

Just What Do You Mean ...Conversion?

By Herbert W. Armstrong
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How many times have you heard non-Christians, judging one who professes Christ, say in disgust: "Well if that's Christianity, I don't want any of it!"

How many judge GOD by the way professing Christians live? How many assume that one must live a perfect life, before he can become a Christian?

How many say: "If I could give up smoking, I'd become a Christian."

How many think a Christian is supposed to be perfect, never doing anything wrong? Suppose you do see or hear about a Christian doing something wrong. Does that mean he is a hypocrite -- that he is not really a Christian, after all?

Is it possible for one to actually sin while he is a Christian and still remain a truly converted Christian?

The startling truth is that few know just what is a Christian. Few know how one is converted -- whether suddenly, all at once, or gradually. Does conversion happen immediately, or is it a process? It's high time we understood what constitutes real conversion.



DO CHRISTIANS ever sin? If one does, is he lost? First let me ask -- and answer the question "What is true Christian conversion?" "What is a real Christian in the sight of God?" Does joining a church make one a Christian? Does saying, "I accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour" make one a Christian?

Let's get the Bible definition. In Romans 8:6-9 you will read: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind [fleshly mind] is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh [fleshly minded] cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

A Christian, then, is one who has received, and in whose mind dwells the Holy Spirit of God. Otherwise he is NOT Christ's -- NOT a Christian.

False Conversion

Millions may profess to be Christians, but unless God's Holy Spirit, given as HIS GIFT by GRACE, is at the moment, dwelling in them, they are NOT CHRISTIANS.

Millions may have their names written in Church membership books, and still be "NONE OF HIS" -- not really CHRISTIANS at all! And millions are so deceived (Rev. 12:9).

So UNDERSTAND THIS! A person is a Christian -- in God's sight -- ONLY while God's Holy Spirit is dwelling IN him. Not before! Not after!

So a truly converted person has received (and currently has) God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. But, there is yet quite a bit more to understanding what constitutes real conversion.

Real Conversion

There is a sense in which true conversion does take place at a definite time -- all at once. But it is also true that in another sense conversion is worked out gradually -- a process of development and growth.

Now NOTICE carefully! WHEN does one really become a Christian? It is when he receives God's Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:9, we read that unless we have the Holy Spirit, we are not Christ's -- not Christians.

There is a definite TIME when God's Spirit enters into one. At the very moment he receives the Holy Spirit, he is, in this first sense, converted. Yes, all at once! If he has Christ's Spirit, he is CHRIST'S -- he is a Christian! The very Life of God has entered into (impregnated) him. He has been begotten as a child of God.

But does that mean his salvation is complete? Is he now fully and finally "saved"? Is that all there is to it? Is he now, suddenly, perfect? Is it now impossible for him to do WRONG?

No! FAR FROM IT! BUT WHY? What's the answer? Why do so many MISunderstand?

Why does almost NOBODY understand the very PURPOSE of the Christian life?

The Purpose of the Christian Life

WHY do people not understand the very Gospel Jesus Christ taught? He taught the KINGDOM OF GOD. So did the apostles, including Paul. Jesus spoke mostly in parables. Take a quick look at one or two. Notice what Jesus revealed. Notice the awe-inspiring TREMENDOUS potential that is ours.

Take the parable of the nobleman going to a far country, later to return. It is in Luke 19:11-27. Jesus is the Nobleman. He was going to a far country -- to the heaven of God's throne, seat of the government of the entire universe. He spoke this parable because His disciples thought the Kingdom of God should appear immediately. So far more than 1900 years have gone by, and the Kingdom of God has not yet appeared.

So He called, in the parable, his ten servants, and He gave them ten pounds -- a pound each, using, in our English language translation, the English unit of money. This is symbolic of one unit of SPIRITUAL VALUE with which each was started out. In other words, representative of the portion of God's Holy Spirit which was given to each on initial conversion.

