

"Conversion"

How does God bring about a change of heart and soul? How are we converted? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're looking at how God converts our souls.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. 1 Timothy 2:3 to 4 says that God our Savior wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The Lord wants us to know the truth because the truth sets us free (John 8 and verse 32). Our salvation is always linked not only to the grace of God found in the blood of Christ but also to the truth found in the gospel. We need God's word. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

For many conversions are a better-felt-than-told experience. They assume in conversion the Holy Spirit miraculously changes the heart from a sinner to a saint; but this concept is foreign to the Scriptures. They believe God arbitrarily chooses who will be saved and who will be lost and miraculously changes the hearts of those that He wants to be saved. This idea first arose in the early 1500s. It's not found in Scripture.

Instead, the Scriptures teach that every person is a free moral agent. And God offers salvation to whosoever will. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only (begotten) Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Later in that same chapter, verse 36 says that, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." You see God offers salvation to all who will believe and obey. And conversion takes place when out of love and faith one changes one's heart and he changes his life to leave worldliness and sin and then follow the teaching of Jesus Christ. You have a choice whether to follow the ways of this world or to follow the gospel of truth found in the words of the New Testament.

Now this is an important study on conversion; and we offer it free! If you'd like a printed copy and 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, call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website at www.searchtv.org and also on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, we'll read then from 1 Peter 1:22 to 25, and we'll explore how God uses the message preached to convert the soul.

Our reading today comes from the inspired apostle Peter who writes about how a person is converted, how they're born again, and by what process in 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 22 to 25.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

"ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,
AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER."

And this is the word which was preached to you.

That's a reading from God's holy word about how people are purified in their soul by their obedience to the preaching of the word. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that Your word is always so clear. And helps us to understand how You work in our lives. And Father we are thankful for Your word for the message of the gospel. Help us to be obedient to Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen.

We're born again not from some miraculous experience but from learning and obeying the truth. That truth is the imperishable seed, the word of God. Luke 8 and verse 11 reminds us that the seed of the kingdom which is planted in hearts is the word of God, not some emotional experience. In the conversion of people to Christ, faith come by listening to the word. Paul said in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of (God or the word of) Christ."

2 Timothy 3:16 to 17 says that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." We must understand Scripture is inspired and carries with it the wisdom of God himself; the Scriptures are all-sufficient. They teach us all we need to know, all we need to stop, all we need to correct, and all the training that we need to do every good work.

We also have God's providence to help us to change as we ought to change. The blessings of God, the events of our lives, the true Christians that we meet all give us the opportunity to hear God's gospel of hope and salvation. The example of Onesimus comes to mind. Though he was a slave of Philemon, Onesimus left home and made his way to Rome. While there he met Paul, from whom he learned the gospel and became a Christian. Well in time Paul rightly sent him back to Philemon with a letter encouraging Philemon to receive him as a brother.

In the letter Paul says that "perhaps" the providence of God played a part in his conversion. "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Philemon 15 to 16). While we do not wish to attribute more to God than Paul does, neither do we wish to rule out that God's providence works in the world today.

Wives, for instance, who cannot teach their unconverted husbands by a spoken message may nevertheless win their husbands to Christ by their living godly lives. 1 Peter 3:1 to 2 says, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior." While the written word is the seed of the kingdom, people who live out the word of God can and do influence others.

If we wish to convert others, we must recognize our responsibility to preach the gospel to them. Paul said in Romans 1:14 to 17, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it (that is the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Paul then said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Later in verse 21 of 1 Corinthians 1, he says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God

was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1 to 2, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”

Again James 1 verse 18 says, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” Now he explains more in verse 21 when he says, James says, “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, (that is to repent he says) in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

In the parable of the sower, the seed of the kingdom, according to Matthew and according to Luke, is the word of God (Luke 8 verse 11). Now scattering the seed is actually preaching the Word. Owen Olbricht said, “Without the Spirit there would be no Word; without the Word there could be no life or birth; and without life and birth no one could become a member of the kingdom.” There’s no indication a direct operation of the Holy Spirit brought about conversion; rather than the seed of the Word which brought about our life.

In the conversion stories of the book of Acts, one thing stands out clearly: those who were saved first heard the preaching of the gospel. Though Peter and the apostles even though they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance, it was their preaching about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that pricked people’s hearts and led them to conversion. Acts 2:37 says, “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and (they) said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” You see preaching the gospel touches hearts! This is why we have the great commission! Acts 2 and verse 41 says, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” Receiving the word, not having an experience, is what led them to be baptized and to be added to the believers in the church.

