

Reasons Why Some Will Not Come to Christ

Jerusalem was buzzing with activity during one of the high Jewish feast days. And now at the pool of Bethesda the controversial young rabbi from Galilee had astounded everyone by healing a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years! But instead of rejoicing, the Jewish leaders first confronted the healed man for carrying his bed on the Sabbath—this was work, they said, and God had forbidden all work on the Sabbath—and then condemned Jesus for His “work” of healing on the Sabbath day! Chapter Five of the Gospel of John records Jesus’ simple response: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” This response the Jews understood as nothing less than Jesus “making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

His plain claims to equality with God stirred up murder in the hearts of those envious Jewish leaders, yet Jesus graciously affirmed His heart’s desire for them when He declared in verse 34, “I say these things that you may be saved.” And since they could not be saved unless they believed on Him as God in the flesh and their promised Messiah, He showed them that His claims to deity were validated by three kinds of evidence, not unfamiliar to any of them: the testimony of John the Baptist, the miraculous works which Jesus had done, and the Scriptures themselves. But in spite of all this evidence, their persistent unbelief called forth from Jesus these words recorded in verse 40:

“And you will not come to me, that you may have life.”

Surely these are some of the most tragic words ever spoken! In them Jesus plainly asserted that life was to be found in Him, and that it was to be obtained simply by coming to Him. He was not speaking of physical life or physical coming, for his hearers had already come near Him physically, but of spiritual and eternal life received by joining themselves to Him through faith. Yet His hearers refused to do the one thing necessary to have eternal life, for they refused to believe on Him. And Jesus’ sober words show that He holds them—and everyone like them—fully accountable for their stubborn unwillingness to come to Him.

What kept these outwardly religious people from coming to Christ? What keeps you, my unsaved friend, from coming to Christ today? As I outline four major reasons why some will not come to Christ, I hope to show you that every kind of reason is inexcusable. I hope to persuade you to abandon those reasons, and come to Jesus Christ.

1. Ignorance of Your Desperate Need of Christ

Some people will not come to Christ simply because they are ignorant of their need as sinners. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were classic examples of this self-ignorance. In Luke 18 Jesus boldly spoke a parable directed toward these hypocrites, who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). When the scribes and Pharisees murmured against Jesus for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus observed, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

What was true of the Pharisees two thousand years ago is true of many today: they don’t even know they are sick. They are unaware that they have any moral or spiritual disease. They don’t care to go to the great Physician of their souls because they don’t think there is anything wrong.

But such indifference to the real condition of your soul is inexcusable, and it is inexcusable because of the clear testimony of the **Bible** and of your **conscience**.

Open almost any book of the Bible and you will read about the sinful, fallen condition of man. From the account of Adam and Eve disobeying God, down through the entire record of man, God’s Word shows we are a guilty and polluted race. But if you count yourself an exception, consider several summarizing statements by the apostle Paul, speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ and through the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit: “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22), or Romans 5:12, “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

We are, indeed, sinners because of this heritage. Paul describes us as “children of wrath by nature” (Eph. 2:3). David, the man after God’s own heart, testifies of himself, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). Each one of us has inherited a sin-nature, and sinning comes naturally to every one of us. We are guilty of breaking the laws of God written on our hearts and in God’s Word. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way,” declares the prophet in Isaiah 53:6. Paul asserts with final, sweeping authority, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

And besides the external witness of the Scriptures, there is the internal testimony of your own conscience. Conscience is active in every person, either accusing bad actions or commending those which are good (Rom. 2:15). You know that conscience takes the pleasure out of sin, and you find ways to argue it down. If conscience could speak audibly it would declare loudly how vile your heart is. It would reveal all the perverse motives and desires active in your spirit. If you would only listen to your conscience you could not be ignorant of your desperate need of Christ. You know that you are under the condemnation of God because of your sin, and liable for the full punishment of that sin. Yet you also know that you are powerless to help yourself.

How many there are who ignore the testimony of the Bible and fight the witness of their own consciences! Don't congratulate yourself that you can listen unmoved to the offer of mercy from Christ, but pray instead for a sight of your desperate need and the extent of your guilt and defilement. Instead of being like the Pharisee in Luke 18, who brazenly stood in God's presence proclaiming his own goodness, may you bow like the humble tax collector and cry, "God be merciful to me, the sinner."

2. Impenitence before the Searching Demands of Christ

Perhaps you are ready to admit your need and escape the accusations of a condemning conscience, but there is another reason why you will not come to Christ. Perhaps you are one who remains impenitent before His searching demands.

Christ's call to come to Him is also a command to leave your sins. "You shall call His name Jesus," said the angel to Joseph, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He will not save them **in** their sins, but **from** their sins. "I have come to call sinners **to** repentance," Jesus said in Luke 5:32. The terms under which you may be wedded to Christ are terms of complete divorce from your sins. Nor can you separate repentance from faith and forgiveness. Paul affirmed the authentic Gospel message to be "repentance toward God **and** faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). God exalted Jesus as Prince and Savior, Peter told the Jews in Acts 5:31, in order to "give repentance to Israel **and** forgiveness of sins."

