

Conversion Confusion

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Conversion is the theme of the New Testament. It embraces redemption, forgiveness, and salvation—the purpose of Jesus’ coming. To “convert” means to change/turn from one’s present course. One’s salvation depends upon his conversion (Mat. 18:3; Acts 3:19), so we **must** understand the New Testament’s teaching concerning it. Few subjects, however, involve more confusion than this one does.

Conversion brings one from sinner to saint, from lost to saved, from non-Christian to Christian, and it involves three distinct and necessary changes.

- **Conviction change:** Picture a “casual” unbeliever in God and Jesus—one who has just not thought seriously about the subject. He drives a car, consults a GPS unit, depends on a smart phone, and operates a computer. He knows such articles required intelligence, design, and manufacturing. He applies this reasoning to the universe and to his own body; he cannot attribute them to blind accident. He reads the Bible’s statement that an omniscient, omnipotent, eternal God created all things (Gen. 1:1)—the **rational** explanation of origins. He reads of Jesus in the Gospel, and moved by His miracles and His love for mankind, he believes in Him as God’s Son. His convictions have changed; the unbeliever now believes. Jesus said, “Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). To millions, belief alone equals conversion. What does the Bible teach?
- **Mind-life change:** The Bible word for this change is *repentance*. The basic meaning of this word is a change of mind—the decision to turn **from** a life of sin and self **to** one that follows wherever Jesus leads through His New Testament. One may believe that Jesus is the Christ without deciding to abandon sin and serve Him. Repentance is the point at which he “makes up his mind” to do so, and then he does so (Mat. 3:8). Jesus said that one will perish if he does not repent (Luke 13:3). Does repentance complete conversion? The Bible answers, “No.”
- **Relationship-to-God change:** While faith and repentance move one **toward** God and His Son, these do not bring one **into fellowship** with Them. This relationship change is accomplished in baptism, wherein one’s sins are forgiven, “washed away” in the blood of Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rev. 1:5). At this point—and not before—one is added to the church of Christ because he is saved (Acts 2:47). In baptism (i.e., immersion in water)—and not before—one enters “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27). Thus **believers** on Pentecost were commanded to “repent and be baptized” to receive forgiveness of sins/salvation (Acts 2:38).

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