

What Conversion Means

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2009

[0:00] Conversion means a changed life. And we see that here in 2 Corinthians 5.17. It says, Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature or a new creation.

! Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. That's becoming a new creation, a new creature in Christ. Old things are passed away. All things have become new. And isn't that a wonderful thing that can happen to a man and a woman? That they can, by God's grace, they can be changed. They can be transformed. They can be converted. And I want to talk about what conversion means. What does conversion all about? What does it mean? It means that a change happens. That something new comes into our life. We become a brand new person. We get a brand new life. Fresh, alive, new. The Bible talks about newness of life.

[0:58] Some have put it this way. The old is gone. The new has come. That's what the Christian life means. You become a brand new person. It's a brand new start. A brand new heart.

A change happens. A conversion. There's a new rush of life that comes in as the old goes away. And how can this happen? We know that the Lord Jesus talked to Nicodemus in John chapter 3. This religious man came to the teacher, the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus said to him, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

He cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again. We cannot even see the kingdom of God unless we're reborn. Unless we have that rebirth. And Nicodemus said, How can this be?

How can a man enter his mother's womb and be born? How can a man be born when he's old? But that can happen to every one of us. By God's grace, we can have new life.

[1:56] So that there's a turning of a page. Where once it was the old life, the old Andrew Craig, and now it's the new Andrew Craig. The one that God has reborn, recreated.

And that can happen for each one as they put their trust in Christ. And God's power can supernaturally take a life and change it and transform it and turn it around.

Someone hears a Christian writer said, There are six things that will be natural to a new Christian. Six things. He put it like this. There's a sensitive awareness of sin.

God prompts us and speaks to us about sin. There'll be a deep hunger for the word of God. We'll want to read it and learn it and study it and apply it and take it in.

There'll be a degree of testing and trial. The Bible says that no man can live godly in Christ Jesus without persecution. There'll be a desire for a changed life.

[2:54] There'll be a love for other Christians. We want to meet with God's people and grow in fellowship and learning and growing together. And there'll be a desire to share Christ with others.

We want to share the message, to witness, to take the message to other people that they might receive Christ too. And these are all the hallmarks about that new relationship with God.

It's not that those things make us a Christian because only God can do that by His grace, isn't it?

It's only God supernaturally. As we realise our state of being lost and we realise that Christ died on the cross for our sin, as our substitute, as the one who took God's punishment against our sin at the cross, and we realise that that was what we deserved.

But He took it for us and He took it on our behalf and died in our place. And as we put our trust in His work for us, He saves us by His mercy. There's some that think that becoming a Christian is just turning over a new leaf.

You know, you just make a decision in your mind that you're going to try to be a better person and you're going to try to change your own life. Or, you know, there's people that have those sort of efforts in different religions and philosophies that think, I'm going to be a whole lot better person by my own trying and striving and try to pick themselves up by their bootlaces.

[4:14] But we know really that our own efforts are inadequate. It's got to be His work and the cross that we put our trust in, not in any working of our own. There's a scripture in Jeremiah 13 that says, Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

You know, it gives rise to the saying we have today, Can the leopard change his spots? We know he can't. We can't change ourselves just as a leopard can't change his spots, just like we can't change our skin colour.

But God can change us from the inside out. It's His working. It's His saving power. And it's also been said, Don't try to teach a pig to sing.

All you get is frustrated and it really annoys the pig. And it's like that with trying to get someone to be a Christian. Or rather trying, for me, to speak to people here tonight and trying to get people who are not a Christian to live like a Christian without being born again.

It's like trying to teach a pig to sing. Because I can't teach you to live the Christian life if you're not born again yet. In some ways it's pointless as much as you might learn some good values and learning.

[5:22] The starting point, the first step, is that you need to trust Christ as your Lord and Saviour. You need to be converted. That's number one. That's the first step.

And everything else is like the growing stages, isn't it? As we know, we that have been Christians for some time, there's heaps to learn. It's a daily learning, isn't it? A daily growing.

