

The Holy Spirit in Conversion

(The third lecture on the theme of the Holy Spirit given at Hindley Bible School, 1956). Readings: 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; John 6:30-47.

THE gospel address delivered by Peter following the healing of the lame man who begged in Solomon's porch was directed to an audience brought together by the miracle. To the audience, Peter testified the death of Christ and, referring to the part they had played in it, said, 'And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers: but these things which God before had shown by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath fulfilled.' Then he went on to say, 'Repent ye and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:17-19). The Lord Himself said, 'This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again ['should be converted,' A.V.], and I should heal them' (Matt. 13:15). See also Mark 4:12: 'Lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them.'

Conversion or turning to God is necessary if we would have our sins blotted out, and escape their consequence, which is eternal separation from the presence of God.

The Scriptures in Conversion

To understand the Spirit's teaching we must attend to what is written in the inspired Scriptures. The 19th Psalm, verse 7 says, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' The perfection of the law of the Lord lies in its being complete, all sufficient, and altogether necessary. 'Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely into every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16).

Turn to the eighth chapter of the Roman letter and read verse 2: 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death.' After reading a statement like that, I want to ask you the question, 'When and how did this take place?' In reply you would no doubt say, 'Paul answers in Romans 6:17-18: "But thanks be to God, that whereas ye were servants [bondservants] of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered: and being made free from sin ye became servants [bondservants] of righteousness".' So if we would be converted by the law of the Lord, we have got to learn God's will as expressed by His Spirit in His Word, and by obeying that teaching in its type, its figure, its form, its mould, we will be set free from the dominion of the tyrant 'sin' and will be turned over to God, who has redeemed us from such slavery by the blood of His Son.

How Conversion Takes Place

I suggest that 'coming to Christ,' 'obeying the gospel,' 'being obedient to the faith,' and 'being converted,' are interchangeable terms in referring to our activity in 'turning to God.' 'And having been made perfect [complete in His office as Saviour], he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation' (Heb. 5:9). From Hebrews 7:25 we

learn, 'Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost [completely] them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

John 6:44, 45: 'No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.' Note: God draws people by teaching them those things which were before spoken of Christ, as well as those things which by the Spirit have been revealed in the last times. The context or setting of John 6:44, 45 indicates why the Lord spoke these things. The Jews were obstinate in not believing in Him who had come to them from God. It is evident that the human will must be in a condition whereby it is willing to come (see also John 7:17). The Lord said: 'And ye will not come to me, that ye may have life' (John 5:40), so indicating that He was condemning them for not coming to Him. Surely He was not condemning His Father for not drawing them. The Father had drawn them; He had taught them His Word; had come to them; but they would not learn. Their continued disobedience resulted in numbness, blindness, deafness, and lack of understanding. With what tender pathos Jesus said, 'O Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Matt. 23:37). If we are not willing to be drawn God cannot draw us.

No evidence of 'secret election' is found in the Scriptures. In John 6:39, 40 we read, 'And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him should have eternal life: and I will raise him up at the last day. Compare this with verse 44 and I think you will see my point, by the statement, 'I will raise him up at the last day.'

1 Cor. 2:10-14: 'But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God: that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things things with spiritual. Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually examined.'

If I were asked what are the chief agencies used by God to bring the knowledge of Himself to man, I would suggest: that the hearts of men must be opened for the reception of God's Word as the seed of the Kingdom; by the evidence of God's providence, by the influence of the children of God and by the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. These influences prepare hearts as good ground to receive the seed, the word of God. A man's acceptance of any truth depends upon his attitude towards that truth.

In the natural creation (Gen. 1), the Spirit and the Word are seen in close co-operation in bringing forth the universe. In the new or spiritual creation (conversion), we see the same co-operation. In Acts 26:17 we read Paul's commission: 'Unto whom I now send thee to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan

unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me.' Note, Paul says that sanctification was by faith which is in Christ Jesus, while in Romans 15 : 15 he says, 'But I write the more boldly unto you in some measure, as putting you again in remembrance because of the grace that was given me of God, that I would be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.'

Read Romans 15 : 17-20 and Acts 26 : 19-23. I would draw your attention to a means which God used in order that the Gentiles should hear His Word. The Holy Spirit helped Paul in time of persecution, so that he could say, 'Having obtained help from God, I continue unto this day.' Thus we see how by providence and by His Holy Spirit the Word came to us.

The Holy Spirit convicts (see John 16:8-11). How does the Holy Spirit convict? How does the Holy Spirit convince? From a study of the book of conversions known as the Acts of the Apostles, we see that men were convicted in each instance by the preaching of the Word, or Gospel, by men who were Spirit inspired (*e.g.*, read Acts 2 : 37).

Preaching and Conversion

Because men must call upon the name of the Lord in order to be saved, Paul said, 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom. 10 : 13-14). Because faith comes by hearing the word of God, Jesus said, 'Go ye, therefore, and make disciples,' 'Go unto all the world and preach the gospel.' In Luke's record of the Great Commission we learn that the apostles were to preach the word, were to be given that word, and the power—ability—to preach that word by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24 : 44-49).

