



# THE EXPOSITOR

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“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” These are the words of the Savior himself. They are also the guiding theme of *The Expositor* for the next several issues. The topic of conversion is not new to any of us in Christianity. We need not worry that we are serving you up something you already know, since conversion is an inexhaustible topic. We will never deplete the topic’s wealth. However, I am also aware that some readers will in vain read the articles to find a new fact about conversion. I am quite sure, that even if every word of this journal is not new to you, its meat will be still desirable even as a second portion of a favorite food is desirable.

In light of our last edition which focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we deem it valuable to follow with how the gospel is applied to the life of the sinner. That’s really what conversion is. It is the gospel working its power in the sinner’s heart and life bringing about a spiritual change.

We are excited to offer you some substantial articles on conversion by two of heaven’s champions, John Owen and Richard Baxter. These two English pastors of the puritan era were known for their depth of insight. That is especially true of John Owen. Someone has said that the Puritans were the redwoods of the Christian faith. If that is true, then Owen must be one of the Sequoias. His writings are yet studied today and have been instrumental in helping many modern theologians of our time.

Richard Baxter was a pastor who was used by God to turn an English town into one parish for God. When Baxter arrived in the town of Kidderminster he reported that about one family on a street believed in God. But when he left Kidderminster it was the testimony that he could hardly find a street where not one family had not been converted. Therefore, I think if anyone is qualified to teach us about conversion it is Baxter.

A very good friend to Living Priorities, Dr. Michael Morrow, pastor of Union Baptist Church, Marion, Ky, has contributed to this issue with an article on the biblical doctrine of repentance. Here is an aspect of conversion where we need clarity and purity of truth. I think you will find such help in this article.

My contribution to this edition of *The Expositor* is the first in a series of articles on the subject of conviction of sin. This is a work of the Holy Spirit that is prior to conversion. It is not an optional work of God but a necessity to the work of conversion. Sadly, very little is written or taught about conviction these days. As a consequence, very few really know much about it.

Also, don’t overlook our *From the Heart of the OGBC Mission Board* section. In this article we explain the why and how we do missions here at Oak Grove. We are praying you find it encouraging as well as challenging. The Great Commission is just that—both encouraging and challenging!

We hope you take advantage of what you find in these pages, and we ask that if you know someone who you think would be helped or blessed by receiving *The Expositor*, please fill out the subscription form and send it to us. We will gladly add them to our mailing list and, like you, they will receive *The Expositor* free of charge.

A Debtor to Mercy,  
S. Michael Durham

# The Necessary

# Grace

# of

# Conviction



*by S. Michael Durham*

*This is the first in a series of articles on conviction of sin. The remainder of the articles will be published in future editions of The Expositor.*

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*V*aried is as much a description of God's works as the words *omnipotent* and *wise*. For example, when the Almighty made flowers he did not just make lilies or violets. The number of types of flowers exceeds most men's ability to count. There is not one kind of tree such as oak or walnut but multiple varieties. And when it comes to spiritual matters the works of God's hand are also multiple and varied. The work of saving the sinner has many facets. Many are the ways of grace. There is the work of God in regeneration and there is the work of God in justification. Sanctification is also God's work and, without doubt, glorification is the work of God.

There is one work of grace, though, that is much overlooked by the contemporary preacher and theologian. It seems to not rate the attention that some of these other above mentioned graces rate. Yet, without this wonderful work of the Holy Spirit there is no subsequent salvation. This work of grace is conviction. Conviction of sin is a part of the mosaic of grace. It is one of the varied and multiple works of God in the saving of a soul. Yet, so little is said of it. Why?

Perhaps we hear so little about this subject because conviction is uncomfortable. The popular method of evangelism today is to console the sinner, not convince him of his evilness. We have bought into the modern marketing method of promising outstanding results if the sinner accepts the Christ of the gospel. The presentation of the good news is much like the peddling of a product hailed as something that the sinner can't have a happy life without. Therefore, conviction or pressing the sinner's conscience with his guilt doesn't appear to be a successful technique for building mega-ministries to this modern, success-oriented culture.

But perhaps another reason we do not stress this work of grace is because it is not a work of man. In the Scriptures it is attributed strictly to the Holy Spirit. Man is the recipient of this work; he is never the one doing the convicting. In this age of individualism and self-determinism, the act of becoming a Christian is billed mainly as a work of human achievement. It is hailed as something man does; God merely cooperates with man and grants salvation. Thus to deal with a subject that is entirely a work of God that leads to the sinner crying out in desperation, hopeless in doing anything himself to gain eternal life, is contrary to the theme of popular evangelism.

But be that as it may, conviction is an important subject if we are to understand some of the spiritual mechanics of conversion. Without conviction of sin there is no salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring men to the Savior, and without this work there is no coming to Christ. The Lord Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit would come his ministry would be to “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

## THE SINNER’S CONDITION

Let’s begin by examining the need and purpose of conviction. Our Lord has stated it for us in John 16:8. The need and purpose of conviction is show the sinner that he is guilty of unrighteousness and therefore deserving of God’s judgment. Without this work of convincing, the sinner remains blind to his danger.

The state of the sinner before conviction is likened in the Bible to several things. First, it is called death. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul writes, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” To the Colossians he says the same, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians. 2:13).

What is this death, since the sinner is physically alive? The apostle explains it as “being alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18). To be devoid of God’s life is death by means of separation from God. It isn’t physical, but spiritual, death. God is the source of all life. To have physical existence without the life

of God is not true life. It is substandard living and the Bible calls it death. That is why the Apostle John says in 1 John 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” The Christian has

been, in effect, resurrected. He has come from the dead and now lives by, in and through the life of Christ. Christ and his divine life lives in him. This is the essence of Christianity.

Another description the Bible uses to illustrate the sinner’s plight is the word *sleep*. The state of the sinner before conviction

is called a sleep. It is a fatal slumber, one from which there is no natural arousal or awakening. The Apostle Paul makes this comparison, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Sleep is for those of the night, but not for those of the day. The metaphor of light and darkness is a constant comparison in the Scriptures. Light represents truth and godliness while darkness represents evil. Paul is saying sleep does not characterize the believer. Vigilance and alertness is the description of the believer.



