

Establish
Session 4

Understanding Conversion

Today's goal is to help you understand the scope and method of God's great plan.

Sometimes you'll hear people say ... I was saved. What they really mean is they gave their heart to Jesus and were born again. Or people say they were converted at 11 years of age. They really mean they were born again at 11 ... that's when they gave their heart to Jesus.

Let's clarify these three terms that are familiar to all, but often get confused when we use them.

1. born again
2. salvation or "saved"
3. conversion

New Birth

In order to come into the family of God, we have to be spiritually born into that family.

As Jesus said, "that which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of Spirit is Spirit"

Natural birth prepares us for human life, but to have spiritual life - to be able to live with God in heaven - we must have a spiritual birth.

- Once we were lost, but now we're found
- Once we were without life, but now we have life
- Once there was eternal separation, but now there is eternal life
- Once we were alienated, but now we are accepted

Being born again is essential, but the new birth is only **THE BEGINNING**.

Our children, when they are born, are little bundles of joy. We love to hold them, rock them, let them fall asleep on our chest. But if at age four they are still little bundles of joy doing the same types of things, they would now be a bundle of sorrow - if they haven't grown, if they aren't walking and talking, and growing up. So, with being born again ... it's the beginning.

UNDERSTANDING CONVERSION

1. WITH “SPIRITUAL BIRTH” THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION BEGINS

It is important that we understand and distinguish between what is meant by being “born again,” being “saved,” and being “converted.”

The New Birth is: **The Beginning**

God’s gift of eternal life through a spiritual rebirth as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our life when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior.

Salvation is: **The End Result**

The reclaiming of our whole life and being from its sinful state for the full purpose of God and His Kingdom both now and throughout the ages to come.

— We “are” saved

— *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*
 – Romans 10:10 (NIV)

— We are “being” saved

– ... *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*
 – Philippians 2:12(NIV)

— we “shall be” saved

He will come again to bring salvation to all those who are eagerly and patiently waiting for Him – Hebrews 9:28

“For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”
 I Peter 1:9 NIV

Conversion is: **The Process**

The process which begins at the new birth and continues until all of our life comes under the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is the **END RESULT**.

The Greek word for salvation is “soteria” (so-tay-ree’-ah). It means wholeness, completeness, full health ... all of God’s plan completed.

That being the case, we should not be surprised that the bible talks about salvation as a past event, as a present possession, and as a future experience:

Past ... “we are saved”

We became possessors of salvation whenever we repented and trusted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Present ... “we are being saved”

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul said to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. So there is a present expression of salvation as we experience more and more of Gods power to deliver us from the bondage of sin.

Future ... “we shall be saved”

Peter wrote, saying, “receiving the end of your faith, with is the salvation of your souls”. So there is a future deliverance of believers. This is what Hebrews says. And He will appear a 2nd time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

So if this work in our lives that is past, present and future is called salvation, then salvation is not an event. The new birth is an event. But, salvation is the entire work of God, His complete plan for our life totally fulfilled.

Conversion is **THE PROCESS** of “working out of our salvation”, which begins at the new birth, and continues until all our life comes under the lordship of Jesus.

Our purpose today is to analyze this process called conversion.

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The process which begins at the new birth and continues until all of our life comes under the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Repentance is critical to the process of conversion. Perhaps the clearest story of repentance is Prodigal Son. We will read the portion written in our notes.

Read Luke 15:17-24

So here is a young man who realized he chose the wrong way in his life and he ended up in a place he didn't want to be. He could have sat there and felt sorry the rest of his days. But he said I'm going to do something about this. "I'll put my foot on the road and go back to Father. I'll say that I've made a mistake. Please let me be one of your servants."

Now this is real repentance. He came to realize that he was doing the wrong thing, and then he acted on that knowledge. He humbled his pride, crawled back to his father, and said he didn't deserve anything. It's the end of our pride and turning around and going to the Lord with a humble spirit.

This story also shows us what God is like when we repent. His repentance opened up the way for his father to restore him. His father was waiting hoping he would come. As soon as he repented and returned, His father was able to restore him.

So just like it was in the prodigal son's life, repentance is the **DOORWAY** that opens up all that God has for us.

You may have seen that painting by Hunt, where Jesus is standing in the garden and knocking on the door with a lantern.

- In that painting, there is no latch on the outside of the door.
- Jesus is knocking, but if he's going to come in, someone will have to open the door from the inside.
- This picture is illustrating Rev. 3:20, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with him."