Acts 10 and 11 show us, further, how the Holy Spirit operated. He sent the preacher to the house of Cornelius who said, 'Now, we are all here, present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord.' Remember also the words which the angel said to Cornelius, concerning the part Peter would play, 'Who shall speak unto thee words whereby thou shalt be saved, and all thy house.'

The Holy Spirit's Activities

The Word of God is a living word because the Spirit of God is in it. The Holy Spirit works in and through and with the Word of God. He does not merely stand by overseeing the work but is working with the world. Peter said, 'Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth and the unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from a clean heart: having been begotten again not of a corruptible seed but of an incorruptible seed through the word of God, which liveth and abideth.' It is a living and abiding word because the Spirit of God is the life of it. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' *i.e.*, enjoy God, experience God. This experience is referred to as the Kingdom of God. 'Except a man be born again he cannot see [experience, enjoy] the Kingdom of God. 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.'

The Holy Spirit and God's Word together operate for our conversion. Just as the seed is the vehicle of life in the vegetable world, so the Word is the vehicle of the life which is the Spirit of God, by which we are begotten to be sons of God, and by which, through our obedience to the Word, we enter into the new state by birth to breathe the atmosphere of the new life, the Spirit of God.

tee that many of them have never measured up to them.

As for Bro. Crosthwaite's letter, it is indeed sad to see a brother of his standing, and one so well loved and respected, continually descend to personal references, and violent anti-Americanism, in discussions of this sort. Besides being irrelevant, such an attitude can only do harm to himself, and to other brethren who have adopted the same tactics, and to the Brotherhood as a whole. Surely, our brother must see that there is a world of difference between opposing the modernistic Disciples' group in America (with whom we are in no way connected), and defending a British anti-scriptural innovation. Surely, he can see the harm such an innovation has done?

In its more developed form (the Co-operation), it has damaged the work in this country, and almost completely wrecked the work in countries that have copied its pattern, such as Australia and New Zealand. It is almost unbelievable that our good brother, who has done more than any other to bring the churches in this country back to the New Testament pattern, should now stand in the way and condemn a complete return—the logical end of his own teaching—as apostacy, and Americanism! We beg our brother, in Christian love, to cease clouding the issue with matters that have no bearing upon it, and get back to basic truths.

L. CHANNING.

Dear Bro. Editor,

In September issue, Bro. Wilson expresses surprise that Bro. Channing and I did not offer Scripture references to refute his claim that the committee has divine approval. He says that in view of our assertion that conferences and committees are unscriptural, 'one would naturally expect many passages condemning them.'

Is our brother really serious in this assertion? Does he believe that the things he defends are right because the New Testament does not condemn them? One might with equal logic ask where the practice of kissing the Pope's toe is condemned, or the 'elevation of the host,' or praying to Mary. These things are not mentioned—are they therefore right?

Further, it should be evident to our brother that he is the one who should produce Scripture. He claims that the committee has the approval of God.

Where does the Word of God indicate this? The simple fact is that the New Testament is completely silent about these human organisations—there is no mention of them whatever. That is the strongest argument against them. Jehovah has not 'required this at our hand.' I have had people say to me, 'Where does the Bible say you should not sprinkle babies?' On the basis of our brother's reasoning the silence of the Scripture would justify that act—or any other counted an 'expedient.' Let us restate the question thus: 'Where are the passages *authorising* these human institutions?'

Our brother did not answer the query concerning the 'Co-operation.' Would it be right to organise committees for women's work, temperance work, overseas work, etc? Is the 'Co-operation' (apart from modernism and worldly practices) Scriptural? If one committee is permissible for one aspect of the Lord's work, why not others? As Bro. Crosthwaite refers to the General Evangelist Committee (the beginning of the 'Co-operation') perhaps he too would consider this same query. If those brethren were right in forming that committee, were they also right in forming another dozen or more, for various aspects of the work, with a committee of committees (the 'Central Council') over all the committees? Could we return to the Co-operation if it abandoned modernism, worldliness and association with the sects?

The references to Mk. 9 : 38, Lu. 9 : 49 are unfortunate. Jesus spoke of the man who did 'a miracle *in my name* . . .' If it was done 'in the name' of Jesus, was it with or without the Lord's authority? To do a thing 'in the name' of the Lord is to do *what he has authorised*. In what passage did the Lord authorise conferences and committees?

Matt. 28 : 18-20 does not help our brother's case either. The apostles carried out that command without calling a conference and appointing a committee by majority vote. We are asked to believe that we to-day cannot do the same work that they did *without a committee*. Yet that work was done by the Lord's people for centuries before such committees were formed. Bro. Wilson formerly classed these organisations as 'expedients,' but has not dealt with the definition of the word. Anything essential to the carrying out of a command is an expedient,