Both of these metaphors speak of the sinner’s ignorance regarding his condition. He is unaware of his jeopardy. He is oblivious to his guilt. He is insensible to his condemnation. This ignorance that the sinner possesses about his lost condition is not a simple ignorance. Rather, an enemy much too strong for the sinner to overcome blinds him to his true condition. Satan himself blinds him. “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

This is enough to dispel the theory that any sinner has what it takes to make a decision for Christ on hearing the gospel. This is impossible since he is blinded by an invincible outside force. The sinner would first have to vanquish Satan before he could accept Christ, even if he wanted to do so, which, of course, he doesn’t. If this were just a simple ignorance, then the remedy would be education. Give the sinner more information to make a new and informed decision to follow Christ. But that is not the reality of the sinner’s condition. A supernatural force that cannot be bested by natural efforts enslaves him. He is in a supernatural dilemma that can only be confronted by a supernatural force greater than Satan’s. In addition to this problem, he is also enslaved by his own sin-inclined will that loves ungodliness and loathes the opposite.

Therefore, what is needed is the arousal of the sinner from his death sleep. He needs someone to enlighten his mind to the alarming fact of his spiritual demise and make him to feel it, as well as know it. This is the function of conviction by the Holy Spirit.

## THE STAGES OF CONVICTION

There are three stages to the convicting work of God, three phases of leading the sinner out of enslavement to Satan’s bondage. They are the awakening stage, the argumentation stage and the abasement stage. First, let’s examine the awakening stage.

### *The Awakening Stage*

Being the beginning of conviction, the awakening phase stirs or arouses the sinner to the fact that something is wrong. The sinner merrily marches to destruction without a care for his soul. The Holy Spirit awakens the sinner out of his sleep and makes him to feel that not all is well. This idea of awakening is the Apostle Paul's way of expressing the disturbance of the sinner when he says, "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14). As we have already quoted Paul from Ephesians 2, the sinner is dead in sins and trespasses. If the sinner is to know the light that is in Christ Jesus, he must first be awakened.

An illustration of this is in the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11. The miracle of resurrecting Lazarus from the dead is a sign or symbol of God raising the sinner out of his death sleep and giving him new life. In fact, Christ called it an awakening when he said to the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

The methods that the Spirit of God uses to arouse the sinner's attention to his lost condition are also varied. It might be an event such as death, financial loss, illness, etc. It could also be hearing a gospel sermon or even reading the Scriptures that stirs the sinner's heart. God can use the witness of a Christian or use no method at all, but speak directly to the sinner's conscience and trouble his heart. But conviction has a beginning, and it is always the alerting or awakening of the sinner's conscience. Where he used to feel no remorse or very little remorse, he is now pained by his sin and may not know the reason why. But he does know something is wrong. He cannot enjoy his sin as much as before. He cannot go and do as he used to without a heaviness settling upon him. He has been awakened and, although the residue of sleep fills his eyes, things are not as they were.

### *The Argumentation Stage*

The argumentation stage is the next phase of conviction where the Holy Spirit persuades or convinces the sinner that he is under and deserving of the condemnation of God. The word used in John 16:8 is reprove. The word is better understood as convict. The same word is used in John 8:9 concerning those who brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus. "And they which heard it, being **convicted** by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (emphasis

mine). As our Lord's word pierced the accusers's hearts, each one dropped his stones, turned around and walked away. They were convinced of their own guilt. This is the idea of the word reprove in John 16:8.

This period of conviction is much like a prosecuting attorney arguing the guilt of the accused with powerful and overwhelming evidence that proves guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Interestingly, the jury before which the Holy Spirit argues his case and presents his evidence is the sinner's very own conscience. The sinner may argue his innocence and try to rebut the conscience, but the Holy Spirit completely and handily demolishes every rebuttal. All counter arguments that the sinner presents in defense are smashed to smithereens.

According to Christ the Holy Spirit's arguments can be classified as three. First is the initial convincing of sin. In particular, the sin that the Lord isolates is the sin of unbelief, unbelief in Christ. Unbelief is the basis of all sin. To disobey God one must dispute what God has said, or in other words, disbelieve what he has spoken. Israel is said to have perished in the wilderness because of unbelief. Surely this does not mean that the Holy Spirit does not convince of other sins, rather he specifies unbelief as the fountain of all sins. As in the temptation of Eve, Satan first had to get Eve to doubt the validity of God's words before she would eat the fruit. Unbelief, therefore, was the root of the first rebellion and is the root of all subsequent sin.

The unbeliever's sins are brought to bear on his conscience. And for the first time in his life he is made to feel that he is unworthy of God's favor and begins to sense his worthiness of hell. The Spirit may isolate a particular sin which the sinner is most guilty of, or he may name them one by one. But sin becomes burdensome to the convicted. The sinner offers reasons why he should be considered good enough to enter heaven, but each prop of false assurance is knocked out from under the sinner. And he begins to sense his descent into the very pit itself.

The second area of the Holy Spirit's evidence against the sinner is the area of righteousness. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convince "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more" (John 16:10). Many commentators say this means because Christ ascended back to the Father after the resurrection that this proves the righteousness of Christ himself. Certainly the resurrection was a vindication of Christ's righteousness. But I do not think this is the flow of our Lord's thoughts. Rather, he is meaning that since he would be no longer physically visible and demonstrably righteous, it would be necessary for the Holy Spirit to persuade the sinner



Its importance is at least two-fold. First, many believe in what's called a law work as preparatory for conversion. The puritans are best known for advocating preaching the law to sinners so that they may be convicted of unrighteousness. John Wesley also believed this and said to a young minister that 90 percent of his preaching should be law and 10 percent grace. But Christ does not say that the Holy Spirit will use the law of God to convince the world of righteousness. He says the Spirit will convince sinners of his, Christ's, personal righteousness.