But His citizens hated Him. They rejected Him as their RULER. They said, "We will not have this man to REIGN OVER us. The Kingdom of God is a RULING GOVERNMENT. They, as of then, received no conversion -- no "pounds." (They shall yet find conversion, as many, many passages of Scripture affirm). Now the reason for His going to heaven was to "receive for himself a KINGDOM, and to return." That is, He was going to the throne of the Government of the entire universe where God Almighty, the Father, sits, to have conferred on Him the RULERSHIP OF THE WORLD. The coronation ceremony will take place in heaven, at the throne of UNIVERSE RULE. When He returns He will be crowned with MANY CROWNS (Rev. 19:12). He is coming to RULE ALL NATIONS with almighty divine POWER (verse 15). Back to Luke 19. On his return, his servants, to whom he had given the money -- that is, the beginning unit of GOD'S SPIRIT at conversion -- are to be called to an accounting, "that he might know how much each man had GAINED" while he was gone. This means each Christian is expected to GROW spiritually - - in spiritual KNOWLEDGE and grace (see II Peter 3:18). The Christian life is a life of spiritual GOING TO SCHOOL -- of training for a POSITION IN GOD'S KINGDOM, when and after we shall be changed from mortal to immortal -- when we shall be no longer flesh-and-blood humans, but composed of SPIRIT, with eternal life inherent.

In the parable, the first came to report he had multiplied what he had been given TEN TIMES. You see, the receiving of God's Spirit is GOD'S GIFT -- that is what God does -- it comes by GRACE, as a gift. WE

CAN'T EARN IT. But all through the New Testament it is made plain we shall be REWARDED according to OUR WORKS. Not SAVED by works we have done. This man had, by his own application, multiplied his spiritual gift ten times -- his one pound was now ten pounds. He received a greater REWARD than the one who gained five pounds.

The nobleman (Christ) said to him, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in very little, have thou AUTHORITY over TEN CITIES.

He had qualified to RULE. He had been obedient to God's commands -- God's government. We have to BE RULED before we can learn to RULE.

The second servant had increased his spiritual stock of goods five times. He had qualified, in this life, for HALF as much as the first servant. He was given HALF the REWARD.

The Kingdom of God

So the parable of the pounds shows Christians are to RULE under Christ, when the Kingdom of God is set up. Jesus was speaking of GOVERNMENT -- world government. This parable was given to show that the Kingdom of God was not to appear at that time. The Kingdom is not an ethereal, sentimental something "in our hearts." It is not the Church.

Daniel's prophecy shows that the SAINTS are to RULE, under Christ the Messiah, when he sets up literal WORLD GOVERNMENT. See Daniel 2 -- read it through and then notice verse 44. This Kingdom will break in pieces every other form of government -- all rule of man -- and will stand forever. Notice Daniel 7: And especially verses 18 and 22. It will be an earthly kingdom -- not in heaven, but "UNDER the whole heaven," verse 27.

Jesus said: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth MY WORKS unto the end, to him will I give POWER over the nations: and he shall RULE THEM with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27).

He said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne. even as I also overcame, and am set down with my father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). When Jesus said this, through John in the 90's A.D., He was in heaven with His Father on the throne from which the entire universe is governed.

When Jesus sits on His own throne on this earth it will be the throne of David, in Jerusalem. Notice what is said of Jesus: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall REIGN over the House of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

But He was not going to set up the world government of the Kingdom of God at that time. The Bible speaks of three worlds -- or ages -- in time order. First, the world that then was, overflowed with water -- prior to the flood; second, this present evil world; and third the world to come. On trial for His life before Pilate, Jesus said He was born to be a king (John 18:37), but that His kingdom was not of this world. He will rule THE WORLD TOMORROW (verse 36).

The saints (Spirit-led Christians) are to reign, under Christ, "ON THE EARTH" (Rev. 5:10), for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6).

WHY has the whole world been deceived with a false gospel (Rev. 12:9)? WHY have they been deceived into belief in a counterfeit Kingdom of God? (Request our free booklets What Is the True Gospel? and Just What Do You Mean -- the Kingdom of God?).

