

We are presently in the middle of a topical study on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit—thus far, after considering an introductory sermon on the Person of the Holy Spirit, we've examined the work of the Spirit in Creation and Common Grace, and the work of the Spirit upon the Head (Christ).

This brings us to begin our consideration of the Spirit's work upon the Body (church), but before we do that, I want to begin, by way of instruction, by providing two important truths:

(1) Every work of God is a work of the Trinity—that is, the works of God in creation, providence, and redemption are a work of the entire Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit). All that God does, He does as God (Father, Son, and Spirit). Thus, in speaking about the work of the Spirit, we must be careful not to separate Him from the Father and Son.

(2) Every work is a work of the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit—that is, while every work is a work of the Godhead, this doesn't deny a distinction within the Persons. Remember the inward and outward works of God. By inward works are meant the inter-Trinitarian relations of God—the Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son—these are essential relations of the three Persons from eternity.

By outward works are meant the works that God does without (outside) of Himself (creation, providence, and redemption). These are all purposed by the Father, who accomplishes them through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, there are two serious errors we must avoid: (1) dividing the Persons from one another, and (2) failing to properly distinguish the persons (and their work) from the others.

This brings us to our theme, The Work of the Spirit in Conversion, and I want to consider it under three main headings—Its Prerequisite, Its Nature, and Its Fruits.

I. Its Prerequisite

II. Its Nature

III. Its Fruits

I. Its Prerequisite

1. By prerequisite I refer to that which necessarily precedes conversion and without which conversion would be impossible.
2. Some of you will know I am of course speaking about regeneration—regeneration is the prerequisite to conversion.
3. Now, before I go any further, let me briefly define what is meant by conversion—the word simply means "to change."
4. Fundamental to conversion is turning from our sin to Christ—repenting from our sin and placing faith in Christ.
5. But before there can be any change of direction, there must first be the impartation of spiritual life to the soul.
6. This impartation of spiritual life to a dead soul is called regeneration which literally means "to re-become" and I want to suggest three things about it.
7. (1) Regeneration is necessary, Jn.3:3—"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
8. By "seeing the kingdom of God" our refers to spiritual sight—a person can not see his need to enter God's kingdom without being born again.
9. The reason is rather obvious—by nature all men are spiritually blind—we are blind to our sin and God's grace.

10. V5—"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."
11. Here our Savior switches the imagery—native man is not only spiritually blind but also spiritually lame or dead.
12. This is why regeneration is a necessity, without it native man is unable to see or enter the kingdom—he's blind and dead.
13. (2) Regeneration is instantaneous—by this I mean, in the strictest sense, regeneration is an act and not a process.
14. This is seen in that our Savior speaks of regeneration as happening to us—it's not something done by us, but to us.
15. Literally our Savior says—"You must be born-again"—sinners are passive in regeneration—it happens to them.
16. Now, this doesn't deny that oftentimes the Holy Spirit works within the heart prior or preparatory to regeneration.
17. Perhaps this can be illustrated by the pains that accompany child-bearing—sometimes there's prolonged pain before birth (perhaps there's relatively little).
18. And so, it's possible, I dare even say common, that the Holy Spirit works within a soul (bring conviction and distress) prior to giving birth.
19. But strictly speaking, regeneration, the work of the Spirit in giving spiritual life to a dead soul, is an act and not a process.
20. Now again, this doesn't mean, that every converted person will be able to pin-point the exact time of their regeneration.
21. With regards to our perception, this can feel like a process, but, if you are a Christian, there was a time when you were brought by the Spirit from death into life.
22. (3) Regeneration is by the Spirit and word—this is suggested by that debated phrase in v5—"unless one is born of water and the Spirit."
23. As most of you know, the phrase "born of water and the Spirit" has been debated among good reformed Christians.
24. Most commonly the phrase is interpreted as follows—by "born of water" is meant the Spirit's work with the word.
25. Scripture often attaches the imager of washing to the word, Eph.5:26—"Christ died that He might cleanse the church with washing of water by the word."
26. Thus, it seems our Savior is underscoring the fact, that the Spirit always breaths life into a soul, through the word.
27. And so, we learn, that the first thing the Holy Spirit does in converting a soul is, giving that soul new and spiritual life.
28. Jn.6:63—"It is the Spirit who gives life. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life"—that is, the Spirit gives life through the word.

