

# THE FAITH BUILDER

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).  
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## From The Editor

Knowing that we are genuinely converted to Christ is the foundation issue that determines the rest of our Christian experience. Without true conversion all we have is just religion. Religion is merely **about** God, giving lip service to Him and His principles, but it falls short of **a personal relationship** with Him. In these days of "easy believer-ism" where all a person has to do is to saunter up to the front of the church on a Sunday morning or evening, we have people running to and fro calling themselves Christians when they are not showing the fruits of holiness. No wonder the "man on the street" does not find our churches credible enough to induce him to consider a change of attitude toward God and Christ!

Conversion to Christ is the **gateway to all the rest**. It leads to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, developing sanctification, effective ministry, successful witnessing for Christ, meaningful and supportive fellowship with other Christians. A genuinely converted Christian is the best example of the work of Christ in a believer, providing the most effective testimony to the world. A person's conversion, if defective, provides the greatest disincentive and hindrance to others coming to the understanding of the Gospel that is needed for conversion to take place.

The problem with easy believer-ism is that people are misled into thinking that they can become fully converted Christians by muttering a prayer and signing a decision card. These days, to suggest that a person has to go through the process of fully realising that he or she is an enemy of God, a condemned sinner with no hope of salvation unless God gives them saving grace, is to invite criticism that "you are being too strict, legalistic, and putting hindrances in the way of people coming to Christ".

Easy believer-ism suggests that the way to eternal life might not be as narrow as we have been led to believe in the Scripture. Many

churches are trying to make it as easy as possible for a person to "accept Christ". Maybe, the motivation is to increase the numbers of people attending the church rather than to get genuine converts to Christ.

I heard an open air preacher once tell people, "You must change your life", as part of his exhortation for them to believe and accept the Gospel. This implies that sinners have the ability to change their lives. But the Scripture teaches that a sinner is so captivated and paralysed with sin that he or she is **blinded to the truth** of the Gospel and **totally unable to change** what he or she is, in the same way that a leopard could change his spots. That preacher is trying to encourage sinners to do something which is an impossibility for them!

I have come to the conclusion that many find it very difficult to accept that there is nothing they can do to achieve a full conversion to Christ. They make all sorts of attempts to better themselves by attending church, praying, reading the Bible and Christian literature, improving their morals, etc., and because they might get some satisfaction or a level of success in reforming themselves, they are deceived into thinking that they are converted to Christ. What they have actually achieved is self-righteousness, or, a lesser degree of badness.

In actual fact, the first important step toward genuine conversion is to know the stark reality of total depravity and complete helplessness in escaping it through one's own efforts. **It is only then that the Gospel becomes good news**, because it is the Gospel that declares that we are saved by the grace of God, and not of ourselves, but saving grace is a gift of God.

Conviction of sin is not conversion. Just because a person knows that he or she is a sinner and needs forgiveness, it does not mean that the person is converted to Christ. All that is happening at this stage is that the sinner knows that he or she is a sinner. Remember, this is what happened to Felix when Paul declared the Gospel to him. He trembled (Acts 24:25). It was at this stage that Felix knew that he was a sinner, but there is no record that he went further to do anything about it. Herod may have had the same realisation, because he said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). But Herod did not move toward a genuine conversion to Christ. So, there are many who realise that they are sinners, and they attend church and "do" Christian activities in the hope that through these they may be absolved of

their sins; but still they come short of what genuine conversion is all about.

So, genuine conversion involves a total giving up of yourself to Christ as your only Saviour from sin and condemnation. The hymn says, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling." It is a falling at the feet of God, expressing your trust in what Jesus did for you on the Cross, believing that He rose from the dead, and pleading God for saving grace, and not being satisfied until you receive that saving grace and full assurance that you are fully and genuinely converted to Christ. Then the on-going evidence of conversion is the strong desire to live a holy life, in God's will, seeking to please Him in all you say and do.

Maybe when people respond to an altar call appeal, it is because they are convicted of their sin and their need for Christ. They should not be allowed to stop at that point and to believe that they are converted to Christ, but should be exhorted to seek God with all their hearts until He does that work by the Holy Spirit to bring them through to a full conversion and assurance.

We need not be fearful of rejection, because God will not reject anyone except those who finally and steadfastly refuse His offer of salvation through Christ. "The one who comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). If you seek the Lord with all your heart, He will be found of you (Jeremiah 29:13). So, if you feel your need for a closer walk with Christ, seek the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:16).

