

What Happens When People Are Converted?

Conversion Series #3

2 Corinthians 5:17

By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Our discussion the past couple of weeks has been on the subject of conversion

1. It's importance is underscored by the statement of Jesus in Mt. 18:3 – “unless you are converted. . . you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”
2. Conversion involves both a turning from and a turning to
 - a. we turn from evil and sin, idolatry and self-centeredness, all forms of worldliness
 - b. we turn to God and godly things, and specifically, we turn to Jesus Christ

B. There is a most natural question that comes to mind – what happens when people are converted?

1. If you're going in one direction of life and stop, turn around and go in another direction then it ought to be obvious that things will change
2. If we are one kind of person, then we are converted to Jesus Christ, it necessarily must mean that we can no longer be the same person we were
3. 2 Corinthians 5:17 -- Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. NASB95
 - a. the real impact of Paul's statement is in the phrase, “he is a new creature”
 - b. the reason that old things have passed away and new things have come is due to the fact that when a person is converted, he has made a turn around, he has experienced a change of life

4. Illustration (Jim Wallis, *The Call To Conversion*, pp. 6-7)

There are no neutral zones or areas of life left untouched by biblical conversion. It is never solely confined to the inner self, religious consciousness, personal morality, intellectual belief, or political opinion. Conversion in Scripture was not a self-improvement course or a set of guidelines to help people progress down the same road they were already traveling. Conversion was not just added to the life they were already living. The whole of life underwent conversion in the biblical accounts. There were no exceptions, limitations, restrictions.

Biblically, conversion means to surrender ourselves to God in every sphere of human existence: the personal and social, the spiritual and economic, the psychological and political.

Conversion is our fundamental decision in regard to God. It marks nothing less than the ending of the old and the emergence of the new.

C. Today, I want to explore just some basic ideas to help us know what to expect when people are converted

I. CONVERSION DEMONSTRATES A SPECIFIC FAITH

A. If conversion isn't just a form of self-help, or self-improvement, what is it?

1. This is perhaps one of the most misunderstood points regarding conversion
2. The idea of conversion taught in the New Testament is specifically defined by faith in Jesus Christ
 - a. Christian conversion is linked to the person of Jesus Christ. It is rooted in fact, not wishful thinking. Jesus demonstrated that He had the credentials to be called the unique Son of God. He challenged men and women to put their faith in Him, that they might know God and what life is all about.¹
 - b. Christian conversion is based upon something objective, the resurrection of Christ²

B. If we understand what biblical conversion is, then we ought to expect that the practical difference in terms of what a person believes and trusts, what a person adores and worships, and to what a person entrusts their lives will be reflected in the changes brought about by conversion

1. In other words, if a person was a pagan before their conversion, they can no longer live as a pagan after their conversion
2. If a person was an atheist or agnostic, or simply not religiously minded, and they are converted, then they can no longer live as an atheist or agnostic, or as a non-religious person
3. When people undergo a biblical conversion, they specifically turn to Jesus Christ as the solution for sin, for a relationship with God, and for the hope of eternal life
4. All of that will be reflected in the life they live after their conversion
5. If not, then we might ask whether or not they actually turned from some things, or whether or not they turned to some things.

C. A good example of what I'm talking about is the apostle Paul

1. When we are first introduced to him he is an unbeliever and a persecutor of the church
2. But, when he was converted, there is no doubt but that the object of his faith changed
 - a. he went from unbeliever to believer
 - b. he went from persecutor to persecuted
 - c. in every conceivable way, he demonstrated through the life he lived that he was different than what he had been

¹McDowell, J., & Stewart, D. (1997, c1993). *Answers to tough questions : Skeptics ask about the Christian faith* (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²McDowell, J., & Stewart, D. (1997, c1993). *Answers to tough questions : Skeptics ask about the Christian faith* (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

II. CONVERSION PRODUCES A PARTICULAR “WAY” OF LIFE

A. In fact, so clearly does conversion produce a particular “way” of life, that the Bible uses that very Word to refer to the lifestyle of the followers of Jesus

1. Acts 9:1-2

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. NASB95

2. Acts 19:23-27

About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar *trades*, and said, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. “You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all*. “Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.” NASB95

2. Acts 22:4

“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, NASB95

3. Acts 24:22

But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.” NASB95

B. The United Bible Society’s New Testament Handbook (translator’s notes) reveals the meaning

1. The phrase the Way of the Lord must be translated with care so as not to imply that this is simply "the road that belongs to the Lord" or "the road that the Lord followed" (as though it were some reference to a road on which Jesus walked). Rather, one must have some such expression as "the Way shown by the Lord" or "the Way that the Lord said people should walk" (or "live"). (from the UBS Handbook Series. Copyright (c) 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies)

2. Conversion to Jesus Christ results in a change of life so complete, that it becomes an entire “way” of life in itself

a. Ephesians 1:22-23 -- And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. NASB95

b. John 14:6 -- Jesus said to him, “I am the way , and the truth , and the life ; no one comes to the Father but through Me. NASB95

III. CONVERSION PRODUCES A CHANGED PEOPLE

A. The simplest way to describe what happens to converted people is that they are changed people

1. There is a change legal standing with God – from condemned to justified
2. There is a change in personal connection with God – from separation to fellowship
3. There is a change in the identifying characteristics – from ungodly to godly

B. We need to know that change is not just possible, but the expected consequence of conversion

1. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. NASB95

2. Let me tell you the emphasis in that passage
 - a. it's identified by the phrase, "such were some of you"
 - b. get the message – they were once correctly identified as participants in all sorts of sins that would have prevented them from inheriting the kingdom of God
 - c. But they were washed, sanctified, and justified – in essence, converted (changed)
 - d. now they were, in fact, inheritors of the kingdom

C. Conversion changes us, but it is also an on-going process

1. All the changes you need to make in your life will not happen immediately (we're going to explore this more next week)
2. As we keep on learning, we keep on growing in our faith, in our knowledge of God's will, and that produces continual change throughout our lifetime

CONCLUSION

A. What happens to converted people?

1. The person they were eventually disappears and a new person exists in their place
2. That new person is a person of faith, a person who lives a particular kind of lifestyle, and who evidences specific, identifiable changes in how they live and what they do
3. Are you converted? You can't inherit the kingdom unless you are?
4. Can you see the evidence of your conversion? It may not be in some extraordinary perfection, but it should be in identifiable and specific ways
5. God's intention is to change you. Are you cooperating with him?

B. Invitation