# 1 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 4

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The last two verses of our chapter (1 Thess. 1) demand our very special attention. They furnish a remarkable statement of the real nature of conversion. They show, very distinctly, the depth, clearness, fullness, and reality of the work of God's Spirit in those Thessalonian converts. There was no mistaking it. It carried its own credentials with it. It was no uncertain work. It did not call for any careful examination ere it could be accredited. It was a manifest, unmistakable, work of God, the fruits of which were apparent to all. " They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Verses 9, 10.

Here, then, we have a divine definition of conversion—brief, but comprehensive. It is a turning from, and a turning to. They turned from idols. There was a complete break with the past, a turning of the back, once and forever, on their former life and habits; a thorough surrender of all those objects that had ruled their hearts and commanded their energies. Those dear Thessalonians were led to judge, in the light of divine truth, their whole previous course, and not only to judge it, but to abandon it unreservedly. It was no half-and-half work. There was nothing vague or equivocal about it. It was a marked epoch in their history—a grand turning-point in their moral and practical career. It was not a mere change of opinion, or the reception of a new set of principles, a certain alteration in their intellectual views. It was far more than any or all of these things. It was the solemn discovery that their whole past career had been one great, dark, monstrous lie. It was the real heart conviction of this. Divine light had broken in upon their souls, and in the power of that light they judged themselves and the entire of their previous history. There was an out-and-out surrender of that world which had hitherto ruled their hearts' affections; not a shred of it was to be spared.

And what, we may ask, produced this marvelous change? Simply the word of God brought home to their souls in the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. We have referred to the inspired account of the apostle's visit to Thessalonica. We are told that "he reasoned with them out of the scriptures." He sought to bring their souls into direct contact with the living and eternal word of God. He did not bring mere human influence to bear upon them. There was no effort to act on their feelings and imagination. All this the blessed workman judged to be utterly valueless. He had no confidence whatever in it. His confidence was in the word and Spirit of God. He assures the Thessalonians of this very thing in the most touching manner, in chapter ii. of his epistle. "For this cause," he says, "thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

This is what we may call a vital and cardinal point. The word of God, and that alone, in the mighty hand of the Holy Ghost, produced these grand results in the case of the Thessalonians, which filled the heart of the beloved apostle with unfeigned thanksgiving to God. He rejoiced that they were not linked on to him, but 10 the living God Himself, by means of His word. This is an imperishable link. It is as enduring as the word which forms it. The word of man is as perishable as himself; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. The apostle, as a true workman, understood and felt all this, and hence his holy jealousy, in all his ministry, lest the souls to whom he preached should in any way lean upon him instead of on the One whose messenger and minister he was.

Hear what he says to the Corinthians: " And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" 1 Cor. 2:1-5.

Here we have true ministry—"the testimony of God," and " the demonstration of the Spirit"—the word and the Holy Ghost. Nothing else is of any value. All mere human influence, human power, and the results produced by human wisdom or energy, are perfectly worthless—yea, positively mischievous. The workman is puffed up by the apparent results of his work paraded and talked of, and the poor souls that are acted upon by this false influence are deceived, and led into an utterly false position and false profession. In a word, the whole thing is disastrous in the extreme.

Not so when the word of God, in its mighty moral power, and the energy of the Holy Ghost, are brought to bear on the heart and conscience. Then it is we see divine results, as in the case of the Thessalonians. Then indeed it is made apparent, beyond all question, who is the workman. It is not Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but God Himself, whose work accredits itself, and shall stand forever; all homage to His holy name! The apostle had no need to reckon up and publish the results of his work at Thessalonica, or rather God's work by his means. It spoke for itself. It was deep, thorough, and genuine. It bore, with unmistakable distinctness, the stamp of God upon it, and this was quite enough for Paul; and it is quite enough for every true-hearted, self-emptied workman. Paul preached the word, and that word was brought home, in the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, to the hearts of the Thessalonians. It fell into good ground, took root, and brought forth fruit in abundance.

And let us mark the fruit. " Ye turned from idols:1 Here we have, in one word, the whole life of every unconverted man, woman, or child on the face of the earth. It is all wrapped up and presented to our view in the one expression, " idols" It is not by any means necessary to bow down to a stock or a stone in order to be an idolater. Whatever commands the heart is an idol; the yielding of the heart to that thing is idolatry, and the one who so yields it is an idolater. Such is the plain, solemn, truth in this matter, however unpalatable it may be to the proud human heart. Take that one great, crying, universal, sin of " covetousness" What does the inspired apostle call it? He calls it " idolatry." How many hearts are commanded by money! How many worshippers bow down before the idol of gold! What is covetousness? Either a desire to get more, or the love of what we have. We have both forms in the New Testament. The Greek has a word to represent both. But whether it be the

desire to grasp, or the desire to hoard, in either case it is idolatry.

And yet the two things may be very unlike in their outward development. The former, that is, the desire to get more, may often be found in connection with a readiness to spend; the latter, on the contrary, is generally linked with an intense spirit of hoarding. There, for example, is a man of great business capacity—a thorough commercial genius—in whose hand everything seems to prosper. He has a real zest for business, an unquenchable thirst for making money. His one object is to get more, to add thousand to thousand, to strengthen his commercial foundation, and enlarge his sphere. He lives, thrives, and revels in the atmosphere of commerce. He started on his career with a few pence in his pocket, and he has risen to the proud position of a merchant prince. He is not a miser. He is as ready to scatter as to obtain. He fares sumptuously, entertains with a splendid hospitality, gives munificently to manifold public objects.

He is looked up to and respected by all classes of society.

But he loves to get more. He is a covetous man—an idolater. True, he despises the poor miser who spends his nights over his money-bags, " holding strange communion with his gold;" delighting his heart and feasting his eyes with the very sight of the fascinating dust, refusing himself and his family the common necessaries of life; going about in rags and wretchedness, rather than spend a penny of the precious hoard; who loves money, not for what it can get or give, but simply for its own sake; who loves to accumulate, not that he may spend, but that he may hoard; whose one ruling desire is to die worth so much wretched dust—strange, contemptible desire!

Now these two are apparently very different, but they meet in one point; they stand on one common platform; they are both covetous, they are both idolaters.* This may sound harsh and severe, but it is the truth of God, and we must bow down before its holy authority. True it is that nothing is apparently more difficult to bring homo to the conscience than the sin of covetousness—that very sin which the Holy Ghost declares to be idolatry. Thousands might see it in the case of the poor degraded miser, who nevertheless would be shocked by its application to a merchant prince. It is one thing to see it in others, and quite another to judge it in ourselves. The fact is, that nothing but the light of the word of God shining in upon the soul, and penetrating every chamber of our moral being, can enable us to detect the hateful sin of covetousness. The pursuit of gain—the desire to have more—the spirit of commerce—the ability to make money—the "fac rem"—the desire to get on—all this is so " highly esteemed amongst men," that very few, comparatively, are prepared to see that it is positively " an abomination in the sight of God." The natural heart is formed by the thoughts of men. It loves, adores, and worships the objects that it finds in this world; and each heart has its own idol. One worships gold, another worships pleasure, another worships power. Every unconverted man is an idolater; and even converted men are not beyond the reach of idolatrous influences, as is evident from the warning note raised by the venerable apostle, " Little children, keep yourselves from idols." 1 John 5:21.

