

a community called ...

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COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT.

BY REV. A. W. MANGUM.

If sinners entice thee, consent thou not. PROV. i, 10.

MY DEAR FRIEND: You have chosen religion. Your choice is wise. It has placed you in the way that leads to happiness and heaven. The pilgrimage is begun. It requires effort and vigilance for its consummation. You need *counsel*, and with sincerest sympathy I humbly offer it. Much that will help you is suggested by those words of warning first uttered by the inspired king: "IF SINNERS ENTICE THEE, CONSENT THOU NOT."

2 COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT.

These words clearly imply that you *may* or *may not consent*; that is, you have the power of choice. It implies that your will is free. Your consciousness tells you that this is so, and all the reasoning in the world cannot prove any thing against the experience of your own mind. Every body believes the same whatever their *professed* faith may be, for they consider it a virtue to do right, and a sin to do wrong. Besides, all mankind, in every variety of government, reward obedience and punish transgression in some way or to some degree, thereby declaring the *will* which determines actions to be free. The divine government is constructed on the same principles. So, no matter what others may say to the contrary, you are a moral agent.

Among the temptations to which you will be liable, it is more than probable that some may try to *convince you that you are not converted*, saying, "It is all excitement; you may be deceived; don't believe in conversion under such circumstances," etc. Remember that excitement exists in every thing of importance

but, owing to the sinfulness of the human heart, it is not condemned in any thing so much as in religion, which above all things is calculated to produce it. It requires some excitement to enable us to be in good earnest. So long as it is the offspring of *proper thoughts*, excitement is right and good. Of course, if it becomes so great as to prevent one from knowing what he is doing, it is objectionable; but it seldom if ever gets so high before *conversion*. Hence, it does not argue against the genuineness of your conversion. Again, you can hardly believe that God would deceive an honest heart. If you are sincere with God he will be sincere with you. If you have sought him *with all your heart* you have certainly found him. At any hazard don't take the advice of a poor, dark, benighted sinner about these things. If you want spiritual counsel, go to Christians; not to the unconverted, for the unconverted know nothing about it. "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth unto all liberally, and upbraideth not." *In the infancy of*
No. 26.

your experience you will have many doubts and fears that arise simply from your ignorance of spiritual life. Hence the value of the promise just quoted.

You may be tempted, on the other hand, to believe *the impossibility of so far losing your religion as to be in danger of losing your soul.* On this point, I pray you, beware! It is one of the most dreadful errors into which it is possible to fall. Turn to the revealed word of God. Read Ezekiel xviii, 26; also xxxiii, 1-20; 2 Cor. x; Hebrew vi, 3-6; 2 Peter ii, 21-27; Matthew xii, 43-45. From these passages you may see not only that you can lose all your religion, but that the case of the real backslider is *worse and more terrible* than it was before his conversion.

You will probably be *troubled about the doctrine of election*, with its horrible counterpart, reprobation. Be sure that whatever it means, neither that nor any other doctrine will necessitate your salvation unless you put your faith in Jesus and try to do your duty; for St. Peter says, "The rather, brethren, *give*

diligence to make your calling and election SURE." If they were *sure* already you would not be exhorted to *make* them *sure*. Common sense tells you this. If, after all the exhortations and warnings to pray and strive that are given in the Bible, you are presumptuous enough to depend on election for your salvation, and then in the end are lost, it will be your own fault, for the Bible teaches you better. God's decrees are all based on man's moral agency. They never have so interfered, and never will so interfere with our moral agency as to take away our accountability. God predestinated those that would *choose to be righteous* to salvation. When the apostles saw persons believing and obeying the Lord, they knew that those persons were of the class or character that God had chosen to save; but they had *chosen* and *striven* to become of tha. character. In other words, those who have *chosen* to do the will of God are "the elect;" for when they make that choice God will *choose* them.

