

5. Union with Christ

The one all-embracing prerequisite of man's attainment of his natural and proper ultimate end—Union with God, Beatitude, Life Everlasting—is the life of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Moreover, the one prerequisite of Life with the Holy Spirit, so far as the individual saint is concerned, is *union with Christ*.

Now the conditions of union with Christ are, basically, four in number, as follows: (1) Faith in Christ, or that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16, John 20:30-31, John 14:1, Acts 16:31, etc.); (2) repentance from sin (Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30, Acts 2:38, etc.); (3) confession of Christ (Matt. 10:32-33, Rom. 10:9-10); and (4) baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:35-39, Gal. 3:27, etc.).

An examination of the representative cases of conversion described in the book of Acts will prove that all who came into the Church in apostolic times came in precisely the same way and on the same terms. The following summarization of these cases of conversion will establish the truth of this statement:

1. The three thousand on Pentecost (Acts 2):
 - (1) *Heard Peter's sermon* (vv. 14-36).
 - (2) *Believed* (v. 37): they were convicted of crucifying the Christ.
 - (3) *Repented* (v. 38). They showed their repentance by their baptism.
 - (4) *Were baptized* (vv. 38, 41).
2. The Samaritans (Acts 8):
 - (1) *Heard Philip's preaching* (vv. 5, 6).
 - (2) *Believed* (v. 12)
 - (3) *Were baptized* (v. 12).
3. The Ethiopian eunuch, a typical case of conversion (Acts 8):
 - (1) *Heard Philip's preaching* (v. 35).
 - (2) *Believed* (v. 37). Granting this verse to be an interpolation, the eunuch manifested his belief by his submission to baptism.
 - (3) *Confessed his faith* (v. 37).
 - (4) *Was baptized*, and went on his way rejoicing (vv. 36-39).

4. Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9, 22, 26):
 - (1) *Heard* what to do, from Ananias (9:16-17, 22:14-15).
 - (2) *Believed* (9:6, 26:19).
 - (3) *Repented* of his sins (9:8-11, 26:19).
 - (4) *Was baptized* (9:18, 22:16).
5. Cornelius and his household (Acts 10):
 - (1) *Heard* the Gospel from Peter (vv. 34-43).
 - (2) *Were baptized* (vv. 47-48).
6. Lydia and her household (Acts 16):
 - (1) *Heard* the Word from Paul (v. 14).
 - (2) *Were baptized* (v. 15).
7. The Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16):
 - (1) *Heard* the Word (v. 32).
 - (2) *Believed* (v. 31).
 - (3) *Were baptized* (v. 33) the same hour of the night.
8. The Corinthians (Acts 18):
 - (1) *Heard* (v. 8).
 - (2) *Believed* (v. 8).
 - (3) *Were baptized* (v. 8).

Thus it will be seen that in every case of conversion set forth in the book of Acts, special mention is made of *faith* and of *baptism*. Why so? Because faith is the beginning of the process of union with Christ, and baptism is the consummating act of the process. Rom. 6:4-5: "We are buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Gal. 3:27—"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." Col. 2:12—"having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Faith, repentance, confession and baptism bring the alien sinner *unto* and *into* Christ. Rom. 10:10—"with the heart man believeth *unto* righteousness." 2 Cor. 7:10—"godly sorrow worketh repentance *unto* salvation." Rom. 10:10—"with the mouth confession is made *unto* salvation." Gal. 3:27—"as many of you as were baptized *into* Christ, did put on Christ."

The answer to the question, What must one do to be saved? is answered clearly in the book of Acts, the answer given in each case depending, of course, on the stage attained by the inquirer in his moral movement toward the goal of union with Christ. For example:

1. If one is a *non-believer*, a heathen man or woman, like the Philippian jailer, naturally the general command is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31).

2. If one is a *believer*, as were the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost, the answer is: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

As an oldtime preacher once put it: What they were to repent for, they were to be baptized for, and what they were to be baptized for, they were to repent for. Therefore, what the Holy Spirit hath joined together, let no "theologian" put asunder.

3. If one is a *penitent believer*, as Saul of Tarsus was, when Ananias visited him, the command is: "Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16), that is, on the name of Christ.

