The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Repent and Be Converted

In Acts 3, we have Peter's second recorded sermon after the Holy Spirit fell on the Apostles in chapter 2. It came on the heels of the lame man being healed at the Temple.

In verse 19, Peter instructs his listeners as to what they need to do to have their "sins blotted out" and receive "times of refreshing from the Lord". The **NKJV** translates this verse as follows:

"**Repent therefore and be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord," **Acts 3:19 (NKJV)**

The way that this reads in the **NKJV**, it looks like conversion is a passive act. That is, it looks like conversion is something that happens to you rather than something that you actively do. However, that is not the idea that is expressed in the original Greek.

It seems that the **NKJV** simply followed the lead of the **KJV** here.

"**Repent ye therefore, and be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;" **Acts 3:19 (KJV)**

It is worth noting that several other translations render this in an active voice as seen in several examples below:

"**Repent ye therefore, and turn again**, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;" **(ASV)**

"**Repent therefore, and turn again**, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord," **(RSV)**

"**Therefore repent and return**, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;" **(NASB)**

"19 **Repent therefore, and turn back**, that your sins may be blotted out 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" **(ESV)** Note: the ESV breaks verses 19 and 20 differently than most translations.

"**Repent, then, and turn to God**, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord," **(NIV)**

These translations have good reason to render this in an active voice rather than a passive one, because that is how the original Greek is worded.

Barnes says the following in reference to the **KJV** translation of "and be converted":

"This expression conveys an idea not at all to be found in the original. It conveys the idea of *passivity,* BE *converted*, as if they were to yield to some foreign influence that they were now resisting. But the idea of being *passive* in this is not conveyed in the original word. The word means properly to *turn*; to return to a path from which one has gone astray; and then to turn away from sins, or to forsake them. It is a word used in a general sense to denote the whole *turning* to God…The expression, therefore, would have been more appropriately rendered '*repent*, and *turn*,'…*To be converted*

cannot be a matter of obligation, but *to turn to God* is the duty of every sinner [emphasis his]."

Gareth Reese gives the following comments on this translation:

"Unfortunately, in the KJV this word has been translated 'be converted'; i.e. the verb is given in the passive sense – and this has given some support to the Calvinistic concept that in conversion the individual sinner is wholly passive and that conversion is a miraculous act brought about by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It should be therefore noted that the verb (in the original) is an aorist ACTIVE [emphasis his] imperative, and indicates that the 'returning' is a responsibility that each individual man has."

Thus, the translations that render this in the passive voice are not true to the original language while those that render it in an active voice are.

There are a couple of other points that should be made about this verse:

First, this makes it clear that "to turn" is something more than "repentance". While repentance involves a change of mind, turning to God or turning back to God goes further than that. This leads us to the second thing that should be noted here.

Second, we must ask what it means to "turn" or "turn back" to God in this verse. Since this is a command, we must know what is meant and how to obey. The results of repenting and turning to God are too important to miss. We all need our sins to be blotted out, and we all need times of refreshing from the Lord. Peter's intention here is probably best seen by noticing the parallel between this verse and Acts 2:38. In that passage, Peter is also instructing his listeners as to how they might have their sins forgiven.

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" **Acts 2:38 (NKJV)**

Of course, Peter is not contradicting himself in these two verses. We see that these verses parallel each other wonderfully as we might expect. This parallel is shown below:

Acts 2:38	**Acts 3:19**
Repent	Repent
Be baptized	Turn to God
For the remission of sins	That your sins may be blotted out
Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit	Times of refreshing may come from the Lord

In both passages, there are two commands to be followed and two promises that are received as a result of obedience. It should be clear from this that the "times of refreshing from the Lord" is another way of referring to "the gift of the Holy Spirit". It should also be clear that "turning to God" is another way of saying "be baptized". In short, we turn to God by being baptized.