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True Conversion

David Dann

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). In the above passage of Scripture, the apostle Paul is discussing true conversion. That is, the necessity of turning completely away from the world and turning entirely to the Lord.

We live in an age in which a person’s conversion to Christ is often based upon some sort of a religious experience that has supposedly occurred in that individual’s life. We live in an age in which emotions are often appealed to as the foremost authority concerning whether or not one has been converted to Christ. We live during a time when many act as though there is no absolute truth, or standard by which to judge our standing with the Lord. All of these conditions create a great need for us to examine the Scriptures in order to come to an understanding of how one is truly converted to Christ.

Special Issue

Conversion
edited by
David Dann

What is Conversion?

The dictionary simply defines the term “conversion” as, “a turning or change from one state to another.” Please notice that conversion is not merely a change in belief, or a change in practice; rather, it is a complete change from one state of being to another. Jesus defines true conversion in Luke 9 in the following terms: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Self-denial refers to the change of heart that is required by the Lord as a man changes his outlook on life and exchanges the desire to please himself with the desire to please God. The idea that a man must “take up his cross” shows the change that is to take place in his life, in which the old sinful practices are exchanged for a life of service to God that resembles the life of Christ. Finally, the words “follow me” give us the conversion in its complete form. The heart has been turned to the Lord, the life has been turned to the Lord, and now the entire state of the individual is turned to the Lord in a new relationship with him. Let’s examine each

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Conversion Demands Conviction

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Chuck Bartlett

During one of his many opportunities to preach the gospel to Roman dignitaries, while incarcerated, the apostle Paul spoke to a governor of Caesarea named Felix (Acts 24:10-25). The message obviously had some effect on this man since we are told, “Felix became frightened” (v. 25). Unfortunately, instead of desiring to know more of what he should do, he sent Paul away until a time of convenience (v. 25). Sadly, the governor never got around to obeying the gospel.

There are reasons why people put off hearing or obeying the gospel. With Felix, it was a number of things: his desire to obtain money from Paul (v. 26), his interest in pleasing the Jews (v. 27), and his willingness to listen, but not respond (v. 25). This created a diversion for the Roman ruler that contributed to him remaining in a lost state.

When someone is being touched by the word of God, conviction starts to surface, and a person faces an important decision — to go forward or backwards. Why? When it comes to the gospel of Christ, obligation, responsibility and urgency are being stressed. Paul taught all of these, yet Felix made the wrong choice. A later time of convenience does not exist when a heart is pricked to the point where the listener is “cut to the heart.”

I realize that in many of our home Bible studies, more than one class has been set up. This is done to keep the interest alive. Yet when a person is seeking to know the truth, if he accepts it, then he ought to immediately respond, rather than put it off. It was good that Felix was afraid, but the governor should have removed that fear by complying with the doctrine of Christ, not by silencing the speaker for a time.

Too often I hear of souls “obeying” when it is convenient. Imagine teaching the plan of salvation and hearing one utter, “I know what I need to do. Can I get baptized next Thursday morning?” Where is the conviction? This person might as well have said, “I believe I am lost and should not stay in sin, but I choose to do so for another week, okay?”

Friend, there is no convenient season, other than the present, for you to be converted to Christ. A convicted heart says, “What must I do to be saved?” and “Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?” If it isn’t done right away when realized, then we have a person who is just like Felix. He believes, but doesn’t believe to the point where he will put God

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Conversion: The Theme of Acts 2

Justin Atkins

J.W. McGarvey states, in the introduction of his *New Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, that the “Acts of the Apostles is a much neglected book . . . and, although it is not now so much neglected as formerly, it still needs to be brought more prominently before the attention of this age.” Times haven’t changed! McGarvey’s words ring loud and clear as we look at the religious division that characterizes our modern age. How sad it is to know that many are neglecting the answers found in the book of Acts.

It is with this confidence in mind that genuine biblical conversion is to be found in the book of Acts. In the first chapter, Luke records that Jesus, “presented himself alive, after his suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Here we find that after the third day of his death, Jesus arose from the grave, speaking of “things concerning the kingdom.” Surely this included the authority of Jesus and his right to rule over men, how one enters this kingdom and the means by which they can be strong members of the kingdom.

What a blessing to know that Christ told the apostles about “things concerning the kingdom” because in the second chapter, we find souls being taught the saving message that made them a part of that kingdom.

Jesus told the apostles that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (1:8). Notice that verse 5 says that the apostles would receive the Holy Spirit, and here again in verse 8 the apostles would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Although this article does not directly deal with the subject of the Holy Spirit and miraculous works, it is clear truth that the apostles received the Holy Spirit according to Jesus’ teaching. Having said this, look at the awesome events of Acts 2!

Some of us might say, “The most amazing thing in Acts 2 is how the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and allowed them to speak in multiple languages so that all the people could understand them.” I would agree that this is pretty amazing. It is the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had spoken many years before, and Peter tells us that this is so (vv. 14-21). Others might say, “The most amazing thing about Acts 2 is the boldness of Peter and the apostles to stand up in this great gathering and speak the word of God

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without fear.” No doubt about it, this was a great display of courage and genuine zeal for Christ. We can learn from this example and speak the whole counsel of God without regard to threats from those who do not love the truth. There may yet be another who says, “The most amazing thing in Acts 2 is how the prophecies come together to show that the Old Testament bears witness to Jesus as the Christ.” Again, I can find no fault with this statement. Peter uses no less than four Old Testament passages to show that the coming of the Holy Spirit is according to the promise of God, and Jesus is the descendant of David who reigns upon the eternal throne (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Pss. 16:8-11; 110:1; 132:11-12; Joel 2:28-32).

