

## Salvation—Sanctification (20<sup>th</sup>)

(Today we continue studying the *experimental* aspect of sanctification in the life of the believer as he lives on earth. Today's podcast continues with the topics of repentance and conversion but focusing on conversion.)

Today we will continue with the topics of repentance and conversion. We have devoted much time to repentance in previous studies and included conversion somewhat with them, but we shall devote the majority of our comments today to the subject of conversion. It has been established from previous podcast that conversion, like repentance, is a work of grace and not a work of man, and that unless the Lord opens the heart first man will never be converted. While it is the work of the Lord, it, too, like repentance, is a product of the preaching of the gospel. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias to announce that he and Elisabeth were going to have a son and that the child was to be named John, Gabriel said that part of the ministry of John's was as follows: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord," Luke 1:16-17. Interestingly, the word "turn" in both verses is the Greek word ἐπιστρέφω (epistréphō, *ep-ee-stref'-o*) that is translated "to convert." I believe the words of John Gill on verse sixteen are worthy of note. They are as follows:

Conversion, which is meant by turning to God, is not man's work, but God's; and is effected by his mighty power, which is only equal to it; but John was to be, and was, an instrument of the conversion of many among the Jews, by preaching the doctrine of repentance towards God, and faith in the Messiah, that was just ready to come: he was the means in the hand of God, of turning many from sin, of bringing them to a true sense of it, and to an hearty and ingenuous confession and acknowledgment of it; and from trusting to, and depending upon, their birth privileges, legal duties, and self-righteousness; and from their gross notions of a temporal Messiah; and of leading them to believe in Christ as a spiritual Saviour, as the Lamb of God, that should take away the sin of the world.

While we might say some things differently than John Calvin's comments on this verse, I believe the overall sentiments are worth mentioning, especially in how he gives all the glory to God for not only repentance and faith, but for conversion as well. Of this verse he said:

That the glory of conversion and faith, on the other hand, may remain undivided with God alone, Scripture frequently reminds us that ministers are nothing in themselves; but in such cases he compares them with *God*, that no one may wickedly steal the honor from God and convey it to them. In short, those whom God, by the aid of the minister, converts to himself, are said to be converted by the minister, because he is nothing more than the hand of God; and both are expressly asserted in this passage. Of the efficacy of the doctrine we have now said enough. That it lies not in the will and power of the minister to bring men back to God, we conclude from this that John did not indiscriminately bring all back, (which he would unquestionably have done, if every thing had yielded to his wish,) but only brought those back whom it pleased the Lord effectually to call. In a word, what is here taught by the angel is laid down by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, that faith cometh by hearing, (Romans 10:17,) but that those only to whom the Lord inwardly reveals his arm (Isaiah 53:1; John 12:38) are so enlightened as to believe.

It would not be complete to study the subject of conversion unless we consider Luke 22:31-32. It reads, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

I desire to relay a comment that I heard years ago (sadly I do not remember who it was that said it) regarding this verse. The speaker noted that the Lord prayed for Simon's faith not to fail, but if He had prayed for Peter's courage not to fail he would not have denied him. I like to think that there is some, if not much, truth to this. Oh beloved! I wonder how often the Lord may have prayed likewise for us? (See John 17:20.)

Clearly, many things could be said about this verse, but since Peter was already a believer and an apostle of the Lord, this conversion is not referring to some initial conversion. This informs us that conversion, like repentance, is not a one-time thing and that a person may be converted many times about many things during his lifetime.

Next I direct our attention to Acts 3:19: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Without going to great details to prove it, needless to say that it is by the Person and work of Christ that our sins are judicially "blotted out"; therefore, "blotted out" upon repentance and/or conversion is experientially in our conscience. The intent of this verse in our study is to demonstrate that while repentance and conversion may take place at the same time, I believe it may be affirmed that sequence-wise repentance is first since a change of mind and heart is included in its definition. Additionally, since it is translated "be converted" some might get the idea that conversion is passive, but the verb tense in the Greek will not allow such because both repentance and conversion are in the active voice with the idea of a command. A clearer translation might be "Repent ye therefore, and turn," etc. However, one thing is clear from this verse, like repentance, conversion is not an option; it is a command from the Lord.

In a previous podcast we considered Acts 11:18 showing that repentance was by the power of God and not a product of the works of man. When reviewing Acts 11:21 with this verse in context it is seen that conversion is equally by "the hand of the Lord." It says, "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." The word "turned" is our Greek word for conversion. In other words, the Gentiles are brought to Christ the same way as the Jews.

As Paul preached repentance to the Athenians on Mar's Hill, so likewise did Paul and Barnabas to the Lycaonians when they (that is, the Lycaonians) endeavored to worship Paul and Barnabas. They said, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness," Acts 14:15-17. Here again the word "turn" is the Greek word for conversion. For other passages showing that conversion was at the core of the gospel see Acts 15:19 (turned); II Corinthians 3:16 (shall turn). From these and other passages we see that conversion is no small doctrine of the Holy Scriptures.

While we covered Acts 26:20 briefly in a previous podcast when reviewing repentance (Podcast 157), I believe it beneficial that we look at Acts 26:18, 20 regarding conversion. To set the context, we will quote Acts 26:15-21: "And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them

of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill *me*.” In verses eighteen and twenty, the word “turn” is the Greek word for conversion, and when we see that verse twenty says “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” it is seen that not only are repentance and conversion joined together but are also a vital part of the preaching of the gospel as commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice again that in verse twenty that repentance is prior to conversion like Acts 3:19 and gives credence to the idea that sequence-wise repentance also is before conversion. It should be also pointed out that because Paul preached repentance and conversion that the Jews that they “went about to kill” him. This leads us to ask, is it possible that the reason that we do not preach accordingly is because we recoil at the idea of being hated with life-threatening actions?

Nevertheless, our time is up for today. The Lord willing, we will conclude our review of conversion in the next podcast. Farewell.