

# HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY IN CONVERSION

by Walton Weaver

The fact that God has committed the gospel to earthen vessels is sufficient proof that He has chosen to convert the world through human agency. In the first century of the Christian age when the truth was yet in the process of being revealed and made known, souls were saved through the power of God, but it was through God's power as it was manifested through the preached message, not through dreams, visions, tongue speaking, angels, or any other miraculous happening. In that early stage when God was revealing His will through inspired apostles and prophets, miracles were necessary in order that God's will might be both revealed and confirmed (1 Cor. 2:6-13; Eph. 3:3-5; Mk. 16:17-20), but once God's will had been completely revealed and made known, the miraculous element was no longer needed, and it therefore ceased (1 Cor. 13:10). Even during the age of miracles souls were saved by the preached message and not by any miracles that were required to reveal and confirm the message.

Someone may ask, "Are you saying that people are not saved by visions today, or that miraculous tongues are not a sign that one has been saved, or that people do not learn God's will through dreams, or by the Holy Spirit or angels?" That's right; that's exactly what I'm saying. In fact, I am saying that even in the days of the apostles when miracles were needed, souls were not saved through miracles. It was not through dreams, angels, tongue speaking, a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or anything like that that souls were saved. It was through the preached word that was revealed and confirmed by miracles. And since it was through the preaching of the word of God then, and it is through the preaching of the word of God today that souls are saved, God has in the past, He does in the present, and he will in the future save souls through human instrumentality.

Let me illustrate from the book of Acts, which is a history of the beginning and development of the early church. This book records several examples of conversion, and all of these conversions took place during the time that God's will was still being revealed, and therefore during the time that miracles were needed.

## **The Eunuch**

Turn in your New Testaments to Acts 8:26-39. Was the eunuch in this story told directly by the Holy Spirit what he must do to be saved? Read the passage carefully before you answer. The Holy Spirit did not speak to the eunuch. He spoke only to Philip, the evangelist. Why did not the Spirit go directly to the eunuch and preach the gospel to him? Because God committed the gospel to earthen vessels who would preach the truth to lost souls. Please note that Philip began at the Scripture that the eunuch was reading and preached Jesus to him. That was God's way. He saves lost souls through human instrumentality.

Next question: Did the angel of the Lord mentioned in this passage speak directly to the eunuch? No, he spoke only to Philip, the evangelist. The role of the angel and the Holy Spirit in this example of conversion was to bring the eunuch, a lost man, and Philip, the evangelist, together so Philip could preach Jesus to him. This is saving a lost soul through human agency, not through a miracle. The miracles in the story served another purpose.

### **Cornelius**

You may read of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11. In this story an angel did appear to Cornelius, but please note carefully what the angel said to him. Did he tell him what to do to be saved? No, he told him to send for Peter. Why send for Peter? Why didn't the angel himself tell Cornelius what to do to be saved? Because "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter "who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14). The fact that Peter rather than the angel would tell this man what to do to be saved illustrates the fact that God uses human agency in the conversion of souls.

The Holy Spirit also had a part in the conversion of Cornelius. What was it? Did the Holy Spirit say anything to Cornelius? No, He spoke to Peter and told Peter what to do. Why did not the Holy Spirit go directly to Cornelius and speak to Cornelius the same words that Peter spoke to him? Because "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The words that Peter spoke to Cornelius were revealed and made known to him by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit said absolutely nothing to this man about what he must do to be saved. Nothing is said about the Holy Spirit enlightening Cornelius' mind, or removing any kind of inherited depravity.

Someone may ask, "But doesn't Acts 10:44-46, which says that the Holy Spirit fell on these Gentiles, and Acts 11:15-18, which says He fell on them as on the apostles at the beginning, show that these people were saved by the Holy Spirit?" Do they? Read these passages again and see if they say any such thing as that. Where do these verses say that these Gentiles were saved by the Holy Spirit falling upon them? Now notice: The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter "who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14). Where are we told that Cornelius would be, or that he was, saved by the Holy Spirit falling on him? We learn what the purpose of the falling of the Holy Spirit on these Gentiles was by the effect it produced on the others who were present. We are told in Acts 10:45 that "those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also." The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles to convince the Jews that the Gentiles were gospel subjects now just as the Jews had been since the day of Pentecost. But they, like all others, were saved by words preached to them by Peter. Acts 11:18 brings us to the same conclusion.

The effect on the Jews who had gone to Cornelius' house with Peter was that they were convinced that "God had also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." But He did

not grant repentance to life by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them-that was simply an outward sign to the Jews that God was now accepting them on the same terms with the Jews. The terms were made known to the Gentiles through the words Peter preached to them. Peter asked, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:47-48). The only ones who might be inclined to forbid water to the Gentiles would be the Jews. But Peter shows that God has demonstrated by pouring the Holy Spirit upon them that the Jews are not to forbid water to them any longer. So God did not save the Gentiles by this miracle, He simply proved something by it.

### **Saul of Tarsus**

Now consider the case of Saul of Tarsus. We read of his conversion in Acts 9:1-19 and 22:1-16. Christ Himself first appeared to Saul, but like the angel and the Holy Spirit in the cases of the eunuch and Cornelius, He did not tell Saul what to do to be saved, even though Saul specifically asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus told him to go into the city and there it would be told him what he must do.

Who told Saul what to do? It was Ananias, an earthen vessel (Acts 22:16). Why? That is God's way. It simply was not, and is not, God's will that Jesus, a heavenly vessel since his ascension into heaven, tell directly any man what to do to be saved. God converts the world through human instrumentality. It has never been done (even in the age of miracles), and it shall never be done, in any other way in this gospel age.

Do not expect an angel to come to you and tell you what to do to be saved. An angel could not and would not tell you. Do not expect the Holy Spirit to tell you directly. He could not and would not tell you. Do not expect Jesus Christ to come to you in a vision, or a dream, or some other unusual and miraculous way and tell you what to do to be saved. He could not and He would not tell you. Why? Because "we have this treasure in earthen vessels."

Now someone may well ask, "Do you mean to say that God does not have the power, or ability, to work in conversion except through human instrumentality, or human agency?" No, I do not mean that God lacks the power, or that He lacks the ability, to work in conversion independently of human agency. The question is not whether God can, or whether He has the power or ability, to tell someone what to do to be saved through a vision, a dream, an angel, the Holy Spirit, or even by the Lord Himself. The question is, does He? We have seen in the cases studied that even in the age of miracles He did not. It is simply not God's will to make his will known except through human agency.

When I hear someone say that God told him something independently of what God has said in Scripture, I know he is not telling me the truth. Now I am not saying that that person knew better, or that he was dishonest when he said it. I am simply saying that he

ought to have known better, and that his honesty ought to lead him to make an honest inquiry as to the meaning of this statement: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."