



Converted or Convinced

Message for April 2018 - 5

International Missionary Society

Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Reform Movement

YOUTH DEPARTMENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Dear Youth:

I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, asking that His blessings, love, and guidance be upon you in abundance.

Conviction

On this occasion we will meditate on the text of Ezekiel 18:32, **“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live!”**

In the life of faith we receive plenty of information regarding the behavior and beliefs that we should adopt as Christians. By reading the Bible and the Testimonies, by listening to the sermons at church or studying the Sabbath School, we learn precious lessons, golden teachings that can lead us to eternal salvation. Yet this does not mean that we all react equally to every effort the Holy Spirit makes to bring us to the whole truth (John 16:13) and to try to convince us of sin, of justice, and judgment (John 16: 8).

Sometimes we hear brothers and sisters speaking in the church who have a natural missionary fervor or a very clear and profound knowledge of the word of God, but in daily practice they act as if they did not know the Lord. We may also find ourselves immersed in the conviction of the message, yet not allowing the message to transform us. One thing is what we decide to believe and another thing is what we decide to live or practice. In fact, we may wheedle ourselves into a dangerous idea: that of thinking that to know the biblical truth and making it ours is a warrant of salvation, but this is not so.

Let's transition into a practical example: Satan believes in God, in his power and absolute dominion; he knows that there is no other god like Him: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. **Even the demons believe—and tremble!**" James 2:19. He also knows that God has condemned him to death: "for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he **knoweth** that he hath but a short time." Revelation 12:12.

There is no doubt that if someone knows the Scriptures better than any human being it is the devil himself. Recall that he quoted them in tempting Christ in the desert: "For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee..." Luke 4:10. The devil and his fallen angels are convinced of the truth because they have seen God, they have worshiped and served him, they have lived in heaven, but they have not allowed the truth to transform them. They believe, but they are enemies of the truth; they hate the message and they look for a way to destroy it. The devil knows that Christ is the Son of God, look how the Bible expresses it: "And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God." Mark 3:11. But accepting something as truth does not mean that this truth is exerting an influence on the person.

Let me explain myself. Someone may believe that God is good and just and that these divine attributes are reflected in His Commandments, but in his daily life he does not accept his requirements and lives in transgression, or when a difficult test arrives the person gives in and denies his faith. This may be due to spiritual weakness or indifference, which leads us to the conclusion that it is one thing to be convinced and another entirely to be converted. These two classes of people are found in the church.

The apostle Peter is a good example of conviction. If there was someone in the group convinced of the divinity of Christ and his message, it was him; always willing to confess his faith, always standing out for his bold statements: "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16. "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." Matthew 26:33-35.

We see that Peter is clear regarding the matter that he must defend the cause of Christ, that Jesus is the Messiah, and that we must give 100% in the work, but this was not enough, Peter needed to convert.

True conversion

Let us note the words Jesus directs to Peter: “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” Luke 22:32. These words Jesus pronounced to the apostle in the context in which Peter flaunted his faith and boasted of facing prison and death for his Master.

The apostle had a sincere and fervent faith, but he did not know himself. He needed to experience true conversion, so Jesus told him that when he would be converted it was then that he would be an effective help for his brothers and a good apostle of the message of the cross. Maybe this is the case of one of us? Do we have conviction but lack conversion? What is it to be converted?

To be *converted* is to be transformed into something else from what we were. From the biblical perspective, to be converted is to be like Jesus. “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Matthew 11:29. Conversion is not the work of a moment but a process that leads us to sanctification.

When we wholeheartedly repent of our sins and seek to live in harmony with the Law of God, a reformation in our life begins that leads us to abandon what we once loved, but which was contrary to the will of God. It is a change of life’s perspective, of the way of being, of tastes, of feelings. The Holy Spirit does this work when we allow Him, that is why Paul says that he who is in Christ is a *new* creature. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

True repentance takes us to the beginning of conversion. The Greek word repentance is *metanoia*, which means to change the way of thinking, or to have a change of mind. This will help us to better understand when people approached Christ and the disciples, the advice they gave to those who wanted to put their lives in order was that they should repent: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts 2:38. Peter was telling them to change their way of thinking, to change their thoughts.

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Acts 17:30. The apostle Paul is in the same line of thought as Peter, and teaches that to be in harmony with the Creator we must learn to think differently about sin, about life, about God, about Jesus; it is a mental change that affects our whole being, habits, ideas, customs, and tendencies.

The first step in the life of one who wants to experience conversion is to reach conviction of sin and understand that sin offends God in a special way,

degrades and estranges us from the divine norm, that will never make us permanently happy. This is the source of all misery and failure, which almost always affects exterior parties, finally depriving us from going to heaven. To sin is to violate God's law (1 John 3:4). No one can be truly happy without fighting sin and overcoming it. The confession of sin to God grants us the possibility to obtain forgiveness in Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1).