II. Its Nature

1. As I earlier said, by conversion is meant that radical change of a penitent sinner, when he turns from sin to Christ.
2. Fundamentally, there are two components to conversion—repentance and faith—turning from self and to Christ.
3. These are obviously two sides of the same coin—nobody can truly turn to Christ without turning from himself.
4. 1Thess.1:9—"you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"—they turned from idols to God.
5. Acts 26:17—"I send you to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."
6. Here I want to, rather quickly, consider these two graces (repentance and faith), and then suggest three observations.

7. (1) Repentance—at the heart of Biblical repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of direction (life).
8. This is why we turn from sin, because we've had a change of mind concerning the nature of God and the nature of sin.
9. A true change of mind will always result in a change of life—if there's no outward change there was no inward change.
10. This is seen in Acts 26:17—"I send you to open their eyes (that's a change of mind), in order to turn them (that's a change of life)."
11. Thus, to be more specific, let me suggest that within conversion, a sinner turns from three things—idols, sin, and self.
12. (a) Idols, 1Thess.1:9—"you turned to God from idols"—that is, they turned from worshipping anything but God.
13. This is fundamental to true conversion—you turn from every false god, and every false notion of the true God.
14. But more than this, to turn from idols is to turn from anything that would receive our ultimate love and allegiance.
15. (b) Sin, Acts 26:17—"I send you to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."
16. Within true conversion, a sinner turns from darkness—that is, moral darkness that is promoted by Satan himself.
17. What does turning from darkness entail? Well, it obviously includes turning from sin as a moral and ethical perversion.
18. It's turning your back upon the intellectual and moral wickedness that pervades this world which is ruled by Satan.
19. (c) Self, Matt.16:24—"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself"—his own merit and strength.
20. This is essential to true repentance—turning from one's own good works as the basis of our acceptance with God.
21. Joseph Alleine—"Before conversion, man seeks to cover himself with his own fig-leaves, and to make himself whole with his own duties. He is apt to trust in himself and set up his own righteousness. But conversion changes his mind; now he counts his own righteousness as filthy rags. He casts it off, as a man would the dirty clothing of a nasty beggar."
22. (2) Faith—at the heart of saving faith is the embracement of Christ, as He's offered in the gospel, as Prophet, Priest, and King.
23. It's not merely enough to turn from idols, sin, and self, but you must also turn to God in the Person of Jesus Christ.
24. Thus, I suggest that within conversion, the sinner not only turns from idols, sin, and self, but turns to trust and serve God.
25. (a) To trust God—that is, having turned from trusting oneself, the coming sinner trusts in the merits of Christ.
26. Joseph Alleine—"Conversion brings the soul to Christ to accept Him as the only means of life, as the only way, the only name given under heaven. He does not look for salvation in any other but Him; he throws himself on Christ alone."
27. (b) To serve God, 1Thess.1:9—"you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"—we come to serve God.
28. Joseph Alleine—"All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the wages but the work of Christ, not only the benefits but the burden of Christ. He takes up the commands of Christ, yes, the cross of Christ."
29. Matt.11:28-30—"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."
30. Obs.1—Repentance and faith are given by the Spirit—that is, they are gifts from God, purchased by Christ, and given by the Holy Spirit.

31. Eph.2:8—"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" 2Tim.2:24-25—"a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance."
32. This is the great work of the Holy Spirit—breathing spiritual life into the soul and turning us from self to Christ.
33. It's for this reason, that Scripture often attributes conversion to God—Ps.80:19—"Turn us, O LORD God of hosts and we shall be saved" Lam.5:21—"Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored."
34. Dear brethren, who can enable a poor sinner to forsake his idols, sin, and self, and cast Himself solely upon Christ!
35. This obviously is the work of Almighty God, and in particular, it is the specific work of the Holy Spirit of God!
36. Obs.2—Repentance and faith are exercised by the soul—though the Spirit gives them, He doesn't repent or believe for us.
37. It's for this reason, Scripture everywhere commands us to repent and believe, or put another way, to return to God.
38. Thus, it's not wrong to say, "I repented" or "I believed" or "I returned to God" because there's a sense in which you did.
39. And there is another very real sense in which, if you fail to repent, believe, and return to God, the fault lies with you.
40. Obs.3—Repentance and faith are continually given by the Spirit and exercised by the soul—there is a sense in which we speak of initial and continual conversion.
41. Initial conversion takes place when we become a Christian and ongoing conversion takes place throughout our Christian life.
42. There is a sense in which a large part of the Christian life can be summarized by this single word—CHANGE.
43. The Christian life begins with a radical and blessed change, and then it continues as an ongoing and blessed change.
44. Martin Luther (95 Theses)—"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