Closer to Him, I trust. I can sermonize and give you all kinds of good philosophies and teachings and try to teach you to live the Christian life, but if you're not saved, it's not going to help you that much.

The first thing, and what I must impress on all of us, and every one of us need to, myself included, need to know for sure, am I saved? Have I been converted? And if not, I need to know how to be saved.

I need to know how to be converted and for God to do that work in me. When God saves us, when we're converted, there's a changed life. Something happens that's dramatic. It's an amazing supernatural thing.

[6:21] There was a preacher of old called Grenfell who was talking to a man who was on a fishing boat off the shore, and this man was saying that some time ago he'd got converted through the preaching of this missionary doctor.

He said, I was converted two years ago. And the doctor said to him, the preacher said to him, what difference did it make in your life? And this man, he said, ask the skipper of the boat.

He was a sailor. He said, ask the skipper. That was his response. And that should be the same for us, that if we're a Christian, ask the people that I work with. They'll tell you that I'm a Christian.

Ask the people that I mix with, my friends, my neighbours. Ask them if I'm a converted. And they'll tell you that, yes, something happened to this man, this woman.

Something happened. There was a difference there. They were converted by God's grace and made a difference in their life. And we see in Ezekiel chapter 36, some of this kind of same sentiment about what does it mean to be converted.

[7:24] And we see in Ezekiel 36 that the Lord God spoke to Ezekiel the prophet and talked about some changes that would happen in a person's life when they put their trust in the Lord, when they became a believer.

And Ezekiel 36, verse 26, it says, A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

One of the things that will notice, that will happen when you become a Christian, is you have a new heart. You will get a new heart. Jesus Christ will change your heart. And the outward ways, the outward actions of your life, will then become different because you've been changed, as I say, from the inside out.

That's what happens, isn't it? When you become a Christian, God changes you. He turns your life around and He changes your heart. Now, the very centre of you, the very core of you, the very real you, changes.

Your heart changes. And God's Spirit lives and abides within us, and our lives become different. I know I was talking with someone through the week, and they were saying that they'd been doing some Bible reading, some daily Bible reading, and they got to Matthew where the Lord Jesus spoke, and He said, That thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength.

[8:45] And this man was saying to me, How do I know that I love God? Or how can I love God with all my heart? And that's a big question, isn't it? And he was searching in his own heart, and his own wanting and loving Christ to draw closer, to have that heart that loves God with all the heart.

And when you become a Christian, you'll want to have that kind of heart. You'll want to have that kind of love for Christ, that affection for Him that's above any other affection than love. So love the Lord with all your heart, with a true heart.

And like to the heart is the mind. The Bible talks in a way that kind of interrelated, our mind, our soul, our heart. They're kind of all kind of linked in a way. And the Bible talks about being renewed in your mind.

We know that familiar one in Romans 12. It says, And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The very mind, the very thinking and thought patterns, and what we dwell upon, what we concentrate upon, what we count as important to think about, is that which is in alignment with His will, and what would be pleasing to Him.

[10:04] And God's life-changing power comes in. It revolutionizes people. It revolutionizes people. It helps us to have a whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of acting and living. And it revolutionizes us.

In Wesley's notes on the Bible, John Wesley, an old-time preacher, he commented about 2 Corinthians 5.17, and he said, A true believer is in Him.

There's a new creation that happens. Only the power that makes a world can make a Christian. When you think about it, only God, the one who made creation, can make a new creation. Only He who made the majesty of the universe, the wonder and splendor of it, He is the only one who can make you a Christian. And he goes on, and when He is so created, the old things are passed away of their own accord.

Even as snow in spring, behold the new, the present, visible, undeniable change. There's a new life, new senses, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas and conceptions.

[11:06] His whole tenor of action and conversation is new. And as He lives, as it were, in a new world, that's what being a Christian, it's such a revolutionary thing. We hear of revolutionaries in our world, and people starting revolutions.

Well, this is a revolution that can happen, one by one, one soul at a time, one heart at a time. We think of people like, the one who penned Amazing Grace, that famous song, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound.

