

Biblical Keyword - Conviction

To know the Biblical keywords concerning conversion is extremely important. Then I do not mean to know this with the mind, but also with our heart. Has that not to do with our eternal destination? Then we must know that we are indeed saved. What does belong to true conversion? What does someone experience? With a difficult word this is: the experimental knowledge of a child of God. That sounds weighty. But if we understand what it means, it is quite simple. Experimental knowledge is to experience what God works in someone's heart. Some do not like 'experience' or 'experimental preaching.' One believes that it is too much focused on man. It is 'man and his experiences.' Another fears that his spiritual experiences do not correspond. However, it is impossible that one will be saved without such experiences. Even as it is impossible that a sick person will be healed without any experience of this process. If that is the case, we should surely doubt the truth of this process. Another fence is that it is essential that this experience *does correspond with what is found in Scripture*. Some are justly afraid for unbiblical experiences. All kinds of mystical experiences that are not in the Bible. Further, these experiences have to have a link with the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. For the person it has to be about the Lord Jesus, and not about his own experiences. That protects from something that is focused on man.

Elements of the true Conversion

Now the questions arises: what does one experience in conversion? For this we use various terms. A fundamental basis we find in the letter to the Romans: predestination, calling, justification, and glorification (Rom. 8:29-30). I want to use the following order of these terms:

Keyword	Timeline	Description
conviction	Process	Knowing his sinful heart and lifestyle
calling	Moment	Words of Scripture or the sermon speak
regeneration	Moment	Receiving of new spiritual life
faith	Moment/Process	Trusting in Jesus as the only Savior of sin
justification	Moment	Acquitted from sin before God and right to eternal life
conversion	Process	Turn from sin and turn to God
sanctification	Process	Process of renewing of a man
glorification	Process	Man is made sinless and perfectly glorifying God

Perhaps these are difficult terms. In the coming articles that will hopefully become clear. Do notice that these terms are cannot be received "separately." It is impossible that someone is born again, but knows nothing of sanctification. If God converts a person, he will receive everything. Also, some terms are linked to each other more strongly than others. They take place at the same time. I have made this clear with various colors. Things that happen at the same moment have the same color. Still I have made conversion and sanctification separate from justification. Why? They commence at the same time, but the first two are two processes that continue. We are going to discuss the first term: conviction.

Conviction

Why is conviction of sin necessary? What does then happen? And, what is its purpose?

Its necessity

The necessity of conviction is due to the *problem of man*. Each person is sinful. Some live in sin. They steal, curse, are drunken or use narcotic substances. They do not reckon with God. Others are

religious and outwardly righteous. They go to church, pray, read their Bible and believe that God exist. However, the main issue is that this man does not realize that he is deadly ill. At its core man is dead. Spiritually dead. This 'sickness' tears him down until he dies. He is on his way to eternal damnation. There he receives his full punishment for his sinful life. He will always suffer pain and feel remorse. But the natural man realizes this not. He feels that all is well. The person who lives in sin has pleasure. He drinks and feasts it away. But does that voice of his conscience never speak? Does he truly have rest? The religious man 'does' quite well in his life. Does he not pray? Does he not read the Bible? He does all he can to get into heaven. Would God then not be merciful? In this way he lulls himself to sleep. Sometimes his conscience speaks, "This can never be right?" But when he sees what all what he does, he is quite satisfied. What then is necessary? That God convicts a man of his sinful life and heart. He must know that he is in deep trouble. He has to know that he has no means of his own for his salvation. He can never fulfill the punishment for sin. He cannot pay for it. What is conviction? That man is going to realize: without Gods deliverance I am lost. Is conviction necessary? Some argue that one can do without, "If a man flees to Jesus Christ, he is saved." Is that correct? No. What is the issue? Without conviction, a sinner will never seek salvation. He will never need payment for the punishment of his sin. Therefore, conviction is absolutely necessary. Without conviction there will be no conversion. "But," one will say, "does this then not become a condition to come to Jesus Christ for redemption?" No. The Bible is clear: each person may, and even must, come to Jesus for salvation. But the issue is that he does not come, except that he sees his sin.

Experience in Conviction

What does one feel at conviction? Does God make this person afraid? Does he suddenly have to do something that he does not want? That is sometimes the image. God would then force a person to repent, but he does not want it. No! That is not how it works in true conviction. That begins with *mourning over sin*. It contains the word "to mourn." He does mourn. Over what? He is sorry over all the wrong that he did. He is pricked in his heart (Acts 2:37). It feels painful. It is the pain as if a loved one died. Then his question is, "Did I do such wrong? Why have I done this?" But it goes deeper. It is not only about what he *does*, but about who he *is*. His heart is wrong. True mourning comes from the heart. Then a person does not want to have it different. He desires to weep. That comes with tears. This can differ per person. The one cries within. The other makes his pillow wet with his tears day and night. And still, there is a sweetness in this conviction. As the Bible says, it is a "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10). How is this possible? Because of love.

