

Counterfeit Conversion - Part One

by Winkie Pratney

Winkie Pratney's sermon challenges listeners to examine their faith and understand the profound difference between true and counterfeit conversion.

Scripture: Isaiah 8:20

Topics: "True Conversion", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Winkie Pratney delves into the topic of true conversion and challenges the church to reexamine their faith and motives. He emphasizes the importance of moving from a state of supreme selfishness to benevolence, highlighting that true Christianity is rooted in love for God and others. Pratney warns against a religion of fear, where outward actions may mimic true faith but lack genuine love and submission to God. He urges listeners to assess their spiritual standing in light of God's Word and to seek true conversion marked by a change of heart and purpose.

Transcript

Over one hundred years ago, revival swept America. Thousands of souls entered the Kingdom of God under the searching sermons of a humble servant of Christ, Charles G. Finney. It has been estimated that over half a million were converted to God as a direct result of his ministry, and that by a conservative estimate over 80% remained true to Christ to the day of their death, without backsliding or falling by the wayside.

The years have passed, and century 21 is almost born. Yet no voice has been raised strong enough to stir the church and shake the world. A wave of watery Churchianity, militant proselytism, and unintelligent "evangelicalism" threatens to be the only apparent forms of "conversion" confronting a reality-hungry generation. The church world is fast drifting into an "easy-believism" salvation that Christ would not recognize. Lest He be grieved, Who bought the Church with His blood, men who profess salvation must meet anew God's own conditions of true conversion.

"Christian" is almost a meaningless word to the masses today. Because so many believe that they are Christians, when in fact, they are not, four of Finney's searching sermons have been selected;

True and False Conversion

True Saints

Legal Religion

Religion of Public Opinion

They have been simplified, condensed and supplemented somewhat from other sections of his lectures and sermons, and thoroughly documented with Scripture. A certain amount of paraphrase was utilized to adapt them to today's vocabulary.

May the Holy Spirit of Truth challenge your heart as you read! You may appreciate the solemn injunction of the apostle Paul:

"Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith... prove your own selves." (2 Cor, 13:5)

Each section is set forth in love, so you can examine your own spiritual standing in the light of God's Word. Many examine themselves by comparing their beliefs with others, or by trying to live up to what is set forth by some man or group. If we profess to truly follow the Lord Jesus, we will heed His words about Scripture:

"To the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20)

"Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39)

"For there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is the way of death." (Prov, 14:12)

These messages may shock you and shake you. They were meant to! But do not be angry or afraid to read on. It is your life and eternal destiny that is being settled by acceptance or rejection of the Word of God. Only the dishonest fear the truth. If your faith is real, it will stand this searching examination; if it is false, God knows it and you shall know it, too. Do something about it before you go out into eternity. May you feel the same yearning love and compassion that moved these messages over a hundred years ago, and may you have the courage and faith to do whatever you must before the God who searches every heart.

The Religion Of Fear

God's question to you is not, "What are you doing?" but, "Why are you doing it?" It is possible to be exactly like a true saint in every outward detail, but for a fundamentally different reason. Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. Men judge you by the ways and means you live out life, God looks at the reason and purpose for which you are living. Almost any means of religious service can be counterfeited by a deceived person, but unless there has been a change of heart, or ultimate purpose, nothing he does is true religion. He is possibly intensely religious, but still may be totally selfish. The true test of real faith is, is he or she motivated basically by hope and fear, or love?

The natural state of all men before true conversion is wholly selfish.

Selfishness is supremely seeking one's own good because it is his own. There is a difference between selfishness and self-love. Self-love, is simply a built in desire for happiness and dread of misery. This is natural, and essential. It is not sin. But selfishness is the desire of happiness and dread of misery above the rights of all others, including God. He who is selfish places his own care above any interests of greater

value, such as the glory of God and the highest good of the universe. And every unconverted man knows that all other such men are selfish. He conducts all his dealings with others on this basis. Scripture calls selfishness sin, and pictures it as a wrong choice of life, or purpose; a wrong ultimate motive of the heart. (I Kings 11:9-11; 15:3; 2 Chron. 12:14; Ps. 28:3; 66:18; 78:37; 95:10; Jer. 17:9-10; Ezek. 14:2-3; 18:30-32; Mt. 5:27-30; 9:4; 13:15; Mk. 3:5; 7:18-23; Lk. 21:34; Acts 8:21; 18-24; Rom. 2:4-6; Heb. 3:17-15)

A man who lives in a converted state is not supremely selfish, but loving, or benevolent.