Who was this man? John Newton, we've heard, many of us would have heard of him. His mother died when he was six years old. And at 11, he went off to sea. He went off to be a sailor.

And his early years were one continuous round of rebellion and sin. And for a while, he worked on the West African coast, collecting slaves for trade. Imagine that.

Human beings were chained and sold like animals. This was the world that they lived in, and this is what John Newton was like, treating fellow human beings like animals, like slaves, like lesser than human.

[12:08] And this is what he was like. He was a rugged man, a vicious man. And he was the captain of this slave ship. So you can imagine, the kind of hard heart that he would have had, as he had that kind of role.

And he was there, capturing and transporting these slaves, from Africa, to the plantations in West Indies in America. It was a cruel and vicious way of life. He was a hard man, a mean man, a vicious man.

And he would not disagree with that, in terms of that part of his life. But something happened to John Newton. On an amazing day, on a particularly stormy voyage, everyone thought the ship would be lost.

And Newton was reading a book that was written by a Christian, a devotional book. And the message of that book, and the frightening experience of the sea, it started to get a hold of John. It shook him. It grabbed a hold of him. He was shaking in his boots. And it was a frightening time. And the Holy Spirit used that devotional book, to turn him, to see Christ, and to find Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

[13:13] And for the next several years, he continued working as a slave ship captain. He still wasn't quite there. He tried to justify his work, as he tried to set to improve conditions on the vessel.

He even held worship services for the hardened crew every Sunday. But eventually, he felt convicted about the inhuman aspects of the work. And eventually, he actually became a crusader against slavery.

I know there's a recent movie being made about Newton, and also William Wilberforce. And at the age of 82, just before he died, he proclaimed, my memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.

And on his tombstone, they have this statement, they wrote on his tombstone when he died, once John Newton, once an infidel, or in other words, a godless person, a servant of slavers in Africa, lost by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, hardened, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy.

He had a new heart. That's what can happen to you, young people, older people tonight. God can give you a new heart, a whole new heart. And secondly, we see in that story where the Lord spoke to Ezekiel, he said also, not just a new heart, but a new spirit, a very new spirit, can come and be resident and evident in our lives.

[14:45] And we see as Christians, we know that God's Holy Spirit comes and fills our lives. When you become a Christian, the Bible says that you have his Holy Spirit, as every child of God has the Holy Spirit.

and the Holy Spirit gives us that new outlook on life, helps us see things with spiritual lives, with the spiritual kind of frame of reference, with a spiritual kind of dimension of living.

The psalmist cried, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. So the psalmist was saying he wanted to have a new heart, a clean heart, and he wanted to have a new spirit, a right spirit within him.

And John 6, 63 says that the Holy Spirit gives life. The Holy Spirit gives life. Without God's Holy Spirit, we don't have life. We know that Adam, even in the Garden of Eden, Adam wasn't even alive till God breathed breath into him, was he?

He was just dust. And God breathed life into him, the breath of life. And becoming a Christian is where God's Spirit breathes new life into us.

[15:49] We become brand new, spiritually alive. And it's been said that there's regeneration and there's conversion. Regeneration is God's action in giving new life, and conversion is the human act of turning from sin to righteousness.

So conversion is our response to God's regeneration. We get born again, and conversion is that response as we turn. There's a conversion, there's a turning, there's a turning around that happens as we trust the Lord and follow him.

How do we know we're a Christian? Because we've done what God says to do. These things are written that you may know that you have eternal life, you that have put your faith in Christ.

Now this is the record that God has given to us, everlasting life. And this life is in his Son. And if we put our faith, our trust, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible says, if you've done that, you can know that you have eternal life as you've taken that step of trusting him by faith.

There will be a sense though too where, as the Lord Jesus says, that the tree will be evident by its fruit. So, if you've got a tree in your backyard that there's apples on, what kind of tree is it?

[17:02] An apple tree. And if there's Christian fruits coming out of your life where you're living a life that is evidently showing forth the fruits, then that's a good sign that something is happening.

