

CONVERSION STUDIES

THE CONVERSION OF THE CORINTHIANS

Example twelve of thirteen

The city of Corinth was outstanding because of its geographical location, its eminence in Greek and Roman history, and its close connection with Paul and early Christianity. The city was one of a cosmopolitan population and a low state of morals. Yet in this city about the year fifty a church of Christ was established.

When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians he reminded them of his manner of preaching (I Cor. 2:1-4). He thus declared the testimony of God. "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God" (I Cor. 2:1). What was God declaring? We learn that from the historical record of Paul's work in Corinth. "But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:5). He is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the spiritual kingdom; the Messiah sought by the Jews. Paul presented the evidence of Jesus' Messiahship. There are several things involved.

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Paul discussed and taught the word. He built up arguments from the Old Testament to lead to the desired conclusion that Jesus is the Christ. He appealed to the thinking capacity of the Jews. He challenged their minds. He did not seek to stir them up into an emotional fervor. He pleaded with them to accept the teaching he presented. He urged them to believe on the basis of the scriptural arguments presented. The persuasion was based on the conclusions reached from reasoning with them. He had seen Christ, and could bear witness to His resurrection. "Am I not free? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Cor. 9:1).

In his work everywhere Paul had one determination. "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). The message of Paul was the gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4). Paul was not interested in their praise or his own popularity. He presented the facts of Jesus which were according to Old Testament prophecies. His concern was their salvation (Rom. 1:16). Christians are made only by faith and conviction.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:8). Paul preached Christ's obedient death. "Though he was a son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

Before we can understand the acceptance of the gospel in Paul's day or ours, we must appreciate its message. Christ lived, died, was buried, and resurrected from the dead. This declares that life after death is a reality. Death is not the end, and Christ showed this in being the firstfruits from the dead (I Cor. 15:20). The desire of all men is life beyond death. Yet desire alone is not proof that such life exists. What is proof? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead. To obtain this life, one must be forgiven of his sins. Salvation from or forgiveness of sins is in Christ alone. "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Anyone who desires to come to God must go through Christ. This is the gospel message. We do not approach God through men, angels, saints, Mary, rituals, or denominations. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

The power of this good news was demonstrated in Corinth. "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). We learn from this verse that belief comes from hearing (Rom. 10:17). We see also that obedience follows belief. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). If they became members of the body of Christ by faith and obedience, all men become members in the same way. The gospel Paul preached is the same gospel needed now as man's ailment is the same - sin. All men are lost without Christ. They need the Savior now. Why not follow the example of the Corinthians? You should obey Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, for fellowship with God, and for eternal life.

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