Repentance is the doorway to all the areas of our life.

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II. REPENTANCE IS VITAL TO THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION

Illustration: The Prodigal Son

— When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, “At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you and am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man.” So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming, and was filled with loving pity and ran and embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him “Father, I have sinned against heaven and you, and am not worthy of being called your son—” But his father said to the slaves, “Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. And a jeweled ring for his finger; and shoes! And kill the calf we have in the fattening pen. We must celebrate with a feast. For this son of mine was dead and has returned to life. He was lost and is found.” So the party began. — Luke 15:17-24.

1. Repentance is the **Doorway** to all areas of our life.

Revelation 3:20

<p>Anger Prov. 15:1 James 1:19-20 <i>Tranquility</i></p>	<p>Guilt Heb. 10:16-17 <i>Forgiveness</i></p>	<p>Fear Heb. 2:14-15 I John 4:18 <i>Peace</i></p>
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<p>Sorrow Isaiah 61:3 <i>Joy</i></p>	<p>Loneliness II Cor. 1:4 <i>Comfort</i></p>	<p>Frustration Col. 2:10 Phil. 1:6 <i>Fulfillment</i></p>

Jesus comes into our heart through whichever door we invite Him to use. Once inside He wants admittance to every other room as well.

The diagram in your notes is the floor plan of a house with its many rooms. The house represents our lives. You notice at the center of the house is the heart. Jesus said that if He knocks and we open, he will come in and will eat (fellowship) with us. At a hotel, when we want something to eat, we call on the phone and someone delivers our food. The room service person knocks on the door and we open the door and he comes in. They don't break down the door.

That's the way it is with Jesus. Jesus enters through any open door. It could be forgiveness, or healing, or help with an addiction, or loneliness, or a broken marriage, or heartbreak, a tragedy, or perhaps fear.

There was a pastor visiting with patients in a hospital. A woman said she was having surgery tomorrow. He wasn't the doctor or the nurse. Why was she telling him about her surgery? Because she was afraid. The pastor was wise enough to understand that. Now he had to make a decision. Could Jesus come in to this woman's heart through the door of fear, or would he have to take her around to the door of guilt? When she was filled with fear about this operation, would he need to convince her that she was a guilty sinner and must repent of her sins? Or, in her circumstances, would Jesus use the door of fear to come into her heart? And the pastor felt that He would. So, the pastor said, "I'll ask Jesus to go with you into the operating room." He prayed with her. You could see the effect the Jesus had on her life.

Whatever outside door Jesus uses to come into our life, He immediately comes into our heart.

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Now you can see on the diagram that there are not only doors on the outside, but there are also doors on the inside of these rooms.

- So, when Jesus comes into our heart, He wants admittance into all the rooms of our life.
- As long as we open the door to the various rooms, He will come in and renew all these rooms with His presence.
- Jesus wants to go from room to room as we open door after door

If we keep any door barred to Jesus, if we say to Him, “I can handle this one, Jesus.” or, “I don’t want You to change anything in this room,” He won’t force His way in.

- If we don’t have a repentant spirit, which says, “I’ll turn from my way, please come in and help me with this problem,” then Jesus won’t have access to these other rooms.
- Conversion will progress into every area of our life, as we say, “Come in Jesus! Deal with this room and fill it with Your presence.”

So Jesus won’t be satisfied until he converts these areas of our life and any others, until He is able to change ...

- our anger into tranquility
- our guilt to forgiveness
- our fear to rest
- our frustration to fulfillment
- our loneliness to comfort
- our sorrow to joy
- our lust to purity.

Repentance urges Jesus to enter every area and compartment of our lives!

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Repentance must go to the **CORE OF OUR BEING**, to the very innermost part of our heart.

Acts 3:19 says, “change your mind and change your heart.”

Let’s consider a few illustrations of this:

- Here is a little boy. He puts his hand in the candy jar. He knows he isn’t supposed to get in the jar without permission. His mother catches him. He is very sorry. Not only sorry because he doesn’t get the candy, but because his mother slaps his hand. But if his sorrow doesn’t go any further than that, guess where his hand is going to be the next time his mother isn’t looking ... right back in the candy jar. Unless inside he agrees that, “I’m not supposed to have sweets without permission.”
- A little girl riding a bus stands up and smiles at everyone. Her mother tells her to sit down. She stands up again. This goes on for a while. Finally her mother puts her hand on her and makes her sit down. And the little girl says, “I’ll sit down, but I’m standing up on the inside.” That really means that the next time her mother removes her hand from the little girl, she’ll be standing back up. Why? There is no repentance in her heart. The outward circumstances are making her sit down, but inside, no way, she wants to do her own thing.
- We as adults experience the same thing. The same is true for the person who has violent anger in his life, or lust, or any other of the problems that are on your diagram.

