

Conversions and Non-Conversions in Acts

Many examples of conversion are given in Acts. Our hearts thrill to the preaching of the first-century preachers and to the ready response given by so many hearers of the gospel. We rejoice when we see others rejoicing in salvation. Sometimes, however, we read of those same men preaching and are disappointed in the lack of results. At times, the audience went away unconverted. What was the difference between those converted and those unconverted?

ELEMENTS OF CONVERSION

We must understand the plain New Testament teaching on conversion, on the plan of salvation. This plan has many elements, and these elements combine as links to form the chain that binds man back to God. We shall notice in this lesson the items that are said to save us. They come under three headings.

Heaven's Part

1. *God* (2 Timothy 1:8, 9). Because He is the origi-

nal Planner and Designer of salvation, God is said to save. He is the source of all blessings. He drew the blueprints; He planned our salvation.

2. *Grace* (Ephesians 2:5). God was not obligated to offer salvation. It was unmerited favor that He bestowed. This is the meaning of "grace." We did not deserve to be saved.

3. *Christ* (Matthew 1:21). God's grace was exemplified in the giving of His Son (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is our Savior.

4. *Christ's Blood* (Matthew 26:28). Jesus' blood shed on the cross of Calvary was the atonement for sin. Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

5. *The Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 6:11). The Holy Spirit was sent into the world after Christ's departure. His role was to reveal the plan of salvation to man. He inspired certain men to speak as He gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). By the Spirit, the Word was delivered to man.

6. *God's Word, or the Gospel* (Romans 1:16). In the gospel message is the power of God for salvation. Everyone who believes that message has the opportunity to be saved.

All of the elements mentioned so far are the part of heaven extended toward man. Each of these is necessary as a link in the chain. No one should think that they are contradictory just because one passage mentions salvation as being predicated upon one element of the plan and others mention it as being dependent upon other elements.

Human Instrumentality

As we study the second division of the plan of

salvation, we find some elements involving man. The gospel is carried to the hearer in earthen vessels, according to 2 Corinthians 4:7. (See Romans 11:14; 1 Corinthians 9:22.) The gospel is brought by gospel preaching and teaching. First Corinthians 1:21 says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

The Sinner's Part

In a sense, the sinner saves himself (Acts 2:40). How? By believing when he hears (Mark 16:16; Romans 10:17), repenting (Acts 17:30, 31; 2 Corinthians 7:10), confessing his faith in Christ (Romans 10:10), and being baptized (1 Peter 3:21).

Since men "save themselves," and since these elements which are performed by men save, it follows that men save themselves by doing what God has commanded. Of course, we understand that Jesus is our Savior. These steps in the plan of salvation save only in the sense that they are conditions which must be complied with before Jesus saves.

THE DIFFERENCE IN CONVERSION AND NON-CONVERSION

What was the difference between those converted and those not converted when the gospel was preached in the Book of Acts?

Let us notice carefully the case of the Ethiopian nobleman in Acts 8. What did God do for him? Had He wanted him to be saved? Certainly. Did Christ die for him? Yes. Did the Holy Spirit do anything for him? Yes, He inspired a preacher to tell him the

story. The gospel was for this man.

Now, let us notice the case of Felix in Acts 24. He was not converted. Let us ask our questions about him. What had God done for him? Did God love him? Yes. Did Jesus die for him? To be sure. Did God give him the inspired message? Indeed. God did everything for Felix that He did for the Ethiopian. The difference between the two was not that God provided an opportunity for one and failed to provide an opportunity for the other. He did the same for each.

Moreover, the difference was not in the fact that one was able to accept while the other was not. God invites everyone to come to Him. The gospel invitation would be mockery if some sinners did not have the ability to accept it.

Was the difference in the human instrumentality? We observe that Philip preached the gospel to the Ethiopian nobleman—but so did Paul to Felix. That is not the difference either.

What, then, is the difference? The only difference is the response by the sinners. One obeyed, and one did not. One had the courage to repent and confess his faith. The other did not. One was willing to go down into the water and be baptized. The other was not.

CONCLUSION

If you are not saved now, it is not that God has not done as much for you as He has for any of us. It is not that you are unable to be saved. It is not that others have refused to bring you the message of salvation. It is only because you were unwilling (see Matthew 23:37).