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Holy Spirit In Conversion

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The Holy Spirit has been greatly abused; he has been credited with many things for which he is not responsible, especially with respect to conversion. But this is a subject about which all should know, since nobody is converted without the Spirit. It is strange that the subject is shrouded in so much darkness, obscurity and superstition, while the Bible is so clear regarding it; in fact, so clear one cannot misunderstand it without assistance.

The reader will please be informed at the outset that the church of Christ **does** believe that if men are converted that God must do it; we **do** believe that those who are converted to Christ must be converted by the Holy Spirit and the power of God; we **do** believe that every conversion comes about by faith; in fact, we strongly affirm that nobody has been, or can be, converted except by the Holy Spirit and the power of God.

True there is some difference between the theories some hold and what the Bible teaches on the subject. There is no difference among us as to the fact that one must be converted by the Holy Spirit and the power of God, but there is a difference as to how the conversion is brought about. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). Therefore, our position must be according to God's Word, otherwise we are in error on the point. With this in view let us appeal to the sacred oracles and see what is taught upon this all-important theme.

Four Witnesses Called

We shall first call upon witnesses to testify as to how one gets faith that leads to conversion. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). But where did the word the apostles preached come from? Read John 14:26; 16:12-15 and note that it was to come from the Holy Spirit, and he spoke through them on Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Christ prayed for a certain class. Which? Was it for the class that demands and expects to receive faith **direct** from heaven without the instrumentality of the Word? Certainly not, but he prayed for those "who shall believe on me through their word. This is conclusive and cannot be misunderstood: God gives faith by hearing the Word of the apostles.

Another witness is John 20:30, 31: "And many

"The word of God is preached by churches of Christ with the conviction that therein is found the only way from sin to salvation and from earth to heaven. It practices the unity of all believers on the basis of God's Word, and invites all men to come and reason together."

other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. For what purpose did John write? "That ye might believe." Language cannot be more plainly put. But someone says, "That is historical faith; I want saving faith." Read it again and notice that John says: "These are written that ye might believe, and believing ye might have life through his name." Certainly faith that can give life through the name of Christ is saving faith, none is better, and it comes from the written Word.

Our next witness is the Apostle Peter, to whom the keys of the kingdom were committed. In Acts 15:7 he said: "Men and brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe." Could language be clearer than this that faith comes by hearing the gospel that was preached by the apostles "as the Spirit gave them utterance?" To oppose this position is to oppose God.

We call upon the Apostle Paul as our fourth witness: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). We are sometimes told we must pray for faith, and, indeed, find people following these instructions, but Paul did not understand or teach it that way. He says (verse 13): "And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;" and then reasons as follows: "How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed?" If one is praying for faith he does not have faith; if he does not have faith he cannot call upon one in whom he does not believe, therefore, one **must already have faith** before he can pray. Too, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), hence, a prayer in order to get faith, is without faith, therefore, cannot be pleasing to God. Further Paul argues: "And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" The implied answer is that one **cannot** believe without hearing, and verse 17 plainly states faith comes by hearing God's Word. This forever explodes the theory that one must get faith from above through prayer, and also that one cannot pray without faith. How did Paul speak? He spoke as the Spirit gave him utterance, being an inspired apostle.

Faith Comes thru written Word now

We have given the testimony of Christ, the Apostles

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John, Peter and Paul that faith comes by the Word of God, which was delivered by their mouth. The only difference today is that we now have the written Word which is the same gospel that they preached before the Word was put in writing. We are now commanded to preach the same Word (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:1-4). Thus we have established beyond all doubt that faith comes by God's Word. One does not have to have a direct operation or revelation from above to have faith. He needs simply to read and study the Bible and faith will be produced. If a person will not accept the testimony of these four witnesses given above, we may pronounce him beyond redemption, for he has closed his eyes, ears and mind to the truth.

Word Given by the Holy Spirit

But what has all this to do with the Holy Spirit in conversion? Just this: it is certain one will never be converted without faith; it is agreed that God gives faith by the Spirit, and now we proceed to show how. As our first witness we call Peter who says the gospel was preached by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven (1 Peter 1:12). Luke, the writer of Acts says: "They (the apostles) . . . began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (2:4). Third witness is Paul who says: Which things we also speak, not in the words which men's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Corinthians 2:13). Fourth, the Lord commands Christians to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches (Revelation 2:29).

Where do we find this gospel that was spoken by the Spirit who come down from heaven? the language that was spoken as the Spirit gave them utterance? these words the Holy Spirit speaks? what the Spirit saith to the churches? **We find it on the pages of the Bible, nowhere else.** The language and testimony of the Bible are the language and testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we have shown that whosoever believes on the Lord believes through the Word of God, the Scriptures; that the Scriptures were written by apostles and other inspired men, as they were directed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, whoever becomes a believer through hearing and studying the Bible is made a believer by the Holy Spirit. From this conclusion there can be no escape.

How Is One Converted by the Spirit?

In the beginning we said nobody is converted except by the power of God and the Spirit. But How? Romans 1:16: "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." People are converted by the gospel. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2). It is the medium through which God exercises converting power. The gospel was given by the Spirit as he

dictated it unto the apostles. Therefore, God converts by the Spirit through the written Word which he gave by the apostles. God operates through Christ, who operates through the Spirit, who operates through the apostles, who operates through the Word (John 16:12-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 2:2). Thus, when one obeys the Word he is converted by the Holy Spirit.

Let us study an example and see how the process works. On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the gospel was first preached, **by the spirit through the apostles.** "When they heard this they were pricked in their hearts" (v. 37). Here is the first indication of "heart work" and it was produced by what the people **heard.** The Word of God is also the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6). The old man of sin is put to death by being pierced to the heart with this sword. It was first wielded by the mouth of the apostles. It made the people cry out: "What shall we do?" This agrees with all we have said before. Faith was produced, they were convicted by what they heard preached by the apostles. This effect was produced by God's speaking by the Spirit through the apostles. By the words from the mouths of the apostles they were made believers, and the same told them what to do after believing. "Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins." The process of conversion was begun with their hearing and believing and consummated by their obedience in baptism, by which they were saved and added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

Testimony of the Bible Sufficient

Friends, how do you know Christ is the Son of God? or that there is a heaven or hell? You reply: "Because the Bible says so." But I ask: "Don't you have other testimony than this?" You reply: "No, we think the Bible is quite sufficient," and this is true, but the same Scripture says "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Why are not the Scriptures just as sufficient in one case as in the other. The same Bible that tells us about heaven tells us how to get there. If we can believe the facts of the existence of God, Christ, heaven and hell without revelation apart from the Bible, why can we not accept God's Word that says we are converted by obeying his will, and not demand other revelation?

If we could stand before Christ's throne in heaven and hear him say "Thy sins be forgiven thee," how would you know you were pardoned? Your answer: "Because the Savior said so; that is all the evidence I need." In the New Testament Christ promises pardon upon our obeying certain conditions: faith, repentance, confession and baptism." When one complies with these terms given by Christ he has the Lord's testimony that he is pardoned. What need has he for other testimony? Friends, let us stay with the Bible.