However, the most amazing thing that happens in Acts 2 is found in vv. 37-41. It would not matter that the apostles received the Holy Spirit if no one believed in the works that they did through him. It would not matter that Peter and the eleven stood boldly if there was no audience to hear them. It would not matter that the prophecies concerning Christ came together so concisely if no one was convicted by the power of them. I am confident that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is pained no more than when helpless, sinful man turns his back upon the gift of eternal life.

Did some amazing things happen in Acts 2? Yes. Did some amazing things happen that led to something even more amazing in the end? Yes. What we find in Acts 2:37-41 is the dynamic process of a heart turning to the Lord, responding to the sacrifice of Christ. Notice that these people were “pierced to the heart” (v. 37) and in accordance with that penitent attitude, they asked the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Isn’t that beautiful?! Isn’t that what makes your heart sing? But we are not done. The preacher doesn’t pat them on the back and say, “You are all right now. Go away believing in Christ.” Peter told them what he was taught by the One who spoke of “things concerning the kingdom.” Peter preached the death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that sermon includes telling men and women how to be saved. What a simple command, “Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). One almost gets the feeling that the people hesitated because in v. 40 Peter was “exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” Finally, these precious souls expressed their faith in God by being baptized into Christ, “and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (v. 41).

I am convinced, friend, that God planned to save men and women long before we came upon the scene (Rom. 11:30-32), and should we ever lose sight of what really happened in Acts 2, then we have lost sight of the plan of God. Jesus Christ said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). This is what it is all about. God worked all the promises to the patriarchs, the prophecies of the Old Testament, the events of the Jews in Israel, and the suffering death of Jesus Christ to culminate in the events of Acts 2:37-41. What does all of this say about God’s love for mankind? What do you think this means in terms of my responsibility in teaching the lost about the great love of God?

I am afraid, good friend, that we have missed the message of Acts 2 and the New Testament teaching on conversion. I am afraid that we are all caught up in offering mint, dill, and cummin as sacrifices to the Lord while we are neglecting the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23). It is my prayer that we learn how to purge our hearts of the dross that keeps us back from enthusiastic service for Christ. We must pray that in God’s merciful heart, we are given the time and strength to meet the true challenge of converting the lost.

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Guardian of Truth Becomes Truth Magazine

Mike Willis

In 1981, after publishing for 24 years under the title of *Truth Magazine*, the magazine changed its name to *Guardian of Truth* to reflect the fact that we had purchased *Gospel Guardian*. For 17 years we published under this name. The Board Members of the Guardian of Truth Foundation made a decision in August 1997 to revert to our original name of *Truth Magazine* beginning with the new calendar year.

Why was the change made? The change was not made because of any change in direction in the content of the magazine. The change has been made for the sake of simplicity. *Truth Magazine* is easier to remember and is less cumbersome. Our bookstore is already being advertised as Truth Bookstore, our tracts are Truth Tracts, and now our magazine, once again, is *Truth Magazine*. — **Editor**

Conversion in Acts 8

James Carter Houchen

The Acts of the Apostles bring great significance to those outside of the body of Christ and those who are faithful members of the Lord's church who are enjoined upon teaching the truth of God's will. The stoning of Stephen, a devout man of God, closes out the seventh chapter of Acts. Those who stoned him for preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ laid their coats at the feet of Saul.

The eighth chapter of Acts begins with "Saul of Tarsus," later name the Apostle Paul, bringing persecution among the first century Christians in Jerusalem. As a result, the church was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Saul continued imprisoning men and women of the faith, bringing havoc on the church. Though men were scattered everywhere, the Scriptures tell us that they "went everywhere preaching the Word" (v. 4). Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to the people. As the multitudes heeded the things spoken of by Philip and saw the miracles performed as confirmation of the Word, there was "great joy in that city" (v. 8).

Simon Was Saved

Among the multitude of people present was a man named Simon, "who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming he was someone great." After Philip had preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women believed *and* were baptized. In verse 13, the Scriptures record the conversion of Simon. He too believed and was baptized and continued with Philip in fascination with the miracles and signs which were done.

Simon Fell From Grace

Simon "saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given," so he offered the apostles' money for this gift. Peter then replied, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money . . . your heart is not right in the sight of God." Simon responds with a penitent heart and

prayerful attitude, equivalent to what should be the actions of a faithful child of God who errs in his walk with God.

As a child of God, the importance of daily communion with the Lord through the avenue of prayer cannot be over-emphasized or underestimated. Truly we are saved by the grace of God through faith (Eph. 2:8). However, it is clear from this chapter that a prayer of repentance to our Father in heaven through Christ Jesus is the means by accessing this grace that God gives his children when they transgress his law. Yet, there are some children of God who will perish upon the day of judgment because they have not repented of their sins. If a lesson is apparent from the story of Simon, is it not the importance of recognizing when we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)? Perhaps our hearts too, at times, are not right with God. In recognizing this fact, we can pray that God will forgive us. David said in Psalm 51, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: that you may be found just when you speak, and blameless when you judge." Let the words of David's prayer of repentance to God be the words that echo in our hearts when we separate ourselves from God through sin. Those who approach sin with grief and sorrow, striving diligently to walk righteously and let their bodies, "be a living sacrifice" as they serve God, will be pleasing to him.

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch

The apostles continued teaching in many villages of the Samaritans. Verse 26 records that, "an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" Here, in the verses that follow, lies the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch had been in Jerusalem to worship, and was returning on the road toward Gaza. Sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Philip approached the chariot asking the question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied that he could not understand unless someone guided

him. The place in the Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And who will declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth." The eunuch asked who this passage was speaking of, and then Philip opened his mouth and preached Jesus to him. As they traveled, the eunuch spotted water and asked, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Philip told the eunuch, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And the eunuch confessed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. And the Scriptures record that the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing."

