

A RADICAL CHANGE

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”—2 Corinthians 5:17.

MY line of discourse will be as follows: according to our text and many other Scriptures, a great change is needed in any man who would be saved...and this change is recognizable by distinct signs.

IN ORDER TO SALVATION A RADICAL CHANGE IS NECESSARY.

This change is a thorough and sweeping one and operates upon the nature, heart, and life of the convert. Human nature is the same to all time, and it will be idle to try to turn the edge of Scriptural quotations by saying that they refer to the Jews or to the heathen, for at that rate we shall have no Bible left us at all. The Bible is meant for mankind, and our text refers to any man, of any country, and any age: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

We prove this point by reminding you, first, that everywhere in Scripture men are divided into two classes, with a very sharp line of distinction between them. Read in the Gospels, and you shall find continual mention of sheep lost and sheep found, guests refusing the invitation and guests feasting at the table, the wise virgins and the foolish, the sheep and the goats. In the epistles we read of those who are “dead in trespasses and sin” (Eph 2:1), and of others to whom it is said, “And you hath he quickened” (Eph 2:1); so that some are alive to God and others are in their natural state of spiritual death. We find men spoken of as being either in darkness or in light, and the phrase is used of being brought “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9). Some are spoken of as having been formerly aliens and strangers and having been made fellow-citizens and brethren. We read of “children of God” in opposition to “children of wrath.” We read of believers who are not condemned, and of those who are condemned already because they have not believed. We read of those who have “gone astray,” and of those who have “returned to the shepherd and bishop of their souls” (1Pe 2:25). We read of those who are “in the flesh and cannot please God” (Rom 8:8), and of those who are chosen and called and justified, whom the whole universe is challenged to condemn. The Apostle speaks of “us which are saved” (1Co 1:18), as if there were some saved while upon others “the wrath of God abideth” (Joh 3:36). “Enemies” are continually placed in contrast with those who are “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). There are those that are “far off from God by wicked works”

(Eph 2:12; Col 1:21), and those who are “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). I could continue till I wearied you. The distinction between the two classes runs through the whole of the Scriptures, and never do we find a hint that there are some who are naturally good and do not need to be removed from the one class into the other, or that there are persons between the two who can afford to remain as they are. No, there must be a divine work, making us new creatures and causing all things to become new with us; or we shall die in our sins.

The Word of God, besides so continually describing two classes, very frequently and in forcible expressions speaks of an inward change by which men are brought from one state into the other. I hope I shall not weary you if I refer to a considerable number of Scriptures, but it is best to go to the fountain-head at once.

This change is often described as a *birth*. See the third chapter of the Gospel of John, which is wonderfully clear and to the point: “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This birth is not a birth by baptism, for it is spoken of as accompanied by an intelligent faith which receives the Lord Jesus. Turn to 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 believed 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.” So that believers are “born again” and receive Christ through faith: a regeneration imparted in infancy and lying dormant in unbelievers is a fiction unknown to Holy Scripture. In the third of John our Lord associates faith and regeneration in the closest manner, declaring not only that we must be born again, but also that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We must undergo a change quite as great as if we could return to our native nothingness and could then come forth fresh from the hand of the Great Creator. John tells us, in his first epistle, 5:4, that “Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world,” and he adds, to show that the new birth and faith go together, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” To the same effect is 1 John 5:1, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Where there is true faith, there is the new birth; and that term implies a change beyond measure, complete and radical.

In other places this change is described as a *quicken*ing. “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). We are said to be raised from the dead together with Christ, and this is spoken of as being a very wonderful display of omnipotence. We read of “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:19, 20).

Regeneration is a very prodigy¹ of divine strength, and by no means a mere figment fabled to accompany a religious ceremony.

We find this change frequently described as a *creation*, as for instance in our text, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” And this also is no mere formality or an attendant upon a rite, for we read in Galatians 6:15, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” No outward rites, though ordained of God Himself, effect any change upon the heart of man. There must be a creating over again of the entire nature by the divine hand; we must be “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10), and we must have in us “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). What a wonderful change that must be which is first described as a birth, then as a resurrection from the dead, and then as an absolute creation!

Paul, in Colossians 1:13, further speaks of God the Father and says, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” John calls it a “passing from death unto life” (1Jo 3:14), no doubt having in his mind that glorious declaration of his Lord and Master: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24).

Once more, as if to go to the extremity of forcible expression, Peter speaks of our conversion and regeneration as our being “begotten again.” Hear the passage: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3)...

My dear friends, can you conceive of any language more plainly descriptive of a most solemn change? If it be possible with the human tongue to describe a change which is total, thorough, complete, and divine, these words do describe it; and if such a change be not intended by the language here used by the Holy Spirit, then I am unable to find any meaning in the Bible, and its words are rather meant to bewilder than to instruct, which God forbid we should think. My appeal is to you who try to be contented without regeneration and conversion. I beseech you, do not be satisfied; for you never can be in Christ unless old things are passed away with you, and all things become new.

Further, the Scriptures speak of this great inner work as producing a very wonderful change in the subject of it. Re-

¹ **prodigy** – a wonderful example.

generation and conversion, the one the secret cause and the other the first overt effect,² produce a great change in the character. Read Romans 6:17: “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” Again at verse 22, “Now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” Mark well the description the Apostle gives in Colossians 3:9, 10, when, having described the old nature and its sins, he says, “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man.” The Book swarms with proof texts. The change of character in the converted man is so great that “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

And as there is a change in character, so there is a change in feeling. The man had been an enemy to God before; but when this change takes place, he begins to love God. Read Colossians 1:21, 22: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable³ in his sight.”

This change from enmity to friendship with God arises very much from a change of man’s judicial state before God.

Before a man is converted he is condemned, but when he receives spiritual life we read, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1). This altogether changes his condition as to inward happiness. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:1), which peace we never had before. “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11).

O brethren, conversion makes a difference in us most mighty indeed, or else what did Christ mean when He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28)? Does He after all give us no rest? Is the man who comes to Jesus just as restless and as devoid of peace as before? God forbid! Does not Jesus say that when we drink of the water which He gives to us we shall never thirst again? What! And are we to be told that there is never a time when we leave off thirsting, never a time when that living water becomes in us a well of water, springing up unto everlast-

² **overt effect** – the author’s point is that conversion is the first open manifestation produced by the new birth.

³ **unreprouvable** – pertaining to one who cannot be accused of anything wrong; blameless.

ing life? Our own experience refutes the suggestion. Does not Paul say in Hebrews 4:3, "We which have believed do enter into rest"? Our condition before God, our moral tone, our nature, our state of mind are made by conversion totally different from what they were before: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17).

Why, beloved, instead of supposing that we can do without conversion, the Scriptures represent this as being the grand blessing of the *covenant of grace*. What said the Lord by His servant Jeremiah? "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). This passage Paul quotes in Hebrews 10:16, not as obsolete, but as fulfilled in believers. And what has the Lord said by Ezekiel? Listen to the gracious passage, and see what a grand blessing conversion is: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Eze 36:26, 27). Is not this the blessing of the Gospel by which we realize all the rest? Is not this the great work of the Holy Ghost by which we know the Father and the Son?...

Do you know anything about this? I trust that a great number of you have experienced it and are showing it in your lives, but I fear some are ignorant of it. Let those who are unconverted never rest till they have believed in Christ and have a new heart created and a right spirit bestowed. Lay it well to heart, that a change must come over you which you cannot work in yourselves, but which must be wrought by divine power. There is this for your comfort: Jesus Christ has promised this blessing to all who receive Him, for He gives them power to become the sons of God.

THIS CHANGE IS RECOGNIZABLE BY CERTAIN SIGNS. It has been supposed by some that the moment a man is converted he thinks himself perfect. It is not so among us, for we rather question the conversion of any man who thinks himself perfect. It is thought by others that a converted man must be henceforth free from all doubts. I wish it were so. Unhappily, although there is faith in us, unbelief is there also. Some dream that the converted man has nothing more to seek for, but we teach not so; a man who is alive unto God has greater needs than ever. Conversion is the beginning of a life-long conflict; it is the first blow in a warfare which will never end till we are in glory.

In every case of conversion there are these signs following: *there is always a sense of sin.* No man, rest assured, ever

found peace with God without first repenting of sin and knowing it to be an evil thing. The horrors which some have felt are not essential, but a full confession of sin before God and an acknowledgment of our guilt is absolutely required. "They that are whole," says Christ, "have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mar 2:17). Christ does not heal those who are not sick. He never clothes those who are not naked nor enriches those who are not poor. True conversion always has in it a humbling sense of the need of divine grace.

It is also always attended with simple, true, and real faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, that is the King's own mark: without it, *nothing is of any worth*. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Joh 3:14, 15); and that passage is put side by side with "ye must be born again," in the same address, by the same Savior, to the same inquirer. Therefore, we gather that faith is the mark of the new birth; and where it is, there the Spirit has changed the heart of man; but where it is not, men are still "dead in trespasses and sin."

Conversion may be known, next, by this fact, that it changes the whole man. It changes the principle upon which he lives; he lived for self, now he lives for God. He did right because he was afraid of punishment if he did wrong, but now he shuns evil because he hates it. He did right because he hoped to merit heaven, but now no such selfish motive sways him: he knows that he is saved, and he does right out of gratitude to God. His objects in life are changed: he lived for gain or worldly honor; now he lives for the glory of God. His comforts are changed: the pleasures of the world and sin are nothing to him; he finds comfort in the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. His desires are changed: that which he once panted and pined for he is now content to do without; and that which he once despised he now longs after as the hart panteth after the water brooks. His fears are different; he fears man no more, but fears his God. His hopes are also altered; his expectations fly beyond the stars.

The man has begun a new life. A convert once said, "Either the world is altered or else I am." Everything seems new. The very faces of our children look different to us, for we regard them under a new aspect, viewing them as heirs of immortality. We view our friends from a different stand-point. Our very business seems altered. Even taking down the shutters of a morning is done by the husband in a different spirit, and the children are put to bed by the mother in another mood. We learn to sanctify the hammer and the plough by serving the Lord with them. We feel that the things which are seen are shadows and the things which we hear are but voices out of dream-land, but the unseen is substantial, and that which mortal ear hears

not is truth. Faith has become to us “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

I may go on to talk about this, but none will understand me except those who have experienced it; and let not those who have not experienced it say it is not true. How do they know? How can a man bear witness to what he has not seen? What is the value of testimony from a man who begins by saying, “I know nothing about it”? If a credible witness declares that he knows such a thing to have happened, it would be easy to find fifty persons who can say that they did not see it; but their evidence goes for nothing...I pray that we may know what this change is; and if we do know it, I again pray that we may so live that others may see the result of it upon our characters and inquire what it means.

The phenomena of conversion are the standing miracles of the church. “And greater works than these shall he do,” said Christ, “because I go to my Father” (Joh 14:12); and these are some of the greater things which the power of the Holy Ghost still performs. This day the dead are raised, blind eyes are opened, and the lame are made to walk. The *spiritual* miracle is greater than the *physical* one. These spiritual miracles show that Jesus lives and puts life and power into the Gospel. Tell me of a ministry which never reclaims the drunkard, never calls back the thief to honesty, never pulls down the self-righteous and makes him confess his sin; that, in a word, never transforms its hearers; and I am sure that such a ministry is not worth the time which men spend in listening to it. Woe unto the man who at the last shall confess to a ministry fruitless in conversions. If the Gospel does not convert men, do not believe in it; but if it does, it is its own evidence and must be believed. It may be to some of you a stumbling-block and to others foolishness; but unto those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation, saving them from sin.

