

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVERSION

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Those who violate the Law of God are guilty of sin, which separates them from God (I John 3:4; Isa. 59:1-2). Sinners will remain eternally separated from God unless they are converted. To “convert” is “to change from one form or function to another” (Merriam-Webster). The sinner must be converted, or changed, from a sinner to a faithful child of God. However, the sinner does not have the power within himself to convert himself into a saved state. This conversion from sinner to saint is not possible without the power of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11-12; 3:4-7). Man should be extremely thankful that God desires every lost soul to be converted and saved from the punishment for sin: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved...” (I Timothy 2:3-4a; cf. Rom. 5:8-9). However, for one to be converted, he must first “...come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4b). This Truth by which men must be saved and sanctified is the Word of God (John 8:32; 17:17; 19; Acts 20:32), which was revealed to men by the Holy Spirit.

### THE SPIRIT IS THE SOURCE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Throughout history, God’s will and Word have been revealed through many means: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...” (Heb. 1:1). Sometimes men would have God-given dreams or visions (Gen. 37:5-9; Acts 10:10-16). Sometimes God’s Word was spoken orally by a prophet, sometimes the Word was written, and sometimes prophecies were even “acted

out" (Ezek. 4:1ff). There were also physical structures like the tabernacle, which contained inspired, prophetic Truth within their very design! (Exo. 25:8-9; Heb. 8:1-5).

Today men are blessed to have the complete, special revelation of God preserved in written form, and the Holy Spirit is the Source of those Scriptures:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Pet. 1:20-21; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Mark 12:36; John 16:13; Acts 1:16; 28:25; II Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

The apostle Paul wrote that there are wonderful things the Holy Spirit has revealed from the mind of God through the avenue of inspired words:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the **words** which man's wisdom teacheth, but **which the Holy Ghost teacheth**; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:9-13, emphasis JPH).

Notice that the Holy Ghost teaches through "words," and Paul wrote that we may understand those words revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:3-5).

Because God's revelation has been completed, or perfected, there are no prophets today revealing more Truth (Zech. 13:1-5; I Cor. 13:8-12; Eph. 4:8-16). The Holy Spirit

guided the early church into all the Truth that God was going to reveal: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” (John 16:13; cf. Jude 3). Man does not need further revelations from God, because God’s “...divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3).

### THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE SOURCE OF SALVATION

The Spirit revealed the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are the Source of man’s salvation. The Scriptures reveal God’s Law to men so that they may obey it. They tell men what they must do to be converted and be saved: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psa. 19:7). David also wrote, “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Psa. 51:13). Notice that conversion requires teaching the ways of God! Peter wrote that Christians “...have escaped the pollutions of the world **through the knowledge** of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...” (II Pet. 2:20, emphasis JPH).

Paul called the Gospel the power of God unto salvation: “For I am not ashamed of **the gospel** of Christ: for it is **the power of God unto salvation** to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16, emphasis JPH). The word “power” was translated from the Greek word *dunamis*, from which the English word “dynamite” was derived. One might say that the Gospel is the “**dynamite** of God unto salvation!” Because of this, Paul knew that “speaking” to the Gentiles was necessary to save them: “Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved...” (I Thess. 2:16).

Paul also described the Word of God as the “word of reconciliation,” because without the Word, no person would be converted to Christ, and thus reconciled to God:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18-19).

The Spirit-inspired Scriptures reveal the Gospel, or good news, to men, teaching them about their sins and the sinless Savior (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; I John 3:4; John 5:39; I Cor. 15:1-4; I Pet. 1:18-19). If one will receive the Word of God with a penitent heart of humility and meekness, he can be saved by the Word: “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). However, James went on to write that men must actually obey what the Word says to be blessed:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:22-25).

Jesus described the conversion process as being “born again” (John 3:3).

According to Jesus, the birth of a new Christian requires the right Seed and the right soil. The Seed which produces salvation is the Word of God, and the good soil is the “honest and good heart” which will “keep” the Word (Luke 8:11-15). Peter described Christians as “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Pet. 1:23). Peter wrote that the Word

of God is alive, everlasting, and able to produce Christians – it is not dead, obsolete, or powerless as some may claim. In fact, Satan knows the power is in the Word, even if men do not! Jesus said, “...then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts...” (Luke 8:12). Why does the devil take away the Word? He knows that Seed has the power to save men’s souls! When that Seed is planted in the right kind of soil, it produces Christians (cf. James 1:18; I Cor. 4:15). This is the new birth, which, by the way, requires water (John 3:5; Tit. 3:5; Gal. 3:26-27). The Spirit has a role in this conversion, or new birth, because the Seed came from Him, and the “implanted” Seed is “able” to save men’s souls (James 1:21 ASV).