Reader, will you permit us to put a plain, pointed, question to you, ere we proceed farther? Are you converted? Do you profess to be so? Do you take the ground of being a Christian? If so, have you turned from idols? Have you really broken with the world, and with your former self? Has the living word of God entered your heart, and led you to judge the whole of your past life, whether it has been a life of gaiety and thoughtless folly, a life of busy money-making, a life of abominable vice and wickedness, or a life of mere religious routine—Christless, faithless, worthless religion?

Say, dear friend, how is it? Be thoroughly in earnest. Be assured there is an urgent demand for out-and-out earnestness in this matter. We cannot hide from you the fact that we are painfully conscious of the sad lack of thorough decision amongst us. We have not, with sufficient emphasis or distinctness, " turned from idols." Old habits are retained; former lusts and objects rule the heart. The temper, style, spirit, and deportment do not bespeak conversion. We are sadly too like our former selves—too like the openly and confessedly worldly people around us.

All this is really terrible. We fear it is a sad hindrance to the progress of the gospel and the salvation of souls. The testimony falls powerless on the ears of those to whom we speak, because we do not seem as though we ourselves really believe what we are talking about. The apostle could not say to us, as he said to his dear Thessalonian converts, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord.... so that we need not to speak anything." There is a want of depth, power, and markedness in our conversion. The change is not sufficiently apparent. Even where there is a work, there is a tameness, feebleness, and vagueness about it truly deplorable and discouraging.

But more of this in our next, if the Lord will.

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 5

We are now called to consider what we may term the positive side of the great subject of conversion. We have seen that it is a turning from idols—a turning from all those objects which ruled our hearts and engaged our affections—the vanities and follies, the lusts and pleasures, which made up the whole of our existence in the days of our darkness and blindness. It is, as we read in Acts 26:18, a turning from darkness, and from the power of Satan; and, as we read in Gal. 1:4, a turning from this present evil world.

But conversion is much more than all this. It would, in one sense, be but a poor thing, if it were merely a turning " from sin, the world, and Satan. No doubt, it is a signal mercy to be delivered, once and forever, from all the wretchedness and moral degradation of our former life; from the terrible thralldom of the god and prince of this world; from all the hollowness and vanity of a world that lieth in the arms of the wicked one; and from the love and practice of sin—the vile affections which once held sway over us. We cannot be too thankful for all that is included in this side of the question.

But, we repeat, there is very much more than this. The heart may feel disposed to inquire, " What have we gotten in lieu of all we have given up? Is Christianity merely a system of negations? If we have broken with the world and self—if we have given up our former pleasures and amusements—if, in short, we have turned our back upon what goes to make up life in this world, what have we instead?"

1 Thess. 1:9 furnishes, in one word, the answer to all these inquiries—an answer full, clear, distinct, and comprehensive. Here it is—" Ye turned to GOD."

Precious answer! Yes, unspeakably precious to all who know aught of its meaning. What have I got instead of my former "idols"? God! Instead of this world's vain and sinful pleasures? God! Instead of its riches, honors, and distinctions? God! Oh, blessed, glorious, perfect Substitute! What had the prodigal instead of the rags of the far country? The best role in the father's house! Instead of the swine's husks? The fatted calf of the father's providing I Instead of the degrading servitude of the far country? The father's welcome, his bosom, and his table!

Reader, is not this a blessed exchange? Have we not, in the familiar, but ever charming, history of the prodigal, a most touching and impressive illustration of true conversion in both its sides? May we not well exclaim, as we gaze on the inimitable picture, " What a conversion! What a turning from and turning to!"

Who can utter it? What human tongue can adequately set forth the feelings of the returned wanderer, when pressed to the Father's bosom, and bathed in the light and love of the Father's house? The rags, the husks, the swine, the slavery, the cold selfishness, the destitution, the famine, the misery, the moral degradation—all gone, and gone forever; and, instead thereof, the ineffable delight of that bright and happy home; and, above all, the exquisite feeling that all that festive joy which surrounded him was wakened up by the very fact of his return—that it made the father glad to get him back!

But we shall perhaps be told all this is but a figure. Yes; but a figure of what? Of a precious, a divine reality; a figure of what takes place in every instance of true conversion, if only it be looked at from a heavenly standpoint. It is not a mere surrender of the world, with its thousand and one vanities and follies. It is this, no doubt; but it is very much more. It is being brought to God, brought home, brought to the Father's bosom, brought into the family; made—not in the language of a barren formulary, but in the power of the Spirit, and by the mighty action of the word—a child of God, a member of Christ, and an heir of the kingdom.

This, and nothing less, is conversion. Let the reader see that he thoroughly understands it. Let him not be satisfied with anything short of this grand reality—this turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan, and from the worship of idols, to God. The Christian is, in one sense, as really brought to God now as if he were actually in heaven. This may seem strong, but it is blessedly true. Hear what the apostle Peter says as to this point: " Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to"—What? Heaven when we die? Nay; but " to bring us to God" now. So also in Rom. 5 we read, " For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation."

This is an immense principle. It is not within the compass of human language to set forth all that is involved in being " turned," or " brought to God." Our adorable Lord Jesus Christ brings all who believe in His name into God's presence, in all His own perfect acceptability. They come in all the credit, and virtue, and value of the blood of Jesus, and in all the fragrance of His most excellent name. He brings us into the very same position with Himself. He links us with Himself, and shares with us all He has, and all He is, save His Deity, which is incommunicable. We are perfectly identified with Him. " Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." Again, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." " These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." " Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto your So also, in that marvelous prayer in John 17, we read, u I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." " As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." " And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Now it is utterly impossible to conceive anything higher or more blessed than this. To be so thoroughly identified with the Son of God, to be so wholly one with Him as to share in the very same love wherewith He is loved by the Father, to partake of His peace, His joy, His glory—all this involves the very highest possible measure and character of blessing with which any creature could be endowed. To be saved from the everlasting horrors of the pit of hell; to be pardoned, washed, and justified: to be reinstated in all that Adam lost; to be let into heaven, on any ground, or in any character whatsoever, would be marvelous mercy, goodness, and loving-kindness; but to be brought to God in all the love and favor of His own beloved Son, to be intimately associated with Him in all His position before God—His acceptability now—His glory by-and-by—this, truly, is something which only the heart of God could think of, and only His mighty power accomplish.

