

I'm a Christian because...

I want to change the world

I want to change the world. I mean, of course I do. I'm an undergraduate. And, I'm a Christian. Let me explain.

Why Change? This is not just a question for Econ majors. Thinking People from all fields of study have, for a long time, thought that something in the world needs to change. You may find this to be an obvious statement, but I ask you to read it again. None of your favorite authors, activists, or artists have been satisfied with Things As They Stand Now. In fact, the general feeling seems to be one of dissatisfaction (Read: Mick Jagger).

Something has got to give. And although these Thinking People, and in fact all people, have been giving it everything they've got, the dissatisfied feeling persists. The world (and by the world I mean the world) has been ignored, embraced, destroyed. The world has been changed many times over. But it has not been fixed yet.

Careful experimental research has prompted many to reach this conclusion: we cannot fix the world. Furthermore, Christian undergraduates cannot fix the world. But Christian undergraduates believe in someone who can.

No Small Change Christian undergraduates at Princeton believe that the world desperately needs to be changed, changed for the better, fixed. But as much as we try to fix it, we cannot escape the fact that we ourselves are part of the needs-to-be-fixed contingent. In fact, Christian scriptures say that we don't just need to be fixed: we're actually dead in our transgressions.ⁱ

The change we need is Big Change. We're going to have to be changed from death to life.

I am about to use the word God. God (there he is) did not create man to be dead. Instead, he created man to live forever with him. But man, from the beginning, had other plans. Because of man's active and passive rebellion against the loving will of God, we experience separation from him. Our transgressions make us all needs-to-be-fixed people. Dead in our sins, we can't save ourselves.

When Jesus died on the cross, he did what we could not do. He took our sin and our death upon himself. He, the Son of God, gave his life to restore man to God. Then, after Jesus was dead for three days, he rose from death to life. This was the resurrection, the beginning of redemption. This was the beginning of the Big Change.

Keeping The Change That is to say, Keeping The Faith. When Christian undergraduates put their faith in Jesus, they are joining his massive movement for Big Change. Jesus rose from death to life; he restores our hearts from death to life; he redeems this needs-to-be-fixed world from death to life.

The Big Change is more than just a change of heart. To believe is to be revolutionized. It is to undergo a radical shift.

When Christian undergraduates take a stand for the global cause of social action, they are living proof of the Big Change. I just used some stock phrases that might have surprised you in this context. Let me shock you again. This global cause was founded and is spearheaded by Jesus.

Change For The Better Change isn't an idea you'd associate with Christians in America. After all, Christians in America (even undergraduates) are afraid of change, right? Well, no. Wrong. If you're a Christian, you live with change every day of your life.

Christians believe that the Big Change made by Jesus is the best and most lasting change in the world. Because we can realistically expect lives to be transformed by Jesus, we can carry out meaningful reform in social justice. Instead of just throwing money at the world's problems, Christians should be willing to engage with the poor, the weak, and the needy; because we recognize that we ourselves are needy. We all need to be changed by the powerful love of Jesus.

So where was this powerful love of Jesus in the Crusades? the American slave trade? the Civil Rights movement? To name but a few of the best-loved blotches on church history.

Ask a Hist major about William Wilberforce and John Woolman. In England and America, these Christian abolitionists risked economic, political and social ruin to demand the rights of men the Bible calls equals.ⁱⁱ Next, consider the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose Letters from Birmingham Jail rival (and echo) those of St. Paul from Roman Prison. Long before people were quoting the Rev., he was quoting the Bible.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yes, that's all very well, you say. But there are still the Bible-Belters who bowed the knee on Sunday and wielded the whip on Monday. And then there are their grandchildren who violently opposed the abovementioned Rev. in the name of Christianity. And then there are the Crusades.

The fact is, Christians do injustice. They do injustice now and they have done it in the past. Sometimes they do it in the name of changing the world for Jesus. These are religious hypocrites. And whether they rush off to Crusades or cut you off in traffic, Christians are often religious hypocrites. For the strongest denunciation of religious hypocrisy, read Jesus' You Brood Of Vipers speech.^{iv}

Also, the fact that Christians wreak unjust change might mean less than you think it means. Christians do injustice; so do Communists; so do Lutherans; so do Liberals. To say that Christians do injustice is not saying much. It is unremarkable. The remarkable thing, instead, is that there is an expectation of justice that nobody seems to be able to fulfill. The remarkable thing is that change for the better is expected, or at least hoped for, with no empirical external evidence that it should be expected or hoped for at all.

Why do we like to imagine that the Justice-shaped hole in the world will someday be filled? I think it's because Justice exists. I think Justice is perfectly embodied in the God of the Bible. I invite you to seek that God with me.

I'm A Christian Because I Want To Change The World Change, justice, and the betterment of Things As They Stand Now cannot be fulfilled by Christian undergraduates alone. In order to keep the change, we will have to be changed from the inside out by Jesus. I want to change the world, so I follow the one who changed the world for good.

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ⁱ Ephesians 2:5, ESV.

ⁱⁱ Acts 13-15; Isaiah 49:6, ESV.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more, see Tim Keller, The Reason for God, chapter 4.

^{iv} Matthew 23:1-36, ESV.