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s-Day morning, July 19th, 1874,
by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist minister. The collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry fill 63 volumes. The sermons’ 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and stand as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



THE MEANING, CAUSES, AND SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION

John Gill (1697-1771)

CONVERSION, though it may seem in some respects to fall in with regeneration and the effectual calling, yet may be distinguished from them both. Regeneration is the sole act of God; conversion consists both of God's act upon men in turning them and of acts done by men under the influence of converting grace: they turn, being turned. Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner; conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God, as one expresses it. In regeneration men are wholly passive, as they also are in the first moment of conversion; but by it become active. It is therefore sometimes expressed *passively*: "Ye are returned," or converted (1Pe 2:25); and sometimes *actively*: "A great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Act 11:21) and "when it"—the body of the people of the Jews—"shall turn to the Lord," which has respect to their conversion in the latter day (2Co 3:16). The effectual calling¹ is the call of men out of darkness to light; and conversion answers to that call and is the actual "turning" of men from the one to the other, so that with propriety, conversion may be considered as distinct from regeneration and the effectual calling. Concerning which may be observed,

I. FIRST, WHAT CONVERSION IS AND WHEREIN IT LIES. The conversion to be treated of is not

1. An external one or what lies only in an outward reformation of life and manners, such as that of the Ninevites. For this may be where internal conversion is not, as in the Scribes and Pharisees, and is what persons may depart from and return to their former course of life again. And where it is right and genuine, it is the fruit and effect of true conversion, but not that itself.

2. Nor is it a mere doctrinal one or a conversion from false notions before imbibed² to a set of doctrines and truths which are according to the Scriptures. So men of old were converted from Judaism and heathenism to Christianity: but not all that were so converted in a doctrinal sense were true and real converts: some had the form of godliness without the power of it, had a

¹ **effectual call** – "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 31.

² **imbibed** – to drink in; to take into one's mind.

name to live and be called Christians, but were dead, and so not converted. Thus the recovery of professors of religion from errors fallen into, to the acknowledgement of the truth, is called a conversion (Jam 5:19, 20).

3. Nor the restoration of the people of God from backslidings to which they are subject, when they are in a very affecting and importunate³ manner called upon to return to the Lord (Jer 3:12, 14, 22; Hos 14:1-4); so Peter, when he fell through temptation and denied his Lord and was recovered from it by a look from Christ, it is called his conversion (Luk 22:32). But,

4. The conversion under consideration is a true, real, internal work of God upon the souls of men. There is a counterfeit of it, or there is that in some men who are not really converted, which is somewhat similar to that which is always found in those that are truly converted, [such as] a sense of sin and an acknowledgment of it; an apprehension of the divine displeasure at it; great distress about it, a sorrow for it, humiliation on account of it, and an abstinence from it; and something that bears a resemblance to each of these may be found in unconverted persons, though their concern about sin is chiefly for the evil that comes by it or likely to come by it, and not for the evil that is in it. So in converted persons there is sooner or later light into the Gospel and the doctrines of it, particularly the doctrine of salvation by Christ, which yield relief and comfort to them under a sense of sin and encourage faith and hope in God. And there is something like this to be observed in some who are not truly converted, who are said to be “enlightened,” that is, in a notional⁴ and doctrinal way; and to “taste” the good Word of God, though it is only in a superficial manner; and to “receive it with joy,” with a flash of natural affection, which lasts for awhile; and to believe it with a temporary faith, historically, and become subject to the ordinances. But yet in all this, there is no heart work, whereas true genuine conversion lies,

(1.) *In the turn of the heart to God, of the thoughts of the heart, which are only evil and that continually and about evil things, not about God and the things of God: “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4), nor in any of the thoughts of wicked men. But when converted, their thoughts are about their state and condition by nature; about their souls, and the eternal welfare of them; and about God and the methods of His grace in the salvation of men. It is a turn of the “desires” of the heart, which before were after vain, carnal, worldly, sinful lusts and pleasures; but now after God and communion with Him, after Christ and salvation by Him, after the Spirit and the things of*

³ **affecting and importunate** – moving and urgent.

⁴ **notional** – existing only in thought; imaginary.

the Spirit. It is a turn of the “affections” of the heart, which before were “inordinate”⁵ and ran in a wrong channel. Before, they were fleshly, after the things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. But now they are checked⁶ and turned towards God, their hearts being circumcised to love Him; and Whom they love with their whole hearts and souls because He first loved them, though before their carnal minds were enmity to Him; and towards Christ, Whom they now love affectionately, fervently, superlatively,⁷ and sincerely; and towards the saints, who are now the excellent in the earth, in whose conversation⁸ is all their delight, though before hateful to them; and towards the Word, worship, and ordinances of God, which they take pleasure in attending on, though before a weariness to them.

Conversion is a turn of the “mind” from carnal things to spiritual ones, and from earthly things to heavenly ones. Yea, it is a turn of the “will,” which before conversion is in a very bad state, is stubborn and inflexible, biased to and bent upon that which is evil and averse⁹ to all that is good; but in conversion God “works in” men “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13); He gives them another will, or however a turn to their will, so that of an unwilling people, they are made a willing people in the day of His power on them; whereas they were unwilling to come to Christ for salvation and take Him alone to be their Savior—“Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life,” says Christ (Joh 5:40), that is, ye have no will to come to Me at all for life and salvation; they chose rather to go anywhere than to Him for it—but now they are willing to be saved by Him and resolve to have no other Savior but Him. Yea, though He slay them, they will trust in Him and say, “He shall be our salvation.” And though before they went about to establish their own righteousness and did not and would not submit to the righteousness of Christ, now their stout hearts, which were far from righteousness, are brought down; and they become willing to be found in Christ and in His righteousness only. And inasmuch as before they would not have Christ to reign over them and chose not to be subject to His laws and ordinances, now they are ready to acknowledge Him as their King and Governor, turn their feet to His testimonies, and esteem His precepts concerning all things to be right.

(2.) *Conversion lies in a man’s being turned from darkness to light:* the Apostle says [that] he was sent by Christ to the Gentiles, as a minister of the Gospel, “to turn them from darkness to light” (Act

⁵ **inordinate** – unrestrained in passions, feeling, or conduct.

⁶ **checked** – stopped in progress; restrained.

⁷ **superlatively** – in the highest degree.

⁸ **conversation** – behavior; manner of living.

⁹ **averse** – turned away in mind or feeling.

26:18), that is, to be the instrument or means of their conversion by preaching the Gospel to them. In this, conversion may seem to coincide with the effectual calling. But it may be observed that the effectual calling is a call *to*, but conversion is a *turning of*, men from darkness to light. God not only calls *unto* light, but turns them *to* light in every sense: to God, Who is light itself and in Whom is no darkness at all; to Christ, Who is the light of the world; to the Gospel, which is the great light that shines on men who sit in darkness; and to the light of grace, which is a shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day.

(3.) *Conversion lies in the turning of men “from the power of Satan unto God,” as in the above place (Act 26:18).* Satan has great power over men in an unconverted state: his seat is in their hearts, which are the palace in which he rules. He works effectually with great power and energy in the children of disobedience by stirring up their lusts and corruptions, suggesting evil things to their minds and tempting them to them. He does all he can to keep them in their native blindness and ignorance and to increase it and to prevent them from hearing the Gospel and from its being beneficial to them, lest the light of it should shine into their minds. He captivates them, and leads them captive at his will; and they are willingly led by him, the lusts of their father they will do. But now in conversion they are turned from his power: he is dispossessed¹⁰ of them and his armor taken from him in which he trusted; the prey is taken out of the hands of the mighty, and the lawful captive is delivered. Men are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. And though they are not freed from [Satan’s] temptations, yet they have grace sufficient given them to bear up under them till it is the pleasure of God to save them from them, who will shortly bruise him under them. And as they are in conversion turned *from* him, they are turned *to* God, who before were without Him, alienated from the life of Him, and strangers to Him; but now they are turned to the knowledge of Him, to love to Him, to faith in Him, and to communion with Him.

(4.) *Conversion lies in turning men from idols to serve the living God:* not merely from idols of silver and gold, of wood and stone, as formerly, but from the idols of a man’s own heart, his lusts and corruptions with respect to which the language of a converted sinner is, “What have I to do anymore with idols?” (Hos 14:8). This is a blessing bestowed in conversion: “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Act 3:26). In *redemption* Christ turns away iniquities from His people by bearing them and making satisfaction for them. And in *conversion*, He by His Spirit and grace turns them from their

¹⁰ **dispossessed** – deprived of possessing something.

iniquities. He turns them from the love of them to an hatred of them, even of vain thoughts, as well as of sinful actions; from the service and drudgery¹¹ of them to the service of righteousness; from the power and dominion of them and subjection to them, and from a course of living in them to a life of holiness; and from the paths of sin to the paths of truth and uprightness.

(5.) *Conversion lies in turning men from their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ:* not from doing works of righteousness, for such converted persons are most fit for and most capable of and are under the greatest obligations to perform; but from depending upon them for justification before God and acceptance with Him. [Of this] they must be convinced by the Spirit of God of the insufficiency of their own righteousness to justify them, being imperfect; and of the necessity, perfection, and fullness of Christ's righteousness, which being turned unto, they receive, embrace, lay hold on, and plead as their justifying righteousness before God. And this requires more than human teachings: for though ministers are said to "turn many to righteousness," that is, to the righteousness of Christ, yet only instrumentally and as the means of it, through preaching the Gospel in which there is a revelation of it. For God is the efficient cause of the turn of them to it; for though the Gospel is the ministration of it, yet it is the Lord that must bring it near to stouthearted ones far from righteousness and make them willing to submit unto it and to be desirous of being found in it. Men naturally do not care to part with their own righteousness: it is their own, and what they have been a long time and with great labor rearing up. To have it demolished, they cannot bear it. They would fain¹² hold it fast, and lean upon it, though it shall not stand. It is their idol in which they place their trust and confidence, and to take this away from them is to take away their god; as Micah said, when his idol was stolen from him, "Ye have taken away my gods...and what have I more?" (Jdg 18:24). Wherefore the conversion of a self-righteous person is more rare and difficult than the conversion of a profligate¹³ sinner; hence our Lord says to the Scribes and Pharisees that "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Mat 21:31); and that He Himself "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mat 9:13).

(6.) *Conversion lies in a man's turning to the Lord actively under the influence of divine grace.* And by this phrase, it is often expressed in Scripture (as in Isa 10:21; Act 11:21; 2Co 3:16), men being thoroughly convinced that there is salvation in no other but in Christ, that

¹¹ **drudgery** – wearisome toil; dull or distasteful work.

¹² **fain** – gladly.

