

CHAPTER 6

REAL CONVERSION **— A Change In Looks or A Change In Outlook** **or "EXCEPT YE BE CONVERTED"**

"EXCEPT YE BE CONVERTED, and become as little children, YE SHALL NOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (Matt. 18:3).

Jesus Christ left little doubt that conversion is a matter of life and death. Unless you are converted, you will never receive eternal life!

But what is conversion? Is it something a Christian can and must demonstrate in his or her life? Is it a sign of a true Christian?

THE SEARCH FOR OUTWARD SIGNS

Down through the centuries thousands of sincere individuals have sought the "conversion experience." They have tried to manifest it by inventing innumerable religious badges, signs, symbols and rituals.

Some change their dress, personal appearance, and diet. Others measure their conversion by the amount of good works performed and so spend years establishing orphanages, helping the poor, passing out food to derelicts on Skid Row — even knocking on doors and proselytizing neighbors. Still others express their conversion as soldiers for Christ by marching down main street while blowing a tuba or shaking a tambourine.

In short, much of what mankind has invented as Christian conduct to represent conversion is primarily visible and external.

CONVERSION NOT AN OUTWARD SHOW

The attitudes behind various "Christian endeavors" are no doubt sincere. And granted, Christianity is a way of life that produces many works and acts of service to mankind. But true conversion goes far deeper than physical works.

Concerning the self-righteous attitude and works of the Pharisees, Christ said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the OUTSIDE OF THE CUP AND OF THE PLATTER, but WITHIN they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is WITHIN the cup and platter, that the OUTSIDE of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed APPEAR BEAUTIFUL OUTWARD, but are WITHIN full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also OUTWARDLY APPEAR RIGHTEOUS unto men, but WITHIN ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, HOW CAN YE ESCAPE THE DAMNATION OF HELL? (Matt. 23:25-28, 33).

If we are to believe Christ's own words, conversion involves more than outward looks and services. It involves a deep personal relationship with God. A relationship which actually develops God's mind and very character in us!

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the living example of what conversion is all about. He demonstrated the real meaning of conversion in those final hours before His death. With all the fervency of His being He prayed, "... Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, NOT MY WILL, but THINE, be done!" (Luke 22:42).

This attitude, THY WILL BE DONE, was the keynote of Christ's life — an attitude that will exist in

us, too, if we also are deeply converted. In all His actions and conduct, Christ continually expressed supreme loyalty and respect — a converted attitude — toward His Father.

Notice the attitude He expressed:

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the WILL OF HIM that sent me, and to finish His Work" (Jn. 4:34).

"The Son can do nothing ... but what He seeth the Father do ... I can of mine own self do nothing ... because I SEEK NOT MINE OWN WILL, but the WILL OF THE FATHER which hath sent me" (Jn. 5:19, 30).

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, BUT THE WILL OF HIM that sent me" (Jn. 6:38).

"I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things...I SEEK NOT MINE OWN GLORY...If I honor myself, my honor is nothing; it is my Father that honoureth me..." (Jn. 8:28, 50, 54)

How apparent! Doing the will of God from the heart, above any personal desires or interests, was the real test of Christ's conversion.

TWO KINDS OF WILLS

Jesus Christ knew, as He plainly taught, that there are two kinds of wills — God's will and self-will. That's why Christ said, Not my will, but thine, be done."

Human self-will is the direct opposite from the revealed will of God. It often takes the form of selfishness, greed, contempt for law, rebellion, and all the other characteristics of the carnal mind. Self-will is a combination of man's instinctive nature and Satan's spiritual influence. It runs the gamut from mild reluctance to open rebellion against God's law and government. As Paul wrote, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

Jeremiah said, "The heart is DECEITFUL above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer. 17:9).

There probably is no other scripture that better describes the natural state of man. He is cunning, deceitful and wicked to the core.

The word "deceitful", the nature of man's heart, means "falsehood". Man is false, sneaky, hypocritical and vain — he cannot be trusted. He works the angles, looks out for his own self-interests, is tricky, subtle and mean. Manifold are the scriptures describing the evil heart of man.

God's desire for man, then, above all things is for him to repent of his wicked nature and **THROUGH CONVERSION** take on the true nature of Christ. He wants us to enter into a relationship with him of highest honor and integrity so that he can eventually trust us with power and eternal life.

Boiled down to a simple explanation, conversion is a wholesale return to God and complete turning away from sin. It occurs when man fully places God's will above his own and receives the Holy Spirit.

YOU MUST DENY YOURSELF

Clearly, then, conversion is a process of dying to one's own will, his inherent carnal nature, and surrendering freely to God's will.

This is what Christ meant when He said, "...if any man will come after me, let him **DENY** himself and TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY, and follow me. For whosoever will LOSE his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

In like manner, Paul admonished: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have PUT OFF THE OLD MAN (carnal self-will) with his deeds; and have put on THE NEW MAN (God's will — conversion) which is **RENEWED** in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:9-10). "And they that are Christ's have CRUCIFIED THE FLESH with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Our self-will must die so that we can live to do God's will.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT IT?

What about it? Have you deeply repented and turned to God with your whole heart? Are you responding willingly and obediently to God's Word, and searching it daily for help in overcoming and growing?

Are you building a track record of being loyal, genuine and true to God even though you may sometimes suffer persecution, hardship and shame? Is your word good? Do you conscientiously keep your promises, commitments? **CAN YOU BE TRUSTED?** Are you converted or growing in that direction?

Or are there still dark and shady spots in your heart? Do you say one thing and mean another for personal advantage? Are there traces of guile, malice, duplicity and evil still lurking within? Are you placing the will of God above all things in your life?

You need to be sure, for I feel that not only your future reward, but also eternal life rests on the answer.

CONVERSION MUST BE MAINTAINED CONSTANTLY

There will be instances in your life as you seek to live as Christ where you'll be tempted to revert to old habits and patterns — your own self-will. The fight will be painful and intense. Whether or not you win the battle and remain in right standing with God will depend on how closely you are walking with Him and the depth of your conversion.

To insure that your conversion remains constant and true, you must conscientiously bring every thought into subjection to the will of God and die to your own will daily. Solomon said: Be thou in the fear of the Lord ALL THE DAY long" (Prov. 23:17). And David admonished: "Blessed are they that keep judgment and HE THAT DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS AT ALL TIMES" (Ps. 106:3).

In summary, conversion is a change in heart and attitude from a former life of rebellion, carnality and self-will to that of wholehearted obedience and surrender to the will of God.

Whose will are you following — yours or God's?

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