

No.18, The State of Grace & Conversion

At this point in our study of this subject – *The Doctrine of Man* – we are giving some consideration to the issue of fallen men being brought into a state of grace or salvation. As the Sorter Catechism reminds us, those, who in the eternal purpose of God are chosen to salvation, are brought into “an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.” Christ has procured all the grace that sinners need in order to their deliverance from their fallen state in which they are spiritually ruined through their total depravity and spiritual inability. He is made unto them “wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption...” 1 Cor 1: 30.

However, the redemption purchased by Christ must be applied to those sinners for whom it was procured; and as we noted last week it is applied to them by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter 1: 2 distinct reference is made to this application of redemption. The first words of the verse are “*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*” As noted, *foreknowledge* means “foreordination” thus there is a people chosen to salvation in the eternal purpose of God. The next words – “*through sanctification of the Spirit...*” refer to this effectual of the Spirit or regeneration by which sinners chosen to salvation are brought into that state of grace. Thus, the word “sanctification” in this context is used in the basic sense of setting apart – by the effectual work of the Spirit those chosen by the Father are set apart in the sense that they are brought into a state of grace & salvation. The verse then states – “*Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*” The “obedience” in view is obviously the obedience of saving faith. By the effectual call of the Spirit sinners are enabled to rest in Christ, specifically trusting in the merits of His blood to save them & reconcile them to God.

Thus, through the effectual call that is exercised by the Spirit of God sinners are brought into this state of grace to enjoy the benefits and blessings of Christ’s redemptive work for them. As was noted, effectual calling is synonymous with regeneration, the word that is employed in Titus 3: 5 with reference to this effectual call – “*According to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” The word “regeneration” means *a beginning again*, a new beginning essentially. We noted some distinctives of regeneration:

1. It is the act of God. 2. It results in the sinner being made a new creature – through the illumination of the understanding & the renewing of the will. 3. It precedes and is the immediate cause of conversion.

Now, these distinctives indicate that regeneration and conversion are two separate experiences; and it is vital that the two terms are not confused and that difference between the two is maintained. They are two different experiences altogether. However, at various times confusion has arisen because the word *conversion* has been employed in two senses.

(a) In a wide sense – it has been used to signify the change of the sinner’s heart and the exercising of that changed heart, thus the word has been used to denote regeneration and its results also. But this use of the word is not only wide, it is too wide for the single & vital reason that the changing of the sinner’s heart is the act of God not man.

(b) In a strict sense – conversion signifies the exercising of the new nature, the new heart that is given in regeneration. Therefore, conversion of subsequent to and because of conversion – this is the correct definition of the word and understanding of its place in the spiritual experience of sinners.

The importance of keeping this distinction is vital. When conversion is used in the wide sense so as to include regeneration, it leads to confusion and that for a very obvious reason – it leads to the conclusion that the sinner is the originator of faith and repentance. Scripture shows that faith & repentance are the two elements of conversion; and it shows that that men exercise faith & repentance. Therefore, if conversion is used in this broad sense so as to include regeneration then it may be concluded that the sinner is the originator of faith & repentance.

This is of course what many teach – that the origin of faith & repentance lies within the human will. Thus, because some have used the word “conversion” in the wide sense already explained, support has been given wittingly or unwittingly to the falsehood that the sinner has the ability to originate faith & repentance. Thus in dealing with the matter of the application of redemption and the bringing of the sinner into a state of grace & salvation, it is important to stress the distinction between regeneration & conversion, the difference being this – **regeneration precedes conversion and is the cause of it.**

The English rendering *convert* or *converted* is found a number of times in the N.T., with the noun *conversion* being found here in Acts 15: 3 – “*the conversion of the Gentiles.*” However, the original Greek word is found many times being translated *to turn* or *to turn unto*. As we study the usage of the word in its various forms & translations we are given something of its meaning.

1. **It is used in the sense of preachers turning sinners to Christ.**

See Luke 1: 16, 17, Acts 26: 18 & James 5: 19, 20 – used in this sense it does not mean that the preacher effects the converting power but that he is the instrument through whom the Lord brings about the conversion of sinners. In keeping with this use of the word “convert” are those Scriptures which speak of preachers being the spiritual father of people converted to Christ, 1 Cor 5: 15.

2. **It is used as a command for sinners to turn to Christ.**

See Acts 3: 19, Acts 14: 15 & Acts 26: 20 – these Scriptures show the Biblical basis & legitimacy of exhorting sinners to seek the Lord & turn from sin. Some attest that the Church has no mandate to exhort men to

turn to Christ, but the example of the Apostles for one thing is our mandate. See also Acts 20: 21 where the language signifies that Paul had exhorted sinners to repent & believe the Gospel.

3. **Then the word is used of the active turning of sinners to the Lord.**

See Acts 15: 19 – here sinners are clearly spoken of as those who actively turn to God, which is the grammatical sense & meaning of these words *are turned to God*. See also Acts 11: 21 which is even clearer – “*a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.*” Here the verb “turned” is an active verb – these sinners in Antioch actually and positively turned to Christ.

In Acts 11: 21 the twin elements of conversion are clearly in view – faith & repentance. First, note that with the fact of their turning to the Lord is this reference to *believing*. Here is a clear statement of what saving faith is: it is believing the Gospel accompanied by turning to the Lord as the object of faith & trust. Note in v.20 reference to the preaching of Christ; then in v.21 “the hand of the Lord” i.e. the Holy Spirit’s power was operating so that these conversions took place. But, turning to the Lord also denotes repentance, so repentance is in view in Acts 11: 21 – the other constituent of conversion. Cf 1 Thess 1: 9.

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