It is a safe assumption to conclude that many people in the religious world claim salvation. Yet, they delete or make additions to the very steps taken by those first century Christians who were taught by the apostles who were filled with the perfect teaching of the Holy Spirit. Verse 35 records Philip preaching Jesus to the eunuch. In preaching Jesus, the next words we have recorded that leave the mouth of

the eunuch are, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" In preaching Jesus, it is evident that water baptism was preached as a means of reaching the blood of Jesus. It is through this death, burial, and resurrection that we are saved (Rom. 6:4). Upon hearing the word (Rom. 10:17; John 6:45), belief in Christ must be present (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24), there must be repentance of past sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30-31), and the name of Christ must be confessed (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). Then upon your faith, you must be buried in the waters of baptism (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:21) for the remission of your sins. The Lord then adds to his church (Acts 2:47) daily those who are being saved. To the child of God who lives faithfully (Heb. 10:23-26; Gal. 5:16-26) while upon this earth, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

May I add, that it is the truth by which we shall be judged (John 12:48), therefore, let us preach it and teach it (salvation) like we read it from God's inspired book (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21). The discussion of such a vital issue can be rewarding to those who are honestly seeking the truth. "Seek the Lord, while he may be found" (Isa. 55).

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Conversion in the Book of Acts

"Much the greater part of Acts may be resolved into a detailed history of cases of conversion, and of unsuccessful attempts at the conversion of sinners. If we extract from it all cases of this kind, with the facts and incidents preparatory to each and immediately consequent upon it, we will have exhausted almost the entire contents of the narrative. All other matters are merely incidental. The events of the first chapter were designed to prepare the apostles for the work of converting men; the gift of the Holy Spirit to them and to others was to qualify them for it; the admission of the Gentiles was an incident connected with the conversion of Cornelius, and others after him; the conference, in the fifteenth chapter, grew out of these conversions; and the long account of Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem, Cesarea, and Rome, with sea-voyage and shipwreck, constitute but the connected history of his preaching to the mob in Jerusalem, to the Sanhedrin, to Felix to Festus, to Agrippa, and to the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. The episode in the twelfth chapter, concerning the persecutions by Herod, and his death, is designed to show that, even under such circumstances, the word of God 'grew and multiplied.' All the remainder of the history consists, unmistakably, in detailed accounts of conversions.

"Such being the work performed by the author, we may

readily determine his design by inquiring, Why should any cases of conversion be put upon record? Evidently, it was that men might know how conversions were effected, and in what they consisted. The cases which are recorded represent all the different grades of human society; all the different degrees of intellectual and religious culture; all the common occupations in life, and all the different countries and languages of the then known world. The design of this variety is to show the adaptation of the one gospel scheme to the conversion of all classes of men.

"The history of a case of conversion necessarily embraces two distinct classes of facts: First, the agencies and instrumentalities effecting it; second, the changes effected in the individual who is the subject of it. In the pursuit of his main design, therefore, the author was led to designate specifically all these agencies, instrumentalities, and changes. He does so in order that the readers may know what agents are employed, and how they work; what instrumentalities must be used, and how they are applied; and what changes must take place, in order to the scriptural conversion of a sinner."

J.W. McGarvey, Original Commentary on Acts 4-5

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch

Jesse Flowers

When one comes to the eighth chapter of the Book of Acts, one comes to a very crucial time in the spread of the gospel in the first century. In the opening verses we read of a great persecution arising against the church immediately following the stoning of Stephen. A young, not yet converted Paul, goes about harassing and tormenting those belonging to the Way. Something which would normally be viewed as negative, turns into something quite positive: “Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

In the following verse we are introduced to a Christian and gospel preacher by the name of Philip. Of course, we are first introduced to him back in Acts 6, Philip being among the seven chosen to serve in a special capacity in administering to the Hellenistic widows that were being neglected in the daily distribution. He was chosen on account of his good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom (Acts 6:3). In Acts 8:5, we read of Philip going down to the city of Samaria in order to preach Christ to them. Preceding Jesus’ ascension he told the apostles that they would be witnesses to him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The gospel of Christ had been proclaimed in Jerusalem and Judea, now the “good news” was brought to Samaria.

Philip is the man who makes his way to this despised area of Palestine, and there he begins to preach and teach. We find that the multitudes heeded the things spoken by Philip concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and both men and women were baptized. What a successful and encouraging beginning for this evangelist. As a result of his work, lives were being changed, souls were being saved, and thus a church is started in the city of Samaria. It is after this grand event that we come to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. The writer Luke pens these words in Acts 8:26: “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a deserted place . . .”

For a moment, put yourself in Philip’s shoes (sandals). Here you are in Samaria preaching and large numbers of people are coming to Christ as a result of your efforts. Then in the midst of all that success, God instructs you to go to an area where, as far as you know, there isn’t anyone around! The Samaritans are hearing and obeying and now you’re being told to move on — *do you ignore or do you listen?* Well, Luke tells us in five words Philip’s response to the instruction he received from the angel of the Lord, “also he arose and went”. He goes from a well-populated city to an unpopulated desert. Most likely a strange request to the ears of Philip, but no questions were asked or hesitations made, for the instruction was a divine one. Behind him the good news was being preached, miracles were being performed, and people were being converted, but at God’s instruction he headed to Gaza. What an amazing attitude Philip possessed! Philip realized that this wasn’t his work he was leaving behind, it was God’s. God said, “Go,” and Philip, a man whose heart was sensitive to the word of God, went!

