

THE

# HARVESTER

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." [LUKE 10:2]

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## ARE YOU CONVERTED?

How would you answer the question, "What is conversion?" Would you perhaps say it's having faith and being baptized? Is this indeed what conversion really is? Is a person really converted when they obey the gospel? The answer is yes and no. Conversion really has two different meanings in the Bible. The first meaning is the one most people think of when they hear the word conversion. It is synonymous with repentance and obeying the gospel. It is illustrated by Acts 3:19, "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out!*" In this usage conversion means that a person is changed or converted from a sinner to a Christian. We all understand this and use the word this way constantly. But

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there is another, deeper, meaning of conversion.

Even David hinted at it almost three thousand years ago. *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul!"* (Psa. 19:7) Here conversion takes place through the law, or word of God. This is similar to Romans 10:17, *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God!"* The word of God can and will convert a person if it is studied. But what was conversion in David's day? It certainly was not repentance and baptism. I do not even think David is referring to a single event here, but rather a process. As a person continues in a study of God's word, his faith grows and he is converted more and more.

Conversion is a growth process. Before becoming a Christian we are very carnal or worldly. A full grown, or mature, Christian is, on the other hand, very spiritual. This change does not take place at the instant of baptism. In fact baptism does nothing to actually convert the heart or mind of a person. When a person obeys the gospel, he has been converted to the point at which he is willing to accept Christ and make a commitment to try to live as a Christian. But really the conversion process has just begun.

Do our physical bodies ever stop changing and maturing? Well, by the same token our spirits continue to grow and mature all of our Christian lives. Conversion is never complete in this life. The final conversion from carnal to spiritual will only be accomplished when we put off this veil of flesh and take on a spiritual body.

What did James mean by conversion when he said, *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the*

*error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"* (Jas. 5:19-20) He is speaking to the "brethren" about erring from the truth. You can't err FROM the truth if you have never been IN the truth. So obviously James is talking to Christians here, people who have already been converted in the sense that they have obeyed the gospel. What did he mean then when he said "*and one convert him*"? Clearly James did not restrict conversion to baptism.

Conversion just means change. When a person strays from the truth he needs to change and come back to the truth. Not even the best Christian is perfect. We all make mistakes regardless of how hard we try not to. So we all need to experience continual conversion. Since we are not perfect we must continually change in order to try to attain perfection.

David pointed out that it is God's word which is able to accomplish this continued conversion. This is why we must continue to study if we wish to progress further in our spiritual growth. This now brings us to a very important point. Quite often in life we see young people in disagreement with older people. These disagreements frequently are the result of differing levels of maturity. The two age groups view many things in totally different ways. But then as the years roll by and the young people begin to grow older they find themselves on the other side of the argument with the new generation of young people. This process has been repeated over and over throughout history. It's all part of growing up.

All the older generation can do is try to set a good example and let the younger generation learn the lessons of life for themselves. Younger people will never achieve maturity and wisdom if they aren't allowed the freedom to

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Ray McManus  
3265 Fowlers Ferry Rd.  
Gadsden, AL 35901-9130  
Phone: (205) 442-4181

make mistakes and learn from them. What does my social commentary here have to do with conversion? Well, conversion is a continual growing-up process for a Christian. And we need to realize that not everyone in the church is going to be at the same level of maturity that we are. We have to allow for people to make mistakes that we out grew years ago. But far too often we expect others to see things the same way we do. How long have you been a Christian? How much have you learned during this time? When you first obeyed the gospel did you know everything you know now? I'm certain most of us learned the majority of what we know now since the time we obeyed the gospel.

Have you ever disagreed with something someone said, only to find out later you were wrong? It happens to all of us. And what we must learn is that someone is not necessarily dumb or insincere if they don't see things the same way we do. Perhaps we are wrong again, or perhaps they just need more time to study and mature as Christians. I have seen people who have studied a certain subject for years. Then when they sit down and try to explain it to someone else they are disappointed and dismayed when they can't get them to understand it. But why should we expect someone else to understand in five minutes what may have taken us five years to learn? We must learn to be patient with one another.

Consider the principle Christ taught when He said, *"And I gave her space to repent of her fornication."* (Rev. 2:21) What does He mean when He says He gave her "space" to repent? He means He gave her ample time and opportunity to realize her error and do something about it. If our Lord did this, then why shouldn't we? Far too often we are ready to immediately ostracize an individual or even an entire congregation for one mistake. But shouldn't we give them a chance? Now I am not for a moment proposing that we condone error. But as long as we see sincerity, and there is hope for change, why should we abandon someone? We do not refuse to teach sinners the truth, do we? Then why should we refuse to be patient with, and teach our erring brethren?

