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The Christian's Relationship To The World - No. 2

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Sumiton, AL

In our first article we studied the position of the Christian in the world. We defined the "world" to mean the characteristic rebellion and alienation from God that is seen in most of the earth's inhabitants. Also it can apply to any thing of this world which is placed between man and God. The Christian is in but not of the world. He has a holy mission in the world. He is to be different from the world.

Christians do not just happen. They are sinners who are converted from the world. Therefore we wish to study the meaning of conversion in connection with the Christian's relationship with the world.

All accountable beings are sinners and are of the world (Rom. 3:23). "And you did he make alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world..." (Eph. 2:1, 2). The only human beings in the world that are not sinners are those who are not accountable to the law through inability to recognize law. Since to them there is no law, they are incapable of transgressing law (1 Jn. 3:4). Thus we must admit that among sinners there will be found none who by nature are Christians. Christians are converted sinners. It is as Paul told the Corinthians, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Several figures are used in the Bible to set forth the idea of conversion. Paul says, "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the son of his

love" (Col. 1:13). The word, "translated," is defined to mean "to transpose, transfer, remove from one place to another: prop. of change of situation or place." Just think of the idea of translating a word from one language into another. In Spanish there is a word called *buenos*. To translate that word into English requires a change so drastic that there is only one letter the two forms would have in common. In English the word would be *good*. Paul's use of the word "translation" to refer to the change from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son shows how drastic a change conversion is.

The figure of birth is used to depict the conversion of the sinner. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). Birth is a momentous event in the life of an individual. In fact, though life has existed in the womb nine months prior to birth, all records of a child's life are dated from birth. Physically one is born of a mother, but spiritually a man is born of water and Spirit. The water is simply the washing of regeneration (rebirth) of Tit. 3:5. That washing of regeneration whereby we are born into the family of God is baptism. "For ye are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26,27). The Spirit is the Holy Spirit by whose guidance and motivation we are led to become children of God. His work in conversion is accomplished through the word of God by which we have been begotten again (1 Pet. 1:23). In Jn. 3:5 Jesus was therefore saying that our conversion is accomplished through baptism and the Holy Spirit. The point we emphasize in this study, however, is that the figure of birth applied to conversion shows what a thoroughgoing change it is.

Conversion is also the transition from an old life to a new life. It is a death to the man of sin and a resurrection of the man of righteousness. Notice a brief exposition of Rom. 6:3-7. Verse 3- All who were baptized into a relationship with Christ are baptized into a relationship with his death. verse4- The purpose of our being buried with Him through baptism into death is that, as He was raised from the dead to live a new life, so we might be raised to walk a new life. Verse 5- We are not united with Him in His literal death but the "likeness" of His death in which He died to the earthly life and then was raised to a new life-one of exaltation. Similarly we die to the life of sin and are raised to live a life of righteousness. Verse 6 -In this process the old man that was given to the lusts of sin was put to death that the body given to the practice of sin might be done away that we might be freed from the bondage of the practice of sin. Verse 7- One who has been buried into Christ's death, and, in the likeness of His death, has died to sin, stands justified from sin. In baptism therefore the guilt of past sins is remitted (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and we die to the practice of sin. We are raised from baptism committed to live a new life.

Many false impressions are left by Christians about the nature of this change. Many sinners have gotten the wrong idea about what this change involves. For example a sinner is converted and in his ardor boasts that he will never sin again. It will not be long before such

a one will have sinned, and his enemies and his observers will gleefully point out his hypocrisy. Many sinners decide for themselves that when one becomes a Christian, and ere long, he sins, and the sinner says, "Well that just proves what I have always thought: no one can be a Christian, so there is no need for me to try."

Actually the change is not from sin to sinless perfection, but from the imperfect to the mature or complete. A study of 1 Jn. 1:8-10, remembering that the writer was an apostle, will show that one will still be found guilty of sin from time to time even after becoming a Christian. Thus one is not changed from an absolute sinner who never does one good thing to a non-sinner who never does one thing wrong, but rather from a sinner to a saint. A saint is one who is set apart to God and *forgiven* of his sins. In conversion one determines that what has been a happenstance doing of good and an occasional inclination to do something right will become a way of life in which good is what one is determined to do always. Then it is sin that becomes occasional and righteousness the continual practice. Let it be noted, however, that there is nowhere in the Bible even the slightest encouragement for the Christian to think he is permitted to sin.

We have looked at conversion as a drastic change. In our next study we shall examine what conversion means with regard to worldliness.

THE WAY WITH WORDS

WORDS ARE MISCHIEVOUS little fellows at times. They may mean one thing in one sentence and something different in the next. They may have different meanings from generation to generation. "Prevent" (Ps. 119: 147; 1 Thess. 4:15) and "let" (Rom. 1:13) are good examples of how words have changed meanings since the King James Version was translated. They now mean to "preceed" and "hinder" respectively.