¹³ **profligate** – recklessly depraved and immoral.

it is in vain to expect it elsewhere. After they have made many inquiries and searches to no purpose, [they] turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and look to Him alone for salvation; being apprised¹⁴ of their danger, they turn as they are directed, encouraged, and enabled to Christ, the Stronghold, where they are safe from all danger and from every enemy. Being made sensible of the insufficiency of their own righteousness and of the suitability of the righteousness of Christ for them, they turn to Him as the Lord their righteousness, in Whom all the seed of Israel are justified and shall glory. And being fully satisfied with the equity of the laws, rules, and ordinances of Christ, they turn to Him as their Lord and Lawgiver and submit to His commands, renouncing all other lords and their dominion over them. Though in their natural state they are like sheep going astray, in conversion they are returned to Christ, as the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls: the parable of seeking, finding, and bringing home the lost sheep is a fit representation of the conversion of a sinner....The parables following represent the same thing, as that of the lost piece of silver, for finding which the woman lights a candle and sweeps the house and searches every corner till she finds it, which gives her joy. This sets forth the high esteem and value the elect are in with Christ, comparable to silver, yea, to fine gold and precious stones; and the passiveness of men in first conversion, who no more contribute to it than the piece of silver to its being found; and the means and methods made use of in conversion, the light of the Gospel ministry and the stir and bustle on that occasion. The parable of the prodigal son and his return to his father is expressive of the same. His manner of living before his return is a lively picture of the state of unconverted men living in their lusts and pursuing the desires of the flesh and of the mind. In his return there are all the symptoms of a true and real conversion: a sense of his starving, famishing, and perishing state by nature; his coming to his right mind; his sense of sin, confession of it, and repentance for it; his faith and hope of meeting with a favorable reception by his father, which encouraged him to return and which he met with (see Isa 55:7).

II. SECONDLY, THE CAUSES OF CONVERSION—EFFICIENT, MOVING, AND INSTRUMENTAL.

1. First, the efficient cause, which is not man but God.

(1.) *Not man, it is neither by the power nor will of man.*

a. *Not by the power of man*; what is said of the conversion or turning of the Jews from their captivity is true of the conversion of a sinner, that it is “not by might nor by power,” that is not of man, “but by my Spirit, as saith the Lord of hosts” (Zec 4:6). Men are dead in a

¹⁴ **apprised** – informed.

moral sense while unconverted, they are dead in trespasses and sins, which are the cause of their death; and their very living in them is no other than a moral death; nor can they quicken themselves, and unless they are quickened they cannot be converted; and being in a moral sense dead they are “strengthless.” They are not only “weak through the flesh,” the corruption of nature, but they are “without strength”; without any strength at all to perform that which is good, and much less a work of so great importance as their own conversion; they have not the command of themselves, nor any power over their hearts, the thoughts, desires, and affections of them. They cannot check them and control them at pleasure; they cannot think anything as of themselves, much less think a good thought. They cannot turn the streams of their desires and affections to proper objects. They cannot move their minds, nor bend their wills, even to that which is to their own advantage. Conversion is such an alteration in a man as is not in his power to effect...Conversion is the motion of the soul towards God. But as this cannot be in a dead man, and unless he is quickened, so not unless he is drawn by efficacious¹⁵ grace; wherefore God, in conversion, draws men with lovingkindness to Himself; and, with the cords of love, to His Son; for “no man,” says Christ, “can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him” (Joh 6:44); and even converted persons themselves are so sensible of this that they pray as the church did, “Draw me, we will run after thee” (Song 1:4). The thing speaks for itself, and shows that it cannot be done by the power of man...

b. *Nor is conversion owing to the will of men.* The will of man before conversion is in a bad state: it chooses its own ways and delights in its abominations. It is in high pursuit after the desires of the flesh and of the mind. It is resolved to go after its lovers, its lusts, which feed its appetite and furnish with things agreeable to the carnal mind. The will is become a slave to carnal lusts and pleasures: though the natural liberty of the will is not lost by sin, it can freely will natural things, as to eat or drink, sit, or stand, or walk at pleasure. Yet its moral liberty is lost; it is shackled with the fetters of sinful lusts by which it is overcome and brought into bondage. And notwithstanding its boasted liberty, it is an home-born slave...he has no will to come to Christ, to be saved by Him; nor to submit to His righteousness; nor to be subject to His laws and ordinances, until such a will is worked in him by efficacious grace. Conversion is denied to be of the will of men; as the whole of salvation is “not of him that willeth,” so this part of it in particular, regeneration, with which conversion in the first moment of it agrees “is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Rom 9:16; Joh 1:13).

¹⁵ **efficacious** – that which produces the intended effect; effective.

(2.) *God only is the Author and efficient cause of conversion.* He that made man's heart and formed the spirit of man within him, He only can turn their hearts and frame and mold their spirits as He pleases. The heart of a king and so of every other man is in the hand of the Lord, and He can turn them as the rivers of water are turned. He, and He only, can give a check unto and turn the thoughts, desires, and affections of the heart into another channel, and the mind and will to other objects. He can remove the stubbornness of the will, bend it at His pleasure, and make it pliable and conformable to His own will. He can take away the hardness of the heart. Though it is like an adamant stone,¹⁶ He can make it soft and susceptible of¹⁷ the best impressions. He can break the rocky heart in pieces, yea, take away the stony heart and give an heart of flesh. As He can take what He pleases out of it, so He can put into it what He will, as He does in conversion—His laws, the fear of Him, and His Spirit. He can and does draw them by the powerful influence of His grace upon them to Himself and to His Son. And this He does without forcing their wills: He sweetly allures by His grace to come to Christ and His ordinances....The power of divine grace put forth in conversion is irresistible, that is, so irresistible, as that a stop cannot be put to the work and that become of no effect, through opposition made unto it from within and from without. Conversion is according to the will of God, His will of purpose, which can never be frustrated: "Who hath resisted his will?" (Rom 9:19).

2. Secondly, the moving, or impulsive cause of conversion, is the love, grace, mercy, favor, and goodwill of God. The same as are the moving cause of regeneration and effectual calling and not the merits of men. For what is there in men before conversion to move God to take such a step in their favor? (see 1Co 6:9-11; Eph 2:2-4).

3. Thirdly, the instrumental cause, or means of conversion, is usually the ministry of the Word. Sometimes, indeed, it is wrought without the Word by some remarkable awakening providence or another and sometimes by reading the Scriptures. But for the most part it is through the preaching of the Word; hence ministers are said to "turn many to righteousness"; and the Apostle Paul says he was sent by Christ into the Gentile world to "turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Act 28:16). This is done both by the preaching of the Law and of the Gospel: "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa 19:7), though perhaps not the Law, strictly taken, but the whole doctrine of the Word is there meant. However, the preaching of the Law is made use of by the

¹⁶ **adamant stone** – stone of surpassing hardness; impregnable to any force.

¹⁷ **susceptible of** – capable of being affected by.

Spirit of God to convince of sin; for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20); and by means of it, when it enters into the heart and conscience, under His influence, sin is made to appear exceeding sinful, and the soul is filled with great distress on account of it. For the “law worketh wrath” (Rom 4:15), though some take this to be rather preparatory to conversion than conversion itself, which may be better ascribed to the Gospel...for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Gal 3:2; Rom 10:8, 17). But then the preaching of the word of the Gospel is not sufficient of itself to produce the work of conversion in the heart: men may hear it and not be converted by it nor receive any benefit, profit, and advantage through it, if it comes in word only and not with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. And when it is accompanied with the power of God or is made the power of God unto salvation, even then it is only an instrument and not an efficient; for “who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?” (1Co 3:5).

III. THIRDLY, THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION. These are not all men, for all in fact are not converted; nor does it appear to be the design and purpose of God to convert all men; nor does He give sufficient grace to all men to convert themselves if they will. For He does not so much as give to all men the means of grace, the outward ministry of the Word: this was not vouchsafed¹⁸ to the Gentiles for hundreds of years before the coming of Christ; and since, millions have never been favored with it; nor are multitudes at this day. And those who have the Scripture to read, to many it is a sealed book and to all, unless opened by the Spirit of God; and to whom the Gospel is preached, it is hid, unless it is given them to know the mysteries of the kingdom, which is not the case of all; the persons converted are the “elect” of God, both among Jews and Gentiles...in a word, they are described as “sinners.” “Sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Psa 51:13), sinners by nature and by practice, and some of them the worst and chief of sinners. And therefore the wonderful grace of God is the more displayed in their conversion.

From A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity.

John Gill (1697-1771): Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.



¹⁸ vouchsafed –given, granted, or bestowed in a gracious manner.

TEMPORARY, COUNTERFEIT, AND TRUE CONVERSION

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

WHAT do we mean by conversion? *It is the first exercise of the new nature in ceasing from old forms of life and starting a new life.* It is the first action of the regenerate soul in moving *from* something *to* something. The very term suggests that: conversion means a turning from one thing to another. The term is not used very frequently in the Scriptures, but the truth which the word connotes and represents appears constantly.

You will find that in the Scriptures the term itself is sometimes used in a more general way for any turning. For instance, it is sometimes used even of a believer. Our Lord rebuked Peter on one occasion and said, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luk 22:32). He meant: when you come back again, when you have turned back. Here the word does not refer to Peter's original coming into the Christian life; he was already in it, but he was going to backslide, he was going to go astray and then come back. That is described as conversion, but in the consideration of biblical doctrines, it is well to confine the word *conversion* to the sense which is normally given to it when we talk together about these things, that is, it is the initial step in the conscious history of the soul in its relationship to God; it is the first exercise, the first manifestation, of the new life that has been received in regeneration.

This, of course, is something which is essential, and there are many statements to that effect. It is stated specifically in Matthew 18:3: "Verily I say unto you," says our Lord, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." But all the texts which we have already considered in dealing with the doctrine of regeneration are equally applicable here, texts such as, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1Co 2:14); and, "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). Men and women must come from that before they can be Christians; they must turn from that to this other condition. So conversion is essential. *Nobody is born a Christian.* We were all born in sin, "shapen in iniquity" (Psa 51:5); we were all "the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3); we are all subjects of original sin and original guilt, so we must all undergo conversion; and the Bible is quite explicit about this.

The next question, therefore, to ask is: How does it take place? What is the agency in conversion? And here the answer is quite sim-

ple. It is first of all and primarily the work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit, does it through the *effectual call*....The call becomes effectual and it is that which leads to the next step—what you and I do. You notice that we are mentioning this for the first time, but in any definition of conversion you must bring in the human as well as the divine activity. The call comes effectually and because it comes effectually we do something about it. That is conversion: the two sides, the *call*—the *response*...but in dealing with conversion, of necessity we must give equal emphasis to the activity of human beings. Now in *regeneration* and in the union, we are absolutely passive; we play no part at all; it is entirely the work of the Spirit of God in the heart. But in *conversion* we act, we move, we are called, and we do it.

We come, then, to consider the characteristics of conversion; and this, I sometimes think, is one of the most important topics that Christian people can consider together. Why is that? *Well, it is vital that we should consider the biblical teaching about conversion because there is such a thing as a “temporary conversion.”* Have you noticed how often that is dealt with by our Lord Himself in His own teaching, how at times He almost seems to discourage people from going after Him? There was a man who said, “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” and our Lord, instead of saying, “Marvelous!” said, “Wait a minute!” “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Mat 8:19–20). “Do you realize what you’re doing?” He said in effect. “It’s a very foolish man who goes to war without making sure of his resources. It’s an equally foolish man who starts building a tower without making certain that he’s got sufficient material to finish it.”

Our Lord, because He knew the danger of a “temporary something” happening, was constantly dealing with it and seemed to be repelling people. Indeed, they charged Him with making discipleship impossible. Take that great sixth chapter of John where the people were running after Him and hanging on to His words because of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, and our Lord seemed to be trying deliberately to repel them. So a large number, who thought they were disciples, went back, we are told, and walked no longer with Him. It is quite clear that our Lord was giving that teaching quite deliberately because He was drawing a distinction between the spirit and the flesh. He knew that they were *carnal*, and He was anxious to stress the vital importance of grasping the *spiritual*.

