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The Growth of A Convert (Dec 1957)

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We may not have the consecrated intellect of Paul, and we may not attain his high spiritual altitude; nevertheless, we can follow his example, and aim at his goal; “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

Luke records for us in Acts 9 something of the spiritual struggle of this bigoted Jew who awoke one morning with murder in his heart, but who, by nightfall, found himself a surrendered servant of Jesus Christ. Let us consider the gradual unfolding of this wonderful experience.

Conversion

“Lord!” That cry of his heart expressed the experience that was so fundamental to all his subsequent life, as is confirmed by his frequent references to the plan and purpose of God. He was sincere but utterly misdirected in his sincerity. He was religious, yet an enemy of the gospel of God. Now, in response to the voice of the Lord, he gladly committed his soul and surrendered his life to Him: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” No longer was it a matter of Paul’s thoughts, will, and interests, but rather those of his Lord. Should not this be the progressive experience associated with our own conversion as we yield our wills to His in an act of glad and full surrender? Think of the fate of those in Rahab’s time who “believed not” (A.V.), who “failed to surrender” (Way’s Trans., Heb. 11:31).

Confession

“He arose and was baptized” (V. 18). It is regrettable that today some are baptized who ought not to be, for they never have had the joyous experience of conversion, while others who are converted refuse to follow the Lord’s example. The New Testament does not seem to envisage unbaptized believers; baptism appears to have been almost an unwritten law in apostolic times. Is this sacred ordinance of much significance, some may ask? Most assuredly, for baptism is at once an act of submission —obedience to the Lord’s command; an act of confession—owning the Lordship of Christ; and an act of identification—public association with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, as is so clearly demonstrated in the act of total immersion (Rom. 6:4. Col. 2:12).

Change

“All that heard him were amazed” (21). They had every right to be amazed. Thus it must ever be with every one who would follow the Lord, for, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). It is Divine order that we should add to our faith in Christ the virtue of practice (2 Pet. 1:5). That is why people knew that the apostles had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Therein is the basis for James’ argument that faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26). Furthermore, we should be known not only by the things which we refrain from doing, but also by the virtuous things which we delight in practising.

Conspiracy

“The Jews took counsel to kill Him” (V. 23). Confessing the name of Christ frequently has given rise to division

in the home, the circle of friends, or personal affections. Erstwhile companions have become enemies, even conspirators, at the mention of the name of Christ. Yet, years later, this same Paul, although in danger of losing his own life, wrote words of encouragement to one who was suffering tribulation and persecution in the service of the Lord, a fellow-partaker of the afflictions of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8; 3:12). May we covet the commendation of Daniel, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God” (6:5), and be found blameless when faced with the treachery of our conspirators.

Company

He assayed to join himself to the disciples” (V. 26). Company usually either makes or breaks a convert. Watch the company of your private life. Remember you are the temple of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:19), and should be a companion of them that fear the Lord (Psa. 119:63). You should be in company “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). The first step of compromise in Christian living may well be the companionship of some “lovely girl” or “fine boy” who, alas, is not saved. Are not the shores of Time strewn with the wreckage of many potentially promising young lives in which companions were not wisely chosen? Watch the company of your church life. Let God’s Word be your guide. Seek those with whom you are in agreement in spiritual matters, and amongst whom you will be happy in the Lord. Be careful not to mistake tradition for truth.

Confidence

“And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus” (V. 29). Paul’s confidence was not in himself nor in his brethren, but in his God. “I believe God” was the hallmark of this man’s life as he pressed forward, never doubting. We do not need to be ashamed of the ecclesiastical position which we take, nor of the evangelical message which we preach; we can afford to be strong and very courageous, for God is with us as long as we are true to His Word in the humble spirit of the Lord Jesus.

“Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone;

Dare to have a purpose true,

And dare to make it known.”

From the time of his interview with Ananias, Paul never forgot the purpose of God for him; he understood the Word of the Lord, “He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (V. 15). That mantle of Paul in one sense has fallen upon every one of us, and like him each should feel, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). Yes! We are saved to serve. We must bear acceptable fruit for God’s glory, otherwise, we shall hang our heads in shame before Him at His coming.