

The Conversion Of The Eunuch

Acts 8:26-39

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There are some subjects we cannot have absolute knowledge of. Some things, we may be very curious about but cannot fully know. In the field of history, science, medicine and other areas of learning you reach a point beyond which you cannot go. And, though that might be frustrating you have to be mature, realistic and humble. There are some things we cannot know.

Solomon reached a place in life where he realized this. He said, "...then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it." Indeed, there are some things we cannot know.

But there is a subject we can know about. There is an important consideration we can read about, and then know about, with the assurance that we have the truth from God. I'm talking about the subject of CONVERSION.

CONVERSION can be defined as TURNING FROM SIN TO GOD. You may change from one religion to another. You may change some of your habits. You may even change from one life-style to another. But, conversion is turning from sin to God.

YOU CAN KNOW THE TRUTH ON THIS SUBJECT! A lot of things about this world, you may never be able to figure out. A lot of problems involving people you may study and think about and investigate for years, but never have any definitive answers. There is a whole host of matters about which we will remain ignorant. But, we can know the truth on the subject of conversion.

THROUGH THE APOSTLES; WRITTEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT --
THERE IS REVELATION FROM GOD ON THE SUBJECT OF CONVERSION.
Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles, to guide them into all the truth; this,

according to John 16:13. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, as reported by Luke in Acts chapter two. Those men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the information God wants us to have about conversion. Here's what the apostles said: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." 1 Cor. 2:12,13

The apostles of Christ wrote the truth from God on this subject. And much of what we have on this subject is found, in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is history; the history of the spread of the gospel under the apostles in the first century. Part of that history relates CASES OF CONVERSION -- that is, actual reports of people who were converted from sin to God by that gospel that was revealed through the apostles.

All of these cases of conversion are consistent as to the conditions required; and, when we add up all that is written in these various cases the sum total is ---> IN ORDER TO TURN FROM SIN TO GOD, THE SINNER MUST HEAR THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST ... BELIEVE IN CHRIST ... REPENT OF SIN ... CONFESS HIS FAITH, AND BE BAPTIZED. This is the important information given by God in respect to the matter of conversion.

And, we shall be impressed with these things -- as we study one of those cases of conversion. This is Acts 8:26-39.

"Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing."

This is one of those cases of conversion; the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. As we read and study this account we will find every essential condition of conversion; we will discover those things a sinner must do, to turn from his sin to God. All of this was made possible by the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord.

In the interest of simplicity and clarity --- our expository approach will be to ANSWER FIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS TEXT:

What did the angel of the Lord do in this case?

What did the Holy Spirit do in this?

What was the role of the preacher?

What did the Ethiopian man do?

What did God do, in this conversion?

As we address these matters, and locate plain answers in the text -- we'll be learning TRUTH FROM GOD on the subject of conversion.

WHAT DID THE ANGEL OF THE LORD DO IN THIS CASE ??

He did not directly do anything to the man to be converted. The angel did not go to the Ethiopian man. The angel did not preach the gospel to him. The angel did not appear to the man in a dream, with a mysterious voice or sound. You see, the angel of the Lord did not directly do anything to the man from Ethiopia!

All there is about the angel's involvement in this entire text is in verse 26: "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert." This is the sum total of what the text says about the angel of the Lord. There is not any evidence - in the words of this text - that the Eunuch even knew of the angel's involvement! ALL THE ANGEL DID, WAS TO GIVE A MESSAGE TO PHILIP, TO GO TO A CERTAIN PLACE.

Let me take this opportunity to bring something up, about these cases of conversion in the book of Acts. WHEN WE STUDY THESE CASES OF CONVERSION --- WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN

CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS !!

In this account, for example, there are various circumstances we can take note of:

- The angel of the Lord speaking to Philip, in verse 26.
- The Spirit speaking to Philip, in verse 29.
- The chariot, the deserted place.

THESE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES PECULIAR TO THIS PARTICULAR CASE OF CONVERSION; you don't necessarily find these things in every single example of conversion.

But apart from circumstances, we need to take note of CONDITIONS OF SALVATION. The Eunuch's confession and his baptism - those are conditions of salvation. We see these same conditions in the other cases of conversion. So -- there are circumstances relative to particular cases of conversion; BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE CONDITIONS THAT REFLECT A PATTERN. The angel's message to Philip (in verse 26) is not a condition of salvation; this is not something that must take place every time a sinner turns to God.

WHAT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT HAVE TO DO WITH THIS ??

There is no evidence, that the Holy Spirit entered the man and changed his heart before and apart from the preaching of the Word! As a matter of fact, the text says nothing about the Holy Spirit doing anything directly to the man! Let's be careful not to read into the text something that isn't there!

I believe two words can be used to capture the Holy Spirit's part in this conversion: COMMAND and REVELATION.

First, there was the COMMAND the Spirit gave to Philip, in verse 29: "Go near and overtake this chariot." This was a simple message to Philip.

