

The Conversion I had almost given up trying to change, but one day, mainly because I liked the new pastor, I went and talked to him. My biggest sin, one I am still fighting today, was anger. If somebody criticized or hurt me in any way, I would lash out. I lived by the motto,

“Roses are red and violets are blue / If you hit me I’ll hit you.”

There were reasons why. My mother was that way and I got it from her. Also, I grew up in a rough mill village, was small for my age, and had a “wandering eye”. I was the target of bullies who called me “cock-eyed”; pushed me around and sometimes made me give them my lunch money.

In middle-school I grew tall and worked out a lot to make the football team. I made “All State”, not because I was a good running back or fast. It was it was because I attacked anyone who tried to tackle me, and fought and clawed and did some other things to get at least five yards.

I was depressed when I was a child. I inherited it from my mother and holding my anger in created depression. {I learned years later that Herschel Walker was bullied as a child and he took out his anger on people trying to tackle him. His anger was so intense that he wanted to leave college and go to Vietnam where he could kill people.}

I told the pastor about my anger and told him I could never promise God I **would “turn the other cheek”** like Jesus asks us to, and I did not want to be a hypocrite. That wonderful man of God said, “Bob, I am not sure I can turn the other cheek.”

I said “Man you have to, you are the pastor.” He laughed and said, I would like to be able to do it and I hope I would, but let me ask you this, would you ask the Lord to help you become the kind of person who could do that. I said yes and he said, that is all God wants, that is repentance.

The Choice A few weeks later I got out of my car, stood beside the road and looked up to heaven. I thought of Jesus praying from the cross, “**Father, forgive them**” and said, “Lord, if you forgave

those people that beat you and spit on you, I believe you will forgive me. Please forgive me and help me become the right kind of person.”

In the Southern Baptist culture, you let people know you have become a Christian by walking an aisle and joining a church. About three weeks after my conversion beside the road I did that.

God called me to preach one year after my conversion. My first sermon was about the criminal on the cross beside Jesus. He heard Jesus offer of forgiveness and he prayed and found salvation. I preached on him first, because I identified with him. I don’t remember ever having heard the word “saved” or “born again” but I had experienced both. This in it is an excerpt from that message.

He did not deserve to be forgiven. He joined in with mocking by the howling hissing mob at the feet of Jesus who would not even let him die in peace. He could not witness for Jehovah; pass a test on who Jesus was; be baptized in a Catholic church; or join a Baptist Church and work himself to death, etc. All he could do was cry out for mercy.

When the sun rose that morning, he was a child of the devil, when it set that night, he was a child of God; that morning he hurled insults at Jesus, that night he was singing praises to Him on Hallelujah Ave. I identified with him and still do. I loved then and I love now the words of the hymn

“The vilest offender, who truly believes / that moment from Jesus, a pardon receives / The dying thief rejoiced to see, that fountain in his day / And there may I, thought vile as he, / wash all my sins away”

Billy Graham said everyone Jesus called he called publicly, and quoted Jesus saying,

“If you confess me before men I will confess you before my Father in heaven, but if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my Father in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32)