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John P. Lewis

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VF LEWIS, JOHN P.

DO RELIGIOUS PEOPLE NEED CONVERTING?

The above question should be of profound concern to every responsible person. If one is not a religious person surely he needs converting. Can it be possible that religious people also need converting?

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

Conversion is that complete process that takes the sinner out of the kingdom of Satan, or the world, and translates him into a saint in the kingdom of Christ, or the Church, with all the necessary changes for citizenship in the latter. The necessary changes through which one passes in this process of conversion are threefold: viz: (1) the heart must be purified, (2) the life must be reformed, and (3) the state must be changed. The heart, as the New Testament often uses the term, refers to that part of the person that thinks, reasons, understands, desires, believes, and obeys. This part of man must be changed in conversion. This is done by faith. One's affection,

trust, confidence, or faith must be turned from Satan to Christ. After one's confidence or trust, in Jesus as the Crucified and Risen Lord, has been established through the preaching of the gospel which produces faith, his life then needs to be reformed. The faith or trust that one has in Jesus as his Lord should lead him to turn from sin. This turning from sin is a result of repentance. Repentance is the change of mind that one has resulting from the faith he has in Jesus as his Lord. The life is reformed as a result of this change of mind. After one's heart has been purified by faith and his life has been reformed as a result of repentance he then needs his state changed. The state is changed from that of sin into that of the saved; from that of the world into that of the called out of the world; from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. This state is changed by baptism. (Gal. 3:27).

CONVERSION ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIAGE

This definition of conversion is illustrated by the institution of marriage. When a young lady is married she passes through these three stages, viz: (1) her affections are changed, (2) her life is changed as a result of a decision made, and (3) her state is changed. When a young lady is introduced to a young man, to whom she will eventually be married, as the sinner is introduced to the Lord, to whom he is to be converted, she has some faith or confidence in him. At first her faith is limited, but it grows—from little to much—25, 50, 75, 85, 90, 99 per cent and finally she reaches

the 100 per cent mark. Though she has reached the 100 per cent mark in her confidence, trust, or faith in the young man, she is not married. She may have taken the first step in the process of the transition from the single state to the married state, but there are other steps to be taken before she has completed the transition.

Many advocate that the sinner is converted when he reaches the 100 per cent mark in his faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ. One might as well contend that the young lady is married when she reaches the 100 per cent confidence or trust in the

young man, as to contend that the sinner is converted when he reaches the stage in the process of his conversion at which he has implicit faith in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. Suppose that after the young lady reached the stage of implicit faith in the young man, he should propose to her and she should accept the proposal. Suppose further that just as she said "I will" he would fall over dead with heart failure. Would she be married? If he had an insurance policy made to his estate what good would it do her? She would miss the benefits of the policy because she lacked one step in completing the process of marriage. That one step was the ceremony. In conversion, the act

CASES OF CONVERSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Let us study the cases where religious persons needed conversion. The first is that of the people on Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. The very occasion of Pentecost indicates that those converted on that day were religious people. "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven" were those from which the first converts to the Christian faith were made. They had assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost to observe the religious worship that came at that time and place. To those assembled Peter preached the good news of the Crucified and risen Lord for the first time. (See Acts 2:22-36). Though these people were very religious the gospel that Peter preached caused them to be "pricked in their hearts," or convicted of their sins. It was the faith they had in the truths that Peter preached that caused them to ask what SHALL WE DO? Peter, with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, (Matt. 16:19), announced for the first time, repentance and remission of sins in the name of the crucified and risen Lord. Hear him give these religious

of baptism is the ceremony that completes the process. (See 1 Peter 3:21.)

An illustration never proves anything. That is not the purpose of an illustration. Its purpose is only to illustrate. The proof is to be found elsewhere. There are several cases of conversion recorded in the New Testament. All of them are found in the book of Acts, the only book of conversions in the New Testament. Many of these cases were those of religious people and show that, in some cases at least, religious people do need converting. All religious people need converting who have not been converted as those were in the New Testament.

people his answer: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." (Acts 2:38.) Matt. 26:28 shows what the expression "unto the remission of sins" means. Just as Jesus poured out his blood unto the remission of sins, that is, in order that sin might be remitted, so Peter said that baptism was unto remission of sins, that is in order that sins might be remitted. Good-speed's translation reads: "Peter said to them, you must repent, and every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, IN ORDER TO HAVE YOUR SINS FORGIVEN." Though these people on Pentecost were religious people they needed to be converted. They needed their hearts purified by faith, (Acts 2:36), their lives reformed by repentance, and their state changed by baptism from the state of sin into the state of the saved. (Acts 2:38.)

