

The Book of Acts (#15); Conversion to Christ (6)

Our examination of the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 has led us to consider God's grace in converting sinners to become disciples of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit performs a great work of grace in the soul, so that the sinner becomes an heir of salvation, having been delivered from his sin and just damnation. On Pentecost we read of 3,000 Jewish souls repenting of their sin, embracing and submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and joining themselves to the newly formed and organized church in the city of Jerusalem. Clearly this great work of God's grace was through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus poured out upon His people on this occasion. But what and how exactly did the Lord accomplish this great work? This has led us to our Lord's own words recorded in John 16:8-10 regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit and His work in converting people to Christ. Here, again, are our Lord's words respecting the work of the Holy Spirit in converting the lost through the gospel.

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Jesus first stated what it was the Holy Spirit would do: He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. But then He explained the means by which the Holy Spirit would convict the world of these three spiritual realities. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world

- (1) ***"of sin, because they do not believe in Me;***
- (2) ***"of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more;***
- (3) ***"of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."***

Now last time when we were considering these matters, we had addressed the first of these three gracious actions of the Holy Spirit in bringing lost souls to salvation. Again, Jesus had said, "when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, ...because they do not believe in Me." People will not be converted unto Christ until they are first convicted regarding their sinfulness before God. This first work of grace administered by the Holy Spirit is a work of conviction of soul that leads the sinner to see his damned and hopeless condition before a holy God. The conviction of sin lays a soul very low and condemned.

But what is this second work of grace that the Holy Spirit convinces the world in order to salvation? Again, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would convict the world ***of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more.*** Where the first work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin, to bring the sinner to a sense of his own hopeless condition before God, this second work of grace shows the sinner the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will convince the world of "righteousness."

Robert M'Cheyne (1813-1843) wrote of this second work of grace of the Holy Spirit in convicting sinners so as to bring them to Christ:

When He has first broken the bones under a sense of sin, then He reveals the good Physician, and makes the very bones which He hath broken to rejoice. When He has first revealed the coming storm of wrath, so that the sinner knows not where to flee, then He opens the secret chamber, and whispers: Come in hither; it may be thou shalt be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. When He has cast light into the sinner's bosom, and let him see how every action of his life condemns him, and how vain it is to seek for any righteousness there, He then casts light upon the risen Saviour, and says: Look there. He shows the Saviour's finished sufferings and finished obedience, and says: All this is thine, if thou wilt believe on Jesus. Thus does the Spirit lead the soul to accept and close with Christ, freely offered in the Gospel.

The first was the awakening work of the Spirit—this is the comforting work of the Spirit. And this shows you plainly that the second work of the faithful minister is to do the very same—to lead weary souls to Christ—to stand pointing not only to the coming deluge, but to the freely offered ark—pointing not only to the threatening storm, but to the strong tower of safety—directing the sinner’s eye not only inwards to his sin, and misery, but outwards also, to the bleeding, dying, rising, reigning Saviour.

In convicting the world of righteousness, what must the Holy Spirit do in the life and thought of the sinner? Four spiritual realities must be comprehended by the sinner in his conversion.

- (1) The Holy Spirit must convict the sinner that he has no true righteousness of his own.
- (2) The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of the true righteousness of Jesus Christ alone.
- (3) The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of the gift of righteousness that is available for sinners.
- (4) The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner that the gift of Christ’s righteousness is imputed to him upon his faith in Christ.

Let us take each of these and consider them carefully.