To be compared to the brilliant righteousness of Christ is much more convicting than even the law of God. The law is a revelation of God's essence and nature, but Christ Jesus is the fullest revelation of God. The writer to the Hebrews confesses this when he says that God spoke in history through the prophets, but he has spoken to us today through his Son. It was the prophet Moses who gave the law, but it was Christ Jesus who showed us what God is like in human flesh.

The law may or may not crush the sinner's heart. When Jesus was asked by the young rich ruler what he should do to inherit eternal life, he answered, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). The young man inquired which laws Christ had in mind, and the Lord answered him by giving him a partial list from the Ten Commandments. But what is interesting is instead of being broken over failure to keep the commandments, the young man replied, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Jesus penetrates the ruler's heart by not quoting another law, but by commanding him to live as he, himself, lived and to follow him. This tore at the young man and exposed him for what he really was—a covetous man who loved himself more than God. None of the Ten Commandments could have done that.

I am not saying that we should never preach from the Ten Commandments or that the commandments have no value to the unbeliever's conscience. The Apostle Paul says the law does have value to the ungodly, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners" (1 Timothy 1:9). But even from this text it can be argued that the work of the law is more a restraining of sin than a convincing of sin.

The second importance of John 16:10 and Christ's righteousness is that this is the standard by which men will be judged. This is the plumb line by which all will be measured. It is Christ and his righteousness that determines what is sin and not codified law. The law reflects that for us but only in small measure. It is Christ himself, in all his glory, in all his holy perfection that the law tries to communicate in words.

Therefore, sin is anything short of this righteousness that is seen in Christ himself.

Thus, the Holy Spirit argues the righteousness of Christ and measures the sinner against it. He reveals the perfection that is in the Son of God and declares that this is the sinner's task, "Be ye perfect as I am perfect." What more can dispel the sinner's resistance than to see the holiness of God in the person of Christ Jesus? Is this not exactly what Isaiah experienced in Isaiah 6? There is nothing more powerful and crushing than to see yourself in light of divine righteousness. To be compared to the perfect, holy, and righteous Jesus means condemnation. It is so devastating that men will cry to the rocks of the mountains to fall upon them rather than face the oppressive righteous stare of him who sits on the throne. Sinai may thunder but the Lamb of God slays.

The third area of argumentation pressed upon the conscience of the sinner is the area of judgment. Again, the Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would reprove "of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). What else is there? After having the first two evidences of your sins brought against you, and the righteous standard of Christ, all that is left is the judgment. Here the Heavenly Prosecutor argues for the justice of the penalty to be carried out. Death is the only righteous verdict, eternal death.

It is during this phase of the argumentation that the sinner is made to know his own worthiness of hell, God's rightness in condemning the sinner to hell and the sense of the wrath of God that already abides on him (John 3:36). Often the sinner is so made to feel this that he cannot understand why God has not before now sent him to the place reserved for the devil and his angels. What keeps the earth from opening up and swallowing him whole? Why is he not already in the flames of the hell? Ask him if he thinks that when he dies, he will go to heaven, and he will quickly answer that he is two-fold a child of hell. That is what the conviction of the Holy Spirit does to a man or woman.

### *The Abasement Stage*

The third and final stage of Holy Spirit conviction is what I call the abasement stage. It is the part of the conviction process that can only begin after the individual has been fully persuaded of his guiltiness before God.

It is during this phase that the inability of the sinner to change his guilt is experienced. He is well aware that all options for him are exhausted. His hand is too impotent to fix his dilemma; his wisdom too foolish to solve his guilt; his resources too impoverished to gain God's favor. He sees his own righteousness as



“filthy rags.” Hopelessness occurs and to say the sinner is laid low is an underestimation of this final stage of conviction.

Often I have seen those who are in this crisis stage become so afraid. They fear God, death, hell and even life. They are best characterized as being so full of fear of the impending doom of God’s wrath that they tremble over the smallest of matters. Like a leaf trembling in the slightest breeze, they shiver at the slightest disturbance. Others have come under such a feeling of being beyond even God’s mercy, they despair of any hope. Others may not come under such emotional duress, but regardless, all those who are brought to this final stage of conviction are humbled and finally arrive where God has all along intended and led—brokenness.

A biblical example of this abasement is in our Lord’s parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. In Luke 18:13 Jesus describes the publican as being so broken that he “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’” Our Lord explains this event this way, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

The goal of conviction is to bring the sinner to humility, abasement, so that he might look away from himself and look to Christ the Savior. It is not until the sinner realizes nothing “in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling” that he can rest in the labors of Lamb of God.



*Could my tears forever flow,  
could my zeal no fading know  
these for sin could not atone,  
You must save and You alone;  
In my hand no price I bring,  
simply to Thy cross I cling.*

*Not the labour of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*



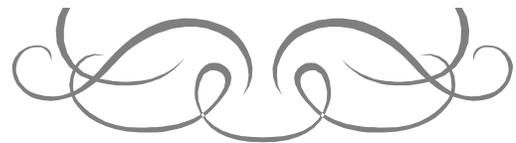
Not until the Spirit of Christ has done his holy work of reproof will the sinner realize “Thou must save, and Thou alone.” For there to be genuine conversion, each stage of the process must be accomplished. That is why this grace of conviction is so vital. Its importance cannot be minimized, yet today it is being marginalized by main-

stream evangelicalism. Its wonders are not being esteemed or extolled. It is a forgotten grace, seldom demanded by the churches of the professing convert. We do not expect the sinner to undergo any deep work of conviction. It would seem we try to avoid it. But churches must be made to realize that the deeper the plow of God rips into the soil of the human heart the deeper the word of God can take root. Shallow conviction often leads to shallow conversions, which in turn, lead to shallow converts.

I ask my reader, have you experienced this spiritual plowing of your own heart? Were you ever made to know not just your sin but the terribleness of it? Were you ever convinced by your own conscience that your best efforts at religion were themselves infractions against God worthy of eternal death? Have you known the perfection of Jesus and felt so hopeless in comparison? Can you truthfully say that you have at any time been made to know that God was right in being against you? That he would be just if he served heaven’s summons against you and cast you body, soul and spirit into hell?

