

## *Conversion Threatened*

The biblical doctrine of conversion is being threatened. It has been under attack since the days of the New Testament. It is always thus. Satan knows that this doctrine has to fall if he is to maintain his hold upon men and women. He must not allow them to be converted! That is why he makes sure that the conversion of sinners is always under attack.

Sometimes the threat is frontal and sharp, open. At other times, it is more a question of subtle drift, insidious. Nevertheless, conversion is always being attacked or undermined. We see it on all sides.

I can see the damage caused to conversion, for example, in the doctrine and practice of infant baptism – especially, *but not exclusively*, when it is associated with baptismal regeneration. When people think that because they were born to a believing parent who had them sprinkled as a baby, it means that they are in covenant with God, the biblical doctrine of conversion becomes an inevitable casualty. Millions have been deceived by the idea. Many go the whole hog and think that when they were sprinkled they were regenerated and made a child of God in that act. An ordained minister pronounced it so, and since age-old tradition and complicated (not to say mystifying) logic buttress it, then it must be right! At least, millions believe it is. It is a Satanic master-stroke. What of conversion in such a system?

I can see the threat to the conversion of sinners in the rise of sacramentalism among the Baptists. When people imagine that by immersing a person in water they convey grace to that person, then the biblical doctrine of conversion is seriously at risk. Baptism and conversion coalesce in such a system, and baptism must, in time, come out as top dog.

I can see the attack on conversion in the increasing emphasis among evangelicals upon inclusivism, whether by design (saddlebackism, to coin a word) or by default. What am I talking about? I am thinking of the growing number of churches which use carnal methods to attract and hold unbelievers; then, having got them, they treat all and sundry as believers. In such a system, the

## *Conversion Threatened*

unconverted are encouraged by every aspect and ambience of the service to feel that they are included, no questions asked – especially when the preaching seems to be designed to do everything to avoid making them feel the slightest twinge of discomfort over their sin. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that the biblical doctrine of conversion is masked, and worse; we should not be surprised when – not if – conversion dwindles to become virtually meaningless, just a social rite of passage.

I can see the danger to conversion when evangelical and Reformed preachers do not preach the gospel. What? Evangelical and Reformed men not preach the gospel? Unthinkable! Well, yes, it ought to be. But, for instance, I recently heard a sermon by a Reformed Baptist minister in which he did not mention Christ once. Not once! The gospel was not remotely preached on that occasion. It was not even broached. In fact, the sermon amounted to salvation by works. If it had not been for some excellent hymns, we were close to experiencing the complaint before the Great Awakening: in those days it was often impossible to tell whether an Anglican preacher was ‘Confucian, or Moslem, or Christian’. And it was said there were three degrees of preaching – ‘dull, duller, dullest’. Sadly, I am not talking about a State Church man preaching in the 1730s. My complaint concerns a Reformed man, an evangelical man, now! What is more, I know, as he knew, that there were some unconverted sitting in the congregation. Reader, the doctrine of conversion is not so much under attack when this happens; it is simply being allowed to wither and die!

I can certainly see the dreadful threat to conversion in preaching which tends to Sandemanianism. What is that? Sandemanianism is the teaching that saving faith is entirely a matter of the head; all one has to do is to accept the facts of the gospel; if you accept the facts of the gospel, you will be saved. Now, incipient or unwitting Sandemanianism is far more common than many realise. What am I talking about? When men lecture, and not preach; when men describe the gospel, and do not actually drive it home; when men, in effect, encourage their hearers to accept the facts of Scripture, and that is all – then, to put it mildly,

## *Conversion Threatened*

conversion is seriously threatened. And this kind of ‘preaching’, I say, is far more widespread today than many will allow.

Wherever we find such things as these, I say, we soon discover that the biblical doctrine of conversion has been mortally wounded.

But none of these threats to conversion are what I have in mind at this time.<sup>4</sup> They are real. They are not figments of my imagination. But they are not my main concern here. Rather, I am thinking of another attack on biblical conversion. I have in mind that threat to conversion which arises when the doctrine of justification by faith is tampered with. And the doctrine of justification by faith is being tampered with today, make no mistake about it; and in more than one way. The particular attack upon justification I am thinking of here is that which comes about through the teaching of what is known as ‘The New Perspective on Paul’.

But before I get on to the threat to conversion stemming from the rise of the New Perspective, with its re-writing of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, let me for a moment come closer to home. I speak as a Reformed Baptist, and I want to have a word or two with my fellow evangelical and Reformed believers on the subject of justification by faith; a friendly word within the family, as it were. Too often we – and I am sorry to have to admit that I have to speak for myself as well as others, perhaps more than many others – we, I say, have suffered from too low a view of justification by faith: we have allowed it to morph into little more than a legal nicety. We have been too cramped, too dry, too academic in our thinking about this great and glorious biblical doctrine. As a result, our experience as believers has been sadly diminished. Not least, the doctrine of conversion has suffered. Looking into this will prepare us when we get to grips with the New Perspective and its effect on conversion.

In the following chapter I will go into this.

---

<sup>4</sup> Apart from Sandemanianism, I have written on these other matters in previous works, which see. As for Sandemanianism, so seriously do I regard the matter, I intend to publish on it.