A Golden Text On Conversion

(by Sewell Hall)

***“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”*** (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). This text describes the marvelous conversion that some of the members of the church in Corinth had experienced. From grossly immoral individuals who were on their way to eternal perdition they had been transformed into justified saints and heirs of the kingdom of God. The text reveals several significant facts about such conversion:

**The Necessity of Conversion**. This text makes it exceedingly clear that no one who is guilty of the sins listed can *“inherit the kingdom of God.”* To miss the kingdom of God is to spend eternity *“with the devil and his angels.”* The list includes sins involving sexual uncleanness, dishonesty (both legal and illegal), drunkenness and pride. These were the very sins for which Corinth was noted. Paul particularly warns against being deceived on this point. There are at least three other similar warnings in the New Testament. As Satan lied to Eve, saying, ***“You will not surely die”*** (**Genesis 3:4**) his servants have continued throughout history saying the same thing about other sins of which God has warned.

We can almost hear Satan’s servants in Corinth saying, *“Don’t be alarmed by Paul’s dire warnings. His training in Jewish culture explains his strait-laced narrow mindedness and homophobic bigotry. Our Greco-Roman culture is much more open because we have advanced far beyond the old fashioned Jewish culture based on a law supposedly handed down by their god 1500 years ago.”*  We can almost hear what they were saying then because of what we are hearing now. And to believe these servants of Satan today is just as surely to be deceived. Right and wrong do not change with changing culture or with passing centuries. If the teaching of Christ and His apostles regarding morality in the first century was to be heeded then, it must be heeded now. If the practices of which they warned are unthinkable in heaven, they are unthinkable for citizens of the kingdom of God on earth, regardless of how common they may be in any given society.

**The Possibility of Conversion**. Some tell us that homosexuals or drunkards are born that way and cannot change. If the Corinthians could cease such practices and become saints why is it impossible today? For arguments sake, we may allow that one person might be more tempted by such practices than another, but this is no excuse for submitting to the temptation. Even persons who are unquestionably heterosexual must control their desires. Under some circumstances they may have to abstain even for a lifetime; but heaven will surely be worth it. For every desire God has given us He has given us the power to control it. We are not slaves of our bodies’ desires. Paul said, ***“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”*** (**I Corinthians 9:27**).

**The Process of Conversion**.  Despite a very popular doctrine that God does it all, it is clear from this passage that man has a part. That the Corinthians had repented is unquestionably implied by the fact that they were no longer practicing the sins of which they had been guilty. Repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of conduct. God ***“commands all men everywhere to repent”*** (**Acts 17:30**). True, God provides the motivation (**Romans 2:4**) but man decides whether he will obey or disobey. The Corinthians decided to obey. Furthermore, they were baptized (**Acts 18:8**) and in doing so they were washed. Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures notes the following regarding the tense and voice of the verb washed: *“First aorist middle indicative, not passive, of apolouô. Either direct middle, ye washed yourselves, or indirect middle, as in* ***Ac 22:16****, ye washed your sins away (force of apo). This was their own voluntary act in baptism. …”* This was something they did. Their action did not merit or complete their conversion but their actions were the conditions on which God extended His mercy.

What they did in repentance and baptism, however, gave them no ground for boasting or claim of credit for their conversion, for without God’s grace, they would not have ceased the practice of sin (**Titus 2:11-12**) and without His love there would have been no forgiveness. No man can sanctify Himself – this is the work of the Spirit (**2 Thessalonians 2:13**, **1 Peter 1:2**). No man can justify himself – this is the work of God (**Romans 8:33**). The glory must be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who are once again united in **verse 11** as instruments of our salvation. ***“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”***