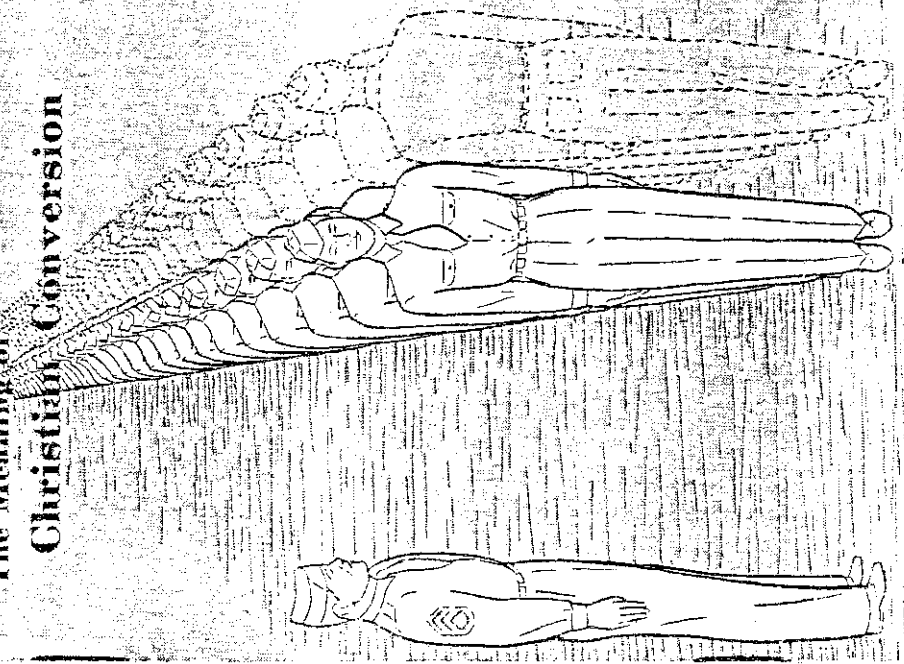


# “About Face”

The Meaning of  
Christian Conversion



## "About Face"

The broad expanse of the drill field lies shimmering in the brilliant sunlight. Above the customary noises of the large military base are to be heard the cadenced footsteps of a large number of men marching to the rhythm indicated by the drill sergeant as he shouts, "Hut! Hut! Hut! Hut!" Suddenly the sergeant's voice is lifted in the command: "Comp'nee-ee-ee--halt!" The rhythmic tread of many feet ceases suddenly with the second beat following the command. "Tou-ou-ou-out face!" the leader calls, and the entire group, still in perfect cadence, turns and is facing the opposite direction. Then, at the command of "Fo-o-o-o'd marchi!" the troop moves ahead, retracing their steps.

This is a perfect example of the experience called *conversion*. Many people speak of conversion in high-sounding theological terms. Others are so vague and indefinite that the average person cannot understand what they are talking about. We will make it just as simple as we can--so easy to understand that one who is looking for a fuller, more satisfying life will have no difficulty finding it, and the one who perhaps is looking into Christianity to see if he should become a disciple of the Saviour will hesitate no longer.

### Conversion a Complete Change

We will begin with a very simple definition.

Conversion means a change. On a national scale we experienced conversion in the beginning of World War II when we converted from peace-time to war-time production. After the war, we had to *reconvert*.

Since the Christian religion is a spiritual matter, the conversion, or change, that we are discussing is spiritual also. Before conversion, a person has what is termed a *carnal* nature. In other words, the desires of the flesh motivate the individual, while, to a disciple of Christ, the carnal, or fleshly, desires are subjected to the superior spiritual motives found not only in the teachings of the Saviour but also in the leadership of the Holy Spirit which dwells within the Christian.

Now am I doing the thing I complained about? Am I using language which you do not understand? Let's pursue this just a little further and see if we cannot bring out some pertinent facts.

#### The Need for the Change

The nature of mankind is such that selfishness, greed, and a tendency toward violence motivate many of his actions. The love and pursuit of pleasure interfere with many saner programs of earning a livelihood and establishing sound home life. Some carry this *carnality* so far that their indulgence in fleshly desires and appetites produce drunkenness, carousing, sensuality, and rioting, resulting in wasted income, personal trouble, and sometimes even poverty and death. But

even if carnality is not carried to these extremes it still stands between man and God, for the carnal nature cannot please God. Perhaps this can be made plainer by a look at Romans 8:6 and 7, which tells us:

*For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

You see, the law of God stipulates that we must love God above all else, and then we should also love our fellow man as much as we love ourselves. The carnal nature puts self first. He who is motivated by it is governed by that which satisfies his own pleasure, appetite or pride, rather than by that which pleases the loving Father in heaven or which benefits mankind.

The Christian feels that one reason for his existence is to make the world a better place, not just for himself, but for others. He gives of himself, even at times when it is most inconvenient. The carnal man feels that his existence is for the purpose of having a good time, amassing wealth or accepting the service of others. The spiritual nature gives; the carnal nature takes all that it can get.

#### Why So Necessary?

This is the reason that conversion (changing or turning about) is the big step which is absolutely necessary before one can be a disciple of Christ. His teachings are the

most sublime and meaning(ul) of any that may be found anywhere. All who embrace them and His way of life find that life takes on a new meaning, depth, and satisfaction. These benefits cannot be realized unless one is indeed spiritually converted.