Look again at the many parables of Jesus. They teach the Kingdom of God. They make plain the fact the Kingdom of God is the WORLD GOVERNMENT soon, now, to be set up by Christ, coming in ALL POWER and GLORY, to bring us world peace, abundance, happiness and joy.

The purpose of the Christian life is to train future KINGS to rule with and under Christ. How then, does one become a Christian? When? And WHY IS salvation a PROCESS, as well as an initial phase when he becomes a Christian instantaneously?

Here is the PLAIN TRUTH YOU need to know.

Real Repentance

I repeat: "A Christian (a truly converted person) is one who has received, and in whose mind dwells the Holy Spirit of God."

But how does one receive the Spirit of God? On the day the Church of God was started, the Apostle Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Repent of what? Of sin. And what is sin? "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). What law? The law that the carnal mind, hostile to God, is not subject to -- the Law of God (Rom. 8:7). Again, we read of "the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).

These are the two conditions to receiving God's GIFT of the Holy Spirit: Repentance and Faith. Being baptized is the outward manifestation of the inner faith in Christ. Repentance is not merely being sorry for something one has done -- or even many such sins. It is real repentance of what one is and has been -- of his whole past attitude and life apart from God. It is a total change of mind and heart and direction of life. It is a change to a new WAY OF LIFE. It is a turning from the self-centered way of vanity, selfishness, greed; hostility to authority, envy, jealousy and unconcern for the good and welfare of others to the God-centered WAY of obedience, submission to authority, love toward God more than love of self and of love and concern for other humans equal to self-concern.

LOVE is the fulfilling of God's Law (Rom. 13:10) -- but God's Law is a spiritual law (Rom. 7:14) and can be fulfilled only by "the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).

The Holy Spirit will open one's mind to UNDERSTAND God's instruction on how to live, but it will not force one to live God's way -- it will not pull or push one. Each Christian must take his own initiative, though God's Spirit will give him help, faith and power. But it is "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

Real Christian Conversion

The two above-mentioned conditions to becoming a Christian -- REPENTANCE and FAITH -- we ourselves must perform.

But these do not make us Christians -- do not convert us. It is what GOD does -- giving His Holy Spirit by His grace as His free gift -- that converts us.

Our repentance and faith do not earn the receiving of God's Spirit. God does not give us His Spirit because we repent and believe. He gives His Spirit because He wants to give it. He wants us to have His Spirit as His gift before we repent. He merely requires repentance and faith as conditions.

Yet no one can, of himself, say: "Oh now, I see -- I must repent. All right, I hereby repent." One does not just decide casually, as a matter of routine, to repent. WHY?

Jesus Christ said that none can come to Him, except the Spirit of the Father draw him (John 6:44, 65). God grants repentance (Rom. 2:4). God calls one, and convicts the mind and conscience by His Spirit, working on the mind externally. Usually a real struggle goes on within. The person has been shaken to know he has done wrong -- that he is wrong -- he has sinned -- he is a sinner! He is brought to real REPENTANCE, not only for what he has done, but for what he now sees that he is. It is not easy. The self never wants to die. To repent is to make an unconditional surrender to God -- to obey His Law!

Yet he, himself, must make the decision. If he does repent, surrender to God, and in FAITH accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, then, upon performance of these TWO conditions, God promises to put within him the GIFT of the Holy Spirit. This is the very life of God -- SPIRIT life. It imparts to him the very divine nature!

Then what, at that stage, has happened? This new convert has only been begotten of God -- not yet BORN. Many who believe they are "born again" on receiving the Holy Spirit are more in error in terminology than in what happens (for a full explanation, write for our free booklet "Just What Do You Mean -- Born Again?").

This new convert has not received the full measure of God's Spirit which Christ had; he is only a spiritual babe in Christ. He must now GROW spiritually, just as a newly conceived embryo in its mother's womb must grow physically large enough to be BORN as a human.

This new convert has now REPENTED, in his mind, from the depths of his heart. HE MEANS IT, too! In all sincerity, in his mind and heart, he has turned around to go the other way -- to live a different life. He is now a CHRISTIAN -- he has received God's Holy Spirit. He has been converted, He is a Christian. He really wants to do what is right -- to obey God -- to live GOD'S WAY.