It is interesting to note that Gaza as a destination was really insignificant for Philip will never make it to the actual city. At this point, neither Philip or the eunuch is even aware that the other exists. Yet out in a deserted place, the road going down from Jerusalem to Gaza, God will bring the paths of this sincere seeker and this sensitive teacher together. It is on this road that we find a political leader riding in his chariot, reading the word of God and receptive to its truths. We learn that this man was employed in the service of Candace, who is described as being the queen of the Ethiopians. This eunuch was placed under tremendous responsibility for he had charge of all her treasury. He had traveled *at least 800 miles* in coming from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, and he had made that trip in order to *worship!* As the eunuch traveled back home he read aloud from the prophet Isaiah.

It is at this point that God will bring these two individuals together. “Then the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and overtake this chariot” (Acts 8:29). Philip, following the

Spirit's direction, engaged the eunuch in conversation. Philip did not wait for the man to lean out of his chariot to ask him for help. Rather, Philip took the initiative to ask him simply, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip's tactfulness paid off. For he asked a question that opened the door for the message of the gospel to be taught. I believe it is interesting to note that Philip doesn't shoot into some sermon, but first listens to what the Ethiopian eunuch is curious about. For part of the eunuch's curiosity was not *what* was written, but to *whom* the passage applied. First Philip initiated the conversation, next he listened, and then he began to teach. In fact, beginning at this wonderful passage in Isaiah 53, Philip proceeds to preach Jesus to him.

Philip recognized that for a man lost in sin, *Jesus is the only issue that really matters!* There is a multitude of subjects that can be discussed at a later time, but Jesus isn't one of them.

One cannot help but to wonder what kind of things Philip spoke of when he preached to the eunuch about Jesus. Once again, God's word does not always satisfy all of our curiosities. One subject we know without a doubt that Philip spoke to the eunuch about was the subject of baptism. It only makes sense that when one preaches Jesus, one preaches about baptism. As Philip spoke to this truth seeker about the identity of the One mentioned in Isaiah 53, the preacher must have spoken of God's eternal plan in redeeming man from his sins. And that God's only begotten Son, came to this earth and gave his life on the cross for the world, in order that all might have the opportunity to inherit eternal life. Naturally, Philip explained to this sinner that in order to come into contact with that precious blood that was shed for him there was a need to be baptized into Christ. It then makes perfect sense when the reader comes to verse 36, and sees the response of the eunuch.

"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, See, here is water. What

hinders me from being baptized?" How wonderful those words must have been to the ears of Philip! Both go down into the water, Philip baptizes the eunuch, and then when they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. Philip's part in bringing this Ethiopian eunuch to Christ was through, and the Lord wasted no time to send him where he was needed next. Some of the sweetest words in all of this text is found in verse 39, when it simply states that the eunuch *went on his way rejoicing!* Because of God's love, mercy, and grace for one soul he made it possible for this eunuch to hear the "good news" of salvation. After learning about his loving Savior and after receiving the forgiveness of sins, how could he do anything but go on his way rejoicing?! Before meeting Philip he was without Christ, but after hearing Philip tell him about Jesus, he found Christ. And didn't each of us go on our way rejoicing when we came to Christ?!

In the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, we find a willing teacher + a sincere seeker + the providence of God = the saving of a soul. Philip started with the road the eunuch was on and from there led him to the cross. Earlier in Acts we have seen 3000 and 5000 souls saved, and it is easy to be impressed with such figures. Yet we must never forget that those big numbers represent individuals, single solitary souls. Philip was in Samaria where he was experiencing a tremendous amount of responses. God took this preacher and sent him to a desolate place and brought him across the path of a man who was searching. Sent him to a city that to our knowledge he never reached (Gaza), but in the process of his going, he was able to reach one man for Jesus. One is never a waste of time, one is never too much trouble, one is never insignificant. May God always help us to see the value of only one soul, and may that realization produce a zeal within us to bring as many souls as possible to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

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“Saul, Saul, Why Persecutest Thou Me?”

Philip W. Martin

The conversion of the Apostle Paul is one of the most striking accounts in the book of Acts. The details of the account are not given in one place, so to fully understand it we must consider all of them (Acts 9:1-18; 22:1-16; 26; 1 Tim 1:12-17). To begin to understand the conversion of Saul, we must first examine what we know of his life prior to our knowledge of him. Paul (Saul) was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:26), a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), a student of Gamaliel, a Jew (Acts 22:3), someone who had attained a certain amount of respect in the Jewish community of that time.

When Stephan was martyred, he was there to hold the cloaks of those involved for he was in agreement with what they were doing (Acts 7:58-8:1). He persecuted the church with zeal unmatched in the New Testament (Acts 8:3). So much so that he went to other cities to stop what he saw as the destruction of the nation of Israel by what he saw as heretics.

It is on this trip that we begin to see the conversion of Saul. “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:3-4). One of the first things that I notice when I look at this moment when the gospel was being introduced to Saul is who the speaker was; it was our Lord and Savior, the very one Saul was persecuting. Who else could have had such a chance? Anyone else who would have tried to talk to him surely would have been put to death and imprisoned. He had persecuted others many times before.

So Saul was led by the hand to Damascus so that he might hear what he must do. For three days he neither ate nor drank and it would be safe to say that he had plenty of time to consider what past sins he had committed. While there, Ananias was sent to him and he was told what he should do: “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name

of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Is there any doubt as to what Saul should do so that he might be saved? So simple is the command and great the reward. Saul displays the nature of faith plainly; God said it and he believed it. Right away Saul begins to preach and teach about the Christ, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah saying, “He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). After growing in strength and confounding the Jews in Damascus for some time, they were seeking to kill him so he left for Jerusalem where he joined himself to the disciples there.