Well, reader, all this is involved in the conversion whereof we speak. Such is the magnificent grace of God, such the love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, enemies in our minds by wicked works, serving divers lusts and pleasures, worshipping idols, the blind, degraded, slaves of sin and Satan, children of wrath, and going straight to hell.

And the best of it all is, that it both glorifies the name, and gratifies the heart of God, to bring us into this place of inconceivable blessedness, love, and glory. It would not satisfy the love of His heart to give us any lower place than that of His own Son. Well might the inspired apostle exclaim, in view of all this stupendous grace, " Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made as accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Eph. 1

What depth of love, what fullness of blessing, have we here! It is the purpose of God to glorify Himself, throughout the countless ages of eternity, in His dealings with us. He will display, in view of all created intelligences, the riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us, by Christ Jesus. Our forgiveness, our justification, our perfect deliverance, our acceptance—all the blessings bestowed upon us in Christ—are for the display of the divine glory throughout the vast universe, forever. It would not meet the claims of God's glory, or answer the affections of His

heart, to have us in any other position but that of His own well-beloved and only-begotten Son.

All this is marvelous. It seems too good to be true. But it is worthy of God, and it is His good pleasure so to act toward us. This is enough for us. It may be, and most assuredly is, too good for us to get, but it is not too good for God to give. He acts toward us according to the love of His heart, and on the ground of the worthiness of Christ. The prodigal might ask to be made as one of the hired servants, but this could not be. It would not be according to the Father's heart to have him in the house as a servant. It must be as a son, or not at all. If it were a question of desert, we do not deserve the place of a servant, any more than that of a son. But, blessed be God, it is not according to our deserts at all, but according to the boundless love of His heart, and to the glory of His holy name.

This, then, is conversion. Thus we are brought to God. Nothing short of this. We are not merely turned from our idols, whatever they were, but we are actually brought into the very presence of God, to find our delight in Him, to joy in Him; to walk with Him, to find all our springs in Him, to draw upon His exhaustless resources, to find in Him a perfect answer to all our necessities, so that our souls are satisfied, and that forever.

Do we want to go back to the idols? Never! Have we any hankering after our former objects? Not if our hearts are realizing our place and portion in Christ. Had the prodigal any longings after the husks and the swine, when folded in the father's bosom, clothed in the father's house, and seated at the father's table? We do not, and cannot, believe it. We cannot imagine his heaving a single sigh after the far country, when once he found himself within the hallowed circle of that bright and blissful home of love.

We speak according to the divine standard. Alas! alas! many profess to be converted, and seem to go on for a season, but ere long they begin to grow cold, and get weary and dissatisfied. The work was not real. They were not really brought to God. Idols may have been given up for a time, but God Himself was never reached. They never found in Him a satisfying portion for their hearts—never knew the real meaning of communion with Him—never tasted heart-satisfaction, heart-rest, in Christ. Hence, in process of time, the poor heart began to long once more for the world, and back they went, and plunged into its follies and vanities with greater avidity than ever.

Such cases are very sad, very disappointing. They bring great reproach on the cause of Christ, and are used as a plea for the enemy, and as a stumbling-block for anxious inquirers. But they leave the question of divine conversion just where it was. The soul that is truly converted is one who has not merely been turned from this present evil world, and all its promises and pretensions, but who has been led by the precious ministry of the Holy Ghost to find in the living God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, all he can possibly want for time and eternity. Such an one is divinely done with the world. He has broken with it forever. He has had his eyes opened to see, through and through, the whole thing. He has judged it in the light of the presence of God. He has measured it by the standard of the cross of Christ. He has weighed it in the balances of the sanctuary, and turned his back upon it forever, to find an absorbing and a commanding object in the Person of that blessed One who was nailed to the accursed tree, in order to deliver him, not only from everlasting burnings, but also from this present evil world.

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 8

The last words of our chapter—1 Thess. 1—now claim our attention. They furnish a very striking and forcible proof of the clearness, fullness, depth, and comprehensiveness of the apostle's testimony at Thessalonica, and also of the brightness and reality of the work in the young converts in that place. It was not merely that they turned from idols to God, to serve the living and true God. This, through grace, they did, and that, too, with uncommon power, freshness, and fervor.

But there was something more; and we may assert with all possible confidence, that there would have been a grand defect in the conversion and in the Christianity of those beloved disciples, if that had been lacking. They were converted to wait for the Son of God from the heavens.

Let the reader give to this very weighty fact his most devout and profound attention. The bright and blessed hope of the Lord's coming formed an integral part of the gospel which Paul preached, and of the Christianity of those who were converted by his ministry. That blessed servant preached a full gospel. He not only declared that the Son of God had come into the world, to accomplish the great work of redemption, and lay the everlasting foundation of the divine glory and counsels, but that He had gone back to the heavens, and taken His seat, as the victorious, exalted, and glorified Man, at the right hand of the throne of God; and that He is coming again, first, to receive His people to Himself, and conduct them into the very innermost circle of His Father's house—the place prepared for them; and then to come forth with them, to execute judgment upon His enemies—gather out of His kingdom all that offend, and all that do iniquity, and set up His glorious dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

All this was included in the precious gospel which Paul preached, and which the Thessalonian converts received. We find an indirect, but very interesting intimation of this in a passage in Acts 17, where the inspired writer records what the infidel Jews thought and said about the apostle's preaching. " But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Such were the ideas which those poor ignorant, prejudiced unbelievers gathered from the preaching of the Lord's beloved servants; and we can see in them the elements of great and solemn truths—the complete upturning of the present system of things, and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Ez. 21:27.

But not only did the Lord's corning and kingdom occupy a prominent place in the preaching of the apostle, it also shines brilliantly forth in all his teaching. Not only were the Thessalonians converted to this blessed hope; they were built up, established, and led on in it. They were taught to live in the brightness of it every hour of the day. It was not a dry, barren dogma, to be received and held as part of a powerless, worthless creed; it was a living reality, a mighty moral power in the soul—a precious, purifying, sanctifying, elevating hope, detaching the heart completely from present things, and causing it to look out, moment by moment—yes, reader, we repeat it with emphasis, moment by

moment—for the return of our beloved Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

It is interesting to notice that, in the two epistles to the Thessalonians, there is far more allusion to the Lord's coming than in all the other epistles put together. This is all the more remarkable, inasmuch as they were the very earliest of Paul's epistles, and they were written to an assembly very young in the faith.

