

TRACTS ON CONVERSION

by John Anderson

A collection of tracts arguing that true human happiness and improvement depend on spiritual salvation and fellowship with God rather than merely on earthly efforts or social reform.

6 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. ToC-0.1-Tracts on Conversion
2. ToC-1-The Best Life Here and Hereafter
3. ToC-2-The Demands of the Gospel in Conversion
4. ToC-3-To Anxious Inquirers: What Shall We do?
5. ToC-4-The Kingdom of Heaven
6. ToC-5-About this edition

ToC-0.1-Tracts on Conversion

Tracts on Conversion

By John Anderson

'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'

ToC-1-The Best Life Here and Hereafter

The Best Life Here and Hereafter

MAN'S short life in this world cannot satisfy his soul. If he lives without a view above and beyond this world his life is only in degree better than that of an animal. Every part of his being is worthy of a life much superior to that of the animal in both its duration and its nature. His best desire is for peace and happiness and for the continuation of his existence, that he may exercise and develop the higher powers God has endowed him with.

If his mind should be set on the things that are unseen and eternal, that does not necessarily weaken his belief that the welfare of this present world is of prime importance. How to be right for both here and hereafter is a problem worth considering. It is also true that to ignore or deny our existence hereafter does not make us more capable of improving our present life or reforming the world. The reverse is the case, as we can only improve the life that now is by living for that which is to come. The infidel in his proposals for reform is, as a rule, vainly striving to attain to the social life which was taught by Jesus as a condition and preparation for our entrance into Heaven.

God left the Gentile nations free for four thousand years to work out their own salvation in their national and social life, and instead of improving they became worse and without hope. The ancients were quick in observation - they could marshal facts, they were capable in organization and strong in action - and yet they failed. It seems impossible to convince man that his power is very limited. Wrecks and ruins strew his path through the ages. The Jews rejected God and His guidance and they failed.

After four thousand years, Jesus came and taught that we must look above the things of this world and view life in its wider and higher sense, and in its relationship to God. He insisted that the things pertaining to the soul and the spirit must come first and the things of the body would naturally follow. He showed that as we receive and develop spiritual life our power and desire to improve the present life will increase. Only through the spiritual life can man remove the lust and selfishness and injustice that bring misery and ruin, and only by the spiritual life can we attain to eternal life. In the Scriptures, eternal, when applied to life, speaks beyond doubt of duration, but it also indicates quality. Sin mars this life and leaves us without hope at the resurrection. Man cannot save himself. Education and personal effort, apart from God-given means, cannot overcome evil and far less can they obtain forgiveness for the past. Therefore, God is our only hope. Our Heavenly Father saw our hopelessness and in His infinite wisdom and almighty power prepared a way of deliverance.

It is to God's offered means of salvation that we wish to respectfully draw your attention. As fellow-men we approach you. Since the apostolic age no person or Church has been empowered, or commissioned, to speak authoritatively for God. Under the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles alone spoke with authority, and the New Testament is the only authentic record of their lives and teaching. We, therefore, draw your attention to what they proclaimed in

the name of God.

What Churches may teach, or what professing Christians may do, should not deter you from listening to what God has spoken through His inspired messengers. In the sacred word there is safety and simplicity. The divine message can bring you to Jesus in whom is salvation. No Church, or system of doctrine, can save you. You first come to Jesus and then through Him to the Church (Local). It is not by joining a Church you come to Jesus. His word explains how you can come to Him.

God created you for His fellowship and friendship here on earth and thereafter in heaven. It is unreasonable to expect that you can obtain peace of soul and happiness of life, or attain to eternal life, in the world over which God rules if you slight His existence and reject His overtures.

With reverence and fear hear what God, in the Gospels, says concerning His Son, our Lord and Savior, and learn of His commands as exemplified in the Acts of Apostles.

ToC-2-The Demands of the Gospel in Conversion

The Demands of the Gospel in Conversion

THE Gospel in the main tells what God has done for man but it also makes great definite demands of man. It asks for a full surrender and an unconditional pledge of obedience to Christ. To hate sin and to live righteously is required of each person. It recognizes no half measures but insists that a man be out and out one thing or another. He must yield body, soul, and spirit. He must be born again and begin a new life.

These are decisive demands that God requires of us and they go beyond what man in himself could satisfy, but along with God's requirements the Gospel supplies the means whereby all creation may meet what is required of them. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We cannot from man's reason learn the dreadful consequences of sin and how we may avoid them. Neither man nor nature can give us a knowledge of God, or His will toward man. In ourselves we are unable to purify the heart, or make the life righteous. Man cannot blot out his sin against God, nor can his mind conceive as to the future life. These things call for the power and the wisdom of God. In the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has supplied to the full all that is necessary.