A true child of God does not live to please himself. Benevolence, (good-willing), is unselfishly choosing the good of others. This is God's state of mind. God is love. (I Jn. 4:16) He unselfishly chooses the highest good of His universe. This love, or benevolence, forms the whole of His character. Everything God does is an expression of His love. It sums up His every action and is the motive behind His every choice. God is purely and unselfishly loving. He does not make His creatures happy just to promote His own joy, but because He loves their happiness and chooses this for its own sake. He does feel happy Himself in bringing them joy, but He does not do it to gratify Himself. And this love is holiness. It is the only basic law God requires of men. (Mt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; I Tim. 1:5; Jas. 2:8-10)

A true child of God is like Him in this way. This does not mean that no one is truly converted until they are purely and perfectly as loving as God is, but that their prevailing choice of life, and supreme purpose, is benevolent. They sincerely seek the good of others for its own sake, not just to make themselves happy or escape punishment. Just as certainly as the converted man yields obedience to God's law,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself", he is like God. He is benevolent, and a true Christian. (I Jn. 4:7; I Pet. 1:16; Jude 21; Rom. 13:10; I Jn. 5:3; John 15:9-14; 17:14-26; I John 4: 16-17)

True conversion is an ultimate change from a state of supreme selfishness to benevolence.

It is a change in the HEART, or ultimate purpose of life, not a mere change in the way of living. A man may change his outward actions, and yet live for the same purpose. It is the intent, or design of his actions that give them character, and not just the means used to carry out that intent or purpose. Conversion is a change in the whole life end, from serving self to serving God and others. The true Christian chooses as his goal the glory of God and the good of His Kingdom. He chooses this goal for its own sake, because he sees it as the greatest good, above even his own individual happiness at times. He is not indifferent to his own happiness, but he prefers God's glory because it is the greater good. He chooses the happiness of others according to their real importance as far as he is able to perceive it. He no longer lives for himself; he begins to live in love for God and others. This change is total and ultimate, involving the whole personality. (Matt. 6:22-24; 7:17-20; 12:33-35; Jn. 3:19-21; Rom. 6:16-18; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 1:15; Jas. 3:10-11)

Has this change taken place in your life? As you read this, you are in one of the two classes above. The supreme end of life you have chosen is determining your own destiny. Do you know which class you belong to? Do you know if you truly love God or are just seeking His favor and aiming at heaven for your own benefit supremely?

I assume that you are perfectly sincere, and possibly even very zealous in your faith. This test will not look however, at what you do. It will not question what you believe. It will simply expose one thing for you; whether or not you are selfish or a true child of God... whether or not you meet the basic requirement of true Christian faith; to love God supremely, and your neighbor as yourself. You can check your own conduct against the following, know for certain your true character, and if necessary, be ready to change it to discover the thrill of true conversion.

Hope and fear - or Love?

There are only two basic principles on which any government, human or divine is based; fear and confidence. All obedience springs from one of these two principles. In one case, people obey from hope of reward (for themselves) or fear of punishment (to themselves) and is the essence of the selfish man's life. The other class obey from love and confidence in the one in authority. Consider two children. One obeys his Dad because he trusts him. He has a faith which works by love. The other yields only an outward obedience from hope or fear, because he does not trust him.

So are the lives of the true saint and the counterfeit. The true saint has confidence or faith in God that leads him to obey, and wholly submit himself into His hands. The counterfeit, like the devil, has only a partial faith and partial submission, He believes and trembles. (Jas. 2:19) So a person may believe that Christ came to save sinners, and on that ground may submit to be saved for his own safety, without submitting to be led and ruled by Him. His submission is only on the selfish condition that he will be happier. It is never with that unreserved trust in God's character and love that leads His true child to say, "Thy will be done." The counterfeit's faith is the religion of fear. It is the religion of law, and not of love. It is totally selfish, and totally non-Christian. It is outward only, and hypocritical. True faith is a faith of the heart and the only acceptable faith in God's eyes.