Likewise, Acts 8 and verse 12 says, “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.” In Acts 8 and verse 35 to 36 Philip taught the Ethiopian Eunuch. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’” The Ethiopian eunuch acted after hearing Philip preach Christ.

Saul of Tarsus went to Damascus to capture Christians and bring them bound back to Jerusalem. Acts 9 verses 3 to 6 says that: As he was approaching Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” Now the Holy Spirit didn’t save Saul on the road; and nothing is said here about Saul’s salvation. Jesus told him to go into the city, “and there it will be told you what you must do.”

According to Acts 9 verse 9 and also verse 11 Saul, who was blind, went into the city. He didn’t eat or drink anything for three days and was praying. His prayer, no doubt, was very sincere and fervent, but his prayer did not save him. Well how do I know this? Well let’s examine Acts 22:12 to 16, which says, “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, (that is to Saul of Tarsus later the apostle Paul) and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. “And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to

hear an utterance from His mouth. 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'"

Now after three days Ananias revealed to Saul what he must do. He told him to get up, be baptized, and wash away his sins. Wash away his sins? You see, Saul was still in his sins. He was not yet saved. Now when people wash their dishes or wash their clothes, they wash them because they are dirty. And though he had seen the Lord, though he had fasted, and prayed fervently for three days, Saul still had a dirty soul that needed to wash away his sins in the blood of Jesus! He was not free from sin until Ananias told him what he must do. Saul was baptized that day (Acts 9 verse 18) because baptism into Christ was necessary, urgent and for the forgiveness of sins.

Now Cornelius and his family were the first Gentile converts. Peter told Cornelius in Acts 10:34 to 35, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." Now the angel who spoke to Cornelius did not save him; instead, the angel told him to send for Peter "and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (Acts 11 verse 14). You see Cornelius and his family were not saved by a miraculous gift but by hearing the gospel of Christ and obeying it. Peter "ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10 verse 48). The miraculous gift that they received when Peter began to speak was given to convince the Jews that Gentiles could then come to Christ according to (Acts 11:15 to 18).

Our conversion must last for a lifetime. It requires a complete change in our thinking and in our behavior. And no one can claim he is converted apart from repentance. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23 to 25 that, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (or his soul)" now denying ourselves means leaving the worldly and sinful life behind. We deny our fleshly passions so that we can take up our cross and follow the Lord. We start living for the Lord and following His teaching. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of ways.

Repentance is a cleansing of our hands and a purifying of our hearts. We'll no longer focus on the sinful ways that ruin lives and then we begin living a Christ-like lives that's different. And of course when we live for Christ that makes the world a better place. Romans 6:1 to 2 says, "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?" The idea of being saved and then turning back to sin is completely against God's will. Some say if a person turns away from Christ, he was never converted in the first place; but this is not true.

Hebrews 3:12 to 14 says, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." Oh, you can harden your heart and lose your salvation. We must continue as long as we live to turn away from sin and live for the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You can change our hearts and change our lives through the preaching of the word. And Father we pray that we will listen carefully and be obedient to Your word out of faith in love. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Have you repented? Have you changed in your heart from one who loves sin to one who loves the Lord Jesus? Have you changed your ways? Paul urged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 verse 12 that we should “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Can people look at your life and see that you’re setting an example of godly behavior? Titus 2:11 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.” Are you that kind of person?

Becoming a Christian is a complete change of heart and life. When you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again, you realize that you can’t live in sin but must change your heart and life in repentance. You want Jesus as your Savior and as your Lord. A convert is not ashamed to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God in the presence of others. People who convert to Christ fulfill the command to be baptized into Christ and into His death. They repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Now they stop arguing with the Lord but out of love keep His commandments. Why not repent and be baptized today, so that your sins will be forgiven?

We pray today’s study about conversion has led you to come to the Lord. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy 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. There’s also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, “SearchTVMinistry.” And be sure to like the programs. That helps us to spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don’t worry, we’re not asking for money. We’re here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Because everybody needs a church home. I realize some of you for health reasons cannot attend worship; I’m speaking to those who can attend and haven’t been. There’s probably a church of Christ near you. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly 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 the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.