

How Does The Holy Spirit Convert The Sinner

Bible Answers About Salvation

The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion is a prime battleground of religious disputes. As H. Leo Boles pointed out, "So much superstition has clustered around conversion that it is difficult to get people to receive the teachings of the New Testament on this question." (Boles, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 195).

It is understood that the spirit of man must be born of the Spirit of God, (Jno. 3:35). There is no serious question in the minds of Bible students that every conversion is begun, carried on, and consummated by the Holy Spirit. While it is generally accepted that the Spirit does operate in conversion, there is much disagreement as to how the Spirit works.

There are two theories advanced about the part the Holy Spirit plays in conversion: (1) There is the theory that man is spiritually dead and only a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit can accomplish regeneration or conversion. This view holds that the Spirit operates directly, irresistibly upon the sinner's heart apart from any means or agency and thus converts him. (2) There is also the view that the Spirit operates through the word, using it as the means or agency, to reach the hearts of men, convict them of sin, causing them to turn to Christ and obey the gospel commands. That the omnipotent Spirit of God could use either, or both, of these methods is beyond question. The issue is not what God or His Spirit might do, but what has been revealed to us in the word of God regarding how the Holy Spirit converts the sinner.

The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion is to convict the world of "sin, righteousness, and judgment" (Jno. 16:8). He accomplishes this by the same means you would employ to convince a friend whose freedom you respect to decide with you on some matters you both face. You would present your story, relate your facts, direct logical arguments, draw your conclusions and persuade earnestly and reasonably. You would not use physical force, a gun or club, nor would you seek to trick the person in any way, and neither does the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit operates in conversion through the word of truth, the Scriptures. The Spirit and the word of God are never separate in conversion. There is no case in the New Testament from Pentecost and afterward of any person being saved in the absence of the teaching of the word of God. There were miracles and there were outpourings of the Holy Spirit, but the context reveals their purpose, and the same passage will also record the fact of the preaching of the gospel, its belief, and the sinner's obedience.

On Pentecost there was the most notable outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but not for converting the sinners. The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem to be endued with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49; Acts

1:4-5). It is only logical to consider the events that took place in Jerusalem to learn how the Spirit accomplished His work.

The apostles were waiting in Jerusalem, then on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came upon them we read, "And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). In this we begin seeing the way the Spirit works. The apostles received the Spirit and began to speak. We see this continued emphasis throughout the chapter. "Cretans and Arabs-we hear them in our {own} tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."...." But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words."...."Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:11; 14; 22). The Spirit was doing His work in convicting the world of sin by the means of the words the apostles were speaking. He was also instilling within the Jews a faith in Jesus as the Son of God. The Spirit implanted faith in Jesus by the use of the medium of the spoken word. We can be assured that the Spirit used this medium by verse 37. "Now when they heard {this} they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" The Spirit through Peter and by the use of words informed them what they had to do to be saved. "And Peter {said} to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." (Acts 2:38, 39). The Holy Spirit was informing all people for all time how to be saved, become a Christian. In the next few verses we observe their actual conversion. "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation! So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:40, 41). Did you notice the emphasis on the word? Peter being directed by the Holy Spirit used words to exhort them to be converted to Christ. Only those who received the word were converted. There is absolutely no record of the Spirit working directly (in some mysterious or any other way) on man's spirit. The Scriptures clearly show that the Spirit used the medium of the word of God to convert men to Christ.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17) because the word of God is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Paul wrote, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet {you would} not {have} many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15). James adds, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (James 1:18a). Peter affirmed, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} through the living and abiding word of God. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:23-25). The Word of God is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses in the converting of the sinner. It is still the Holy Spirit converting the sinner today and He is still using the tool of the Word of God. No, the Spirit does not operate directly upon the sinner and overpower him/her in the conversion process.

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