The Gospel gives enlightenment to the mind. It can change and purify the heart and draw our affections to God. It constrains and enables us to surrender our will to that of God. It shows how we may confess and come to Christ and receive remission of sins. It instructs us how to live for Christ and remain faithful to our confession. It tells of the resurrection, and of a blessed hope in the hereafter - in short, it can beget in us a new life. If the Word, which is the seed, is received into a good and honest heart it begets life and brings forth fruit. The truth is the means through which the Holy Spirit convicts, and converts, man. The listening ear, the open mind, and the understanding heart, are what is asked of man. To whom should he give heed if not to his Creator, the God of love and mercy?

All that man may do is without merit and is insignificant when compared with that God has done on his behalf in the scheme of redemption, and humanity was entirely helpless until God, in the Gospel, opened up a new way.

The four Gospels prove that Jesus is the Son of God, and faith in Him opens our eyes to the revelation He has given of the Father. We see God in His grace and truth. Our faith opens our eyes as to our own state and our position toward God, and gives a view of our real relationship to this world and our fellow-man. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ brings Him into our heart and if He is enthroned sin will depart. Faith purifies the heart. Faith in the heart urges us to seek Jesus and produces the surrender of our will as in repentance. We resolve to act on our faith and perfect it in action.

With the mind enlightened by the truth, our heart made true, and our will in full submission, we feel that within we have, through the Lord Jesus Christ, entirely turned toward God and we then long to complete our conversion by changing our outward life. We wish to declare our inward change and

openly confess Christ. The Lord asks that you do this by confessing Him as the Son of God and as your Lord, and then being immersed into His name. From your baptism you rise to walk in newness of life. The Ethiopian eunuch openly confessed Jesus as the Son of God, and publicly declared his faith, and made it acceptable to God by being baptized into Jesus Christ. In the words of the Apostle Peter, we say, 'he purified his soul in obeying the truth.'

As Christ died for the sin of the world, pardon and everlasting life are now offered, through Him, to those who believe in God and hear the words of His Son. The words of Jesus to the whole creation, Jew and Gentile, are, 'he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' If you do believe in Jesus, as the people did at Pentecost, then, in the words of Peter, we say, 'repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.' If you believe and have repented, as had Saul of Tarsus, then, in the words of Ananias, we say, 'arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on [confessing] the name of the Lord.' 'Then they that gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.' 'And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.'

ToC-3-To Anxious Inquirers: What Shall We do?

To Anxious Inquirers: What Shall We do?

(Acts 2:37)

MANY preachers and tracts ask us to have simple faith, meaning only believe, and they speak of the moment you believe and of the instant you receive life. At the same time they suggest that you can be saved, where you sit, by resolving to accept Christ. But these are not Scriptural words nor New Testament ideas.

Moreover, to tell inquirers to only believe bewilders their mind as they already believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and they accept as true what is taught in the Bible. Their conviction as to the truth of the Gospel will likely have been unwavering for years while they continued to live for this world. They have no doubt as to the claims of Jesus being genuine, but that belief in itself has not brought any assurance of their salvation, and no person can tell them of anything else that they should believe.

The trouble of inquirers arises not because of what they should believe but because they only believe. Their strong feeling which comes from their believing, and which cries out 'what shall we do?' leads them in a correct way, but instructors often take them astray from the path of duty, instead of bringing them to the guidance of the Lord and his Apostles as given in Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47; John 3:5 : Acts 2:38. The anxious room, in our country, provides many examples of the blind leading the blind.

If we try to avoid having a prejudice against the four passages we above refer to and others with the same teaching, it is difficult to understand how we can interpret John 3:16 so that it contradicts the unavoidable teaching of so many passages, and the pervading doctrine of the New Testament that we obtain and can keep possession of eternal salvation by obedience to Christ in addition to believing Hebrews 5:9 etc. The word of God nowhere says that belief in Christ is a momentary act and bold assertion by man does not make it true. Paul says he had kept the faith and that the just shall live by faith, and he speaks of them that believe to the saving of the soul, and of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Paul was baptized and washed away his sins, yet he says he was justified by faith (Acts 22:16, Romans 5:1). His believing carried him on through confession and baptism to Jesus Christ and forgiveness. He believed to the saving of his soul and entered into everlasting life.

Believing on Christ implies the acceptance of His words. He said, 'he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life;' here heareth means more than to listen. Again he saith, 'whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed.' Now Jesus says, 'he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' These are the words of Christ; are we prepared to believe in Him? When Paul spoke the word of the Lord to the Philippian jailor, he believed, and was baptized the same hour of the night. Many who profess the

name of Christ refuse to accept his teaching that baptism is a condition of pardon and of entrance into the Kingdom of God.