It’s only when we invite Jesus in to those rooms, those areas of our life, and say, “Jesus, please help me, please change me,” that He can make a change at the very root of our nature. Only when this occurs will any permanent change take place.

2. Repentance must reach to the **Core of Our Being**
It must go deeper than just our actions — Acts 3:19
3. Repentance must become the **Constant Attitude** of our heart.

A tender and turning heart is the key

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise — Psalm 51:17

III. PARTIAL CONVERSION IS NEVER GOD’S FULL INTENTION

Illustration: A six-year-old boy

A converting Christian continually gives as much of himself as he can to as much of Christ as he knows.

Illustration: Peter — six stages

Thus the process of conversion for most Christians never ends

“mostly converted”

“almost converted”

Jesus will keep on knocking and keep on converting until all our life comes under His loving Lordship and flows in the purposes of God.

CONCLUSION:

**THE VITALITY OF OUR Witness DEPENDS ON
THE PROGRESS OF OUR CONVERSION.**

— It is directly related to our experience.

— It becomes a never ending “adventure with Jesus”

Repentance must become the **CONSTANT ATTITUDE** of our heart.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite spin you will not despise.”

When our heart is soft and tender to the Lord, and this is the daily spirit of our life, then our repentance will continually open the door for conversion to move forward in our life.

Some people believe that repentance only occurs when they are born again, or maybe during revival meetings.

- But repentance is to be the spirit of our life every day.
- So that if we are deviating from Gods will in any way, immediately we recognize it and ask for God’s help.
- We repent. We turn from putting ourselves first. “Lord I want to go your way.”

Repentance will grow as we come to new situations or areas in our lives.

- It’s not just once, or again, or a couple of times, but a willingness to live in repentance.
- When we have a repentant heart, then God is able to do all the good things in us that he wants to do.
- But as soon as our spirit closes the door to God, then it stops right there.
- What God wants to do for us, and the changes that he wants to bring, and the conversion process that he wants to move forward in our lives, will stop right there, until our heart is repentant. We need a repentant heart.

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Partial conversion is never God's intention for us.

Our conversion must be constantly updated!

The repentance of a 6 year old is not the same as that of a 12 year old. A 12 year old knows more and can make more decisions than a 6 year old. But there is an even bigger difference between a 12 year old and an 18 year old. They hardly live on the same planet. They know so much more, they face so many different things.

Now what happens is this ... many people who receive Jesus are between the ages of 6 and 12. This may not be true in new tribal areas, or in pagan areas. It's wonderful when a child accepts the Lord. But often, their experience with the Lord as they grow older doesn't keep up with their physical development.

All the new things he's learned about himself - about the world, about money, about his sexuality - are unconverted because his conversion is still at a 10 years of age level, Many of the main areas of his life have remained under his control; not under Jesus' control.

He may have been an eager Christian back then, but he isn't living like one now, because his conversion has never been updated to where he is today. As the 18 year old becomes a 24 year old, his conversion needs to be updated to a 24 year olds. So that at every stage of his life he is asking Jesus to become the Lord and Director of what is currently happening to him.

So in your notes you see, a converting person continually gives as much of himself as he can to as much of Christ as he knows. We should be more excited about what God is doing in our life as we were when we first began to follow Him.

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Conversion should never stop. It should keep right on going. We should not miss out on anything that the Lord has for us.

If we had the time, we could study Peters life. 6 times in his walk with the Lord, God convicted him, and he had to turn away from the way he was walking to new ways that the Lord had for him.

- Even though he was a strong Christian, this impetuous man had a tender, turning heart. And he did allow these changes to take place, and the process of conversion was able to go on in his life.
- And he became a tremendous force in God's church, because he had a repentant heart, and allowed God to continue to change him.

The Conversion of Airplane Factory to a Truck Factory

Back in the US, during the World War II, there was a huge plant that produced airplanes (bombers). Now when the war was over, we read in the papers that the Willow Run Plant was going to be converted into a truck factory. So the plans were drawn, and the construction people began to come in, and they began to do their work.

