

PERSONAL FROM



Christianity Is a Growth Process

How many times have you heard non-Christians, judging one who professes Christ, say in disgust, “Well if *that’s* Christianity, I don’t want any of it!”

How many judge GOD by the way professing Christians live? How many assume that one must live a *perfect* life, before he can become a Christian?

How many say, “If I could give up smoking, I’d become a Christian.”

How many think a Christian is supposed to be perfect, never doing anything wrong? Suppose you do see or hear about a Christian doing something *WRONG*. Does that mean he is a hypocrite—that he is *NOT* really a Christian, after all?

Is it possible for one to actually *SIN*, while he is a Christian, and *still remain* a truly converted Christian?

I suppose many would reply in the negative. But here is a vital point *you need to UNDERSTAND!*

It’s hard to believe—but *TRUE!* Few know just what *is* a Christian. Few know *HOW* one is converted—whether suddenly, all at once, or gradually. Does conversion happen *immediately*, or is it a *PROCESS*? *IT’S HIGH TIME WE UNDERSTAND!*

The *TRUTH* is that there is a sense in which true conversion *does* take place *at a definite time*—all at once. But it is also true that in another sense conversion is *worked out gradually*—a process of development and growth.

NOW NOTICE CAREFULLY!

WHEN does one really become a Christian? It is when he receives God’s Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:9, we read that *unless* we have the Holy Spirit, we are not Christ’s—not Christians.

There is a definite *TIME* when God’s Spirit enters into one. At the *very moment* he receives the Holy Spirit, he is, in this first sense, *converted*. Yes, *all at once!* If he has Christ’s Spirit, he is *CHRIST’S*—he is a Christian! He has been begotten as a child of God.

But does that mean his salvation is complete? Is he now fully and finally “saved”? Is that all there is to it? Is he now suddenly *perfect*? Is it now impossible for him to do *WRONG*?

NO! FAR FROM IT! But *WHY?* What’s the answer? Why do so many *MISUNDERSTAND*?

Here is the *PLAIN TRUTH* you need to know.

First, there are *TWO conditions* to becoming a Christian: *REPENTANCE*, and *FAITH*. These two we, ourselves, must perform. Yet no one can, of himself, say, “Oh now I see—I must repent. All right, I hereby repent.” One does not just decide casually, as a matter of routine, to repent. *WHY?*

Jesus Christ said that none can come to him, except the Spirit of the Father draw him. God *grants* repentance. God calls one, and convicts the mind and conscience by his Spirit, working on the *mind externally*. *Usually a real struggle goes on* within. The person has been shaken to *know* he has done wrong—he has sinned. He is not only sorry—he abhors himself! He is brought to real *REPENTANCE* not only for what he has done, but for what he now sees that he *is*.

Yet he, himself, must make the decision. If he does repent, surrender to God and in *FAITH* accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior, then, upon performance of these *TWO conditions*, God *promises* to put within him the *GIFT* of the Holy Spirit. This is the very *life* of GOD—*SPIRIT* life. It imparts to him the very *divine nature!*

Then *what*, at that stage, *has happened?*

This new convert has only been *begotten* of God—not yet *BORN*. He has not received the full measure of God’s Spirit Christ had—he is only a *spiritual babe* in Christ—he must now *GROW* spiritually, just as a newly conceived fetus in its mother’s womb must grow (Continued on page 39)

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physically large enough to be BORN as a human.

This new convert has now REPENTED, in his mind, from the depths of his heart. HE MEANS IT, too! In all sincerity, in his mind and heart he has *turned around to go the other way*—to live a different life. He is now a CHRISTIAN—he has received God's Holy Spirit. He really *wants* to do what is right—to obey God—to live GOD'S WAY.

YET HE FINDS HE DOES NOT DO THIS PERFECTLY! Many, at this stage, become discouraged. Some give up even trying to live a Christian life. And WHY? *Because of the false notion that a Christian is one who becomes PERFECT at one fell swoop*—or that one cannot become a Christian *until* he has broken all wrong habits, and *made himself* righteous.

It's vital to UNDERSTAND how true Christianity REALLY WORKS!