But not that we're putting our trust in those doing good works because there's lots of well-meaning people who can read the Bible every day and go to church morning, noon and night, and yet they're not saved.

It's not the things that we do that save us, but it's our faith that saves us and those things that come out of our life can be just the natural fruit, the natural flow of that inward trust that we've given to the Lord.

So, we're seeing there's a new heart and there's a new spirit. And thirdly, there's a whole new dimension that happens. When you become a Christian, there's a whole new purpose, a whole new outlook to life, a whole new dimension.

It's grace. It's grace that happens. Grace is meaning God's favour, God's unmerited kindness to us, His love to us that we don't deserve. It's grace that comes and saves us and it's grace that comes and we grow in grace.

[18:13] As a Christian, we grow in that grace, in that love for the Lord, in our faith in Christ. It's a growing thing. It's a learning process. The question is, when the chips are down, when it's the end of your life, will you be saved?

Are you saved? There was a man who was dying one day. He'd amassed great wealth in his life. He was a wealthy man. And the doctor came and told this man, he said, that his time was coming to an end.

And this rich man, he sent for a lawyer to come and to make out his will. And this dying man's little girl was with him. She was only about four years old.

She didn't understand what death really meant. And the mother told her that Papa was going away. And the little child went to the bedside and looked into her father's eyes and asked, Papa, have you got a home in that land you are going to?

And the question sank deep into his soul because he had spent all his time and energy, his life's energy in amassing great wealth and making a life for himself, so he thought, a grand home to live in.

[19:25] But he now had to leave that home and how that question came home to him. What a question for you that if you were to come to death's door, are you ready? Is there a home waiting for you beyond?

Have you got that new destination, that new place to belong of heaven? As a Christian, we know that we have that place, not by any working of our own, but because the Lord Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh unto the Father but by me. And he says, don't be troubled, believe in my Father's house and many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. Isn't that great to think that the Lord Jesus, and in a sense, we could take that personally as a promise to each believer here tonight, the Lord Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you.

He says, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also. And then he goes on to explain the way there. They asked him, what's the way? How do we get there?

[20:26] He says, I am the way. That beautiful scripture, isn't it? That he is the way. It's so simple and yet so profound that there's that new destination. If we'll just go on that way, that narrow way that is Christ as we trust him.

The Christian life is a journey, it's part of that experience as we know that that's the destination and in the meantime from here to then is that journey that he takes us on as he walks with us, as we walk with the Lord.

As we know, the Bible talks about walking with Christ, to walk in the light, to walk in the spirit and to be walking with our Saviour. I had walked life's way with an easy tread, I had travelled where pleasures and comfort led, until one day in a quiet place I met the Master face to face.

With station and rank and wealth for my goal, much thought for my body but none for my soul, I'd entered to win this life's mad race when I met the Master face to face.

I built my towers and reared them high till they had pierced the blue of the sky, I'd sworn to rule with an iron mace when I met my Saviour face to face. I met him and knew him and blushed to see that his eyes full of sorrow were fixed upon me, I faltered and fell at his feet that day while my castles melted and vanished away.

[21:44] Melted and vanished in their place, nothing else could I see but the Master's face, my thoughts are now for the souls of men. I had lost my life to find it again since that day in a quiet place when I met the Master face to face.

That's what happens when we meet the Master, when we meet the Saviour, when we meet the Lord Jesus face to face, when we see him. If we could just take a moment to go to Calvary today, if I could just take you by the hand and point your face into his face and see the blood and see the pain on his face and see what he did there for you, for me, if we could just dwell on that and see the Master's face, it would make such a difference to our lives.

in the 18th century, William Wilberforce, he was the other man I referred to, he was converted and it says of him that he almost single-handedly broke the shackles of slavery in England.

In 1785 he was converted and he wrote in his diary this, he said, I am wretched, miserable, blind and naked, what infinite love that Christ should die to save a sinner such as me.