Saul’s life gives us a unique opportunity to look at a Christian and his behavior in close detail both before and after his conversion. Saul epitomizes the nature of true repentance. After he heard the words that would help lead him to salvation and obeyed those words, he from that point forward becomes one of the staunchest defenders of the faith. At the close of his days he had the moral fortitude to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Earlier it was said, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13). Saul completely turns his actions around and protects this cause he once hunted.

In an old hymn we hear the words sung from time to time, “Did you repent, fully repent of your past sins, friend?” Of this Paul could have answered with a resounding yes!

We can look at Paul’s life and his work to see how he used this new found salvation. He goes from a time of being the persecutor to a life of persecution. In the book of 2 Corinthians he gives a small listing of some of the things he had endured: “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false breth-

ren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 11:24-27).

This messenger of God inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit even received abuse by his fellow Christians (2 Cor. 10:10). All the while he learned to be content in whatever situation he was in (Phil. 4:11).

We can learn many important things from the life and conversion of Paul. He was one who understood and lived the simple life of a Christian in a tough and trying time, obeying the simple commands given unto him and placing his ultimate trust in God. He was open and forthright with his faith never shirking or hiding from it. Paul would

rather have let his own freedoms be curtailed than to even risk offending his brother in Christ. But he was not one to hide from controversy or let sin and worldly ways invade the church. We would do well to reconsider our own ideas and actions and see if we truly are the example Paul wanted Timothy to be. “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). Possibly one day we too can have the faith to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

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If I Was the Devil

Olen Holderby

If I was the devil, I would consider myself basically to have two problems: (1) How I could keep control of people in general, and (2) How I might ensnare the Christian.

1. If I was the devil, the very first thing I would do would be to discredit the inspiration, perfection, and authority of the Scriptures. I would do my best to find an argument that would keep people out in the world from accepting these as attributes of the Scriptures. Perhaps I could do so through your schooling, your friends, the music to which you listen, or through the published materials which you read. However, I would not dare to show you 2 Timothy 3:16, James 1:25, or 1 Corinthians 4:6, and 2 John 9. For should you read these you could believe that all Scripture came by inspiration of God, that it is a perfect law, and that you were to be limited in teaching and practice by those Scriptures. Thus, I might fail here, but I would not give up.

Next, if I was the devil I would try to persuade you that you had plenty of time to obey the gospel, that you had some things that you could and should enjoy before you settle down to become a Christian. Of course, if you managed to read 2 Corinthians 6:2 or Hebrews 3:15, you could see things a little different. Then, should you happen to read the examples of conversion in Acts of Apostles you would immediately see the urgency in obeying the gospel. So, again I might fail, but I would not quit.

Should you really believe the Scriptures and knew that you should obey in haste, I would point out how difficult it would be for you to live the life of a Christian. You just couldn't do it, I would point out. Look at all those who

are trying and how far short they fall; you would not wish to be a hypocrite in such an effort. If some truly concerned Christian should have you read Galatians 6:2, you would know that you would have the help of others of God's people. And, to make matters worse for me, that same Christian might have you read 1 Corinthians 10:13. I could see failure of my efforts here, because you would realize that you had the assistance of the Almighty.

Has the Devil Been Talking to You?

2. If I was the devil, I would wish to ensnare the weak Christian and destroy the influence of the church. I would advertize my products as belonging in the home, I would point to all the celebrities using them, and how that in moderation they were harmless. And, I would point to the popularity of those who use my products. For the places which I wished you to go, I would make such as clean and attractive to the eye as possible. For the young, I would have a “chaperon” for all these places and activities. Yes, sir, if I was the devil that is exactly what I would do. Live it up, when in Rome do as the Romans do, I would say. But, I would be very careful that you did not read 1 Thessalonians 5:22 or Romans 12:2, especially if you were really honest. For, then, you would see something wrong with my reasoning. Then, if you should read Ephesians 5:6 and you really wanted to reach heaven, you would want no part of my advice. This is all true because, you see, my success depends greatly upon your cooperating with me. Alas, I might fail in this if you did not wish to walk with me.

Has the devil been talking to you?

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Cornelius

Neal Bahro

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what is called the Italian Regiment.” In Acts chapter 10 we are introduced to a military officer of the Roman army named Cornelius. He was a Gentile who was a good example to his household and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:2). We also read that Cornelius was a generous man who gave alms to the people. In Acts 10:22 it is revealed that Cornelius was a just man who had a good reputation among the Jews.

One day, at the ninth hour, Cornelius was instructed in a heavenly vision to send for Simon Peter who would tell him what he must do (Acts 10:6). Now we begin to see how the actions of Cornelius demonstrate the kind of faith that he possessed. When the angel departed he sent for Simon Peter without delay. There are many people today who will gladly hear what God has to say to them, but they refuse to act on what is heard. James, by inspiration, tells us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas. 1:22). Cornelius heard and acted on God’s word.

Peter had a vision in which God told him not to call common what had been cleansed. Following this vision, he went to meet Cornelius when the servants came for him. We note that Cornelius wanted others to hear God’s word because he gathered his relatives and close friends together to await Peter’s arrival. Cornelius fell down at Peter’s feet showing that he did not have the proper concept of worship. Peter corrected him immediately, telling him to get up, that he was a man also. Sadly we see many people today who choose to worship a man or woman instead of God.

Cornelius was very eager to hear what Peter had to say. His desire to hear God’s will is a good lesson for all of us. Cornelius wanted to hear all things commanded Peter by God (Acts 10:33). Many people today will hear God’s word and treat it like a buffet, simply picking the things they like and leaving the rest.