The Scriptures also fully equip Christians for every good work, so they can know how to live the remainder of their lives faithfully after obeying the Gospel:

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:15-17; cf. Psa. 119:11; Matt. 4:4; Acts 20:32; I Tim. 4:13, 15-16; II Tim. 2:15; II Pet. 1:3; I John 2:1-5).

#### THE SPIRIT SAVES SOLELY THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Spirit is active in the conversions of sinners, but it is important to understand both how He converts and how He does not convert. Calvinists teach that man is “totally depraved” and cannot be converted without God exerting some kind of direct influence on his mind (an influence separate from the Word of God). However, the Bible does not teach such a doctrine. Man can learn God’s will and choose to do it, and the Spirit converts solely through the Word He has revealed.

In Bible times, when men rejected the Word of God, they rejected the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit was affecting human hearts through the proclamation of His Word:

Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and **testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear:** therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands (Neh. 9:30, emphasis JPH).

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, **ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?** and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:51-52, emphasis JPH).

In the days of Noah, God's Spirit strove with men by the preaching of His Word (Gen. 6:3; I Pet. 3:18-19; II Pet. 2:5). God's Spirit still "strives" with men today through the preaching of the written Word.

Paul wrote that faith comes from hearing the Word of God, not from a direct operation of the Spirit on the human mind (Rom. 10:17). He also taught that the Word of God is what effectively works in the hearts of men:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you** that believe (I Thess. 2:13, emphasis JPH).

Passages such as John 6:44 have been used by some to teach that God does something to men in conversion beyond what His Seed does: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." However, the very next verse explains how the Father draws men to Him – simply by men hearing and learning: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all **taught** of God. Every man therefore that hath **heard, and hath learned** of the Father, cometh unto

me" (John 6:45, emphasis JPH; cf. Isa. 2:3). Men are "taught of God" by His Word that they have "heard." By God's Word they have "learned" how to be reconciled to Him through Christ (John 6:45; cf. II Cor. 5:19). God "draws" or "calls" men to Him by the Gospel: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 2:14). John 6 also records Jesus going on to say that the power to quicken, or make alive, is in His words: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63; cf. 6:68; 12:50).

One may wonder what Paul meant when he wrote that the Holy Spirit sanctifies men, such as in Romans 15:16. Does this mean that the Holy Spirit does something "magical" or "supernatural" to men in this sanctification? There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit sanctifies, but one must ask, "How?" The Bible teaches that Christians are sanctified (set apart for a holy purpose) through the Word the Spirit has revealed (John 17:17, 19; Acts 20:32; cf. John 15:3; Eph. 5:26). It is no coincidence that Paul mentions "the gospel of God" in Romans 15:16 when he referred to sanctification by the Holy Ghost. Through the Gospel, the Gentiles could be "acceptable" and "sanctified":

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, **ministering the gospel of God**, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:16, emphasis JPH).

The analogy has been used of a man cutting down a tree with an axe. Did the man cut the tree, or did the axe cut the tree? It is understandable stated either way; but whether one states that the man cut the tree or the axe cut the tree, it is understood that

it was the axe that made direct contact with the tree for it to be cut. The Holy Spirit “pricks” or “cuts” the hearts of men (Acts 2:37; 7:54), not with an axe, but with the sharpest, most powerful Sword that has ever existed:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The Word of God is the Spirit’s Sword, His Tool for affecting the hearts of men, defending the Truth, and defeating error: “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17; cf. II Tim. 3:16-17; 4:2).

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would “...convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8 ASV), and Acts 2 is a perfect demonstration of this. The Spirit gave the apostles the words to preach (2:4), and through preaching those Jews in Jerusalem were convicted by the Spirit of sin (2:36), righteousness (2:38), and judgment (2:40; cf. 24:25). The Holy Spirit converts through the Word by convincing men that they have committed sin and need conversion to Christ through compliance to His commandments (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; I Pet. 1:22-23).

It was the preaching of the cross that pricked their hearts on the day of Pentecost, not a direct operation of the Spirit:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now **when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart**, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (Acts 2:36-37, emphasis JPH; cf. 7:54).



