

Obedience from the Heart

Ponder: Conversion or coercion?

Scripture: "You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17, NKJV).

Many motorists routinely drive several miles per hour above the speed limit until they spot a highway patrol car. Then they slow down, wait for the police vehicle to pass by, and resume speeding. While they technically obeyed the law for a short time, their hearts weren't in it. Their "obedience" resulted only from the threat of punishment.

God requires our obedience. And, yes, He will punish the disobedient. But He has always desired obedience from the heart. Some religions practice "conversion at the point of the sword." Conquered people are given an ultimatum: "Convert or die!" Such has never been the way of Christ.

Jesus didn't send the apostles with swords to slaughter those who rejected His gospel. Sad to say, more than a few have abused the name of Christ, persecuting and killing those who reject their misguided view of Christianity. But conversion by coercion is really no conversion at all! Genuine conversion must proceed from the heart.

Ancient Israel mechanically obeyed God in the Sinai wilderness, but in their hearts, they still hankered for the idols they knew in Egypt (see Amos 5:25-26). When good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah occasionally came to power in Judah, their reforms lasted only until the next king took over. The people's hearts simply weren't dedicated.

The gospel is for "whosoever will" (Rev. 2:17). Jesus said He would draw people to Himself, not drive them (Jn. 12:32). None reading this would use violence to "convert" someone, but neither should we badger people into the baptistry. Let us seek to persuade as Paul did (2 Cor. 5:11).

Hymn: "Give Me Thy Heart"

Prayer: Loving Father, help us to be obedient from our hearts and to lead others to do the same. In Jesus' name, Amen.