

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Pentecostal's “First Faith”

(Jerry Fite)

In the *Pentecostal Herald*, Nathaniel J. Wilson wrote an article on Faith. He set forth a “first faith” that “is felt” and “often transcends understanding.” The “first faith” is “enigmatic, intuited rather than learned.” This “first faith” is therefore something felt when one finds himself or herself drawn to God through intuition rather than the avenue of conscious reasoning. According to “Pastor” Wilson, this is “the initial conversion experience.” The believer then works outwardly from this experience to the final form of “the faith.”

Thinking one has a conversion experience apart from conscious reasoning is wrong. When the man born blind was healed by Jesus, his initial response was full of sound reasoning. Experiencing his new-found eye sight, he knew Jesus was “a prophet,” knowing that “if this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9:17, 33). He did not go along with the Jew’s assessment that Jesus was “a sinner” because he reasoned, “We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do His will, him He heareth” (John 9:31).

Later, Jesus came to this man saying, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” The man responded, “And who is He Lord, that I many believe on Him?” When Jesus identified Himself as the One, the man says, “Lord, I believe.” “The faith” was not the first response to Jesus’ miracle. However, the man’s first response to experiencing the miracle incorporated reasoning and understanding.

The response of the blind man underscores the divine purpose of miracles. They are described in the New Testament as “signs,” “wonders” and “powers” (Hebrews 2:4, Acts 2:22, Mark 16:20). Miracles create “wonder” in the observer, as he or she witnesses a “power” that could only come from God, which then “sign-i-fies” that the one doing the miracle is from God.

Experiencing the wonderment fostered by a miraculous act of undeniable Divine power, the man reasoned more clearly and logically than Jesus’ detractors. The miracle confirmed in a mind, actively engaged in reasoning, that Jesus was from God. He now had no problem in believing when Jesus claimed He was the Son of God.

When reading of the “conversion experience” of the Ethiopian eunuch, his “first faith” came when he reasoned from what he heard. He did not know to whom the passage recorded in Isaiah 53:7 was referring. Philip was sent by God, not to create some “first faith” unexplainable feeling, but to reveal the gospel message to the trusted officer of the queen’s court. Philip began from this passage in Isaiah and “preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). The eunuch learned from the gospel message that he needed to be baptized, and with new found understanding, he was ready to confess: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

“First faith” occurs with a reasoning mind engaged. Yes, wonderment occurred in the face of miracles, but reasoning from the “sign” of the miracles drove first-century men and women to “first faith.” You can have a shocking, even exalting experience without reasoning, but you cannot put your trust in someone without reasoning and understanding. From the beginning of Christianity unto today “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” (Romans 10:17).