

## The Christian.

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## EDITORIAL.

## CONVERSION.

Instead of the usual editorial we give in this number extracts from an article in the *Sunday School Times* on conversion.

"As a natural consequence of the common misunderstanding of the mission and work of the Holy Spirit, there is a widespread popular feeling that sinners are converted from their evil course to the service of God, rather than that they themselves turn to God, when they see it to be their duty to do so. The incorrect language of our ordinary English Bible, in referring to this act or process of conversion, has been a fruitful cause of this misconception.

In our old version it would appear that Jesus said to his disciples, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." But in the new, and more correct version, it reads, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." In our old version, again, Jesus is said to have counseled Peter, in view of his coming denial and repentance, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." But the new version gives it thus: "When once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren." According to the old version, Peter preached, after the day of Pentecost, to the people in the temple courts: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." According to our new version, Peter's call was: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out."

These differences in the two versions, in their teachings on this point, represents fairly well the difference between the popular idea of "conversion," and the Bible idea of it. The popular thought is that conversion is wrought on or in a man by outside influences, or by a force from above. The Bible thought is that conversion is the act of the individual himself, for which he is directly responsible, however he may be affected by influences from without and above. The old version seemed to say to the sinner, "Be converted." The new version distinctly says to him, "Turn." There is no such command, either in word or spirit, as "Be converted," in the new and more correct version. Yet that command is still repeated as if it were justified by the Bible teachings, in pulpit and press, and many believe that it is not at variance with the teachings of the Bible.

The practical bearing of this truth on the appeals made to sinners to submit themselves to Christ, and on sinners in their response to these appeals, is incalculably important. It makes a vast difference whether a man is summoned to immediate personal action in his attitude and conduct toward Christ, or

whether he is led to suppose that he must wait passively for some process on or in him which shall give him different views and feelings, and make him a different man. The tendency of this error as to the Bible call to men has been manifest in innumerable instances, whatever good has been done in spite of it by those who held the error, or who were appealed to in view of it."

Here the writer states a number of cases known to himself, one of an earnest, praying working man who lived and died out of the church vainly seeking what he thought conversion. Other amiable young men who would not be persuaded to obey Christ because they could not after all their efforts get converted. Another of a preacher telling his hearers that they could not convert themselves and all they could do was to wait for God to convert them. Another man when rebuked for his profanity exclaims: "For that matter it will be all right, for I was converted seventeen years ago last September, and I never lost that old hope."

"Mr. Moody tells of the definition of "conversion" given by a believer who was won to Christ while a soldier in the British army.

"It was just," he said, "Halt! About face! March!"

That is the Bible idea of conversion, as contrasted with the popular idea, illustrated in the other cases.

As "conversion," in the Bible use of that term, is the deliberate turning of an individual toward God, it follows, as a matter of course, that a man may thus turn as often as he finds himself in a wrong attitude toward God, or facing in the wrong direction. When Andrew found Jesus, and was convinced that he was the Messiah, Peter turned, or converted, and followed Jesus. When, again, Peter turned away from Jesus, by denying him, Jesus wanted him to turn, or convert, back again. Thus any man can turn, or convert, again, as many times as he goes astray.

In illustration of the fact, however, that a mistaken and unbiblical view of conversion is widespread and misleading, a circular sent broadcast through the country from a centre of religious interest in New York City furnishes abundant evidence. The object of this circular is to obtain information for permanent preservation as "a study of conversion." It gives a series of specific questions which the person receiving it is desired to answer. Here are specimens of these questions, with this preliminary caution:

"Persons answering the following questions should be especially careful not to confuse beliefs and experiences of a later date with those of the time of conversion."

"Where, on what occasion, and under what circumstances, were you converted? Had you, before that moment, made up your mind that you would be converted if possible? Tell, in detail, what you then meant by conversion. Why did you desire it? What did you expect of it? . . . What was the state of your health?"

"Relate your conversion. What were the various thoughts in your mind, and the various feelings in your heart, at the moment of conversion? . . . Were you very much moved? by what or by whom were you moved?"

"Describe your feelings and your thoughts immediately after conversion. Were you aware that you had experienced conversion? In what particulars had you become changed?"

"If you have passed through more than one similar experience, or through other less momentous moral crises, describe each one separately, giving date of each."

In all these questions not a word is said as indicating or suggesting any sense of responsibility, on the part of the individual, for his turning from the wrong to the right, from self to God. All of them look not to a man's turning to God, but to a man's being converted to God.

Turning to God whenever one is away from him is the plain duty of believer and unbeliever. That is conversion. There is nothing in the Bible which, read and understood as it is written, would lead one to suppose otherwise. Of course, the power to turn or go forward, to halt or to move, to act, to speak, to breathe, is from God; but when God calls a man to halt or to turn, God is ready to give the man all necessary power to enable him to act accordingly.

Regeneration, whenever that takes place, is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is not the work of man. But the Bible never confounds regeneration with conversion; nor ought a man to make this mistake for himself or for others."

From the above article in a very popular paper, we may learn how wonderfully the light of God is passing into the minds of religious teachers and through them to the people. The Bible student can be greatly assisted by the revised version.

When an anxious inquirer learns that instead of waiting and praying for a power to come upon him to convert him, the blessed Saviour is pleading with him to turn from his sins and accept of salvation from his hand as a child accepts of a gift from a loving parent, what a joy the startling discovery gives to his troubled mind! Religious teachers are seeing these things, therefore they urge men to turn to God. This inspires hope that these teachers or others after them, will go still farther, and show what are the steps sinners are to take in turning from the broad way to the narrow path which leads to life. Jesus, the great leader, has marked that path by his own footsteps, whom the lost sinner is to trust and follow. Jesus' first public act is plainly and fully recorded in Matt. 3: 13-17, so that his believing followers can tell how to begin the course. When he compares this with what Jesus said in his last commission to his apostles, Mark 16: 15, 16, and with the first sermon of his apostle with the Holy Spirit, Acts 2: 36-38, and with every case on record since Jesus' death, when those who turned to God began to follow Jesus, we say surely teachers will see, and tell men what is so plain.