

a study of the *Holy Spirit*

Lesson 12: The Holy Spirit in Conversion

NOTE: This lesson should probably be discussed in two parts due to the scope of the material. If the class plan of thirteen weeks is being followed divide this lesson as follows; however, if time does not allow for a full thirteen weeks condense the material and present in one lesson.

Part 1: Discuss the impact of John Calvin regarding original sin and the necessity of the Holy Spirit operating directly upon the sinner. Be sure to point out how modern denominations teach Calvin's errors.

Part 2: Discuss the Scriptural teaching on conversion. Use the conversion accounts in Acts to illustrate how the Holy Spirit utilizes the gospel Word to convict. Emphasize that the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion violates this simple biblical teaching.

1. The role of the Holy Spirit in converting sinners is hotly debated. There is great misunderstanding. Many honest hearts have been led to believe that the Holy Spirit operates directly from heaven upon the sinner's "heart" to bring about conversion. Some have gone to their graves, lost for eternity, waiting for the "call" of the Holy Spirit to salvation. Cite example of "Raccoon" John Smith (*Search For The Ancient Order*, Vol. 1, 243, 244).

☞ This causes us to ask, "Why is there such mass confusion regarding this topic?" The answer can be found in a number of points.









a. There is a general ignorance about the Holy Spirit. We have noted this fact throughout the series. People do not know what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit.

b. There is much religious error about the Holy Spirit that has blinded many to the Truth about the Holy Spirit (cf. Raccoon Smith).

Note: This lesson will examine these two facts and will continue to explain this misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit's role in conversion.

2. ☞ Two important forces have influenced the way that modern religion views the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

a. **JOHN CALVIN** [1509-1564] was a French theologian who is known as the "Universal Reformer" because his teachings have impacted the world. From his pen came a five point doctrinal system that has served as a basis for modern denominational thought. His system is commonly referred to as "Calvin's TULIP."

- 1)  **T** - Total Hereditary Depravity (original sin). All are born so wicked they cannot even think good.
 - 2)  **U** - Unconditional Predestination (election). This refers to a set number that God has chosen to go to heaven. If you are not among this "elect" you will be damned regardless of desire to obey.
 - 3)  **L** - Limited Atonement of Christ. This follows because if only a certain number is elected then Christ's sacrifice was only for those who are predestined. Thus Jesus could not have died for ALL.
 - 4)  **I** - Irresistible Grace. When God is ready to call one who is elected He sends the Holy Spirit into that person's heart. The Holy Spirit's call cannot be resisted.
 - 5)  **P** - Perseverance of saints. The elect will persevere until the end and none will be lost! "Once saved always saved!"
- b.  **JACOB ARMINIUS** [1560-1609] was a Dutch theologian who first agreed with Calvin but later opposed parts of his system. He disagreed with—
- 1) The unconditional election.
 - 2) The limited atonement.
 - 3) The irresistible grace - claimed it could be resisted.
3.  There was some agreement between these two camps. Even though these were opposed they did find some common beliefs. Shared in common was the doctrine of "divine grace."
- a.  This basically upheld the belief that God would send the Holy Spirit into the sinner's heart and "draw" the sinner to God.
 - b. This operation of the Holy Spirit was taught to be separate and apart from the Word of God.
 - c. Thus today many "religious" folks have accepted the doctrine of these two men without knowing it! They believe that the Holy Spirit comes upon the heart of the sinner with a strong compelling force that separate and apart from the Bible.
 - d. The result of this doctrine is the belief that every saved person has some "experience of grace" that has drawn him from their depraved state to a "grace state" in fellowship with God. This "experience" is the grounds for their salvation. The Scriptures are thus put second to experiences and emotions. Because of this emphasis upon experience the Scriptures are not seen as necessary.

4. ☞ There are three common arguments FOR the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon sinners (note: we will answer these later in the lesson).
 - a. ☞ **Acts 16:14**—The Lord "opened" Lydia's heart so she could hear what Paul said.
 - b. ☞ **Acts 11:19-21**—The "Hand of the Lord" is with the preacher to say words that will get responses.
 - c. ☞ **John 6:44**—The sinner must be "drawn" directly by the Holy Spirit's irresistible call.

5. ☞ There are some important facts to note in regarding this concept that the ☐ Holy Spirit operates directly and apart from the Word in conversion.
 - a. ☞ It denies the necessity of Scripture to lead to salvation. The emotional experience is held to be superior.
 - b. ☞ It is founded upon the faulty premise of "original sin."
 - c. ☞ It takes the words of two men and elevates them to a position of greater authority than God's Word.
 - d. ☞ It forces absurd doctrines—What if one does fall from grace, who is to blame? God must be at fault for He "chose" such a one! But if it is God, why did He not know the person would fall?

6. There is another perspective regarding the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners—the biblical one! **Transparency 12F** The ☐ Bible's concept of salvation is based upon two terms that are quite clear—
 - a. ☐ **CONVICTION**—A realization that one is lost in sin and there is no hope of heaven unless his sins are removed.
 - b. ☐ **CONVERSION**—Those thus convicted of sin turn to the Lord as the Lord directs them to do so.

Note: This twofold process is described in Scripture as a new birth or resurrection (Ephesians 2:5; John 3:3-5; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

7. **Transparency 12G** According to the Scriptures there is a ☐ threefold aspect of conversion (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
 - a. There must be a ☐ purification of the sinner's heart. This comes via faith (Acts 15:9; 1 Peter 1:22).
 - b. There must be ☐ a change in life's practices. This comes via repentance (Luke 13:5). This choice changes our minds/attitudes and results in a changed life.