Second, there was the element of REVELATION. First of all, the passage used as the text in their study (Isaiah 53) was a passage originally given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; for Isaiah was one of those “holy men of God,” who spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). Furthermore, Philip preached the gospel to the Eunuch, and 1 Pet. 1:12 says that the gospel was preached “by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”

So the Holy Spirit's involvement in this conversion can be captured by two words: COMMAND and REVELATION. The COMMAND to Philip to join himself to the chariot (in verse 29). And, the REVELATION that came through the Spirit, in the writings of Isaiah and the preaching of Philip.

The only other thing I can find in regard to the Holy Spirit, in this passage --- "the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away," in verse 39 and that must be put in the category of CIRCUMSTANCES; it is not a condition of every conversion.

One more interesting sidelight, in respect to the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in this text . EVERYTHING THE HOLY SPIRIT DID, AS RELATES TO THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER WAS DONE BY OR THROUGH WORDS !! The Spirit said to Philip, “join thyself to the chariot.” The Spirit gave the prophet those words, written in Isaiah 53. The Spirit revealed the gospel Philip was preaching to the Eunuch!

Isn't it significant --- that everything the Holy Spirit did, as relates to the conversion of the sinner was done by or through words! Of course, other passages teach, there is a presence or influence of the Spirit, in the lives of those who have obeyed the gospel. But I'm convinced, that influence or indwelling is associated with the Word.

You have the Angel getting the preacher in contact with the sinner. You have the Holy Spirit giving commands and words to the evangelist. So much for the role of the angel, and the Spirit.

WHAT DID THE PREACHER DO ??

It might be of some interest TO CONSIDER WHAT HE DIDN'T DO! What did this preacher NOT DO?? He didn't ask the Eunuch for a donation to his multi-million dollar ministry! He didn't go into a lengthy discussion of civil affairs, politics and social problems. He didn't rely on sheer human emotion to change this man. He didn't tell him he was saved by faith alone. YOU SEE --- A LOT CAN BE LEARNED BY TAKING NOTICE OF WHAT New Testament. PREACHERS

DIDN'T DO ... as compared to the practices and procedures of modern preachers.

You see, the preacher in our text was A GOSPEL PREACHER. And so, as verse 35 says, this preacher used the inspired Scripture to preach Jesus to the Eunuch !! Can I say to you: that's what gospel preachers do! They use the inspired Scriptures, to convince people; to preach Jesus to the lost, and tell people how Jesus wants us to live. This preacher used inspired Scripture to preach Jesus to the Eunuch. The text was Isaiah chapter 53, which is a prophetic statement of the suffering of Jehovah's servant, the Messiah - Jesus. Philip used that passage the Eunuch was reading, and he PREACHED JESUS TO HIM.

What does it mean to PREACH JESUS? Here's the answer many would give: "HE PREACHED JESUS TO HIM ... MEANING, Philip told the Eunuch, "Jesus is the Son of God, and He died for you; all you need to do is accept Him as your personal Savior, and ask Him to come into your heart." This is the typical message of Evangelical religion today: "Jesus is the Son of God ... He died for you ... Ask Him to come into your heart." To many, this is PREACHING JESUS.

But in the context of Philip and his work as an evangelist, as reported in Acts, WHAT DOES IT MEAN: HE "PREACHED JESUS TO HIM."

Earlier in Acts eight, verse five says this is what Philip did in Samaria: "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them." You see, Philip preached the same thing wherever he was (Samaria the deserted place between Jerusalem and Gaza) ... wherever he was, he preached Christ.

So, if we can discover what he preached in Samaria, that's the same thing he preached to the Eunuch! The answer is found by looking at two clear verses; Acts 8:5 and Acts 8:12. Here's what Luke tells us about Philip's preaching:

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. (Acts 8:5, NKJV).

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. (Acts 8:12, NKJV).

So - there is more to preaching Jesus, than to just tell someone: "Jesus died for you ... receive Him into your heart." Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom, or church; he told people ALL about Jesus! He gave people the essential truth about WHO JESUS IS, and WHAT HE DID. And, in response to his

preaching -- men and women were baptized.

All right - getting back to our question: WHAT DID THE PREACHER DO ?? HE PREACHED THE GOSPEL TO THIS MAN, AND THEN ASSISTED HIM IN BEING BAPTIZED !! I refer you to verse 35 again: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him."

"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38, NKJV). Then in verse 39, Philip is taken from the scene.

So, the role of the preacher in this conversion was to PREACH THE GOSPEL, and, Philip assisted the man in being baptized.

WE HAVE YET TO CONSIDER THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPLE PERSON IN THIS ACCOUNT -- THE MAN FROM ETHIOPIA.

If we may make another comparison between this Bible account of conversion, and the teachings of men today: LET US NOTICE THAT THE EUNUCH DIDN'T JUST RECEIVE INFORMATION, AGREE WITH IT AND ASK JESUS TO SAVE HIM. In many circles today -- this is all that's taught: "Hear the gospel, agree that Jesus is the Son of God ... and ask Him to save you."

