

Conversion

Lord's Day 33

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 4:2
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Our Scripture reading this morning is found in the first epistle of Peter. 1 Peter 4, and we read the entire chapter.

1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; 2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: 4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: 5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. 6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. 7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. 8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. 9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify

God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word.

Before we turn to the Catechism, we read from Scripture 1 Peter 4:2 in connection with Lord's Day 33.

2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

It's upon this and many other passages of Scripture that the Catechism bases its teaching in Lord's Day 33, Questions and Answers 88 through 91. There we read,

Q. 88. Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Q. 89. What is the mortification of the old man?

It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Q. 90. What is the quickening of the new man?

It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Q. 91. But what are good works?

Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, are you converted? Every true believer will experience conversion. That's not just a Baptist term. Conversion is the experience of every believer. Those who are not converted cannot be saved. That's what the Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 32, Question and Answer 87, "Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?" Can they be saved if they are not converted to God? And the answer is, "By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man,

drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God." That shows the importance of knowing whether or not we are converted. Are you converted and am I converted? We ought to ask ourselves that question.

Now of course, if we are going to know whether or not we are converted, we have to understand what is conversion. That's what Lord's Day 33 is about. What is conversion? Of how many parts doth true conversion consist? Then it defines conversion as the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. Is that our experience? 1 Peter 4, that chapter that we read indicates that conversion is the experience of the believer. 1 Peter 4:1 first talks about the basis of that conversion, that's God's work through Jesus Christ, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us," that's the source of our conversion, but then verse 2 says, "That he," that is, the believer, "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." It's talking about the work of conversion. That work, of course, ultimately is God's work but when God works in our hearts that conversion, there will be fruit, the fruit of good works, and that's what the Catechism deals with in the last question and answer, Question and Answer 91, "But what are good works?" Let's consider, then, the truth of Scripture concerning conversion. In the first place, let's note the meaning; secondly, the work, that is, God's work; and lastly, the fruit of that conversion. Conversion: the meaning, the work and the fruit.

Conversion is a radical change that God works in the lives of believers. Conversion is a radical change. Jesus talks about that change and there are many passages of Scripture that talk about that change. Jesus talks about that in Matthew 18:3 and Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Conversion is absolutely necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Well, what is conversion? That Greek word translated "converted" in Matthew 18:3 literally means "to turn or to be turned." We must be turned around if we are going to enter the kingdom of heaven. In Adam, the whole human race turned away from God. They turned away from God in rebellion when they deliberately sided with the devil and now by nature having that corruption that we have obtained from Adam, by nature we hated God and his ways. Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way," we turned away from God, "we have turned every one to his own way and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." There is the salvation from that rebellion in Jesus Christ, "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

We have turned away from God. Now, conversion turns us out of that evil way and turns us back to the right way, back into the paths of righteousness. Conversion, then, has a twofold nature, both a negative and a positive, and therefore it's not surprising that when Scripture speaks of conversion, it speaks of it in both aspects, the negative and the positive. For example, in Psalm 34:14, the Psalmist under the inspiration of the Spirit says, "Depart from evil, and do good," there is the negative, depart from that and do that, depart from evil and do the good. Or Ephesians 4:28, "Let him that stole steal no more," there is the negative aspect of conversion, the turning away from sin, the turning away

from stealing. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather," and here's the positive aspect, "but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." And that's the same thing we find also in 1 Peter 4, "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men," there's the turning away from evil and then also the turning to the good, "but to the will of God." That he no longer should live the rest of his life in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. Conversion, on the one hand, involves abandoning the lusts of the flesh, and on the other hand, involves living to do the will of God.

Now it's true you can talk about those two aspects separately, you can talk about them separately but it's impossible for them to be separated, that is to say, both the positive and the negative aspects of conversion happen together. When there is a turning away from evil, there is also a turning to do the good. Both are necessary, and that makes sense. You cannot turn out of the wrong way unless you are also turning into the right way. You cannot obey God unless you are forsaking sin. On the other hand, God not only forbids us to do the evil, he also commands us to do the good. Both aspects go together.

So the two components of conversion in the first place are the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new. Colossians speaks of those two aspects. Colossians 3:9 we read, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Put off the old man and put on the new man. The old man is talking about our corrupt sinful natures, those natures that we get from Adam. Our old man is what makes us delight to do evil and our old man is what makes us hate to do the good.

Scripture has many names for the old man. Sometimes the old man is called the body of sin, Romans 6:6. Sometimes he is called the flesh, Romans 8:8. Sometimes he is called the body of death, Romans 7:24. Sometimes he is called the law of sin and death, Romans 8:2. Many names for the old man of sin.

Why do we call him an old man? Well, because he's been with us since the day that Adam and Eve fell into sin; since the day that Adam and Eve rebelled against God. You could say our old man is 6,000 years old. But he's also old because that old man has been with each and every one of us since the day we were conceived. He is old when you compare him to the new man.

We call him man, we call the old man a man because he involves every part of us. He involves our body and our soul. He involves all our faculties. The old man affects every single part of us. The old man.

