



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 164

Conversion – Scripture defines conversion as a turning or returning, where the sinner out of godly sorrow turns to God from his sins and lives a life devoted to God. More specifically, conversion can be defined as the sinner repenting of his sins and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. Thus, conversion is composed of two elements, the negative element of repentance, and the positive element of faith. In regeneration the sinner is entirely passive, but in conversion he is both passive and active. The sinner is passive in the sense that God is the author of conversion, where even repentance and faith are gracious gifts of God, implanted in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit. Only after what God has done does the sinner then actively and consciously forsake his old life and turn to God to start a new life (Isaiah 55:7).

Faith – In today’s culture the word faith has come to mean a blind belief in something which is unreasonable. Sometimes it is spoken of as a “blind leap into the darkness,” alluding to an irrational or emotional belief in something which most of the evidence is against. But this is not the meaning of the words “faith” or “belief” in the Bible. Contrary to atheists and skeptics, the Christian faith is not a “blind faith,” based on myths, superstitions and legends, but a faith based on historical events and evidence (Luke 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1-3).

Gift from God – The faith which the saved have is not of themselves, it isn’t something which originated in their minds or wills, but rather it is a gift from God, thus it is grace. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the spiritually dead and thus enables them to believe in Christ and be saved. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul is saying that even faith is a “gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Philippians 1:29). The Bible also clearly teaches that faith alone is the necessary condition for salvation, or theologically speaking faith alone is the instrumental cause or means of justification. A sinner is saved by faith alone, and not by faith and works. This is encapsulated in the Reformed phrase “Sola Fide” (Acts 16:31; Romans 3:28; 9:32; 10:13; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9; 2 Timothy 3:15).

Given to the elect – God does not give this gift of faith to everyone, but only to the elect. Faith is the fruit of regeneration. The person whom the Holy Spirit calls inwardly and regenerates will certainly believe in Christ and be saved (John 6:37; Acts 13:48). An important point we need to be aware of here is that though this faith is a gift of God wrought in us, and though this faith is not of us, it certainly is our faith and no one else’s, meaning when we are regenerated and given the gift of faith, we are then the ones who go on and exercise that faith and believe in Christ. It isn’t God who believes for us!

Through the Word – Though regeneration is a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit accomplished directly in the sinner, without the use of any means, yet in conversion, having planted the seed of faith, the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God as an outward and ordinary means of grace to convict the sinner of his sinful state and present to him the way of salvation in Christ, and thus making it effectual for salvation (Romans 10:13-17).

In Reformed theology the Word of God is referred to as an “outward” means of grace, as distinguished from the “inward” work of the Holy Spirit, for not all who hear the gospel are saved, but only those whom the Spirit regenerates inwardly. Also the Word of God is called an “ordinary” means of grace, because in ordinary cases the Holy Spirit uses and accompanies the Word to save the elect. Thus as commanded by God, it is critical for us believers to fully and accurately proclaim the Word of God, through preaching, teaching, and evangelism, trusting that the Holy Spirit will bring His elect to salvation (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 10:42-43; Romans 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 1:17-21; 2 Timothy 4:1-2). In special circumstances, such as infants dying in infancy or persons who are mentally impaired and thus incapable of understanding the gospel, the Holy Spirit may save people solely by His inward Word, without the use of any outward means (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 10, Section 3).