What If a Christian Sins?

So a Christian convert, then, is one who has received God's Spirit, which is dwelling in him, leading him, and he is following GOD'S WAY of life. A converted Christian has forsaken his former habitual way of life -- his selfish way unconcerned with God. Now he lives in the habitual way of God's WORD -- in the light of the Word of God.

But suppose, like an 8- or 10-month-old baby trying to learn to walk, as he "walks" this NEW WAY, he stumbles, "falls down," as it were, and SINS. Is he then condemned lost -- no longer a Christian?

I would like you, now, to notice, and UNDERSTAND, what the Apostle John was inspired to write for our admonition. It is in the first letter (epistle) of John:

Speaking of Christ, in his opening salutation, as "That which was from the beginning ... which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:1-3).

The true Christian has been reconciled to God through Christ. And, having God's Spirit, he enjoys actual fellowship with the Father and the Son Jesus Christ. And even his fellowship with fellow-Christians is through God and Christ. He is joined to them, as the different branches are joined to a grape vine and joined together through and by the vine. Compare Jesus' analogy in John 15:1-7. Christians, then, are actually walking with Christ -- and two cannot walk together except they be in agreement (Amos 3:3).

Now continue in I John: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not [are not doing] the truth" (verses 5-6). That is, He -- the living Christ -- is walking in the light -- as if on a brilliantly lighted path. But if we are walking in darkness, we are walking on a different path altogether, where it is dark. Therefore we are not walking with Him at all, and if we say we are, we are lying.

But suppose, while walking with Him -- in the light -- one of us stumbles and falls down. This is not a case of having turned away from Him and the path He is treading, to a different and darkened path. If we say, "Oh I'm sorry," would He not give us a hand and help us get up and continue on the lighted path with Him? Would He become angry and say, "Get off my path -- go walk down a darkened path"?

In still other words, the true Christian has turned from his former life of habitual sin -- and from his former attitude of selfishness, and self-seeking when he had no serious intention of living God's way. But now he has turned from his former way. His life, in general, now, is the habitual way of the Christian life.

But he is not perfect the minute he is converted and receives God's Spirit. He must GROW spiritually, in grace and knowledge of Christ, as Peter writes in II Peter 3:18. He is the creature of habit, and all old former habits do not just automatically leave him without any effort on his part to overcome them. He must learn to overcome sin. It is inevitable that he may be caught off guard and make a mistake. So continue in I John 1:

"But if we walk in the light" -- that is, even though we may stumble occasionally, it is now only the occasional slip -- not a turning our back on God's WAY -- not a turning back to the habitual and constant way of sin.

Do you begin to UNDERSTAND the difference? The true Christian intends to live God's WAY. He wants to live God's way. He tries to live God's way. And, in general, it now actually is his habitual NEW WAY of life. The occasional slip, or sin, does not mean that in his mind and heart he has rejected God and God's WAY. Continue:

" ... As He is in the light" -- if that is now our goal and purpose and habitual way of life -- then "we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us [us who are now Christians] from all sin. If we [Christians] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (verses 7-8).

If we, now Christians, say that we are already perfect -- that we never slip up and make a mistake or commit a sin, we are deceiving ourselves. I knew a woman who deceived herself in this way. She claimed to be above sin -- claimed she never sinned. And although she was what most people would call a good woman, she actually was committing the biggest sin of all -- spiritual pride and vanity! She gloried in her "sinless" state. She lacked Christian humility.

But if, while walking down this lighted path with God, one stumbles and falls down, does God kick him aside?

Verse 9: "If we [we who are Christians -- it is not talking about the unconverted] confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. "

So notice the "IF." "If we confess our sins." When we stumble, we must admit it -- we must repent of it -- we must ask forgiveness. If we deny it, or blame it on somebody else, we shall not be forgiven. We must confess it -- to God!