He knew that he needed to be saved and at 23 years of age his life changed and it changed the course of England's history as he fought against the slave trade likewise as well.

[23:11] And when we get saved, we'll want to live for Christ, we'll want to serve him, we'll want to do something for him, for his glory. In Ephesians 2.10 it says, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Come, labour on! Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain while all around him waves the golden grain? And to each servant does the Master say, Go work today!

Now the context here refers back to a parable of our Lord Jesus where he talked to some standing idol in the marketplace and he talked about the great harvest field, the great labouring work to be done.

And it goes on, Come, labour on! Claim the high calling! Angels, couch, share! To young and old the gospel! Gladness, bear! Redeem the time! It's ours to swiftly fly!

The night draws nigh! Come, labour on! Away with the gloomy doubts and faithless fear! No arm so weak but may do service here! Through feeble agents, mate, we all fulfil God's righteous will.

[24:23] Come, labour on! No time for rest till blows the western sky till the long shadows o'er our pathway lie and a glad sound comes with the setting sun.

Well done! Well done! Labour on! Now, as a Christian, you've got such a tremendous message that we know we can't keep this to ourselves.

We care so much because there's lost souls that who knows how much time you have before it's over. You know, even younger ones, we don't know, older ones, we can't..

I know my dad said he wants to live to 100. He might not get that far. It might not happen, Dad. I'm not going to. So don't count on it. Because we can't boast ourselves of tomorrow, the Bible says. None of us. There was a young lady whose parents were church members. She came to a meeting, maybe a meeting just like this. This young lady came. It was the close of the service.

[25:21] The preacher was urging this young lady to trust Christ. And her aunt too, her godly aunt who was a Christian, came to this young lady and urged her to listen to this message.

It's too important to take carelessly. And this young lady, she was listening and yet, as they earnestly pleaded, she still said no.

She said no. She refused to seek God. And at the close of the meeting, this young lady, she left the meeting, went off with her parents, just carefree. She didn't care about God, about hearing the message, about salvation.

and just a little way, just a little way down the street, this was in a snowy area, in a sleigh. Suddenly, the team of horses, they became frightened and ran and the sleigh overturned.

And the young lady was thrown out with great violence and her head struck a telephone pole and bang, she was dead. She was dead just like that. She didn't know that her life was going to end so abruptly.

[26:25] Just one hour after the meeting, she was dead, instantly killed. She left it too late. God forbid that that should be true for anyone here tonight. But you should leave it too late.

Whether it be a year too late, a month too late, a day too late, or an hour too late. Friends, people tonight, you need to be converted. And only you and Christ know where you're at tonight.

I can't say whether there might be some saying they're a Christian here that are not truly a Christian. It's something to take very seriously. Only you and God know where you're at tonight. And I'm not here to condemn anybody, but really to preach grace.

Because that's what I need. That's what we need. Every one of us here tonight need God's grace to save us. You know, that His law says that we condemn, we're guilty. As you know, the Ten Commandments, we fail really when you measure every one.

In some aspect, we've neglected, we've failed, we've fallen, we've fallen short of the glory of God. As it says, that all have come short. And yet it says that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[27:32] And that free gift is extended and He wants to see people converted tonight. And if you're not tonight, certainly let it be that the seed is planted to act upon that, but not to leave it as the young lady did that was too late for her.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you tonight that you can give a new heart, a new spirit, and a new direction, a new dimension to lives that we can be converted, not by any trying or working of our own doing, but Lord, as we put our trust in what you did for us in Calvary, in dying on the cross for our sin.

Dear God, we thank you tonight for everybody here, for every soul, because every soul is so precious, Lord, and yet we know that even for our, even for my vile soul in my vile, helpless, sinful state, Lord, that you would deign to shed that blood for me and for each one that blood, that precious blood that fell to the ground, Lord, that blood is just an evidence of your love for us and yet, Lord, some would disregard it.

Lord, help us to see how valuable that is and how valuable every soul is that you died for that we might not be careless with this message, Lord, but to be very careful with it. In Jesus' name, Amen.