'Believe in Christ' is used in many passages with a comprehensive special sense, and sometimes covers repentance, turning to the Lord, and living for Him. James says that faith by itself is dead. Noah built an ark by faith, but not by 'faith alone.' To fear God means more than to reverence Him in your mind; it includes living for God. And to believe in Christ means more than having a conviction in the mind; it includes a change of heart and will, and a submission of our life. The scriptures show that not only a decision but a full conversion is necessary, and so the inspired word calls for repentance, confession of Jesus as your Lord, and baptism into Christ in order to an assurance of pardon and adoption.

The present-day preachers often speak eloquently of what God, through His Son, has done in the work of redemption, making a full atonement, and thus they open the minds and influence the hearts of their hearers toward the Savior, but, as a rule, they fail to lead their audience to a knowledge of scriptural conversion, as it is exemplified in the Acts and explained in the Gospels and Epistles. It is safe to bring all theories and popular sayings to the test of the word of God. Let us pray that our theories may not blind us to the truth or may not take away our reasonableness and commonsense.

They who preach 'only believe' contradict their own teaching when they insist on a decision. Certainly God commandeth all men everywhere to repent, but His word is consistent and therefore never says 'only believe.' Faith alone is only mentioned to be condemned (James 2). Decision or repentance while an outcome of faith is in addition to and not a part of belief. The devils believe, although they have not repented. They only believe. The chief rulers believed although they did not add to their faith repentance and to their repentance confession (John 12:42).

In contrast to these, Abraham by obedience perfected his faith and made it acceptable to God (James 2:22). His faith was not only in his mind but lived in his heart and was clothed in action (Genesis 22:16-18). Faith moved him to obedience. His was a work of faith, not of law or of merit. It was through faith and by grace he received the friendship of God. May our faith carry us on past 'only believe' to where by obedience our faith is made acceptable to God, and by His grace it is reckoned as righteousness. We should walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham (Romans 4:12).

The woman, with the issue of blood, came into contact with the Savior, not by the belief in her heart alone, but by an act resolved on through her faith - a work of faith. The thief on the cross not only believed but openly confessed Christ and demonstrated his faith as far as his circumstances permitted or Christ required of him. Even before the death and resurrection of Christ and his enthronement in heaven, and before the gospel dispensation and the world-wide commission, when the faith of Christ's immediate followers failed them, the thief seemed to look into the future with unwavering trust in Jesus and his faith raised him above his unfavorable circumstances and brought him to the physical act of confession. May you, like the thief, have Christ's own word that you are saved. His word to you and to every creature since Pentecost is 'he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'

Any person who loves the Lord will desire not only that in believing his mind should be given to Christ, and that in repentance his will and the affections of his heart should be yielded up, but also that he should come to Christ in person and by one act give him body, soul and spirit in one. This God requires in baptism. In primitive times confession of Jesus as Lord was associated with baptism. With a mind and heart regenerated by the Gospel and having now died to the world, they who believe do in baptism give their whole being to Him who died for their sins (Romans 6:1-8). They are baptized into Christ and thus put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

These requirements cannot be inconsistent with full atonement by the blood of Jesus, or with salvation by grace, as each and all are clearly taught. Only superficial and unsound reasoning presumes to make them contradictory. Faith by itself, although it be mental, is as much an act of man as is the obedience of faith. Neither have merit. Combined they simply bring us to Him who can save us. There is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. May we all be faithful unto death and at our Lord's return receive the crown of life.

IT is now admitted that Baptism in the early church was by immersion of the whole body in water, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Wherever immersion has been abandoned the spiritual meaning and dramatic effect of Baptism have been tremendously impaired, if not altogether lost. In the 'one Baptism' (immersion of penitent believers) we see dramatized the great central fact of the Christian religion - the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ. The symbolism is such as to make real the spiritual union with this Death and Resurrection which Baptism effects.

ToC-4-The Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of Heaven

THE Old Testament has references to the everlasting Kingdom that will exist after the end of the world, but there are also many prophecies of a coming Kingdom in which the Messiah will reign over the earth. There is also reference to a new covenant. Both of these suggest allegiance and service. Kingdom suggests that we accept Jesus as Lord and are loyal to him as our Sovereign, while Covenant implies that we fulfill the condition under which God promises to bless us. A Kingdom and a Covenant can mean nothing less than that.

During the ministry of John the Baptist and of Christ it was proclaimed that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Christ gave the keys to Peter, and Peter, acting on the authority given him, opened the Kingdom on Pentecost. Christ having entered within the veil, into the presence of God, with an infinite and ever enduring sacrifice, he was then enthroned at the Father's right hand. Like Melchizedek he became both priest and king. He is King of Salem and priest of the most high God.