One other thing I need to write about is concerning the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. There are many theories about what this actually is, and how it affects the believer. It is also significant that of all the different doctrines of the faith, this is the most controversial and confusing. As a result, many believers choose to "put it on the back burner", preferring to concentrate on those areas of doctrine and practice that maintains their faith and keeps them away from argument and controversy.

If we go back to the New Testament descriptions of Baptism with the Spirit, we see that it is an event subsequent to conversion, and not merged with conversion as some choose to believe. But the Holy Spirit is active in the act of conversion in that it is the Holy Spirit who baptises a person into the body of Christ, the Christian Church. This is not an outward ritual, but an inward work by the Spirit in the heart of the repentant person. Water baptism is the

outward acknowledgment by the believer that he or she believes that this inward work has taken place.

But the Baptism with the Spirit is an action done by Jesus. This is what makes it separate from conversion. The only reference that seems to support simultaneous action is in the account of what happened to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48). All the other references point to the Baptism with the Holy Spirit happening to those who were already believers.

What we see in the accounts of the Holy Spirit falling on the believers is that something definite happened to them. It was not something they "took by faith" with no discernible effects. At Pentecost, it was the rushing mighty wind, the cloves of "fire", and the speaking in tongues. In Acts 4:31, it is the shaking of the room, and the boldness they received, and the Lord working with them confirming the Word with supernatural acts. Peter, in describing the events at Cornelius' house, told the elders at Jerusalem that when he **saw** that the Holy Spirit had fallen on these Gentiles, who was he to deny baptism for them?

When we consider Church history, we read the accounts of the revivals that have taken place. In every case, something happened to a group of people that was out of the ordinary. We see many of the characteristics of these revivals which were similar to those events we read in the Book of Acts. Someone has said that a revival is a group, small or large, of people receiving the Baptism with the Spirit at once.

Because we see that a revival situation is so out of the ordinary in most of our church situations, I am led to believe that the spiritual state of our churches is far below the level of the New Testament Church, and that it would not be wrong to say that most of the churches in this country are dysfunctional in terms of spirituality and Holy Spirit power.

This is just as true for those churches who advertise themselves as "Spirit-filled" churches. But are they really Spirit-filled, or are they merely assuming they are because they have a mental assent to Pentecostal and Charismatic doctrine?

What I am saying here is that there is more to the Baptism with the Spirit than what we have experienced to date. We have never seen the type of revival that would compare any of our churches to what was normal in the First Century.

Because it is Jesus Christ who baptises with the Spirit, all we can do is ask, and keep on asking that He will cause the Holy Spirit to

fall on us in the way that it happened in the Book of Acts, and in the subsequent revivals that have taken place in the Church ever since. We can't work up a revival, in the same way that we cannot baptise ourselves in the Holy Spirit.

Although I believe that we need to ask, and then receive the Baptism with the Spirit by faith, I am realising that it is Jesus who does the actual baptising, and when He does, we will know all about it. Something definite will happen to us and the people around us, bringing the presence of Jesus in a very intense way, that people will be convicted of sin, repent, get right with God, get healed, have demons cast out.

Let's not be satisfied with just having a form of godliness without the power. This is the present state of most of our churches, and although there is much good ministry to Christian believers, the unbelieving "man on the street" is hardly affected. The Baptism with the Spirit is an enduement of power from on high (Luke 24:49), and when it comes, the impact on the community around us will be clearly observable. I will explore this further in future issues of this magazine.

Paul Christensen, 3 March 2013.

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## Remarkable Parrot

 hree sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. They discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother. The first said: "I built a big house for our mother."

The second said: "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver."

The third said: "You remember how our mother enjoys reading the Bible. Now she can't see very well. So I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach him. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse and the parrot recites it."

Soon thereafter, their mother sent out her letters of thanks.

"Milton," she said, "the house you built is so huge. I live only in one room, but I have to clean the whole house."

"Gerald," she said, "I am too old to travel. I stay most of the time at home so I rarely use the Mercedes. And that driver is so rude! He's a pain!"

"But Donald," she said, "the little chicken you sent was delicious!"

**CHURCH OF THE COVERED DISH** by Thom Tapp



"I've never heard a better sermon on missions giving, have you?"



# TRUE CONVERSION

## Introduction

There are many times in our Christian experience when we need to test ourselves to make sure that our faith is genuine, and that we are not fooling ourselves into thinking that we are on the right road when maybe we are not. Then again, we may be concerned that we may not be converted when we actually are. The devil has made many counterfeits of conversion. He has cheated some people with one type of counterfeit and others with another type. His expertise at counterfeiting conversion is such that it is quite possible for him to deceive even the very best and committed Christian believer.

