

BRYAN STATION BAPTIST CHURCH
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CONVERSION

By: C. D. Cole

Acts 15:1-19, “*And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel,*

and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,

saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.”

I want to speak to you on the old-fashioned doctrine of conversion. It is old-fashioned because much of modern Christianity does not require Bible conversion. A girl was talking about being baptized and joining the church, and when she was asked about when she was saved, she was embarrassed; she said she just joined the church last Sunday. She could not distinguish between conversion and joining the church. But joining the church is not conversion. One may join the church without being converted.

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WHAT IS CONVERSION?

The noun conversion means the act or state of being converted. The verb convert means to turn, or to change. The word has a wide range of uses. From one position or direction to another; To turn from one view or course to another; To turn or change from one state, character,

or form to another, as in converting water into ice. So to convert is to turn or change one thing into another. In its moral and religious use it means a change in the ruling disposition of the soul. This includes a change in belief, a change in feeling, and a change of purpose. Conversion in the sense of salvation is a change of attitude towards God with respect to sin and to Christ. It is an inward and vital change; a revolution in thought and act.

There is an initial, once for all, conversion which results in salvation. In Acts 15 we are told that when Paul and Barnabas went from Antioch to Jerusalem to discuss the way of salvation that they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles. That is, they told in these places how the Gentiles in Antioch and other places had been converted to faith in Christ. And when they got to Jerusalem they went before the church and told all things God had done with them; they told how God had used them in the conversion of the Gentiles.

The initial conversion in salvation may be followed by many subsequent conversions. In predicting Peter's fall and restoration, Christ said, Luke 22:32, "*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" There was hope for Peter in these words; "*when thou art converted.*" The clear implication was that he would be converted; that he would not remain a denier of Christ. And he did not. His life ended in bold confession, and he died as a martyr to the Christ he once denied. If one has been converted from his lost estate as an unbeliever, he will be experi-

encing many conversions from particular sins and errors in which he will be involved. As we grow in grace we will be converted from many sins and failures. One gets into grace as a babe or infant, but by feeding on the word of God, he will "*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...*" II Peter 3:18.

POWER OF CONVERSION

Conversion in every realm of change requires outside power. If water is converted into ice there must be freezing weather or an ice-making machine. If ice is converted into water, there must be the outside heat of the sun or other heating agency.

In moral conversion there is the power of God. No sinner has the inherent power to change himself from a sinner into a saint; from the nature of unbelief; the nature of enmity to God; to faith and love for God. The sinner has power to join a church but he has no power to change his nature. You may make the church attractive to a lost man without changing his nature, but you can't make the gospel attractive to him without changing his nature. Spurgeon: "We need to be turned from our sins, but only God can turn us; God the Saviour must put His hand to work. To turn the heart to God is as difficult as to make the world revolve on its axis."

Psalm 80:3, 7, 19, "*Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved...Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved...Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*"

Psalm 85:4, "*Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.*"

This work of God is called by several names:

It is called regeneration or the new birth. John 3:3-7, "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*" John 1:12, 13, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

It is called quickening or making alive. Ephesians 2:1, "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*" Acts 11:21 "*And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*" John 6:63, "*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*"

It is called a spiritual translation. Colossians 1:13, "*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*"

It is called a new creation. II Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* Ephesians 2:10, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* Before there can be any good works God must create somebody capable of good works. Romans 8:7-8, *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”* The flesh profiteth nothing it is the Spirit that quickeneth.

HUMAN AGENT

In converting sinners to faith in Christ, God uses the human agent. Acts 26:18, *“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”* In his defense before Agrippa, Paul told how he had preached to Jews and Gentiles. Acts 26:20, *“But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”*

We may not be able to harmonize the sinner’s duty to turn to God through Christ with the fact of his inability to turn to God. But the Scriptures teach both and I must teach both. John 6:44, *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...”*

EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITY

The human experience and activity in conversion. In conversion the sinner does something; he turns in his heart from sin to Christ. In conversion the sinner repents of sin and trusts Christ. He takes sin seriously and takes Christ gladly. He recognizes sin as dangerous and looks to Christ for deliverance. In conversion sin is bitter and Christ is precious. I Peter 2:7, *“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious...”* In conversion the sinner loses all hope in self and finds hope in Christ. In conversion the sinner comes to have the right attitude towards two persons: himself and Christ. He sees himself as a helpless sinner and Christ as a mighty Saviour. Have you had this experience? And this is a permanent and growing experience. I have been a Christian many years. I am still only a sinner in my own eyes and Christ is my Saviour; my one and only hope for eternal blessings.

Conversion is the human side or aspect of that spiritual change wrought in us in regeneration. The Scriptures recognize the voluntary activity of the human soul in this change as distinctly as they recognize the causative agency of the Holy Spirit.

TROPHIES

Some of the trophies of redeeming grace. What we are talking about is not some abstract idea that vanishes into thin air. There are many examples in the Bible and out of it of what the power of God can do in a human life. Paul said in I Corinthians 15:10, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am...”* Paul was converted from a self-righteous Pharisee to a humble be-

liever in Christ. Acts 9:4-6, *“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* He had an experience in which he turned from his own righteousness and labeled it as dung or refuse, that he might win Christ and be found in Him. Philippians 3:7-9, *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”*

John Bradford (martyred in the reign of Bloody Mary): *“But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford.”*

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