

"Conversion"

About three fourths of the people in America claim to be Christians, but many who claim this don't live or talk like Christians. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're going to talk about conversion. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Nothing in life is more important than a sincere study of the Word of God. God has spoken to us so that we can know His will and make the changes to our attitudes and our behavior that pleases Him and blesses us. God gave His word for our good. It teaches us, guides us, protects us, rebukes us, and encourages us. This book is our only hope for eternal life, and we must understand what it says. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Matthew 18:1 thru 4 speaks of an encounter that Jesus had with his disciples. The Bible says: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" Now conversion is not a childish act, because only the mature can choose to set aside their fleshly desires and become like children.

The Lord knows our hearts. He knows that we need to make conscious changes in our thinking in order to be the kind of people who can enter heaven. We must turn from what is evil to what is good. We must have the humility and the faith of a child, who looks to the Lord rather than depend on his own ability. Being converted turns our hearts from our fleshly desires to what God expects. Repentance is deeply involved in conversion. We must have a change of heart that leads to a change of life.

Now we're offering this study about conversion free. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Luke 13, verses 1 to 5, and explore what it means to be converted.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 13, verses 1 thru 5. It contains the words of Jesus. "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'" Those are the words of Jesus encouraging us to repent. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your word and for how it teaches us and instructs us in the things that we need to do. We pray Father that we'll be faithful to You, and to love You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Occasionally I encounter people who are Christians in name only. They claim to be Christian, but you couldn't tell it from the way they think, or talk, or act. They say they're Christians, but they don't behave the way a committed Christian behaves. They rarely pray, rarely go to church, rarely read their Bibles, and rarely talk about Christian beliefs. By listening to their language or watching their behavior, you might not be able to distinguish them from someone who never goes to church. Christians in name only are as likely to gamble, or drink alcohol, or watch sexually explicit movies, and use four-letter words as people who say they have no faith at all. In fact, many of these folks have stopped living for the Lord altogether.

If you ask them if they are Christians, they might be offended; but you couldn't tell it from the way they act or talk. For them Christianity is more inherited than chosen, more assumed than embraced. They were told when they were young that their family was Christian. And they say they are, but one wonders if they were really converted to Jesus.

On other occasions I've encountered folks who were once faithful church members but fell away from the truth of the gospel to follow popular religion, where worship is replaced by entertainment or the inspired gospel is replaced by man-centered doctrines or human traditions. One wonders how someone who was once strong in the faith could leave the truth of the Scripture for a lie or forget Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. One wonders how they could follow things that are never mentioned in Scripture but were innovations of men and then imagine that they're acceptable to God. Didn't Jesus say in Matthew 15 verses 13 and 14, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. (And He said) Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit"? How can they say they are converted to the Lord Jesus?

Conversion is a life-changing event, a transition from darkness into light, from the fleshly to the holy, from the deceptions of men to the truth of God in Scripture. Like a child, we choose to trust what God says is true and right, trust how He wants us to live, and determine how we will do whatever He commands. Now this change of heart is enlightening; it opens our hearts to a new and better way than the sinful ways of the world. The Lord wanted Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in order "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (that's Acts 26 and verse 18).

To be converted means that you will change what you believe, change how you will live, and leave sin to walk in righteousness. God doesn't save us merely to forgive our sins. He saves us to turn our hearts so that we could pursue a holy and righteous life! Titus 2 verses 11 to 14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Conversion means that I must die to myself, die to my desires, and die to my sin. I can't continue to sin and still remain right with the Lord. Paul asked in Romans 6 verses 1 and 2, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" We just can't do that! Becoming a Christian means that I die to sinful ways. I don't practice sin, I don't think sinful thoughts, or at least whenever I'm tempted I don't stay there, I don't give in to my sinful feelings, or say sinful words anymore. I'm no longer what I used to be. You know when we're baptized into Christ, "our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin

might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6 and verse 6). Our attitudes and our behavior must change.

Now Paul concludes in Romans 6 verses 12 to 13, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Some people are baptized but fail to repent, to stop their sins, and to serve the Lord in righteousness, they never get around to that. Again he says in Romans 8 verses 12 to 13, “So then, brethren, we’re under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you’re putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Now those who call themselves a Christian but live sinfully after the desires of the flesh, they will die spiritually and be lost.

So let’s follow the words of Colossians 3 verses 5 to 11: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it’s because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them (that is those sinful ways) you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” Oh that, my friend, is conversion! It’s a change of heart and life, turning from the old way of sin to a new and righteous way that follows in the steps of Jesus.

