



WAS YOUR CONVERSION GENUINE?

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Have you been converted to Christ? Was your conversion genuine?

Salvation from sin can only take place when one is converted from his sin to righteousness. We usually describe someone who believes and becomes a follower and adherent of the Christian faith as having been converted. What is conversion? When and how is a person converted? And how can we know that we have been truly converted? I want to begin today in Acts 15. Some controversy arose among Jews in the church when the Gentiles began being converted to Christ and added to the church. Beginning in verse 1, Luke tells us: *“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.”*

Some of the Jewish leaders of the early churches were questioning the conversion of the Gentiles because they had not been circumcised according to the requirement of Jewish law. They were arguing that their conversion was not genuine if they did not submit to the laws of Moses. So, a great meeting was called between the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem to discuss and settle the matter and using the word of God they did just that. Some question their own conversion or the conversions of others today for other various reasons. How CAN we know if we have really been converted? That will be the object of our study today as we pose the question to you “Was Your Conversion Genuine?”

One cannot be saved and be in fellowship with God without being converted. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 18:3, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” This is one of ten times the words “converted, conversion, or convert” occur in the King James Version. In the English language, the word convert, according to Webster’s dictionary, means “To change; transform; turn” as you would, for example, convert grain into flour. The Greek word the New Testament writers used means to turn, and then turn again. Vine’s

Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says the word implies a turning FROM and a turning TO. It means, in other words, to turn away from sin and turn to righteousness; to turn from Satan and turn to God; to turn from self and turn to Christ. It is a transformation and a change of state and a change of direction that takes place when one hears, believes, and obeys the gospel.

Conversion is not merely an encounter or an experience, it is a total revolution of heart and life that leads to a completely different course in life. Conversion changes our thinking; it changes our believing; it changes our allegiance; and it changes our living. Now, many claim to have been converted at some point in their life but that may not necessarily be so. I meet people from time to time who are worried about their conversion. They are concerned that they may not have genuinely been converted. And that may indeed be the case. So, how can we know if our conversion is true and genuine? How can we know that it was real?

Well, let's begin by noticing how we **cannot** know whether conversion was genuine. Some have a false confidence and are basing their claim of conversion on some things that do not really measure the genuineness of conversion. In fact, they can be deceptive and make us think we have been converted when in truth, no real conversion has taken place. First, you cannot know by your feelings whether you have been converted. A lot of people put a great amount of stock in the way they feel about things, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. Often the most difficult ones to persuade with the truth are those who have strong emotional responses to things and who rely on their feelings to guide them. It's hard to argue with what a person feels or thinks they have experienced without appearing to accuse them of not being honest or sincere. But this highlights the folly of allowing our emotions to be the standard by which we judge matters of truth. In fact, it's a dangerous standard. Wise Solomon said, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12) And the apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 "For we walk by faith, not by sight." By faith, he means (as faith always means in the bible) a trust or belief in what God has said in His word. Sight, on the other hand, refers to the things we deduce by our own senses, or our own experiences, or our feelings. To use our emotional reaction to something as evidence that we have done what is right is to walk by sight instead of walking by faith.

Emotion isn't a bad thing. God gave us emotions and it's a wonderful thing to feel happy or relieved and to truly know peace and joy because our sins have been forgiven and we are right with God by His grace, but feelings can and often are wrong. Feelings prove nothing and they certainly are not EVIDENCE of a genuine conversion. Paul FELT as though he was doing the right thing when he opposed Christianity and persecuted Christ's followers but, of course, he wasn't doing right. He was very wrong.

And then, our parents' religion is not a way of knowing if our conversion was genuine. Just because our parents believed something and raised us to believe the same thing doesn't mean that thing is true. Again, Paul spent much of his life living by the tradition of his fathers, according to Galatians 1:14-16. While parents instilling truth and faith in the hearts of their children is a wonderful thing and is by God's design, the fact that our parents believe something and teach us to believe something in and of itself doesn't make that thing the truth. And it is often an incredibly difficult thing to get people to see truth and break away from the false religion of parents and grandparents.

We also cannot know whether our conversion was genuine by the testimony of others. Simply because most people make religious claims and believe things about salvation doesn't make them so. It's a popular practice today for people to offer to others what they call their testimony about how they were converted and saved. They tell of great events that led to their conversion and others then look to have

a similar 'experience' or think that conversion must take place in the way that person claims to have been saved. But friend, they can be just as wrong. Perhaps they have been misled. Again, it's a wonderful thing if a person has been converted to share the gospel with others and encourage them to be converted to Christ but we must remember that people are not saved by personal testimonies and personal experiences don't determine what is true in the sight of God; we must be looking to a different standard or higher rule by which to measure true and genuine conversion.

Now, is there such a standard? Is there an OBJECTIVE way, instead of a SUBJECTIVE way, to know that our conversion is real and genuine; that we truly have been saved and converted to Christ? Indeed, there is! Listen to Paul recounting how the Corinthian church had come to Christ when Paul first went to that city and preached the gospel to them. He writes to them in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Now, what does he mean that he came in demonstration of the Spirit and power and that their faith should be in that as opposed to something else? Well, a few verses later in verses 12-13 he says: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." You see, the Holy Spirit furnished the apostles with the words to communicate the mind of God. They were converted by those words. They were converted to Christ by the gospel the apostles preached to them. Now, in the Roman letter, Paul refers to this as "the witness of the Spirit." In Romans 8:16, Paul says: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." Now, the Greek word that Paul wrote here which is translated "bears witness with" means "to testify jointly." It means "to corroborate by concurrent evidence." In other words, there is an agreement between what the Spirit of God has said and how the spirit of man has responded.