"If we say that we [as Christians] have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." The context continues right on into the second chapter: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." In other words, we should not sin -- we must strive to avoid any sin. God gives us no license to sin. But, " ... if any man sin, we [we Christians] have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins [those of us who are Christians]: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (chapter 2:1-3). But, of course He is the propitiation for the sins of the unconverted in the world only when they come to real repentance, and faith in Christ.

Real Conversion -- A Process

Because many do not correctly understand the whole above- mentioned process, they become discouraged. And some even give up even trying to live a Christian life. And why? Because of the false notion that a Christian is one who becomes PERFECT at one fell swoop, or that one cannot become a Christian until he has broken all wrong habits, and made himself righteous.

It's vital to UNDERSTAND how true Christianity REALLY works! The newly begotten Christian must grow up, spiritually. What would you think of a human baby, who became 6 feet tall all at once, without growing up? The growing up process requires TIME. There is an instant when a person receives the impregnating Holy Spirit of God -- when he first becomes a Christian. But he is only a spiritual infant. He must grow up spiritually.

The newly converted person, in his mind and heart, sincerely has ABOUT-FACED! He has actually gained contact with GOD, and received God's Holy Spirit. God's own divine NATURE has now been conceived within him. BUT THAT'S ALL: It is merely conceived -- not yet full grown! He is still human -- mortal -- flesh and blood. He is still composed of matter, not Spirit.

Understand this! For nearly 6,000 years, humanity has been going in the WAY OF pride and vanity, selfishness and greed, a lack of outgoing concern for others -- the spirit of competition, opposition, strife, effort to acquire, and to exalt the self. Humans have been filled with self-gratification, jealousy, envy, resentment toward others, a spirit of rebellion against authority and hostility toward God and the Law of God.

The Christian must overcome these tendencies. The Christian must develop the righteous CHARACTER to choose the right way, and resist the wrong -- to discipline the self in the way he ought to go, instead of the way of self-desire and vanity.

Perfect Character

God's PURPOSE in having created humanity -- in having caused YOU to be born -- is to reproduce Himself. (Write for our free booklet "Why Were You Born?")

God, above all things, is PERFECT, RIGHTEOUS Character! God is able to create character within us; but it must be done as a result of our independent free choice. We, as individual separate entities, have our part in the process.

What is perfect character? It is the ability, in a separate entity with free moral agency, to come to the KNOWLEDGE of the right from the wrong -- the true from the false -- and to CHOOSE the right, and possess the WILL to enforce self-discipline to DO the right and resist the wrong.

Like muscle, character is developed, and grows by exercise. My name is Armstrong. I suppose I could make my arm slightly stronger, and develop the muscle, by constantly bending it back and forth at the elbow. But if I pull, or push, against some heavy weight or resistance, the muscle will develop much faster. There is within us this NATURE that exerts a heavy pull against that perfect righteous character -- to give us something to strive against for the VERY PURPOSE OF STRENGTHENING AND DEVELOPING RIGHT CHARACTER!

God's CHARACTER travels in the direction of His Law -- the way of LOVE. It is an outgoing CONCERN for others. God has that character! He has an outgoing concern for you and for me. He GAVE His only begotten Son to reconcile us to Him and make the JOYS of His character and everlasting life possible for us (John 3:16). He showers on us every good and precious gift. He even puts within us HIS DIVINE NATURE (II Peter 1:4) -- when we repent and turn from the WRONG ways of THIS WORLD, begin to resist it, and turn TO Him through faith in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour!

God's divine nature is the nature of love -- of giving, serving, helping -- of outgoing concern. It is also the nature of humility.

Now when one is converted -- has repented, and turned from this world's false WAYS -- has at once received God's Holy Spirit -- his humanity -- his HUMAN nature does not flee. It too, remains. It still exerts a pull. We still live in THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD, and it exerts a pull. God still allows Satan to be around; and HE exerts a pull.

So we now have THREE PULLS to RESIST -- to OVERCOME! We must now overcome these three: Satan, this world, and our own SELVES. We have to battle against these three, in order to develop and strengthen RIGHT CHARACTER within us. God says plainly it is THE OVERCOMERS who shall be saved -- who shall REIGN with Christ! (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 21:7.)