On any day of the week you can hear this on religious radio and television: "HEAR THE GOSPEL, AGREE THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD ... AND ASK HIM TO SAVE YOU." Yet when we look into the Bible; when we study the inspired Word of God - as we are now, in Acts 8 - THIS ISN'T WHAT WE FIND. The man from Ethiopia didn't just receive information, agree with it and ask Jesus to save Him. He certainly did receive information - from Philip, and from the inspired text in Isa.53. He did agree with that information; he confessed his belief in Jesus as the Son of God. And, by his actions, HE DID CALL UPON THE LORD TO SAVE HIM.

But - if we're going to look into this passage, to ascertain correctly and exactly THE CONDITIONS OF CONVERSION we must be careful to notice everything that's in the text. Let's do that:

FIRST, the Eunuch heard the gospel. Before Philip arrived, he was reading about Jesus in Isaiah 53. Philip used that same passage as his text, and he preached Jesus to him. So, if we're going to make a list of what the Eunuch did, WE BEGIN WITH THIS: He heard the gospel.

SECOND, the Eunuch believed in Christ. He heard the gospel of Christ, and believed what he heard. The Eunuch said (in verse 37) ---> "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

THIRD, I believe the text indicates, though it is not directly stated, THAT THE EUNUCH REPENTED. Repentance isn't specifically mentioned in the text, but it is CLEARLY IMPLIED. You see repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of life. And, all through this passage you can clearly see that THIS MAN CHANGED! He had been to Jerusalem to worship in the manner of the Jews. But, as a result of gospel preaching, he confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized for the remission of sins and went on his way rejoicing. Did this man change?? HE CERTAINLY DID ... he repented! He heard, believed, repented ... and ...

FOURTH, he CONFESSED HIS FAITH IN CHRIST. He said (in verse 37) ---> "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

FIFTH, he was BAPTIZED, for verse 38 plainly says that Philip "baptized him."

What did the Ethiopian man do? HE HEARD THE GOSPEL, BELIEVED IN CHRIST, REPENTED OF HIS SINS, CONFESSED HIS FAITH AND WAS BAPTIZED. And what is this? It is a case of conversion, given by inspiration of God!

One more vital question ...

WHAT DID THE LORD DO?
WHAT WAS HIS PART
IN THIS CONVERSION ???

Can you imagine this. A man is drowning in the bay. He grabs hold of a rope thrown to him. The person on the other end of the rope pulls him out. Once he gets up on the pier and he collects himself, HE FALLS DOWN TO KISS THE ROPE, AND HE CONGRATULATES HIMSELF on the remarkable way he got hold of the line, to pull himself out of the water.

What do you think about that? He falls down to kiss the rope that saved him; and

he boasts about how he got hold of the rope, but ignores the one who threw him the rope and pulled him out.

What do you think? "INGRATITUDE," you say! But may I suggest to you, THE ROPE WAS AN ESSENTIAL PART IN THIS MAN'S SALVATION and, IT WAS NECESSARY FOR HIM TO GRAB HOLD OF IT, AND DO HIS PART. And yet ---> The rope would not have been there, to grab hold of ... HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE PERSON WHO TOOK PITY ON A MAN IN DANGER !!

Now, THE SAME IS TRUE OF SALVATION FROM SIN BY THE GOSPEL. Philip was a part of this process; water was involved, and the Eunuch had do something. But, had it not been for God, who took pity on sinful man and sent his Son and caused the gospel to be revealed, Philip would have had nothing to preach, and the Eunuch WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE THE DROWNING MAN, WITH NO ROPE.

So when we study a case of conversion, we must acknowledge THE LORD'S PART. Without His part, there would be no other part!

If God had not had mercy upon us even when we hardly knew we needed it - where would all our believing, repenting and being baptized get us ?? So - when we tell people what Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," LET'S LET IT BE KNOWN ... WHO DOES THE SAVING. The Lord does! Pardon is an act performed in the mind of God, which frees the sinner from past sin --- and it happens when the sinner does what the Eunuch did.

Conclusion:

Let's review. We read the story of this man's conversion, then we studied five questions:

What did the angel of the Lord do in this case? He told the preacher to "go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

What did the Holy Spirit do in this conversion? Told Philip to join himself to the chariot, and revealed the gospel that was preached.

What was the role of the preacher? To preach that gospel, and assist the Eunuch in being baptized.

What did the Ethiopian man do? HEARD the gospel, BELIEVED in Christ,

REPENTED, CONFESSED and was BAPTIZED.

And, let us not leave out the question ---> WHAT DID THE LORD DO? The Lord does the saving, through the gospel, upon the obedience of a penitent believer.

What we have studied is DIVINE LAW, AND IT HASN'T BEEN CHANGED. So, sinners today can do what the Eunuch did, and go on their way rejoicing, certain in the knowledge that they are now Christians, saved by the grace of God.

Conversion is turning from sin to God. There's only one way that can be done --- through hearing, believing and obeying the gospel.

Bro. Cecil Willis
for the "five
question" approach
to this text;
I heard him preach
the text this way in
Morrilton, Arkansas
in the early 1970's.
