

Mafia to Mormon

A friend recently loaned my wife a book by this title, "Mafia to Mormon." In it a man tells of his transition from being a very important member of the Mafia to being a faithful member of the church. As you can guess from the title, the circumstances of his conversion are remarkable, and the book truly is inspirational. If you have the opportunity I would happily recommend that you read it.

However, even as I was reading the story I realized that the importance of the book was not the circumstances of his conversion, remarkable as they were. After all, my wife also has a remarkable conversion story to tell, as do thousands (if not millions) of others. The important factor is the strength of the testimony this man received, and how he changed his life to live in accordance with that testimony.

The word conversion itself gives some clues as to what is going on here. Conversion means a change or transformation from one state or nature to another. In conversion we are changed from the state of the natural man to a creature of God. Romans chapter 8 contains some of Paul's teachings on this matter. It is, in fact, the central theme of the whole chapter, but verse 13 perhaps summarizes it well.

For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

The key is that the change is accomplished through a power greater than our own; indeed, it is only by the grace of God that we are changed. And so it is not enough simply to know that the Gospel is true¹. In fact, it is not enough to change our actions to be in accord with the teachings of the Gospel. Knowledge and actions are important, but the ultimate goal is to change who we are. When this change comes we live the Gospel because it is what we want to do, it is our nature to do God's will.

In that sense conversion is not the province of those who meet the church after the age of eight. Every soul who would live with God in the eternities must receive this change of heart, and so each one must become truly converted.

In my own life I look at significant steps that have contributed to my conversion, but I am not convinced that the process is complete – in

¹ James 2:18,20

fact, I know it is not, because my nature still leads me at times to do things contrary to the will of the Lord. So each of us is a conversion story at some stage of completeness. In that sense we need not look at others and envy their experiences, whether it is the new member of the church with the miraculous story of how the Gospel came into their life, or if it is the president of the church who has lived such a life of holiness that he is an example to the whole church. We are all in the same process. We are entitled to the miracles, and some part of our life is probably an example to others, even if we are not aware of it.

And so I know the church is true, and I am humbly grateful for the testimony of the Spirit of God that has imparted that knowledge. I believe that my actions bear witness to the fact that "I'm trying to be like Jesus."² But the measure that matters most is, what have I become? The answer to that question may not be final for a great while yet.