



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Turning to God

Many of today's so-called Christians glibly use the phrase "turning to God." They like it because it is generic enough for them to duck the issue of the necessity of immersion in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sins and for the receiving of the indwelling Spirit. But "turning to God" is a scriptural term, and it is important that the word of God itself define the meaning of that term. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, comments that the message had spread — throughout the congregations — that the Thessalonians had "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." They turned; how did they do that?

■ **Converted** — The King James Version and others often use the word *converted* instead of *turned*. But those words are synonyms; they basically mean the same thing. Example: Acts 3:19 in the KJV and NKJV says, "Repent and be converted." The NASB says, "Repent and return." The ESV says, "Repent and turn back." The NIV says, "Repent and turn to God." The NIV, as stated in its preface, is not a word-for-word translation, so the translators felt free to add the words "to God" which were not there in the original Greek text. The point is that repentance and conversion (turning) are necessary "that your sins may be wiped out." Thus, where turning or conversion fits in Acts 3:19, *immersion* fits in Acts 2:38. A person may only be spoken of as having been *converted* or having *turned* to the Lord if he has been properly immersed into Christ. *Conversion* occurs in *immersion*!

- **The Thessalonians turned** — The brethren in Thessalonica therefore "turned to God" at their immersions in Jesus' name. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians describes how in immersion a spiritual circumcision takes place. In Christ, he said, "you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11). When a person commits his first sin, this spiritual sheath called here "the body of the flesh" drops in place, and separates him from God. Until this is removed in immersion, the individual has no fellowship with God. Paul described it in somewhat different terms in writing to the brethren in Corinth, calling it a *veil which lies over their heart*. "It is removed," he averred, "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:14). A person enters into Christ at immersion (Romans 6:3). Hence, since turning occurs in immersion, Paul would say, "Whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:16). What does the inner man see when the veil, or the body of the flesh, is taken away? "But we all," affirms the apostle, "with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). When the Thessalonians turned to God, their inner man beheld the glory of King Jesus, shining in His radiance and seated on His throne.
- **To God from idols** — Paul, remembering the positive reception those who believed in the word of God gave him, also notes "how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The brethren, spiritually speaking, had to turn their backs on the idols they formerly worshiped, and in turning to God, their inner man beheld the glory of the risen Christ. The inner man was thus prostrate before the throne of the Almighty — worshipping — while the outer man of these brethren would be serving the great King.

There is only one living and true God; there is no substance at all to idols other than that of which men have been convinced. Through their immersions into Christ, these brethren turned to the Lord, were being transformed as the inner man beheld the Lord's glory, and they had fellowship with the blessed and only Father of all who is over all and through all. What blessed people these were!!

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