



## **Jeremiah 31:18**

New International Version of the Holy Bible

# **CONVERTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**“You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.” Jeremiah 31:18**

When trying to describe the Holy Ghost to his friend, a man once said: *“The Holy Ghost is something which just gets into you and makes you feel good.”* Note that he was of the opinion that the Spirit was something, not someone. He obviously was confused about the Holy Spirit.

We Lutherans have been accused of not knowing anything about the Holy Spirit or at least not stressing his work. Maybe we don't know as much about the Holy Spirit as we ought. Of this I'm sure – if we want to know who the Holy Spirit is, and what he does, and what blessings he gives, we need to go back to the Holy Scriptures (*the Bible*) in order to find more information. That's why we have been preaching a series of sermons on the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.

As you know the Article begins with the words: *“I believe in the Holy Ghost.”* Another name for the Holy Ghost is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is no new invention, nor has he been discovered only recently. He has been there from eternity and Christians have been blessed by him throughout the entire history of the Christian church. The Spirit's work is tremendously important. True, if the Father hadn't created us, we wouldn't be alive; if Jesus Christ hadn't died for our sins, we wouldn't be redeemed; but if the Holy Spirit hadn't done his work, none of us would be

worshipping in church today nor would any of us be saved. His great work is leading us to faith in Jesus Christ or converting us through the Gospel.

## **I. Who is the Holy Spirit**

Before we can appreciate the Holy Spirit's work, we have to know who he is. To a degree his title "*Holy Spirit*" describes him. He is a spirit, which means that he has no body but that he has a mind, a will, and powers of his own. The Holy Spirit is real and he can think, act and serve just as well as the Father and the Son. He is holy, which means that he isn't like the evil angels or the devil that are given to deception and always at work trying to hurt and destroy us. His intentions and efforts are always for our good and our blessing.

Our Lutheran Confessions state: "*He is true God with the Father and the Son.*" He is not someTHING. He is someONE, some One truly great and able to bless. According to the Holy Scriptures, just like the Father and the Son, he is almighty, everywhere present, all-knowing, eternal, just, merciful, and holy.

As human beings we can't comprehend the mystery of the Holy Trinity. We simply believe what the Holy Scriptures teach and sing with joy:

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise him, all creatures here below;**

**Praise him above, ye heavenly host;**

**Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost**

## **II. The Spirit's Greatest Work**

In one sermon we can't begin to speak of all that the Holy Spirit does nor of all the wonderful blessings he brings us. Today we want to address

ourselves to his greatest work, namely, to his work of leading us to faith in Christ Jesus. This work has been called by various names. Our text speaks of it as a turning around or conversion. The prophet Jeremiah says: **“Restore me, and I will return . . .” Jeremiah 31:18**

I will give an example of what a conversion means. In the Arlington Cemetery, in Washington DC, there is a monument dedicated to the *“Unknown Soldier”*. Day after day a soldier is assigned to stand watch in front of this tomb. At regular intervals he strides down the path in front of the tomb, comes to a sudden halt at the end, makes a complete turn-about-face and marches in the opposite direction. This story illustrates to us what a conversion is - it is a turn-about-face. By nature we fear God, distrust him, want to go our own way and want to get away from God. In conversion we are turned around so that we love God, trust him, want to go his way and want to be near him.

After a series of evangelistic services a man said: *“I don’t curse anymore. I gave \$500 for a new hospital yesterday. I regularly visit my mother and others in the local rest home. I have been converted.”* Maybe he was converted and maybe he wasn’t. A true conversion involves an INNER change which is a complete change of mind, attitude, and heart toward God. Such a conversion is told in scripture in the story of the *“Prodigal Son”* or the *“Lost Son”*. The lost son didn’t like his father or his father’s house. He asked for his inheritance and went into a foreign country. He spent it all in riotous living and before long he found himself among the swine, hungry and forsaken. Then, the Bible says: **“. . . he came to his senses.” Luke 15:17** His attitude toward his father and his father’s house was changed. He said within himself: **“I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you . . . . So he got up and went to his father.” Luke 15:18 and 20** So conversion is a complete change of

attitude toward our Father in heaven – a change of heart so that fear is turned into trust, hate into love.

Conversion involves trusting Jesus Christ for our salvation. Changing one's way of life is not necessarily a conversion or rebirth. Leading a decent civilized life, suddenly quitting evil behavior and doing good, does not prove that a man has been converted. Conversion involves sin and grace, confession of sin and trust in Christ as Savior. Someone said: *"Hell is going to be filled with good people."* Only those *"good people"* will be saved who realize that in God's sight they aren't good, that they need a Savior, and that Jesus Christ is that Savior. When the jailer at Philippi asked: **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30** St. Paul's answer was clear and simple: **"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31** Jesus Christ is the touchstone. **"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 3:36**

### **III. How Does the Holy Spirit Convert Us?**

To that question Luther, in the words of our Catechism, replies: *"He calls me by the Gospel, enlightens me with his gifts."*

**1. He calls me by the Gospel.** Christ himself tells the story of the man who made a great supper. When the fatlings were killed and the meal prepared, he sent his servants to tell the guests: **" . . . everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." Matthew 22:4** The application is obvious: the Host is Christ. The Great Supper which Christ prepared is not barbeque, cakes, and noodles but something far more precious, namely: forgiveness of sin, peace with God, hope, joy, a new life with new powers here and an eternal and blessed life in heaven. As the servants called the guests, so the Holy Spirit now calls us to the banquet. The

Father planned this banquet in eternity. In the fullness of time Christ came and prepared it. The Holy Spirit now calls us: *"Come for all things are now ready."*

Luther rejected the false notion of the enthusiasts who, like some charismatics of today, held that the Holy Spirit still comes in dreams, visions, or revelations not found in the Scriptures. Luther instead insisted that the Spirit calls through the GOSPEL found in the Holy Scriptures. This is, of course, what the Bible itself teaches.

