

THE OLD PATHS

Volume 23, Issue 39

November 27, 2016

Overlooking Prospective Converts

Jarrod Jacobs

A lament I hear at times is the fact that “we” are “not converting more people.” Sometimes, folks reminisce about by-gone days when folks were converted to the Lord by the “dozens” in gospel meetings, and how this is not happening today. Usually in conversations like these, a statement will be made to the effect that “we” are only “converting our own”.

What do you think of such statements that lament the fact that all we can do is “convert our own”? I have come to the conclusion that such people: 1) Help no one with such comments. 2) Have overlooked a large group of prospective converts that need to be saved.

The large group of prospective converts being overlooked is our children and other family members! Do they not have souls? Do they not need to be saved from sin (Rom. 3:23)? Do they not have value or worth? Yet, when people disparage the fact that we are, “only converting our own”, what is that saying about these dear ones? Are their souls not of equal value to the “strangers” in the community?

Please understand, I am not trying to negate the good work done in foreign fields, or to somehow squelch our efforts to convert neighbors, friends, and strangers. Their souls have worth (Matt. 16:26). I am just begging that we be balanced and stop ignoring one group of precious souls in favor of another.

Please take a moment and consider the emphasis the Bible places upon teaching our family members. Begin with Noah in Genesis 6-8. The Bible describes him as a “*preacher of righteousness*” (II Pet. 2:5). In addition to building the ark, Noah was preaching to the people and warning them of the coming Flood. Yet, had Noah not convinced his wife and his children’s families, concerning the coming Flood, he would have entered the Ark by himself (Heb. 11:6; I Pet. 3:20)! Was Noah a failure? Will we disparage Noah because “all he could do” was “convert his own”? I know what God said about his work (Ezek. 14:14-20). What say you?

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way ...” (Jer. 6:16).

Take the time to read John 1:40-42. Since Andrew was concerned about “converting his own,” we have the blessings of the confession Peter made (Matt. 16:16) the preaching of Peter (Acts 2-11), and the letters of Peter to Christians. Let us be thankful that Andrew showed such an interest in his brother. Had Andrew had the mentality of some, and looked disparagingly upon converting “his own”, who knows when the apostle Peter might have been introduced to the Lord!

Further, remember that one of the qualifications of elders is to have “believing children” (Titus 1:6). A man who would be an elder must instruct his children in the truth (I Tim. 3:4-5). At the same time, notice that nothing is said in the context about how many strangers or “alien sinners” he has won to Christ. Instead, the emphasis is placed upon the family life of this man who would be an elder/overseer over God’s flock!

In addition to the above, consider Eunice, Lois, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian Jailer, Aristobulus, Narcissus, Rufus, and Nereus. What do these people have in common? Each one of these people had family members who were brought to the Lord (Acts 16:1-5; II Tim. 1:5; Acts 10-11, 16:14-15, 25-34; Rom. 16:10, 11, 13, 15). What if these people were not active? What if they were more focused on the souls “out there” than they were the souls right in their own “back yard”? Are we guilty of overlooking prospective converts? Are we missing the forest for the trees?

Again, I am not disparaging efforts to reach “strangers” and folks in the world with the truth. We *must* do this (Mk. 16:15; I Thess. 1:8; II Tim. 4:2-5; etc.). Yet, let us also be balanced and remember our children and other members of our families have souls that need salvation. Even those “brought up in the church” will be lost if we are so focused on folks “out there” that we never teach the ones “right here” (Mk. 16:16)!

For those who lament the fact that “we” are “losing our young people”, is it possible that we are losing them because we did not take the time to teach them what is necessary to be saved and stay saved while we could? Were we focused on them when we should have been? I hope so! Let us not be guilty of overlooking prospective converts under our roof.

Seeing The Good In Suffering

Joel Raulerson

Many people today are guilty of making decisions and not considering the consequences of their decisions. We can see this in almost every aspect of life. The massive debt that many will

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incur with credit cards without planning for the future is an ever-present problem. Furthermore, the partaking of drugs and sexually promiscuous activities that destroy the body for a few passing moments of pleasure is epidemic. These are just a few ways to show that many often live only in the present without looking to the future. Not only do many live for the moment in the passing pleasure of sin, but some also wallow and focus on the suffering they have. This has contributed to the numerous cases of suicide and depression. Many think that there will never be an end to the suffering or hardship. What does the Bible have to say about this mentality? James 1:2-4 says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

I recognize that this is easier said than done. It is human nature that we focus on the suffering and hardships that we experience. To count it a joy when we are diagnosed with a terminal illness, when we lose a loved one, or when any other suffering comes our way seems laughable. However, the message James is telling us is that through such trials and sufferings we can grow and be complete. I have seen this personally with friends, including a 16-year-old girl who had brain cancer. Her saying throughout the cancer treatments was, “Life is more interesting when you are happy.” Do we have the same insight to look at the various trials we are experiencing and still put our faith and trust in God?

Seeing the good in suffering does not mean that we can never be sad, mourn, or have a sense of loss. The Bible tells us there is a time for such emotions (Ecc. 3:1-8). The fact is, James is warning us against going to that place of mourning and sorrow and staying there. When we gain the wisdom to be able to look ahead to see how our sufferings can actually help us, it makes the trials we are facing that much easier to bear. When we recognize the anguish and heartache of losing a loved one, it will allow us to sympathize and talk to others who have experienced the same thing. Perhaps the sickness we have will give us the chance to evangelize with those going through the same sufferings. Most importantly, it puts our lives in perspective that Satan perceives us a big enough threat to him to send trials our way and God knows we are strong enough to endure.

How then are we able to face all of these trials and temptations and have the foresight to look ahead and stay faithful? James 1:5-6 tells us, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven*

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and tossed by the wind.” As chaotic as our trials can get, it can be like a boat being tossed about by a storm. James tells us that we can still pray to God for wisdom and He will give it to us all generously. The next time we are suffering or facing trials, remember to pray to God for wisdom and guidance and we will receive it. Only then will we be able to see the good in our suffering and look ahead to how we can use our experiences to better serve God.



Spotlight On A Bible Verse: Acts 2:38

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” These words were spoken on the day of Pentecost following the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. On this day, when the Jews were rightly accused of killing Christ (Acts 2:23), they then asked what they could do (Acts 2:36). Acts 2:38 is the answer to this question, and by extension, the answer to our question when we ask what we must do to be saved from our sins! Have you repented of your sins? Have you been baptized? If not, why not? Repentance and baptism is necessary to remit (forgive) your sins and put you in a right relationship with God. Why are you waiting?

- Jarrod Jacobs



“I want the truth, give me book, chapter, and verse!”

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