

The Preparation for Conversion

by Olin Alfred Curtis

The sermon discusses the preparation for conversion, highlighting the human and divine sides of the process and the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about moral experiences and conversion.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 1:18, John 3:3, John 16:8, Romans 8:15, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Peter 1:16, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Christian Conversion", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis preaches on the Ordo Salutis, focusing on the process of building the new man in Christ. The sermon outlines the preparation for conversion, emphasizing the human and divine sides of preparation, including the work of the Holy Spirit in conscience. Conversion is highlighted as the first point of Christian attainment, leading to loyalty and the development of a holy person in Christian holiness. The sermon also delves into the bearing of individuals, the church, the preacher, and the sinner in the journey towards conversion, stressing the importance of personal influence and divine intervention.

Transcript

Ordo Salutis -- Building the New Man in Christ

The Typical Process in Outline

I. The Preparation For Conversion

A. The Human Side of the Preparation.

1. The bearing of persons.
2. The bearing of the Christian church.
 - (1) The preacher.
 - (2) The people.
3. The bearing of the sinner himself.

B. The Divine Side of the Preparation.

1. The ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in conscience.
2. The extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in conscience.

(1) Enlightenment.

(2) Awakening.

(3) Conviction of sin.

(4) Invitation.

II. Conversion - The first point of Christian attainment -- the loyal person.

A. The Human Side of Conversion.

1. Repentance.

2. Faith.

B. The Divine Side of Conversion.

1. Justification.

2. Regeneration.

3. Adoption.

III. Christian Holiness -- The second point of Christian attainment -- the holy person.

IV. The Intermediate State -- The third point of Christian attainment -- the completed personal individual.

V. The Resurrection of the Body -- The fourth point in Christian attainment -- the completed new man in Christ.

First of all, it may be well to remind you of the true philosophy of influence in any consistent Arminian theology; for many an Arminian is quite ready, after insisting that the influence of God cannot be coercive, to teach that the influence of men can actually and efficiently bring about the conversion of a sinner. Surely you readily perceive the underlying inconsistency. Let it be said, then, plainly and repeatedly, that no human influence is ever compulsory to the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ. But what, then, can we do by our influence? We can do very much. The Holy Spirit, in his dispensation, allows us to work together with him in doing two things: First, in clearing up the self-consciousness so there can be self-decision. Second, in furnishing a motive for immediate self-decision. Never can we coerce a moral person, but we can make it necessary for him to do something instantly. We also can do many very valuable things in relation to the surface of life; but with these we are not now concerned. For example, it is of worth to keep the life of a child outwardly moral by personal watchcare, but we are doing a superficial thing, after all, a thing which should not be in any manner confused with real conversion.

The Bearing of Persons. By the term bearing I mean much more than word or deed, although these may manifest the bearing. I also mean something different from the quiet influence of moral character, although such character is of the largest moment. "What you are speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say." I

mean precisely this: You hold a certain noble ideal over against a certain man -- that he shall be a Christian of the largest and profoundest kind -- and steadily you bear toward this man, without dropping the ideal, and without weakening the demand. To yourself you say, day after day, and perhaps year after year: "Ah, you cannot deceive me. I will believe in you more deeply than your own estimate. And I will not be satisfied with any makeshift. You simply must be this other man which I have in mind." The important thing is not how this bearing is expressed; the important thing is that you really have it, that you cultivate it, that you never give it up either before men or before God. If we could only exchange our general "passion for souls" for an unyielding heartache for definite men, our influence would be greater. The mightiest thing we can ever do for a man is to insist upon suffering for him until he is a new man in our Lord. But it takes a great Christian to suffer, and to suffer wisely and helpfully, for other men.

The Bearing of the Church. Here the problem is to create for all the work of the church, and especially for the church services, a Christian atmosphere. The first thing to do is to unload the church of all its unchristian features -- music or ritual or anything which is planned as a substitute for Christian pressure. It matters not whether the church service is in form simple or complex, beautiful or rugged, provided that every item makes its positive spiritual offering to a Christian atmosphere. But yet more important is the bearing of the Christian congregation. Every Christian person in the congregation should insist upon a Christian atmosphere, praying for it, preparing for it, expecting it, and so making personal contribution to it. But yet more important is the bearing of the preacher himself. He can, in combination with the Holy Spirit, do more than the entire congregation. Again and again I have known Dr. John Hall to come into his pulpit and before he had spoken one word change the atmosphere from that of the world to that of the gospel. He brought Christian urgency with him; and personality began to rouse up, and conscience to make demand all over the room. The preacher's bearing was fully as important as his sermon.