I. The Holy Spirit must convict the sinner that he has no righteousness of his own.

First we must address the question: What is righteousness, or, what is it to be righteous? The basic idea of righteousness in the Bible is that of a person having, enjoying, and experiencing a right relationship with another person, or with God Himself. Righteousness depicts the relationship between two persons or parties. Often times we may think of righteousness to be merely a life in conformity to a moral standard of behavior—God’s law. But this may wrongly convey the thought that a man can be “righteous” individually apart from being related to another, that he is righteous in and of himself. But actually the idea of being righteous in the Bible is better understood to be the life lived in a faithful relationship with another. Here is a quotation that describes the nature of righteousness as a right relationship between a man and God:

That the New Testament uses the concept “righteousness” to designate a relationship between man and God is shown in a variety of passages. Cornelius, a centurion, is called a “righteous” man not because he acts in accordance with some moral norm, but because he is a “God-fearing” man—i.e. one whose attitude toward God is the attitude which the relationship to God requires (Acts 10:22; cf. v. 35). Elymas the magician is an “enemy of all righteousness” because, as a “son of the devil,” he makes “crooked the paths of the Lord”—i.e. he destroys the relationship with God by obscuring the requirements of this relationship (Acts 13:10). Simon is in the “bond of unrighteousness” because he proves by his desire to buy “the gift of God” that he is outside a positive relationship to God (Acts 8:20, 23). Jesus calls a judge “unrighteous” (Luke 18:6), not because the judge refused to heed the pleas of the woman (he does resolve to vindicate her), nor because his judgments were perverted. He is called unrighteous apparently because he neither feared God nor regarded man” (Luke 18:2); i.e., the judge met the demands neither of the relationship to God nor of that to man.¹

To be righteous, therefore, is to be in a right relationship with another. For one to be righteous before God indicates that righteous man is in a right relationship with God.

When God had originally created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden of Eden, they had a right relationship with God. Adam and Eve were righteous, in that they thought and lived in accordance with what God required of them in order for them to continue in their relationship with Him and which was required of them so that they could enjoy the fruits of their relationship. Their faithful compliance and obedience to God was essential. They were to order their lives according to God’s law, which was their righteousness, the ground of their covenant relationship with God. But when they sinned by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they became unrighteous. They had broken the basis of their

¹ **The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible**, vol. 4 (Abingdon Press, 1962), 92.

relationship. Although God had maintained His righteousness in having maintained His covenant promises in His relationship with them, they had failed in their obligations. Having become “unrighteous” they forfeited life with and from God and they were excluded from the Garden in which their relationship with God had been experienced and enjoyed. From that time onward, it was not possible for Adam and Eve or their posterity to live a life of righteousness, for they could not initiate or maintain a covenant relationship with God. All mankind were thereafter “unrighteous.” They were unable to obtain or acquire righteousness to enter and maintain a relationship with God through their own desires or efforts. There was no way that they could conform their thinking and living to God’s will and ways, for they were guilty, unrighteous sinners under the wrath of God.

But thankfully God in His great love showed forth His mercy and grace in establishing a way in which unrighteous sinners could become righteous before Him. In other words, although they were incapable (and unwilling) in themselves to acquire a righteousness whereby they could enter and enjoy a relationship with God, from which they would receive life in all its blessedness and fullness, God provided another way by which they could become righteous so as to be in this blessed relationship with God. God would enable guilty, unrighteous sinners to become righteous through the gift of righteousness that God Himself would freely grant to those whose lives were characterized by faith in Him and His provision for them.

This teaching of justification, that is, becoming regarded and treated by God as righteous, even though the sinner is unrighteous in heart and life, is set forth in detail and clarity in the New Testament gospel. But the truth of justification by God’s grace through faith alone has been the plan and purpose of God throughout history for any and all people who have come into a saving relationship with God. Paul had declared this forthrightly in Romans 4. There we read these words:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered;

⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Paul argued that the Old testament saints became righteous, that is, they came into a right relationship with God through faith alone. But then Paul further reasoned that this way to become righteous before God is also available to Gentiles. We read on in Romans 4:

⁹Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

¹³For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is

the father of us all ¹⁷(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” (Rom. 4:1-18)

And so, God throughout all of history has brought guilty, unqualified, unrighteous people into a true saving relationship with Himself through bestowing freely the gift of righteousness upon those who believe the gospel savingly.