Take also the parable in Matthew 13—the parable of the sower—and our Lord’s own exposition of it. Notice particularly verses 20 and 21: “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that

heareth the word, and anon¹ with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth² for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.” But notice what our Lord says about this same man: he, “anon with joy receiveth it [the Word].” That is what I mean by a temporary conversion. He seems to have received the Word, he is full of joy, but he has no root in him, and that is why he ends up with nothing at all. Now that is our Lord’s own teaching; there is the possibility of this very joyful conversion and yet there is nothing there in a vital, living sense, and it proves temporary.

There is also further teaching in the Scriptures about this same thing. Take Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. We are told in verse 13, “Simon himself believed also: and...was baptised.” And yet look at the end of that man’s story. He was “in the gall of bitterness” (v. 23), and Peter simply said to him that he had better ask God to have mercy and grant him repentance. He seemed to be a true believer, but was he?

Then Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 1:19–20 of “holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.” Now that is very serious teaching, and he says the same thing in 2 Timothy 2. Here Paul is writing to Timothy about certain people who seemed to have been believers but were now denying the resurrection, as a result of which, some frightened Christians thought that the whole Church was collapsing. “It is all right,” says Paul: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (v. 19). God knows; He is not deceived or deluded. There is such a thing as temporary conversions, temporary believers, but they are not true believers. That is why it is so vital that we should know the biblical teaching as to what conversion really is.

What about the case of Demas, I wonder? There are many who would say that Demas was never a believer at all. I would not like to go so far. He may have been backsliding: “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2Ti 4:10). But, at any rate, he is a doubtful case. And then you come to that great classic passage in this connection in Hebrews 6, with a similar passage in the tenth chapter of that epistle. “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance” (Heb 6:4, 6).

Therefore, I deliberately use this heading of “temporary conversion.” There is obviously something wrong with these people, so we must ask questions. We must consider, we must have definitions, be-

¹ **anon** – immediately.

² **dureth** – endures.

cause “All that glisters is not gold.” All that appears to be conversion is most certainly not conversion according to our Lord’s own teaching and the teaching of the inspired apostles. So I know nothing that is so dangerous, reprehensible,³ and unscriptural as to say, “But you mustn’t ask these questions.” No, no, let them come. *Always* ask: does the Scripture entitle us to say that? If we are to be true teachers of the Word, and helpers of others, and concerned about the glory of God, we must realize that there is such a thing as a temporary conversion which is based upon misunderstanding.

My second reason for being concerned about precise definitions is that there are not only temporary conversions but even counterfeit conversions. Now I draw a distinction, you will notice, between the two and the difference is that in the case of a temporary conversion, conversion is something that has happened as the result of the presentation of the biblical truth. In the case of a counterfeit conversion, it is a phenomenon which, though closely resembling and simulating Christian conversion, has been produced by some other agency that is not the truth. So we must draw the distinction.

This was never more necessary than today because there are so many people who seem to think that as long as there is a great change in the person’s life, it must be a true conversion. If a man gives up sins and lives a good life and does good, that, they say, is Christian. But it may not be. It is possible for a man to undergo a great, profound, climactic change in his life and way of living and experience which has nothing to do with Christianity. People may even come out of the world and join a church, and their whole life from the outside may apparently be different, but it may be a counterfeit conversion. It is a conversion in the sense that they have left one thing and have come to another, have given up sins and are now doing good, but it is counterfeit because they lack the necessary, essential relationship to truth. If you are only interested in phenomena, if you are only interested in someone who can get up and say, “My whole life is absolutely changed,” then you need only go to books on psychology. Psychology has been very popular now for many years, and it makes a most powerful attack upon the Christian faith—that is why I am so concerned about it. I heard a man say that if his Christian faith were attacked, it would not worry him. He would simply reply, “I don’t care what you people say; I don’t care what science says, I know because of what’s happening to me.”

Now my response to that was, “Yes, and every psychologist in your audience would smile. They would say, ‘We agree that you have had a psychological change and experience. But, of course, many things can

³ **reprehensible** – deserving rebuke; blameworthy.

do that.' And they would continue to dismiss the whole of Christianity."

No, the defense of the Christian faith must never rely simply upon some experience that you and I have had. *The defense of the Christian faith is objective truth.* So unless we are careful at this point in defining conversion, the danger is that we shall have nothing to say to those who have undergone one of these counterfeit experiences.

Then there is one other thing—and here we leave the counterfeit and the temporary and come to something which is more immediately practical. There are variable elements in connection with conversion, and because of these we must be very careful that we know what the essential elements are. Let me illustrate what I mean: take the time element, *the time factor in conversion. Must it be sudden?* Is it impossible for it to be gradual? Well, I would say that the Scripture does not teach that it must of necessity be sudden. The great thing is that it has happened, whether sudden or gradual. The time element is not one of the absolute essentials; it may have its importance, but it is not vital.

Secondly, must one's conversion of necessity be dramatic? We all tend to emphasize these, do we not? They have human interest, we say, and we must be interesting. But must conversion be dramatic? Now if you read just one chapter in the Scriptures—Acts 16—you will see that you have no right to say that. Of course, if you only read the story of the Philippian jailer, then you will say conversion must be full of drama. But I am equally interested in the story of Lydia and there is nothing to suggest that about her conversion. Not at all! It may have been quite quiet, but it was equally a conversion. So here we have another variable element. Dramatic quality may be there, but it may not be. It is not essential.

Then there is the old vexed question of the place of feelings. Of course, they must be there, but there are feelings and feelings. They may be very intense, or they may not be, but they are still feelings. We all differ by nature and temperament, and in this matter of feelings we differ very much indeed. The most demonstrative person is not always the one who feels most....So it is not the one who is weeping the most copiously who is of necessity the most intensely feeling. Another person may be feeling so deeply that his feelings are down beyond the very possibility of tears, as it were. Feelings are variable and express themselves variously in different people. They must be present, but God forbid that we should insist upon a particular intensity or display of feelings.

And then there is the whole question of age. Some have said that unless you are converted when you are an adolescent, you will never be converted at all because the requisite psychological factors can

never be there again. What utter rubbish! How unscriptural! I have never seen a more striking conversion than I once saw in a man aged seventy-seven: thank God for that! No, there is no age limit. Age does not make the slightest difference. We are talking about something the Holy Spirit produces. There is as much hope for the man who is shivering on the brink of the grave and of hell as for the adolescent—if you are interested in true conversion, that is. If you are interested in psychological experiences, then I agree, adolescence is the right time for it. Everything is very explosive at that point; you merely strike a match, and there it is. But we are not interested in psychological changes; we are talking about true, Christian, spiritual conversion. And there age, thank God, is a complete irrelevance.

Now we have considered these things because there is always a tendency to standardize the variable aspect of conversion. Sometimes it works out in the evangelist, in his desiring everybody to become a Christian in the same way, and he is doubtful of the converts unless they are all the same. But it may happen in us too; we all desire to be the same. That is always one of the dangerous things about reading of somebody else's experiences; consciously or unconsciously, we tend to reproduce them. It is a part of our make-up and of our nature: we are imitators, and if we like a thing that we see in someone else, then we wish that to be true of us, too.

Then we also tend to concentrate on particular manifestations of conversion. The feelings, for instance, are only one aspect, yet we put all our emphasis on them. This can be extremely dangerous because feelings, as I have indicated, are one of a number of variables, and this way may lead to tragedy. Some people are always insisting upon the presence of a variable quality, which is not essential. Thinking it was essential, and not having experienced it, they say that they have never been converted. And this can lead to untold and unnecessary unhappiness....if we postulate⁴ something that is variable and insist upon it, we may do ourselves or somebody else great harm. We may tell other people that they are not converted because they do not conform to our particular standard. So we must be very careful that we do not go beyond Scripture and say things which the Bible does not say. Therefore, how vital, how essential it is, that we should have clear definitions in our mind.

What, then, are these permanent elements? There are two essential elements in conversion, and these are emphasized everywhere in the Scripture—in the Gospels, in the book of Acts, and in the epistles. Paul, fortunately, has put it all in a phrase for us, in Acts 20:21, on that moving occasion when he said farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. I have sometimes thought that if there was

⁴ **postulate** – to claim the existence of something; to assume as a basis for discussion.

one scene in history more than any other at which I should like to have been present, it was just that. "I'm going," Paul says, in effect, to the elders, "you'll never see me again, and I want you to hold on to the things I've told you, and to remember what I did when I was with you." What was this? "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." That is conversion. Those are the essential and the only essential elements in conversion: *repentance* and *faith*. Sudden or gradual, it does not matter. Repentance must be there; faith must be there. If one is missing it is not conversion. *Both* are essential.

At this point, let me ask a question: in which order do they come? Which comes first, repentance or faith? Now that is a fascinating question. There is a sense in which faith is bound to come before repentance, and yet I shall not put it like that and for this reason: when I am talking about faith, I mean it in the sense that the apostle Paul used it—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not faith in general. There must be faith in general before you can repent, because if you do not believe certain things about God, you do not act upon it, and there is no repentance. But I am referring to faith in the special sense of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In that case, repentance comes before faith and Paul puts them in that order: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Why must repentance come first? Well, you will find that it always comes first in Scripture. Who was the first preacher in the New Testament? The answer is John the Baptist. What did he preach? The "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). This was the message of the forerunner, and the forerunner always comes first. Then the second preacher was the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you turn to the Gospels and observe the first thing He ever said you will find that He again exhorted the people to repent and to believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). So, exactly like John the Baptist, the first thing He taught was repentance.

Then what did Peter preach? Take the great sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter preached and the people cried out saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" This was the reply: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Act 2:37, 38). Repent. And, as I have already quoted to you, repentance was the message of the apostle Paul. He started with repentance. He did it in Athens: God "...commandeth all men every where to repent" (Act 17:30).

Repentance is of necessity the first message, and it surely must be. It is Scriptural, yes, but Scripture also enables us to

reason. Let me put it to you like this: Why should men and women believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? It is no use just asking them to believe in Christ. They are entitled to ask, "Why should I believe in Him?" That is a perfectly fair question. And people do not see any need or necessity for believing in the Lord Jesus Christ if they do not know what repentance is. Of course, you may be inviting them to Christ as a helper, or as a friend, or as a healer of the body, but that is not Christian conversion. No, no, people must know why they must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Law is our schoolmaster (Gal 3:24) to bring us there, and the Law works repentance.

In other words, the primary point about conversion, the primary thing in the whole of Christian salvation, is to bring us into the right relationship with God. Why did Christ come? Why did He die? The answer is that He did it all to bring us to God. And if we think about these things in any way except in terms of being reconciled to God, our view is entirely false. I say it hesitatingly because I know the danger of being misunderstood, but there is far too much Christianity today, it seems to me, that stops at the Lord Jesus Christ and does not realize that He came and did everything in order to reconcile us to God. Indeed, it was God who was "in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2Co 5:19). I think the greatest weakness in evangelical Christianity today is that it forgets God. We are interested in experiences, we are interested in happiness, we are interested in subjective states. But the first need of every soul, as we shall see, it to be right with God. Nothing matters but that. The Gospel starts with God, because what is wrong with everybody is that they are in a wrong relationship to Him.

So we must put repentance first; it is the original trouble, the main consequence of the Fall and original sin. God is orderly in His working, and He starts with the big thing, the first thing.

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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century. He left a successful medical career to be a preacher of the Gospel. Successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-68. Born in Wales.



CONVICTION AND CONVERSION

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

IT may be proper here to make a few general remarks, explanatory of what is often the state of a sinner's mind immediately before conversion.

He discovers that the Bible is a revealer of the secrets of his soul, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of his heart.

