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## Why Not More Conversions.

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The statistical tables of several Christian denominations, for several years past, exhibit a lamentable decrease of members received on confession of faith. During the last decade the population of our land was increased immensely, but the conversion of souls has not increased in like proportion.

In all genuine conversions a divine factor must be recognized as well as a human factor; and any attempt to answer the question, "Why are there not more conversions?" is attended with no little delicacy and difficulties. Some facts, however, may throw some light on it.

1. The first fact is that the period of active church work is being diminished every year. In a large number of the churches in all the large towns there is almost an entire suspension from June to September, often to October. The old jest that religion, like oysters, is confined to months that have an "R" in them has quite too much truth in it. An eminent New York pastor told me that he did not have his congregation before his pulpit more than seven months in the year, and even in the winter there was a continual flitting away to Florida, California, and other popular resorts.

Far more serious than the three or four months of migrations is the increasing tendency to half-day attendance at church on the Sabbath. Instead of an opportunity to press his message of eternal life twice on the Lord's Day (as in former times), a faithful minister of Christ has but one chance, and then he is often obliged to shovel many of his auditors out from beneath the snow-bank of a godless Sunday newspaper. Satan has got the track before the minister of the gospel starts.

2. A second fact is that there is too little pungent, fervid, and pointed preaching to the consciences of the unconverted. Jesus Christ died to save sinners; and unless people are made to feel that they are sinners they are not likely to flee to Christ for salvation. If there is such a thing as "a wrath to come," why conceal it? Had Noah not been "moved with fear" he never would have built the ark, and a minister has no more right to throw away the threatenings of God's Word than he has to throw away the invitations and the precious promises. Paul ceased not to warn men night and day with tears, and I have no doubt that the old hero was never afraid to mention the word hell.

The most successful soul-winners, from Wesley and Whitfield to Finney, Spurgeon, and Moody, have never sprinkled their audiences with cologne-water. The redeeming love of Jesus Christ is never so glorious, never so winsome, never so overpowering as when it is presented against the background of human sinfulness and weakness and guilt.

The only conversion worth having is a conversion down to the roots, and no preacher is likely to have many such converts unless he puts the Bible-plough into the conscience beam deep, and tears up the native depravity, and makes room for the precious seed of the gospel. The man who preaches the most faithfully and lovingly for souls will always have the Holy Spirit with him.

3. It is a fair question whether some of the falling off of conversions is not to be attributed to a falling off in many minds of an implicit faith in the perfect truthfulness, perfect infallibility, and perfect inspired authority of God's blessed Word. A certain style of reckless and irreverent Biblical criticism is working sad havoc in these days. The minister who wastes his week over studies that unsettle him, and on Sunday mounts his pulpit with shaking knees, is not likely to win many converts. Brethren, "preach the Word!" That is the beginning and the end of your high commission. Preach the Word, seasoned with prayer, and God will take care of it, and converts

will be multiplied.

4. Many professedly Christian parents have their full share of responsibility for the diminution of conversions. They do not maintain the "church in the house." Family worship is either neglected entirely or else degraded into a pious sham. Instead of following up the faithful preaching of the best pastors by watering the gospel-seed at home, they choke the seed by their worldly talk on God's day and their worldly walk during the week. Their children become disgusted with the very name of religion. The downward pull of the week is too much for the upward pull of the best preaching of the Sabbath. Who doubts that if there were more Elkanahs and Hannahs there would be more Samuels? If there were more Eunices there would be more Timothys.

God made mothers before he made ministers; and I defy any minister to do any wide converting work in his parish if the homes and the households are nurseries of utter worldliness. Childhood is the golden time for conversions; and I feel confident that if parents and Sunday-school teachers did their work thoroughly we should have a generation growing up in the church and into Christian living instead of the young being left to run at large in the vain hope of being overtaken and "lassoed" in a "revival."

5. This brings me on to a rather delicate question. The way with many churches does not seem to be a good way. They are content to go on after a mechanical fashion, listening to orthodox preaching (for at least once on the Sabbath), cultivating sociality and maintaining their respectability. Their prayer meetings are scanty and the prayers offered are rather perfunctory. If a church sociable is to be held, or a fair, or a Sunday-school picnic, or any kind of religious festivity, they come out in full force.