Now even a word spoken in private matters is important. We may think we’ve spoken or acted in secret, but secrets don’t always stay secret. God always sees, hears, and knows. Proverbs 15 and verse 3 says that, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.” The wicked person discounts God, ignores God, and assume “well God has forgotten; He’s hidden His face; He’ll never see it” (that’s from Psalm 10 verses 2 to 11). But God does see and hear. Words also matter, because they reveal our inner person. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12 verse 34, that “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” Christians should speak words that edify and bless. “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it’ll give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4 and verse 29).

This world is darkened, callous, ignorant, sensual, impure, and greedy. Paul explained in Ephesians 4, verses 17 to 19, “So I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that’s in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” Oh what a terrible situation. God certainly wants something better for us!

Now Paul continues in verses 20 to 24, he says “But you didn’t learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you put on the new self, which is in the likeness of God, and it’s been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

What Jesus teaches is better than what the world offers. The Lord Jesus said in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Jesus expects his converts to hear His word and believe God sent Him to be Savior, if they want eternal life.

Now don't say, "I believe in Jesus," if you're not willing to believe what He says. Jesus once asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6 and verse 46). To call Jesus 'Lord' and yet never be willing to do His will is hypocrisy. God distinguishes between a man who claims to believe and a man who actually lives out what he believes. 1 John 2 verses 4 to 6 explains: "The one who says, 'I've come to know Him,' (that is I'm a Christian) and doesn't keep His commandments, that person is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we're in him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." We prove our faith and our love for Jesus by keeping His commandments and abiding in His word. Claiming to love Jesus while ignoring his word is merely a delusion. Oh my friend, be real; be genuine.

We must recognize and treat Jesus as our Lord as well as our Savior. Only then do we have the kind of faith to be saved. Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. James said that in humility we're to "receive the word that's implanted, which is able to save your souls" (James 1 and verse 21). The faith that pleases the Lord is first humble, realizing that God is God, who knows all, sees all, and is wiser than we are. Let's love and trust Him enough to listen and to do all that He commands. Considering what Jesus did for us, that's the least that we can do.

Faith leads a person to obey the Lord in every respect. If I believe in the Lord, I will love and trust Him. That means I want to be saved and live with Him forever. If I believe in Jesus, I'll confess that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God and my Lord. If I call Him Lord, I'll change my heart and I'll change my life. I'll repent of every sin. And I'll stop my rebellion and I'll honor Him by being obedient.

Now if I believe in Jesus, I'll be baptized in water for the forgiveness of my sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). I'll be born of water and the Spirit in baptism to enter into His kingdom (John 3, verse 5). I will be baptized to have my sins washed away (Acts 22 and verse 16). Oh I want to be buried with Him in baptism so that I can rise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6 verses 3 to 7). And with humility I'll do what the Lord says without trying to argue that I can be saved a different way. No, I'll trust Him to the point that whatever He says, I'll do. Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that Your word has taught us the things that we most need to hear so that we can be right with You. Help us Father to have a heart of love. A heart that's willing to change to be like You. And Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

When we're converted to Christ, we'll think like Jesus thinks, love like Jesus loves, act like Jesus acts, and obey like Jesus obeyed. We'll stop pleasing the world and start pleasing God. Jesus said in John 8, verse 29, "for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." When we're converted, we'll examine what people teach with what the Bible says. There are a multitude of religious voices in our world. Conversion to Christ means I'll stop listening to the human doctrines and start testing everything by the Word. 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 21 and 22 says, "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; and abstain from every form of evil." We must evaluate religious teaching and it's practices to see if those things comes from God or from man.

In 1 John 4 and verse 1 the Bible says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Don't

believe everything that you hear some preachers say. Be like the noble Bereans of Acts 17 and verse 11: it says "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

When we become servants of Christ, we cannot accept every idea that comes along. We must compare what we hear with a Scripture! And if it doesn't agree with Scripture, don't follow it. True disciples abide in the words of Christ (John 8 and verse 31). We want everyone to be a true disciple. And so believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and out of love repent of your sins, confess Jesus, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Conversion doesn't end with a change of heart, it also changes the relationship with God. And when you're baptized you become a child of God! The Lord adds you to His church! God unites you with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection so that you can walk in newness of life. Oh my friend won't you be converted today?

We hope that today's study causes you to ask if you are truly converted. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. We also appear each week on YouTube! You can subscribe at "SearchTVMinistry." We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

So please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.