If the reader will just glance rapidly through these two most precious writings, he will find the hope of the Lord's return introduced in every one of the eight chapters, and in connection with all sorts of subjects. For example, in chapter 1 we have it presented as the grand object to be ever kept before the Christian's heart, let his position or his relationship be what it may—the brilliant light shining at the end of his long pilgrimage through this dark and toilsome world. " Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for"—what? The time of their death? No such thing, no allusion to such a thing. Death, for the believer, is abolished, and is never presented as the object of his hope. For what, then, were the Thessalonian disciples taught to wait? " For God's Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead."

And then mark the beauteous addition! "Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." This is the Person for whom we are waiting; our precious Savior; our great Deliverer; the One who undertook our desperate case, who took, on our behalf, the cup of wrath, from the hand of infinite Justice, and exhausted it, forever; who cleared the prospect of every cloud, so that we can gaze upward into heaven, and onward into eternity, and see nothing but the brightness and blessedness of His own love and glory, as our happy home throughout the everlasting ages.

Oh, beloved christian reader, how blessed to be looking out, morning, noon, eventide, and midnight, for the coming of our gracious Deliverer! What a holy reality to be ever waiting for the return of our own loving and beloved Savior and Lord! How separating and elevating, as we rise each morning to start on our daily course of duty—whatever that duty may be, whether the scrubbing of a floor, or the evangelizing of a continent—to cherish the bright and blessed hope that, ere the shades of evening gather round us, we may be summoned to ascend in the folds of the cloud of glory to meet our coming Lord!

Is this the mere dream of a wild fanatic or a visionary enthusiast? Nay, it is an imperishable truth, resting on the very same foundation that sustains the entire fabric of our most glorious Christianity. Is it true that the Son of God has trod this earth of ours in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth? Is it true that He lived and labored here amid the sins and sorrows of poor fallen humanity? Is it true that He sighed, and wept, and groaned under the sense of the wide-spread desolation which sin had wrought in this world? Is it true that He went to the cross, and there offered Himself without spot to God, in order to vindicate the Divine Majesty; to answer all the claims of the throne of God; to destroy all the works of the devil; to make a public show of all the powers of hell; to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; to bear the sins of all those who, from the beginning to the end of time, should, through grace, believe in His name? Is it true that He lay for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and on the first day of the week rose triumphant from the grave, as the Head of the new creation, and ascended into the heavens, after He had been seen by at least five hundred witnesses? Is it true that, fifty days after His resurrection, He sent down the Holy Ghost, in order to fill and fit His apostles to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth? Is it true that, from the day of Pentecost to this very hour, He has been acting on His people's behalf as an Advocate with the Father, a great High Priest with God; interceding for us in all our failures, sins, and shortcomings, and sympathizing with us in all our infirmities and in all our sorrows; and presenting continually our sacrifices of prayer and praise, in all the fragrance of His own glorious Person?

Are all these things true? Yes, thank God, they are all divinely true, all set forth in the pages of the New Testament, with most marvelous fullness, clearness, depth, and power; all rest on the solid foundation of holy scripture—a foundation which not all the powers of earth and hell, men and devils, can ever touch.

Well, then, the blessed hope of the Lord's coming rests on precisely the same authority. It is not more true that our Lord Jesus Christ lay as a babe in the manger of Bethlehem; that He grew up to man's estate; that He went about doing good; that He was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb; that He is now seated on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, than that He will come again to receive His people to Himself. He may come to-night. No one can tell when He will come, but at any moment He may come. The only thing that detains Him is His long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. For eighteen long centuries has He waited, in lingering love, mercy, and compassion; and during all that time salvation has been ready to be revealed, and God has been ready to judge; but He has waited, and He still waits, in long-suffering grace and patience.

But He will come, and we should ever live in the hope of His coming. Thus the apostle taught his beloved Thessalonians to live. Thus he lived himself. The blessed hope was intimately bound up with all the habits and feelings of his daily life. Was it a question of reaping the fruit of his labors? Hear what He says: " For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" He would see them all then and there. No enemy will be allowed to hinder that meeting. " We would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us." Very wonderful! Very mysterious! Yet so it was. Satan hindered an angel of God in the discharge of his business in the days of Daniel; and he hindered an apostle of Christ in the accomplishment of his loving desire to see his brethren at Thessalonica. But, thanks be to God, he will not be able to hinder the joyful meeting of Christ and His saints for which we wait. What a moment that will be! What precious reunions! What sweet recognitions! What affectionate greetings of dear old friends! But, far above all, Himself! His smile! His welcome! His soul-stirring " Well done!"

What a precious soul-sustaining hope! Need we wonder at the prominent place it occupied in the thoughts and the teachings of the blessed apostle? He recurs to it on all occasions, and in connection with every subject. Is it a question of progress in the divine life and practical godliness? Thus he puts it: " And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all, even as we do toward you; to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints"

Let the reader specially mark the last clause of this touching and beautiful quotation. " With all his saints" What admirable wisdom shines here! The apostle was about to touch directly upon an error into which the Thessalonian believers had fallen, in reference to their departed friends. They feared that those who had fallen asleep would not participate in the joy of the Lord's coming. This error is completely demolished by that brief sentence, " with all his saints." Not one will be absent from that joyous meeting, that festive scene. Blessed assurance! Triumphant answer to all who would have us believe that none will share the joy of our Lord's coming save those who see this, that, and the other! "With all his saints," spite of their ignorance and their errors, their wanderings and their stumblings, their shortcomings and their failures. Our blessed Savior, the everlasting Lover of our souls, will not shut any of us out at that blissful moment.

Is all this matchless grace to make us careless? God forbid! Nay, it is the abiding sense of it which alone can keep us alive to our holy responsibility to judge everything in us and in our ways which is contrary to the mind of Christ. And not only so, but the hope of our Lord's return, if it be kept bright and fresh in the heart, must purify, sanctify, and elevate our entire character and course, as nothing else can. "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure." It is morally impossible for any one to live in the hope of seeing his Lord at any moment, and yet have his heart set upon worldly things, upon money-making, self-indulgence, pleasure, vanity, folly. Let us not deceive ourselves. If we are daily looking out for the Son of God from heaven, we must sit loose to the things of time and sense. We may hold the doctrine of the Lord's coming as a mere dogma in the intellect; we may have the entire range of prophetic truth mapped out before our mind's eye, without its producing the smallest effect upon the heart, the character, or the practical life. But it is another thing altogether to have the whole moral being, the entire practical career, governed by the bright and blessed hope of seeing the One who loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in His own most precious blood.

Would there were more of this amongst us! It is to be feared that many of us have lost the freshness and power of our true and 'proper hope. The truth of the Lord's coming has become so familiar as a mere doctrine, that we can flippantly speak of it, and discuss various points in connection with it, and argue with people about it, and, all the while, our ways, our deportment, our spirit and temper give the lie to what we profess to hold.

