

WHY I BELIEVE

Psychological Methods Should Be Abandoned in Evangelism

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The secular world and religious liberals attempt to explain away Christian conversion by religious psychology. Conversion is merely an emotional experience because certain people have insecurities and need something to cling to in order to cope with life. NOTE: There are good Biblical, logical and experiential reasons to show that Christian conversion is not psychological but is a reality and based on historical fact (cf. Lesson #40 – “Conversion To Christ Is Not Psychological”).
- B. There are many problems over the subject of conversion. It is quite possible to have a religious experience without having a Christian conversion. It is possible for men to be psychologically converted without being truly converted to Christ. Some men who call themselves Christian are masters at psychological manipulation and they can get people to do anything if they ask for a “decision” at the right time and the right way. Much of what we are seeing in present day evangelism is only a psychological experience and not a Christian spiritual experience. The problem in our day is basically theological for men fail to understand that salvation is of God and not of man. This theological defect produces wrong practice and men develop human techniques and methods to get men to make a “decision” for Jesus Christ.

II. WHAT IS CONVERSION?

- A. Definition: “Active conversion is that act of God whereby He causes the regenerated sinner, in his conscious life, to turn to Him in repentance and faith. Passive conversion is the resulting conscious act of the regenerated sinner whereby he, through the grace of God, turns to God in repentance and faith” (Berkhof, Systematic Theology).
- B. Elements In Conversion: The first step in the conversion process is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11) whereby a person becomes convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment. The next step

is the sovereign drawing of God whereby He begins to move the convicted sinner towards Christ who alone can forgive sins and grant eternal life (John 6:44). God then gives the convicted and spiritually thirsty sinner the efficacious call to salvation, II Tim. 1:9. Then God shoots life into the sinner which is regeneration (Titus 3:5) and the sinner receives Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. NOTE: God calls to salvation but man answers the call by active faith. There must be a definite act of faith by man's will, for receiving Christ is part of the total conversion process (John 1:12; 3:36; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 2:8-9). NOTE: A person may or may not have an emotional experience when converted. His responsibility is to trust Christ, and if he genuinely has done this, realizing he is a sinner and under God's wrath, then conversion has taken place. However, the proof of conversion comes when the repentant sinner begins to have new desires for Christ and live a holy life (I John 3:9 – "does not habitually commit sin . . . cannot habitually sin").

III. WHAT IS TRUE REVIVAL?

- A. Definition: A revival is a sovereign moving of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel in which massive numbers of people are truly converted to Jesus Christ. The stimulus for a revival always comes from God.
- B. Origin: A revival begins as men moved by the Holy Spirit become concerned about the spiritual state of men.

The actual facts are that, generally speaking, the church, before a revival, has been in a low and lethargic state. Then suddenly, without any apparent explanation, one man, or a small group of men, suddenly begin to be disturbed and become concerned about the state of the church. They become dissatisfied with their own lives and go to God in prayer, confessing their sinfulness and that of the whole church and pleading for a visitation of God's Spirit. God in His grace and in His own time hears and answers the prayer and pours out His Spirit, and so the revival begins and spreads. Sometimes this happens in several places, and even in different countries, at the same time (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Conversions – Psychological and Spiritual).

- C. Doctrinal Emphasis: Revival in history has been prompted by right preaching on sin and God which gives a right emphasis to the necessity of the Cross of Christ. These doctrines plus the insistence upon the "new birth" that comes from God are always at the base of a revival. Of the great revival in the 18th century it was said,

Nor, in all the preaching of the instruments of this work in town, did I ever hear any teach to follow impulses or any religious impression but of the Word of God upon our minds, affections, will and consciences; and which,

agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, the most famous reformers and Puritan ministers, both in England, Scotland and New England, have in their writings taught us. As to the doctrinal principle of those who continue in our congregations, and have been the subjects of the late revival, they are the same as they have been instructed in all along, from the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism" (Thomas Prince of Boston).

The terrors of the Lord denounced in his Word against the willful transgressors of his holy laws, and the impenitent unbelieving despisers of his gospel grace; the impossibility of salvation on the score of self-righteousness; the absolute necessity of the efficacious influences of the grace and Spirit of God, in order to a vital union with Christ by faith, for righteousness and salvation; that all the blessings of the new covenant, freely given by the Father to the elect, and purchased for them by the sufferings and death of Christ the Son, are effectually applied to them by the Holy Ghost – these were the doctrines insisted on to the people of this congregation" (Evans, Revivals).