When Peter began preaching, he taught that God does

not show partiality but accepts those who fear God and work righteousness. Until this time the gospel had been taken to the Jews only. Gentiles were considered dogs (Matt. 15:26), but God had shown Peter in the vision that he should call no man common or unclean. The message Peter delivered to the Gentiles was similar to the one he spoke to the Jews on Pentecost, which was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. As Peter was speaking the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles who were there. This is a very significant time in the spread of Christianity. Now God had extended salvation to not only his chosen people but also to the Gentiles. In Genesis 12:3 God told Abram “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” All people were now truly blessed, having access to salvation provided by the blood of Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Peter continued speaking and commanded his hearers to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Now God had truly “granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18). We see once again, as in the other accounts of conversion, that baptism was a necessary requirement in order to be saved (1 Pet. 3:21).

When someone asks me, “What must I do to be saved?” I direct them to the Bible and point out that they must hear God’s word (Rom. 10:17), believe God’s word (Mark 16:16), repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38) and live faithfully until death. If anyone does this he can obtain that crown of righteousness which is available to anyone who desires it.

Cornelius was a devout man, a generous man, and a praying man. These things are good, but it was only by listening to God’s will and submitting to it that brought salvation to Cornelius and his household.

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The Faith of Lydia

Eric McKee

The faith that is able to save our souls is a living, active faith. It is a faith that takes God at his word and puts trust in him. It is a faith that will cause us to want to do whatever it takes to be found pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . . By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible . . . Without faith, it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:1, 3, 6).

Faith is the foundation of all true conversions to the Lord and is essential to the salvation of all mankind. Therefore, it is important for us to understand what it really means to have faith in God. From where does it come? What is it? Is it the only thing we need? These questions can be answered by taking a look at the tiny story (only three verses) of Lydia found in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Acts. She was a human being who was found faithful in the eyes of God and attained salvation. Now, if we know that God accepted her, we can have confidence that if we follow her example, we will be accepted by him also.

In verse 12, we find that Paul and his traveling companions are visiting the city of Philippi to preach the gospel. They end up preaching to some ladies on the bank of the river. "On the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted

thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us" (Acts 16:13-14). Now, a few obvious conclusions can be drawn from this passage. The first is that Lydia seems to be a religious, devout woman. She worships God; she prays to him; she keeps the Sabbath; she has faith. However, apparently something is missing in her life. Otherwise, why would these men be preaching the gospel to her? The answer is Jesus Christ. During his ministry, Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). So, even though Lydia had "faith," she did not have the faith that saves, because she was simply unaware of the truth — the truth that Jesus Christ had come to this earth to die on the cross for her sins — the truth that could set her free (John 8:32). No matter how religious she had been in the past, she can now no longer have a relationship with God without also having a knowledge of the truth and a true faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:17 tells us, "Faith comes by hearing the word of God." Before Paul and his companions came to the bank of the river, we find Lydia praying and worshipping the Lord. When the men arrive, Paul begins telling these women about Jesus. The words which he speaks produce faith in the heart of Lydia. Keep in mind that these things which Paul preaches are not from his own mind, but from the mind of God (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Verse 14 declares that “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” Notice that her faith was not produced by the praying and worshipping she had done previously. It was not produced by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on her heart. Her faith was produced from hearing the simple teaching of the Word of God. That is where the power of the gospel lies — in its ability to “cut a person to the heart” (Acts 2:37) — to cause a person to realize his lost condition and want to make the necessary changes in his life in order to be pleasing to God.

Let’s take a look at how the story of Lydia ends. “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul, and when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us” (vv. 1, 2). Had Lydia been faithful to the Lord? By the reaction of Paul and the others, we can definitely make that conclusion. What then had Lydia done that had caused them to be persuaded that she had faith? We know that she must have done something, because we recognize that the Lord had saved her at this point. We are taught throughout the New Testament that there is something that must be *done* in order for one to obtain salvation. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22). That is the way in which faith works. We hear the Word of God proclaimed (or read it in our Bibles), and this produces faith in our hearts. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Now, how is that faith made known? It is expressed through our actions. In James 2:14-26, James begins by asking, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

You believe there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble! For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” What good is it for a person to claim to have faith in God, yet neglect to do the things which he has commanded?

Now, go back to Lydia’s situation. In what way did she express the faith she had in Jesus Christ? We are told that she and her household were baptized. There is no way that she could have even known to be baptized unless she had been told to do so. Therefore, we know that Paul must have told her that baptism was necessary for salvation. Jesus had taught, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Peter, as he preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Now, let us suppose that Lydia had not been baptized. Would she have been found faithful to the Lord? Remember: “Faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:17). If she had

neglected to follow the prescription set forth by Jesus Christ, could she have received salvation? Let’s put it this way: if she had not been baptized, what would have been her motive? If a person truly has faith in God and wants to do what is right, why wouldn’t he be baptized when he is told to do so by Jesus himself? It is not that a person is trying to earn or merit his salvation, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). The simple truth is that if a person truly has faith in God, he will be more than willing to obey him — being baptized for the remission of his sins, just as Lydia and her household did.

