

Conversion

Introduction. Early preaching contained two distinct notes. First, the crucifixion was the greatest crime in human history. Second, the resurrection vindicated the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was the first to preach in the name of Jesus, and all who truly preach the gospel stand in the tradition deriving from him. Peter and John's healing of a man crippled from birth drew a large crowd. When Peter saw that crowd, he began his sermon in Acts 3:12.

In the sermon, Peter explored the matchless name of Jesus Christ. He described the Master as the Servant, the Savior, the Holy One and the Just, the Prince of Life and the Christ. The sermon concluded, as all good sermons do, with the theme of repentance.

Throughout redemptive history, God's spokesmen have called sinners to repentance. Repentance involves far more than a mere intellectual decision. It is a change of mind that provokes a change of behavior. "Converted" is a word frequently used in the New Testament to speak of sinners turning to God (Luke 1:16-17; Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; 2 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25).

These people needed to repent, for they had rejected their Messiah and were in rebellion against God. In the first part of the sermon, Peter convicted them of their guilt. He then offered them hope, reassuring them that it was not too late to repent. We will explore what repentance involves and then discuss its overall relationship to salvation in this lesson.

I. ***Distinct Changes In Alienation And Restoration***

A. Alienation.

1. A change of mind.
 - a) The first preacher that appeared after the human family, consisting of Adam and Eve, were created and placed in Eden, brought a message of disobedience.
 - b) God told them that if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would die (Genesis 2:16-17), but this preacher said, "Ye shall surely not die."
 - c) The supremacy of positive law hung in the balance (Genesis 3:1-6). The woman listened to the sermon on disobedience.
2. A change of attitude.
 - a) As the preacher persuaded, she resolved to eat of the forbidden fruit. She brought her will in subjection to the will of the devil.
 - b) Yet neither she nor Adam fell from their high position until they committed the outward act of disobedience (cf. James 1:13-15).

3. A change of relationship.
 - a) When they actually ate of the fruit, their eyes were opened. They immediately discovered that they were naked (Genesis 3:7).
 - b) They were driven from the garden and the sentence was pronounced (Genesis 3:14-19).
 - c) They were alienated from God because sin had entered their hearts. They no longer enjoyed personal communion with their Creator; their relationship was changed by their evil act -- a disobedience of divine law.
- B. Restoration.
1. A change of mind.
 - a) The sinner, being of the world and alienated from God, listens to the message of salvation from the preacher of righteousness (Romans 1:16).
 - b) He or she hears the facts of the gospel (Acts 4:12; Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21; 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:20). They believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He is the Savior.
 2. A change of attitude.
 - a) Moved by a knowledge of God's will (Matthew 11:21-24; Luke 16:30-31; John 20:30-31), the sorrow of past sins (2 Corinthians 7:9-10), the goodness and mercy of God (Romans 2:4) and the fear of final judgment (Acts 17:30-31), they change their attitude from disobedience to that of willingness to obey.
 - b) This is genuine repentance, and it leads to confession of sin and reformation of life. Yet the change of attitude does not put one into the kingdom. There is one more change necessary.
 3. A change of relationship.
 - a) A person shows their faith and repentance by the overt act of obedience which puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16).
 - b) Immersion in water is the "boundary line" between the church and the world just as the Rio Grande is the boundary line between Texas and Mexico.
 - c) By their own act of disobedience to divine law, mankind fell from their high position. By their own act of obedience to divine law, they may be restored to the kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 5:17).

II. **"Unto" And "Into"**

- A. We find that three actions lead us "unto" Christ, and one action puts us "into" Christ. "Unto" means a coming up to; "into" means an actual

entrance. When I go "unto" a certain city, I approach it; when I go "into a city," I actually enter within.

1. Belief "unto" righteousness (Romans 10:10).
 - a) Righteousness is doing the will of God (Matthew 3:15).
 - b) Faith leads a person to do the will of God.
 2. Repentance "unto" salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10).
 - a) Godly sorrow causes the sinner to repent, or turn to God. This turning leads "unto" salvation, but not "into" Christ.
 - b) Judas repented, but his sins were not remitted because he did not obey the gospel (Matthew 27:3-5).
 3. Confession "unto" salvation (Romans 10:10; Acts 8:37).
 4. Baptism "into" Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3).
 - a) This act puts us into Christ. It is the visible line between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. It is an action ordained by the Master Himself.
 - b) There is no virtue in the water alone, except as a symbol of purification. There is virtue, however, in the outward act of obedience to a positive law. When a person does what God commands, they manifest genuine faith.
- B. God's law of restoration is unchangeable, just like the laws governing the natural universe. Prayer will not alter positive, divine law.
1. For example, in the story of the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron, Miriam was covered with leprosy as a consequence of her rebelliousness (Numbers 12:1-16). She, Aaron and Moses all prayed for cleansing, but she was not healed.
 2. Why? Because God had given a detailed law for the cleansing of lepers, and He could not change it (Leviticus 13:1-14:57). Moses stopped the entire procession of the Israelites for seven days so that Miriam could be set outside the camp and healed according to the law of Moses.

Conclusion. Mankind must be taught to respect the law of God. We hear of thousands "converted" in "revivals" who are not converted at all. We must learn that the only way is God's way. In order to be righteous, one must do the will of God. When this is done, then one's sins are truly remitted or "wiped away." This expression is taken from the practice of creditors charging their debtors, and when the debt is paid, the record is cancelled or blotted out. This is a similar concept to "propitiation" in Romans 3:25. The blood of Christ has so worked that God does not "see" the sins of the believer when it comes time for justification.

The Jews anticipated that the Messianic age would be a period when they would have rest from their enemies, a respite from the evils of oppression and war and great national prosperity and peace. However, Peter

used the phrase, "restitution of all things," to indicate the time which began on the day of Pentecost when men were first told how to be free from their sins. It continues today as the gospel message of repentance and remission of sins is still being preached in His name and offered to all men. These times will continue until the Lord shall come again to judge the world, welcome the redeemed to the Celestial City and banish the wicked to hell. Are you ready?