III. Its Fruits

1. Here I want to briefly suggest three fruit or evidences of conversion, and they are all suggested in Mathew 18:3.
2. Matt.18:3—"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."
3. Our Savior says that those who are converted become as little children—thus, the question becomes, in what way do they become as little children?
4. Well, I want to suggest three things true of children that are also true of those who've been converted by the Spirit.
5. (1) Dependence—that is, just as children are dependent upon their parents, so Christians are dependent upon God.
6. They know their weakness and inability—they know that if they were left to themselves, they would eternally perish.
7. Matt.18:4—"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
8. (2) Obedience—just as children obey their parents so everyone who's been converted, obeys their heavenly Father.
9. Another way of putting this would be—they now humbly realize they need God's word to guide them throughout life.
10. (3) Love—children love their parents for many reasons, but one being, it was them that gave them physical life.

11. So too, those converted realize it was God who made them, both physically and spiritually, and thus they love Him.
12. Thus, in the time we have remaining, I want to make application of our theme by way of examination, exhortation, and exaltation.
13. Application 1—Examination—in light of what we've learned, we each need to ask ourselves this question—have I been converted?
14. And I believe this is proper place to begin as there is great confusion on the nature and necessity of true conversion.
15. There are many professing Christians in this country especially, who believe they are converted when they are not.
16. And a large part of the problem is they lack a clear understanding of what is and what is not true Biblical conversion.
17. Thus, let me digress for a few minutes and suggest to you three common mistakes concerning the nature of conversion.
18. (a) Conversion is not merely intellectual consent—that is, it isn't merely accepting or believing religious truths.
19. Now, obviously, no person can be truly converted without accepting religious truth, but you can accept certain things as true and not be converted.
20. Perhaps I can put it like this—conversion is not merely changing your mind about God, creation, or even morality.
21. You can change from atheism to theism, evolution to creation, gay marriage to traditional marriage, and still not be truly converted.
22. You can become politically conservative and pro-life, and yet for all that, remain just as unconverted as the Devil.
23. (b) Conversion is not merely outward morality—that is, a person can give up many vices and still not be converted.
24. You can stop abusing drugs and drink, living immorally, stealing and lying, and yet, for all that, remain unconverted.
25. Furthermore, you can perform all the outward duties of religion—you can go to church, read your Bible, and give to the church, and yet, for all that, remain unconverted.
26. (c) Conversion is not merely inward emotions—that is, a person can have strong feelings and yet not be converted.
27. You can experience great sorrow of soul and guilt—you can experience emotional highs and joys, and yet, remain unconverted.
28. Remember, dear friends, what true conversion entails—turning from sin and self, to God in Christ, as Savior and Lord.
29. Before I come to my second application, let me provide, what I believe is a very necessary clarification for some.
30. If true conversion consists in repentance and faith, let us remember that these graces can be present though weak.
31. The issue here is not perfection but overall direction—have my eyes been opened to see the vanity of all idols?
32. Have my eyes been opened to the moral darkness of this world? Have my eyes been opened to see I have no native merit?
33. Have my eyes been opened to see God's grace in Christ? Have, albeit feebly, turned from these and come to Christ?
34. Application 2—Exhortation—here of course, I am speaking to those who know they have never been converted.
35. Remember what we learned earlier—while conversion is the work of the Spirit, God calls you to be converted.
36. Thus, I would encourage you to turn from your idols, this dark world, and your own native merits, and turn to God in Christ.

37. (a) God's heart, Ezek.33:11—"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"
38. (b) God's goodness, Rom.2:4—"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"
39. (c) God's good news—this is why you should turn to God in Christ, because in Him there's blood and righteousness.
40. Application 3—Exaltation—here of course, I am speaking to those who, by God's grace, have been converted.
41. O dear brethren, let's remember that conversion is ultimately the result of God's grace and the work of His Spirit.
42. Thus, let us respond this morning by giving Him praise and adoration, for His work of conversion in our lives.
43. Ps.92:1—"It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High" v4—"For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands."
44. Ps.110:1-4—"Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."