The faith that is able to save our souls is a living, active faith. It is a faith that takes God at his word and puts trust in him. It is a faith that will cause us to want to do whatever it takes to be found pleasing in the sight of the Lord. This is what we must have, the same faith that this woman Lydia possessed, for “without faith, it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

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The Philippian Jailer

Joshua Reaves

I was speaking with a close friend and brother the other day and we were talking about different things that can cause spiritual problems in our lives. He was telling me that no matter what the problem seemed to be in his spiritual life, much of the problem came down to the question of humility. His point seemed very appropriate with the title of my article. Am I being humble enough to face God's will and not turn the other way, or do I have too much pride to give up my own will and repent? No wonder Peter says in 1 Peter 5:5, ". . . God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." It seems that pride has always been one of man's most powerful oppositions. It took a certain amount of pride for Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-6). It also caused Ahab to take a vineyard that was not rightfully his (1 Kings 21:2), and caused Peter to stand in the way of Christ carrying out the Father's will (Matt 16:22, 23). Though Peter had the best intentions in mind, he was not yet willing to yield "self" and submit completely to the Father's will.

The Lord desires hearts that are willing to put away the pride of the old man and finally say, "Lord, thy will be done." The Philippian jailer had the type of humble attitude that the Lord is pleased with. Acts 16:22 says that the magistrates commanded Paul and Silas to be "beaten with rods." It goes on to say in v. 23, "And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely." This man, who was about to be transformed into one of God's chosen vessels, may have actually beaten and ridiculed Paul and Silas. In any case, the Philippian jailer was commanded to make certain that Paul and Silas would not escape by placing them in the innermost prison and fastening their feet into stocks. Paul and Silas, refusing to let the circumstances keep them from rejoicing, began to sing songs of praise and continue in fervent prayer to the Lord. Paul was learning by experience the lesson which he afterward taught the disciples in the very same city, saying: "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your

hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6, 7).

The prisoners must have heard the message of rejoicing and realized that God was behind it because as soon as a great earthquake opened the doors of the prison and loosened their chains, they froze in their places, so to speak, and did not try to escape (Acts 16:28). However, the jailer was not aware that none of the prisoners had escaped and drew his sword to take his own life. The jailer was convinced that taking his own life would be a much better fate than falling into the hands of the ruthless Roman government. If they had found the next morning that the prisoners had escaped, the death he would undergo would be dreadful at best. What was worse than that, the Philippian jailer was floating on the brink of eternal damnation. There seemed to be no hope left in the life of the Philippian jailer. That is, until the words of Paul came echoing forth from every prison wall, "Do yourself no harm for we are all here." The Philippian jailer "ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas" (v. 29).

After he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He was not asking what he should do to save himself from the anger of heathen gods, for his appeal would not have been to Paul and Silas, for they did not worship these gods. Neither did he ask what he should do to be saved from the wrath of his superiors; he had nothing to fear from them, since the prisoners were all safe inside the prison. The answer that Paul gave implies the meaning of his question; he was asking what he must do to be saved from his sins. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," they replied, "and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Then the Philippian jailer took Paul and Silas to his house and they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all his household. The jailer took them the very same hour of the night and tended to their stripes, then immediately he and his family were baptized. Paul must have felt the irony of delivering this message of salvation to a man who was much like he had once been, a man who possessed a

The Conversion of the Corinthians

Joshua Gurtler

As Paul entered into the sin-ridden port city of Corinth in Acts 18:1, his expectations might have been running a little lower than usual. Paul had just arrived from Athens where he had received some ridicule as well as some fruit in the Lord, neither of which were to be compared to what was about to take place. He immediately joined himself to a couple of the same trade and he began making tents until his support from Macedonia arrived via the hands of Silas and Timothy (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:15; Acts 18:5).

What a great weight of responsibility now lay on the shoulders of the apostle to the Gentiles. Corinth was a sin-sick cesspool of the vilest sort, yet this was to be his audience for the next few months. He at once engaged in “testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:5). This effort was met with resistance in the form of blasphemies (Acts 18:6). What a discouragement this could and might have been, yet he continued his proclamation, next going to the house of Titus Justus (Acts 18:7). Here the word found the good soil of honest hearts and Crispus and his household were baptized (Acts 18:8).

We will take a moment to note the interesting fact that baptism was obviously considered a necessary element to enter the kingdom of God in the New Testament and attain all the privileges and blessings as a child of God. In case one may wonder whether the baptism here was only an isolated, unique incident to the Corinth church, we have but to turn and read 1 Corinthians 12:13 where we are told that the whole church in the city of Corinth was “baptized into one body” (see also 1 Cor. 1:14-16). Of course, shortly after this, thanks to the help of a band of some of Paul’s ungodly, closed-minded Jewish brethren, he was brought before the Roman Proconsul to stand trial. The charges were dismissed as a farce and Paul pressed on to Syria (Acts 18:12-18). This is the history of the beginning of the Lord’s body in Corinth to whom Paul eventually wrote at least three letters (see 1 Cor. 5:9).

I recently heard a sermon in which the preacher said, “The Bible is clear about the subject of salvation in the New Testament, and if anyone has any questions then all he needs to do is to sit down and read the book of Acts.”

great status in the Roman government and was privy to the persecution of Christians. Surely this event had been on the mind of Paul as he wrote to Lydia and the rest of the saints in Philippi saying, “. . . in nothing shall I be ashamed, but with all boldness as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20, 21). The Philippian jailer humbled himself and obeyed the word that Paul and Silas had presented to him. Then, in an act of Christ-like kindness, he took them to his own home and set a meal before them.

The Lord has promised us in Matthew 7:8 that “everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who

knocks it will be opened.”

We can learn much from the Philippian jailer. There is much to be said about his willingness to become a child of God in spite of his ever-growing status as a Roman citizen. So much can be learned from the way he treated Paul and Silas, showing a true transformation in spirit. But most of all, the Philippian jailer is a wonderful example of a seeker. He sought with desire, fear, and with a humble spirit that was truly pleasing to the Lord.

