

“Except You Be Converted...” (Mt. 18:3)
Understanding Genuine Conversion To Jesus Christ

Introduction

One cannot listen to a sermon on the radio or watch some religious service on television without hearing the preacher at some point discuss “conversion to Jesus Christ.” When talking to people who admit to being “regular church-goers,” they, too, will confess that conversion is essential. However, sometimes we see these same people publicly behaving in such ways that makes us wonder if they have a proper understanding of what “genuine conversion” is all about. Indeed, it is a misunderstood topic – even by New Testament disciples of Christ.

We are not trying to unfairly judge brethren (cp. 2 Tim. 2:19). Yet, the Lord has taught us that we shall know men “by their fruits” (Mt. 7:16). Consequently, when we see or hear Christians either failing to do what is plainly taught in the Scripture or doing something that Jesus has not authorized, it begs the obvious question about whether or not they understand how a “converted person” is to think and act when it comes to religious issues. This particular lesson is devoted to help that understanding.

Defining “Conversion”

The root word is *strepho*, and means to “turn around; turn one’s self about; to turn the heart or mind; to change one’s course of conduct” [Thayer, p. 591].

1. Using the following passages, show how the Bible uses this term in a literal or “outward” sense:

Mk. 5:30 _____

Mt. 5:39 _____

Mt. 7:6 _____

2. Now show how the Scripture portrays conversion in a figurative or “inward” sense with the following passages:

Acts 7:39 _____

Acts 15:3 _____

Acts 3:19 _____

Acts 11:21 _____

Mt. 18:3 _____

1 Thess. 1:6-9 _____

Jas. 5:19-20 _____

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Lesson 2

3. Thought question: using **Mk. 7:14-23**, how do we know that changed conduct results after one's heart or mind has been changed?

The Need For "Conversion"

4. Using **Mt. 18:3** & **Jas. 5:19-20**, be able to explain how we know conversion (*i.e. "turning to the Lord"*) is not a trivial matter...how it is very essential.

5. What condition among men makes conversion necessary? (**Rom. 6:23**)

6. Using these passages, show how they describe God's character or how He feels about sin:

Prov. 6:16-19 _____

Mal. 2:16 _____

1 Pet. 1:16 _____

1 Jn. 1:5 _____

Rev. 4:8 _____

Isa. 46:8-10 _____

Isa. 59:1-2 _____

7. Based on the above passages alone (*there are many more we could consider*), do we really have to wonder why God calls on us to be "converted" or to "turn around?" (**cp. Gal. 6:7-8**)

8. Some verses in **Eph. 1-2** uses terms that illustrate how God feels toward those who have sinned.
- God has never at any time been under obligation to preserve mankind that has transgressed His will by sinning against Him (**cp. Gen. 6-9**)
 - He would be well within His rights to "wipe us out" (**cp. Ex. 32:7-10**)
 - Instead of "wiping us out," God's word uses expressions that describe how He feels and has reacted toward sinners (those who needed to "turn" or be "converted")

Write down the 2 words or phrases from each verse that describe God's heart toward sinners:

Eph. 2:4 _____ & _____

First Principles Of The Oracles Of God

Lesson 2

Eph. 2:7 _____ & _____

Eph. 1:7 _____ & _____

9. How might 2 Cor. 5:9 summarize on how one might consider his/her conduct in light of whether or not "conversion" has taken place?

Conclusion

Both believers and unbelievers will be challenged with understanding and applying the concept of "conversion" to the Lord.

Unbelievers

They need to be convinced the road they presently travel is in reality a "dead end street" with certain destruction awaiting them (**Eph. 2:1-13**).

- their sinful behavior makes them dead in their sins (**vv. 1-3**)
- they are without Christ, aliens, and without hope in the world (**v. 12**)

They need to be "converted" or "to turn around" and begin living a life that pleases God...one that is in harmony with what is revealed in the Bible.

Believers

Their challenge will not be so much turning to "new sins," but rather overcoming temptations to go back and pick up "old sins."

- they need to live a "transformed" life (**Rom. 12:2**)
- they do not need to make "provisions for the flesh" to satisfy sinful lusts or desires (**Rom. 13:14**)
- they need to "mortify" (kill) works of the flesh (**Col. 3:5**)

They need to remember that in the past they "turned to the Lord" and their present behavior needs to match that commitment and confessed allegiance to Christ.

- in their public obligations of assembling regularly and work in the kingdom
- in their private moments of Bible study and prayer life

Hopefully this lesson has given us a deeper understanding of what "*genuine conversion*" to Jesus Christ really is and what it involves.