All of those who have been brought out of death and have been given the life that is in the Son have first crossed the chilling waters of conviction. The degree to which the sinner experiences these waters varies from person to person. However, whether it is a 6 year old or 60 year old person, it matters not, for both are made to loath their sin. Both will be made, by this grace of conviction, to feel as if they are sinners worthy of condemnation.

Have you been awakened out of your death slumber and felt the sin that lies at your door? If not, you must. Look towards the Son of God and view his infinite beauty, his divine excellencies and tremble that such righteousness is not yours. Look upon him with brokenness and contrition remembering that “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psalms 34:18).





# The Nature of Conversion - A Change of the Mind

by Richard Baxter

*This is the first in a series of articles by Richard Baxter from his Treatise on Conversion. The remainder of the articles will be published in future editions of The Expositor.*

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*“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).*

I don’t need to beg you to love yourself, or convince you to seek happiness. You will do those things without me telling you to do them because they are in your own interest. Only a fool doesn’t love himself and want to be happy.

My purpose is to tell you where happiness comes from and where it does not – and to advise you to go in the direction that will bring you the greatest pleasure.

My motive is to please God and save souls. I don’t think it is right to enter the pulpit for any other purpose. A man who preaches for some other reason is seeking something for himself, and not for Christ. No wonder such “preachers” use smooth words and pleasing sentences. They are trying to please the people rather than trying to please God.

I know how hard it is to get anyone to listen to the truth concerning conversion. I know how hard this work is, how cold people are even when they owe their very souls to a faithful preacher. But I remember that I must speak in the name of Christ. I also remember that I must speak to people who will either be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I know how little time you have to change your everlasting state. I know also that the Bible says very few people will be saved, that many “are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 20:16; Matthew 22:14). Most people are lost forever because they will not think about Christ, or accept the mercy God offers them.

That’s why I speak to you on only one subject: that one upon which your life or death depends. If I wanted you to think of me as a great scholar, or to get you to applaud what I say, I would speak on a more pleasing subject, and I would have told you some cute stories and funny jokes. But I know that this would please the Devil instead of pleasing God, so I will not speak that way at all. I pray for God to use what I say to convert your soul. That’s what I want to happen.

*“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).*

The “kingdom of heaven” means the state of true grace (salvation) as well as the future kingdom. In this verse it refers to being in a state of salvation. Conversion is the entrance into the preparatory kingdom, because conversion is the entrance into salvation.

## **I. The Doctrine of Conversion**

We can learn several doctrines from this text in Matthew 18:3.

1. Unless people are converted, they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.
2. All people are by nature in the kingdom of Satan. When they are converted they are transferred into the kingdom of heaven. A person is moved from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of heaven by experiencing conversion.
3. The words conversion, repentance, regeneration, and sanctification are used in the Bible to explain the same work of God in the human soul. But each word shows something different about this one work.
4. “Repentance” describes our motion away from the sinful state – from which we turn when we are converted. The word “repentance” explains that we turn to Christ, away from sin. There are two sides of repentance: one is turning from a *state* of sin and misery (it also can refer to turning from a *particular* sin), the other is turning *to* Jesus Christ.

“Repentance” speaks of two things: (1) Deep sorrow that we have sinned; (2) A change of mind *from* that sin *to* Jesus Christ. The first is only a part of the second. The changed mind is sorrowful over past sins, although sorrow is not all there is to such a change. Yet whenever real repentance occurs, part of the change of mind does include deep sorrow for sins.

5. “Regeneration” also means the same thing as “conversion.” But there is this small difference: the term means “the new birth.” “Regeneration” means “the new birth.” So great is the change, that a person is a new man. Although the term “regeneration” is more comprehensive than “conversion,” the two words mean essentially the same thing.
6. “Sanctification” also means the same thing as “conversion,” but with this small difference: the word focuses on our deep love for God, and the holiness of life that comes from such love.

Now I must show you what it means to be “converted and become as little children.” This can’t be done very well unless I first give you a description of the state of an unconverted person.

Man sinned, broke the law of God, and made himself a ruined slave of Satan and a child of death. Therefore, the very nature of an unconverted person is corrupted and depraved. So, we are unclean within our very natures. Conversion deals with the question, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). How could Adam pass on to the human race a good nature when he had lost this himself? We are all born with corrupted natures because we inherited such a nature from Adam. Our natures are against God and heavenly things, and are interested in earth and earthly things. Pride, covetousness, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, ungodliness, fighting, and all wickedness have their roots inside of us. If temptation comes, we will bring forth the fruit because of our depraved nature.

Since this is your nature, it will only get worse the longer you sin, and the longer you put off being converted.

Since your nature is corrupted, something outside of yourself must convert you, for a corrupted tree cannot bring forth good fruit. The main cause of conversion is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of Jesus Christ (whether read or heard) to convert people. The Holy Spirit causes a person to believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit turns a person away from trusting himself to, instead, trust Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes conversion occur within the sinner, to bring about this inward change.

The parts of this conversion are these three: It is a change of mind, it is a change of heart, and it is a change of life.

## II. Conversion Changes the Mind

Every unconverted person is *ignorant* of the saving truths of the gospel. Each person is ignorant either because he has not heard of it, or because he has not understood it.

Most people in the world do not know that man’s nature is totally corrupted. They do not know how God hates sin, and how sin deserves God’s everlasting wrath. They do not know how Jesus Christ has satisfied God’s justice and redeems us from misery. They do not know that Jesus offers them pardon through His death on the Cross, and on what terms that pardon is offered to them, or

how those who believe will enter everlasting glory, and those who do not believe will be in everlasting misery. Many are completely ignorant of these fundamental principles of the Christian religion. Most of those who do know some of these doctrines know them only in a shallow and ineffective way.

1. *Now the first thing that the Spirit of God does in conversion is to open people’s eyes to understand these truths; so that the person who used to hear the sermon as an unreal thing, now is like someone who is brought out of a dark dungeon into the open light.* That person is like someone who was blind but has recovered their eyesight, who is happy to see the light and is surprised at their former ignorance and blindness.



I will prove this to you by the Scriptures: “The natural (unconverted) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:14).