We tend to take terms like this (especially when the Holy Spirit is involved) and make them mystical and abstract. People, for some reason, always want to jump to the conclusion that when the Holy Spirit is said to be involved in something that it must involve a vision or an inner voice or a feeling or perhaps a better felt-than-told experience, but this is not the case at all. Remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 that the Spirit had given him and the other apostles WORDS to speak by which to convey spiritual things or spiritual truths. The Holy Spirit gave to the apostles the gospel message to preach and write down for us to believe, obey, and then share with others. Where does it come from? From the Word of God which the Holy Spirit produced. The power of conversion, friend, is not in an experience or a feeling or an inner sense of some kind, the great power of conversion is in the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ. The word is the Spirit's means of converting the sinner to Christ. Psalm 19:7 says "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;"

So, Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit bears witness with or testifies WITH our spirit that we are the children of God. That's not an inner feeling. It is concrete and objective evidence that means we can be assured that we belong to Him. Well, if the Spirit has testified of Christ and salvation in His word, how can there be agreement between the Spirit and our spirit? It's simple. There must be an agreement between what the Spirit has testified in the gospel and how we have responded to that testimony.

Now, friend, the New Testament tells us how people are converted to Christ. It tells us how the apostles went forth and what they preached to convert people. And if we believe and obey the same things the apostles preached to them back then, we can be converted to Christ in the same way and have the assurance of the Holy Spirit through the word of God that we have been converted: that we have “turned and turned again” or turned away from sin and turned to Christ.

The first thing that must take place is we must HEAR the word of God. No person can be converted apart from HEARING the gospel. That’s why Christ commissioned the apostles to go and preach it. That’s why we today have the New Testament record of what the apostles preached: so that we too can believe the same things and obey them and be converted.

Now, Paul said in Romans 10:17 that the word of God brings about faith. Again, faith is not a feeling. It is not a hunch. It is an obedient, active belief in the word of God when we hear it. And without “faith” it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)

Hearing the gospel and believing what we have heard causes us to repent. The word repent means to change our will resulting in a change of life. Our belief in the gospel and the conviction that comes through hearing and believing the word of God causes us to make a life-changing decision – to turn from our sin – to stop practicing sin and to instead obey the Lord. The scripture says in Acts 3:19 “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”

This revolution of mind and will causes us to confess our faith in and our allegiance to Christ. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10)

This change of mind and will and allegiance causes one to want to have his sins forgiven and be united with Christ. That’s why Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21 that “baptism is the answer (or the appeal) of a good conscience toward God.” Jesus said in Mark 16:16 “He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned.” Peter said in Acts 2:38 “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism thus puts us INTO a new relationship with Christ according to Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3-4.

Friend, that’s the pattern we see again and again as the apostles, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, went throughout the world preaching the gospel. That’s what took place time and again as they went about converting people from being sinners to being disciples of Christ. Now, if that’s what the Spirit testifies in His word, then how can my spirit jointly testify with God’s Spirit that I am His child: that I have truly been converted? When I have complied with the teaching of the gospel. Not just baptism: but when I have truly placed my faith in Christ, repented of my sins, confessed Him as the Son of God, and been united with Him in baptism for the forgiveness of my sins, then I can truly know with all the evidence of heaven backing it up that I have been converted. Yes, that ought to make me feel good. But it’s not the feeling that testifies to a genuine conversion: it’s the testimony of the word of God – which is the Spirit’s witness.

Now then, let’s apply that for a moment. How can we know if our conversion was not genuine? I speak with people from time to time who worry about that. Is it possible that you may believe you have been converted but no true conversion has taken place?

Well, first, those who were not taught the gospel or did not understand the message of the gospel could not have been converted. While baptism is necessary, you can be baptized a hundred times without ever being converted. Baptism is only for those who believe the gospel because they've heard the gospel. Babies can't hear and understand the gospel and turn their hearts to Christ. And so, being sprinkled as a small child doesn't make one converted it just makes a baby wet and upset. Baptism is for those who hear, understand, and believe the gospel and desire to turn to Christ and be saved.

Those who did not truly BELIEVE the gospel have not been converted. Being baptized because others were being baptized or being baptized to satisfy someone else (perhaps parents, or a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a husband or wife); that's not conversion!

Those who never repented of sin have not been converted. That doesn't mean perfection but there must be a decision to turn away from one's sinful living for there to be a conversion.

Those who were too ashamed or embarrassed to confess the Christ were not converted. A person is converted Christ loves Christ and claims allegiance to Christ. There is no such thing as an incognito Christian or a secret disciple.

And those who have not been immersed for the forgiveness of sins have never been genuinely converted for this step was commanded by Jesus Himself and is the consummating step in ones turning to Christ.

Friend, hearing the gospel changes a person's understanding. Believing changes a person's mind. Repenting changes a person's will and determination. Confessing Christ changes a person's allegiance. But baptism (when preceded by faith, repentance, and confession) changes a person's STATE in relation to Christ. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." So said the apostle Paul in Romans 6:3-4.

Have you truly been converted? I'm not asking if you have had a feeling. I'm not asking if you've seen a light or heard a voice. I'm not asking if a preacher has told you that you are converted. I'm not asking if you've had an experience that you just can't explain. I'm asking does the Word of God teach that you have been converted? Have you ever truly become a new creation in Christ? If not, I want to urge to obey the gospel and be converted to Christ today.

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