You can tell a man or woman in the religion of fear. Some of their characteristics are:

They serve God like taking medicine.

The counterfeit convert obeys God, not because he loves Him, but because he hopes to get something good out of it for himself. The true child of God delights in doing God's will. When Christ and the Gospel is loved for their own sake, there is no weariness or struggle in serving. His commandments are not grievous. (I Jn. 5:3; Matt. 11:30; 23:4; Lk. 11:46) Do you enjoy Christianity or do you serve God basically only for what He can do for you? The man in the religion of fear reads the Bible and prays because he knows he should. It would not do to say you are a Christian and not read the Bible! But they do not enjoy it. They never go to prayer meetings unless it is absolutely necessary, or unless it will be of some benefit for them. When they do go, they are cold, dull, listless and lifeless, and glad when it is over. Their only enjoyment in religion is chiefly one of anticipation; they hope they will be happy in the next world, but never enjoy the service of God in this one. The true child of God already enjoys His peace; heaven has begun already in his soul. He has eternal life now, not merely the prospect of it. He has the very feelings of heaven in his life. He anticipates joys higher in degree only, not of a different kind, in heaven itself. He is not waiting until he dies to taste the thrill of eternal life. (John 1:12; Rev. 3:20; John 11:25-26; 14:23-27; 15:3-11; Rom. 5:1; 14:17; 18:13; 8:1-17; Mk. 12:28-34; I Jn. 3:2)

They do what they have to, not what they really want to.

The counterfeit convert is moved by his convictions, not his affection. His "faith" is the religion of fear. He is driven by warnings, not drawn by the love of God. (Jn. 10:3-5; 2 Tim. 1:7; John 10:14,16,27-28; 3:29-30) He regards the law of God for fear that God will pass him by if he does not, but he does not LOVE to do what God requires in His law. He is filled with the spirit of fear, lest he make the wrong move or do the wrong thing. God is not a loving and compassionate heavenly Father to him, but a stern, exacting taskmaster. (1 Pet. 2:7; Heb. 10:7) He is more or less strict in religion according to what he knows to be right, and more or less miserable to the degree his conscience bothers him. He knows what is right, but does not have a heart to do it. The more he knows, the more miserable he becomes. (Matt. 23:23) Here is a key difference. The true saint prefers obedience; the counterfeit purposes or intends it, but usually fails to do so. He knows he should, like Paul before his conversion, (Rom. 7), but fails, because his heart is not in it. (Ezk. 33:31-32; Matt. 21:28-31; Lk. 6:45-46)

A counterfeit convert has a basic motivation of fear, not love.

He is not only afraid of hell but of punishment, judgment and disgrace in men's eyes. He still lives for himself, thinks of himself, and seeks his own happiness and safety supremely. These fears keep him outwardly moral. He keeps up a kind of obedience that is formal, heartless, loveless and completely worthless. (Matt. 15:1-20; 23:4, 13-33; Gal. 4:3-12; 8:4-6)

His happiness in religion is only his hope of heaven or reward. Most of his joys are those of anticipation, because he is not really happy doing right and loving God here and now. This is not his purpose, but the way he has chosen to try to get his own happiness. When his hope of heaven is strengthened, he enjoys religion a great deal. But the true saint is happy serving God anywhere, in anything. He is not interested in saving his own life, because he has lost it. (Mk. 8:34-35; Lk. 9:23-24; 12:24-26; 14:26) He would even be happy in hell if he could do God's will there, for he would still be doing the things in which his happiness consists. (Ex. 32:30-32; Mk. 8:35; 10:45; Rom. 9:3) If the duties of faith are not joy to you, and your happiness rests on the strength of your hopes, you have no true faith; it is all selfishness. (Phil. 2:21:1 Tim. 3:2a, 5) This does not mean that true saints do not enjoy their hopes; but it is no great thing with them. They think very little about them. Their thoughts are taken up with God and saving others. (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 10:23-33; Rom. 14:5-8; Phil. 3:3-14)

They are more afraid of punishment than sin.

The counterfeit keeps on sinning, because he does not really hate sin; only punishment for it. The true child of God is more afraid of sin than punishment. He does not ask, "If I do this, what will happen to me?", but feels, like Joseph, "How can I do this wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen. 39: 7-9; Ezek. 8:12; Job 31:33-34; Rom. 2:16-29; 2 Tim. 2:19) The counterfeit keeps committing the same sin by convincing himself that God will forgive him eventually and he can always repent of it afterwards.