“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

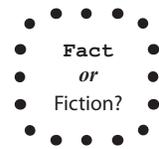
And then the Bible tells us of the healing that happens in conversion: “I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:17-18). You are ignorant of the great truths in the Bible until God Himself awakens you to their reality.

2. *In conversion your mind is also changed from thoughtlessness to serious attention.* The main reason we cannot get people to hate this world of sin and seek to find Christ is that we cannot get them to think seriously. Instead of thinking deeply about the sermon, lost people go home from church to think and talk about other things. They are never helped by the sermon because they don’t *think* about it. We can’t get them to go alone for an hour and actually recall seriously what they heard.

When the Spirit of God comes to convert you, He makes you *think* about the sermon. He wakes up sleeping souls and shows them that the sermon is for *them*. God sets the truth of the sermon before their eyes and makes them contemplate *seriously* what they heard. God Himself focuses their thoughts on the sermon they heard, which before they would have forgotten right away. They might have heard a hundred sermons on sin and Christ, and the need to be converted, they may have heard about judgment and Heaven and Hell many times, but they never seriously thought about these things until now. Now God brings the things they heard in the sermon sharply and clearly into their minds.

This is a great part of the converting work of God's Spirit, to make a person actually **think** about the sermon they heard.

3. **The third change in the mind at conversion is from unbelief to true faith.** A word or two in the sermon about Heaven or Hell, if it were really believed by you, would make you search for Christ with all your heart. But unconverted sinners only half believe the Bible. They are really unbelievers. But when the Spirit of God begins to work in you, then you will begin to see that everything in the Bible is **really true**. You will begin to see that Christ, and everlasting torment in Hell, are not dreams, but are actual **facts**. Whatever you think about this now, all people on earth will soon find themselves in Heaven or Hell.



If you tell someone that a robber is following him, and he does not run away fast, you can be sure he did not **really** believe you. But if you see that person run for his life it is proof that he believes you. When a person is truly converted, you can easily see by the way he acts whether he believes what the Bible says. Because Noah truly believed what he heard, he was moved with fear and prepared for judgment (cf. Hebrews 11:7). If you saw Noah at work on the ark you would know that he really **believed** what he heard, otherwise he would not have worked so hard to escape the danger.

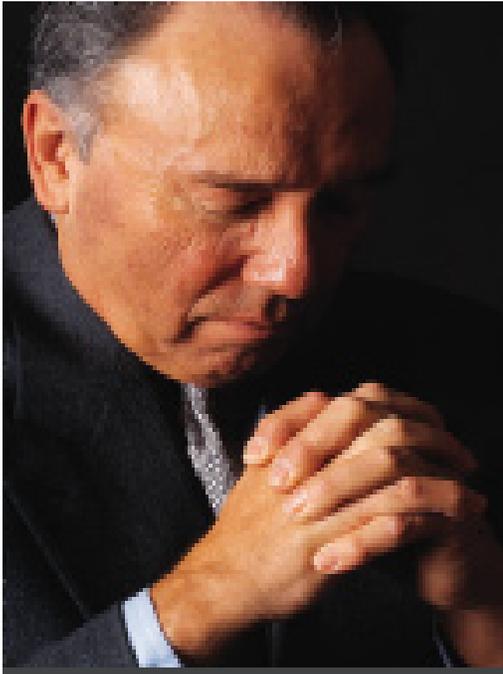
4. **The fourth change that comes with conversion is a turning away from errors.** Before, lost people think that there is no Heaven or Hell. They think that God will save them the way they are.

But when God converts you, you change all these opinions. You once thought it was O.K. to miss church for any reason. You once thought it was all right to sin in one way or another. But when God converts you, you will turn away from these errors and sins. You will then think, "Oh, what a fool I was to sleep away the short time of my life instead of searching for salvation in Christ! What a fool I was to forget how close God's judgment is!" **When** you are awakened by God, you will say, "I must hurry to make sure I am ready for Heaven! I must do all I can to make sure that I don't go into the flames of everlasting torment!" Unconverted person, your mind will be changed, you will think differently from the way you do now, when you are converted. You will have a new way of thinking about sin and church, the wicked and the godly.

You may say that you will never change your mind, but God Himself can make you think differently from the way you think now. God's light will not be overcome by your darkness, if He means for light to shine into your soul.

Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

*This was adapted from the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter and his book Treatise on Conversion. We are indebted to Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr., pastor of Baptist Tabernacle of Los Angeles, CA for amending Baxter's work into modern English and giving us this valuable work in an easier to read format.*



# Biblical Repentance

*By Dr. Michael Morrow*

Repentance is a change of mind about sin, self, and God, that affects the lives of people, causing them to turn from sin, to stop loving and relying on self, and to turn in faith toward the Lord. Repentance and faith are inseparable graces, but we are going to deal with them separately for clarification's sake.

We know that repentance is definitely given as a command to sinful men. It was the first message John the Baptist preached when he arrived at the Jordan. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:1).

It was the first word Christ gave as He began His earthly ministry. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

It was a major part of the message Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38).

It was an integral part of the message Paul preached as he took the Gospel all over the Roman Empire.

At Athens:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent (Acts 17:29-30).

To the Ephesian elders:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations,

which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:17-21).

Before King Agrippa:

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

Men are to repent and believe the Gospel. And we know that it is not just certain men who should repent but all men, "but (God) now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

But there is something about repentance that is seldom mentioned in today's easy-believism atmosphere. A repentant heart is not something a natural man has on his own. It must be given to him. Notice the passages that teach this.

Peter is testifying before the Jewish Council:

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him (Acts 5:29-32).

Did you notice, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” The word *give* in this verse is extremely important. It means, among other things, to bestow a gift. In this verse repentance is a gift that is bestowed through the Messiahship of Christ.

In Acts 11 Peter is again the main character. He has been to Cornelius’ house and is being questioned by the Jewish believers. When he finishes his account of God saving the Gentiles, the group responds. In verse 18 we have these words. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

Notice the response of the Jewish believers. They glorified God because He “. . . also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” The significant word here is *granted*. It is the same word as that translated *give* in Acts 5:31. Again it means the bestowal of a gift.

Let me give one last example of this truth.

