

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF THE PRIESTS

Example two of thirteen

Luke's description of the early days of gospel preaching in Jerusalem contains a remarkable statement. "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied;... and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). When he says the word increased he is speaking of the spread and influence of the gospel. When God's word gains a victory over even one soul, we can say the word of God increased. Two details of that increase are an increase in the number, and a large number of priests being converted. This is the only mention of priests being obedient. Hopefully others were, but if not, this is even more outstanding. A great number of priests would strengthen and encourage one another. This number must have severely hurt the cause of Judaism. It would also be a great encouragement to the other disciples. The power of the gospel shines forth as a great company of the leaders in the holiest city of Judea were convinced to accept the new faith. The word of God is true and these men saw it.

The priests were leaders in opposition to the preaching of the gospel (Acts 4:1,2,5,6;5:17; et al.) They were religious people who killed Christ, and later persecuted and killed His disciples. Perhaps some of the priests who were involved in bringing about Christ's death are now among the believers. The One they killed is now their Savior. No one should be satisfied just to be religious. Instead, be obedient to the faith revealed by the Spirit in the New Testament. The priests who opposed Christ were linked to the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. They would seem to be the least likely to accept the gospel. All the physical benefits of being priests as well as their standing in Jewish society were willingly surrendered to become a part of the body of Christ. Why? They embraced the gospel. They felt the power of the word and were converted to the truth of Christ. Paul described other converts in words applicable to the priests. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and

every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:4,5). They were convinced by evidence presented that Jesus was the Messiah, God's anointed, the one whom the prophets had foretold. The men who brought about the death of Jesus had been blinded by prejudice even to the point of admitting that Christ had performed miracles, but still rejected Him by claiming His power was from Satan (Matthew 10:25). Now they have swallowed their pride and confessed Him as Lord by obeying the gospel.

The word "faith" used in our text does not refer to their personal faith, but to the word they had been taught. This is obvious from similar uses of the word. "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Paul says there is "one faith" (Eph. 4:4-6). Many take offense at this, but don't be foolish to argue with the word of God. What is overlooked by many religious people who insist on "faith only" is the purpose of the gospel which is to bring men to obedience. "By the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith" (Romans 16:26). When one has obeyed the faith he has embraced all that is involved in such. One then must "continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard" (Col. 1:23).

The great company of priests were "obedient to the faith" just as are all who yield to the authority of Christ. When we study the examples of conversion in Acts we see how one obeys the faith. All conversions have different surroundings and circumstances, but all do exactly the same things. When it says they became "obedient to the faith," it makes clear that there is something in "the faith" that demands obedience. Since obedience follows faith, it is something additional to faith. It is not faith only. Faith must express itself in order for there to be "obedience to the faith." Obedience comes before justification by faith.

Looking at the examples in Acts it is clear that the first step on the path to salvation is to hear the gospel (Mark 16:15). This hearing must lead to faith. "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). Salvation has never been by faith only. We must obey. The first example on Pentecost established this (Acts 2:37,38).

The same pattern will be repeated in every case. "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). If you have not become a Christian, you need to obey now. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). (B. G. Echols)

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