

190130-4 Doctrine Series, Conversion by the Mediate Means of the Gospel – Craig Thurman

Christians that are properly instructed in the word of God are aware that life with Christ is an ongoing conversion experience. Conversion for Christians is usually the result of failing of the grace of God, turning from the Lord and to error.

Ga 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

And then back to the Lord.

Christ to Peter, an apostle:

Lu 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Jas 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

So, as long as we are in this present body of sin there will be conversions. Ignorance of this will result in confusion and doubts as to whether we were ever Christ's. So, while it is important to know this aspect of conversion, it is not the conversion I would refer to in this lesson. I want to refer to that very first instance when we turned to Christ in faith. This followed the new birth. Apart from this order, the new birth, then conversion, there is no true conversion experience.

'Conversion may be a mere mental process; the understanding convinced, but the heart unchanged. It may be effected as education and refinement are effected. The schools are constantly doing it.' *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2 [3]. p.137, *George W. Lasher*

Some drunkards, drug addicts, liars, thieves, adulterers, fornicators, sluggards, convert, or turn away from a self-destructive manner of life, for reasons that have nothing to do with Christ.

However a conversion which is wrought by the Lord always follows the time of the new birth. *Ye must be born again.*

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

...

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Remember what we said in the previous lesson, that the new birth is an immediate act of God, and conversion is a mediated act, which is through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cause of the new birth is God. The cause of conversion is the gospel. Only after there is an hearing ear, a seeing eye, a new heart and a new mind *can* one hear, understand, and be affected so as to turn in faith to the Son of God.

Article #28 of our newly adopted confession of faith expresses that conversion comes by means of preaching the gospel. It reads,

28. The Preaching of the Gospel and Conversion*

The preaching of the gospel is the only thing necessary to the conversion of sinners. This in no way requires any qualifications, preparations, terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law. This preaching is the power of God to bring the naked soul, a sinner and ungodly, to receive Christ crucified, dead and buried, and risen again.

Jn.3:14, 15, 1:12; Is.55:1; Jn.7:37; 1Ti.1:15; Ro.1:16; 4:5; 5:8; 10:14; 1Co.1:21-24.

**Formerly Article 25 of 1644 COF*

What is Conversion?

First, let's define conversion. The verb, *to convert*, is found 39 times in the N.T., and is tss. *to turn, turn about, turn again, return, go again, to convert, to come again.*

to convert, ἐπιστρέφω, ἐπί upon, at, upon, among + στρέφω, strephō, to turn, to turn back, and also tss. convert; ἐπιστρέφω, to turn about; cf. with the prefixed prepositions ἀνά-, διά-, ἐπί-, κατά-, ὑπό-

Mt.9.22, Jesus *turned* him *about* when the woman that had an issue of blood came forward from behind him to acknowledge she was the one that touched Him.

Mt.10.13, *let* your peace *return* to you if the house you come to does not receive you (to the apostles as they went out to preach Christ in the cities of Israel).

Lk.8.55, and her spirit *came again*, spoken of the raising of the daughter of Jairus to life.

Acts 15.36, Let us *go again* and visit; Paul expressing his desire to revisit the churches that were begun during his first missionary endeavor.

So, to convert would mean to turn from a previous manner of life, to Christ and the life that is only in Him.

Acts 11.19 ¶ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

The noun *conversion* is found in the KJV Bible only once. It is with reference to the Gentiles turning to Christ. When Paul and Barnabas were sent of the Lord to begin the first missionary endeavor they preached Christ among the nations and some professed faith in Him. They were converted from their former manner of life to live as Christians.

Ac 14:27 And when they were come (that is, Paul and Barnabas), and had gathered the church together (at Antioch), they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles (meaning, the nations).

The Lord had *opened the door of faith* to the Gentiles, which is called *conversion*.

Ac 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they (particularly Paul and Barnabas, with certain other brethren from the church of Antioch) passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

conversion, ἐπιστροφήν, acc. sing. of ἐπιστροφή; tss. conversion.

The Gentiles were turned from a former, empty manner of life to the living God which gave them hope of life after all of this world passes away.

Ac 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein ...

How is conversion effected?

First, there must be the prerequisite of life, then there is conversion. We know everyone that has ears do not necessarily hear. Not everyone that has the physical organ of an ear hears. Folks that are deaf have ears, but are unable to hear sound, or if they hear sound it is unintelligible to them. And like that, folks that have the physical organ of an ear, whether they can hear sound or not, do not necessarily *hear* the message of Jesus Christ. Hearing Christ isn't conditioned on physical hearing at all. It is conditioned on the capacity to understanding. We must have the *capacity* to understand the message of Christ. We believe that means a previous work of the Spirit of God has brought forth life, and thereby opened the understanding so that we *can hear* the gospel and come to *trust* in Christ as the Christ of God, sent by the Father to die for our sins.

Mt 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it ...

Mark's gospel account of this, the key word is *receive*. (Mk.4.20)
Luke's gospel account of this, the key word is *keep*. (Lk.8.15)

Before this the understand was *dark*.

Eph.4.17 ¶ This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

having the understanding darkened means that the processes of their minds have no light of the life of Christ in them at all. To say it another way, the eyes of their understanding were closed; they were spiritually blinded. (cf. Ro.11.20)

Only after the bestowal of everlasting life do any come to *understand* the gospel of Christ and convert to the saving of the soul.

Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Second, conversion is effected by preaching Christ. A good example, clean living, good behavior, will not affect conversion in sinners. They must come within the sound of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No one can be converted to Christ without hearing of Him. How can men trust in someone of whom they have never heard? And that is the point of preaching Christ: informing sinners of the Savior.

Ro 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

The word of truth is first heard, then follows faith.

Eph 1:13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation ...

The gospel preached confirms to sinners everlasting life. In a way it bids sinners to *look and live*; to turn away from the sin and the world, and to Christ to live

(meaning saving our lives for Christ, instead of continuing to *waste* them by living after the flesh).

1Jo 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (Very simple statements of fact)

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The more acquainted we are with the truths of the word of God the more steadfast our faith in Christ will be. This activity begins the moment of our turning to Christ.

2Ti.1.9 Who (God) hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (ages of time),

*10 But (God's purpose and grace) is now made manifest ('in contrast to its concealment heretofore in God's eternal purpose,' J-F-B) **by** (διά) the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality (deathlessness) to light **through** (διά) the gospel ...*

hath brought ... to light, φωτίσαντος, gen. sing. masc. part. aor. act. of φωτίζω, tss. to give light (Lk.11.36), to lighten (Re.21.23), enlighten (He.6.4), to bring to light (1Co.4.5), to make see (Eph.3.9), to illuminate (He.10.32).

God

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according to His own purpose and grace

which grace is given us in Christ in eternity,

but

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By the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, Who abolished death.

And,

Through the gospel, has brought brought life and immortality to light.

In the main this says that the saved of God received grace in Christ before the world began, and that now it is manifested by the Person and gospel of Christ. Note, that the gospel is the means of God which exposes life and immortality. It does not cause life and immortality, but exposes it. These must be in the sinner first or else the gospel has nothing to expose. (see diagram below)

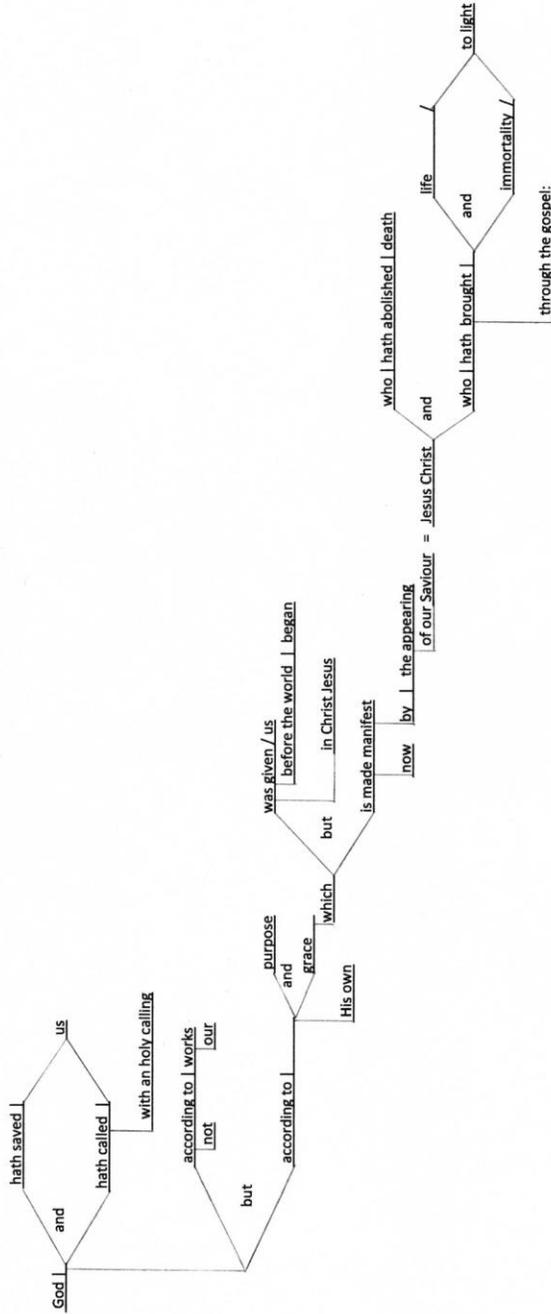
The gospel is the instrument which exposes the prerequisite of life and immortality (deathlessness).

In summary

Conversion is the time when we are turned from the world, from sin and self to trusting in Jesus Christ as our Savior. It must be preceded by the new birth. Only quickened sinners have the capacity to understand the things of Christ. Its cause is the hearing of the gospel. The gospel introduces sinners to the Savior. By it they come to know the Person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Do you know Christ? Have you come to trust Him as Lord and Savior? By that I mean, does the Lord by His word of God dictate your life? Are the things that I think, do, and say governed by the word of God? Are you living in expectation of His return? These are indicators of a genuine conversion experience.

Grammatical Diagram of 2Timothy 1:9, 10



The main thought appears to be that: God hath saved and called us according to His own purpose and grace. This grace which was given us in Christ in eternity is now made manifest by the appearing of the Savior, Jesus Christ. He has both has abolished death and exposed prerequisite life and immortality through the [preaching] of the gospel.

If the text is to speak freely this informs us of the work of the gospel: it is the instrument which brings to light the life and immortality in those being saved. If there is no life and immortality there is nothing that the gospel can bring forth from the sinner but enmity against God.