He is ready to say, "Come see a book which hath told me all things that ever I did." At such times God's Word is as a glass,¹ in which a man beholds his natural face. It reflects his image and shows him his sad deficiencies and his great deformity. He finds his heart to be exceedingly depraved. He is convinced that the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually. In this state of mind, David compared his pains to "broken bones" (Psa 51:8). If you have ever had a broken bone, you may have an idea of his meaning. Thoughts of it occupy the mind day and night. For a moment, company may seem to create a diversion of the thoughts, but soon they revert to the fractured limb. Such a one, awaking at a dead hour of the night, immediately thinks of the injured part. All attempts to shake off reflection concerning it are fruitless. In another place David says, "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3). His mind dwelt upon his transgressions. Like a vast army of men, they were continually passing in solemn review. In this state of mind, one feels that God has a right to have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and to have compassion on whom He will have compassion. Whatever may be his theory on the subject, his heartfelt conviction is, that without wrong to him, God may withhold all the blessings of salvation. Yea, he feels that God would be justified in condemning him for ever and be clear in driving him to outer darkness.

Sometimes one in this state is greatly annoyed with wicked and even blasphemous thoughts. The object of the tempter seems to be to banish all hope of reconciliation with God. It sometimes happens to such a soul as to that young man of whom we read, "And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down and tare him" (Luk 9:42). When his prey is about to be taken from him, the old lion is greatly enraged. He cannot bear to witness the escape of a single soul.

One thus exercised will discover that the belief which he has hith-

¹ glass – mirror.

erto had of the Bible is unavailing. It has been merely historical,² cold, and powerless. Or it has been the faith of devils and has merely filled his soul with terrors. He now feels the need of a faith which is “of the operation of God” (Col 2:12). And even in the surrender which he is about to make, there is so much timidity and such a sense of unworthiness that commonly the most he can say is, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mar 9:24). Boldness in coming to the throne of grace is seldom enjoyed even by young converts.

One who has advanced thus far will probably be more than ever beset by the evil one. The Hebrews never fared so hard as just before they left Egypt and never were so hated as after they began to march towards Canaan. He is sadly disappointed that the measures he has adopted for relief have but sunk him the deeper in misery. Like that woman in the Gospel, he has spent all his substance on physicians and is no better, but worse. Prayer, hearing the Word, reading, conversation, and resolutions have all been found ineffectual; and even worse, they have brought more wrath on the soul because of the sin attending them.

In this state one might adopt the language of the psalmist: “My soul is full of troubles...I am as a man that hath no strength...Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deep. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves...I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction....Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? ...Thy terrors have cut me off” (Psa 88:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14). He feels that God must help him, or he must die in his sins. Like Peter sinking, he says, “Lord, save me” (Mat 14:30). Or like Hezekiah, he exclaims, “Mine eyes fail with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me” (Isa 38:14).

Such a man will grieve because he cannot grieve, and mourn because he cannot mourn, and weep because he cannot weep. He is astonished at his guilt and at his hardness of heart. He is convinced that an entire change of heart is in his case necessary to happiness here and hereafter. He also sees that if he shall ever be saved, it must be by an act of free, rich, sovereign grace. His boasted ability is found to be nothing. His strength is weakness. His merits are now not named. He feels that he deserves no good thing. His righteousnesses are as filthy rags. He is ready to come before the Lord with the language of self-condemnation.

This state of mind is conviction, which involves always a sense of five things: sinfulness, guilt, ignorance, helpless-

² **historical** – a natural faith concerned only with historical events, as distinct from the faith produced by the Holy Spirit which enables a sinner to believe the Gospel.

ness, and misery. This conviction is, of course, not alike pungent³ in all cases; nor is it necessarily accompanied with extreme agitations or terrors; but it is a clear view of one's state as demanding the remedy provided in the Gospel. If the work of conviction should proceed and hope never come to the relief of the soul, the result would be the impenetrable gloom of despair, as in the case of the damned. Let a man see his lost estate and not see the Savior...and he will be a desperado⁴ in the government of God. Often the sinner desires that his convictions may proceed because he looks upon them as punishments for sin—as punishments richly deserved. If he had his way, he would not even now come to Christ. If he could weep and mourn and grieve and be melted as he wishes, he would be satisfied without any other atonement than that which he could thus make. At least, he would seek no other. In all His dealings with him, God's plan is to shut him up to the faith of Christ; that through the Law he may be dead to the Law that he may be married to Christ.

Ask such a one if he thinks he is under conviction, and he will probably reply in the negative. His views on that subject are very vague and erroneous. Indeed, he has no distinct idea of what conviction is, except that he believes it is a step towards salvation. He thinks he has no such feeling as in anywise prepares him for a change. It seems to him that he is losing instead of gaining ground.

The nearer he approaches to salvation, the further does he seem from it. The darkest hour is just before day. It was midnight when Pharaoh dismissed Israel (Exo 12:30, 31). In his *Almost Christian*,⁵ Mead gives a salutary warning: "Never rest in convictions till they end in conversion. This is that wherein most men miscarry; they rest in their convictions and take them for conversion, as if sin seen were therefore sin forgiven or as if a sight of the want of grace were the truth of the work of grace." Conviction, however deep or distressing, is not saving.

From *Vital Godliness* reprinted by Sprinkle Publications

William S. Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister and graduate of Old Princeton; it has been said that among 19th century Reformed writers, "none was more doctrinally sound, experientially searching, and practically realistic"; known as pre-eminently a preacher of the Gospel, while a contemporary described his public prayers as "the tender pleadings of a soul in communion with God."

³ **pungent** – sharp; acute.

⁴ **desperado** – a person in despair or in a desperate condition.

⁵ *The Almost Christian Discovered* – by Puritan author Matthew Mead (1629-1699), reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publishers.



REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

REPENTANCE belongs exclusively to the religion of sinners. It has no place in the exercises of unfallen creatures. He who has never done a sinful act nor had a sinful nature needs neither forgiven. But sinners need all these blessings. To them they are indispensable. The wickedness of the human heart makes it necessary.

Under all dispensations,¹ since our first parents were expelled from the Garden of Eden, God has insisted on repentance. Among the patriarchs, Job said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Under the Law, David wrote the thirty-second and fifty-first psalms. John the Baptist cried, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat 3:2). Christ's account of Himself is that He "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mar 2:17). Just before His ascension, Christ commanded "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luk 24:47). And the Apostles taught the same doctrine "testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 20:21). So that any system of religion among men which should not include repentance, would upon its very face be false....This doctrine will not be amiss while the world stands.

Though repentance is an obvious and oft-commanded duty, yet it cannot be truly and acceptably performed except by the grace of God. It is a gift from heaven. Paul directs Timothy in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves: "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2Ti 2:25). Christ is exalted a Prince and a Savior "to give repentance" (Act 5:31). So when the heathen were brought in, the church glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Act 11:18). All this is according to the tenor² of the Old Testament promises. There God says He will do this work for us and in us. Listen to His gracious words: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Eze 36:26, 27). So that true repentance is a special mercy from God. He gives it. It comes from none

¹ **dispensations** – the arrangement of events by divine providence.

² **tenor** – general sense or meaning.

other. It is impossible for poor fallen nature so far to recover herself by her own strength as truly to repent. The heart is wedded to its own ways and justifies its own sinful courses with incurable obstinacy,³ until divine grace makes the change. No motives to good are strong enough to overcome depravity in the natural heart of man. If ever we attain this grace, it must be through the great love of God to perishing men.

Yet repentance is most reasonable. No man acts wisely till he repents. When the prodigal came to himself, he went straightway to his father. It is so obviously proper that he who has done wrong should be heartily sorry for it and never do so any more, that some infidels⁴ have asserted that repentance was sufficiently taught by natural religion without the Bible. But this is a mistake. The true doctrine of repentance is understood nowhere but in Christian countries, and not even there by infidels. Besides, that which is required of us may be very reasonable, and yet be very repugnant⁵ to men's hearts. When called to duties which we are reluctant to perform, we are easily persuaded that they are unreasonably exacted of us. It is therefore always helpful to us to have a command of God binding our consciences in any case. It is truly benevolent in God to speak to us so authoritatively in this matter. God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Act 17:30). The ground of the command is that all men everywhere are sinners. Our blessed Savior was without sin, and of course He could not repent. With that solitary exception, since the Fall there has not been found any just person who needed no repentance. And none are more to be pitied than those poor deluded men who see in their hearts and lives nothing to repent of.

But what is true repentance? This is a question of the highest importance. It deserves our closest attention. The following is probably as good a definition as has yet been given. "Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace... [whereby] a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness⁶ of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous Law of God, and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent,⁷ so grieves for and hates his sins as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments."⁸ That this definition is sound and Scriptural will appear more and more clearly the more thoroughly it is examined. True repentance is sorrow for sin, ending in reformation. Mere regret is not repentance, neither is mere outward reformation. It is not an imitation of virtue, it is virtue

³ **obstinacy** – the condition of being stubborn.

⁴ **infidels** – those who deny the authority of Christ and His Word.

⁵ **repugnant** – arousing disgust; offensive; repulsive.

⁶ **odiousness** – the quality of being hateful; repulsiveness.

⁷ **penitent** – one who repents, with serious purpose to amend the sin or wrongdoing.

⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith* 15.1a, 2.

itself...

He, who truly repents, is chiefly sorry for his *sins*. He, whose repentance is spurious,⁹ is chiefly concerned for their *consequences*. The former chiefly regrets that he has *done* evil; the latter that he has *incurred* evil. One sorely laments that he deserves punishment; the other that he must suffer punishment. One approves of the Law which condemns him; the other thinks he is hardly treated, and that the Law is rigorous. To the sincere penitent,¹⁰ sin appears exceeding sinful; to him who sorrows after a worldly sort, sin, in some form, appears pleasant. He regrets that it is forbidden. One says it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God, even if no punishment followed. The other sees little evil in transgression if there were no painful consequences sure to follow. If there were no hell, the one would still wish to be delivered from sin. If there were no retribution, the other would sin with increased greediness. The true penitent is chiefly averse to sin as it is an offence against God. This embraces all sins of every description. But it has often been observed that two classes of sins seem to rest with great weight on the conscience of those whose repentance is of a godly sort. These are *secret* sins and sins of *omission*. On the other hand, in a spurious repentance, the mind is much inclined to dwell on *open* sins and on sins of *commission*. The true penitent knows the plague of an evil heart and a fruitless life. The spurious penitent is not much troubled about the real state of heart, but grieves that appearances are so much against him.

It is indeed true that oftentimes some one sin is very prominent in the thoughts of the genuine penitent. Peter wept bitterly for having denied his Lord. David says of the matter of Uriah, "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3). On these words Luther says, "That is, my sin plagues me, gives me no rest, no peace; whether I eat or drink, sleep or wake, I am always in terror of God's wrath and judgment." And how often and penitently does Paul refer to the great sin of his life, the murder of the saints....But though one sin may be first or most deeply impressed on the mind, yet in true repentance the mind does not rest there. The Samaritan woman was first convicted of living with a man who was not her husband. But soon she says that Christ had told her all things that ever she did. On the day of Pentecost, Peter labored to convict his hearers of the guilt of Christ's death. He was successful to a great extent. The result was their repentance for all sin, and their conversion unto God. "He that repents of sin as sin, does implicitly¹¹ repent of all sin." So soon and so clearly as he discovers the sinful nature of any thing, he abhors it. A wicked

⁹ **spurious** – superficially resembling, but lacking the true quality of: sham.