The Bearing of the Sinner Himself. It is of the utmost importance how the sinner meets the different pressures against his life, and how he treats the moral ideal which he now has. Not infrequently we hear some man say: "But I have never had any feeling that I should become a Christian -- I must wait for that." If the man's words are true to the fact, the probability is that his bearing has been unopen toward many small spiritual appeals. The work of the Holy Spirit is not arbitrary -- it has root-connections. Just as the bursting blossom has a history which reaches down out of sight into the ground, so a spiritual crisis is the outcome of many unseen things in personal history. This I believe: any self-conscious person can begin right where he is and bear toward God. There is some right thing which he can choose some moral beckoning which he can follow. This does not mean that conversion is immediately possible, but it does mean such a personal response to the Holy Spirit that more spiritual experiences can be given to a man. But from what I have said you are likely to infer that the work of the Holy Spirit is always in this measure-for-measure method? Such is not the case. The Holy Spirit will do, sooner or later, every possible gracious thing for a sinner; but it is in his wish to make use of people, and the sinner himself, as much as possible; and so again and again he waits for men, and precisely adapts his influence to their bearing. It is almost impossible to give a perfectly balanced statement of the entire case; but there are two points which you must tenaciously hold: First, that moral response is always possible to a self-conscious moral person. Second, that such response tends toward conversion.

The Divine Side of the Preparation. Every movement in conscience is the work, I believe, of the Holy Spirit; but it is impossible to obtain any exact and exhaustive psychology of this work. We may, though, for the sake of redemptional emphasis, fairly divide the whole field, by making a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary operations of the Spirit. What we find is precisely this: Beyond all those

common moral experiences which I have covered with the phrase sporadic morality, there are certain additional experiences which are so momentarily significant that they should be made to stand out, in all practical Christian discussion, as something more than the usual manifestations of conscience. These additional experiences are in inherent correspondence with the higher experiences of the moral process, but they are deepened and augmented and corrected by GRACE. By grace I understand neither more nor less than that special intense action of the Holy Spirit which is his response to the definite redemptional purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator in actual session between God and man. What we have now under the grace of Christ is the filling out of the old moral indications. Even those initial things are in the dispensation of the Spirit, and in consequence (logically) of the atonement, and in teleological connection with the plan of salvation; but it is only in grace that we perceive the crowning peculiarity of the Spirit's dispensation. What I want you all to do is this: First, ground the process of conversion in the moral process itself. Then, lift the whole thing into positive Christian peculiarity. Keep the moral bottom, but add grace.

These extraordinary moral experiences, in as far as they belong to the preparation for conversion, are as follows:

1. A Vision of Righteousness. For the first time the sinner sees that all separate items of wrong are but splinters of one vast wrong which is in antagonism to one vast righteousness. It is not enough to do right, here and there, now and then. Thus, the man obtains a moral ideal, and a sense of personal obligation toward his ideal. Morally the man is in a new state, and the theological term which expresses this new condition is enlightenment. The sinner has been enlightened by the Holy Ghost. This term enlightenment is very convenient; but I would make no battle for the word. The main thing is to keep hold of the fact of this new conception of righteousness as a whole.

2. A Vision of the Holy God. In the bare moral process, this vision of the totality of the right secures no adequate outcome; but in the full Christian process it is but the beginning of a larger vision, namely, the vision of the Holy God. Righteousness is now made personal, but that is not all. There is a further note of intense divine concern for righteousness. The Holy God is not a mere person who is righteous; his whole being is on fire with it, and the flame of his awful purity is unapproachable by man. With this vision of the Holy God the sinner may be considered as having been awakened by the Holy Ghost.

3. A Vision of Sin. This is the completion of the vision of righteousness and God. Sin is seen to be not merely a violation of conscience, but an unnatural rebellion against the Holy God, who is intensely concerned about it. Now comes the real conviction of sin. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight." If we try to analyze the conviction of sin we shall find in it two features:" First, the feeling that our sin is under God's absolute condemnation. In John Bunyan's case there was such a keen realization of impending judgment that he was literally filled with terror. He says: "There was I struck into a very great trembling, insomuch that at some times I could, for days together, feel my very body, as well as my mind, to shake and totter under the sense of the dreadful judgment of God." This is an extreme case, and it would seem almost as if the terror were so great as to become coercive; but in all conviction of sin there is deep distress over the wrath of God. Second, there is a feeling of self-blame. When convicted of sin, a sinner does not begin to excuse himself. He does not blame his parents, the law of heredity, the people about him; he blames just himself. He actually joins in the divine condemnation; and, to keep Wesley's phrase, lets the law of God "glare upon him."

4. Divine Invitation. Were this conviction of sin the end, the sinner's situation in the Christian process would be more hopeless than it is in the moral process; but the end is not yet. Into this distress and severity and gathering despair there comes the invitation by the Holy Spirit. The form and outward circumstances of this invitation may be one thing or another -- a friendly Christian look, a letter from home, a prayer, a sermon; but whatever the form, the content is the voice of God's Spirit, saying, "Come, come, my son; Jesus Christ wills to save you." The tenderness of this invitation is almost the most wonderful thing in all the action of the Holy Spirit. It is like a rainbow springing into the sky after a storm and lending a quiet hopefulness to every frightened creature and to every dripping thing.

With this invitation from the Holy Spirit, the entire preparation for conversion is completed.

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