You will often be enticed to *neglect duty*

and to commit sin. It is the pleasure and practice of some to seduce as many as they can from the fold of Jesus. The unregenerated heart is "enmity against God." "Men love darkness rather than light." The sinful are naturally prone to dislike righteousness in their friends. It may not be strong dislike, but it savors more of that than it does of approval. Who has not known a votary of intemperance to tear the folds of the serpent from his heart, and, with desperate struggles, contend against its charmings, and long and labor to be free? And when he was about succeeding, his old companions at the bowl, by taunt and entreaty, unnerved the arm of resolution, and the serpent coiled around his poor doomed heart again! Then those companions were glad, as devils are, and *laughed* in their fiendish joy. Who has not seen the same respecting our religion, that glorious reformation of life and soul? Alas for the truth that vice so fondly loves companionship! If the vicious see those who they think would make pleasant associates in dissipation, they

long to add them to their number, particularly if they are those who have joined them in their sinful pleasures in time past. The means used to effect this purpose depend on the circumstances, occupation, and general character of the tempted and the tempter. They are different in different persons, and may differ continually in the same person. They are, perhaps, most dangerous when they assail the points where you are weak by nature or old habits. The world knows too well where you are most insecure—most liable to surrender to temptation. They are very wise and cunning in their schemes. They will perchance lead you first into sins that appear very trivial, then gradually entice you farther, easing your unskilled conscience by such expressions as “There can be no great harm in that; Mr. A. is a good man, and he does so; religion doesn’t forbid innocent enjoyment; if you never do worse than that you’ll be sure of heaven,” etc. You may not know or consider that “little sins are pioneers to hell;” and you may not pause and reflect that “there

3 COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT

was a time when all the evil that has existed in the world was comprehended in one sinful thought, and all the evil now in our sin-stricken world is the ruinous progeny of one little sin." Caught by their devices, you may soon find yourself willfully sinning again, and instead of praying to be restored, you may *give up*, and with the stream of joy frozen in the heart, and the light of celestial hope gone out in the bosom, you may stagger back to the world, to worship its vanities, and grope your way to hell.

The devil, through his agents and agencies, will *adapt his temptations to the peculiar condition of your feelings*. When you are cheerful and pleasant, he will tempt you to levity and frivolity. When you are thoughtful and serious, he may tempt you to unbecoming despondency, or even partial despair. If there be any thing that the heart is very fond of, though it may be innocent in itself, Satan will connect some temptation with it. He will even join his temptations with your pious and devotional feelings. He knows how to "quote

Scripture for his purpose," for he tried it with our Saviour.

Be ever on the alert! This is a dangerous policy of our enemy. He comes to us then as an "angel of light." All that wears the badge of religion is not religion. This is true as to yourself, your friends and companions, social enjoyments, various institutions, and it is sometimes true of the Church and the pulpit. *There is nothing on earth so pure and holy but that temptation may be and is associated with it.*

If you have not already done so, let me advise you immediately to *unite with some branch of the Church of Christ*. Those who refuse or neglect to do this make rather *sorry* Christians, or give up entirely in a little while. You will need all the help you can get; and as, in the Church, you have more means of grace than *out* of it, you must join without delay. Your poor heart will be too much of the world at best, so you ought to separate from the world in every legitimate sense and manner.

You must decide as to which Church you will join. Be sure to join that one in which you think you can be most pious and do most good. In making this selection, don't delay in order to read all the creeds, and to consult with this and that friend. You know more about the different Churches from their practice and preaching than you would soon learn by waiting and reading, etc. Join *now* what you *now* think to be the best Church for you; and if you hereafter find you were mistaken, which is not probable, you can change.

And now, addressing you as a member of the Church of the Lord Jesus, my first and most earnest advice is that given by himself when speaking to his disciples: "What I say unto you *I say unto all*—WATCH!"

Your life is a probation; be not lulled to careless quietude till it is ended. Your life is to be a contest as long as it lasts. Keep the sentinels out till the warfare is ended and the victory won. Watch! for your company and circumstances may be dangerous. Watch! for what is safe to one is ruinous to another.

Watch! for the world has many charms to the young. Watch! for it is easy to be proud and hard to be humble. Watch! for there are marks which will always betray Satan to the true Christian. Watch! for when you *see* danger you can better guard against it. Watch! for the sooner you know you are tempted the easier it will be to escape unhurt.

My next advice is —PRAY! When Satan is working with you your refuge is prayer. To the Christian prayer is priceless; aye, it is indispensable to the life of his religion. It has as a means often subdued the flesh, overcome the world, conquered death, and opened the gates of glory.

