

Adult Conversion

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A young mother was working alongside a Christian girl who is in her upper teens. A day after the young Christian had spoken of her position against abortion, the young mother approached the teenager to ask for more information about the young girl's God and church.

This began a series of conversations between the two, which were punctuated with questions. Initially, the questions were about some of the most basic and fundamental truths of Scripture. The questions were often very difficult to answer because of the almost total lack of Biblical knowledge on the part of the young mother. Some of the questions dealt with the most profound of subjects, and the answers had to be simple without being simplistic and incomplete.

This was not easy for the Christian young girl. As the saying goes, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," so she was willing but felt very inadequate for the responsibility which God has so evidently placed in her path. She prayed fervently. In her prayers before her meetings she asked God to guide her by His Spirit, as He promised, so she would have the right words. And after her conversations she would pray for God to bless her feeble efforts unto the spiritual awakening and development of the woman who was obviously searching. She frequently sought the assistance of her parents and of pastors. She was driven to study diligently God's Word.

God graciously answered in a positive way the prayers of the teenager and of those whom He used to assist her. Every evidence of regeneration and conversion can be seen in the life of the young mother. Her thirst for knowledge of the truth continues. Though her husband remains unbelieving her interest in the truth steadily increases. It seems that she cannot attend worship services and Bible studies frequently enough. Hundreds of questions were and still are being asked, and every effort is made to answer them Biblically.

I would dare to say that such a real life experience might seem most extraordinary to most who read this.

Should it?

What is conversion?

The word "conversion" means "to turn or to be turned, a change of direction." The word is used spiritually to refer to a cessation of willful sin and a commitment to godliness, howbeit imperfectly.

According to the Heidelberg Catechism it consists of "the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

This spiritual activity of conversion takes place in two ways. First, there is the initial turning around, at which time one realizes that they are a sinner and in desperate need of forgiveness and they find that forgiveness in the only Savior, Jesus Christ. This initial conversion can be sudden and instantaneous, but often takes place gradually, both in the case of an elect, regenerated child of God who is raised by godly parents in the Church (more gradual), and in the life of that elect person who comes to know God and His Christ at a later age (less gradual). This initial conversion is the opening of eyes of one's spiritual understanding and the opening of one's spiritual ears to the voice of the Shepherd as He speaks through the true preaching of the Word.

And second, there is the ongoing activity of repentance and sanctification in the life of the believer. After initial conversion, it must be said that conversion or repentance is an on-going process which never ends.

How does conversion take place? No man can convert himself.

Conversion in its beginning, as well as in its progress, until its completion in the future life, is the work of God (Ezek. 36:36, 37). It is the fruit of the call of God coming through the gospel and the inward working of the Holy Spirit. Conversion takes place after God has performed His work of regeneration, but it is not true that after regeneration the child of God now converts himself. Jeremiah 31: 8 teaches us the correct relationship, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the LORD, my God." "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned" (Lamentations 5:21).

That having been said, conversion is also an activity of the regenerated sinner. He is sorry for and hates his sin and rejoices in Christ and delights to do God's will. Gospel preaching ever brings the responsibility to man to turn, to repent and to believe. Whereas only some who hear this call of the Gospel have the ability to obey, all must and are responsible to do so.

Within the true church, adult conversions are not the norm. This is because God not only usually gathers His people in the line of continued generations (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:49), but also usually uses the faithful nurturing of praying and godly parents to bring the young elect child soon to the consciousness of personal sin and salvation in Jesus.

On the other hand, the initial conversion of an elect, regenerated adult child of God is the norm outside the sphere of the true church. In those locations where the church is false or where there is no church, then the norm is adult conversion. For example, when the gospel of Christ was preached by the apostles, they saw many adult conversions. These were then baptized (along with their households) as a sign of their having been turned around spiritually.

Christian young people who have been raised within the true church do not often think about adult conversions. (It is hoped that they do think about other spiritual things.) For them the incident mentioned at the beginning of this article will be a happy but unusual one. For them the norm of their experience is the gradual coming to the consciousness of salvation while a child.

It is probably also true that in their minds skepticism attends the subject of adult conversion. This is because it seems that nine times out of ten the context of the adult conversion is questionable. By the "context" I mean that the theology is Arminian and the testimony of the "conversion experience" is more likely to praise the person than God.

I would contend that the Christian young people raised within the true church, should have a better perspective of adult conversion. This perspective begins by realizing that the Scriptures show that adult conversions do take place. We must be careful not to let the wrong or bad use of adult conversions cause us to conclude that they all are either wrong or of no concern to us.

It is often the case that when we get a job among the work force of this world that we are likely to meet those who are unconverted. Then there is an increase in the possibility of our

having humbly to give an answer to those who ask of us a reason for our godly attitude, conduct and language.

Could it be that among the reasons why we do not see many adult conversions is because of the lack of a godly life on our part?

Could it be that among the reasons why we do not see many adult conversions is because of the lack of a readiness to give a reason for our godliness?

Could it be that among the reasons why we do not see many adult conversions is because of the sin of not exercising love for our neighbor by praying for opportunities to speak to them of the balm of Gilead?

Originally Published in:
Vol. 50 No. 5 May 1991