We need not to be afraid of subjecting ourselves to even the most rigorous test, because then we will know for sure what our actual condition is. It is the same as when we are feeling not quite right, and needing to go to the doctor to be examined, and maybe have to go to hospital for tests. Some people are afraid to go to the doctor because they are afraid of what the doctor may find. But the greatest fear is not knowing, and once an 'all clear' is given then the person is relieved of his or her fears. If something is found, then treatment can start to put the condition right. Often, even when a serious condition is found, a person may feel a sense of relief that the true condition has been diagnosed and the correct treatment is prescribed.

As we have concerns about a person who refuses to go to the doctor when things are not right, we have the same concerns when a church person resists hearing preaching or advice that might put him or her to the test. But we must not take anything for granted. The Bible is quite clear about that: *"Examine yourselves to see that you are in the faith."* *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* *"Be sober and vigilant, for your adversary goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*

So, the purpose of this sermon is to fix up the mistakes of those who think they are converted when they are not; and to remove the troubles and fears of those who think they are not converted when they actually are.

Let's start with describing the nature of conversion - what it is and what it isn't. For this session, we will start with the negative.

## **Conversion is not just professing Christianity.**

A person can call him or herself a Christian, but that does not mean that they actually are. 1 Corinthians 4:20: *“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power...”*

If it were possible to stop being unbelievers and become Christians in name, then the members of the churches at Sardis and Laodicea would be better Christians than what they were. They were all Christians in name, but they were in name only. That is why Christ condemned them.

Revelation 3:14-16: *“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*

There are many who name the name of Christ but do not depart from iniquity: 2 Timothy 2:19: *“Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness’”;* and they say they know Him, but in works deny Him (Titus 1:16).

Do we think that God will receive these ones as true converts? How can they be converted from sin if they are still living in sin? It is a visible contradiction! The notion that because someone is saved they can go on living any way they please, is called antinomianism. Paul refutes this by saying: *“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How can a person who has died to sin continue to live in it?”*

A true convert to Christ cannot continue in sin as a lifestyle, because there is something within him or her that makes sin an unwelcome visitor. Even though sin is still present with us because of our sinful nature, we have the deep desire within us that we want to live a holy life, and often we feel unhappy because of our shortcomings. This is a sign of true conversion. But a person who continues on with a sinful lifestyle as a preferred option may be showing the signs that true conversion still has to take place.

## **Conversion is not the putting on of the badge of Christ in baptism.**

Ananias and Sapphira and Simon Magus were baptised as well as all the others, and we know what happened to them. There are people who go through the external ceremony of baptism and then think they are converted. But people are not converted through baptism. If people were converted through baptism and expect to get through the gates of heaven, they could show their certificate of baptism to gain entrance.

Baptism is a ceremony to advertise publicly that conversion has already taken place; otherwise, if people were automatically converted through baptism, then it would contradict Matthew 7:13-14, which says: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

We could no longer say that “small is the gate and narrow is the way”, but that the way to eternal life is as wide as a six lane motorway. If this is true, thousands could enter into life abreast, and we could no more teach that the righteous would scarcely be saved or that there would be no issue about taking the kingdom of heaven by violence, or striving to enter in (1 Peter 4:18, Matthew 11:12, Luke 13:24).

If the doctrine is true, then the disciples would not be saying, *“Who then shall be saved?”* But they will be saying, *“Who then shall **not** be saved?”* Then, if a person is a fornicator, a drunk, violent, greedy, he will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:9-10).

So, you will need much more than baptism to be truly converted to Christ. If any of you is a prayer-less person, or a scoffer, or a lover of evil company (Proverbs 13:20), if you are not a holy, strict, self-denying Christian, you cannot be saved (Hebrews 12:14, Matthew 15:14).

### **Conversion does not consist in moral righteousness.**

This does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, therefore it cannot bring us to the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:20). Paul, while unconverted, his righteousness according to the Law, was blameless (Philippians 3:6). The Pharisee could say, “I am no extortioner, adulterer, unjust...” etc., (Luke 18:11). You must have more than this to show, or else, however you may justify yourself, God will condemn you. We are not against morality, but don’t rest in it. Holiness includes morality, as Christianity includes humanity, and as grace includes reason, but we must not divide them.

