

Has Healthy Converts

by Seth Rees

A spiritually strong church with a good start in religious experience produces strong and vigorous converts.

Scripture: Acts 1:14, 1 Corinthians 2:4, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Revival"

Description

Seth Rees emphasizes the importance of continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, highlighting the significance of being spiritually wellborn and having a strong start in religious experience. He contrasts feeble converts with strong ones, stressing the need for a revival that strengthens the church's spiritual vigor. Rees discusses the secret of spiritual vigor seen in strong converts at Thessalonica, attributing it to the power of God working through the preaching of the gospel with conviction for sin.

Transcript

They are described as "continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." A healthy mother gives birth to healthy children, and a church spiritually strong will have strong and vigorous converts. It is of incalculable value to have a good start in anything. This is eminently true in religious experience. There is such a thing as being wellborn spiritually. A feeble church, if she have converts at all, will have feeble ones. She may have life and power enough to put sinners under conviction and, perhaps, get them to a place of prayer, but she will fail in faith and prayer to bring them forth, to get them to a place of victory.

A revival which does not greatly increase and strengthen the spiritual vigor of the church is superficial. Much of the so-called revival work is so shallow that the thousands of counted "converts" can not be located in four months after the special services have closed. They can not be found in the prayer-meeting. They are absent from the class-meeting. They do not attend the Sunday preaching services. The only evidence of their religious existence is the name on the church register. A union meeting of one hundred days was held in one of our large cities, under the leadership of a noted evangelist. Hundreds of persons signed cards and made profession of religion. In a few months the converts were not to be seen. Indeed, the pastors themselves confessed that their churches were in a worse condition than before the special services. Another evangelist went to a certain city and began preaching an old-fashioned, fiery gospel. His "pulpit manners" were uncouth and objectionable. The truth itself was sent forth in great rugged chunks, with edges and corners almost incapable of polish. Even the pastor was disturbed. But the evangelist continued in the fear of God, and the Lord vindicated His truth,

sending power and conviction on the people until three hundred and twenty-five souls made profession of salvation, joining the church on probation. At the end of six months two hundred and seventy-five of this number were received into full membership.

We read of strong converts at Thessalonica. Paul says of them, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power," and they "received the word in much affliction with joy in the Holy Ghost." They were such strong converts that though they had not been sanctified wholly yet they were "ensamples to all that believe " and their "faith Godward" was "spread abroad." What was the secret of this vigor? Paul, himself a man filled with the Holy Ghost, began his ministry among them by "reasoning with them, opening and alleging out of the Scriptures." He had no stock of thrilling anecdotes; no heart-rending deathbed scenes to stir up the people. He preached a gospel that carried with it conviction for sin. It so stirred the conscience and so effectively set in array the sins of the sinner before his eyes that souls were eager to call on God for pardon. It was not Paul's "personal magnetism" or eloquence that produced these results. He declared that he preached through "infirmity of the flesh." "I was with you," he says, "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my speech was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Paul denies that he is strong either in natural or acquired ability. He is careful to say that he preached "in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" and for this very reason his converts "stood in the power of God."

If the Pentecostal Church had such a thing as a "minister's meeting" those who took part certainly did not meet to simply deplore the situation, read papers and pronounce the benediction. Decline in piety was felt to be a grave question. It was too serious a matter to be dealt with lightly. The backslidden brother must be restored by those "that are strong." Effective and divinely ordained methods must be used. We can hardly imagine a member of the early church suggesting church work as a remedy or preventative for backsliding. It was not thought that the converts must have mission work, a Sunday school class, or a place in the choir to hold them in the church. More probably the converts did not feel that they needed to be held. Doubtless the question with them was "To whom shall we go?" for, on the day of Pentecost, they "that gladly received the word were baptized." Too many of the so-called "converts" of today are coaxed and almost compelled to join the church. No wonder that they have so little heart for real church work and very quickly drift by the law of gravitation and consciousness of kind to their own company.

To be well-born spiritually means that the convert have a clear, satisfactory witness of the Spirit with his own that he is born of God. After this preliminary work of grace is completed in the heart, if he is instructed and encouraged to "tarry until" he is "endued with power from on high," he will continue steadfastly in the apostles' faith, doctrine and fellowship. The baptism with the Holy Ghost is the only safeguard against backsliding. Some one has said that "God justifies us that he may sanctify us, and he sanctifies us that he may keep us justified." There are few people living justified lives who are not also living sanctified lives. We hear a great deal said about "sinning and repenting" among Christian people, so-called. That there is much sinning among those who talk in this way, we doubt not; but that there is much hearty repentance, we can not believe. Repentance of sin means forsaking sin with no secret purpose of remaining a sinner. This attitude of the soul God demands before he pardons. God certainly has no more tolerance for sin in the heart or life of a Christian than he has in a sinner. One would suppose that if leniency were granted anywhere it would be in the case of those who do not know by experience what it means to have sins pardoned. But God hates sin wherever found, and gives no license in any instance for its committal or retention. We therefore believe the number of those who thus forsake sin and repent of it every day to be

very small. They either give up in despair or seek and obtain a grace which keeps them from sin.

"They continued steadfastly " in prayer. The Pentecostal Church was not divided into praying and non-praying members. All of the members were praying people, and prayer became such a fixed habit with them that they were steadfast in it. There were offered no inducements to attend prayer- meeting, such as cake, coffee, and a "short, spicy service." Ah, no; they made no stipulations as to the length of their prayers. The lone Man on the mountain deep in midnight prayer was ever before them. The Holy Ghost taught the early saints what to pray for, and they received answers. They "stirred up themselves to take hold on God." They knew how to continue in prayer and "watch in the same." Baxter stained his study walls with praying breath. Epaphras, one of the members of the early church, "always labored abundantly in prayers." All members of the Pentecostal Church do the same. If our fathers had known as little of the power of prayer as many church members do today, some of our great religious bodies would never have existed. If they had indulged in the practice of resorting to everything else before calling on God, as is so common now, we would have had no great denominations.

Someone asked an old saint what she thought of the new minister, who had just delighted the body of his hearers with an eloquent sermon. "I do not know," she answered, "I have not heard him pray." The Pentecostal Church took everything to God. He must redress all their wrongs, defend their characters, and protect their property. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer . . let your requests be made known unto God," was the exhortation ever ringing in their ears. They lived in an atmosphere of prayer, and died praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." There is a great demand in these days for a race of moral heroes and heroines -- men and women who can withstand the surging tide of worldliness and the spirit of compromise, and who can not be bribed, bought, or brow-beaten into the desertion of the truth.

If the Holy Ghost was allowed to convict people for sin, and they were taught to look to God for the witness of their salvation, instead of relying on themselves, their feelings, the word of the evangelist, or the opinion of the pastor, God would answer them from heaven and they would desire no further evidence. They would then remain "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Amen.

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