- D. Physical Manifestations: In most revivals there has been some real emotion displayed. Men have been known to display physical prostrations, crying out, fainting and so on, but this was not true of all who were saved during the revivals. During the Great Awakening in America Jonathan Edwards preached the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" from the text of Deuteronomy 32:35. Men came under great conviction of sin and there such weeping and sobbing and sighing that Edwards had to ask for silence that he might finish the sermon. NOTE: This was genuine conviction of the Spirit without manipulating the congregation in any way.

- E. Conclusion: A true revival has certain characteristics attached to it. A revival will see true Spirit-wrought emotion but this is quite different than emotionalism. Emotionalism is man-made means to produce a revival but this in reality is a counterfeit. There is a distinct difference between a revival and an evangelistic campaign. Men can produce an evangelistic campaign with methods and techniques but they cannot produce a revival. NOTE: Just because a church places a sign in front which says "Revival" does not mean that there is a revival. Much of the present day man-made evangelistic methods and techniques can be traced back to the Pelegian (freewill) theology of Charles Finney in the 19th century. Finney taught if a man applied a given technique he could have a revival at any time. If man met the conditions for revival, God was obligated to bring it. Finney had massive numbers of people give outward evidence of conversion but they fell away and made a mockery of the gospel. Finney was the first person to use the altar call (anxious seat) and would whip the emotions of people so as to get them to "decide" for Jesus. Finney became somewhat suspicious of his own techniques later in life and said,

“If I had my time over again I would preach nothing but holiness. The converts of my revivals are a disgrace to Christianity, and if I had my time over again I would preach nothing but holiness.”

IV. WHAT ARE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES THAT ARE BEING USED IN MODERN DAY EVANGELISM?

- A. Introduction: As Christians we must answer the problem of “temporary results” in modern day evangelism. Multiple thousands are walking aisles, signing cards, raising hands and praying rote prayers but only a small percentage of these people are going on to evidence any genuine reality in salvation. Very few who “decide” for Jesus in an evangelistic campaign ever really affiliate with a Bible-believing church. Campus Christian organizations know the tremendous drop out rate of students after they leave the college campus and go into the world. Is the problem with God or with man? If cannot be with God, for His plans and purposes always come to pass. It must be with man and perhaps it is not so much the fault of a person who makes a false profession of faith, for he is only doing what he is told, but it goes back to Christians who have a theology that is not Biblical and they use methods and techniques not found in the scriptures. NOTE: An objector might say that through these methods and techniques some do stick. This is true but how many fall away and become disillusioned with Christianity? They tried and found it would not work. We must say their religious experience was only psychological.
- B. Emotional Environment: It is a known fact that through the emotions of a man a person can have a religious experience. This experience may not be Christian but it is tied to the religious nature of man. All primitive religions employ techniques such as dancing, drumming, tom-toms, singing and similar things to get a religious experience. They can produce the desired results by setting up an emotional environment. NOTE: Many so-called modern revival meetings are filled with emotionalism to break down a man so he will make a decision. The use of emotional group singing, massive choirs, clapping of hands, altar calls, etc., are all devised to prepare a person to make a “decision.” A person may well have a psychological experience under these conditions and not be truly converted to Christ. When the excitement and emotion wear off, the person feels defeated, discouraged, disillusioned and seeks for another emotional experience, believing that this is real Christianity.
- C. Pressure Tactics: There is a tendency among evangelicals to put pressure upon men to believe so as to “force” a decision when the person is not ready to believe in Christ. This sort of thing may be seen in peer pressure, for it becomes the “in thing” to be a Christian. A

person decides for Jesus because everyone else is doing it and he does not want to be different. Pressure tactics can also be seen in encouraging a person to pray some kind of a prayer when he simply is not ready to believe. Pressure tactics may actually harden a person to the true gospel.