### **Conversion does not consist in the observance of the external rules of holiness.**

People can have the form of godliness without the power (2 Timothy 3:5); may pray long prayers (Matthew 23:14); fast often (Luke 18:12); hear sermons gladly (Mark 6:20); be very forward in the service of God though costly and expensive (Isaiah 1:11); and yet be strangers to conversion. They must have more to plead for themselves than just to go to church, contribute to the offering, join in the prayers, to prove themselves sound converts. There is no outward service that a hypocrite may not do even to the giving of all that he owns to feed the poor, or give his body to be burned (1 Corinthians 13:13).

**Conversion is not the mere chaining up of corruption by education, human rules, or compulsion through sickness or disability.**

It is too common and easy to mistake conversion for education. If this was enough then who is a better man than Jehoash? While Jehoiada (his uncle) was alive, he was very forward in the service of God, and even organised the repair of the house of God (2 Kings 12:2, 7). But this was nothing but good education and mentoring, and when his mentor is taken away, he falls into idolatry.

**Conversion does not consist in illumination or conviction, or a superficial change, or partial reformation.**

An apostate may be an enlightened man (Hebrews 6:4), a Felix may tremble under conviction (Acts 24:25), and a Herod do many things (Mark 6:20). It is one thing to have sin alarmed only by conviction, and another thing to have it crucified by converting grace. Many, because they have been troubled in conscience for their sins, think well of their case, miserably mistaking conviction for conversion.

Now that I have given you a taste of what conversion isn't, I want now to turn to the positive, and show you what conversion actually is. Conversion then, in brief, consists in the thorough change both of the heart and life. The following will describe it in more detail.

**(1) The Author of conversion is the Spirit of God.**

Therefore it is called "*the sanctification of the Spirit*" (2 Thessalonians 2:13) and "*the renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5). This does not exclude the other Persons in the Trinity, for the apostle teaches us to bless the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who "*has begotten us again unto a lively hope*" (1 Peter 1:3). And Christ is said to "*give repentance unto Israel*" (Acts 5:31); and is called the "*everlasting Father*" (Isaiah 9:6) and we His "*seed*" and, "*the children which God has given Him*" (Hebrews 2:13). Yet this work is principally ascribed to the Holy Spirit, and so we are said to be "*born of the Spirit*" (John 3:5-6). So then, conversion is a work above man's power. We are "*born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:13). Never think you can convert yourself. If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of doing it in your own strength.

It is a resurrection from the dead (Ephesians 2:1), a new creation (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10), a work of absolute omnipotence (Ephesians 1:19). Are these not out of the reach of human power? If you have no more than you had

by your first birth, a good nature, a meek and chaste temper, you are a stranger to true conversion. This is a supematural work.

## **(2) The efficient cause of conversion is both internal and external.**

**1. The internal cause** is free grace alone.

*“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but of His mercy He saved us,”* and, *“by the renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:5). *“Of His own will He fathered us”* (James 1:18). We are chosen and called unto sanctification, not for it (Ephesians 1:4). God finds nothing in man to turn His heart, but enough to turn His stomach. He finds enough to provoke His loathing, but nothing to excite His love. Look back upon yourself, O Christian! Reflect upon your sinful nature, the spiritual filthiness of your flesh, your once beloved mire (2 Peter 2). Consider your moral slime and corruption. If your own clothes abhor you as is stated in Job 9:31, then we would have to ask the question, “How then should holiness and purity love you?”

Zechariah cried out, *“Be astonished, O Heavens, at this be moved, O earth. Who but must needs cry, Grace! Grace!”* (Zechariah 4:7). This is what the Holy Spirit would say to someone who is trusting in themselves to be approved of God: “Hear and blush, you children of the Most High. O unthankful men, that free grace is no more in your mouths, in your thoughts; no more adored, admired and commended by such as you!” These are very serious words and deserve our careful consideration.

One would think we should be doing nothing but praising and admiring God wherever we are. How can we forget such grace, or pass it over with a slight and formal mention? What but free grace could move God to love us, unless enmity could do it, unless deformity could do it?

How affectionately Peter lifts up his hands: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who of His abundant mercy has begotten us again.”* How feelingly does Paul magnify the free mercy of God in it: *“God Who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, has quickened us together with Christ; by grace are you saved”* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

**2. The external cause** is the merit and intercession of the blessed Jesus.

He has obtained gifts for the rebellious (Psalm 68:18), and through Him it is that God works in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight (Hebrews 13:21). Through Him are all spiritual blessing bestowed upon us in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). He intercedes for the elect that believe not (John 17:20). Every convert is the fruit of His travail. There was never an infant born into the world without that difficulty which Christ endured for us. All the pains that He suffered on the Cross were our birth-pains.

