

Conversion

Intro: 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

If you were to take an unbeliever to a doctor for a physical examination and have the doctor check him out from top to bottom, a physical per say, he would fill out a report on this person's physical condition and give you his certified opinion on the state of this man. Now if you bring him back some time later after he has become a believer and do the same examination a second time the doctor might say "he is exactly the same as before, nothing has changed with maybe the exception of having a bigger smile," so what has changed? If you told the doctor that "before he was dead to sin and now he is alive to Christ because now he was converted, and he has put off the old man and put on the new man and because of that he will live forever more" . If the doctor is a Christian he will know what you are talking about and praise God for the event, if not he will look at you and say you are weird and give you the number to the closest psychiatrist because he would argue that he was physically alive now just as he was before and would claim that there has been no change in that person from the first examination to the second or after this so called event of conversion.

So what is conversion? What defines conversion? What happens to a person at conversion? Today we want to look at this life changing event of conversion and try to define what actually happens at this moment in a person's life.

I. DEFINITION OF CONVERSION

We will begin with the definition from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary on the word conversion which is this and I, Quote: "the initial change of attitude and will that brings a person into right relationship with God. The word "conversion" appears as a noun only once in the New Testament, referring to the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:3). But the Bible is filled with examples of persons who experienced conversion.

The fullest description of conversion occurs in the words spoken to Saul of Tarsus at his own conversion: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and

from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18).

Conversion involves turning away from evil deeds and false worship and turning toward serving and worshiping the Lord. Conversion marks a person’s entrance into a new relationship with God, forgiveness of sins, and new life as a part of the fellowship of the people of God.” End of quote

As the definition states, the word conversion occurs only once in the bible, yet there are many illustrations and accounts of the action and results of conversion but the word conversion itself is used only once. Let’s turn to that portion of scripture, it is in Acts chapter 15 half way through the book of acts the believing Jews have been converting Gentiles to God but now a problem arose. Let’s read from verse 1 to verse 5 to get a quick background to the situation and event that was taking place.

Acts 15 1 through 5

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

The dispute in this passage was that some of the converted Pharisees (yes verse 5 describes them as Pharisees who believed) preached that the conversion must be followed by physical circumcision as the law of Moses commanded to be followers of God, in their minds there still had to be an actual physical act of change to be accepted as prescribed by Moses for anyone becoming a believer. We cannot see the conversion, we can only see the fruits of its effects on the person only the described change that occurs in their

lives but for some of these Pharisees that was not enough.

As in the passage they *described* the conversion of the Gentiles, according to Strong's definition when you describe something you try to convey the appearance of an object or event, you try to "narrate in full" or "relate, tell, or declare the thing you are trying to bring across.

For example if I were to describe or narrate in full to you how I had my wisdom tooth removed it would probably gross some of you out, if I were to describe to you how the transmission in your car works it would probably put some of you to sleep but what did this description of the conversion of the Gentiles create? It caused great joy to all the brethren. Is this what happens in your heart when you hear of someone getting saved, how about if it's somebody that you have been praying for a long time?

Yes we're over joyed when we hear this news, its halleluiah and praise the Lord, and there is joy in the presence of the angels, but what if its someone we don't know? How about if its someone that has wronged us in the past and a long buried dislike of that person comes back on us, what is it then? Are we full of great joy?

I'm sure this is how some of the Jews must have felt during this time, being the chosen people of God in all manner of customs and laws and now all of a sudden having to share that privilege that gift with the *Gentiles*, with dogs who merely had to repent and believe and be converted to be eligible to enter the class of the chosen ones. Look back at the text, after the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter, comments like these came from the apostles: Peter;

verse 7 *"Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*

Verse 9 *"and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

Verse 11 *"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they".* Wow we the Jews shall be saved in the same manner as they? The gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas verse 12 *declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.*

And lastly James verse

14 *"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.*

and verse

19 *"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,"*

and the trouble was adding of Jewish laws in becoming a Jew. In the remaining part of the chapter the conclusion of the meeting was that there was no endorsement of circumcision of new Gentile believers, verse 24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" —to whom we gave no such commandment—". It was the outward change that was to be the evidence of the change that had taken place on the inside. The Greek word for conversion in this verse is *epistrophe* (ep-is-trof-ay') and as we noted earlier it is used only once in the bible and is defined as "the conversion of the Gentiles from idolatry to the true God" in the Greek lexicon , the Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary described it as , Conversion involves turning away from evil deeds and false worship and turning toward serving and worshiping the Lord. David in his lamentation of psalm 51verse 13 says *"Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You."*

Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology* does an excellent job of conveying imagery of this process that takes place in a new believer's soul upon conversion. It is titled, It is a New Birth. And is as follows: The same doctrine on this subject is taught in other words when regeneration is declared to be a new birth. At birth the child enters upon a new state of existence. Birth is not its own act. It is born. It comes from a state of darkness, in

which the objects adapted to its nature cannot act on it or awaken its activities. As soon as it comes into the world all its faculties are awakened; it sees, feels, and hears, and gradually unfolds all its faculties as a rational and moral, as well as physical being. The Scriptures teach that it is thus in regeneration. The soul enters upon a new state. It is introduced into a new world. A whole class of objects before unknown or unappreciated are revealed to it, and exercise upon it their appropriate influence. The "things of the Spirit" become the chief objects of desire and pursuit, and all the energies of the new-born soul are directed towards the spiritual, as distinguished from the seen and temporal. He says: This representation is in accordance with the evangelical doctrine on this subject. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. As Hodge writes "The soul enters upon a new state." we are "introduced unto a new world." and it becomes a new beginning for a new believer.

Now we have briefly looked at the definition and dilemma of conversion and also talked about the changes that are to be evident, as in Acts 15 when the apostles *described* the conversion of the Gentiles, they were able to tell others what had happened to these changed individuals and this brought great joy to all the brethren, so the question is what would you describe to others of what happened in a conversion? What are some things you would see different in a person after their conversion? In the introduction I illustrated on how a physical examination of the body would not reveal anything different, so what would you expect to find different in a new converted believer? This brings us to point number II, the aspects of conversion, the change that takes place on the inside, the first one we will be looking at is repentance and then faith, both vital to the Christian walk at the moment of and life style after conversion.

II. ASPECTS OF CONVERSION

As we noted before the actual conversion of a person is immaterial, there is nothing physically changing in that person's body although the body can be changed as a result of, but we cannot take a blood sample and put it under a microscope and say yep that person is converted. Although that would make a pastors job a lot easier in certain situations, but it doesn't work that way. Certain changes should come about because of

the conversion. These would be such things as a change in behavior, from anger to meekness, changes in desires, from lusts of this world to the things of God and this is because of the repentance portion of conversion. It is the part of a person's conversion that is to be evident to the world and other Christians around you, it is that part of which we would say that the person has changed no matter what side we are looking from, either saved Christians or the unsaved world. So under aspects of conversion we will be looking at this aspect of conversion called repentance.

A. Repentance

We have often heard of the Greek word *met-an'-oy-ah* from which the word repentance comes from and it simply means a change of mind. To repent is to change one's mind or to have a change *of* mind. It is that first change that should be evident in a new Christian. Repent, it is the acknowledgement of sin, the regret of walking along the wrong path and choices made in that walk, it is the desire to change to the truth, to God. it is found throughout the Old Testament, it was preached by John the Baptist, it is taught by Jesus, it was spread to the Gentile in the epistles, and is found most often in the last book of Revelations. It is as we would say one of the greatest underlying themes of the entire bible, from beginning to end, that is the call for repentance. It is only in this change of mind were we can begin to grow and God can begin to chip away at those sinful habits and addictions that have plagued all of mankind and create in us what He wants us to become. It is in Jesus own words that describe this so well, Matthew chapter 9 verse 12 and 13. This just after the Pharisees questioned why he was eating with tax collectors and sinners. When Jesus heard that, He said to them,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

In Acts 3:19 it says

"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."

If you hear this today this is what God does with your sins if you repent of them and believe in Jesus Christ. This phrase “that your sins may be blotted out” in the Greek lexicon is described as to anoint or wash in every part, to wipe off or wipe away, to obliterate, erase, wipe out, blot out and so that you can become that person God can use for his glory and for his Kingdom and so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and you will find peace, if I say “I want to live right before God, I want to be a worker for his kingdom, I want to be his servant and do his will, to be in his will.” Listen; This is not just a feeling we should have, it is a desire we should crave.

In Paul’s defense before King Agrippa he alludes to the actions that should come out of conversion, out of repentance. Acts 26 verses 19 and 20 he says...

