

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Convenience, Conviction, Conversion

By Bobby Witherington

Initially I intended to entitle this article “The Three C’s of Christ’s religion.” It is a fact that the three words in the title all begin with the letter “C,” and it is a fact that religious people are often affected, or influenced, by either Convenience, Conviction, or Conversion – each “C” separately, or all three “C’s” jointly. However, upon further reflection, I recognized that “Christ’s religion” often involves the difficult, the unpleasant and the inconvenient. In fact, “Convenience” and “Conversion” frequently point in opposite directions, and genuine “Conversion” is seldom experienced by those who bow at the altar of “Convenience.” Hence, this article begins with a somewhat unusual explanation as to why it is given one title as opposed to another.

Convenience

This word is defined as: (1) “the fact or quality of being convenient.” (2) “Comfort, advantage, accommodation.” (3) Anything handy or easy to use; a thing that saves trouble or work.” (4) “An opportune occasion; opportunity.” (*World Book Dictionary*).

Basically, the word “Convenience” is from the Greek EUKAIRO; it is used both as an adjective and as an adverb, and it denotes that which is “in season,” “well timed,” “opportune,” or convenient” (*Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, by W.E. Vine). With these definitions in mind, we cite Mark 14:11 wherein we learn that Judas “**sought how he might conveniently betray**” Jesus. Likewise, we note 2 Timothy 4:2 wherein Timothy was charged to “**Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.**” “**In season**” conveys the idea of “convenient,” “**out of season**” denotes times when it is inconvenient.

Nothing inherently wrong is inferred in the words “Convenience,” or “Convenient.” Most people choose to take their vacations at an opportune or convenient time. Compared to a horse and buggy, a modern air-conditioned automobile is a convenient mode of travel. A new gas or electric range provides a more convenient way of cooking than the old wood stove which grandmother used. Indoor plumbing provides a more convenient means of obtaining water than that of going out in the backward on a cold day and using the old hand pump which first had to be primed. In modern society we enjoy conveniences unheard of in former times, and most of us do not really want to go back to those days in which ordinary life involved constant daily burdens. We don’t want to give up our microwave ovens, remote controls, indoor plumbing, central heating and air, and countless other things which help make life comfortable. In short, most of us are environmentally conditioned to be a convenience minded people.

But this is where the danger lies! In spite of our modern advantages, there will always be some things which are inconvenient. It is inconvenient to care for loved ones who are incapacitated. It is inconvenient to get up and go out to worship God when arthritis pains whisper in our ears saying, “stay in bed.” In a pleasure-mad society which cries out, saying, “get all the gusto you can, and get it right now,” it is inconvenient to save one’s virginity for the marriage bed, or to buckle down and learn a trade or obtain a good education while there are so many “fun things” to do. In a world that preaches tolerance for every abominable lifestyle imaginable and for every false doctrine conceivable, it is inconvenient to “**expose**” the “**unfruitful works of darkness**” (Eph. 5:11), or to “**mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them**” (Rom. 16:17). In a convenience-crazed society it is inconvenient to **fight** “**the good fight of faith**” (1 Tim. 6:12), do “**the work of the Lord**” (1 Cor. 15:58), and make the personal sacrifices which “**love**” demands (1 John 3:17, 18). For that matter, there is never “**a convenient season**” (Acts 24:25) to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conviction

“Conviction,” briefly, is defined as “the state of being convinced.” Biblically speaking, one may be convicted of **sin** (John 8:46; 16:8); gainsayers may be convicted with regards to **the faith** (Titus 1:9), or people may be convicted and

convinced, and being convinced they act accordingly.

On the day of Pentecost some 3,000 precious souls became so convinced of the reality and severity of their own sins, and the genuine Messiahship of Jesus that they, without hesitation, repented and were ***“baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”*** (Acts 2:38, 41). The apostle Paul was slandered, vilified, stoned, maligned, and imprisoned, but nothing could stop him from pressing ***“toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”*** (Phil. 1:14). But **why** did he persevere in the face of so many obstacles and so much opposition? The answer is given in 2 Timothy 1:12 wherein Paul, from a prison cell in Rome, and awaiting execution, wrote saying, ***“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”***

Conviction prompted Jesus Christ to resist any impulse to submit to the plea of convenience. He could have summoned ***“legions of angels”*** to His rescue (Matt. 26:33) but being fully convinced of both the sinfulness of sin and its horrible eternal consequences, Jesus submitted to death by crucifixion – not because of His sins – but because of ours!

Conviction propelled the apostles ever forward in the proclamation of the soul-saving gospel of Christ. Because of conviction, they put their lives on the line, suffered unimaginable hardships and abuse, refuted false doctrines, exposed sin, opposed false teachers, and fought ***“the good fight of faith.”*** It is inconceivable that these men of faith would have ever entertained the idea of absenting themselves from worship assemblies because of a slight headache, or because they imagined that some professed Christian had mistreated them by the utterance of an unkind remark! The apostles, who died martyrs’ deaths because of their conviction, would be unimpressed by the petty excuses so often uttered by modern convenience-wed members of the church.

Conversion

Biblically speaking, ***“conversion”*** is from EPISTROPHE (Greek), which “implies a turning from and a turning to” (***Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words***). In keeping with this definition, we note that the saints at Thessalonica had ***“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”*** (1 Thess. 1:9). The action of ***“turning from”*** and then ***“turning to”*** is what Paul spoke of as he went forth ***“describing the conversion of the Gentiles”*** (Acts 15:3). Conversion is absolutely essential to salvation. Jesus said, ***“except ye be converted, and become as little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven”*** (Matt. 18:3). Peter admonished his hearers to ***“repent...and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”*** (Acts 3:19).

The gospel is the instrument which God uses to effect true conversion (Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). But the gospel must be obeyed (2 Thess. 1:7-9). In New Testament days people obeyed the gospel (and were thus converted) when the proclaimed word produced **faith** in their hearts (Rom. 10:17), when they **repented** of their sins (Acts 2:38), **confessed** their faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), and were ***“baptized into Christ”*** (Gal. 3:27) in order to ***“wash away”*** their sins (Acts 22:16). In this manner, they turned **to God and** from Satan. In brief, they were converted.

Conviction precedes conversion, and conviction and conversion go hand in hand. If one is truly converted he is genuinely convinced – convinced of the sinfulness of sin, the existence of God, the reality of both heaven and hell, and of his own need to continually make his ***“calling and election sure”*** (2 Pet. 1:10). One who is convicted and converted does not rest on past accomplishments, bow out when there is work to be done, go AWOL when there is a battle to be fought, or forsake when there is an opportunity to worship God.

Conclusion:

Dear reader, what is the nature of your religion? Have you become so enamored with the shallow desires for convenience that you are repelled by the deeper demands of conviction and conversion? Are you waiting for a ***“convenient season”*** to obey the gospel? Do you plan to be regular in attendance after you “get everything worked out” so that worship will longer be an inconvenience? By no means should we deliberately make it difficult and inconvenient to serve God. In fact, we generally try to remove as many obstacles as possible in an attempt to accommodate people who seek to learn the truth, and who endeavor to worship God. However, it is not always convenient to do what is right, but regardless of circumstances right is **always** right! Hence, we recognize the value of true conviction and genuine conversion – two words which begin with the letter “C” – two words which help identify a real Christian and enable us to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit. Consider ye well! ■