The newly begotten Christian must grow up, spiritually. What would you think of a human baby,

who became 6 feet tall *all at once*, without *growing up*? The growing up process requires TIME. There is *an instant* when a person receives the impregnating Holy Spirit of God—when he first becomes a Christian. But he is only a spiritual *infant*. He must *grow up* spiritually.

The newly converted person, *in his mind and heart*, sincerely has ABOUT-FACED! He has actually gained contact with GOD and received God's Holy Spirit. God's own divine NATURE has now been conceived within him. BUT THAT'S ALL. It is *merely conceived*—not yet full grown! And his HUMAN NATURE is *still there*. It has not been killed or removed!

God's PURPOSE in having created humanity—in having caused YOU to be born—is to reproduce himself. And GOD, above all things, *is* PERFECT, RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER! God is able to create character within us—but it must be done as a result of our independent free choice. We, as individual separate entities, have our part in the process.

What *is* perfect character? It is

the ability, in a separate entity, to come to the KNOWLEDGE of the right from the wrong—the true from the false—and to CHOOSE the right, and possess the WILL to enforce self-discipline to DO the right and resist the wrong.

God's CHARACTER travels in the direction of his law—the way of LOVE. It is an outgoing CONCERN for others. GOD has that character! He has an outgoing *concern* for you and for me. He GAVE his only begotten Son to reconcile us to him, and make the JOYS of his character and everlasting life possible for us. He showers on us every good and precious gift. He even puts within us his DIVINE NATURE—*when* we repent and turn *from* the WRONG way of THIS WORLD, begin to *resist* it and turn TO him through faith in Jesus Christ as personal Savior!

God's divine nature is the nature of love—of giving, serving, helping—of outgoing concern. It is the nature of humility.

Now when one is converted—has repented, and *turned from* Satan's and this world's false WAY and has

at once received God's Holy Spirit—his HUMAN nature, as I said before, does not flee. It, too, remains. It *still* exerts a pull. We still live in THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD, and *it* exerts a pull. God still allows Satan to be around—and HE exerts a pull.

So we now have THREE PULLS to RESIST—to OVERCOME! We must now *overcome* these three—Satan, this world and our own SELVES. We have to battle against these three, in order to develop and strengthen RIGHT CHARACTER within us. God says plainly it is THE OVERCOMERS who shall be saved—who shall REIGN with Christ!

No human being is strong enough to do this BY HIMSELF! He must seek, and IN FAITH receive, the help and power of GOD. Even with God's power he will not overcome such forces easily, or all at once. IT IS NOT EASY! Christ plainly said the way to ultimate salvation is hard, difficult. It's a constant BATTLE—a struggle against self, the world and the devil. The creation of CHARACTER comes through EXPERIENCE—it takes TIME!

THIS development is a PROCESS. It is a matter of GROWTH—DEVELOPMENT. It requires, to become PERFECT, full and right KNOWLEDGE of the very Word of God—because Jesus taught that we must *live by EVERY WORD OF GOD*.

The natural, unconverted mind cannot fully and rightly UNDERSTAND the Scriptures of God. The acquisition of this KNOWLEDGE, in itself, is a procedure requiring TIME. It is the DOERS of this Word, not hearers only, who shall be saved.

But can any man DO, immediately and all at once, this new WAY he now learns about? Can any man, all at once, break all HABITS he now sees are wrong? No, he finds he has a FIGHT against acquired former habits.

He still has this PULL of human nature to overcome. This nature is A LAW working within him. The apostle Paul calls it the law of sin and death.

Paul was *converted*. Paul was a real Christian. He had repented, accepted Christ and received the Holy Spirit. With his MIND, he wanted with all his heart, and in real intense sincerity, to DO God's WAY! But did Paul DO it perfectly?

Let him tell. LISTEN!

"For we know that the law is spiritual," he wrote, "but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. . . . Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." He is speaking of human nature within him. He continues, ". . . for to WILL is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:14-15, 18-19, 24.) Then he thanks God that GOD WILL—through Jesus Christ, and by the power of his HOLY SPIRIT. BUT IT TAKES TIME!