St. Paul wrote: **"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."** **Romans 10:17** Again: **"... in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."** **I Corinthians 4:15** Peter reminded the Christians: **"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of Gospel."** **I Peter 1:23**

The Gospel is the means of grace, the pipeline through which the Holy Spirit brings us the water of life. New York City has a population of 10,000,000 people. Do you know where they get their water? There are huge reservoirs in the mountains north of the city which are filled with the melting snows of spring and the rains of the summer. This water, however, would be of no practical value if they didn't have pipelines which channel this water into the city and into the homes. Without these pipelines the people would all die of thirst. So, in the spiritual realm, Christ through his suffering and resurrection filled heaven with the living water of life, which we call salvation. The Gospel (*found in the Bible*) is the pipeline through which the Holy Ghost brings these eternal blessings into our homes and lives. Without it we would all die spiritually.

The Gospel is the pipeline. That's why Christian parents are so concerned about teaching the Bible, that part of it which tells of Jesus

Christ. Christian parents want their children to know these Bible teachings. You often hear parents saying that they are teaching their children to live right and do right at home. I am confident that they do this. However, this will never save their children's souls unless they also teach the Bible stories of Christ's life, crucifixion, and resurrection. The children should be taught Bible passages which assure them that by believing in Christ they have everlasting life.

The Gospel is the pipeline. That's why Christians are so concerned about bringing the Gospel, the Good News to those who are yet unconverted among us. That's why Christians bring a share of their income for missions so that the unsaved in other countries might also hear what the Bible teaches about Christ and be saved.

**2. He enlightens me with His gifts.** *"Enlighten"* means to give light, to open the eyes of a person so that they can see. Before conversion, people by nature are in spiritual darkness for they don't know themselves and they don't really know God. These people don't know the way to heaven and In fact they don't even know that there is such a place. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit removes the spiritual cataracts from human eyes to reveal their true condition. For the first time they see themselves as lost sinners. They also see that God is a God who loves and forgives sins. The enlightened person sees salvation as a gift which comes not by works but by faith. The new believer sees life as a pilgrimage which leads to a home in heaven.

*"Enlighten"* means even more. It means leading a person not only to know the truth but also to believe it. This is the greatest problem: that even after hearing and knowing the truth, the unconverted still won't believe it. To such an individual God's love (*God's own Son dying in a person's place and rising again*) sounds like foolishness. When St. Paul spoke to the philosophers in Athens they heard him gladly, for they were

always interested in some new philosophy. But when St. Paul spoke of Jesus and the resurrection they murmured: **“What is this babbler trying to say?” Acts 17:18** Again, when St. Paul, defending himself before King Agrippa and Festus, preached of Christ’s suffering and resurrection, Festus shouted: **“you are out of your mind, Paul! . . . your great learning is driving you insane.” Acts 26:24** That’s why we say in Luther’s explanation of this article: *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel and enlightened me with his gifts.”*

Conversion involves two steps: Knowing the truth and believing the truth (*obeying it*). Christ himself said: **“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” Luke 11:28** To believe, obey, to treasure and ponder are all a part of a living faith brought about by conversion: **“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Luke 2:19**

Are you a Christian? Give thanks to the Spirit for he converted you. Are you a Christian? Don’t look down on those who are not for you didn’t convert yourself. Are you a Christian? Spread the Good News that Jesus died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Through this message the Holy Spirit can convert the unconverted.

Have you been sick, so sick that you had to go to a hospital? Usually there are three things involved in accomplishing a cure. The doctor, after diagnosing your case, writes out the prescription. The pharmacist fills that prescription and the nurse gives you the medicine. So there are three in heaven who affect your spiritual cure: 1. The Father wrote you the prescription which involved the suffering and resurrection of his Son 2. Jesus filled the prescription by dying for your sins on Good Friday and rising again Easter morning. 3. The Holy Spirit gives you the medicine which is the Gospel. It’s all God’s work from beginning to end.



*“If conversion is the work of the Spirit,” someone asks, “why is it that some are saved and others lost even though they might go to the same Sunday school, the same confirmation class, and the same church?”* The Bible assures: **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9** Even though a doctor prescribes good medicine, the Pharmacist fills the prescription, and the nurse brings it to the patient - the patient can refuse to take it and die. If God wrote a prescription for a person’s salvation, Jesus filled the prescription, and the Holy Ghost offers it to all who hear the Gospel – yet a person can obstinately reject it and perish in hell. The Pharisees did it in the days of Christ and some are doing it today. I pray that no one who is reading this message today will do this!

Blessed are you who believe. Do you trust in Christ as your Savior? Thank the Holy Spirit because he is the One who called you by the Gospel and gave you faith in Christ as Savior.

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost  
Amen**