- D. Fraud: Some men are masters at telling stories or being descriptive. They tell a graphic story and play upon people's emotions. They have told little or nothing of the truth of the gospel but have actually "baited" the people to make some kind of decision. People are actually tricked into making a decision.
- E. Playing On People's Sympathies: All men have certain psychological needs. Men are insecure and need peace, joy, purpose and happiness in life, and above all, men need to be loved. It is quite possible for a person to believe in Christ for the wrong reason. He may receive Christ because he wants love, peace and joy but has never seen himself as a sinner, under God's wrath and headed for eternal judgment. Therefore, a person may receive Christ as a joy-giver and not as a Savior from sin and its consequences. These kinds of superficial professions will only result in psychological religion that will not last.
- F. Conclusion: It becomes obvious that if men desire to use psychological methods then they are going to get psychological results. There will be man-made converts and not God-made converts. NOTE: The basis of all genuine conversion is the truth of God's Word. Conversion is not real until the will of a person has been reached. Scholars disagree over the best way to reach the human will. Some think that the will can best be reached in some people through the mind and others through the emotions. Dr. Orville S. Walters, a Christian psychiatrist, says,

... the will is like a cart pulled by two horses, the emotions and the intellect. With some people the will is reached more quickly through the emotions. With others it is reached through the mind. But in every case there is no genuine conversion unless the will has been involved. (Paul Little, Know Why You Believe)

This view of Dr. Walters does not seem to be the Biblical emphasis for the Bible teaches that man's emotion and will are always related to the truth of scripture. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says,

... we must never, in the first place, make a direct approach either to the emotions or to the will. The emotions and the will should always be influenced through the mind. Truth is intended to come to the mind. The normal course is for the emotions and the will to be affected by the truth after it has first entered and gripped the mind. It seems to me that this is a

principle of Holy Scriptures. The approach to the emotions and the will should be indirect. Still less should we ever bring any pressure to bear upon either the emotions or the will. We are to “plead” with men but never to bring pressure. We are to “beseech” but we are never to browbeat. (Conversions)

V. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR ELIMINATING ALL PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS?

- A. To Eliminate Confusion and Criticism: It is the excessive emotionalism and gimmicks of much modern day evangelism that draws the fire of the critics of Christianity. They can see the hypocrisy of it all, and, therefore, they label all Christian conversion as psychological. Furthermore, man-made techniques can become very confusing to the new convert. All gimmicks should be done away with so that a new Christian will know he has been drawn to Christ by God and that he voluntarily received Christ, being pressured by no human being. The only pressure he should know is the convicting and drawing work of the Holy Spirit. He should never feel that he was conditioned in a psychological manner.
- B. To be Faithful to Scripture: The only authority the Christian has for doctrine and practice is the inspired scripture. Many of the modern day evangelistic methods are not found in the Bible. The use of non-scriptural methods brings the gospel into disrepute. The New Testament must be our pattern for evangelism, even in the area of methods.
- C. To Really Trust God: When the Christian begins to depend on techniques, methods and gimmicks to get men to decide for Jesus, he is really showing a lack of faith. He simply does not believe in the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of a soul. He substitutes methods for faith, techniques for prayer and gimmicks for God.

I would affirm that much of the modern approach to evangelism, with its techniques and methods, is unnecessary if we really believe in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His application of God’s message. I suggest that our “techniques and our “mechanics” actually divert the attention of people from the truth of the message to some lower, particular, immediate and practical action which may have the opposite effect from what is intended. The point I am making is that it is surely our business to avoid anything which produces a merely psychological condition rather than a spiritual condition.

VI. WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN FOR EVANGELISM?

- A. Christians Witnessed (Acts 1:8; 5:42): There was personal witnessing (Acts 8:4-12; 11:19; 15:35) and mass evangelism (Acts 2:8). They went everywhere declaring the message of sin, judgment, Christ's death for sin and sinner, and His resurrection from the dead to declare men righteous.
- B. Christians Used No Deceit in Witnessing: (I Cor. 2:1-5): All man-made methods were deliberately rejected in order that it might be clear to everybody that the results were not of man but of God.
- C. Christians Depended Upon the Sovereign Work of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:4 cf. I Thess. 1:3-5): They understood that the whole conversion process was supernatural and had to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- D. Conclusion: These three principles, coupled with fervent prayer, are the basic principles for Biblical evangelism.

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