When one communion season after another passes by and no candidates for membership appear, or but a very few, the pastor and his official board take the alarm and determine that something must be done. Instead of honestly confessing their guilty lukewarmness, arousing themselves to their own duties, and beseeching the help of the Holy Spirit, they send off for some itinerant or professional "revivalist" to come—as if he could bring a new gospel or a new Saviour or another Holy Spirit than the one that is promised to the prayer of faith and obedience. Instead of going right to God, they run off to Egypt for help; and the result too often is that their own pastor is dishonored, their own responsibilities are shirked, and the church left in the end weaker than before.

Any one who has witnessed in his own church as glorious outpourings of the Holy Spirit as the writer of this article has done, is the last man to disparage a genuine "revival." But it is not imported to order. It is not manufactured by machinery. When a minister preaches the whole gospel fearlessly and faithfully and soaks his seed in prayer, when his people co-operate with him and feel that they are as responsible for the salvation of souls as he is, then the Holy Spirit descends upon such a church and abides with them. Instead of a fitful and spasmodic alternation of short showers and long stagnations, there is a constant sowing and a constant reaping; and this ought to be the normal condition of every healthy church.

There was no lack of conversions in that early church at Jerusalem. Why? Simply because those men and women believed the gospel, believed in prayer, believed in Christian brotherhood, believed in consecrating their money and time to their Master, and practised what they believed. Outsiders began to believe in them. They did not grieve away the Holy Spirit. Conversions occurred every day. I don't wonder that such wide awake, steady-going Christians praised God and found favor with all the people.

All that is possible then is possible now. The gospel has not changed; the Holy Spirit has not

changed; human nature has not changed; the promises have not changed; and why in the name of common sense should there not be thousands of just such churches all over our country? Ah, when Christ's people are thoroughly converted themselves there will be no lack of conversions from the world.

## Jesus in the Home.

A little girl went on an errand to an elegant home. The lady was proud of her home, and she showed Jennie the carpets, pictures, ornaments, and flowers, and asked, "Don't you think these things are lovely?"

"They are pretty," said Jennie. "What a beautiful home for Jesus to visit! Does he ever come here?"

"Why, no," said the lady.

"Don't you ever ask him?" asked Jennie.

"We have only a room and a bedroom, and we have no carpets or pretty things; but Jesus comes and makes us very happy."

The lady told her husband what Jennie had said, and he replied: "I have often thought that we ought to thank God for his goodness, and ask him to come and live with us."

They became Christians, and Jesus came to live with them, and make them happy. Jesus blesses every home to which he comes.

## Ruskin's Analysis of Mud.

"What dirty, disgusting stuff!" exclaimed a man, regarding that peculiarly unpleasant compound, the mud of London streets.

"Hold, my friend," said Ruskin. "Not so dreadful, after all. What are the elements of this mud? First, there is sand; but when its particles are crystallised according to the law of its nature, what is nicer than clean, white sand? And when that which enters into it is arranged according to a still higher law, we have the matchless opal. What else have we in this mud? Clay. And the materials of clay, when the particles are arranged according to their higher laws, make the brilliant sapphire. What other ingredients enter into the London mud? Soot. And soot in its crystallised perfection forms the diamond. There is but one other—water. And water when distilled according to the higher law of its nature, forms the dewdrop resting in exquisite perfection in the heart of the rose."

So in the muddy, lost soul of man is hidden the image of His Creator; and God will do His best to find His opals, His sapphires, His diamonds and dewdrops."

## Could Not Work on Sundays.

John Nelson, the Yorkshire man who was co-worker with John Wesley, possessed convictions and earnestness that should characterize every Christian of to-day.

When threatened with dismissal because of his refusal to work on Sundays, he said: "I would rather have my wife and children beg their way barefooted to heaven than ride in a coach to hell! I will run the risk of wanting bread here rather than the hazard of wanting water hereafter."

It is interesting to relate that Nelson's employer admired his earnest steadfastness so much that he increased his wages and stopped all work on Sunday.

The healthiest spot in the world seems to be a little hamlet in France named Annome. There are only forty inhabitants, twenty-five of whom are eighty years of age, and one is over one hundred.