But *pray in spirit and in faith*. All is not prayer that is called prayer. If it be without *faith*, it is like a purse without money; like a statue without life. Adopt as your rule that of an eminent Christian—never to cease praying till you believe you are heard, and expect God to answer you according to his wisdom and mercy.

12 COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT.

If you find it difficult to exercise faith, it will be of service to you to fix your heart upon the idea of the stupendous interest God feels for you. The Father has sacrificed vast treasures, sent men and angels, enlisted the armies of heaven, and the Son of his glory, to secure your soul unto happiness and heaven; so you cannot doubt that he would delight to bless you. You know that Jesus loves you—always loved you. He suffered for you, wept for you, bled for you, died for you. Then he loves you enough to prompt him, if possible, to bless you.

Think of this, and of the kind invitations, and even entreaties, of the Lord to come and feast upon his love and mercy. So will you be enabled to have sweet confidence in him, and to “pray in faith, nothing doubting.”

I exhort you next constantly to *remember your entire dependence upon God*. “Lean not to thine own understanding. in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” It is written in Isaiah: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is

stayed on thee ; for he trusteth in thee. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Cultivate by prayer and contemplation a close union with Christ. You may get to heaven without money, or pleasure, or fame, or genius, but you can "never go to heaven without Christ." And *improve every opportunity to do good.* Seek to be useful, to make others better and happier. This is a sure way to grow better and happier in your own heart. Mercy blesses both the giver and the receiver. Rejoice when you consider that good words, good deeds, and good influences shall live, and prosper, and expand, to make bosoms glad and homes happy, and to redeem immortal beings even till time is no more. It was said by Dr. Johnson, "He who waits to do a great deal of good at one time will never do any thing." This is generally true. Hence, you must do good in little things, in every thing. Begin immediately ; look around you ; see who needs your help in word or deed. Do the good thing that is near you, be it ever so

14 COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT.

small, and then other opportunities will arise. He who does all the good he can will always find some good to do.

The simple scriptural measure of duty is ability. When the poor woman poured from the broken alabaster box the perfumed ointment on the head of Jesus, the Saviour said, "She hath done what she could." What we *can* is what we are to *do*. The servant who hath one talent intrusted to him by his lord was not expected to use five talents but he was expected to use one. On the other hand, the man who had the five talents would have come short of the duty he owed his master if he had improved only one, or two, or three, or even four. Nothing less than five satisfied the demands his employer made on him.

Finally, I exhort you to *be full of hope and joy*, because of your privileges and your destiny. Before you is enough to entice you more mightily than unnumbered worlds. The heaven you seek is a kingdom worthy of a lifelong battle. O for a home at last in that "city which hath foundations, whose builder

and maker is God!" Glorious things have been spoken of that city. Eye hath not seen such beauty as blooms in it. Ear hath not heard such melody as floats from its harps and tongues. Fancy hath never dreamed of all its charms, its thrills, its raptures, and its glories. It is all perfection; it is unchanging and eternal! *Those who live there are* "SATISFIED."

Such and so glorious is the Eden of the blessed, the saints' everlasting home in heaven. Onward, then, till the prize is won! Though ten thousand worlds entice you to falter or to wander, consent not, but *strive* till you have entered the gates of the city. Let the song of your soul be,

"How sweet to reflect on those joys that await me
 In yon blissful region, the haven of rest,
 Where glorified spirits with welcome shall greet me,
 And lead me to mansions prepared for the blest.
 Encircled with light, and with glory enshrouded,
 My happiness perfect, my mind's sky unclouded,
 I'll bathe in the ocean of pleasure unbounded,
 And range with delight through the Eden of love.

16 COUNSELS TO A YOUNG CONVERT.

"Hail, blessed estate! Hail ye songsters of glory!
Ye harpers of bliss, soon I'll meet you above!
And join your full choir in rehearsing the story,
'Salvation from sorrow through Jesus's love.'
Though prison'd in earth, yet by anticipation
Already my soul feels a sweet prelibation
Of joys that await me when free from temptation;
My heart's now in heaven, the Eden of love."

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