

The Problem of Partial Conversion

I have been thinking about the phrase "the problem of partly converted people" since it was sent to me in an email recently. Just who are "partly converted" people, and who are "fully converted", and how are we to judge?

We know that even though Peter had been at the side of Jesus for three and a half years, and had seen miracle upon miracle, and grace upon grace ? and even though he had left everything to follow Jesus ? he was still not fully converted.

Luke 22:32 says

"But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren"

It was shortly after Jesus said these words to Peter, that Peter lied about knowing Jesus, and said to the maid "I know Him not" yet Peter knew Jesus better than almost anyone. Was Peter still only partly converted after spending year after year in Jesus company? Do we have the right to condemn newly baptized if we think they have not grasped the same understanding as we have?

It seems that God gives us trials to help more fully convert us if we let Him, and if we see Him at work and do not harden our hearts.

I am reminded of an exhortation by Bro John Thatcher who described the healing of the man born blind. It was another occasion when Jesus deliberately healed on the Sabbath to confront the Pharisees with their own blindness that placed the traditions of men above mercy and compassion.

The man born blind did not see at once. When Jesus touched his eyes the first time he saw men walking as trees. Some people never get past this stage, they do not really care about other people -unless people are in their favoured group- but all others may as well be trees. But then Jesus touched the man's eyes again and this time he saw people as people, and not just as objects.

Some of us need Jesus to touch our lives several times before we begin to have real compassion for others, before we are really converted and see clearly.

Unless we begin to see things through the eyes of Jesus we will never understand, we will never be truly converted. The Pharisees sought a baptism of water- but their hearts were not touched and although they thought they were righteous they did not know the first thing about true righteousness.

God knows who are His, we do not. We can never know what trials people have been through or how God may touch their lives in the future. The purpose of this life is for us all to grow and mature in Christ, and we are all at different stages on that journey. Unless we suffer as others have then we don't really know what they are going through. Ezekiel was one person who could sympathise with others, because he was going through exactly what they were going through. We are told in Ezek 3:15

"I sat where they sat"

Think about these few words? they speak volumes.

To think we know or can judge others situations from afar can be very dangerous.

"Sympathy is born in the womb of experience"

Unless we begin to see things through the eyes of Jesus we will never understand, we will never be truly converted. The Pharisees sought a baptism of water ? but their hearts were not touched and though they professed to know about grace ? it was far from them. They thought they were righteous but did not know the first thing about it.

But for those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, there is no condemnation. In Romans 7 Paul contrasts the man of the flesh with the man of the spirit. A person who is in the flesh is one who is carnally minded; one who is in the spirit is one who is converted and spiritually minded? he is a new creation. It is clear to God what is motivating people and He can clearly judge between those who are His and those who are not. Often we do not know the thoughts of others, whether they are motivated by a spiritual mind or walking in the rituals of traditions thinking that will gain them an entrance to the kingdom. The Pharisees believed they entered the kingdom simply by being descended from Abraham. It is possible as Christadelphians to fall into the same trap of thinking that water baptism and adherence to a system will also gain us entry to the kingdom - of thinking we are converted, but to still be blind. The Kingdom of God is being given to those born from above, those who bear spiritual fruit.

In the parable of the wedding banquet those who should have come to the feast were too pre-occupied with other affairs and mistreating the servants? so there was an urgent order to go to the highways and byways and all were gathered who could be found, both good and bad? a real emphasis on God wanting His wedding banquet to be full. That time is surely close.

I have been inspired by those who have kept going despite being persecuted and judged harshly by their fellow brethren? who have endured when others would have left. I have a now faded verse stuck on our wall, written by a sister for encouragement, which says

"Let those who suffer according to God?s will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator" 1 Pet 4:19

When others judge motives and make harsh accusations, when our fellow brethren deem us not "Bona Fide" or only partly converted then we go to God who is our anchor and entrust our souls to Him, knowing that as long as we live He is still working in us.