

The Holy Spirit In Conversion

by J. T. Smith

For centuries there has been sort of “mystery connected with conversion and the Holy Spirit. Some have come to the point of being so enthralled by *superstition* and *so-called experiences* that they will not listen to further *evidence* from the Bible. However, we all need to recognize that there has never been a case of conversion recorded in the Bible that was not *begun, carried on, and consummated* by the Holy Spirit.

Meaning of Conversion

Preachers often speak of being converted, of redemption and regeneration; the meaning of which is clear to us. But, I wonder if it clear to you, our readers. The word *convert* means, “A person who is converted from one opinion or practice to another; one who is turned from sin to holiness.” The word *convert*, however, should not be confused with the word *repent*. In Acts 3:19 Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out . . .” So, if they were one and the same thing, we would have a double reference in the same passage. The word “*repent*” means, “a change of will,” while the word *convert* means, “a reformation of life.” Hence we are to have a “change of will that results in a “change of life.” Thus we are talking about that which causes one to have a change of will and of life. There is not a conversion that comes without the Holy Spirit and His work. However this is a far cry from saying that it came about because of a *direct operation* of the Holy Spirit.

What Is The Holy Spirit’s Work In Conversion?

No single passage sets forth the mission of the Holy Spirit better than does John 16:7-14. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” From this reading we conclude that the Spirit’s work is fourfold. (1) To abide and comfort the disciples. (2) To reveal the truth. (3) To glorify the Son. (4) To convict the world. The Holy Spirit was to convict the world of sin – because they believed not on The Christ. Christ is Holy, Just and Pure. To reject Him is to reject righteousness. To convince the world of righteousness – because I go to My Father. Hence, the Holy Spirit’s work was to convict or convince the world that Jesus was Deity as He claimed to be. To convict the world with respect to judgment – because the prince of the world has been judged. He could not hold the Christ; and Christ was given to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). The Christ was shown to be the Messiah that was to come, and it was prophesied that the devil could not hold him in the grave.

How Does The Holy Spirit Accomplish His Work?

Not by a direct operation on us personally – that is, separate and apart from the word. There is no evidence of this in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God never did send

His Spirit directly on a person who was an alien sinner in an effort to save him. If so, where is the Passage? A miracle cannot convert – it can only cause people to give a favorable hearing to the word. Jesus said, “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs”(Mark 16:20). The miracle, therefore, was to help people believe. They then had a change of will (repented) which brought about a change or reformation of life. That is, a life in harmony with the will of God, the word of God. This is illustrated in several different places in the Bible.

In —Acts 8:5-6, Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Jesus. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”

As Saul was on his way to Damascus, . . . “suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.” (Acts 9:3). Many think that Saul was sent a direct operation of the Holy Spirit to save him at that very moment. Not so! Saul was told by the Lord, “So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’.” (Acts 9:6). Saul went there and prayed, neither eating nor drinking, three days and three nights. Now the Lord did not tell him to do that. But this certainly shows his penitence.

The Lord then said to a man named Ananias, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying”(Acts 9:11). Ananias did as he was told. When he came to Saul he told him what he *must* do. (That was a word used by Jesus in verse 6 – what Saul *must* do).

Paul recounts what happened in Acts 22:16. Ananias said, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Is one saved before he receives the forgiveness of sins? Surely not! If Saul was saved when the Lord appeared to him:

1. The Lord didn’t know it, for he told Saul to go into the city and he would be told what he **MUST DO**.
2. Saul didn’t know it. For he went into the city and there fasted and prayed for three days.
3. Ananias didn’t know it. For he was told to go and tell Saul what he must do.

It is a strange circumstance indeed that so many today are just sure that Saul was saved on his way to Damascus – yet the Lord didn’t know it, Ananias didn’t know it and even Saul himself didn’t know it.

In Acts chapters 10 and 11 several miracles were performed by the Lord in this particular case, but none of them that are recorded says anything about the Holy Spirit falling on Cornelius or any of his household in order to **SAVE** them. Peter said that when men came unto him from Joppa, they said Cornelius had sent them, “And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved’ ”(Acts 11:13-14). The Holy Spirit was not given to them to save them, but to show the Jews that the Gentiles had been accepted. “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ ” (Acts 10:34-35). Just

as in Saul's case (and every other case of conversion in the book of Acts) the act of baptism is when sins are washed away (but not because of anything in and of the water itself). One's sins are washed away WHEN they are baptized. That's the WHEN of the matter. The blood of Christ is WHAT washes them away, (Revelation 1:5).

But without some sign from god that these had been accepted who were Gentiles, they would not have been permitted to have been baptized and thus added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). However, when they heard them speak in tongues as the Jews had in Acts chapter two, Peter said, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). But remember, the Holy Spirit was not given to SAVE them, but as a sign to show the Jews that the Gentiles were also included in this plan of Grace; and that God is not longer a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

Remember now, when the Lord – or the word of the Lord – was preached that in every instance in the Acts of the Apostles, people heard the word, believed the word, repented of their sins, confessed Jesus as the Son of God and expressed a desire to be baptized.

Question: Where is the example in the Old or New Testaments where anyone ever had a miracle performed ON THEM that they might be saved? It cannot be found. Always and in every case, people heard the word of the Lord, and obeyed the word of the Lord – and THEN they rejoiced. Find an exception! It cannot be found.

There are only two ways the Spirit could work on man. (1) Immediate – no medium through which He works – which would be direct operation. Or, (2) Mediate – working through some agent – not direct.

I suggest, without fear of successful contradiction, that *every effect or emotion generated within us is generated by the word of God*. Paul said that the Christian is to use the sword of the Spirit *which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17). Thus the Spirit does not work directly upon a person to save him but uses the instrument of the Word of God in the hands of men today to "prick their hearts" just as He did in Acts 2:37, and in Acts 7:54. Don't wait for a direct operation from the Holy Spirit today to save you. That was *not promised* by God. What we need to do is *obey God's word now*.