¹⁰ **penitent** – feeling or expressing remorse for one's deed.

¹¹ **implicitly** – being implied without being plainly expressed.

thought, no less than a vile word or evil deed is for a loathing to the true penitent. The promise runs, "They shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations." So that if there were no beings in the universe but God and the true penitent, he would have very much the same emotions of sorrow and humiliation that he has now. And if instead of countless offences he was conscious of comparatively few, the nature of his mental exercises would be the same as now. It is therefore true that he, who ingenuously¹² repents of sin, repents of all sin. To change one sin for another, even though it be less gross or more secret, is but disowning one enemy of God to form an alliance with another.

Nor is a true penitent afraid of humbling himself too much. He does not measure the degrees of his self-abasement before God. He would take the lowest place. He says, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?" (Job 40:4). "O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee" (Psa 69:5). "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa 130:3). "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psa 51:1). It is not of the nature of genuine lowliness of heart before God to be nice and careful not to get too prostrate in the dust. Its great fear is that it will after all be proud and self-sufficient.

True repentance has in it also much shame. This relates not only to open and disreputable crimes, but also to secret sins, to vain thoughts, and evil imaginations: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God" (Ezr 9:6); "Shew the [temple] to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities" (Eze 43:10). He who does not blush for his sins has never been truly ashamed of them, has never really and heartily forsaken them....Nor does this shame cease with the hope of pardon, but is rather thereby increased. So God says, "I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed....And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD" (Eze 16:60b, 61a, 62, 63). On this point, universal Christian experience fully accords with God's Word. Paul never forgave himself for his cruel persecutions. Peter never ceased to be ashamed of his cowardly denial of his Lord. David never ceased to be ashamed of his base conduct.

A true penitent also reforms. A holy life is the invariable fruit

¹² **ingenuously** – honestly; straightforwardly.

of genuine repentance. "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (Job 34:32)...When Ephraim sincerely repented, he utterly renounced idolatry, saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos 14:8). He does not really confess sin who does not forsake it. He who hates sin turns from it. It was not the habit of David's life to commit murder and adultery, though he once did both; nor of Peter to deny his Lord, and curse and swear, though he was once guilty of both these. A true penitent is not willing to be always sinning and repenting. We often read of "fruits meet for repentance," or "fruits worthy of repentance." Paul, having said that "godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2Co 7:10), gives a very lively account of the effects of true repentance: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" (2Co 7:11).

Genuine repentance also draws its chief motives from the milder aspects of the divine character and the sweet influences of the cross. It is not the severity so much as the mercy of God that melts the heart. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom 2:4). It melts the heart when it sees God's kindness and its own baseness. None but a soul not touched by the finger of God can agree to be bad because God is good, or consent to a career of folly because the Lord is merciful. Repentance unto life invariably looks not merely at the goodness of God in creation and providence, but has a special regard to the work of redemption: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness" (Zec 12:10). This is specially stated to have been the ground of the repentance of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. It is so still. Nothing breaks the heart like a sight of Christ crucified. This is obtained by faith only. There can be no evangelical repentance without saving faith. Indeed, "the true tears of repentance flow from the eye of faith." To "repent and believe the gospel" are not separate, though they are distinct duties. He who sincerely does one never omits the other. He who lacks one of these graces never attains the other. So that true repentance is always also connected with love.

From *Vital Godliness* reprinted by Sprinkle Publications



One of the surest tests to apply to the professed conversion is the heart's attitude towards sin. Where the principle of holiness has been planted, there will necessarily be a loathing of all that is unholy.—A. W. Pink

FAITH AND CONVERSION

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

EVERYWHERE in the Scriptures great stress is laid on faith. In scores of passages, its absolute necessity is explicitly declared. With the Word of God, Christian experience well agrees. The young convert had neither hope nor joy till he believed. His faith being weak, he manifests great instability. But as it increases, he grows stronger until he is undaunted and cries, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Old Christians speak much of faith and always love to have the truth concerning it clearly explained.

But what is the faith on which the Scriptures so much insist? This is a matter of chief importance. An error here will affect our whole religious life. Faith is either human or divine. In human faith we rely upon what men say. This we do by the constitution of our minds. Thus, children rest upon what their parents tell them. Human faith is properly confined to things on which God has not spoken. Its basis is human testimony. Divine faith rests on the testimony of God. It concerns things which are revealed from heaven...

The faith of God's people relates to things past, present, and to come. It believes that God made the world. There is the *past*. It believes that God is. There is the *present*. It believes that there will be a Day of Judgment. There is the *future*. Nor are these and other revealed truths believed by different kinds of faith, but all by one and the same faith. As with the same visual organ we look to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south, at objects far from us or near to us, so with the same eye of faith we look at things thousands of years past, or thousands of years to come, or things now existing in the unseen world. Of old for thousands of years, the pious believed in a Savior to come. In the days of His flesh, His disciples believed in a Savior then come. For nearly two thousand years, God's people have believed in a Savior that has come. In all these cases the faith was the same in principle and in its effects also.

The *Westminster Confession* says, "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened. By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word for the authority of God himself speaking therein, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.

But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory; growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.”¹ A little consideration of this account of faith will show how full, complete, and Scriptural it is.

The first thing asserted is that saving faith is not of earthly, but of heavenly origin; that it is not of man, but of God. Faith is the gift of God: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him” (Phi 1:29); “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom 12:3). When “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 16:16, 17). This faith is particularly ascribed to the Holy Ghost as its Author. He produces it in the heart. So say the Scriptures: “The fruit of the Spirit is faith” (Gal 5:22); “To another is given faith by the same Spirit” (1Co 12:9); “We having the same Spirit of faith...also believe” (2Co 4:13). The reason why saving faith endures is because it is the incorruptible seed of God.

It is next said that in working this faith in us, God puts honor upon His Word as the ordinary instrument. With this also the Scriptures well agree: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:14, 17); “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1Co 1:21). This is the foundation of all our encouragement in proclaiming the Gospel. That which is sown in the weakness of man is raised in the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost. No wonder that such happy results flow from proclaiming the Gospel whenever God’s Spirit attends it. It is thus the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. “God’s gracious biddings are effectual enablings.”

In like manner this faith is chiefly nourished by the ministry of the Word and other ordinances, and by prayer. “Lord, increase our faith” (Luk 17:5). The baptism of water is effectual when accompanied by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The breaking of bread and drinking of wine are means of nourishment to all those who drink spiritually of the Rock which follows them, even Christ, and who by faith eat the true bread which cometh down from heaven, even the Son of God. All the saints desire the sincere milk of the Word that

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith* 14.1-3.

they may grow thereby.

True faith respects all God's Word. It receives narratives, promises, threatenings, doctrines, precepts, warnings, encouragements, all as they were designed for its use. It obeys God's commands. They were given for that purpose. It is afraid of His threatenings. It trembles at His Word. It relies upon the promises, both as they respect this life and the next. It takes warning from many parts of Scripture. It rejoices in solid Scriptural encouragement. It relies upon God's Word as testimony that is infallible. Whatever God speaks, faith believes. It receives all He has said. The Word of God liveth and abideth for ever. So faith receives it as His Word and not as the word of man. His authority is perfect.

But saving faith has special reference to Christ. So the Scriptures often teach: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1Jo 5:5); "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1Jo 5:9-11); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (Joh 3:36); "He that believeth on him is not condemned" (Joh 3:18). In God's Word, the great theme is Christ Jesus: "To him give all the prophets witness" (Act 10:43); "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10). If to deny the Father is fatal, so is it also to deny the Son. If to do despite to the Spirit of grace involves the loss of the soul, to reject Christ as the Savior makes destruction inevitable. But to receive Christ, to rest upon Him, to look to Him, to come to Him, to flee to Him for refuge, to take Him as our Sacrifice, as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and to do this heartily is the great office of saving faith.

This faith is not of equal strength in all believers, nor in the same believer at all times. We read of "him that is weak in faith," of "little faith," and of "great faith." Faith grows by the divine blessing. The faith of some grows "exceedingly." Every true disciple says, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24). It finally gains every needful victory. In some cases it is matured into full assurance. This is all through Christ, Who begins, carries on, and perfects the work of faith in us by His Spirit and grace.

This whole view of faith is consistent with itself and with all the Scriptures. It explains many things which otherwise would seem to us

enigmatical.²

First, we see why faith always was and always will be necessary: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Heb 11:4). This was the religion of those early times. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luk 18:8). This will be the religion of the latest times. The reason why no man was ever able or shall ever be able to please God without faith, is, that unbelief at every step sets aside all that God has said and done for man’s salvation. He who would be saved in unbelief, would put perpetual contempt on all the arrangements of heaven for the recovery of lost men.

We also see how reasonable it is that faith should be required of us: “Have faith in God” (Mar 11:22); “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established” (2Ch 20:20); “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Joh 6:29); “Be not faithless, but believing” (Joh 20:27). These are but specimens of the authoritative tones in which God speaks to us on this subject. He could not say less if He sought our good. To permit us to live in unbelief would be to license all sin.

We can also now understand why the minds of truly religious people are so ready to take up with God’s offers of grace and mercy. Believing all God says, they of course receive as true all that He has alleged concerning their fallen and depraved condition. In other words, they find out that they are sinners, lost, guilty, vile, and helpless. To such the Gospel is *always* good news. It is indeed life from the dead to a poor, convinced sinner to see the door of mercy wide open and Christ standing ready to receive all that come to Him...

And yet faith, even the simplest and strongest, is not irrational, nor foolish. No man acts so wisely as he who implicitly believes God. Abraham never showed that his faculties were so well regulated and orderly as when he went straight forward at God’s bidding to sacrifice Isaac. He asked no reasons, he stated no difficulties; he simply did as he had been commanded and staggered not through unbelief. The reason why faith is so wise is because it reposes³ confidence in God, Who cannot lie, cannot change, cannot fail, cannot be deceived, thwarted, or even perplexed; Who sees the end from the beginning, Who loves beyond all names of love known to mortals or even to angels; a God and Savior Who never trampled on a broken heart, Who never despised the cry of the humble, Who never left the penitent to perish in their sins; and Who will infallibly bring to eternal glory all who take refuge in atoning blood...

² **enigmatical** – obscure; perplexing.

³ **reposes** – rests.

The following is a good definition: “Justifying faith is a saving grace wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth⁴ to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness therein held forth for the pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.”⁵

Without further comparing formal definitions on this subject, it may be said that sound writers fully agree with the Scriptures in representing faith as a simple act of the mind, in which both the understanding and will are united; that the light of knowledge goes before it so far as to reveal the mind of God, and so it is not blind and credulous,⁶ but sober, watchful, and intelligent; and that it is the fruit of warm affections, and so is not cold, speculative, and without practical effect...

The effects of saving faith are many and of great value. Indeed they are so important, that without them salvation in any of its benefits is impossible.

1. True faith is the instrument of a sinner’s justification before God. So the Scriptures abundantly teach: “The just shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38); “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23); “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1); “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). “For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21). Here is a grand result: sin is forgiven and the sinner is accepted simply by believing on Him Who is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth. This is indeed a mystery and an offence to many...

2. Adoption is also by faith: “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” (Joh 1:12); “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). What a wonderful effect is this: a child of the devil becomes a child of God, an heir of perdition⁷ is changed into an heir of glory, and all by reliance on the Word of God and by confidence in the Person and merits of Jesus Christ. No wonder believers have ever celebrated the wonders of faith.