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

Here Paul is instructing the young preacher, Timothy, not to strive with men over foolish and ignorant questions. He tells him that the servant of the Lord must not strive. He must be gentle and patient “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” In the phrase “if God peradventure will give them repentance. . .” you guessed it. The Greek word for “give” is the same one used in the references above. It is a gift bestowed.

Yes, God commands all men every where to repent of their sin and turn to Him. But he is commanding them to do something that they cannot do on their own and He is commanding them to do something that only He can grant them the power to do. I believe the reason is simple. God will have all the glory for the salvation of men.

Many times those who think they are including repentance in their message are preaching a faulty non-biblical repentance. I was at a meeting on one occasion with a group of missionaries working in Romania. We were discussing the fruits of some of the evangelism that was going on in that country. The leader of one of the mission groups was asked about his view of the integrity of the work being done there. His answer was, “The people cried.” Now, crying might be an emotional attendant of real

repentance, or it may not, but it is certainly not the criteria by which one should judge evangelistic success.

I was standing on a street corner in Bucharest once when I was approached by a ragged little Gipsy boy who sincerely looked hungry. He had left a small group of children to approach me. With tears literally streaming down his face he asked me for money and



indicated that his stomach was empty. I reached into my pocket and gave him a little money. Immediately his tears were gone. He skipped lightly back to his friends with his tongue out, taunting them that they had not had the boldness to approach me, and I noticed he put the money in his pocket and began to look for another “victim.”

Now there is no doubt in my mind that he needed the money to buy his food, but I do doubt that the tears were real. They just dried up too quickly. Soon he had another person cornered and the tears flowed freely once again.

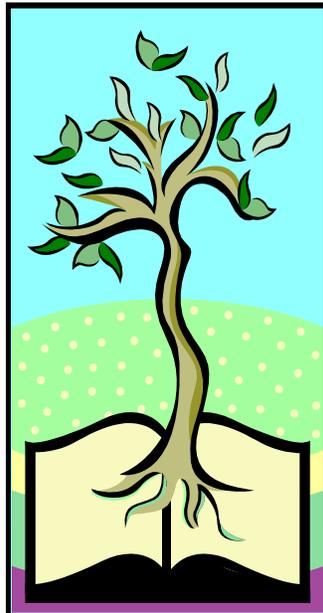
My point is that crying is not necessarily an indication of the condition of one’s heart. One can be moved emotionally and one’s will never be touched. I have felt the chill bumps on my arms and a sob arise in my throat on many occasions when no life change was involved. Emotional response is not repentance.

Temporary outward change is not repentance. In the parable of the sower Jesus tells of those who receive the word of God with joy. They even endure for a while. But, in the end, they fall away because they have no root in themselves. True repentance and true faith has not been demonstrated even though there was change for a while. “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:20-21).

The issue in the parable of the sower is not the seed. It is perfect. The seed is the word of God. The issue is not the sower. He is doing exactly what he is supposed to do. He is sowing the seed in every place. The issue is the ground. The ground symbolizes hearts. Hearts that are full of this world and are so busy that the word has no time to take root are sure to have the word taken away by the devil.

Hearts that are stony and hard may have a surface change but there is no room for roots to grow, and when the hot sun of tribulation or persecution bears down, the word withers away.

Hearts that are full of the thorns of care or the briars and brambles of riches have no room for the word of God, and soon it is choked out. Only those hearts that are called “good ground” are ready and able to receive the word of God and produce that which is eternal. Good ground is prepared ground. It is ground that has been plowed deep. It has lost the hardness of the beaten path. Good ground has had the briars and brambles uprooted and the stones thrown out. It is ground that has been thoroughly changed. Good ground is a heart that has been



completely turned up by repentance. When the word of God is sown in such a heart, the seed can take root downward and grow strong upward, so that only those hearts that are called “good ground” are ready and able to receive the word of God and produce that which is eternal. Repentance is not just temporary, outward change. It is rather the uprooting of sin, the breaking up of hard heartedness, the removal of obstacles that would hinder the Gospel, and the clearing away of secondary cares and temptations.

The Puritan Thomas Watson said that there were at least six elements to true repentance:

- ☞ Sight of Sin
- ☞ Sorrow for Sin
- ☞ Confession of Sin
- ☞ Shame for Sin
- ☞ Hatred for Sin
- ☞ Turning from Sin<sup>1</sup>

Lewis Berkhof defines repentance by saying:

Repentance looks to the past, and may be defined as that change wrought in the conscious life of the sinner by which he turns away from sin. It includes three elements, namely,

- (a) an intellectual element, in which the past life is viewed as a life of sin, involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness;
- (b) an emotional element, a sense of sorrow for sin as committed against a holy and just God; and
- (c) an element of the will, consisting in a change of purpose, an inward turning from sin and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is, repentance is hardly ever mentioned in modern presentations of the gospel. When it is mentioned, only temporary or emotional indications of its reality are usually considered. When true Bible repentance is not included in the Gospel presentation, only half the truth has been told and sinners go away unsatisfied and in many, many cases deceived. Later these same people have great problems with the assurance of their salvation because they have only received part of the truth, and they wonder why they cannot go on in their sin and have the peace with God they desire at the same time. Or even worse, they think they do have peace with God and that He is indifferent when it comes to their sins.

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Carlisle, Pa: The Banner of Truth) 1987, 18.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, (Eerdmans, 1938, P132).

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*Dr. Morrow is pastor of the Union Baptist Church of Marion, KY. He is happily married to his wife of 33 years, Susan, has 3 wonderful children and a grandchild on the way.*



# The Work of Conversion

by John Owen

The corrupt principle of sin works early in our natures, and for the most part prevents grace from working in us (Psa. 58:3). As we grow mentally and physically, our natures increasingly become the willing instruments of unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13). This perverse ruling principle in us reveals itself more and more as we grow older (Eccles. 11:10). So the child, as it grows, begins to commit actual sins, e.g., lying.

