

passions are under the control of the Spirit. However obstinately and effectually the truth may be resisted as a ruling power, as truth it cannot be resisted.

3. Moreover, in the secret recesses of man's nature the grace is given disposing and enabling him to yield. Though the will must at last act from its own resources and deliberate impulse, it is influenced through the feeling and the understanding in such a manner as to give it strength. It is utterly hopeless to penetrate this mystery: it is the secret between God's Spirit and man's agency. There is a Divine operation which works the desire and acts in such a manner as not to interfere with the natural freedom of the will. The man determines himself, through Divine grace, to salvation: never so free as when swayed by grace.

Ultimate  
Secret of  
Grace.

#### CONVERSION, REPENTANCE, FAITH.

Conver-  
sion.

Conversion is the process by which the soul turns, or is turned, from sin to God, in order to its acceptance through faith in Christ. This is its strict meaning, as distinguished from that broader sense in which it is applied to the entire history of the soul's restoration. As the turning away from sin it is closely allied to Repentance, though not synonymous with it; as the turning to God it includes or is merged in Faith.

#### CONVERSION.

The Term

I. The term Conversion stands here for a few equivalents in Hebrew and Greek which express the same religious idea; that of the change by which the soul is turned from sin to God. The fact that it is thus common to the two Testaments gives it a great importance. It is the general description of the restoration of the sinner that runs through the Bible; and therefore has been very often regarded as including much more than the mere crisis of moral and religious change. Sometimes it is thought to represent the whole course, through all its stages, of the return of the soul to God: this is the case especially in the works of

mystical writers, and of some who are not mystical. By those, for instance, who recognise no saving influence before regeneration, out of which repentance and faith flow, conversion is of necessity made to include all the moral blessings of the state of grace : in fact, it must have a very indeterminate meaning in every system of Calvinism. The theology that may be called Sacramentarian generally regards conversion as the process of recovery from a state in which the regenerating grace conferred in baptism has been neglected and might seem to be lost. Sometimes, by a very loose employment of the term, it is made synonymous with the experience of forgiveness and the assurance of the reconciliation. But we must remember that it simply means the turning point of the religious life : its turning from a course of sin to the commencement of seeking God. Hence the crisis that it marks is not in the religious life of a believer, but in the life of the soul, redeemed indeed, but not yet a new creature in Christ.

Preliminary  
Grace.  
Divine  
and  
Human  
Agency.

II. Conversion belongs, therefore, only to the outer court of the Christian temple. Two considerations will further illustrate this.

1. In conversion the Divine and the human agency combine : It may be said that they co-operate, if the word be rightly understood. This is not the case in the inner court of the state of salvation by grace. The blessings proper to the Christian covenant are imparted : the believer simply receives his justification, his adoption and regeneration, his sanctification. But his conversion is the preparation for these absolute gifts of redemption : the new life of righteousness, sonship, and holiness is the one supreme conclusive benefit of the Christian covenant grace, and man must be made fit to receive it. The process of this preparation is his conversion to God. When that process is accomplished the conversion is ended : *Ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now RETURNED unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.* Now throughout this preliminary stage of the religious life the grace of the Spirit and the effort of man unite. (1.) The appeal to God to convert the soul runs through the Bible : such Old-Testament prayers as *Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned ; for Thou art the Lord my God,* and *Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned ; renew our days as of old,* express the spirit of the New Testament also, though not found in its letter. (2.) But the

1 Pet. ii.  
25.

Jer. xxxi.  
18.  
Lam. v. 21.

appeal from God to man to turn himself is yet more abundant : *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* where the whole strain is without meaning if converting grace is irresistible. Here the New Testament affords abundant support: *Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.* Hence, when treating of Repentance and Faith, the two elements of conversion, we have continually to exhibit, as will be seen, a Divine commandment with promise. The grace is from the Lord; the use of it is with man himself.

Ezek.  
xxxiii.  
11.

John v.  
40.

New-Test-  
ament  
Use.