Now one might ask how this relates to God’s dealings with the nation of Israel, the Mosaic covenant, and God’s law that He had established at Mount Sinai? God had promised Abraham that He would raise up through him a great nation comprised of his descendants. God’s promises were on two levels. There were God’s promises respecting a physical seed—the ethnic Jewish people descending from Abraham-- and there were promises that God gave to Abraham’s spiritual seed, specifically, promised to, and realized through Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:16). Jesus Christ is the promised seed of God through whom all of God’s promises of blessing are brought to sinners. With respect to Abraham’s physical seed--his physical descendants--God established a covenant at Mount Sinai constituting the Jewish people as the political nation, Israel, promising to bless them above all the nations of the earth. God had promised them health, wealth, and security, a covenant that was conditioned upon their conforming the life of their nation to the laws of God given through Moses, the basis of which was the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:13). This nation’s righteousness, that is, the ground of its favored relationship with God was conditional and in force as long as they kept the terms of their covenant, as long as they were “righteous” in ordering their lives according to the law of God. God had obligated Himself to favor them above and apart from the Gentile nations while the Mosaic covenant was in effect and enforced. But Israel broke this covenant, becoming “unrighteous” and therefore incurred the curses of the covenant. Israel became a cursed nation having transgressed their covenant. Paul later wrote that their sin and rejection had released God from His covenantal commitment to them and was thereby able to legitimately and righteously to show mercy and grace to the Gentiles, for the unbelieving Jews had become as evil and guilty as the Gentile nations.

But we should understand that in all of God’s dealings with the nation of Israel, even while the Mosaic covenant was intact and in force, God was desiring and looking for a sound, enduring faith of the Jewish people. Their faith in God was to be manifest in their obedience in keeping God’s laws. The political, ethnic nation of Israel could continue in its covenantal relationship with God upon their “righteousness”, that is, ordering their lives according to the Mosaic law. Consider Deuteronomy 6:24-25:

And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. ²⁵Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.’

The covenant relationship of the nation of Israel with God was conditioned on their works. However, though God had required the people of Israel to observe all the commandments that He had prescribed for them, and that in doing so they would be regarded and treated as “righteous” before God, God’s favor toward them was not due to any merit in their obedience or their faithfulness. Their law keeping was to be the demonstration of their faith and love for God. The favor they experienced and enjoyed in their relationship with God was due to God’s mercy and grace alone, not due to any “righteousness” they acquired or earned. God made this very clear to them:

“Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. ⁵It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ⁶Therefore

understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people. (Deut. 9:4-6)

The apostle Paul drew this conclusion regarding the relationship between law keeping and faith in Christ quite clearly in Romans 3. There we read these words:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (Rom. 3:21-30).

We began to address this matter by asserting that when the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness, He must convict the sinner that he has no righteousness of his own. There is nothing that a man or woman can do to improve his heart or life so as to become righteous, that is, to be found to be in a right relationship with God, experiencing His forgiveness of sins and the His blessing of life that He alone imparts to His people. The Holy Spirit in the grace of converting the sinner, must convict that sinner he is unrighteous before God and that he has no way to gain or achieve a righteous standing in order to enter a saving relationship with God.

But herein lies the problem: fallen human beings presume that they are righteous, that is, in a right and saving relationship with God based upon how they think and how they live their lives. In other words, the manifestation of our sinfulness all too often is manifest in our self-righteousness. We wrongly think that because we do certain things or because we do not do certain things, that on this basis we are regarded and treated as righteous before God. But the Holy Spirit must dispel this faulty thinking entirely, if we are to be saved. The Holy Spirit must reveal to our souls our utter spiritual bankruptcy, that the best of our desires and efforts are sinful and deserving of God's eternal wrath upon us for our sin. The truth of the hymn we sing is a deeply settled reality for the converted soul:

Not what my hands have done
Can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne
Can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears
Can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.
Thy love to me, O God,
Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,

And set my spirit free.²

And so, the Holy Spirit must strip us of all pretension, disclose the reality of our corruption, that all our so-called righteousnesses are as dirty rags—filthy, defiled, disgusting, all of which warrants God’s wrath, not His favor. We must come to be as Isaiah, who wrote of himself and his people,

But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away. (Isa. 64:6)

The Lord Jesus sought to reveal this truth before the people He publicly addressed. He had declared to the religious leaders of Jerusalem, “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:28). We also read of another occasion in which He spoke to the crowds.