Another case of a religious person needing conversion is that of the Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in Acts 8:26-39. That this man was a reli-

gious person is evidenced by the fact that he had come to Jerusalem to worship, he was reading the sacred writings of his religion, and he was willing that Philip guide him in understanding what he was reading. Have you ever asked yourself this question: "If I were to learn that the religion that I have been holding was not in harmony with the will of God, would I give it up as did this Ethiopian eunuch?" This man was not only religious, but was also religiously honest. That is probably the hardest thing to be, but it is a very commendable trait. That is the kind of man the eunuch was. Philip preached unto him Jesus. The eunuch learned from the preaching of Jesus that he ought to be baptized. An angel sent Philip to the eunuch, and the Holy Spirit told him to join the chariot, but it was the preaching of the crucified and risen Lord that led the eunuch to believe, the first step in the conversion. It was that faith produced by preaching "unto him Jesus," that led him to request baptism, the final step in the process of conversion. The eunuch continued on his journey to Ethiopia as a convert to Christ, but the record of that conversion is but one more New Testament example of a religious person that needed conversion.

Another case of a religious person needing conversion found in the book of Acts is that of Saul of Tarsus. Events connected with Saul's conversion are found in chapters 9, 22, and 26. That Saul of Tarsus was also a religious person is shown by the fact that he was a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees, (Acts 23:6), that he was brought up in the city of Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and that he was "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; touching the law, a Phari-

see; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is of the law, found blameless." (Phil. 3:5-6)

On the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul and instructed him to go to the city of Damascus and there it would be told him what he must do. (Acts 22:10.) On the Damascus road, when Jesus said to Saul "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest", he had reached the stage in the process of his conversion at which he had 100 per cent faith, trust, or confidence in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. He was a penitent prayer for three days and nights. This evidences the fact that Saul had passed the first two, of the three steps in the process of conversion, and he needed but to take the third step in order to complete his conversion, Ananias was the preacher that was sent to Saul to tell him what he must do. Hear Ananias as he says: "Brother Saul, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16.) If prayer alone ever converted anyone, why did it not convert Saul of Tarsus? If he was converted before he met Ananias, he was converted before his sins were forgiven, because they were not forgiven until he met Ananias three days after (1) he began praying, (2) had faith in Jesus, and (3) had confessed Jesus as Lord. (Faith is here used in a restricted sense that does not embrace repentance, not in a comprehensive sense as it is used in John 3:16, Eph. 2:8-9, etc., which includes repentance as it does baptism.) If Saul of Tarsus was converted on the road to Damascus he did not know it, Jesus did not know it, nor did Ananias know it. And, too, he was the most miserably converted man of which anyone ever read—he could neither eat nor drink during the three days

intervening between the Damascus road experience and his meeting Ananias.

The first Gentile convert to the Christian faith was Cornelius. He is described as a "devout man, one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." (Acts 10:2.) Where can a better moral man be found than was Cornelius? Not only was he a moral man, but also he was a very religious man. Why should a man like Cornelius need converting? The answer is because he had not experienced the three fundamental changes in one's conversion to Christ. An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter who would tell him words whereby he and his house would be saved. (Acts 11:14.) This indicates that he was not saved until Peter told him what he must do. After preaching Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ, (Ac. 10:35-43), Peter commanded him to be baptized into the Lord Jesus. (Acts 10:48.) This indicates that faith, or believeth, in verse 43 is used in a COMPREHENSIVE sense that embraces the other two steps in conversion, rather than in a RESTRICTED sense that excludes them.

The case of Lydia, a travelling saleslady in the city of Philippi, is another religious person that needed conversion. There were probably no synagogues in Philippi when Paul and Silas entered that city. They went out to a riverside where they "supposed there was a place of prayer." The very fact the Lydia was among

those present at this sabbath day prayer meeting shows that she was very religious. (See Acts 16:13-15.) Faith is produced by preaching the word, (Rom. 10:17.) Paul preached the word to Lydia and her house and they gave heed to that word. This led to the final step in the process of her conversion--she was baptized and her house.

There are other cases of conversions recorded in the book of Acts, but these are cases where the people were already religious before their conversions. Many think that because one is religious, and honest in his religious views, that he is in a state which is acceptable to the Lord. If this is true none of these cases would have needed conversion. The very fact that each person was very religious before his conversion shows that religious people, in some cases, need conversion. Every person, religious or otherwise, who has not had his heart purified by faith, his life reformed as a result of repentance, and his state changed from that of sin to that of the saved, which is done in the act of baptism--that person, according to New Testament teaching, needs converting. (See Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21.)

This view of conversion is in harmony with what Jesus taught when he gave the Great Commission, with that which is found in all cases of conversion found in the book of Acts, and with the various references to conversion in the letters to the Churches. The Galatians became sons of God by FAITH when they were BAPTIZED into Christ. (Gal. 3:26-27.)

JOHN P. LEWIS
Norman, Oklahoma