## Sin Increases

As men grow in their unregenerate state, sin gains ground subjectively and objectively. The natural subjective desires of the body grow stronger, and objectively the physical organs for the fulfilment of these desires are developing. But those subjective desires ruled by sin become sinful desires, and the organs for the fulfilling of those desires become instruments of sin. Thus when Paul was confronted by God's commandments which forbade him to fulfil those sinful desires, he was tempted more strongly to satisfy his lusts (Rom. 7:8). Timothy is warned to 'flee youthful lusts' (2 Tim. 2:22). David prayed that the sins of his youth would not be remembered and held against him (Psa. 25:7). It is these sins of youth that are often the torment of old age (Job 20: 11).

God often allows men to fall into great actual sins in order to awaken their consciences or as a judgment on them (Acts 2:36, 37). He allows them to fulfil the desires of their heart. Then a dominant habit of sinning takes hold of men. Men become hardened in sin and lose all sense of shame.

Yet there is still hope, even for the worst of sinners ( 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Matt. 12:31, 32; Luke 12:10). Firstly, because, in spite of the depravity of nature, various feelings, fears, forebodings, or what they have been taught or heard in sermons may stir up the nearly extinguished 'celestial fire' within men. These

are inbred notions of good and evil, right and wrong, rewards and punishments, coupled with the sense that God can see us, and that he may be willing to help us, if only we did not dread facing him. And secondly, God works on men by his Spirit through many outward means to make them consider him. 'God is not in all their thoughts' (Psa. 10:4). Whatever they do in religion it is not to glorify God (Amos 5:25).

## Variety in God's Ways

God may begin his work in several ways. He may begin it by sudden, startling judgments (Rom. 1: 18; Psa. 107:25-28; Jonah 1:4-7; Exod. 9:28). He may begin it by personal affliction and disaster (Job 33:19, 20; Psa. 78:34, 35; Hos. 5:15; 1 Kings 17:18; Gen. 42:21, 22; Eccles. 7:14). He may begin it by remarkable deliverances from death along with other great mercies (2 Kings 5:1 5-17) . He may begin it by the witness of others (1 Pet. 3:1, 2). He may begin it by the Word of God (1 Cor 14:24, 25; Rom. 7:7).

Yet in spite of all these, men often take no notice because their minds are still dark. They think they are as good as they can be. They love to be popular and fear losing their friends. They have good intentions which come to nothing. Satan blinds their minds and they are full of love for their lusts and pleasures.

## The Spirit Convinces of Sin

In calling men to God the Holy Spirit first convinces them of sin. The sinner is made to consider his sin, and feel its guilt on his conscience.

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin by the preaching of the law (Psa.50:21; Rom. 7:7; John 16:8).

Some lose all sense of conviction because the power of their own lusts dulls this conviction. They are healed superficially but there has been no real repentance. Thus they are led into a false sense of peace with God. The world draws them back into its evil clutches (Prov. 1:11-14). They are not immediately punished for their sins (Eccles. 8:11; 2 Pet. 3:4).

In others the Holy Spirit is pleased to carry on this work of conviction until it results in conversion. A conflict between corruptions and convictions is aroused (Rom. 7:7-9). Promises to be and do better are made. Great distress may arise in the soul as it is torn between the power of corruption and the terror of conviction.

The Holy Spirit awakens in them a dread about their eternal destiny. They feel sorrow and shame (Gen. 3:7; Acts 2:37). They begin to fear eternal wrath and damnation (Heb. 2:15; Gen. 3:8, 10).

They want to know the way of salvation (Mic. 6:6, 7; Acts 2:37; 16:30). They begin to pray for salvation, abstain from sin and make every effort to live a better life. They are brought under the spirit of bondage to fear (Rom. 8:15; Gal 4:22-24).

These fears are not required as a duty man must fulfill before he can be saved. He may indeed feel these fears, but God could quite easily convert him without them. God deals with each person differently. But two things are necessary.

The sinner must be brought to acknowledge his guilt before God without excuses or blaming others (Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:22). He must acknowledge his need of a physician.

As his only hope of salvation lies in receiving and believing the gospel, this he must do or he will not be saved. His duty then is clear. He must receive the revelation of Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God in him (John 1:12). He must accept the sentence of the law (Rom. 3:4, 19, 20; 7:12, 13). He must be careful not to believe everything that is put to him as to how he can be saved (Mic. 6:6, 7). In particular he must beware of false religious cults, and of believing that he can somehow save himself by his own self-righteousness.

There are two dangers of which to beware. The first is thinking, "I have not sorrowed enough or truly repented of my sin." No degrees of sorrow are prescribed in the gospel. God alone can work true repentance in you. Repentance is his gift to you.

The second great danger is thinking that you are so bad a sinner that Christ cannot possibly save you. Remember, the more difficult the disease is to cure, the more glory does the physician get when he cures it. Christ calls to himself the worst of sinners, so that he might get the greater glory for their salvation.



## Faith in Christ

God completes his work of conversion by regenerating the sinner and so enabling him to turn from his sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the special work of the gospel (John 1:17; Rom. 1:16; I Pet. 1:23; James 1:18; Eph. 3:8-10). The gospel must be preached (Rom. 10:13-15). The preaching of the gospel is accompanied with a revelation of God's will (John 6:29). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). To reject this call makes God a liar because it shows contempt for his love and grace (I John 5: 10; John 3:33).

Christ must be preached as crucified (John 3:14, 15; Gal. 3: 1; Isa. 55: 1-3; 65:1), and seen as the only Saviour of sinners (Matt. 1:21; 1 Thess. 1:10). There is a way of escape from the curse of the law (Psa. 130:4; Job 33:24; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). God is well pleased with Christ's atonement and wants us to accept it (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Isa. 53:11, 12; Rom. 5:10, 11). If we believe, we shall be pardoned (Rom. 8:1, 3, 4; 10:3, 4; 1 Cor. 1:30, 31; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8-10).

The gospel is filled with such reasons, invitations, encouragements, exhortations and promises to persuade us to receive Christ. They are all designed to explain and declare the love, grace, faithfulness and good will of God in Christ.

In preaching, God often causes some special word to fix itself on the mind of the sinner, and by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit that word is made the means of bringing the sinner to conversion.