Well, the mortification of the old man means to put him to death. Mortifying the old man means putting him to death, killing him. Now you understand when we kill the old man, we don't do it so suddenly or it is not done so suddenly that one minute the old man is alive and the next minute the old man is absolutely dead, instead the old man is put to death little by little, kind of like killing the old man by a slow starvation. But we

shouldn't think just because the old man is put to death that there will come a time in our lives where now on this particular day or that particular day, all of a sudden after a long process, now the old man is completely dead and we never have to deal with him again. No, the old man will remain with us until the day that we die and we are taken to heaven.

Our old man will never be completely done away with in this life and yet we kill the old man. What does killing the old man look like? As the old man is put to death, we will become truly sorry for our sins. We will become sorry for our sins not because of the consequences of our sins but we will become sorry for our sin because we have sinned against our God. As we are killing the old man, we will become more sorry for our sins and if we are truly sorry for our sins, if we truly see that we have offended God and we are sorry for that, we will also hate our sin and we will seek to avoid our sins more and more.

Killing the old man. Is that your experience, beloved? Do you see in yourselves a killing of the old man of sin? Are you truly sorry for your sins? Am I truly sorry for my sins? Do you honestly hate sin and seek to avoid sin, to avoid the temptations that lead us to sin? Well, if so, then we are experiencing conversion. We are being converted.

That's the first aspect of our conversion, the mortification of the old man. Of course, conversion also includes the positive aspect, the quickening of the new man. The new man is the new nature that God gives us when he causes us to be born again. Just like the old man has a number of names in Scripture, so does the new man have a number of names. Sometimes the new man is called a new creature, Galatians 6:15. Sometimes he is called spirit, not to be confused with the Holy Spirit, but he is called spirit, John 3:6, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Sometimes he is called the inward man, Galatians 5:17. Sometimes he is called the hidden man of the heart, 1 Peter 3:4. Many names for the new man.

We call him new because God gives us something new that we did not have by nature. By nature in Adam we don't have the new man but God gives us the new man. When he gives us the new life of Jesus Christ, he makes us new creatures, Colossians 3:10, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." The new man is new because he is renewed after the image of Jesus Christ. He is being renewed so that he looks more and more like Jesus Christ. That's just like the old man, our new man, the new man is like the old man in the sense that he is a man, that is to say, the new man affects all of our faculties. The new man involves our heart and it also involves our minds. God gives us a new man.

Well, quickening the new man simply means to give life, giving him life. Colossians 2:13 says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." You being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened, hath he made alive together with him, that is, Jesus Christ.

There is a sense in which God gives us that new life all at once. Essential students will remember we call that regeneration in the narrow sense. God gives us that new life all at once but there is another sense in which that new life becomes stronger and stronger over time. 2 Corinthians 4 speaks of that process. 2 Corinthians 4:16, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man," that's another name for the new man, "yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Our inward man is renewed, the new man is renewed day by day. That this renewal is ongoing is evident from the Greek verb used. The Greek says, "is renewed." It doesn't say the new man was renewed, past tense. It doesn't say the inward man will be renewed in the future, that's the future tense. No, it says the inward man is renewed, is being renewed, it's the present tense that is used. He is being renewed. Yes, there is a sense in which he was given life but now over time he is being renewed.

Well, what does the quickening of the new man look like? As the new man becomes more alive, we rejoice in the God of our salvation and out of thankful joy, we love God and we delight to walk in his ways. We delight to order our lives according to his will. That's the quickening of the new man. Can you see that, beloved, in your lives, the quickening of the new man? Can you see a joy in the God of our salvation? Can you see a delight to walk in his ways? That's the quickening of the new man.

Now, some imagine that the work of conversion is mostly their own work. They imagine that the work of conversion is due to their effort but Scripture makes it clear that conversion is God's work. Philippians 2:13, a familiar verse, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." When we will to do according to God's good pleasure, when we do God's good pleasure, it's because God has worked it in us. Hebrews 13 and we could point to other passages as well, Hebrews 13:20, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect," the God of peace make you perfect, "in every good work to do his will." That's God's work. "May the God of peace do this," the apostle is saying, "because it's his work." He makes us fit and prepares us to do his will.

Conversion is God's work. We can never look back at our daily conversion and see that conversion happening, we can never look at that and say, "Look what I have done. I got myself to this point." We may not say that because it's God's work. Conversion, then, is not all about finding the right book that lists seven steps to overcoming this or that sin, although books can be helpful, but that's not what conversion ultimately is about. God must turn our hearts and then we shall be turned, and that means if it's God's work, we ought to be in prayer to God that he will carry on that work of conversion. We ought to pray like the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations, Lamentations 5:21, he says, "Turn thou us unto thee, O Jehovah, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old." There is a prayer to God that he would turn us and then we will be turned. He knows that Jehovah alone can accomplish that radical change in the lives of believers.

The verse we read in Hebrews 13 is another prayer, a prayer by the apostle that God would turn his people, that God would work that change. Again, Hebrews 13:20, "Now the God of peace... Make you perfect," make you fit, "in every good work to do his will, working in you," that is, God working in you, "working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever."

