

# True or False Conversions?

The apostle Peter declared, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." What does it mean to be "converted"? Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology defines conversion as "our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation." Conversion is the desired end of evangelism. But how does true conversion take place? It is essential to realize that conversion is 100% the work of God and not at all the work of man. Man does not have the ability to convert others or to even convert himself. Because of his sin nature, man is incapable of truly coming to Christ, of believing, or of attaining to a repentant heart. Jesus said, "No one *can* come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him... (John 6:44)." Paul said, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them...(1 Cor. 2:14)" And again, "But the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom . 8:7,8)."

For true conversion to take place, God Himself must do a miraculous work to change the human heart by drawing and calling us to Himself. He does this by illuminating our minds, and by convincing us of His truth inwardly by the Spirit. Jesus said, "...And they shall all be taught by God... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me (John 6:45)." Conversion is not effected by merely making an outward decision. Yet, evangelists often press for quick decisions as if the Holy Spirit was not needed, as if man, instead of God's Spirit, can set the timing for the salvation of a soul.

In modern evangelism, salvation is made to depend upon conformity to certain external responses which are then identified with "coming to Christ". Instead of repent and believe, people are told to "ask Jesus into their heart", come forward, or lift up their hand in a meeting. It is further assumed that if someone goes to church, or is confirmed, or baptized, that they are Christians. But these are all merely outward responses and completely worthless without the change of heart which God alone can produce. Thus, many unregenerate people "confess their faith" and often begin to attend church. But no real change has occurred, only an outward form of religion. Then, when there is no real hunger for God, much "follow up" is thought necessary.

What is really needed, however, is the continued clear teaching of the biblical Gospel. This Gospel is not the superficial fluff of today which is designed for a "quick sell". It is rather the proclamation of a Holy God who has a holy law which everyone has grievously broken. It is in turn the proclamation of Christ and all that He has done for us on the cross, that through faith in Christ alone, on the basis of His righteousness alone, we might be accepted forever by Him.

Do today's evangelistic methods produce true or false conversions? Undoubtedly many false and temporary conversions happen because of a wrong message and method. When true conversions do happen, it is often in spite of these methods. Much harm is caused, however, when true salvation is confused with an external decision. The results are disillusionment and hardening of the heart toward the true Gospel. As we go forth and proclaim this Gospel, let us be careful to wait upon God and place our total dependence upon Him. Then when God Himself convinces someone of truth, conversion will be real and lasting. There will be a real faith and a heartfelt repentance as only the Holy Spirit can inspire. Those who answer God's inward call will not be easily or permanently shaken because their hearts will be made new.

## The Nature of Our Salvation

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31b-32). Being free in Christ involves knowing the truth about Jesus, what He has done for us, and the true nature of our salvation in Him." If we are saved, if we have been truly converted, if God has drawn us by His Spirit, and called us to Himself, then it is important to understand the nature of the glorious salvation He has given us.

- Salvation is a *free gift* from God and not deserved in any way.
- Salvation is dependent only upon what Christ has already done through His substitutionary death on the cross for our sins.
- Salvation is received by *faith alone*; yet even this faith does nothing to merit our salvation. Saving faith is a gift from God.
- Salvation is 100% God's work. Christ *died* for us. The Father *calls* us, *draws* us, brings us to faith, and *preserves* us forever.

- When God saves, He *perfectly* saves, *permanently* saves, and *irrevocably* saves from sin, completely doing away with all condemnation forever. True salvation can never be lost.
- It is necessary, however, to *persevere in faith*. The God who saves *will* keep and preserve His own forever.
- *True salvation will completely change our lives*. It produces certain fruits like faith, repentance, love for God, and love of the brethren. Through understanding our salvation we will grow in our love for God and for others and our lives will be transformed into His image from glory to glory.