Peter preached the crucifixion of Christ, and notice what Paul wrote about this: “For **the preaching of the cross** is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it **is the power of God**” (I Cor. 1:18, emphasis JPH; cf. 1:21). The preaching of the Gospel is God’s power to convert the souls of men, and even though the events of Pentecost involved miracles, those miracles were done so those lost souls could be saved by hearing the Gospel! (Acts 2:4-38). The Holy Spirit not only revealed the Word – He also confirmed it so that men might believe the Word and be saved by obeying it (cf. Mark 16:20; John 20:30-31; Heb. 2:3-4; 5:9).

One wonders, if the Holy Spirit converts sinners to saints through a direct operation, why did the Spirit tell Philip the evangelist, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot”? (Acts 8:29). Why did not the Spirit just go convert the Ethiopian with a direct operation? Philip had been doing miracles by the power of the Spirit (8:6), but the Spirit Himself knew that the power for salvation was in the Word! (8:29, 35).

One also wonders why Jesus sent a man instead of the Holy Spirit to convert Saul (Acts 9:6-17). Instead of Jesus telling Saul what to do to be converted, or sending the Holy Spirit to directly operate on Saul’s heart, notice what Jesus said: “...Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). A man named Ananias came and “told” Saul what he “must do” to be saved (cf. Acts 22:16). Notice also these actions of the Holy Spirit and the angel regarding Cornelius’ conversion:

And **the Spirit bade me go** with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: And he shewed us how he had seen **an angel** in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for **Simon**, whose surname is

Peter; Who **shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved** (Acts 11:12-14, emphasis JPH).

Apparently, Jesus, the Spirit, and the angel understood something that many do not understand today – people are saved by “words,” not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on their hearts! It is God’s will for men to teach others how to be saved until Christ returns, and this is often called “The Great Commission” (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Notice that this task of spreading the Word to convert sinners has been given to men – not Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or angels. God the Father gave His Son, His Son gave His blood, and the Spirit gave His Seed. Now Christians must do their part to save lost souls – they must spread the Spirit’s Seed, which has the power to convert the lost.

If men are converted by a direct operation instead of the Word, why have there never been conversions where the Word has not been spread? Why preach the Gospel to every creature? Why do men need the Bible at all if the Holy Spirit is going to save whom He will by direct operation? If one says that the Spirit works directly on the hearts of men “in conjunction with the Word” in conversion, then he has gone beyond what the Bible teaches. He has also contradicted the Bible by implying that the Scriptures are not “able to save” (James 1:21; cf. Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18; I Pet. 1:23, etc.). If the Holy Spirit directly operated on the hearts of some who heard the Word, causing them to be converted, but did not operate on others who heard the Word, leaving them lost, this would make God a respecter of persons. However, the God of the Bible is no respecter of persons! (cf. Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:10-11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet.

1:17). The God of the Bible wants all men to be saved (Matt. 11:28-30; Acts 2:21; I Tim. 2:3-4; II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 22:17).

Paul wrote about God's "righteous judgment" in Romans 2, but the doctrine of a direct operation in conversion impugns God's judgment. Such a doctrine implies that God will condemn people He chose not to save by a direct operation, while allowing some, who were fortunate enough to receive a direct operation, to enter Heaven. The true God is not the God of such a false, Calvinistic doctrine, as Paul clearly conveyed:

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:5-11).

How could men be judged by the Word of God if ultimately it would be the Spirit's fault for not "directly operating" on their hearts to convert them? (John 12:48; cf. 12:50).

May men never doubt the righteousness and impartiality of the true living God of Heaven. The Bible is the Word of God that men must decide, of their own volition, whether they will obey:

**Turn you** at my reproof: behold, **I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.** Because **I have called, and ye refused;** I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But **ye have set at nought all my counsel,** and would none of my reproof...For that they **hated knowledge, and did not choose** the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools

shall destroy them. **But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely,** and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Prov. 1:23-25, 29-33, emphasis JPH; cf. Deut. 30:19; Jos. 24:15; Neh. 9:30; Psa. 119:30; Ezek. 18:20-32; Isa. 56:4-5; Matt. 13:15; Acts 7:51-52; Rev. 22:17).

Those who are waiting for a direct operation of the Spirit to “move” them to obedience will be waiting until it is too late to obey the Gospel!

### CONCLUSION

The Spirit is the Source of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are sufficient to save souls. The Spirit does not save separately from the Scriptures, but solely through His Seed and Sword. Instead of searching for some type of sensationalism regarding what the Spirit does, may men be satisfied with the simple Truth supplied by the Spirit.

### REFERENCES

Merriam-Webster. “Convert.” Merriam-Webster Online.

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*Note: This manuscript can be found in the 2012 Spiritual Sword Lectureship book, and on Jason’s website: <http://www.TheBibleDomain.com>*