There is no Scripture to show that Christ will come and reign in person on earth. That smacks of going back to Judaism. Christ from his throne in heaven now rules over his kingdom on earth, which was established at Pentecost, and he will reign until at the end of the world he comes to judge and reward.

Revelation 20 tells of a thousand-year period in the reign of Christ when some of the saints and martyrs will be associated with Christ in his reign. The reign of Christ itself is not discussed in the passage, but that of those who had been persecuted and who, under Christ, had an influence over the hearts and lives of the people of God. Reformers and martyrs can live in the hearts of men. It is not revealed when in Christ's reign the thousand years will begin or how long after the thousand years Christ will continue on his throne in Heaven. These questions and the mistaken idea that there will be a reign in person on earth, are unprofitable fields of fanciful speculation which fascinate many and blind them to the simple truth. No person should be deceived by a profound and superior manner.

The Mosaic Law having been annulled and the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile having been taken away, Peter on the day of Pentecost opened the world-wide kingdom. Being guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter would do all things in keeping with the Lord's instructions and his great commission. Jesus said that 'except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.' He taught the same in different words when he said, 'he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' He also said that 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his Name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' These plain statements, in spite of the attempts to undermine them have never been reasonably explained away. We will try to find from Acts 2 how Peter at the opening of the Kingdom understood the words of the Savior.

In Acts 2:22-36 we have what Peter proclaimed. The Gospel or the life-giving word of God that was preached seemed to be received and take root in the hearts of the hearers, as their conviction caused them to say to the Apostles, "what shall we do?" Acceptance of the Apostle's word and belief in Jesus, and nothing else, would bring them to this state of mind. Spiritual life had been begotten in their hearts. In the parable of the Sower it is said, 'the seed is the word of God.' Paul said to the Corinthians, 'yet have ye not many fathers: For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.' As the Apostle only associates the Gospel with the part of the father, we should avoid making the Word cover both the part of father and mother. James 1:18 says 'of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.' 1 Peter 1:23 (R.V.) says, 'having been begotten again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible through the word of God.' From the passages quoted we conclude that the Holy Spirit through the Gospel begets life. It is one thing to receive life or be begotten and it is another to be brought forth or born again. In one we receive, in the other we emerge from. The one has a premier place from the beginning right through while the other only consummates our conversion or turning to God.

The words of life spoken by Peter had gone home and changed the minds of the hearers. It is written 'Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.' The fact that Peter in his reply did not tell them to believe shows that he looked on them as having believed the Gospel they had just heard. The anxious inquiry they made indicated their belief. The answer to their question was, 'repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and yet shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' To repent is to resolve to act on your faith and therefore implies that there is faith. The prodigal through his faith in his father said within himself, 'I will arise and go to my father.'

In like manner baptism presupposes faith. I have never heard of a person of responsible age being baptized who was an unbeliever; it is as a believer they are baptized. Philip said to the eunuch, 'If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest.' So although it is not stated we cannot but conclude that the three thousand all believed. As they had believed on the Name of Jesus Christ and accepted the word of God into their heart, they possessed the right or privilege to become children of God - the right to be born of water into the family of God. Having in baptism pledged themselves to serve Jesus Christ as Lord, it then remained with them to hold fast the confession of their hope so that they might inherit the promises.

Following Peter's reply we read then they that received Peter's word were baptized (immersed) and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Here you have the words of the Lord fulfilled to the letter. You here see illustrated what it is to be born of water and of the Spirit, also an example of men believing and being baptized, and a lesson as to how repentance and remission of sins should be preached. The three thousand had been saved by grace through faith, they had become children of God and had been translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son.

What took place also agrees with what Paul taught as to his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 26:18-20). Peter opened the eyes of the Jews so that they saw Jesus as the Savior of the world, and they then repented and turned to God. They received forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

Repent and be baptized is synonymous with repent and turn to God. Baptism is the act in which man as a man turns. Previously his mind, heart and will may have turned, but in baptism he buries the old man and comes forth from the water for his whole being, the new creature, to walk in the new life.

Regarding the New Covenant, we find in Hebrews 10:22 how we can come under its blessing. The conditions, although in different words, are the same as those in Acts 2. The same ideas are given in Titus 3:5. Baptism is the washing connected with regeneration by the Gospel, and we are created anew by the Truth which the Holy Spirit has given us. It means being born of water and of the Spirit.

Faith changes man's attitude to God, while the obedience of faith gives assurance that God's attitude to us has changed, and we are now recognized in Heaven as being justified by faith through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

BAPTISM administered to penitent believers is not merely a symbol without meaning or result. Everywhere in the New Testament it is vitally connected with the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apart from faith, administered to infants, it is a meaningless rite. But when administered to believers it really effects and seals all that it symbolizes - death to sin and resurrection to new life.

'Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' Romans 6:4

ToC-5-About this edition

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