The truly converted Christian will find that he often stumbles, *under temptation*, and falls down—even as a physical child, learning to walk, often falls down. But the year-old child does not get discouraged and give up. He gets up and starts out again.

THE TRULY CONVERTED CHRISTIAN IS NOT YET PERFECT!

God LOOKS ON THE HEART—the inner MOTIVE—the real *intent*! If someone is trying—if he or she gets up whenever he or she falls down, and in repentance asks God's forgiveness, and sets out to do the very best NOT TO MAKE THAT MISTAKE AGAIN—and to persevere with renewed effort to OVERCOME, God is rich in mercy toward that person in his or her striving to overcome.

Speaking to CONVERTED CHRISTIANS, John writes, ". . . these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And *if any man sin* . . ." (even though he ought not) ". . . we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for OUR sins . . ." (I John 2:1-2). Yes, for the SINS of converted CHRISTIANS. Such people often are under heavier temptation than before conversion. They are STRIVING against sin—STRIVING to overcome. But they are not yet perfect. Sometimes they are caught off guard. They may actually sin. Then they WAKE UP, as it were, and realize what they have done. They REPENT. They are filled

with remorse—*truly sorry*—disgusted with themselves. They go to GOD, and CRY OUT for HELP—for more power and strength from God to OVERCOME!

This is the WAY of the Christian!

It is the way of a constant BATTLE—a striving against SIN—a seeking God in earnest prayer for help and spiritual POWER to overcome. They are constantly GAINING GROUND. They are constantly GROWING in God's KNOWLEDGE, from the BIBLE. They are constantly rooting out wrong habits, driving themselves into RIGHT habits. They are constantly growing closer to GOD through Bible study and prayer. They are constantly growing in CHARACTER, *toward* perfection, even though not yet perfect.

With Paul, they say, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I FOLLOW AFTER. . . . Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, FORGETTING those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS"! (Phil. 3:12-14.)

But, someone may ask, what if one's life is cut off, and he dies *before* he has attained this perfection? Is he saved, or lost? The answer is that we shall never obtain absolute perfection in *this* life.

I said, earlier, that a person who is converted does receive the Holy Spirit at a *definite time*—*all at once!* Not the full measure Christ had—he is not at once full grown spiritually—only a spiritual babe in Christ. Yet he is then a changed, converted man—changed in mind, in attitude, in the *direction* he has set himself to strive to travel. Even though he has not yet reached perfection—even though he may have stumbled under temptation and taken a spiritual fall—as long as, in his mind and heart, he is earnestly striving to travel GOD'S WAY, to overcome and grow spiritually—as long as God's Spirit is in him—as long as he is being LED by the Spirit of God, he is a begotten SON of God.

If, anywhere along this life's journey, that life is cut short, such a man will be resurrected. It is only

the foolish one who deliberately QUILTS and GIVES UP—who REJECTS God, and God's WAY, and rejects Christ as his Savior—who turns FROM this direction of GOD'S WAY *in his mind and heart*—in his inner INTENT—who deliberately and intentionally in his mind TURNS FROM Christ, who is lost. If, once having been converted, having received God's Spirit, and TASTED of the joys of GOD'S WAY, one deliberately rejects that way, makes the DECISION, not under stress of tempta-

tion, but deliberately and finally, NOT to go God's way, then God says it is IMPOSSIBLE to renew such a one to repentance. He would have to REPENT of that decision. But if he WILLFULLY made it, not in a time of temptation, but calmly, deliberately, willfully, then he just WILL NOT ever repent of it.

But anyone who FEARS he may have committed the "unpardonable sin"—is perhaps worried about it and HOPES he *has not* committed it and still WANTS to have God's sal-

vation—no such has committed it. Such a person MAY repent and go right on to salvation IF HE WANTS TO!

If YOU have stumbled and fallen down, *DON'T* BE DISCOURAGED! Get up and press on ahead!

If you see a Christian do something wrong, DON'T SIT IN JUDGMENT AND CONDEMN—that's God's business to judge, not yours! Let's have compassion and mercy—we don't know the inner heart of others—only GOD does! □