- c. There must be a change in relationship (Ephesians 2:11-13). This comes via baptism (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). With a purified heart and a changed life one is thus ready to start a new relation with Christ.

Note: In biblical conversion there is produced a new attitude, new emotions, new actions, and a new creature. The Holy Spirit has a part in each of these!

8. How is the Holy Spirit involved in this conversion process? **Transparency 12H** Examine John 16:7-14 and note these points which answers the question. There are three important points stated by Jesus.

- a. **16:7b**—The promise is made to those who would be preaching, not those who would hear.
- b. **16:8**—The Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin as He came to those preaching.
- c. **16:13**—The Holy Spirit will reveal the unknown things to those who were to speak the gospel, not to those who were to hear the gospel.

Note: Each of the above was fulfilled...

- a. When the Holy Spirit came to man, He came to those who were to preach the Word, NOT to those who were to hear the Word. When the Bible did not exist the Holy Spirit had to guide the message. Today the Holy Spirit guides the preacher via the Bible.
- b. The second point was fulfilled as the hearers were "pricked" in their hearts (Acts 2:37). These were convicted as their response shows. The preaching of the gospel was that which convicted the hearers (Acts 2:14, 22). When they "heard" they were convicted—a plain and simple observation. But they were not yet saved for they had to repent and be immersed!
- c. The third point was fulfilled as those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit revealed the unknown Truths of God (Ephesians 3:3-4; 1 Peter 1:12).

Note: This explains the argument in John 6:44. The verse does not state what means the Father uses to draw men to Him. But 6:45 tells us how – by "hearing" the gospel one is drawn near to God. Thus the Holy Spirit utilizes the preaching of the gospel to educate sinners about their state and to reveal what they must do to be saved (Romans 10:8-15).

9. The Holy Spirit's part in conversion is consistently illustrated in the book of Acts. Notice each of the following accounts and see how the Holy Spirit works in the conversion of sinners. It will be seen that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are NEVER separate in conversion. **Transparency 12I** All of the examples of conversion in the New Testament reveal the fact that the gospel, when heard, believed, and obeyed, is God's power to save.

- a. Acts 2—The 3,000 heard, believed, and obeyed. They were thus converted and added

to the Church.

- b. Acts 8—The Ethiopian Eunuch was reading (v. 28) and asked the meaning of the text (v. 35). He heard, believed, and was baptized and went on his way rejoicing as a converted man.
 - c. Acts 9, 22, 26—Saul of Tarsus had certain miraculous events that accompanied his conversion, but the miracles were not a part of his conversion nor essential to his conversion. He heard, was convicted, repented, and was baptized.
 - d. **Note:** In EVERY case of conversion the Holy Spirit NEVER worked separate and apart from the Scriptures!
10. The fact that the Holy Spirit works through the Word, and the Word only, in convicting and converting sinners, is clearly evident. **Transparency 12J**
- a. Luke 8:11—The "seed" of the Kingdom is the Bible. Thus when one is convicted of sin ("quicken" by the Holy Spirit) he finds such via the Word! Not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit! (Psalm 119:5).
 - b. John 5:24—Eternal life is available ONLY to those who hear and believe the Word, not through a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. John 6:63—The power of the Word is emphasized not some mystical direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon one's "heart."
 - d. Hebrews 4:12—The Bible is not a "dead" influence that becomes alive only when the Holy Spirit operates upon it! It is living and active—there is no mention of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
 - e. Acts 2:41—They were saved by responding to the Word not to some mystical operation of the Holy Spirit.
 - f. James 1:18—They had not been converted by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit but by the Word of Truth!
 - g. 1 Peter 1:23—The Word of God was the means of the conviction and conversion of those addressed.
11. **Transparency 12K** The Bible does not teach that the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the heart of the sinner to "draw" him to salvation. Believing otherwise leads one to violate basic biblical principles.
- a. Violates the principle of God's impartiality. If the sinner cannot be saved until the Holy Spirit "draws" him, why are not all saved? Since all are not saved, God must respect some more than others. This is absurd! (Acts 10:34, 35)

- b. Violates the principles of man's free will choice. Man is free to choose. But a direct operation of the Holy Spirit violates this choice for it denies man's choice by having God interfere.
 - c. Violates the commands of the Great Commission (Mark 16:1-16). We must first preach, then baptize those who believe. But a direct operation of the Holy Spirit disrupts this order.
 - d. Violates the principle of the Word's power. The Word of God is powerful (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12) but a direct operation of the Holy Spirit rejects the Word's power.
 - e. Violates the principle of common sense reasoning which Scriptures teach (Isaiah 1:18-20). The salvation of a soul depends upon reasoning. But the direct operation of the Holy Spirit is unreasonable!
 - 1) Why are not all converted?
 - 2) If sinners cannot do anything until the Holy Spirit comes directly into their hearts, are not the Holy Spirit, God, and Christ responsible for their lost state?
 - 3) How can a sinner be responsible for his unsaved state, if the Holy Spirit must operate directly upon him for conversion?
12. "The Holy Spirit does not operate on the soul of man, independent of the Word of God, in converting the soul. When men talk about conversion by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, they are presuming that conversion may be experienced without the spirit, without life, and without the Word of God. Such 'conversion,' therefore, of necessity would be Christless, Godless, Spiritless, and lifeless. In the last day, men of earth will be judged, not by some peculiar experienced presumed to have been caused by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, but by the Word of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit (John 12:28)." (V.E. Howard, "The Holy Spirit in Conversion," 22)