We ought to be praying, "Lord, do a work in our hearts. Do a work in my heart," so that we can pat ourselves on the back? So that others will see us and praise us? No. "For thy name's sake. Do a work in our hearts for thy name's sake." Do we pray that, beloved, that God would work in our hearts, that God would change us, that God would convert us?

Well, the work of conversion is surely God's work. We ought to recognize that he also uses means. God uses means, especially God uses the preaching of his word to turn the hearts of his people. Now, of course if God wanted to, he could simply do the work apart from any means whatsoever but that's not how God in his wisdom has chosen to convert us. In his wisdom, God has chosen to use especially the preaching of his word to work in the hearts of his people.

Now in the preaching, it comes to the wicked, of course they will not be converted, they will be hardened in their sin. They will be hardened. But when the Gospel in the preaching of God's word comes to God's people, the Spirit uses that word to melt our hearts and to turn us. When the preaching tells us of our sins and sinfulness, the Spirit applies that to our hearts so that we mourn over our sins, so that we see, no, we are not loving God as we ought to love God; we do not love our neighbor as we ought to love our neighbor. And when the preaching tells us of the grace of Jesus Christ so that we rejoice in the God of our salvation, so that we know that word applies to us, to us the obligations of the ?? so that we turn from our sins and we turn to God in thankfulness for what he has done for us.

The Spirit uses the preaching to soften our hard and stubborn hearts and he uses that to infuse new qualities into our wills. The Spirit uses means and we could talk about other means as well, the encouragement of believers, the meditation upon God's word, but the point is the Spirit uses means, especially the preaching of his word, but when he uses those means, we ought not to expect that conversion is going to be something instantaneous. Some people expect that. They think when they confess their sins before God and ask God for grace, they expect that those sins will melt away before their eyes and they will never sin that sin again, but the truth is that conversion is not instantaneous. Conversion is a life-long process. Conversion is a life-long battle. And the truth is, conversion proceeds in fits and starts. Sometimes we take two steps forward and then take one step backwards. Sometimes we have grievous falls like David did, and yet God continues that work in our hearts.

We see that example in David. David in his younger years was not as humble as he was in his later years. We have an example of that, 1 Samuel 25:34 in the case of Nabal. David was going to kill Nabal and his whole house. 1 Samuel 25:34, "For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth," David says, "as the LORD God of Israel liveth which

hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall." He was going to kill all of the men of Nabal's house.

Later in his life, David was much more humble. 2 Samuel 16:9, we read this when David was being cursed, 2 Samuel 16:9, "Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" God used David's trials throughout his life to change him.

Now it may be true that we do not recognize that in our own lives, we may not clearly see God's work, we cannot plot out on a graph and see our conversion, that's not something we can quantify, but that doesn't change the fact that God works in our hearts anyway. Conversion is not some measurable process that we can weigh and measure and say, "Here's how much I have been converted." We can't do that but God works in our hearts anyway. Job 17:9 says, "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." That's talking about conversion. Then Proverbs 4:18, "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." That's the path of the just, the path of conversion of God's people.

That's God's work in the lives of believers. When God works true conversion, there will be fruit. There will be fruit. What are the results of true conversion when God changes our minds and wills, when God works that work in our hearts? Well, those inward changes will show themselves outwardly. When we sorrow over our sins and when we hate sin, we will see also that we flee from sin. On the other hand when we have a sincere joy in God and when we love and delight to do his will, that will show itself in good works. 1 Peter 4 again, 1 Peter 4:1-2, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind," there is the inward work, "for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

When a tree is made good, then that good tree will bring forth good fruit and so too when God gives us new life, we ought to expect and seek after good fruit. Where once the will was only evil and the Canons talk about this, where once the will was only evil, God renders it good. Where once disobedience was the only fruit, now obedience begins to show itself. I say begins to show itself. Where once only existed a stubborn and stiff-necked person, God makes us willing to serve him. And from the complete service of the devil, God turns us to serve himself.

From the way of sin, God turns us into the way of righteousness. Not perfectly. We'll have to wait until heaven before perfection. We won't have perfect good fruit but we will bear good fruit, that is to say, there will be good works and that's what the Catechism deals with in the last Question and Answer, "But what are good works?" Good works are those in the first place that proceed from a true faith. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. But those who have a true faith will bring forth truly good works. They will proceed from a

true faith. Secondly, good works will be those who are performed according to the law of God. Now that law, of course, governs not only the outward, the law of God also governs the inward, it governs the heart, and good works will be those that are done for the glory of God. All those three things must be true of a work if it is going to be a good work. That means the wicked cannot do good works. They can do things that appear to be good but they are not truly good because they fail to meet those conditions.

Beloved, are you converted and are you being converted? Am I? That ought to be our desire. We want our daily conversion to be carried on because we want God to be glorified in our lives. May God be pleased to work that conversion in us for his name's sake. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that thou hast given us life and we thank thee that thou by thy Spirit dost work in us that we may grow in grace. Father, we pray that thou wouldst continue that work, turn us and then we shall be turned. Cause us to follow after thee. Draw us and we shall run after thee. Father, we pray thou do this work for thy name's sake. Forgive our sins and lead us by thy Spirit we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.