A second mark of true conviction, and the most important one, is *love*. It comes from the love towards God. He does not just see that he is wrong. No. He has done evil against a good doing God. He cared for him always. He transgressed against Him. He has sinned against love. He stepped on the heart of God. That makes this mourning so bitter. He feels that he has done wrong. A good example is a child that suddenly realizes that he has pained his mother. Then he does not think it is wrong to shed tears about that. No. Does it not concern his beloved mother? He has pained her. In the same way this is true spiritually. When someone gets true knowledge of sin, he has pained God. Much pain. He sees that God is angry about this. With a difficult word we call this "wroth." He has to make things right again. He has to come into a right relationship with God. He is guilty. But is it ever going to be solved? This has to be paid for. First, he tries this in many different ways. He flees sin. He prays. He is going to read the Bible. He sheds tears. But all these things will not help to pay. If this truly comes from God, a sinner can *not* rest in it. He has to have a solution. But this cannot be found in himself.

Another mark is an *aversion of sin*. This is inseparably linked with true mourning over sin. If one truly feels pain, he no longer wants to sin. No, this is not as Satan says a 'have to.' It is not a 'chain around his neck.' That is not how God operates. But this aversion comes from his heart. Let me give an example. Someone always ate spoiled meat. He does not recognize it, because his nose is not working well. One day his nose is healed. Now he notices the stench of rotten meat. Does he then not

get an aversion of this meat? Certainly! What is the difference? Is that the meat? No. But his sense of smell works rightly. In the same way spiritually. His spiritual 'nose' works again as it should be. Because of this he 'smells' the stinky smell of sin. Therefore, he is willing to separate himself from it. This is what Scripture says too, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. 110:3). But separation from sin does not happen overnight. God does it step by step. For a sinner it can be a strong wrestling to improve his life. It becomes a strife. What must he learn? That he is unable to fight against sin by his own power. He needs Another for this.

Purpose of Conviction

Finally, conviction in and of itself is *not sufficient* for salvation. It is not a purpose of itself. The same is true when a patient cannot be happy when a doctor only tells him that he is deadly ill. It *must* be more than that. That is for me a deep concern about the conservative wing. Some think it is sufficient if one only has knowledge of sin. That is at times visible in the preaching. Gladly, sin is preached. However, Christ is absent. I must say: that is fatal! What is necessary? Let us think about the example of a doctor. The patient needs to know what the cure is. He has to make use of this means. Only then healing will take place. That is spiritually true too. A sinner *must* get to know the Lord Jesus Christ. It is necessary to flee unto Him. That is also what our Dort fathers argue. Sinners will only be saved by the gospel of the Lord Jesus.¹ This is what the annotations on the Dutch Statenvertaling say, "[A mourning that] is pleasing God and brings the sinner to God; namely when the heart of the sinner is truly sorrow over this that He has angered God his Father by sin, *with a trust of its forgiveness by Jesus Christ*, accompanied by a firm intention to flee from sin" (Annotations on 2 Cor. 7:10). True knowledge of sin always has a purpose. It causes that someone is convicted in such a way about his sin and guilt that he needs the Lord Jesus as the only Savior.

In summary, we could say that conviction of sin is necessary. When that does not happen, one will never come to the Lord Jesus. True conviction has three elements: there is true sorrow from the heart. It comes forth from love, and the result is a fleeing from sin. The knowledge of sin is not something on its own, but Gods true work causes that someone comes to Jesus Christ. Only in that way one gets saved. Therefore, a number of questions that we need to ask ourselves. Do we know this sorrow over sin? Do we see that sin pains a good doing God? Do we try, with all shortcomings, to flee from sin? If that is not the case, let us make haste with our repentance! How? Ask God that He will show you your own heart. He will certainly fulfill that wish. Confess all your sins, no exceptions. Think about yourself in light of the Ten Commandments. Ponder about the commandments one by one. How often have you transgressed them? Meditate about the goodness of God. How often have you stepped on His heart? Finally, realize that the knowledge of sin itself, the tears, and prayer, will not save you. This is only possible by the sole Savior and Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ!

¹ "What therefore neither the light of nature, nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old, as under the New Testament" (Canons of Dort, Head 3/4, paragraph 6).