



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## “Convinced?”

By T. Sean Sullivan

As a preacher of the word of God, I am directed to "convince, rebuke, and exhort," and in proper measure, all three are necessary parts of instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-5). It is my daily prayer to have the wisdom to teach God's people and to convince those outside of Christ to seek salvation (James 1:5). There is, however, an insurmountable obstacle in the way of my goal of convincing others. That obstacle is what they have convinced themselves of, before I ever even speak. Many outside influences are distracting and misleading souls, but the most powerful deterrent is convincing themselves that they cannot succeed. Many believe in their own failure, so they quit before they start. Let's consider some things that people say to themselves, and what they should be saying instead. Let's consider these points.

### **Convinced: "I am too afraid"**

Fear is the most powerful emotion. All other emotions have elemental fears. Fear can forcibly paralyze us or propel us away on a wild tangent. We know that fear is one of Satan's tools (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul told Timothy that God did not give them a spirit of fear. God is not the source of this type of distracting fear.

Fear holds many from their necessary salvation. Family reactions pose great fears. Some are afraid of how their obedience will reflect on their loved ones (most often those who have already passed on, who did not obey "this way"). We must remember, every soul has their own opportunities; we need to do what is right (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Timothy 2:15). Also, IF they are "lost", we know from Luke 16:27-28 that they do not want you to be lost with them. Friends' reactions can also pose great fears. Friends can be our greatest support or our greatest weakness. They are our support when they encourage us to greater things (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). They are our weakness when they corrupt our "good habits" (Proverbs 14:12; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Peter 4:1-5).

Some fear what they will have to give up: Many like their vices, but not one of those things improves our lives-they are detrimental (Galatians 5:19-21). Present life priorities also hold many from obedience (Matthew 6:25-33; Luke 14:15-20). Do not be convinced that fear is a valid excuse not to be saved today.

### **Convinced "I'll never be good enough anyway"**

It is so tough to overcome and succeed when we begin in defeat. Satan wants to convince us that we like the way we are too much to change. He wants us to think; even if we try to change, we will still fail and go back. Many times, this defeated mindset comes from exaggerating others' perfection; idealizing others, and not being able to see themselves achieving the same level of success. Some are indeed more at ease with truthful living because they have been at it a while: They are "no longer children" (Ephesians 4:14). They have their "senses exercised" (Hebrews 5:14). But they need forgiveness, just like you and I (Ephesians 2:1-13).

If we convince ourselves that we will fail, we will never even begin to try. In truth, every one of us can, with determination, achieve salvation (Mark 16:15-16). There is no conclusion less truthful than not being able to do something that God expects of us. In Acts 17:30, we learn that God has issued a command for "all men, everywhere" to repent. By speaking this command, God declares an expectation for "all men, everywhere". God is not wrong-if God expects that this ability to repent is within you, it must be! This certainly goes hand in hand with the Great Commission's call to preach the gospel to every creature [all men, everywhere] (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). All who desire salvation are capable of achieving it, unless they do not try or decide to give up. Do not be convinced of defeat before you start. Obey God and be saved today.

### **Convinced: "I'll do it later"**

Remember what Satan said to Eve in the Garden? He said, "...you will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). He has told this lie to countless numbers of souls, in the hope that they will postpone their obedience to God. He knows that you likely will never find a convenient time to obey. There are so many who, "someday," like King Agrippa in Acts 24:25.

When will a convenient time ever be? Reality check: There is no time in our modern lives that will be less busy. The right time is the only time we have to do anything we do; that time is right now. The time to obey is when you are cut to the

heart by truth (Acts 2:36-39). The time to obey is when you believe (Acts 16:30-34). The time to obey is today (2 Corinthians 6:2). Your life has no guaranteed continuation (James 4:14).

Do not let an excuse today become your greatest regret in eternity. Do not be convinced that you will always have "later"; be saved today.

Conclusion:

As long as any individual continues to convince themselves that they shouldn't obey the gospel, they will remain apart from the blessings of being in Christ. Excuses will push the Lord further and further away, until it is too late. There is something better to be convinced of. Be convinced of confidence, not fear (2 Timothy 1:7). Be convinced of success, not predetermined defeat (1 John 5:13). Be convinced that today is the day to be saved (2 Corinthians 6:2). Becoming convinced of the truth is a good start, but you must act on God's instructions. Take action in obedience to God right now.

## Toying with God's Mercy

Mark W. White

I received a letter from a woman who is not a member of the church of Christ. She is married to a man who is a member, and charges him with emotional and mental abuse. She is thinking of divorcing him, and wanted to know— "how do I divorce him and still enter the kingdom of Heaven?" Furthermore, she stated, "I am hoping that by confessing my sins, repenting and being baptized, I will be forgiven."

I assured her that God does not approve of her husband's behavior and that he needs to repent, seek competent counseling, and change his ways. In fact, I also told her that if he would not do so, the church where he is a member should insist upon it, or else the church must withdraw their fellowship from him and refuse giving him acceptance (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). The church cannot harbor either men or women who will abuse their families and their mates.

But her question still bothered me for a second reason. She was hoping to be able to divorce her husband but later "repent," "be baptized" and "be forgiven." She knew she did not have the scriptural cause for divorce (fornication, i.e., "sexual immorality") stated in Matthew 19:9. Yet, somehow, she wanted out of the marriage with an easy means of forgiveness for walking away from her vow to live with this man "for better or for worse as long as we both shall live."

May we, with impunity, deliberately disobey God and then toy with His mercy and grace? Can one just do what he knows to be wrong and accept God's forgiveness on a "deferred-payment plan?" This puts God at man's mercy! It is equivalent to "God, you may forgive me now." How unthinkable! Paul informed the Romans (6:1,2) that it was deplorable to treat God's grace so shabbily. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!" was the inspired apostle's response to such nonsense.

I begged her to reconsider her course. While sympathizing with her valid distresses and abuse, I could not encourage her to make a bad situation worse. With proper admonition and teaching, perhaps her husband will repent of sin and change his ways. She can obey the Gospel, become a Christian, and make a godly home with him. This will not be easy, of course, but it is not impossible, if both parties are willing to do what is right.