I once had a little difficulty explaining to a brother that a certain couple was not having *martial problems* because the wife had publicly confessed that she had "left her first love". (See Rev. 2:4). Did you ever hear that Cornelius was a *musician* because he was "a centurion of the *BAND* called the *Italian BAND*"?

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Speakers (and writers), especially in spiritual matters, should choose their words carefully, wisely, and accurately. Otherwise, they may mislead souls and/or fall prey to those who desire "to catch (them) in (their) words." (See Mark 12:13). No wonder James wrote, "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation ...if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (James 3:1,2).

Hearers (and readers) also have a responsibility. One should try to understand exactly what the other person is saying. Be honest. Be fair. Even if one's words are, in our judgement, poorly chosen--would it not be better to try to understand what he means? Could it not be that his wording is not really so bad, but just dif-

ferent from the way we would have said it? Could it be that there are other meanings of the word familiar to him but not to us?

If we hear a strange word, a good dictionary might help us. If we hear a familiar word used in an unfamiliar way, see if it may not indeed be so used. A given word may have several meanings.

"Baptism", in most modern dictionaries, means: to sprinkle, pour, or immerse. But, what did the Bible writers have in mind by the word? Faced with all the evidence, one must conclude that they meant *immersion*. That was the meaning of the Greek word they used. Bible examples of Baptism demonstrate immersion. Bible descriptions also point to immersion ("Buried...in baptism--Rom. 6:4). While it may have all three meanings today, to be honest we must conclude that Biblical writers meant only immersion.

I do not want to minimize the importance of giving attention to the exact wording of speakers and writers. Jesus made an important argument on the very tense of a verb: "I AM (not "was"--EOB) the God of Abraham..of Isaac...of Jacob" (Matt. 22:32). Therefore, those patriarchs were living long after the death of the body. Paul made an argument on the difference between the singular and plural (Gal. 3:16).

However, it is possible to pick at "words to no profit" (2 Tim. 2:14). I once sat in a Bible class where the entire period was spent arguing the difference between believing "ON Christ" and believing "IN Christ". The fact that the King James Version reads, "IN him", and the American Standard, "ON him", in John 3:16 did little to calm the arguments.

I sat in on another discussion where the time was spent arguing how the sign in front of the building should be worded. Some said that "Church of Christ" was sufficient, others agreed providing "church" was spelled with a little "c". Some contended for "THE Church of Christ", others said it should be "THE Church Of Christ MEETS HERE"; another argued that it should be "A Church of Christ Meets Here" since it was not the only congregation of Christ. But I think I had a better suggestion: "Some Of The Church of Christ Meets Here Some Of The Time", since I never known them all to be there at once!

When folks used to tell me they were "going to church", I was quick to correct them. It was fine to speak of "going to worship", but "going to church" was out. But, someone was kind enough to point out that "church" is used for the assembly of brethren (I Cor. 11:18; 14:34,35).

"Oh, that is just your INTERPRETATION", has been the often used response to our pointing folks to what the Bible says. So, when one professes to "interpret" the Scriptures it leaves a bad taste with us. Now it is all right to "explain", not "interpret". But, one meaning of "interpret" is "to give an explanation". You see, it is alright for "our preachers" to "explain" a passage as long as he does not "interpret" it. Could it be that we become so hide-bound to a particular way of expressing a

thought that we will not allow a synonum to be used without raising a racket over it? Maybe someone can "explain" to me how one can preach on Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation without just a wee bit of "interpreting".

I once had a friend, who should have known better since he had known me for over 20 years, to jump into print with a literary tantrum over my using the word "interpolation" in a good sense. If we had meant, as he said, to "alter (a text, etc.) by the insertion of new matter" (Random House American Dictionary), thus corrupting the text, he was justified in rebuking us. Anyone who claims such a right is dangerous and should be marked! But, we meant simply "to introduce (something additional or extraneous) between other things or parts; interject, interpose, intercalate", (Ibid.) or simply an insertion for the purpose of explanation. Of course, any interjection, should be identified as such. The King James does this with Italics so that we may know that such words are interpolated by the translators and not a part of the actual text. We, in our writings, often do it with parenthesis. "He that believeth (in Christ) and is baptized (in water) shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The words in () are "introduced between other things or parts", interjected, inserted, or interpolated. Maybe I should have chosen another word, but the fact still remains that the word can be and often is so used. To hop up and down over its use before the ink dries gets mighty close to "strife about words to no profit".

It is easy to develope a one-track mind about words and phrases and jump to wrong conclusions. We may even find ourselves measuring a brothers soundness by our PERSONAL choice of words. We might find ourselves in perfect agreement with his position once we understand what he means by his words. Let's try to be responsible both as speakers and listeners, writers and readers.

THE EVANGELIST



"Many people who plan to be saved from their sins the eleventh hour, die at 10:30."

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