Because the counterfeit lives in known sin, he likes to hear sermons on the security of the believer; on God's grace and mercy, on His long-suffering. His only trouble is that he does not realize the majority of these scriptures do not apply to him, because he is not saved at all! Proof positive of this is his love of sin more than God; he likes to be soothed along in it, not shocked out of it; comforted, not challenged; assured, not examined. His conscience bothers him so much already that he cannot stand sermons that throw further light on his true state. (John 3:19-20; 9:39-41; 12:44-48; Matt. 13:40-43)

His greatest blessings come out of hearing sermons on saints who sinned. He fondly imagines God exposes such tragic failures to set precedents for those who would follow His Son. Instead of such stories

breaking their hearts, that men of God should fall so low; instead of accepting this as a message to watch and pray, to keep under the body lest they should become a castaway - they actually enjoy it! They see themselves in the saint's sin; they feel strengthened, not shocked; glad and not grieved. If their own souls can be temporarily assured, they care very little what happens to the rest of the world. They like sermons that give them a license to go on in sin. They prefer ministers who can preach with conviction on abstractions. Listen to them pray, and they basically pray for their own salvation. (Lk. 18:9-44; Jn. 9:31-34)

They have a spirit of GET instead of GIVE.

True Christians enjoy giving and helping others more than being helped by others because they love. Their hearts are set on the highest good, and their deepest, sheerest joy is to be able to do it. (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 12:42-44; Lk. 3:11; 2 Cor. 12:9-13; Heb. 12:2) Counterfeit converts are always looking for ways to get from others whatever they can. Especially is this true in daily business, if selfishness rules our conduct there with men, as sure as God rules we are selfish before Him. A man in the religion of fear finds it hard to give anything of his to God. He may have to, to keep his reputation, but it bothers him no end. (Lk. 6:30-35; 16:11-16 Matt. 25:41-45; I Jn. 3:16-17) The counterfeit never enjoys self-denial. If a man sets his heart on anything, he enjoys everything he saves for it and the more he saves from other things to give to this, the more he is pleased. The phony finds it hard to give to Christian work, it is easy to see that his heart is not in it. It gives him a pain in the neck to give to God. He cannot understand the joy of unselfish giving, to advance God's kingdom, because it drains resources from his own little world where he rules as king. (Deut. 15:7-11; Matt. 10:9; 13:44-46; 19:29-30; Luke 12:13-34; 16:19-25; 18:18-30)

Their prayers and cares for others are born out of fears for themselves.

The counterfeit is chiefly afraid of hell himself, and when he is strongly convicted he is afraid that others may go there too. The true saint prays for the sinner because he has a sense of the evil of sin which sinners commit, the counterfeit because he has a fear of the terrors of hell. The phony prays for a sinner's safety. The Christian prays for safety from sin. Christians feel compassion for the sinner, but grieved anger on God's behalf for the sinner's rebellion. The man in the religion of fear feels more sorry for the sinner than for God, because he shares his sin and sympathizes with him. A counterfeit can never understand how God could allow a loved one to go to hell. They feel more for the "loved one" than for the God whose heart the rebellious "loved one" has broken. Christ's words commanding supreme love of His followers over all other earthly loves have no meaning to them. They do not supremely love Him; they love themselves, and everything connected with their own happiness. (Matt. 6:33; 22:36-40; 10:37-39; Lk. 14:25-26)

It is not extravagant to say that the religion I have described appears to be that of a very large majority in the church. To say the least, it is to be feared that a majority of professing Christians are of this description. To say this is neither unloving nor censorious.

This religion is radically defective. There is nothing of true Christianity in it. It differs from Christianity as much as the Pharisees differed from Christ, as much as the Gospel faith differs from legal religion, as much as the faith of love differs from the religion of fear. Now, let me ask you, to which of these two classes do you belong? Is Christ the center of your life, or are you trying to fit Him in for your own happiness? God knows if your faith is the religion of fear. Why be afraid any longer? Why try to find happiness in serving yourself? Will you come, and trust Him simply as a child, to live no longer for yourself, but to live in love for God and His glory?

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