This conversion is brought about by love. When one understands the wonderful love which God, the Father, has shown to us and the matchless love of His Son, Jesus Christ, the only natural response is a reciprocating love. This love which we experience causes us to be deeply sorry for the wrongful acts which we have committed and for the selfish motives which prompted them. This is what is called repentance. Thus we can see why the Lord said in Luke 13:3 and 5:

*...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

It also helps us to understand Peter's statement in Acts 3:19:

*Repent ... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...*

Repentance—deep, sincere sorrow, prompted by true love—is the beginning of conversion.

#### The Meaning of Repentance

This is the about face of our lives. One day we are walking away from God. Then the love of God in our hearts suddenly calls out, "Halt! Do not take another step forward in your sinful habits." The profane and base things of life that have been enjoyed

become offensive. We realize how deeply we have offended God, whose love caused the sinless Son of God to give Himself for our redemption. We cannot always understand this perfectly; nevertheless, we know it is true. This makes it easy for us to do an about face and walk the other way—toward God instead of away from Him.

Walking toward God we learn more of His Word, the significance of the ordinance of baptism, the meaning of holiness, and the hope of the saints in the promised Kingdom which is prepared for those who love Him. Since our nature is renewed after we have started walking the other way and is not the same as it once was, each new revelation is a thrill to us. Our thoughts dwell on spiritual matters. We enjoy spending time probing into the depths of God's Word to learn more of His will for us and His promises to us. We find ourselves eager to reach out to help others. We enjoy fellowship with others of like faith. It is a privilege to attend services where the God of love is being worshiped.

The converted life will not be as wild and hilarious as the former life; yet, its compensations are far greater. Where many of the former satisfactions were of temporary duration, and sometimes produced subsequent remorse, the experiences of the new life are uplifting and honorable. They give deep and lasting peace.

#### How Is It Recognized?

How will you know when it happens?

If the conversion has been genuine, if the change has been one of complete reversal, there will be no mistaking when the urge to do an *about face* comes, although the event does not produce the same experience for everyone. He or she who has been turned from the depths of sin will perhaps have a more positive testimony as to time and place than the person who has been reared in a Christian atmosphere and was never a habitual sinner. However, regardless as to what the life has been before, when the Spirit begins to work in the heart, there will be no mistaking it; and if there is a yielding to its call, the experience of conversion will follow that cannot be forgotten.

Life will suddenly take on a new meaning and will become channeled into new and more noble paths. The assurance of having become a new creature in Christ Jesus, with sins forgiven and completely reconciled to God, brings an inward joy and peace that so transcends the life before conversion that it is like living in the sunshine after having been confined in a dungeon.

#### A New Birth

For one unfamiliar with theological language this may be another expression that is a little difficult to understand. In the third chapter of John we read of Nicodemus coming to Christ, who told him that he must be born again. He later explained that He was speaking of a spiritual rebirth, a reconstruction of the heart, a complete change

of nature. Regeneration is another word which is applied to this experience—rebirth, if you please.

In Galatians 6:15 we read:

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

This new creature is the result of conversion. The old nature—also spoken of as the old man, or the old creature—is destroyed, and in its place is the new nature of Christ. The new nature, or the new man, is also mentioned as the new heart. After all, is there a better way to speak of it than to say that a person has received a new heart?

Of all that might be said on the subject of conversion, there is one fact that is outstanding. To a person who has not found the love of God which moves us toward repentance and conversion, it is still merely a lot of words. But to one who is looking for a way to show that he has found and understands that love, and wishes to return it, this is the way. "*For the love of Christ constraineth us . . .*" (2 Cor. 5:14) said the apostle Paul, and so it is. We find ourselves bound by love, yet, paradoxically, we are free, for we are free from the sinful elements of this world, and we are free from the penalty of sin.

We have not yet said much about escape from the consequences of sin. Needless to say, everyone who has been even remotely exposed to Christianity and its teachings understands that sin brings dire consequences.

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," Paul wrote in Romans 6:23. It is through conversion that we qualify for membership in the family of God and can look forward to eternal life in His glorious Kingdom. However, it is not proper motivation for conversion. True conversion is not based on what we expect to receive. It is based on what we expect to give. We give ourselves without reserve, and the subsequent blessings which come our way are incidental.

An old shepherd offered a prayer in a Welsh revival meeting. He put it exactly right when he lamented his backslidings in these words: "Lord, I got among the thorns and briars, and was scratched and torn and bleeding. But, Lord, it is only fair to say that I was not on thy ground. I had wandered out of thy pasture!"

#### God's Great Love

In the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel as recorded by Luke is a beautiful story of a young man who came to the place that made an *about face* necessary. This is the story of the prodigal son who went away from his father and wasted his riches in sinful, licentious living. Then, having sunk to the depths of degradation, he got to thinking, and he came to a halt. Further meditating motivated him to turn about and to direct his footsteps homeward. He recalled the love that his father had shown to him, and he resolved that he would re-

turn to his father and offer to take a servant's place.

As the young man approached the family home, the father looked out and recognized him trudging along the road. Running out to meet him, the father embraced his son. He thought not to give him a place among the servants, but rather he welcomed him as his son returned home.

And so it is with a penitent sinner who truly enters into the experience of conversion. He gives himself as a servant, and God gives him a place as a son.

How about you? Have you been converted? Is your life that of a son in the household of God? Do you long for deep peace? Has the love of God struck a special note in your heart? Why not do that *about face* now and take your place among those who know the fulness of the new life in Christ Jesus?