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ ¹³And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14).

The apostle Paul was self-righteous before his conversion, but the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that all of his self-righteous achievements had blinded him to the person of Christ and salvation through Him alone apart from his own achievements. He therefore cast away any and all sense of self-worth or meritorious achievement.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

⁷But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:2-11)

The Holy Spirit must reveal to the sinner the depths of his sin and of his total inability to bring remedy to himself through his desires and efforts, through his prayers and devotion, through the follies and foolishness of prescriptions of ignorant and errant men. **Charles Spurgeon** (1832-1894) wrote of this important work of God’s grace in a soul to bring him to salvation. Here he was speaking of weak and ineffectual preaching which failed to see souls converted:

² “Not What My Hands Have Done”, written by Horatius Bonar, 1861.

These people do not get a true healing because they do not know the disease under which they are suffering; they are never truly clothed because nothing is done towards stripping them. In many ministries, there is not enough of probing the heart and arousing the conscience by the revelation of man's alienation from God, and by the declaration of the selfishness and the wickedness of such a state. Men need to be told that, except divine grace shall bring them out of their enmity to God, they must eternally perish; and they must be reminded of the sovereignty of God, that He is not obliged to bring them out of this state, that He would be right and just if He left them in such a condition, that they have no merit to plead before Him, and no claims upon Him, but that if they are to be saved, it must be by grace, and by grace alone. The preacher's work is to throw sinners down in utter helplessness, that they may be compelled to look up to Him who alone can help them.³

And so, in the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of righteousness, He must show the sinner that he is unrighteous and has no way to attain to righteousness apart from embracing the gospel. The Scriptures declare both in the Old and New Testaments, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10)

But the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of righteousness must also convince the sinner of this reality:

II. The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of the true righteousness of Jesus Christ alone.

The Holy Spirit must teach and convince the sinner that Jesus Christ is the only truly and completely righteous man that has lived. This truth, of course, is made clear and declared openly in many ways and at different times in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus was fully obedient and conformed to the law of God, keeping it fully and perfectly throughout life. He was actively obedient in His intentional conformity to the law of God. He was passively obedient in that His faithful commitment to speak and live according to the law of God resulted in His death. He achieved a righteousness for himself above and beyond what any and every other man had ever aspired to or sought to acquire. John the apostle had written,

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.
And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, *Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2:1).

There were witnesses during the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus that had declared His righteousness. The fact that the opposers of Jesus had to round up false witnesses displays the fact that they could find no unrighteousness in Him. And it was at the crucifixion that a Roman officer made a declaration of Christ's righteousness. "So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'" (Luke 23:47).

But the main cause or ground of our knowing of the righteousness of Christ was declared by our Lord to His apostles in John 16:10. He told them that the Holy Spirit would convict the world "*of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more.*" As one once declared of these words:

Because He has gone to the Father. He is ascended into the presence of God. And how did the Father receive Him? We are told in the 110th Psalm. A door is opened in heaven, and we are suffered to hear the very words with which God receives His Son: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." So, then, God did not send Him back, as one who had not obeyed perfectly enough. God did not forbid Him His presence, as one unworthy to be accepted; but God highly exalted Him-looked upon Him as worthy of much honour-worthy of a seat on the throne at His right hand. Oh! How plain that Christ is accepted with the Father!-How plain that His righteousness is most lovely and all divine in the sight of God the Father!⁴

³ From Spurgeon's excellent book, *The Soul Winner*.

⁴ Robert M'Cheyne, sermon: "The Conviction of Righteousness."