Your problem may not be insensitivity—in fact, you may be miserably aware of your desperate need for pardon and peace. But you are not ready to leave your sins and come to Christ on His terms. This was the problem of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. He sincerely desired eternal life, and he came to Christ looking for it. But Jesus, in His omniscient knowledge of the human heart, focused on one issue: the man's love of possessions. Jesus must be his only master: "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But the rich young ruler was unwilling to yield to the searching demands of Christ, and the narrative says, "he went away sorrowful."

We must not think that the issue is always a call to forsake riches, for Jesus called at least a few rich men like Matthew and Zaccheus and never made that particular demand upon them. But when He dealt with any sinner, like the woman of Samaria in John 4, He found his or her darling sin and boldly staked His claim. Jesus says to each one that eternal life is to be found in supreme attachment to Himself. "You cannot serve God and the things of this world" (Matt. 6:24). "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34).

Do you see that impenitence before the searching demands of Christ is inexcusable? The perfectly holy Lord of glory calls you away from your sins in order to give you eternal life, and you refuse to leave them. But those sins to which you are clinging, what will they do for you in the end? "The wages of sin is death," says the apostle in Romans 6:23. Salvation through Jesus Christ is intended to deliver you from the penalty, power, practice, and one day, blessed be God, even the presence of sin. Why do you cling to those sins which will only drag you to hell?

Jesus knows how costly separation may be. He spoke of sins as dear as a right eye or a right hand. He knows that true repentance, confession and forsaking of sin may cause embarrassment, misunderstanding, financial loss, and the pain of breaking off close relationships. When He said to those Jews, "You will not come to Me," He knew that they loved to receive honor from one another (John 5:44). To follow such a despised teacher was more than their proud hearts could bear. Jesus knew their struggles but never compromised His flesh-withering demands.

Do you see that such impenitence is not only inexcusable, but also irrational? Consider all the evidence against a life given over to sin. Look closely at the scarred and twisted lives of those who resisted God's gracious call in their youth—people who are the very fulfillment of God's prophetic words in Isaiah, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace for the wicked,' says my God" (Is. 57:20-21). "The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Look at the terror-filled deathbeds of those who die in their sins. Look at the coming Day of Judgment, when the great ones of the earth will cry for mountains and rocks to fall on them, to hide them from "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16). Look into hell itself, as unrepenting sinners are cast into the furnace of fire: "There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42). "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11).

Finally, look at the cross. Behold the Lord of glory, the only man who ever lived a sinless life, who, there on the cross, was made to be sin for His people. Look at the price Jesus paid for the sins which you love. Look upon His sufferings at the hands of wicked men. Mark His greater, indescribable agony under His Father's wrath for human sin. Stand and look until you can say with John Newton: "A bleeding Savior I have viewed, And now I hate my sin."

If such meditations are not enough to turn you away from those sins which now seem so dear, it will be right in that last great day for God to say to you, "Depart from Me, you cursed" (Matt. 25:41). "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). Do not sink down into hell, clinging to your darling sins. Come to Christ on His terms, that you may have life.

3. Unbelief with Respect to the Promises of Christ

You may not be guilty of some daring, idolatrous attachment to sin. Perhaps you already have forsaken many sins, for your own good and for the sake of respectability before others. Yet there is one subtle form of sin which you have never even considered. Maybe you do not think it is very important, and certainly not very disgraceful. Perhaps you are one who does not believe Christ's promises.

But you say, "Unbelief? What kind of sin is that? And why would God hold me responsible for not believing something?" My friend, consider for a few minutes how unbelief can be one of the greatest obstacles to coming to Christ, and thereby keep you from entering heaven.

Can there be any question that the promises of Jesus Christ are clear, certain, and all-embracing? Read this sampling of His promises. Look them up in the Bible to see for yourself how absolutely free of conditions and qualifications they are.

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Romans 10:12 "The Lord is rich to **all** who call upon Him."

Romans 10:13 "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

John 5:24 "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and **shall not** come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

John 6:37 "The one who comes to Me I will by no means"—under no conditions what-so-ever, under no circumstances—"cast out."

God likens His work of salvation to a wedding feast and says, "All things are ready. Come to the wedding" (Matt. 22:4). God has made all the preparations, and God has done all that needs to be done. We do not need to bring anything; we only need to come.

In the light of such marvelous, unqualified promises of forgiveness and acceptance, do you see how inexcusable is the sin of unbelief? The gospel feast has been spread and God has sent His servants to say, "Come, for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17). But you linger outside the banquet hall, lost and condemned in your unbelieving refusal to embrace the promised mercy of God. You may not be ignorant of your desperate need or impenitent for your sins, but you are unwilling to believe God's testimony concerning the sufficiency of His Son as a redeemer for sinful men—the God who spoke audibly from heaven, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him" (Mark 9:7).