3. Besides obtaining justification and adoption, we also by

⁴ **assenteth** – to give or express one’s agreement with a statement.

⁵ *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 72.

⁶ **credulous** – over-ready to believe; apt to believe on weak or insufficient grounds.

⁷ **perdition** – the condition of final spiritual ruin or damnation in hell.

faith are made partakers of the Holy Spirit to all the ends of illumination, sanctification, and encouragement in the Lord. Christ says, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)” (Joh 7:38, 39). There is no success, progress, or comfort in religion, but through this blessed Spirit. To receive Him in His fullness of grace is to secure the earnest of all good things, the pledge of heaven itself. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). But if a man have the Spirit of Christ, nothing can prove him a castaway, a reprobate, an enemy.

4. Saving faith is an infallible sign of regeneration. None ever thus believed but those who “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Joh 1:13). “Who-soever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God” (1Jo 5:1). Genuine faith being ours, our regeneration is no longer doubtful...

5. The powerful effect of true faith in purifying the heart is among its transcendent⁸ blessings. This chiefly makes the difference between it and the faith of devils. It awakens intense hatred of sin, eager longings after holiness, blessed hopes of attaining complete conformity to God, and a purpose to do right, whatever may be the result. There is no effectual purifying of the heart but by faith—by faith laying hold of Christ, and obeying the truth. Hooker well says, “To make a wicked and sinful man most holy through his believing, is more than to create a world of nothing.”

From *Vital Godliness* reprinted by Sprinkle Publications



Beware of any change that is not conversion; of any reformation that leaves you without Christ; of any religion, however refined and beautiful, that is not the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and that does not transform you into the image of God’s own holy Son. If you rest content with anything short of these, you are only hardening your hearts, searing and stupefying your consciences; rendering yourselves more and more insensible to the power of divine things and bringing yourselves into a state which will not only exclude God and repel his Holy Spirit, but will invite the return of Satan, and all Satan’s legions of darkness, into your miserable souls, making you twofold more a child of hell than ever.—*Horatius Bonar*

⁸ **transcendent** – surpassing others of its kind; going beyond the ordinary limits.

SEVEN THINGS TO CONSIDER

A. W. Pink (1889-1952)

FIRST, let us consider the causes and the means of salvation. There are no less than seven things which do concur in this great work, for all of them are said, in one passage or another, to “save” us. Salvation is ascribed to the love of God, to the atonement of Christ, to the mighty operations of the Spirit, to the instrumentality of the Word, to the labors of the preacher, to the conversion of a sinner, to the ordinances or sacraments. The view of salvation entertained today by the majority of professing Christians is so superficial, so cramped, so inadequate. Indeed, so great is the ignorance which now prevails that we had better furnish proof texts for each of these seven concurring causes lest we be charged with error on so vital a subject.

Salvation is ascribed to God the Father: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling” (2Ti 1:9)—because of His electing love in Christ. To the Lord Jesus: “He shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21)—because of His merits and satisfaction. To the Holy Spirit: “He hath saved us, by the renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5)—because of His almighty efficacy and operations. To the instrumentality of the Word: “the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam 1:21)—because it discovers to us the grace whereby we may be saved. To the labors of the preacher: “In doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1Ti 4:16)—because of their subordination to God’s Word. To the conversion of a sinner in which repentance and faith are exercised by us: “Save yourselves from this untoward generation”—by the repentance spoken of in verse 38 (Act 2:40); “By grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). To the ordinances, or sacraments: “Baptism doth also now save us” (1Pe 3:21)—because it seals the grace of God to the believing heart.

The love and wisdom of God comprise the prime cause, the first mover of all the rest of the causes which contribute to our salvation.

From *The Doctrine of Human Depravity* reprinted by Chapel Library.

A.W. Pink (1889-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, voluminous author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and many books including his well-known *The Sovereignty of God*. Born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934.



DO YOU THINK YOU ARE CONVERTED?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted”—Acts 3:19.

THE subject which forms the title of this paper is one which touches all mankind. It ought to come home to all ranks and classes, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple. Any one may get to heaven without money, rank, or learning. No one, however wise, wealthy, noble, or beautiful, will ever get to heaven without CONVERSION.

LET ME SHOW THAT CONVERSION IS A NECESSARY THING: this is a point of great importance. Some worthy people are ready enough to admit that conversion is a Scriptural truth and a reality, but not a thing which needs to be pressed on most English people. The heathen, they grant, need conversion. Even the thieves, and fallen characters, and inmates of jails, they allow, may require conversion. But to talk of conversion being necessary for Church-going people is to talk of things which they cannot see at all. “Such people may, in some cases, need a little stirring up and amendment.¹ They may not be quite as good as they ought to be; it would be better if they attended more to religion; but you have no right to say they need conversion! It is uncharitable, harsh, narrow-minded, bitter, wrong to tell them they require conversion!”

This sadly common notion is a complete delusion. It is a pure invention of man’s, without a scrap of foundation in God’s Word. *The Bible teaches expressly that the change of heart called conversion is a thing absolutely needed by every one.* It is needed because of the total corruption of human nature. It is needed because of the condition of every man’s natural heart. All people born into the world of every rank and nation must have their hearts changed between the cradle and the grave before they can go to heaven. All, all men without exception must be converted.

Without conversion of heart we cannot serve God on earth. We have naturally neither faith, nor fear, nor love toward God and His Son Jesus Christ. We have no delight in His Word. We take no pleasure in prayer or communion with Him. We have no enjoyment in His ordinances, His house, His people, or His day. We may have a form of Christianity and keep up a round of ceremonies and religious performances. But without conversion we have no more heart in our religion than a brick or a stone. Can a dead corpse serve God? We know

¹ **amendment** – reformation; correction; removal of faults.

it cannot. Well, without conversion we are dead toward God.

Look round the congregation with which you worship every Sunday. Mark how little interest the great majority of them take in what is going on. Observe how listless,² and apathetic,³ and indifferent they evidently are about the whole affair. It is clear their hearts are not there! They are thinking of something else and not of religion. They are thinking of business, or money, or pleasure, or worldly plans, or bonnets, or gowns, or new dresses, or amusements. Their bodies are there, but not their hearts. And what is the reason? What is it they all need? *They need conversion.* Without it they only come to church for fashion and form's sake and go away from church to serve the world or their sins.

But this is not all. Without conversion of heart we could not enjoy heaven, if we got there. Heaven is a place where holiness reigns supreme, and sin and the world have no place at all. The company will all be holy; the employments will all be holy; it will be an eternal Sabbath-day. Surely if we go to heaven, we must have a heart in tune and able to enjoy it, or else we shall not be happy. We must have a nature in harmony with the element we live in and the place where we dwell. Can a fish be happy out of water? We know it cannot. Well, without conversion of heart we could not be happy in heaven.

Look round the neighborhood in which you live, and the persons with whom you are acquainted. Think what many of them would do if they were cut off for ever from money, and business, and newspapers, and cards, and balls, and races, and hunting, and shooting, and worldly amusements! Would they like it? Think what they would feel if they were shut up for ever with Jesus Christ, and saints, and angels! Would they be happy? Would the eternal company of Moses, and David, and St. Paul be pleasant to those who never take the trouble to read what those holy men wrote? Would heaven's everlasting praise suit the taste of those who can hardly spare a few minutes in a week for private religion, even for prayer? There is but one answer to be given to all these questions. We must be converted before we can enjoy heaven. Heaven would be no heaven to any child of Adam without conversion.

Let no man deceive us. There are two things which are of absolute necessity to the salvation of every man and woman on earth. One of them is the mediatorial work of Christ *for* us—His atonement, satisfaction, and intercession. The other is the converting work of the Spirit *in* us—His guiding, renewing, and sanctifying grace. We must have both a title and a heart for heaven. Sacraments are only generally necessary to salvation: a man may be saved without them, like the

² **listless** – not inclined to exert effort.

³ **apathetic** – showing a lack of interest or concern.

penitent thief. An interest in Christ and conversion are absolutely necessary: without them no one can possibly be saved. All, all alike, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple, churchmen or dissenters, baptized or unbaptized, all must be converted or perish. *There is no salvation without conversion.* IT IS A NECESSARY THING.

LET ME NOW SHOW THAT CONVERSION IS A POSSIBLE THING: I think I know the feelings which come across many people's minds, when they read the things which I am writing in this paper. They take refuge in the idea that such a change as conversion is quite impossible, except for a favored few. "It is all very well," they argue, "for parsons to talk of conversion; but the thing cannot be done; we have work to mind, families to provide for, business to attend to. It is no use expecting miracles now. We cannot be converted." Such thoughts are very common. The devil loves to put them before us, and our own lazy hearts are only too ready to receive them: but they will not stand examination. I am not afraid to lay it down that conversion is a possible thing. If it were not so I would not say another word.

In saying this, however, I should be sorry to be mistaken. I do not for a moment mean that any one can convert himself, change his own heart, take away his own corrupt nature, put in himself a new spirit. I mean nothing of the kind. I should as soon expect the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision to give themselves life (Eze 37:3). I only mean that there is nothing in Scripture, nothing in God, nothing in man's condition, which warrants any one in saying, "I can never be converted." There lives not the man or woman on earth of whom it could be said, "Their conversion is an impossibility." Any one, however sinful and hardened, any one may be converted.

Why do I speak so confidently? How is it that I can look round the world and see the desperate wickedness that is in it and yet despair of no living man's soul? How is it that I can say to any one, however hard, fallen, and bad, "Your case is not hopeless: you, even you, may be converted"? I can do it because of the things contained in Christ's Gospel. It is the glory of that Gospel that under it nothing is impossible.

Conversion is a possible thing because of the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him is life. In His hand are the keys of death and hell. He has all power in heaven and earth. He quickeneth whom He will (Joh 1:4; Rev 1:18; Mat 28:18; Joh 5:21). It is as easy to Him to create new hearts out of nothing, as it was to create the world out of nothing. It is as easy to Him to breathe spiritual life into a stony, dead heart, as it was to breathe natural life into the clay of which Adam was formed and make him a living man. There was nothing He could not do on earth. Wind, sea, disease, death, the devil—all

were obedient to His word. There is nothing that He cannot do in heaven at God's right hand. His hand is as strong as ever: His love is as great as ever. The Lord Jesus Christ lives, and therefore conversion is not impossible.

But beside this, conversion is a possible thing because of the almighty power of the Holy Ghost, whom Christ sends into the hearts of all whom He undertakes to save. The same divine Spirit, Who co-operated with the Father and Son in the work of creation, co-operates specially in the work of conversion. It is He who conveys life from Christ, the great Fountain of Life, into the hearts of sinners. He, Who moved on the face of the waters before those wonderful words were spoken, "Let there be light," is He who moves over sinners' souls and takes their natural darkness away. Great indeed is the invisible power of the Holy Ghost! He can soften that which is hard. He can bend that which is stiff and stubborn. He can give eyes to the spiritually blind, ears to the spiritually deaf, tongues to the spiritually dumb, feet to the spiritually lame, warmth to the spiritually cold, knowledge to the spiritually ignorant, and life to the spiritually dead. "Who teacheth like Him!" (Job 36:22b). He has taught thousands of ignorant sinners and never failed to make them "wise unto salvation." The Holy Ghost lives, and therefore conversion is *never* impossible.