But we shall not pursue this sad and humbling side of the subject. May the Lord look upon us, and graciously heal, restore, and lift up our souls. May He revive in the hearts of all His beloved people the proper christian hope—the hope of seeing the bright and morning star. May the utterance of the whole heart, and the utterance of the whole life, be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Here we must close this paper, and with it the entire series of papers on the great subject which has, for the past few months, engaged our attention. We had hoped to run through the two epistles to the Thessalonians, in company with our readers, in order to prove and illustrate the statement, that the hope of the Lord's return was bound up in the heart of the apostle, with all the scenes, circumstances, and associations of christian life. But we must allow the reader to do this for himself. Sufficient, we trust, has been said to show that true conversion, according to apostolic teaching, cannot stop short of the blessed hope of the Lord's coming. A truly converted person is one who has turned from idols—has broken with the world—broken with his former self—turned to God, to find in Him all he can possibly want for time and eternity, to serve Him, and Him only—and, finally, " to wait for the Son of God from heaven." Such we conceive to be the true and proper answer to the question, " What is Conversion?"

Reader, art thou converted? If not, what then? If thou art, does thy life declare it?

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 6

The more we dwell on 1 Thess. 1:9, the more we are struck with its marvelous depth, fullness, and power. It seems like sinking a shaft into an inexhaustible mine. We have dwelt a little on that very fruitful and suggestive clause, " Turned to God from idols." How much is wrapped up in it! Do we really understand the force and fullness of it? It is a wonderful thing for the soul to be brought to God—to know Him now as our resource in all our weakness and need—the spring of all our joys—our strength and shield—our Guide and Counselor—our all in all—to be absolutely and completely shut up to Him, wholly dependent upon Him.

Reader, do you know the deep blessedness of all this in your own soul? If you are a child of God, a truly converted soul, then it is your happy privilege to know it, and you ought not to be satisfied without it. If we are " turned to God," what is it for, but to find in Him all we can possibly want for time and eternity? Nothing can ever satisfy the human soul but God Himself. It is not within the compass of earth to meet the cravings of the heart. If we had the wealth of the universe, and all that that wealth could procure, the heart would still want more; there would still be an aching void which nothing under the sun could fill.

Look at the history of Solomon. Hear him recording his own experience. " I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem; and I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven; this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold this also is vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself to wino, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom, and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works: I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle, above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat mo men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" Eccles. 1; 2

Such is the withering commentary upon all earth's resources, as given by the pen of one who had all that earth could give—of one who was allowed to drain to the very dregs every cup of human and earthly pleasure. And what was it all? " Vanity and vexation of spirit." "All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." The poor human heart can never be satisfied with the resources of earth. Creature streams can never quench the thirst of the immortal soul. Material things cannot possibly make us truly happy, even if they were permanent. " All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The truth of this must be proved by every human heart. Sooner or later all must find it out. Men may turn a deaf ear to it now; they may refuse to listen to the Spirit's warning voice; they may vainly imagine that this poor world can yield them substantial comfort and happiness; they may eagerly grasp at its riches, its honors, its distinctions, its pleasures, its material comforts; but they will find out their mistake. And, oh, how dreadful to find it out too late! How terrible to open one's eyes in hell, like the rich man in the parable! What human language can set forth the horrors of a soul shut out forever from the presence of God, and consigned to outer darkness, to the place of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth? It is absolutely overwhelming to think of it. What will it be to realize it? What will it be to find oneself in the tormenting flames of hell, at the other side of that impassable gulf, where a single ray of hope can never break through the deep and horrible gloom of eternity?

Oh, that men would think of all this in time! that they might flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the blessed hope set before them in the gospel; that they might " turn to God." But alas! the god of this world blinds their minds, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them. He engrosses them with present things—business, money-making, pleasures, cares, lusts, anything and everything but the one thing, in comparison with which all earthly things are but as the small dust of the balance.

But we have digressed from our special theme, to which we must return.

We are particularly anxious to press upon the christian reader the immense importance of seeking to find all his resources in the living God. We have only, for a moment, turned aside from this point, in order to sound a warning note in the ear of any unconverted, careless one who may happen to take up this paper.

We earnestly entreat the latter to turn to God. We entreat the former to seek a deeper acquaintance with the One to whom, by grace, he has turned. We have the two things before us in penning these papers on the great subject of " conversion." We can truly say, we long to see precious souls converted to God; and we long to see converted souls happy in God.

We are increasingly convinced of the practical importance of Christians proving in their daily life that they have found thorough rest of heart in God. It has immense weight with worldly people. It is a grand point gained when we are able, through grace, to tell the world that we are independent of it; and the only way to do this is to live in the abiding sense of what we have in God. This would impart a moral elevation to our entire course and character. It would deliver us completely from that strong tendency to lean on human props, and to betake ourselves to creature streams, which we have all, more or less, to lament, and which must assuredly issue in disappointment to us, and dishonor to God.

How prone we are, on all occasions, to look to our fellow men for sympathy, succor, and counsel, instead of looking directly and exclusively to God! This is a serious mistake. It is in principle to forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. What can we expect? What must be the issue? Barrenness and desolation. Our God, in very faithfulness to us, will cause our fellow man to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of leaning upon an arm of flesh.

Hear what the prophet says on this great practical question: " Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited."

But mark the contrast. " Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Jer. 17

Oh, reader, it is a grand reality to lean on the arm of the living God—to find in Him our relief and our resource, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. He never fails a trusting heart. He will never disappoint us. He may see fit to keep us waiting for an answer to our call, but the time we spend in waiting is well spent, and when the answer comes, our hearts are filled with praise, and we are able to say, " Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men." Psalm 31:19.

It is a great thing to be able to trust God before the sons of men, to confess His sufficiency for our every exigence. But it must be a reality, and not mere profession. It is no use to talk of leaning on God, while at the same time we are, in one way or another, looking to some poor mortal to help us. This is a sad delusion. But, alas! how often we fall under its power! We adopt the language of dependence upon God, but in reality we are looking to man, and letting him know our wants. We deceive ourselves, and dishonor God, and the end is disappointment and confusion of face.

Header, let us look closely and honestly at this matter. Let us see to it that we understand the meaning of those precious words, " Turned to God." They contain the very essence of true happiness and true holiness. When the heart is really turned to God, it has found the true, the divine secret of peace, rest, and full satisfaction, it finds its all in God, and has no occasion whatever to turn to the creature. Am I in any perplexity? I can look to God for guidance. He has promised to guide me with His eye. What perfect guidance! Can man do better for me? Surely not. God sees the end from the beginning. He knows all the bearings, all the belongings, all the roots and issues of my case. He is an infallible guide. His wisdom is unerring, and moreover He loves me perfectly. Where could I find a better guide?

