

The What & How of Conversion

Matthew 13:13–16

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. What Does Conversion Mean?

1. Webster defines convert as to “turn around, to transform, to transmute, to translate, to alter,” or very simply “to change.”
 - a. Auto body and detail shops use the word *conversion* to describe customized changes made in a vehicle that transform it into a specialized use.
 - b. Re-modeling contractors will speak of *converting* a garage into a room having different use (e.g. we recently *converted* part of the old auditorium into an office).
 - c. Milk, flour, salt and baking powder are combined in order to be *converted* to bread.
 - d. Dollars can be *converted* into lira, marks, pounds or pesos.
2. Thayer says the Greek word *epistrepho*, which is sometimes translated *convert*, means “to turn to, to cause to turn, to bring back.”
 - a. Literally, the word is used of:
 - (1) Turning around (Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:30; 8:33; John 21:20)
 - (2) Returning to whence one came (Matthew 12:44; 24:18; Luke 2:20)
 - (3) A resurrection, that is, the spirit returned (Luke 8:55; cf. James 2:26)
 - (4) Turning toward a thing (Acts 9:40; 16:18; Revelation 1:12)
 - (5) Making a return visit (Acts 15:36)
 - b. Metaphorically, the word is used to describe the process whereby a sinner is transformed into a saint, the process by which a child of the devil becomes a child of God (Luke 1:16-17; 17:4; 22:32; John 12:40; Acts 3:19, 9:35, 11:21, 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20, 28:27; 2 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 4:9; James 5:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25; 2 Peter 2:21-22).
3. Conversion is described in the Scriptures as:
 - a. A healing (Matthew 13:15)
 - b. Becoming as little children (Matthew 18:1-6)
 - c. Turning the disobedient to wisdom (Luke 1:16-17)
 - d. Having ones sins blotted out (Acts 3:19)
 - e. Forsaking idolatry for Christ (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)
 - f. Turning from error back to the truth of the Gospel (James 5:19-20)
 - g. Returning strays coming back into the fold (1 Peter 2:25)

B. The Essentiality of Conversion—

1. I do not believe that anyone would deny the essentiality of conversion.
2. The Scriptures teach that men must be converted (Acts 3:19; Matthew 18:3; John 12:40; Matthew 13:15).
3. Simply, unless you are converted you cannot go where Jesus is (John 8:21).

II. DISCUSSION:

A. There Is a Divine Law or Rule Which Effects Conversion (Psalms 19:7)—

1. That which needs to be changed in man is the heart or soul (Psalms 19:7; Acts 15:9; I Peter 1:22; James 5:20; Acts 28:27; cf. Isaiah 6:10; II Corinthians 3:15-16).
2. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is employed to change the heart of the sinner into that of a true saint.
 - a. The Gospel has the power to convict the heart of sin (Hebrews 4:12)
 - b. The Gospel has the power to purge the heart of any conscience of sin (Hebrews 10:16-22; Acts 15:9).
 - c. The Gospel has the power to transform the heart to serve Christ (Romans 6:17; I Thessalonians 1:9).
3. Specifically, the gospel effects the transformation of a sinner into a saint by leading him to faith, repentance, and baptism into Christ.

B. How Does the Gospel Change the Heart?

1. The heart of man is changed by faith.
 - a. Not the blood pump, nor just the emotions.
 - b. But the mind or the intellect, the seat of affection and allegiance (Hebrews 4:12; II Corinthians 9:7)
 - c. The preaching of the gospel is necessary to having faith which effects a change in trust and affections (Ephesians 1:12-13).
 - (1) We are no longer trusting in:
 - (a) Riches (Mark 10:24; I Timothy 6:17)
 - (b) The Law (John 5:45)
 - (c) The flesh (Philippians 3:4)
 - (d) Ourselves (Luke 18:19)
 - (2) We no longer love:
 - (a) The world (James 4:4)
 - (b) Sin (I John 2:15)
 - (c) Family (Matthew 10:35-39)
 - (d) Pleasure (Matthew 16:24-26)

- d. We cannot be saved without faith (Acts 15:9; Romans 10:8–10, 13–17), but conversion is not complete at the point of faith (Acts 11:21; James 2:24; e.g., John 12:42; Acts 2:37–38).
2. The heart of man is changed by repentance (Acts 2:36–38; 8:22; Romans 2:5).
- a. The gospel, when preached and believed, brings men to repentance (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32; Acts 3:19; 15:19; Romans 2:4–5; II Corinthians 7:8–11).
- b. Repentance is a change of will followed by a corresponding change of conduct (Matthew 21:28–29).
- (1) This is one intended accomplishment of conversion (Luke 1:16–17).
- (2) Consider some things repentance is not:
- (a) Sorrow (II Corinthians 7:10)
- [1] Sorrow is antecedent to repentance; it must complete its work. The former effects the latter.
- [2] One cannot repent without being sorry toward God, but there is a sorrow that will not produce repentance (e.g. Matthew 27:3–5).
- (b) A general desire to reform (Matthew 21:29)
- [1] God is longsuffering and gives us time to repent (2 Peter 3:9, 15; Revelation 2:21). But, His mercy does not extend to the continued practice of sins. God does not wink at sin.
- [2] It has been well said, “Repentance is the difference between ‘I will not’ and ‘I will.’ Where there is the will there is the fruit (Matthew 3:8).
- (c) Quitting one sin (Mark 1:5)
- [1] Thayer makes it clear that repentance requires “a hearty amendment of life;” however, not all changes in life are the result of godly sorrow which works genuine repentance of sin (Matthew 27:3).
- [2] Many have quit one sin or another out of fear of the physical or emotional consequences, but not out of reverence for God.
- (d) Belief (Mark 1:15; Matthew 21:32)
- [1] Denominational doctrine leaves the impression that repentance *is* faith; however, the two are distinct (Acts 20:21).
- [2] It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4–5). An unbeliever cannot repent, but a believer can (Acts 2:36–38; 17:30–31).
- c. However, conversion is not complete upon repentance (Acts 3:19; 26:20).
- (1) Faith prepares the heart to repent, and repentance changes the heart with regard to manner of life, but neither changes the fact that one bears the guilt of past sins.
- (2) God forgives and has stipulated at what point he forgives sins.
3. The heart of man is changed by baptism.
- a. The gospel reveals the necessity of baptism and qualifies the candidates (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; etc.).

- b. It also reveals the design or purpose of water baptism which is to be cleansed by the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5; Acts 22:15; Rom. 6:3-4; Colossians 2:11–12)
- c. When the penitent believer is baptized his sins are forgiven and his conscience purged of dead works (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; I Peter 3:21).

III. CONCLUSION:

A. Are You Converted?

1. Have you believed on Christ?
2. Have you repented toward God?
3. Have you been baptized into Christ?

B. Repent and Be Converted that Your Sins May Be Blotted Out.