God's Help

No human being is strong enough to do this BY HIMSELF! He must seek, and IN FAITH receive, the help and power of GOD. Even with God's power he will not overcome such forces easily or all at once. IT IS NOT EASY! Christ plainly said the way to ultimate salvation is hard, difficult (Matt. 7:13, 14). It's a constant BATTLE -- a struggle against self, the world, and the devil. The creation of CHARACTER comes through EXPERIENCE. It takes TIME!

This development is a PROCESS. It is a matter of GROWTH -- DEVELOPMENT. It requires, to become PERFECT, full and right KNOWLEDGE of the very Word of God; because Jesus taught that we must live by EVERY WORD OF GOD (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

The natural, unconverted mind cannot fully and rightly UNDERSTAND the Scriptures of God. But the Holy Spirit opens the mind to this spiritual comprehension. The acquisition of this KNOWLEDGE, in itself, is a procedure requiring TIME. It is the DOERS of this Word, not hearers only, who shall be saved (Romans 2:13).

But can any man DO, immediately and all at once, this new WAY he now learns about? Can any man, all at once, break all HABITS he now sees are wrong? No, he finds he has a FIGHT against acquired former habits.

He still has this PULL of human nature to overcome. This nature is A LAW working within him -- produced by the broadcasting of Satan the devil -- the Prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). This whole world is in tune with the very mind of the devil (Rev. 12:9).

The Apostle Paul calls this pull of human nature the law of sin and death.

Paul was converted. Paul was a real Christian. He had repented, accepted Christ, and received the Holy Spirit. With his MIND, he wanted with all his heart, and in real intense sincerity, to DO God's WAY! But did Paul DO it perfectly?

Let him tell. LISTEN!

Paul's Experience

"For we know that the Law is spiritual," he wrote, "but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." He is speaking of human nature within him. He continues, " ... for to WILL is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:14-23).

The law of his mind is the Law of God -- the Ten Commandments. The law "in his members" is human nature. Then Paul cries out. " ... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ..." Then he thanks God -- that GOD WILL -- through Jesus Christ, and by the power of His HOLY SPIRIT. BUT IT TAKES TIME!

The truly converted Christian will find that he often stumbles, under temptation, and falls down -- even as a physical child learning to walk often falls down. But the year-old child does not get discouraged and give up. He gets up and starts out again.

THE TRULY CONVERTED CHRISTIAN IS NOT YET PERFECT! GOD LOOKS ON THE HEART -- the inner MOTIVE -- the real intent! If he is trying -- if he gets up whenever he falls down, and in repentance asks God's forgiveness, and sets out to do his very best NOT TO MAKE THAT MISTAKE AGAIN -- and to persevere with renewed effort to OVERCOME, God is rich in mercy toward that man in his striving to overcome.

I think it should be apparent by now that the newly converted Christian is not PERFECT all at once. He does not -- must not -- commit sin deliberately and willfully in a spirit and attitude of rebellion. That's what he has repented of! He wants to live completely above sin. But to live perfectly would require all spiritual KNOWLEDGE. He would have to live by EVERY WORD of the Bible. The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual perception so he can UNDERSTAND the Bible. And to understand all the Bible TAKES TIME. We have to GROW into the KNOWLEDGE of HOW to live perfectly without sin.

A Christian may, from force of habit, or under weakness and temptation, sin. But if he is a Christian, he is immediately repentant, and on this repentance Christ's sacrifice cleanses his sin (I John 1:7-9).

Converted people often are under heavier temptation than before conversion. They are STRIVING against sin, STRIVING to overcome. But they are not yet perfect. Sometimes they are caught off guard. They may actually sin. Then they WAKE UP, as it were, and realize what they have done. They REPENT. They are filled with remorse -- truly sorry -- disgusted with themselves. They go to GOD, and CRY OUT for HELP -- for more power and strength from God to OVERCOME (Hebrews 4:16).