He is made sanctification to us (1 Corinthians 1:30). He sanctified Himself, that is, set apart Himself as a sacrifice, that we might be sanctified (John 17:19). We are sanctified through the offering of His body once for all (Hebrews 10:10). It is nothing, then, but the merit and intercession of Christ, that prevails with God to bestow on us converting grace. If you are a new creature, you know to Whom you owe it: to Christ's sufferings and prayers.

The foal does not more naturally run after its parent, nor the suckling to the breast, than a believer to Jesus Christ. And where else should you go? If any in the world can show for your heart what Christ can, let them do it.

Does Satan claim you? Does the world court you? Does sin sue for your heart? Why, were these crucified for you? Christian, love and serve your Lord while you have a being.

### **(3) The instrument of conversion is personal and real.**

First, **the personal instrument** is the ministry. *"In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel"* (1 Corinthians 4:15). Christ's ministers are they that are sent to open men's eyes, and to turn them to God (Acts 26:18). The message to the unthankful world is that little do you know what you are doing when you are persecuting the messengers of the Lord. These are the ones whose business it is, under Christ, to save you. *"Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?"* (Isaiah 37:23). These are the servants of the most high God that show unto you the way of salvation (Acts 16:17). And the foolish and unwise ones pay them in this way? (Deuteronomy 32:6). Sons of ingratitude, against whom do they sport themselves? These are the instruments that God uses to convert and save sinners, and do the unbelievers revile their physicians, and throw their pilots overboard? *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

Secondly, **the real instrument** is the Word. We are begotten by the Word of Truth. It is this that enlightens the eye, that converts the soul (Psalm 19:7-8), that makes us wise to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). This is the incorruptible seed by which we are born again (1 Peter 1:23). If we are washed, it is by the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

If we are sanctified, it is through the truth (John 17:17). This generates faith, and regenerates us (Romans 10:17; James 1:18). Saints of God, how you should love the Word, for by this you have been converted! You that have felt its renewing power, make much of it while you live; be ever thankful for it. Tie it about your neck, write it upon your hand, lay it in your bosom. When you go, let it lead you; when you sleep, let it keep you; when you wake, let it talk with you (Proverbs 6:21-22).

Say with the Psalmist, *"I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have quickened me"* (Psalm 119:93). You that are unconverted, read the Word with diligence; flock to where it is powerfully preached. Pray for the coming of the Spirit in the Word. Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from

the sermon to your knees. The sermon does not prosper because it is not watered by prayers and tears, nor covered by meditation.

**(4) The final cause and purpose of conversion is man's salvation, and God's glory.**

We are chosen *"through sanctification to salvation"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13), called that we *"might be glorified"* (Romans 8:30), but especially that God might be glorified (Isaiah 60:21), that we should show forth His praises (1 Peter 2:9), and be fruitful in good works (Colossians 1:10). Christian, do not forget the purpose of your calling. Let your light shine, let your lamp burn, let your fruits be good and many and in season (Psalm 1:3). Let all your designs fall in with God's, that He may be magnified in you (Philippians 1:20).

**(5) The subject of conversion is the elect sinner.**

That in all his parts and powers, members, and mind. Whom God has pre-destined, those only He calls (Romans 8:30). None are drawn to Christ by their calling, nor come to Him by believing, but only His sheep, those whom the Father has given Him (John 6:37, 44). Effectual calling runs parallel with eternal election (2 Peter 1:10). You begin at the wrong end if you first dispute about your election. Prove your conversion, and then never doubt your election. If you cannot yet prove it, set upon a present and thorough turning. Whatever God's purposes be, which are secret, I am sure His promises are plain. How desperately do rebels argue, saying, "If I am elected I shall be saved, do what I will. If not, I shall be condemned, do what I can." Perverse sinner, will you begin where you should end? Is not the word before you? What does it say? *"Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"* (Acts 3:19). *"If you...mortify the deeds of the body and you shall live"* (Romans 8:13). *"Believe and be saved"* (Acts 16:31). What can be plainer? Do not stand still disputing about your election, but set to repenting and believing.

Cry to God for converting grace. Revealed things belong to you; in these busy yourself. "It is just," as one well said, "That they who will not feed on the plain food of the Word should be choked with the bones".

Whatever God's purposes may be, I am sure His promises are true. Whatever the decrees of Heaven may be, I am sure that if I repent and believe I shall be saved; and that if I do not repent, I shall be condemned. Is not this plain ground for you; and will you yet run upon the rocks?