Friends, let us love another and be patient with one another. We are all being converted daily as we study God's word. When someone makes a mistake, when they take an unscriptural stand, be patient. Give them space to repent. Where would you be today if you were judged by everything you have ever believed? I have been wrong about many things I believe now. I'll probably always be wrong about some things. But I'm going to keep studying and learning and allowing the word of God to convert me into the kind of person I need to be.

Over the past few decades the Lord's church has seen far too much strife and division. We have been too quick to judge, too quick to condemn. We were so afraid of being accused of participating in someone else's error that we would immediately sever all ties with them if they made a mistake. Is this the Christian spirit? Fortunately it seems that many today are beginning to awaken to the mistakes of the past. Walls and roadblocks to fellowship which were erected in the past are being torn down today. Old wounds are being healed.

We as Christians are a family. Some of us are aged and mature, while others are young and immature. But we all have a vital contribution to make to the family. What would a family be without children? Or what would a family be without grandparents to share their experiences and wisdom? We all have something to offer the family and we all have something we need from the family. Let us not thrust aside our young brothers and sisters and our immature congregations. But rather we should try to help them achieve maturity. We all have a vital part to play in the continuing conversion process of one another. We can't afford to let each other down.

TONY WHIDDON

7350-F Howells Ferry Rd.

Mobile, AL 36618

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Who begged for Jesus' body?
2. How many foxes did Samson tie tail to tail in pairs?
3. In the book of Revelation, what did the twenty four elders cast before the throne?
4. What is the scripture reference for the longest verse in the Bible? Hint: Look in the book of Esther.
5. What were the angels doing that Jacob saw in his dream?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Who did Jesus send to make preparations for Passover the day before He was crucified?  
PETER AND JOHN (Luke 22:8)

2. Who did God tell to buy a linen belt, wear it and not let it touch water? JEREMIAH (Jer. 13:1)
3. Because Abraham believed God, what title was given to him, according to James? THE FRIEND OF GOD (Jas. 2:23)
4. Who first said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" DAVID (Psa. 22:1)
5. Did the people of Israel do an evil thing when they asked for a king? YES (1 Sam. 12:17)

#### BIBLE FIRST AID KIT

If you find yourself in sudden trouble or sorrow, apply instantly Hebrews 12:5-11 and saturate your heart in Psalm 23.

If you have slipped down and hurt yourself, Psalm 91 will be found to greatly benefit.

When that lonely feeling steals over the heart, a good stimulant will be found in Matthew 11:28-30.

Should you be suffering from loss of memory and cannot call to mind your blessings, try a good dose of Psalm 103.

In time of failing strength and courage, two or three applications of I John 5:13-15 will be found beneficial.

Whenever you find that bitter taste in your mouth and cannot speak lovingly of others, take a good draught of I Corinthians 13 and Psalm 34:12, 13.

Some days when your faith is weak try the tonic found in Hebrews 11.

## A DISTURBING TREND

One of the most disturbing of all trends today is found in the fact that so many of our present generation of preachers do not preach sermons that ring with the old Jerusalem gospel. . . . Recently a preacher told me of the last three meetings through which he sat, conducted by *three of our best known preachers of the twentieth century*. He said that there had not been as much gospel in all of the forty-five sermons as most of our older preachers used to put into one. Of the last of the three, he said that the preaching was witty, original, morally uplifting and entertaining but that there was not a single sermon presented that could not have been enthusiastically delivered by a sectarian evangelist. Preachers nowadays are being taught somewhere to avoid very carefully any references to the "plan" of salvation, and to preach "commitment to Christ" rather than New Testament conversion. They are being educated out of the "mistaken legalism" of the preceding generations! They know now that we cannot stoutly maintain that Jesus has only one church, and there are not Christians in all denominations! The whole approach seems to be that we are only a little closer to being right than most of the other religious groups.

written by ELDRED STEVENS

copied from THE LIGHT, Jan. 1986

submitted by Buster Boyd

REMEMBER ... to have your congregation's meetings announced in this paper, be sure to send the appropriate information about two weeks before the first of the month in which the meeting takes place. For example, if the meeting is scheduled for June, then the information must reach me by the middle of May. This is the time when the June issue is being typed and sent to the printer. Thanks from the editor!