

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

CONVERSION

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Luke 22:32

That prayer which the LORD taught to HIS disciples in Matthew 6:9-13 is often called the LORD's Prayer. In reality this is just a model prayer which HE set forth as an illustration of such things as those who call upon the name of the LORD will be found desiring. Many have made the recitation of it to be little more than the vain repetition of the heathen much like the rosary of the Roman's. True prayer is not found in forms and eloquent recitations of learned phrases handed down by one generation to the other. Children may be taught religion by form prayers but they cannot be taught to pray by these little poems, however cute and easily committed to memory. True prayer is that which is prompted in the heart by the SPIRIT of GOD. *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."* (Rom 8:26) It is this prayer that is always heard because it is according to the will of GOD. *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."* (1John 5:14) This prayer is not contrived or "learned" by rote but is the work of GOD in the heart of HIS people.

The LORD's prayer is mentioned here in the passage before us. (see Luke 22:32) HE revealed that HE had prayed for Peter. At the time that the LORD told him this, Peter probably thought such a prayer to be unnecessary and something of an oddity, because he was still imagining in his own mind how strong he would be in the face of any adversity which might arise out of his discipleship. (see Luke 22:33) But, Oh the glorious thought that must have entered Peter's mind sometime later as HE contemplated the mercy of this statement. Something ultimately took place in Peter which he could neither produce nor foresee. He was "converted".

Much is often made of this word "convert" and many go to great lengths to try to define it as some experience or happening which takes place once in a person's life never again to be repeated. It has become synonymous with the word "saved" in the current religious vernacular. It is often viewed as a "possession" which one can take charge of. I have heard some speak of their "conversion" as if that was the ultimate benefit for the children of GOD. Yet it appears that what the LORD was describing here to Peter was not the first nor only work of GOD in him. The LORD had already told Peter that the confession that he had made saying *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Mat 16:16) was the evidence of divine revelation and not the understanding of the flesh.

The greek word "epistrepho" translated here as "converted" appears in the scriptures 39 times and is translated "turn, turn about, return,, or turn again" 29 times. Conversion seems to be somewhat synonymous with repentance which is a constant work that is taking place in the children of GOD because of the presence of the SPIRIT of GOD in them. Peter was evidently quickened by the SPIRIT and taught who CHRIST was but was yet in need of

greater correction. The LORD chastens those whom HE loves and never has the rod of HIS correction been felt any keener than when Peter recalled the words of the LORD as the cock crew and he wept bitterly. (see Luke 22:60-62) But, Peter was not yet converted because repentance had not yet had its perfect work. *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* (Heb 12:11) Later when the LORD told the women at the tomb *"But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you."* (Mark 16:7), HE specifically told them to be sure that Peter was told because HE had an appointment with Peter wherein HE would apply the healing balm of comfort to Peter's troubled soul. In John 21:15-17 the LORD began the application of this powerful potion telling Peter, "feed my sheep", and then brought forth the evidence of its healing power on the day of Pentecost when indeed Peter "strengthened the brethren" as the HOLY GHOST came upon him. Who could declare that Peter was not converted. That man who stood before that assembly was not the same man who boasted of his willingness to die for the LORD, nor that cowered in fear at a young maid's question, nor even that one who had shed tears in the valley of Baca, yea even the valley of the shadow of death. Yet Peter's "conversion" was not yet complete, for Paul says *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."* (Gal 2:11) Peter needed to be "turned from" the error of Judaism which he had in a measure re-embraced.

Paul said, *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Phi 3:13-14) The work of CHRIST in the lives of HIS people is not yet finished but is a constant and current operation of the SPIRIT of GOD whereby HE is teaching them all things. We are being "changed" or turned by HIM. *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* (2Cor. 3:18) Even then, there is yet one "change" that awaits the sons of GOD which we have heretofore never experienced and so shall we ever be with the LORD. *"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."* (1Cor 15:51-53)

All of this takes place because the LORD has "prayed for us". HE said *"I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."* (John 17:14-19) HE specifically prayed here for HIS disciples but included all of HIS elect in the same prayer saying, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."* (John 17:20)

Oh the glory of it! JESUS CHRIST has prayed for us, HE who set the moon and stars in place and stretches out the heavens like a curtain has interceded in our behalf as a MAN taking upon HIMSELF our sin and guilt. Even more glorious is the fact that HE presently, in the current hour, ever lives to make intercession for HIS own in the very court of heaven. But this "intercession" is not carried out with groanings and the utterance of words, but by the very fact that HE is present at HIS FATHER's right hand. As Wesley wrote:

Five bleeding wounds HE bears, received on Calvary,
They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me.
Forgive him Oh forgive they cry, Forgive him Oh forgive they cry.
Nor let that ransomed sinner, die.