More particularly, this change of conversion extends to the whole man. A carnal person may have some shreds of good morality, but he is never good throughout the whole cloth. Conversion is not a repairing of the old building, but it takes all down, and erects a new structure. It is not the sewing on a patch of holiness. No, but with the true convert holiness is woven into all his powers,

principles and practice. The sincere Christian is quite a new fabric, from the foundation to the top-stone. He is a new man, a new creature; all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Conversion is a deep work, a heart work. It makes a new man in a new world. It extends to the whole man, to the mind, to the members, to the motions of the whole life.

So there it is. It remains for you to come to Doctor Jesus and open yourself to be examined by Him, and get a true diagnosis of your condition. If after carefully considering these things and you are assured that you are genuinely converted, then rejoice in the grace and mercy of God, and go on for Christ, bearing good fruit for the glory of His Name.

If you are realising that you need to get things right with God, then you can come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in your time of need. Today is the day of grace. Today, if you hear His voice speaking to your heart. . . Don't harden your heart to it, but come to Jesus and throw yourself upon His mercy.

Remember that Jesus has come to seek and save that which is lost; it is the sick person who needs the doctor; it is the lost sheep that the shepherd goes out of his way to find; it is the lost coin that makes the housewife vacuum and clean the whole house to find. It will not be your sinful life or your shortcomings that will prevent you receiving the grace and mercy of God, but walking away from the only remedy for your condition.

How many people have died prematurely because they did not go to the doctor to receive diagnosis and treatment when, if they did, they might be still alive and healthy today? Jesus is standing this morning at the door of your heart and knocking. There is only one handle on the door, and that is on the inside. To let Jesus in, you have to open the door. To let Jesus in you must do the following:

1. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, and without Jesus in your life there
2. is no hope for you, no matter how good or religious you try to be.
3. Believe that Jesus died for you on the Cross and rose again from the dead to give you new life in Him.
4. Seek the Lord with all your heart in prayer, asking Him to give you a
5. full understanding of the Gospel, and for saving grace.
6. Believe that if you come to Jesus, He will in no way cast you out.
7. Receive Him as your Saviour and Lord and continue under good Christian ministry and fellowship until you come to a full assurance that you are truly converted to Christ.

The final word - a precious promise from Christ: *“Come to Me all who labour and are heavy laden (under a load of sin), and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). As the Christian pilgrim in Pilgrims Progress looked up at the dying Saviour on the Cross, the burden of his sin fell off his back and disappeared out of sight.

There is life for a look at the Crucified One. Look to Jesus and live!

Sermon preached by Paul Christensen at St Aidan’s Presbyterian Church, Conifer Grove, 27 January 2013.

The work of Joseph Alleine (1634-1668), *An Alarm To The Unconverted*, is acknowledged as the ideas behind this sermon.

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*The purpose of this magazine is to broaden the perspective of ordinary Christians to see that there is great potential in having a strong faith in God and faithfulness to His Word.*

*The views expressed in this magazine are my own and the views of others whose ministries I support.*

*They are not necessarily the views of the leadership of St Aidan’s Presbyterian Church.*



## **You can't take it with you**

Once upon a time there was a very rich and prominent man who was dying. Before he died, he told his wife that he wanted to take his money and riches to heaven with him. So he gave her instructions to take all his money and riches and put them all inside

a bag and tie them up on the ceiling of their attic, so that when his spirit left him and he was ascending to heaven he could grab the bag and take it all with him.

So the time came when the man was on his death bed and he finally died. The wife waited in the attic for the bag full of money to be taken. Time elapsed for a period of time and the bag remained there.

Suddenly a thought dawned on her and she suddenly grabbed the bag and ran downstairs to the basement....

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## Creating A Culture

### Where People Want To Stay

By; Pastor Paul Edlin (Wainuiomata Baptist Church – “Life Impact Centre”,  
New Zealand)

In the **Gospel of St. John 21:15-17**, Jesus makes two statements and repeats them three times:

#### **1st statement ~**

Verse 15: "**Simon**, [Peter] **feed My lambs.**"

Verse 16: "**Simon**, **take care of My sheep.**"

Verse 17: "**Simon**, **feed My sheep.**"

Above all things – people matter. Even if they don't yet know it – people matter a whole lot to God.

