

A Case for Conversion

Bubba Garner

We use the word conversion in many aspects of life. We convert temperatures from Celsius to Fahrenheit and numbers from fractions to decimals. When we travel out of the country, our currency is converted from U.S. dollars to euros, pounds, or pesos. What's interesting about these conversions is that there's no disagreement about how the change occurs. A certain formula is applied, and the outcome leaves no room for discussion. When the math teacher converts $7/2$ to 3.5, no student says, "I think it should be 3.3!" There is an indisputable standard to be followed.

Why, then, is Biblical conversion such a cause for disagreement? If you were to ask several people how they came to be saved, some might describe a feeling they had or an experience they encountered, while others might respond that they "accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior." But what pattern or standard was followed? What Scriptures were appealed to? How do we know which one is right?

When the apostles went into all the world to preach the gospel, they encountered different people in different locations with different situations. But their message was the same every time: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And the response required from each individual was the same. When the Ethiopian eunuch was converted, the same pattern was applied as in the case of Cornelius and Lydia. That tells us that this divine standard must still be used by men who seek to be converted to the Lord today.

Conversion is a turning point. The word itself is a combination of two words: con, "together or altogether," and vertere, the Latin verb "to turn." Thus, it means to "turn altogether," or to undergo a complete change.

What, then, does it mean to be converted to the Lord?

It means you change your heart altogether. Jesus said, "unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). The disciples had just asked the Lord who "the greatest" was in His kingdom. Jesus' response indicated the need for a complete change of heart. The person who has the humility to recognize their dependence upon God and their helplessness to "live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28) without Him is the one who will be truly converted. That quality is usually not something people attach to "greatness." Such requires a total transformation and, in most cases, a heart transplant. It's what caused those on Pentecost to ask, "brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? Their hearts had been pierced by the gospel.

It means you change your allegiance altogether. Paul commended the conversion of the saints in Thessalonica because they "turned to God from idols to serve a living

and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Since it was impossible for them to serve many gods and the One God at the same time, they had to make a choice. They had to cling to one and despise the other. They had to change. Conversion is not trying to hold on to where you’ve been and stretch out to where you want to go. God grants no dual-citizenships in His kingdom. Conversion involves turning away from darkness and coming to the Lord of light. That’s why the Philippian jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and begged, “sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30)? He was ready to follow a new Leader.

It means you change your conduct altogether. Peter demanded a response from his hearers when he said, “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Even though they had “acted in ignorance” (3:17) in crucifying the Son of God, there was still an action required on their part to have their sins forgiven. When we limit conversion to an exercise of the mind, we remove our responsibility of change. Converted people ought to look different – in our priorities, in our activities, in our relationships. Saul of Tarsus was “formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” (1 Tim. 1:13). But when he arose and was baptized, his sins were washed away (Acts 22:16). He was a changed man. And his changed conduct was evident to all.

“You sure have changed.” When someone has been converted, turned altogether into the image of Jesus Christ, there could be no higher compliment. That’s change you can believe in.