Am I in want? I can go to God about it. He is the Possessor of heaven and earth. The treasures of the universe are at His disposal. He can help me, if He sees it to be good for me; and if not, the pressure will be much better for me than the relief. " My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." Is not this enough? Why look to a creature stream? What a poor thing to have to make known our wants to a human being! It is in reality giving up, so far, the ground of faith, the life of simple dependence on God. It is actually dishonoring our Father. If I apply to my fellow for help, it is tantamount to saying that God has failed me. It is really betraying my loving Father who has taken me up, body, soul, and spirit, to do for me for time and eternity. He has pledged Himself to provide for all my wants, be they ever so many, ever so great, ever so varied. " He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

But we sometimes hear people say that the Lord has told them, or laid it upon their hearts, to apply to some human resource. This is very questionable indeed. It is not at all likely that our God would ever lead us to forsake the Fountain of living waters, and betake ourselves to some broken cistern. His word is, " Call upon me"—not upon your fellow—" in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

True it is that God uses the creature to meet our need; but this is a totally different matter. The blessed apostle could say, " God who comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Paul was looking to God for comfort, and God sent Titus to comfort him. Had Paul been looking to Titus, he would have been disappointed.

Thus it is in every case. Our immediate and exclusive reference must be to God in all our need. " We have turned to God from idols;" and hence, in every exigence He is our sure resource. We can go to Him for counsel, for succor, for guidance, for sympathy, for all. " My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be moved."

Will this most blessed habit of looking only to God lead us to undervalue the channels through which His precious grace flows to us? The very reverse. How could I undervalue one who comes to me directly from God, as His manifest instrument, to meet my need? Impossible. But I value him as a channel, instead of applying to him as a source. This makes all the difference. We must never forget that true conversion means our being brought to God; and, most surely, if we are brought to God, it is in order that we should find in Him a perfect covering for our eyes, a perfect object for the heart, a perfect resource in all our exigencies, from first to last. A truly converted soul is one who is turned from all creature confidences, human hopes, and earthly expectations, to find all he wants in the living and true God, and that forever.

(To he continued, if the Lord will)

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 7

We are now called to consider a deeply practical point in our subject. It is contained in the clause, " To serve the living and true God" This is full of interest to every truly converted soul—every true Christian. We are called " to serve." Our whole life, from the moment of our conversion to the close of our earthly career, should be characterized by a spirit of true, earnest, intelligent service. This is our high privilege, not to say our hallowed duty. It matters not what our sphere of action may be, what our line of life, or what our calling; when we are converted, we have just got one thing to do, namely, to serve God. If there be anything in our calling which is contrary to the revealed will of God—contrary to the direct teaching of His word—then we must at once abandon it, cost what it may. The very first step of an obedient servant is to step out of a false position.

Suppose, for example, the proprietor of a public-house is converted to God. What is he to do? Can he go on with such a business? Can he abide in such a calling with God? Can he continue in the sale of that which entails ruin, misery, degradation, death, and perdition on thousands and hundreds of thousands? Can he possibly serve the living and true God in the bar of a public-house?

We cannot believe it. We may be deemed harsh, severe, and narrow, in writing thus. We cannot help that. We must write what we believe to be the truth.

We are persuaded that the very first act of a converted public-house keeper should be to shut up his shop, and turn his back, with stern decision, on such a godless, horrible calling. To talk of serving God in such an occupation is, in our judgment, a miserable delusion.

No doubt, the same may be said of many other callings, and the reader may feel disposed to ask, " What is a Christian to do? How can he get on?" Our answer is simply this: We are called to serve God, and everything must be tried by this standard. The Christian has to ask himself this one question—" Can I fulfill the duties of this situation to the glory of God?" If not, he must abandon it. If we cannot connect the Name of God with our calling in life, then, assuredly, if we want to walk with God, if we aim at serving Him, if it be our one desire to be found well-pleasing in His sight—then we must give up that calling, and look to Him to open some path for us in which we can walk to His praise.

This He will do, blessed be His Name. He never fails a trusting soul. All we have to do is to cleave to Him with purpose of heart, and He will make the way plain before us. It may seem difficult at first. The path may appear narrow, rough, lonely; but our simple business is to stand for God, and not to continue for one hour in connection with anything contrary to His revealed will. A tender conscience, a single eye, a devoted heart, will settle many a question, solve many a difficulty, remove many a barrier. Indeed the very instincts of the divine nature, if only they be allowed to act, will guide in many a perplexity. " The light of the body is the eye; therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." When the purpose of the heart is true to Christ—true to His name and cause—true to the service of God, the Holy Spirit opens up the precious treasures of divine revelation to the soul, and pours a flood of living light upon the understanding, so that we see the path of service as clear as a sunbeam before us, and we have only got to tread it with a firm step.

But we must never, for one moment, lose sight of the grand fact that we are converted to the service of God. The outcome of the life which we possess must ever take the form of service to the living and true God. In our unconverted days we worshipped idols, and served divers lusts and pleasures; now, on the contrary, we worship God in the Spirit, and we are called to serve Him with all our ransomed powers. We have turned to God, to find in Him our perfect rest and satisfaction. There is not a single thing in the entire range of a creature's necessities, for time and eternity, that we cannot find in our own most gracious God and Father. He has treasured up in Christ, the Son of His love, all that can satisfy the desires of the new life in us. It is our privilege to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and to be so rooted and grounded in love, as to be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Thus filled, satisfied, and strengthened, we are called to dedicate ourselves, spirit, soul, and body, to the service of Christ; to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. We should have nothing else to do in this world. Whatever cannot be done as service to Christ, ought not to be done at all. This simplifies the matter amazingly. It is our sweet privilege to do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and to the glory of God. We sometimes hear people speak of "a secular calling," as contrasted with what is " sacred." We question the correctness of such a distinction. Paul made tents and planted churches, but in both he served the Lord Christ. All that a Christian does ought to be sacred, because it is done as service to God. If this were borne in mind, it would enable us to connect the very simplest duties of daily life with the Lord Himself, and to bring Him into them in such a way as to impart a holy dignity and interest to all that we have to do, from morning till night. In this way, instead of finding the duties of our calling a hindrance to our communion with God, we should actually make them an occasion of waiting on Him for wisdom and grace to discharge them aright, so that His holy Name might be glorified in the most minute details of practical life.

The fact is that the service of God is a much simpler matter than some of us imagine. It does not consist in doing some wonderful things beyond the bounds of our divinely appointed sphere of action. Take the case of a domestic servant. How can she serve the living and true God? She cannot go about visiting and talking. Her sphere of action lies in the shade and retirement of her master's house. Were she to run about from house to house, she would be actually neglecting her proper work, her divinely appointed business. Hearken to the following sound and wholesome words:

" Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." Titus 2:9, 10.

Here we see that the servant, by obedience, humility, and honesty can adorn the doctrine of God just as effectually, according to her measure, as an evangelist ranging the world over in the discharge of his high and holy commission.