#### **2nd statement ~**

**"Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me?"** Jesus repeated the question three times.

When God speaks He's telling something important. When He says the same thing twice He really wants us to get it. **But when God makes the same point three times, you can be certain of one thing – this is not negotiable.** When you put the two together, obviously our love for God is measured: **"Do you love Me?"** Yes! Then prove it by **"Feeding My sheep."**

**Question:** So what on earth does that have to do with **"Creating a Culture Where People Want to Stay?"** Everything!

**Jesus meant for the Church to grow! It is normal for your church to grow!**

New sheep should continue to come into the church and stay. God does not have an alternative "Plan B." The "church" is it. Not only is growth normal, but He put within His Church the seed for it to grow. The seed represents potential; DNA. That's the good news. But here's the challenge – and so many churches miss this truth:

- **God is not responsible to fulfil your church's potential.**
- **His job is to create that potential. The rest is up to us.**

When Christine (my wife) and I took over the leadership of our church six-and-a-half years ago, we inherited a church that was declining [and had been declining for five years]. The people who were left – all 47 of them [I know because I counted] – were lovely folk, but the truth is, they had lost their way. It wasn't so much what they were trying to do that was wrong – it just was not working. And to their credit [and for this I honour them] they knew something had to change

## **8 KEYS**

Let me share with you 8 keys to creating a culture where people want to belong...

### **1. You Have to be Prepared to Lead Change!**

Change is not your enemy. If you do "change" it can be your best friend. A Pharisee or religious person would say "But Paul, God doesn't change. He's **'the same yesterday, today and forever'**" (Hebrews 13:8). I say, "I agree. But He is also creative. He's the

Creator. **"And if I'm not willing to be creative, nothing will change.**

- **If you want to avoid decline you have to be prepared to lead your people through change.**

I am always critiquing what we do. If it's not working I'll change it. For example

- Giving of Church Notices
- Children's Church
- Crèche

Over the past few years I've come to realize something...

**"Churches don't fall into decline; they're led into it!"** They're led into it, either through bad decisions, hasty decisions, or no decisions. Conversely, **churches don't fall into growth. They're led into it.** And they're led into it **through leaders who have the courage to embrace change.** Not change for the sake of change. But **change for the sake of the Kingdom!** Change is good news – it attracts people. (Bad news stinks.) As one commentator put it: *"If you find yourself sitting astride a dead horse, for goodness sake, dismount."*

**To create a culture where people want to belong you have to be prepared to lead change.**

## **2. Create a Culture of Biblical Values**

**Question:** Why values? They set the tone and atmosphere of your church.

- **If you don't deliberately create the culture, it will create itself.**

**Question:** Why? Because a culture does what a culture is. If you allow a culture of gossip, guess what will happen – gossip!

- **What you tolerate will not change.**
- **What you don't confront will continue to grow.**

**So, in your church, you set the culture by determining your values.** In our church I expect my people to honour leadership; I expect them to do ministry with excellence, and I expect them to be gracious – at all times. Outside of those values they can do what they want.

### **3. Build a Culture of Faith**

God-inspired faith –

· **“Sees the invisible; Believes the incredible; Receives the impossible!!”**

Let me share with you a story: “A man slipped and fell off a cliff while hiking on a mountaintop. Luckily he was able to grab a branch on his way down. Holding on for dear life, he looked down only to see the valley floor some fifteen hundred feet below. When he looked up it was twenty feet to the top from where he had fallen.

Panicked, he yelled, “Help, Help! Is anybody there? Help! “God spoke in a loud voice: “I am here, and I will save you if you believe in Me.

“I believe! I believe!” yelled back the man. “If you believe in Me, let go of the branch and then I will save you.

“The young man looked down again. Seeing the valley floor far below, he quickly looked back up and shouted, “Is there anybody else up there?”

**Question:** What is faith? Faith is not the absence of doubt. **It’s the presence of belief!**(Mark 9:24).

**The nature of Faith is that it believes for what it cannot see!**

**Question:** So how do you create an environment for it to grow?

**Encourage people to dream. Encourage people to dream big dreams. Impossible dreams! Create a culture of crazy**

**dreamers.** If you lead in the safety of the status quo – you will limit God incredibly.

**Don’t fear! When God gives you a vision, He also gives you the provision needed to fulfil that vision.**

All He requires from us is that **we believe Him for it**. That's not pride, or "mind over matter." It is faith tapping into the resources needed to do what God has called you to do.