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

Paul says that they should repent, that they should have a change of mind “turning away from evil deeds and false worship” and turn “to God”, “turning toward Him, serving Him and worshiping the Lord” and do works *befitting* or suitable or appropriate for repentance. The walk must match the talk. There must be a change in your life from before conversion to after, there must be a change on the inside from darkness to light, and if this hasn’t happened then maybe you need to reexamine your profession of conversion on the other hand if you are here today and you know you have been converted, you have repented of your sins and turned to God and desire to follow him but find yourself not moving forward or are in a loss of direction at this moment in time. Then maybe you need a little more of the second aspect to conversion which is faith. The letting go of what is behind and grabbing on to what is ahead, not looking back but trusting in the one who holds the future. Faith point B in the outline.

B. Faith

In the new testament it is the word *pis'-tis* and is defined by the Greek lexicon as 'conviction of the truth of anything' it is the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ' and that he Christ is the messiah. We have faith in and believe these things. As Hebrews 11:1 says

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

It is probably one of the best descriptions of the word faith you could find. A. A. Hodge in his Outline of Theology defines very well and it reads like this "Faith is a complex act of the soul, involving the concurrent action of the understanding and the will, and modified in different instances of its exercise by the nature of its object, and of the evidence upon which it rests.". In the aspect of conversion it is so crucial that the element of faith is born, develops and grows in that new believer because it is one of the main deciding factors of that persons life in Christ in which he will either grow or fall away. If faith builds as time passes the Christian becomes stronger, his faith becomes stronger, his trust in God grows stronger and God can uses that person for his kingdom for his will. When trials come, and if he perseveres, he will become more and more grounded in the faith and learn to trust God more and more. Colossians 1:23 "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister". However if faith stays the same or dwindles the believer will become weaker, their faith begins to doubt God, their trust, or belief in God begins to slip. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians he wrote "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain." 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 5. It is so important that faith grows and is evident in the Christian walk so that the Christ likeness can be revealed and be seen by others who are still looking for the true way. In 1 Thessalonians 1:8 and 9 we can see how a faith that is strong and growing affects others, for it reads "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in

every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.
9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,” end of quote.

By using Hebrews 11:1 Fausset Bible Dictionary describes faith like this, "the substance of things hoped for (i.e., it substantiates God's promises, the fulfillment of which we hope, it makes them present realities), the evidence (the 'convincing proof' or 'demonstration') of things not seen." It then goes on to say "Faith accepts the truths revealed on the testimony of God (not merely on their intrinsic reasonableness), that testimony being given to us in Holy Scripture."

When we walk in faith we are looking forward to God, when we repent we turn our minds from sin and death to righteousness and God and we believe what the bible says about who He is and what he has done for us as sinners and we put our faith in Him. We have faith and believe that God will continue to work in our lives so that we can be overcome in this life to overcome struggles and difficulties that we encounter in our lifetime, we look forward to His coming and our focus is on eternity not the here and now. We believe that God hears us in our prayers even though sometimes it takes 10 minutes, sometimes it takes 10 years. But when that prayer is answered it is our faith that grows stronger. It is as A. A. Hodge wrote 'When trials come, and if he perseveres, he will become more and more grounded in the faith and learn to trust God more and more.' And I thought that how could I explain faith any better than reading Hebrews chapter 11 in its entirety. Hebrews chapter 11

Hebrews 12 1-2

1 ¶ Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is this faith that converts the trials of this world into stepping stones in our walk with Christ, sometimes terrible and horrible events that this world cannot understand how Christ's preserver and overcome but that we can look back and say that was the hand of God working in my life and faith carrying me through, and it causes great joy to those who are converted. Romans 1:16 and 17 says it best "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Concl:

So in conclusion, we have looked at the definition of conversion of how it is an immaterial change that occurs in man, and yet changes his entire life as he becomes a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new, We looked at repentance, which is a change of mind in turning from sin and turning to God, we looked at faith, which was the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and how it can be a deciding factor in your walk with Jesus Christ whether you will grow or fall, for we all await that final hope of meeting our Lord and Savior in everlasting life here after. And I want to close with this last thought, If you were to ask Jesus, the Great Physician for a certified opinion of your heart, a heart physical per say, what would he find? Would He find a converted heart, would it be a heart that is walking strong in this walk of faith, or one that is stumbling along. Would it be a heart that is alive and vibrant with a zeal for God, or a lost one still searching and looking for Him. Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, in Mark 1 verses 14 and 15 *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* Today, here and now it's not too late, but remember, tomorrow may never come. Take that first step, that first aspect of conversion, repent, and then live your life through the second which is faith, without ever looking back. Eph 2: 4 and 5. *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).* It is all there, it has been prepared for you and all that is left is your part, repent and believe.

"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.