Again, we read, " Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." Eph. 6

How lovely is all this! What a fine field of service is opened up for us here! How beautiful this " fear and trembling!" Where do we see it now-a-days? Where is the holy subjection to authority? Where the singleness of eye? Where the willing-hearted service? Alas! we see headiness and high-mindedness, self-will, self-pleasing, and self-interest. How must all these things dishonor the Lord, and grieve His Holy Spirit! How needful that our souls should be roused to a sense of what becomes us as those who are called to serve the living and true God! Is it not a signal mercy to every true Christian to know that he can serve and glorify God in the most commonplace domestic duties? If it were not so, what would become of ninety-nine out of every hundred Christians?

We have taken up the case of an ordinary domestic servant, in order to illustrate that special line of practical truth now under our consideration. Is it not most blessed for us to know that our God graciously condescends to connect His Name and His glory with the very humblest duties that can devolve upon us in our ordinary domestic life? It is this which imparts dignity, interest, and freshness to every little act, from morning till night. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men/é Here lies the precious secret of the whole matter. It is not working for wages, but serving the Lord Christ, and looking to Him to receive the reward of the inheritance.

Oh, that all this were more fully realized and illustrated amongst us! What moral elevation it would give to the entire christian life! What a triumphant answer it would furnish to the infidel! What a withering rebuke to all his sneers and cavils! Better by far than ten thousand learned arguments. There is no argument so forcible as an earnest, devoted, holy, happy, self-sacrificing christian life, and this life can be displayed by one whose sphere of action is bounded by the four walls of a kitchen.1

And not only does the practical life of a true Christian afford the very best possible answer to the skeptic and the infidel, but it also meets, in a most satisfactory manner, the objections of those "who talk about works, and insist upon putting Christians under the law, in order to teach them how to live. "When people challenge us as to our not preaching up works, we simply ask them, " For what should we preach works?" The unconverted man cannot do any works, save " wicked works," or " dead works." There is not a single thought of his heart, not a single word of his lips, not a single act of his life, for which he does not righteously deserve the flames of an everlasting hell. "They that are in the flesh"—unconverted people—" cannot please God/' Of what possible use can it be to preach works to such? It can only cast dust in their eyes, blind their minds, deceive their hearts, and send them down to hell with a lie in their right hand.

There must be genuine conversion to God. This is a divine work, from first to last. And what has the converted man got to do? He certainly has not to work for life, because he has it, even life eternal, as God's free gift, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has not to work for salvation, because he is saved already -" saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." What, then, is he called to do? "To serve the living and true God." How? When? Where? In everything; at all times, and in all places. The converted man has nothing else to do but to serve God. If he does anything else, he is positively untrue, unfaithful to that blessed Lord and Master, who, ere ever He called him to serve, endowed him with the life, and the grace, and the power, whereby alone the service can be rendered.

Yes, reader, the Christian is called to serve. Let us never forget this. He is privileged to "present his body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is his reasonable, his intelligent service." This settles the whole question. It removes all difficulties; it silences all objections; it puts everything in its right place. It is not a question of what I am doing, but how I do it—not where I am, but how I conduct myself. Christianity, as displayed in the New Testament, is the outcome of the life of Christ in the believer; it is Christ reproduced in the Christian's daily life, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Everything the Christian touches, everything he does, everything he says, his whole practical life, from Lord's day morning till Saturday night, should bear the impress, and breathe the spirit, of that great practical clause on which we have been dwelling—"serving the living and true God." May it be so more and more! May all the Lord's beloved people, everywhere, be really stirred up to seek more earnest, out-and-out, whole-hearted devotedness to Christ and His precious service!

(To he concluded in our next, if the Lord will.)

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Conversion: What Is It? Part 3

Having thus far, seen the absolute necessity, in every case, of conversion, and having, in some measure, sought to point out what conversion is not, we have now to inquire what it is. And here we must keep close to the veritable teaching of holy scripture. We can accept nothing less, nothing different. It is greatly to be feared that very much of what passes, now-a-days, for conversion is not conversion at all. Many so-called cases of conversion are published and talked of, which cannot stand the test of the word of God. Many profess to be converted, and are accredited as such, who prove to be merely stony-ground hearers. There is no depth of spiritual work in the heart, no real action of the truth of God on the conscience, no thorough breaking with the world. It may be the feelings are wrought upon by human influence, and certain evangelical sentiments take possession of the mind; but self is not judged; there is a clinging to earth and nature; a lack of that deep-toned earnestness and genuine reality which so remarkably characterize the conversions recorded in the New Testament, and for which we may

always look where the work of conversion is divine.

We do not here attempt to account for all these superficial cases; we merely refer to them in order that all who are engaged in the blessed work of evangelization may be led to consider the matter in the light of holy scripture, and to see how far their own mode of working may call for holy correction. It may be there is too much of the merely human element in our work. We do not leave the Spirit of God to act. We are deficient in profound faith in the power and efficacy of the simple word of God itself. There may be too much effort to work on the feelings, too much of the emotional and the sensational. Perhaps, too, in our desire to reach results—a desire which may be right enough in itself—we are too ready to accredit and announce, as cases of conversion, many which, alas! are merely ephemeral.

All this demands our serious consideration. It is of the very last possible importance that we allow the Spirit of God to work and to display—as He most assuredly will—the fruit of His work. All that He does is well done, and it will speak for itself in due time. There is no necessity for us to blaze abroad our cases of conversion. All that is divinely real will shine out to the praise of Him to whom all praise is due; and then the workman will have his own deep and holy joy. He will see the results of His work, and think of them in adoring homage and worship at his Master's feet—the only safe and truly happy place to think of them.

Will this lessen our earnestness? The very reverse; it will intensify our earnestness immensely. We shall be more earnest in pleading with God in secret, and in pleading with our fellows in public. We shall feel more deeply the divine seriousness of the work, and our own utter insufficiency. We shall ever cherish the wholesome conviction that the work must be of God from first to last. This will keep us in our right place, namely, the blessed place of self-emptied dependence upon God, who is the Doer of all the works that are done upon the earth. We shall be more on our faces before the mercy-seat, both in the closet and in the assembly, in reference to the glorious work of conversion; and then, when the golden sheaves and mellow clusters appear, when genuine cases of conversion turn up—cases which speak for themselves, and carry their own credentials with them to all who are capable of judging—then verily shall our hearts be filled with praise to the God of all grace who has magnified the name of His Son Jesus Christ in the salvation of precious souls.

How much better is this than to have our poor hearts puffed up with pride and self-complacency by reckoning up our cases of conversion! How much better, safer and happier to be bowed in worship before the throne, than to have our names heralded to the ends of the earth as great preachers and wonderful evangelists! No comparison, in the judgment of a truly spiritual person. The dignity, reality, and seriousness of the work will be realized; the happiness, the moral security, and the real usefulness of the workman will be promoted; and the glory of God secured and maintained.

