 152 Second, near Morrison—Children's Progressive Lyceum, 11 A. M.; lecture on health, 1 P. M.; 5 P. M., Mrs. Laura F. Share will conduct the services assisted by Mrs. Ladd Finnison.

Swedenborgian.

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and Fremont street, Rev. William L. Upshaw, pastor—Sunday school, 10 A. M.; morning service, 11 A. M.; morning worship, 11 o'clock, "The Secret of Endurance"; 6:45, Christian Endeavor; 7:45, evening service, "The Cause of Indifference."

Highland, Prescott and East Sixth street North, Rev. Arden M. Rockwood—Preaching, 11 A. M., subject, "The Wiles of the Adversary"; 7:45 P. M., the last of this series on "What the Church Owes the Community: A Broader Outlook"; Sunday school, 10 A. M.; Junior Endeavor, 3 P. M.; Senior Endeavor, 6:45 P. M.; boys' meeting, 4 P. M.; address by Dr. W. F. Hubbard, subject, "Virtue's Reward."

University Park, Artisan Temple, Portmouth, Rev. D. B. Gray—11 A. M., "Finding Christ," illustrated by the rich courtesier who renounced her title and spent her fortune in doing good; Sunday school at 10 A. M.; J. E. Boone, superintendent.

Laurelwood-Arlene Hall, Rev. D. A. Gray—3 P. M., "The Need of a Safe Guide in Life's Journey"; Sunday school at 10 A. M.; Mrs. Ingalls, superintendent; Y. P. S. C. E. at 7 P. M.

Christian.

Central, East Twelfth and Salmon streets—Rev. J. F. Thornhill will speak at 10:45 A. M., theme, "The Great Salvation," and at 7:45 P. M., "The Gospel of Health"; special music, Mrs. McPherson Gale, chorister; Miss Eva Ryan, organist; Sunday school, 11 A. M.; Senior Endeavor, 6:30 P. M.

Rodney-Avenue, Rodney Avenue and Knott street, E. Elmo Robinson—8:45 A. M., Bible school; 11 A. M., Lord's supper and sermon by Rev. M. M. Soper; 7:30 P. M., Y. P. S. C. E.; 7:30 P. M., "The Mind," second in series of sermons to young men on "More Abundant Life."

Church of God.

The Chapel, 400 Hawthorne Avenue—Services, 10:30 and 7:30 P. M.; Sunday school, 1 P. M.; prayer meeting, Wednesday, 7:30 P. M.; all are invited.

Episcopal.

St. David's