**Build a culture of faith.**

#### **4. Believe in and Release the Right People**

Here's a truth:

**"Our potential for failure is equal in proportion to our potential for greatness. In regards to leadership, your greatest asset is not the people around you. Your greatest asset is the right people around you"** [*Jim Collins in "Good to Great."*]

Whether someone is the right person has more to do with character traits and natural ability than with specific knowledge, or skills.

**Some tips re- an Assistant Pastor:**

**God doesn't call those He's equipped. He equips those He's called.**

**If you don't give people the opportunity to grow, you've limited them, limited your church, and limited the Kingdom of God.**

**Question:** Will they make some mistakes? Absolutely! And so did you! Choose wisely certainly, and then give them the freedom to fly.

#### **5. Encourage Your People to Become Attractive**

Become attractive on the inside. Some people go through life changing faces depending on the occasion. I will let you into a secret:

- **Your title or position does not determine who you are. Your spirit does!**
- **The spirit of who you are creates an atmosphere around your life.**

Don't be fooled. People will interpret you by your spirit about three seconds after they have met you.

Jesus spoke these words to the Pharisees:

***"You look great on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones"*** (Matthew 23:27).

Becoming attractive is an act of surrender – Surrendering your spirit over to His Spirit. That's why David prayed: ***"Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me"*** (Psalm 51:10). He understood that real beauty comes not from without, but from within.

To create a culture where people want to stay . . .

## **6. Build a Climate of Trust**

**Pastor/Leader:** There is no short-cut with this one. Do you know why? Trust is not a Biblical command. Nowhere in Scripture am I commanded to trust you, or you me. **I am commanded to love you.** But I am not commanded to trust you. The real challenge with that truth is, **without trust you're not going to build anything!!**  
**Question:** So how do you create a climate that builds trust?

**You have to keep your word!**  
**You have to learn to delegate!**

Ecclesiastes 4:9 ~ ***"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work."***

Sure, people need boundaries [knowing what is acceptable and what is not]. People need guidelines [job descriptions, etc.] to identify upper and lower limits. But notwithstanding that you need to delegate and let them fly.

**Pastor/Leader: You need to own up to your mistakes. Nothing builds trust more than when you make a mistake and your people see you take responsibility for it.**

## **7. Preach the Truth of God's Word!**

Some of the preaching today, when examined, is “a teaspoon of truth in an ocean of error.” Biblical preaching is not always popular, but it is life-giving because it’s **“truth.”** That is what Jesus meant in John 8:31-32:

***“If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”***

**Any time someone claims special revelation from God that does not line up with Scripture – run in the opposite direction!**

You say, “That sounds a little harsh.” So is surgery, but it will save your life!

### **8. Believe in the Holy Spirit!**

Folks, if you’re serious about creating an environment where people want to belong, you need to believe in the Holy Spirit!

**There is only one way God builds His Church as we lead, and that is through the Person and Presence of the Holy Spirit!  
It’s the Holy Spirit that brings revelation, enlightens, empowers, convicts, renews, restores!!**

John 14:26 ***“But the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.”***

I’m not smart enough, or gifted enough, to grow His church without His help. God Bless You!

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"The Gospel Faith Messenger" Ministry. PO Box 57, Paraparaumu 5254, New Zealand.

What did the ghost say to the wall?  
Hey! just passing through.

**B.Z. Toons**

by Brian Zaikowski

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## The Editor



Paul Christensen

I first became a Christian in an Assembly Of God church in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, in 1966, under the ministry of Trevor Chandler. This was the first time I realized that I needed to make a definite, personal commitment to Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I guess I heard the voice of Christ in my heart then, but did not have the maturity to recognize it as such, but I obeyed it and that is the main thing.

About two years later, I felt the need to have a closer relationship with God as a person and set out to seek him more earnestly. One night, in the middle of a golf course, in desperation, I told Him that people had been able to introduce me to church, Bible Study, prayer, appropriate Christian living, etc., but no one had been able to introduce me directly to God. So, I said "I am Paul, and you are God, and I am very pleased to meet you." Immediately, I felt as though I were lit up inside, and I heard Him say, "Paul, we have been waiting for this for a long time." It was a comforting, assuring voice that spoke deep in the back of my mind. This has continued from that time until this.

Although I have been involved with Anglican and Baptist churches during the last 20 years, I am now an Elder of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove in Auckland. I am also involved in The Gospel Faith Messenger ministry with its Prophetic Equipping Days and other outreaches, seeking to empower Christians to hear and recognize the Voice of God making His will clear to them. It is with this in mind that I trust that this booklet will be of assistance to you.

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Once you have read this, pass it on to someone else who might be encouraged by reading it.