“The first step in reconciliation to God, is the conviction of sin. ‘Sin is the transgression of the law.’ 1 John 3:4. ‘By the law is the knowledge of sin.’ Romans 3:20. In order to see his guilt, the sinner must test his character by God’s great standard of righteousness. It is a mirror which shows the perfection of a righteous character, and enables him to discern the defects in his own.” *The Great Controversy*, pg. 467.

Dear youth, it would be important for us to learn to see sin, or to consider it as God sees and considers it. Sin is despicable in the sight of God, it is contrary to His nature; sin is disharmony, chaos, misfortune, enmity against God, a death sentence. The enemy works so that each human being sees his sins as something unimportant; he has managed to introduce into society the concept that no one should embitter their life on account of sinning. These are religious issues invented by churches to subdue people. The worst thing is that a great number of churches disseminate the lie that one cannot stop sinning, so the believers continue to sin deliberately, leaving the only thing that each one must do is confess that they believe in Jesus.

The devil presents sin as attractive and appetizing. It's the same strategy he used with Eve: “Do not worry—what God said is not true—you can eat the fruit; sin without repercussions. You will enter a new realm of knowledge and power. That's what I've done!” But there lie the terrible consequences of a single sin. Let us ask God through his Holy Spirit, to place in our hearts an aversion towards sin, the same distaste that the Lord Jesus experienced.

The next step is missing: conversion! Jesus would tell the people whose sins he had forgiven: ‘*Go and sin no more.*’ John 8:11. “The law reveals to man his sins, but it provides no remedy. While it promises life to the obedient, it declares that death is the portion of the transgressor. The gospel of Christ alone can free him from the condemnation or the defilement of sin. He must exercise repentance toward God, whose law has been transgressed, and faith in Christ, his atoning sacrifice. Thus he obtains ‘remission of sins that are past,’ and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. *The Great Controversy*, pg. 467.

Here lies the key: to become partakers of the divine nature. Without Christ we can do nothing for our salvation (John 15: 5). We cannot sincerely repent, nor can we change our way of being, because what is born of the flesh is flesh (John 3: 6). We need to give our lives to God, accept Christ as our personal Savior, and place our faith in Him. It is only then the Holy Spirit comes to take possession of our hearts and there the miracle takes place. It is impossible to change through our own efforts, but with the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is different. He imparts his power to change us. He gives us the desire, genuine repentance, and the strength to change our life: “For it is God which

worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13. It is a spiritual metamorphosis in which the believer should only let himself be led by God.

Repentance, then, teaches us to be aware of our sinful state, to recognize our specific sins and know that we are on the wrong path. Conversion is a change of direction; it means to turn around, follow a different path, cease doing wrong. If someone commits a sin he must repent and change his trajectory. While a change is not made and a new life lived, repentance is not efficacious, because sincere repentance leads to a desire and strife for a change of course.

“The practicing of the truth is essential. The bearing of fruit testifies to the character of the tree. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. There is need of a thorough conversion to the truth.” *Evangelism*, pg. 308.

“God would be better pleased to have six truly converted to the truth as the result of their labors, than to have sixty make a nominal profession, and yet not be thoroughly converted.” *Evangelism*, pg. 320.

Our goal is holiness

Perhaps the word “holiness” scares a lot of people, because they see themselves very far from being saints. If the Lord has asked us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16), it is because we can become holy in our sphere with His help. To be converted is to have entered the path of holiness and to have begun to grow; this work lasts a lifetime. That does not mean that you will never make mistakes again, but the converted person will do everything possible to live the Gospel. He will seek harmony with the Lord and his neighbor, support the church, spread the truth. Through prayer and the study of the Word, he will make fervent efforts to change his character.

If we do everything on our part to please the Lord, dear youth, He will not abandon us. “When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and **He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit**. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father’s commandment.” *Select Messages Book 1*, pg. 382.

“When He sees men lifting the burdens, trying to carry them in lowliness of mind, with distrust of self and with reliance upon Him, He **adds to their work His perfection and sufficiency**, and it is accepted of the Father. We are accepted in the beloved. The sinner’s defects are covered by the perfection and fullness of the Lord our righteousness. Those who with sincere will, with contrite heart, are putting forth humble efforts to live up to the requirements of God, are looked upon by the Father with pitying, tender love; He regards such as obedient children, and the righteousness of Christ is **imputed** unto them.” *Our High Calling*, pg. 51.

Dear youth, I wish the best for your life. I encourage you to undertake the wonderful adventure of faith. Living in harmony with God is what produces true happiness, the rest is ephemeral, fleeting, and disappointing. Ask Him to give you the experience of genuine conversion and it will come to pass, because He has promised it. Do not be discouraged if you fell into sin. Ask God for forgiveness and strive to not offend Him more. If you have already experienced a conversion, then remain in Christ (John 15: 4-5). God bless you. Amen.

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Addendum:

It would be good for your meeting to talk about biblical characters who experienced true conversion. Revise the difference between being convinced and being converted. Are there false conversions? Research some examples. Take advantage of your meeting to pray for true conversion.

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