- Now if the newspaper had declared the day after the plans were announced, that, "The Willow Run Airplane factory is converted to a Truck Factory!", would they have been correct?
- No. There were plans drawn, there were decisions being made, but they hadn't started the work yet.

Now it's 3-6 months later, when the blueprints had all been made, and they were all ready to begin making the changes, could we then say the Willow Run factory is now a truck factory, because the plans had just been drawn. Of course not.

- Now what if just one area of the plant had been converted, could we say now the Willow Run factory is a truck factory?
- No, because only one little area of the plant had been changed over.

(Continued on next page)

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Suppose the whole plant was gutted and the new equipment was put in.

- Could we say, now it's converted?
- Not quite yet because the plant is not converted until all the old equipment is removed, and all the new equipment has been put in, and trucks are actually rolling off the end of the production line.
- Only then can we say that it is converted. Before that you could say there are plans for it to be converted, they've started to convert it, you could say it's a quarter converted, you could say it's "almost converted". But, until trucks are coming off the line you couldn't say that the plant has now been converted.

Many of us sitting here today could legitimately say:

- "Praise God! I've been born again. And the process of conversion has started in my life."
- Or, "I'm doing all I can to help this process of conversion take place in my life as fast as it can."
- Or, "I believe I'm half-converted now."
- Or, "By God's grace I'd say I'm almost converted."

But we cannot truly say, "I am now converted," until all of God's full salvation has been realized, and every little bit of us has been taken over by Jesus, and we have been changed to be like Him, and what God intends for us is continually produced from our life.

So you see, conversion is a process which only ends when God's full plan for our life is complete and Jesus takes us to be with Him for ever and ever. Jesus wants to continue to work in our lives.

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The vitality of our **WITNESS** depends on the progress of our conversion.

- A witness is someone who tells what has happened to them.
- Some people have the same testimony everytime; they give it, "Praise God, I was born again 20 years ago!"

But what about today, and this week? What testimony do you have now that you didn't have a year ago? We can't witness about anything up-to-date unless our conversion is up-to-date, moving along from where it used to be.

The vitality of our witness is in direct proportion to how conversion is going in our life. It's only when we've experienced it that we can talk about it.

Perhaps we have tried to comfort someone who lost a loved one. As sincere as we are, our comfort may not be very effective unless we can say, "I know how you feel. I lost my mother 6 months ago." We have experienced it.

Sadly, some people fail to experience the full conversion Jesus desires for them. He wants them to discover what He can do in each of the rooms of their lives, to bring His light into them, heal them, make them whole, make them complete, make them healthy. That is why conversion is a process which never stops.

If we don't update our conversion to our present job, our current relationships, to how we spend our money ... in all the things that comprise our life today, then our conversion is old, stale, it stopped back there someplace. We are probably spiritually bored or spiritually miserable.

When we first come to Jesus it is just a beginning. But our repentant spirit allows the process of conversion to continue in our lives. It allows Jesus to make a new person of us, to keep our witness alive. We now have things we can report to people of the goodness of the Lord. We don't have to sit on what's happened in the past, but we can enjoy God working in our life every day, year after year. It becomes a never ending adventure with Jesus.

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FULL LIFE IN CHRIST, Group Facilitator Suggestions
ESTABLISH: Building the Foundation, Session 4

FIRST

- Quickly go over the answers to the Question Sheet for Session 3.
- _ Collect those which were filled out. Give them back next week.

A GOOD WAY TO START and to help your group open up would be to have each one share around the circle:

- *What has impressed or helped you the most in the “Full Life in Christ” Sessions so far?*

THEN Begin to discuss tonight’s teaching. You may want to use some of the following:

1. Discuss and contrast the difference between the terms “the New Birth,” “Conversion” and “Salvation.”
2. How do you interpret the statement “*Repentance must go far deeper than just actions?*”
3. How is repentance the “key” to conversion?
4. What is the most recent time when you felt that your conversion experience was being “updated?” Can you tell us what this involved?

FINALLY:

1. If there are those who did not complete their “Personal Response Sheet” in the main session give them time to do so now. Please collect this from each one before they leave. You may look them over, but give them to the instructor before the next session. They will not be returned to the group members.
2. Call attention to the question sheet for Session 4. Encourage them to take the time to respond to the questions