## The Holy Spirit Gives a Desire to Obey Christ

When the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to put his faith in Christ, his heart is also filled by the same Holy Spirit with a holy desire wholeheartedly to obey Christ and turn from all sin.

Those thus converted to Christ, are, on their confession or profession of faith, admitted into the society of the church and into all the mysteries of the faith.



*John Owen was born in 1616 and died in 1683. He was a Puritan whose voluminous work has left an enduring legacy to Christianity. He is often referred to as, "The greatest British theologian of all time."*



## From the Heart

by S. Michael Durham

In the last edition of *From the Heart of the Oak Grove Baptist Mission Board*, it was shared that a glimpse into the inner workings of Oak Grove Baptist Church's missions strategy

would be given. Oak Grove Baptist Church is a member church of the Southern Baptist Convention and participates in the Cooperative Program, which is the main instrument of supporting Southern Baptist missions around the world.

However, in 1997, God began to burden our hearts as to our church's personal responsibility in fulfilling the Great Commission. Giving to a missions program such as the Cooperative Program and thinking our responsibility to our Lord's command to take the gospel to every creature was fulfilled became increasingly insufficient.

While in prayer one day, the Lord of the harvest opened my mind to the possibility of Oak Grove Baptist Church literally going out into the world. It became crystal clear to me that a weakness prevailed in my and our church's heart. By giving to the Convention's method of supporting missionaries and missions we had become blinded to what we could do, not just with our money, but with our hands. God burned in my heart that we were not to rely on the denomination to do our missions work for us. We were to read, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19) as if there were no Southern Baptist Convention or any other evangelical church to fulfill its edict.

As I thought more about this, which was totally radical and hitherto foreign thinking to me, it came to me that if every church had this same opinion, why, we could evangelize the world in one generation. If every Bible believing church took a hands-on approach to evangelizing the nations and viewed the Great Commission as being solely theirs, as if there were no other churches, we could do much more than what is being done now.

At that same time of prayer it was put on my heart a simple strategy. First, start conducting a local mission's conference in our church every year. For three consecutive Sundays we host a conference about missions. We invite missionaries to speak and we have other events during the three weeks to present and promote world evangelization.

Second, we appointed a five person mission board from within our church that would have the responsibility to oversee the missions activities of the church. These five people have a vision and heart for missions. All five have been out of the country on a missions trip or missions related event. To see others come to a saving knowledge of Christ for the glory of God is the passion that fuels this OGBC Mission Board.

Third, our strategy would include indigenous missionaries. "Indigenous" means native to a particular region or culture.

Therefore, an indigenous missionary is someone who is evangelizing and church planting within his own homeland or culture. This is an integral part of our missions strategy.

It is not probable that every member of Oak Grove is going to be called to be a foreign missionary and the cost to the church would be prohibitive at this point to send very many missionaries out from our congregation. We pray that the Lord raise up from within our congregation servants to labor on fields foreign and domestic. But the cost to prepare and support one American missionary overseas is astronomical.

Why not support men who are willing to preach the gospel to unreached people groups who are from those very groups or near them? You do not have to teach them to speak the language since the language of the foreign region is their native tongue. Nor do you have to teach them the customs and traditions of the culture since they already know them.

And the cost to support them is so low that it's even possible that a family here could support a missionary and his entire family. In most countries the monthly support of a fulltime indigenous missionary would be \$150-200. For some countries it is even less than this. This is one of the major resources these men need. Most indigenous missionaries are bi-vocational or have to scratch a living out of the soil to feed their families. Their time is very limited to minister the gospel because they are weighted down with the responsibility to provide for their families.

The second need is pastoral and theological training. Most of these men have never seen the inside of a Bible college or seminary. Some do not even have a Bible but perhaps only portions of a Bible from which to study and preach. Basic Bible doctrines for many of these men are piecemeal. We provide the training while they provide the hands and feet.

The concept is quite easy to understand. They have the resources of labor, and we have the resources of money and knowledge. For the sake of the Kingdom of God and fulfilling the Great Commission, we join our efforts and make up for each other's deficiencies. We are coming together to form a strong bond and take the gospel to the unreached.

Currently our efforts are in two countries in Eastern Europe, Romania and the Republic of Moldova. In the gracious providence of God, a young Romanian pastor named Florin Vasiliu was put into my pathway a few years ago. It was evident that the hand of the Lord was upon this young man. The Lord seemed to give him to me, and after being invited to his church to preach, the pastor and his wife pleaded with us to disciple them. It has not been easy to disciple someone long

distance but with God's grace we have done so. Now, Florin is the regional director for all of our church's missions activities for Eastern Europe.



First Baptist Church  
Iasi, Romania

We believe that missions must be tied to local churches, and so Pastor Florin's church and our church formed a partnership. Florin began to preach the vision of their church fulfilling the Great Commission as if there were no other churches to do it. His congregation of 400 has begun to catch the vision that their church can be used by God to evangelize all of Eastern Europe. Today this church has about 6 missions points in villages and communities where there are no other evangelical churches or work. This is instrumental in the strategy that we believe God gave Oak Grove. We must partner with local indigenous churches and not just preachers, pastors or missionaries.

The vision of the church in Romania is to build a missions center where young men can come and Pastor Florin can train them in the ministry and church planting. In addition to this, Oak Grove Baptist Church hosts two pastors and missionaries conferences a year to supplement their training, plus gives them solid theological books in their own language.

From here the Lord has opened up another door in the Republic of Moldova where communism remains in power. Here we are replicating the process we used in Romania. Very soon we anticipate being able to support and send out new missionaries to go to villages and towns where there are no evangelical works whatsoever.

This is what we believe is the will of the Lord for Oak Grove Baptist Church. We speak for no other, nor do we criticize other approaches to the work of global evangelization. This is our calling. But we unashamedly say that a church that is not seeking the Lord for his direction in fulfilling the Great Commission is a disobedient church. The hour comes when night shall fall and what is to be done will have been done. Let us redeem the time. Let us gird ourselves as ambassadors and send forth the glorious message of joy in Christ through his blood to the glory of the Father. The command has already been given, "Go ye."



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