4. If one is a *baptized penitent believer*, a Christian, the command is: "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

5. Finally, if one is an *erring Christian*, a backslider, as was Simon the sorcerer in Samaria, the command is: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). For if we who are Christians confess our sins to God in prayer, "he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Baptism is the last step, the consummating act of obedience, in the process of becoming united with Christ, even as it is the last phase of the Divine process of regeneration. Hence, in every case of New Testament conversion in which it is stated that the converted person "rejoiced," in the knowledge of the pardon of his sins, it is made explicit that *this rejoicing followed his baptism*. On the Day of Pentecost, all those who

received the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41), "continued stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47). The joy of these first Christians was so overwhelming that they "had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need (Acts 2:44-45). This was a spontaneous outpouring of brotherly love in genuine Christian stewardship. Again, it is explicitly stated that the Ethiopian eunuch, after his baptism by Philip, "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). And the Philippian jailer and his household, after their baptism, brought Paul and Silas, the evangelists, up into their house; and the jailer "set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God" (Acts 16:33-34). Why did their rejoicing follow their obedience in baptism? Because they had God's promise that upon the conditions of their repentance and baptism they would receive the remission of their sins; and they took God at His Word. What a change would be wrought in the Church today if all professing Christians would just follow their example!

One last word, in this connection: The Holy Spirit, through His divinely appointed apostolic messengers (John 17:6-18, 20:21-23) tells us clearly what men must do in order to receive remission of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He has made it abundantly clear that those who would enter the New Covenant relationship must do so on certain conditions. These are; that they accept Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; that they turn from their evil ways—from their sins both public and private—and forsake them; that they confess the Lord Jesus, that is, Jesus as Lord, in the presence of witnesses; and that they be buried with Him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life, thus witnessing to the unsaved that He too was buried, but in a literal grave and was literally raised from that grave and crowned King of kings and Lord of lords (Phil. 2:9-11). These are the terms laid down in His revelation vouchsafed mankind through the Apostles whose teaching is embodied in the New Testament canon. Now, having written us this letter, so to speak, do we not impugn His integrity if we demand that He give us, in addition, a *telegram* (a special visitation in the form of a

mystical experience) to authenticate His letter? *Why cannot we take Him at His word and believe what He tells us?* Cf. Luke 16:24-31, Rom. 10:6-10, 1 Thess. 2:13, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, etc. Does not the Apostle Peter inform us positively that "divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" with the completion of the New Testament canon (2 Pet. 1:2-4)? Does not Jude state unequivocally that we should "contend earnestly for the faith which was *once* for all delivered unto the saints" (v. 3?) What more do we need? (Cf. Matt. 12:38-41, 16:4; Luke 11:29-32.) The canon of the New Testament was closed with *Revelation*, just as we have it today.

6. Spiritual Circumcision

Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Jer. 4:4, 9:25-26. Cf. Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Acts 7:51, Gal. 3:27-28, 2 Cor. 3:2-6, Col. 2:9-13. The Scriptures teach expressly that there is such a thing as "circumcision of the heart." But what does "heart" (Heb. *leb*, Gr. *kardia*) mean in Scripture? This we can determine by what the "heart" is said to do, to experience, to suffer, etc., namely, it *thinks* (Gen. 6:5, Deut. 15:9, Prov. 23:7, Matt. 9:4, Heb. 4:12); it *reasons* (Mark 2:8, Luke 5:22); it *understands* (Matt. 13:15); it *believes* (Rom. 10:8-10); it *loves* (Matt. 22:37); it *knows* (Deut. 29:4); it "*breaks*" with sorrow (Jer. 8:18, 23:9); it can be *grieved* (Deut. 15:10); it can be *troubled* (John 14:1); it can be *fearful* (John 14:27); it *rejoices* (Psa. 16:9, 28:7; Acts 2:26); it can be *comforted* (Eph. 6:22); it *wills*, "*purposes*," "*determines*" (Dan. 1:8, 2 Cor. 9:7, 1 Cor. 7:37); it can *lust* (Matt. 5:28, Rom. 8:6-7); it *obeys* (Rom. 6:17, Eph. 6:6); it *approves* and *condemns* (Rom. 2:14-16, Acts 2:37, 1 John 3:19-22). From all these texts we must conclude that the Scriptural "heart" includes intellect, feeling, conscience, and will. It is the entire "inner man," everything that is not included in the phrase, "flesh and blood" (John 3:6, 1 Cor. 15:50, 2 Cor. 4:16, Rom. 7:22, cf. 1 Pet. 3:4—"the hidden man of the heart").

1. There is such a thing as spiritual circumcision, "a circumcision not made with hands." The Bible leaves no room for doubt on this matter.

2. Fleshly (physical) circumcision of the Old Covenant was designed to be a type of spiritual circumcision under the