What can you say to these things? Away with the idea for ever that conversion is not possible. Cast it behind you: it is a temptation of the devil. Look not at yourself and your own weak heart—for then you may well despair. Look upward at Christ and the Holy Ghost and learn that with them nothing is impossible. Yes! The age of spiritual miracles is not yet past! Dead souls in our congregations can yet be raised; blind eyes can yet be made to see; dumb prayerless tongues can yet be taught to pray. No one ought ever to despair. When Christ has left heaven and laid down His office as the Savior of sinners—when the Holy Ghost has ceased to dwell in hearts and is no longer God—then, and not till then, men and women may say, "We cannot be converted." Till then, I say boldly, conversion is a possible thing. If men are not converted, it is because they will not come to Christ for life (Joh 5:40). CONVERSION IS POSSIBLE.

LET ME SHOW THAT CONVERSION IS A HAPPY THING: I shall have written in vain if I leave this point untouched. There are thousands, I firmly believe, who are ready to admit the truth of all I have said hitherto. Scriptural, real, necessary, possible—all this they willingly allow conversion to be. "Of course," they say, "we know it is all true. People ought to be converted." But will it increase a man's happiness to be converted? Will it add to a man's joys and lessen his sorrows to be converted? Here, alas, is a point at which many stick fast. They have a secret, lurking fear that if they are converted, they must become melancholy, miserable, and low-spirited. Conversion and a

sour face, conversion and a gloomy brow, conversion and an ill-natured readiness to snub young people and put down all mirth, conversion and a sorrowful countenance, conversion and sighing and groaning—all these are things which they seem to think must go together! No wonder that such people shrink from the idea of conversion!

The notion I have just described is very common and very mischievous. I desire to protest against it with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. I assert without hesitation that the conversion described in Scripture is a happy thing and not a miserable one, and that if converted persons are not happy, the fault must be in themselves. The happiness of a true Christian, no doubt, is not quite of the same sort as that of a worldly man. It is a calm, solid, deep flowing, substantial joy. It is not made up of excitement, levity, and boisterous, spasmodic mirth.⁴ It is the sober, quiet joy of one who does not forget death, judgment, eternity, and a world to come, even in his chief mirth. But in the main, I am confident the converted man is the happiest man.

What says the Scripture? How does it describe the feelings and experience of persons who have been converted? Does it give any countenance to the idea that conversion is a sorrowful and melancholy thing? Let us hear what Levi felt, when he had left the receipt of custom to follow Christ. We read that he “made him a great feast in his own house,” as if it was an occasion of gladness (Luk 5:29). Let us hear what Zacchaeus the publican felt, when Jesus offered to come to his house. We read that he “received him joyfully” (Luk 19:6). Let us hear what the Samaritans felt, when they were converted through Philip’s preaching. We read that “there was great joy in that city” (Act 8:8). Let us hear what the Ethiopian eunuch felt in the day of his conversion. We read that “he went on his way rejoicing” (Act 8:39). Let us hear what the Philippian jailer felt in the hour of his conversion. We read that he “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Act 16:34). In fact, the testimony of Scripture on this subject is always one and the same. Conversion is always described as the cause of joy and not of sorrow, of happiness and not of misery.

The plain truth is that people speak ill of conversion because they know nothing really about it. They run down converted men and women as unhappy, because they judge them by their outward appearance of calmness, gravity, and quietness and know nothing of their inward peace. They forget that it is not those who boast most of their own performances who do most, and it is not those who talk most of their happiness who are in reality the happiest people.

⁴ **boisterous, spasmodic mirth** – loud, noisy, outbursts of laughter and merriment.

A converted man is happy because he has peace with God. His sins are forgiven; his conscience is free from the sense of guilt: he can look forward to death, judgment, and eternity and not feel afraid. What an immense blessing to feel forgiven and free! He is happy because he finds order in his heart. His passions are controlled, his affections are rightly directed. Everything in his inner man, however weak and feeble, is in its right place and not in confusion. What an immense blessing order is! He is happy, because he feels independent of circumstances. Come what will, he is provided for: sickness and losses and death can never touch his treasure in heaven or rob him of Christ. What a blessing to feel independent! He is happy because he feels ready. Whatever happens he is somewhat prepared: the great business is settled; the great concern of life is arranged. What a blessing to feel ready! These are indeed true springs of happiness. They are springs which are utterly shut up and sealed to an unconverted man. Without forgiveness of sins, without hope for the world to come, dependent on this world for comfort, unprepared to meet God, he cannot be really happy. *Conversion is an essential part of true happiness.*

Settle it in your mind today that the friend who labors for your conversion to God is the best friend that you have. He is a friend not merely for the life to come, but for the life that now is. He is a friend to your present comfort as well as to your future deliverance from hell. He is a friend for time as well as for eternity. **CONVERSION IS A HAPPY THING.**

LET ME NOW SHOW YOU THAT CONVERSION IS A THING THAT MAY BE SEEN: this is a part of my subject which ought never to be overlooked. Well would it be for the Church and the world, if in every age it had received more attention. Thousands have turned away in disgust from religion because of the wickedness of many who profess it. Hundreds have caused the very name of conversion to stink by the lives they have lived after declaring themselves converted. They have fancied that a few spasmodic sensations and convictions were the true grace of God. They have imagined themselves converted because their animal⁵ feelings were excited. They have called themselves “converts” without the slightest right or title to that honored name. All this has done immense harm, and it is doing peculiar harm in the present day. The times demand a very clear assertion of the great principle that true conversion is a thing that can always be seen.

I admit fully that the manner of the Spirit’s working is invisible. It is like the wind. It is like the attractive power of the magnet. It is like the influence of the moon upon the tides. There is something about it far beyond the reach of man’s eyes or understanding. But while I ad-

⁵ **animal** – carnal; fleshly; relating to the physical nature as opposed to the spiritual.

mit this decidedly, I maintain no less decidedly that the effects of the Spirit's work in conversion will always be seen. Those effects may be weak and feeble at first: to the natural man they may hardly be visible and not understood. But effects there always will be: some fruit will always be seen where there is true conversion. Where no effect can be seen, *there you may be sure there is no grace*. Where no visible fruit can be found, *there you may be sure is no conversion*.

Does any one ask me what we may expect to see in a true conversion? I reply [that] there will always be something seen in a converted man's character, and feelings, and conduct, and opinions, and daily life. You will not see in him perfection; but you will see in him something peculiar, distinct, and different from other people. You will see him hating sin, loving Christ, following after holiness, taking pleasure in his Bible, persevering in prayer. You will see him penitent, humble, believing, temperate, charitable, truthful, good-tempered, patient, upright, honorable, kind. These, at any rate, will be his aims: these are the things which he will follow after, however short he may come of perfection. In some converted persons, you will see these things more distinctly, in others less. This only I say: wherever there is conversion, something of this kind will be seen.

I care nothing for a conversion which has neither marks nor evidences to show. I shall always say, "Give me some marks if I am to think you are converted. Show me thy conversion without any marks, if thou canst! I do not believe in it. It is worth nothing at all." You may call such doctrine legal if you please. It is far better to be called legal than to be an Antinomian.⁶ *Never, never, will I allow that the blessed Spirit can be in a man's heart, when no fruit of the Spirit can be seen in his life.* A conversion which allows a man to live in sin, to lie, and drink, and swear is not the conversion of the Bible. It is a counterfeit conversion, which can only please the devil and will lead the man who is satisfied with it, not to heaven, but to hell.

Let this last point sink down into your heart and never be forgotten. Conversion is not only a Scriptural thing, a real thing, a necessary thing, a possible thing, and a happy thing: there remains one more grand characteristic about it—it is A THING THAT WILL ALWAYS BE SEEN.

And now let me wind up this paper by a few plain appeals to the consciences of all who read it...

(1) *First of all, I urge every reader of this paper to find out whether he is converted.* I am not asking about other people. The heathen no doubt need conversion. The unhappy inmates of jails and

⁶ **Antinomian** – from the Greek *anti*, against, and *nomos*, law, antinomianism basically means "against law." It generally means one who holds the theological view that God's Law has no place in the life of a believer.

reformatories need conversion. There may be people living near your own house who are open sinners and unbelievers and need conversion. But all this is beside the question. I ask, Are you converted yourself?

Are you converted? It is no reply to tell me that many people are hypocrites and false professors. It is no argument to say that there are many sham revivals and mock conversions. All this may be very true: but the abuse of a thing does not destroy the use of it. The circulation of bad money is no reason why there should not be good coin. Whatever others may be, Are you converted yourself?

Are you converted? It is no answer to tell me that you go to church or chapel and have been baptized and admitted to the Table of the Lord. All this proves little: I could say as much for Judas Iscariot, Demas, Simon Magus, Ananias, and Sapphira. The question is still not answered. Is your heart changed? Are you really converted to God?

(2) *In the next place, I urge every reader of this [article] who is not converted, never to rest till he is.* Make haste: awake to know your danger. Escape for your life: flee from the wrath to come. Time is short: eternity is near. Life is uncertain: judgment is sure. Arise and call upon God. The throne of grace is yet standing...The promises of the Gospel are wide, broad, full, and free: lay hold upon them this day. Repent, and believe the Gospel: repent, and be converted. Rest not, rest not, rest not till you know and feel that you are a converted man.

(3) *In the last place, I offer a word of exhortation to every reader who has reason to think that he has gone through that blessed change of which I have been speaking in this paper.* You can remember the time when you were not what you are now. You can remember a time in your life when old things passed away and all things became new. To you also I have something to say. Suffer the word of friendly counsel, and lay it to heart.

(a) *Do you think that you are converted?* Then give all diligence to make your calling and conversion sure. Leave nothing uncertain that concerns your immortal soul. Labor to have the witness of the Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God. Assurance is to be had in this world, and assurance is worth the seeking. It is good to have hope: it is far better to [be] sure.

(b) *Do you think that you are converted?* Then do not expect impossibilities in this world. Do not suppose the day will ever come when you will find no weak point in your heart, no wanderings in private prayer, no distraction in Bible-reading, no cold desires in the public worship of God, no flesh to mortify, no devil to tempt, no worldly snares to make you fall. Expect nothing of the kind. Conver-

sion is not perfection! Conversion is not heaven!...the world around you is yet full of danger; the devil is not dead. Remember at your best that a converted sinner is still a poor, weak sinner, needing Christ every day. Remember this, and you will not be disappointed.

(c) *Do you think that you are converted?* Then labor and desire to grow in grace every year that you live. Look not to the things behind; be not content with old experience, old grace, old attainments in religion. Desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby (1Pe 2:2). Entreat the Lord to carry on the work of conversion more and more in your soul and to deepen spiritual impressions within you. Read your Bible more carefully every year: watch over your prayers more jealously every year. Beware of becoming sleepy and lazy in your religion. There is a vast difference between the lowest and the highest forms in the school of Christ. Strive to get on in knowledge, faith, hope, charity, and patience. Let your yearly motto be, "Onward, Forward, Upward!" to the last hour of your life.

(d) *Do you think you are converted?* Then show the value you place on conversion by your diligence in trying to do good to others. Do you really believe it is an awful thing to be an unconverted man? Do you really think that conversion is an unspeakable blessing? Then prove it, prove it, prove it by constant zealous efforts to promote the conversion of others. Look round the neighborhood in which you live: have compassion on the multitudes who are yet unconverted. Be not content with getting them to come to your church or chapel; aim at nothing less than their entire conversion to God. Speak to them, read to them, pray for them, stir up others to help them. But never, never, if you are a converted man, never be content to go to heaven alone!

From "Conversion" in *Old Paths* by J. C. Ryle.

This article is available as a small booklet from Chapel Library.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church. Revered author of *Holiness*, *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and many others. Born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