This is the WAY of the Christian! It is the way of a constant BATTLE -- a striving against SIN -- a seeking God in earnest prayer for help and spiritual POWER to overcome. And if they are diligent, they are constantly GAINING GROUND. They are constantly GROWING in God's KNOWLEDGE, from the BIBLE. They are constantly rooting out wrong habits, driving themselves into RIGHT habits. They are constantly growing closer to GOD through Bible study and prayer. They are constantly growing in CHARACTER, toward perfection, even though not yet perfect.

What If One Dies?

But, someone may ask, what if one's life is cut off, and he dies before he has attained this perfection? Is he saved, or lost? The answer is that we shall never obtain absolute perfection in this life.

I said, earlier, that a person who is converted does receive the Holy Spirit at a definite time -- all at once! Not the full measure Christ had -- he is not at once full grown spiritually -- only a spiritual babe in Christ. Yet he is then a changed, converted person -- changed in mind, in attitude, in the direction he has set himself to travel. Even though he has not yet reached perfection -- even though he may have stumbled under temptation, and taken a spiritual fall -- as long as, in his mind and heart, he is earnestly striving to travel GOD'S WAY, to overcome and grow spiritually -- as long as God's Spirit is in him -- as long as he is being LED BY the Spirit of God, he is a begotten SON OF GOD.

If, anywhere along this life's journey, that life is cut short, such a man will be resurrected -- saved -- immortal in God's Kingdom.

Never Give Up and Quit

It is only the one who QUILTS and GIVES UP (Hebrews 10:38) -- who REJECTS God, and God's WAY, and rejects Christ as his Saviour -- who neglects or turns FROM this direction of GOD'S WAY, in his mind and heart (in his inner INTENT) who deliberately and intentionally in his mind -- or, from continued neglect -- TURNS FROM Christ -- who is lost.

If, once having been converted, having received God's Spirit, and TASTED of the joys of GOD'S WAY, one deliberately rejects that way, makes the DECISION, not under stress of temptation, but deliberately and finally, NOT to go God's way, then God says it is IMPOSSIBLE to renew such a one to repentance. He would have to REPENT of that decision. But if he WILLFULLY made it, not in a time of temptation, but calmly, deliberately, willfully, then he just WILL NOT ever repent of it.

But anyone who FEARS he may have committed the "unpardonable sin" -- is perhaps worried about it, and HOPES he has not committed it, and still wants to have God's salvation -- no such individual has committed it -- such a one MAY repent, and go right on to salvation IF HE WANTS To!

(If you would like a booklet that thoroughly expounds and explains all about "the unpardonable sin," write for our free publication on the subject. Its thought-provoking title is "What Do You Mean -- "The Unpardonable Sin"?" It will make the truth plain.)

What To Do?

If you see a Christian do something wrong, DON'T SIT IN JUDGMENT AND CONDEMN -- that's God's business to judge, not yours! Let's have compassion and mercy -- WE don't know the inner heart of others -- only GOD does!

And if you, yourself, have stumbled and fallen down, DON'T BE DISCOURAGED! Get up and press on ahead!

God looks on the heart -- the attitude -- the intent. As long as one, in his heart, has the real desire to walk God's WAY with Him -- is deeply sorry and repents when he commits the occasional sin -- and is seeking to overcome sin, and to make God's way his habitual way of life, he will stumble on occasion, but if he confesses it and repents, he will be forgiven. But, if he is diligent in his Christian life, his occasional stumbling will become less and less -- he will be making good progress, overcoming, GROWING spiritually and in righteous godly character.

What is your attitude? When you have sinned, have you been carelessly indifferent about it? You are on dangerous ground. Do you justify it, feel others are to blame? That will never justify your sins. Do you still desire to go God's Way? Then it's not too late. Turn from sins, CONFESS your sins -- to God. REPENT! Pick yourself up, with Christ's helping hand, and go on overcoming and GROWING spiritually.

(And if you are one who has NEVER really repented, been baptized and received God's Holy Spirit -- and yet earnestly desire to -- you may want to get in contact with one of God's true ministers. See page 25 for details.)

But remember, once you know you have really repented and been forgiven, don't repeat the sin(s), but FORGET it. As the Apostle Paul wrote, FORGETTING those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).