Let us see how all this is illustrated in 1 Thess. 1 " Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love, and patience of hope"—the grand elements of true Christianity—" in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of Gad and our Father; knowing, brethren, beloved of God, your election." How did he know it? By the clear and unquestionable evidence afforded in their practical life—the only way in which the election of any one can be known. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake"

The blessed apostle was, in his daily life, the exponent of the gospel which he preached. He lived the gospel. lie did not demand or exact aught of them. He was not burdensome to them. He preached unto them the precious gospel of God freely; and in order that he might do so, he wrought with labor and travail, night and day. He was as a loving, tender nurse, going in and out among them. There were with him no high-sounding words about himself, or his office, or his authority, or his gifts, or his preaching, or his wonderful doings in other places. He was the loving, lowly, unpretending, earnest, devoted workman, whose work spoke for itself, and whose whole life, his spirit, style, deportment, and habits, were in lovely harmony with his preaching.

How needful for all workmen to ponder these things I we may depend upon it that very much of the shallowness of our work is the fruit of the shallowness of the workman. Where is the power? Where is the demonstration of the Spirit? Where is the "much assurance?" Is there not a terrible lack of these things in our preaching? There may be a vast amount of fluent talking; a great deal of so-called cleverness; and much that may tickle the ear, act on the imagination, awaken a temporary interest, and minister to mere curiosity. But oh! where is the holy unction, the living earnestness, the profound seriousness? And then the living exponent in the daily life and habits—where is this? May the Lord revive His work in the hearts of His workmen, and then we may look for more of the results of the work.

Do we mean to teach that the work of conversion depends upon the workman? Far away be the monstrous notion! The work depends wholly and absolutely on the power of the Holy Ghost, as the very chapter now lying open before us proves beyond ail question. It must ever hold good, in every department and every stage of the work, that it is " not by might nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

But what kind of instrument does the Spirit ordinarily use? Is not this a weighty question for us workmen? What sort of vessels are "meet for the Master's use?" Empty vessels—clean vessels. Are we such? Are we emptied of ourselves? Are we cured of our deplorable self-occupation? Are we "clean?" Have we clean hands? Are our associations, our ways, our circumstances, clean? If not, how can the Master use us in His holy service? May we all have grace to weigh these questions in the divine presence! May the Lord stir us all up, and make us more and more, vessels such as He can use for His glory!

We shall now proceed with our quotation. The whole passage is full of power. The character of the^ workman on the one hand, and of the work on the other, demands our most serious attention.

" And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples [or models] to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything, for they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you."

This was real work. It carried its own credentials with it. There was nothing vague or unsatisfactory about it—no occasion for any reserve in forming or expressing a judgment respecting it. It was clear, distinct, and unmistakable. It bore the stamp of the Master's hand, and carried conviction to every mind capable of weighing the evidence. The work of conversion was wrought, and the fruits of conversion followed in

delightful profusion. The testimony went forth far and wide, so that the workman had no need to speak about his work. There was no occasion for him to reckon up and publish the number of conversions at Thessalonica. All was divinely real. It was a thorough work of God's Spirit as to which there could be no possible mistake, and about which it was superfluous to speak.

The apostle had simply preached the word in the power of the Holy Ghost, in much assurance. There was nothing vague, nothing doubtful about his testimony. He preached as one who fully believed and thoroughly entered into what he was preaching about. It was not the mere fluent utterance of certain known and acknowledged truths—not the cut and dry statement of certain barren dogmas. No; it was the living outpouring of the glorious gospel of God, coming from a heart that felt profoundly every utterance, and falling upon hearts prepared by God's Spirit for its reception.

Such was the work at Thessalonica—a deep, solid, blessed, thorough divine work—all sound and real, the genuine fruit of God's Spirit. It was no mere religious excitement, nothing sensational, no high pressure, no attempt to " get up a revival." All was beautifully calm. The workman, as we are told in Acts 17, " came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews; and as his manner was, he went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures"—Precious, powerful reasoning! would to God we had more of it in our midst!—" opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ."

How simple! Preaching Jesus out of the scriptures! Yes, here lay the grand secret of Paul's preaching. He preached a living Person, in living power, on the authority of a living word, and this preaching was received in living faith, and brought forth living fruit, in the lives of the converts. This is the sort of preaching we want. It is not sermonizing, not religious talking, but the powerful preaching of Christ by the Holy Ghost speaking through men who are thoroughly impressed with what they are preaching. God grant us more of this!

Thankfulness and Thanksgiving: May 2015, Reasons for Thanksgiving

God’s Purpose to Bless

We can give thanks that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Eph. 1:4). For this we give thanks.

“Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom. 8:29-30).

We can thus look back into eternity and give thanks that our salvation is according to eternal purpose — yes, give thanks to Him “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9). What a theme for thanksgiving!

“When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4). For this again we can surely give thanks. And what God purposed in eternity Jesus accomplished in the fullness of time.

And further, for the believer’s thanksgiving, redemption is not only accomplished, but we have it. “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). Again, we have not to pray for redemption or the forgiveness of sins, when we have both, but surely to give thanks.

If we believe God, we have justification and peace. Believing God we are justified. It is written, “By Him all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). We are reckoned righteous, believing God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). All this is distinct cause for thanksgiving.

But now, as to the present journey through a world where everything is against Christ and therefore against us as believers, and we, like sheep, ever ready to turn aside, how can we, and for what can we, now give thanks? We can each one give thanks because “the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psa. 23:1). We don’t have to pray for a shepherd, but to give thanks. Oh to know Him and trust Him more! Think of what He does for us: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,” and so forth. Is not every verse in Psalm 23 a wondrous theme for thanksgiving?

But in the midst of so much temptation and needing someone to sustain, succor and help us that we fail not, can we now give thanks? Yes, we can give thanks for our great High Priest. “In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). “We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without [apart from] sin” (Heb. 4:15). “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

But if we fail, can we, besides confessing our sins, also give thanks? Yes, we can give thanks because “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1). What marvelous themes for thanksgiving!

But if we are about to die, as to the body, can we give thanks, or is all uncertain in that crucial moment? We can surely give thanks, for we well know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Concerning this the Christian alone can say, “We are confident … and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

In the immediate prospect of the coming of the Lord, that which will so terrify the world, can we look forward to His coming and give thanks? Yes, with fullest joy, for come what may, Jesus has given divine assurance. He has said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3).

As Christians, we can give thanks for every one of these things. We might go on and add greatly to the list of matters for thanksgiving. Oh how blessed that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

C. H. Mackintosh (adapted)

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