There will be many surprising kinds of sinners in heaven. There will be notorious sinners like the immoral woman of Luke 7 whose reputation was known by all. There will be desperate sinners like the thief whose crimes warranted crucifixion. There will be murderers and blasphemers in heaven like Saul of Tarsus, and even some people whose hands put to death the Son of God (Acts 2:23). But there will be one type of sinner who will be conspicuously absent: there will be no unbelievers. There will be no persons in heaven who in this life were not joined by faith to Jesus Christ.

The Book of the Revelation paints many pictures of God's final judgment of mankind. Many of these images are puzzling and mysterious, but look at one very clear picture of those standing outside the gates of heaven. Revelation 21:8 says, "But the cowardly, **unbelieving**, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Those whose lives were respectable and even upright, but marked by the chronic sin of unbelief, shall take their eternal place with those whose lives were characterized by murder, lying and other grosser forms of sin.

We are tempted to view unbelief as a defect, or a sort of "vitamin deficiency" that leaves us spiritually anemic but really not so bad overall. God views unbelief in its true light. When Jesus describes the Holy Spirit's purpose in coming to convict the world of sin, here is the principal sin which He highlights: "Because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:9).

If until now you have been unbelieving, will you turn from this sin and cling by faith to Christ? Will you believe His abundant promises of salvation, pardon and rest?

4. Unwarranted Expectation of Additional Revelation from Christ

Perhaps we have not yet identified your reason for waiting to come to Christ. You feel your need and you are ready to leave your sins. You are seeking to put your faith in Jesus at the right time, but you want some additional word from Him.

Your exposure to the Bible, whether through personal reading, family training, or church attendance, has taught you an important truth. You know that unless you are one of God's elect, one of God's special chosen ones, you cannot come to Christ. God must awaken a sinner to his need, God must draw him to Himself, and God must give him the gift of faith. And so, you reason, "Until I know that I am one of God's elect, it would be presumptuous for me to come to Christ."

With this conviction firmly in hand, then, you have determined that you cannot act until some additional revelation comes from Christ. You would not demand a vision or a voice in the night, of course, but you are waiting either for some special text which fixes itself on your mind, or some overwhelming sense of God's convicting presence, or some evidence of the marks of regeneration in your life. And so, you will not come to Christ because you are waiting for a message from God.

Why is it unwarranted to expect such additional revelation? The passage in John 5 gives us a compelling answer to that question. Jesus asserted that, to the Jews, the Old Testament Scriptures should be the final, convincing proof of His claims. He said in verse 39, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." In verse 46 he says, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." In other words, Jesus is saying, "What the Scriptures say about Me, from the earliest writings of Moses through the closing words of the last prophets, is all the warrant you need to come to Me. You should not wait for something else; these words are sufficient."

The dialogue with the rich man in hell further reinforces Jesus' teaching on the sufficiency and finality of the scriptural witness. To the rich man's plea that someone warn his brothers about the torments of hell, Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). The rich man, though, has a better scheme: "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (v. 30). We hear the voice of Christ speaking in the final answer of Abraham: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Are you waiting for some spectacular revelation from God before you will come to Christ? Are you ignoring the message of “Moses and the prophets” which you have in your Bible? Do you see that such waiting is inexcusable? Do not think that your attitude is humble submission before God. Your reluctance is actually a proud and arrogant demand upon God, telling Him how He ought to act. In effect you are saying with the rich man, “God, I have a better plan of salvation than your ordinary methods. I have a special way for you to call me, and I’m waiting for this special revelation.” The truth is, God’s plan of salvation has been presented plainly and simply to you through the witness of the Scriptures. The wedding feast of the gospel has been spread, and God invites you to have eternal life. All you need to do is come.

Is Jesus Christ calling to you? Do you see yourself, not as a special sinner, but as a needy, lost, hell-deserving sinner? Then come to Him in repentance and faith. Look upon Christ as the perfectly suitable “friend of sinners.” See how His perfectly righteous life fully satisfies the requirements of divine law. Consider how His substitutionary death fully satisfies divine justice for your sins. Do not make complicated what God has made beautifully simple; just come.

Come to Christ because of God’s gracious directive: “This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). Come to Christ because of God’s gracious promise: “Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). May you this day put aside any reasons that stop you. Come to Christ, that you may have life!

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd’st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am! Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Albert N. Martin has served for over thirty years as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Montville, New Jersey. God has used his evangelistic preaching worldwide through his personal ministries and the distribution of his messages on cassette tape. Pastor Martin also teaches Pastoral Theology at Trinity Ministerial Academy and is heard weekly on the God’s Word to Our Nation radio broadcast.

Trinity Baptist Church
Box 395
Montville, NJ 07045