2. The New Testament expressly limits the term Conversion to the beginning or introduction of the Christian life. There is no instance of its use in reference to the changes in the believer's state as such. But here a distinction must be made. It is true that the word is constantly employed to mark the recovery of those who were backsliders from the preparatory grace of the old covenant. In fact, this is its habitual signification throughout the Old Testament: the appeals to return to Jehovah are addressed to those who had departed from a God already known and forsaken. The same holds good of our Lord's use of the word when He quotes Isaiah: *lest they should be converted, and I should heal them*; as also of the prophecy of His forerunner's agency: *many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.* Simon Peter's conversion, after which he should strengthen his brethren, was a return from backsliding. But after the day of Pentecost the word begins to be used more broadly, of the turning *from darkness to light* generally. St. James gives the solitary instance of its employment to note a Christian's recovery from *the error of his way*; but that error was no less than a full departure from the truth of the Gospel. Generally, conversion is supposed to be accomplished when the Christian faith is received. From that time the penitent is a convert: his conversion is an accomplished fact.

Matt. xiii.  
15.

Luke i. 16.

Acts xvi.  
18.

James v.  
20.

III. It remains to consider the relation of Conversion to Repentance and Faith, as distinct from and yet including each.

1. Sometimes the term seems to embrace both in the unity of preparation for the common evangelical benefit. The blessing of Jesus is the *turning away every one of you from his iniquities*; or *from darkness to light*; or *from idols to serve the living and true God.*

Acts iii.  
26; xvi.  
18.

- 1 Thess. i. 9. Here the negative and the positive are united in the description of the conversion whether of Jews or of Gentiles.
- To Repentance. 2. Sometimes it is more particularly the negative repentance : the aversion of the soul from sin through a conviction of its true character ; a sorrowing hatred of it as estrangement from God, and abandonment of it in the sincere purpose of the convinced spirit. *Repent ye therefore and be converted* : here the forgiveness is supposed afterwards to follow, and conversion is limited to the effect of repentance. But repentance is also exhibited as the effect of conversion : *Surely after that I was turned, I repented*.
- Acts iii. 19. Again the conversion is itself repentance : *he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death*. These are all instances of a certain freedom of Scripture in the use of these terms which should warn us against over-careful dogmatic distinctions.
- To Faith. 3. More frequently conversion is made equivalent to faith.
- Acts xi. 21. *A great number believed and turned unto the Lord* : where faith has the same relation to the turning which repentance has in the previous passages. Sometimes faith is omitted where it is nevertheless meant : *And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord*. It is even made the distinguishing element in conversion : *but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*.
- Acts ix. 35. 1 Pet. ii. 25. Varieties. 4. Thus it is observable that conversion is more closely than repentance and faith connected with the means or circumstances that bring about the crisis. These circumstances may be very various, and the concomitants may also vary. The same result was produced by the terrors through which the jailer was converted, and the gentle influence which turned the heart of Lydia. And, in the ordinary application of the Gospel, these are typical instances : there may be sudden or instantaneous conversion, and there may be gentle and gradual conversion.
- Acts xvi. 5. Hence, finally, as both repentance and faith enter into the Christian life, continue in it, and in it are made perfect, there is a sense in which Conversion, of which repentance and faith are the two elements, also runs on into the state of grace. This brings us back to the point from which we set out : that there is a wider meaning of the term which must not be forgotten while the stricter
- Continuous Conversion.

is adhered to. So far as the old man remains in the regenerate there must be a perpetual turning away from the sins of the past and advancement towards holiness: whether that holiness be separation from sin in a perpetual conversion, or union with God in a never-ceasing faith. In other words, there is an ethical conversion that goes on until the soul is entirely dead to sin and one with God. But in the Order of Grace Conversion is the process of the soul's first coming to Christ, and it would be well on the whole to restrict its use to that meaning.

REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

Repent-  
ance and  
Faith

As the conditions of that salvation which is the personal possession of the common heritage, Repentance towards God and Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ are always united in the New Testament. They cannot be separated, as repentance implies pre-existing faith, and faith implies pre-existing repentance. But they differ in this, that faith is the instrument as well as a condition of individual acceptance; and, as such, springs out of and follows repentance. Both are produced by the preliminary grace of the Holy Spirit, but not perfected without the concurrence of the will of man. Though both are only introductory to the state of grace, properly so called, faith in its saving exercise is the transition point where the state of conviction passes into life in Christ.

REPENTANCE.

Repent-  
ance.

Repentance is a Divinely-wrought conviction of sin, the result of the Holy Spirit's application of the condemning law to the conscience or heart. It approves itself in contrition, which distinguishes it from the mere knowledge of sin; in submission to the judicial sentence, which is the essence of true confession; and in sincere effort to