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ by His Father, God declared that Jesus was righteous, that He was in a real, vital, everlasting relationship with His Father, that He indeed was and is righteous. The resurrection of Jesus Christ by God the Father was the divine vindication that Jesus Christ had suffered and experienced an unjust death. But because Jesus Christ was without sin, death could not hold Him. God the Father could not, He would not, allow His holy One to continue in the grave. God the Father raised Him from the dead, caused Him to ascend, and then seated Him on His throne in heaven ruling forever over all of creation.

But there is a third truth of which the Holy Spirit must convince the sinner in bringing him to experience conversion unto Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of the gift of righteousness of Christ is available for sinners.

III. The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of the gift of righteousness of Christ is available for sinners.

The Holy Spirit must convict the sinner of the truthfulness of the free gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul wrote of the gift of righteousness that God confers upon believing sinners.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of *the gift of righteousness* will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:12-19)

This faith in the gift of the righteousness of Christ must be a faith alone in Christ alone. Faith in Christ plus any other means or manner accompanying the work of Christ on behalf of sinners is not saving faith. Paul was greatly concerned regarding the salvation of people in the churches of Galatia. He declared to them, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you" (Gal. 4:19f). What was the cause of his concern? They were being taught by false teachers that there was something more than faith alone in Christ alone to become justified before God. They were told they must have faith in Christ, but only when that faith is in conjunction with keeping the law of Moses could they obtain salvation. Paul declared to them,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ²Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

⁷You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in you, in the Lord,

that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. (Gal. 4:1-10)

There are many who claim to believe on Christ for salvation. But if you inquire of their understanding you will discover that they are adding some other work to their faith in Christ. This sets them outside of God's saving work. They may say, "Yes, you are to believe in Christ, and we do so! But you also must believe in the Blessed Virgin, pray the rosary, go to confession, be baptized by Rome, and submit to the authority of the pope in order to be saved." That is heretical doctrine that renders Christ of no benefit to them. Faith in Jesus Christ alone brings to the soul the gift of righteousness, the blessing and privilege to be in a right relationship with God.

But there is a fourth spiritual truth of which the Holy Spirit must convince the sinner in order to bring him to salvation.

IV. The Holy Spirit must convince the sinner that the gift of Christ's righteousness is imputed to him upon his faith alone in Christ.

There is a need for the sinner to believe that the Lord will justify him to if he but believes God's promise of the gospel. Why would one even hesitate to embrace Christ alone for salvation? Do you think yourself too wicked? Do you think that you need to prepare yourself before you come? You will perish in your sin, if you follow that course. You must come to Christ as you are. If you think that you must clean yourself up before coming to Him, you are sadly and tragically deluded. Christ came into the world to save sinners, not those who think that there is some measure of righteousness that they have obtained. No, you are to cast your soul upon Christ alone for He alone is righteous. And praise to God that those who believe on Him are declared, regarded, and treated as righteous as Jesus Christ Himself. Why would anyone doubt, hesitate, procrastinate? Let go. Abandon any hope in any other means or method. Believe on Jesus Christ alone.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) did well in summing up the substance of our Lord's words that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of righteousness, for I go to My Father and you will see Me no more:

Of Christ's righteousness communicated to us for our justification and salvation; that everlasting righteousness which Messiah was to bring in (Dan. 9:24). Now, *First*, the Spirit shall convince men of this righteousness. Having by convictions of sin shown them their need of a righteousness, lest this should drive them to despair He will show them where it is to be had, and how they may, upon their believing, be acquitted from guilt, and accepted as righteous in God's sight. It was hard to convince those of this righteousness that *went about to establish their own* (Rom. 10:3), but the Spirit will do it. *Secondly*, Christ's ascension is the great argument proper to convince men of this righteousness: *I go to the Father, and, as an evidence of My welcome with Him, you shall see Me no more*. If Christ had left any part of His undertaking unfinished, He had been sent back again; but now that we are sure He is *at the right hand of God*, we are sure of being justified through Him.

We have one more truth of which the Lord declared that the Holy Spirit conveys and convinces the world in order to conversion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus had declared, "when He has come, He will convict the world... of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." We will address this next time, Lord willing.