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How simple and yet how true. Why is it that mankind must question, criticize, and reject God's biblical directives given for our own well being? The conversion of the Corinthian brethren, which involved hearing and believing God's word, repenting of their past wickedness, confessing Christ as the Son of God and Lord, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins, is the simple and repeated method we see in the Scriptures. Modern critics, the denominational world, and even some of our own brethren will mock the "five fingered plan of salvation" as being that which has its origin in man. Take away the fingers if you like, but what steps do we need more or less in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of God? I've also heard talk of doing away with the invitation at the end of every worship service and whether or not we should *even mention* baptism when we teach one the gospel of Christ! Change for the sake of God's word is always a good thing, but change for the sake of change should always be questioned as to motive, consequence, and scriptural authority.

Inevitably, sin entered the body of saved believers in

Corinth at which time Paul wrote a searing but loving letter of rebuke and admonition. "What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?" is how he put it in 1 Corinthians 5:21. The sins of fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, drunkenness, reviling and swindling are listed as those that some had previously engaged in before their conversion (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). In the same letter we learn that some of them are back at it, adding even more sins to their already lengthy list. When Paul directs his first N.T. letter to the church, he specifically addresses the problems of division, quarrels, and sectarianism (ch. 1); jealousy and strife (ch. 3); arrogance (ch. 4); fornication and the tolerance of sin (ch. 5); taking a brother to law (ch. 6); misunderstandings of God's marriage law (ch. 7); causing a brother to stumble from personal liberties (ch. 8); idolatry (ch. 10); headship and abuse of the Lord's supper (ch. 11); spiritual gifts and the usurping of authority in the worship by women (chs. 12-14); and misunderstandings on the resurrection (ch. 15).

Paul did not overlook these sins with such excuses as, "we need to give them time to grow" or "we might be too hard and run them off" or "we should tolerate their sin under Romans 14 since they are the weaker brethren" (1 Cor. 3:1, 2). Paul recognized sin in the camp and confronted it as such. This is our example and pattern which we too often fail. Frequently, we would rather look the other way when sin enters the church, and sometimes we may even fail to teach the "whole counsel" when speaking with a non-Christian. But all too soon we will stand before God almighty and render an account for the deeds we have done and the blood of the souls of mankind which stain our head and our hands (Acts 20:26, 27; Ezek. 3:18). If we don't do our best to call for true conversion as Paul did the Corinthians and to keep the church pure, we may someday be the ones God is purging for the purification of his Church (Eph. 5:26, 27).

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The Willing Ephesians of Acts 19

Marcus Vondracek

In 2 Timothy 3:1-4, Paul writes, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” If we were to take the first and last items listed, we would have “lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God.” What a fitting description of the world we live in today. There are multitudes of people who do not care about the God of heaven, who loved them enough to send his only Son to die for their sins. Instead, there are individuals who are only concerned with themselves and how they can enrich themselves with the pleasures of this world.

Paul further states in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” We see around us, even in the religious community, the precise thing of which Paul wrote. Many are no longer concerned with the teachings of the gospel, let alone, obeying these teachings. We now have preachers and teachers doing exactly what Paul said they would — telling the unwilling hearers only what they want and desire to hear.

The account of the conversion of the Ephesians in Acts 19 is a breath of fresh air when we look at the condition of those in the world around us. These men had a characteristic that is worthy of notice. They were willing!

Willing Hearts

The Ephesian men had willing hearts. These men, like all men created by God, had free will to make their own choices. The first description presented to us is that they were disciples. They had made the choice to follow the teachings of John the Baptist, which included the kingdom of heaven, baptism of repentance, and belief in the Son of

God (Matt. 3:1-3; Acts 19:4). They were men who were searching out the truth. The Scriptures give us plenty of examples of those who had willing hearts. When Moses was gathering the materials to build the tabernacle, he was instructed by God to take from the people who were of a willing heart and a willing spirit (Exod. 35:5, 21-22, 29). King David, when teaching his son Solomon how to serve God, said, “Serve him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind” (1 Chron. 28:9). King David and the people rejoiced greatly “because they offered willingly to the Lord” when they gathered materials to build the temple (1 Chron. 29:9). Amasiah “willingly offered himself to the Lord” when King Jehoshaphat numbered the mighty men of valor (2 Chron. 17:16).

Paul stressed the character of willingness in his letter to the Corinthians when discussing the subject of giving to the Lord. “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:12). Our willingness and purpose are far more important to God than the amount. The Macedonian brethren “first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5). A willing heart is needed if one is to serve God. This is demonstrated by the Ephesian disciples, something not seen among many today.

Willing to Listen

The Ephesian disciples were willing to listen. The religious world today is in such confusion and chaos. Everyone states that he is right and that his church will get the sinner to heaven. This confusion has turned many an ear from listening to the good news of Jesus. Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, “Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to listen to my speech” (John 8:43). People are confused, frustrated, stubborn, and do not understand the word of God. Why? Because they are unwilling to listen! The Ephesian disciples were truly willing to listen. Paul came to them preaching about things of which they had no knowledge, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2), yet they were willing to listen.

continued bottom of next page

Almost Persuaded

Bruce J. Dehut

One of the saddest proclamations noted in the New Testament is that of King Agrippa in Acts 26:28. Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

The biblical record gives no statement beyond this, of Agrippa’s inclination towards Christianity. As far as we know, the king passed from this life failing to commit himself to the saving power of Jesus Christ. But this failure was not due to a lack of knowledge or opportunity on Agrippa’s part.

An Expert in Jewish Protocol

Agrippa II was the great grandson of Herod the Great. The Herodian house descended from Esau and were of Edomite stock. The land in which they dwelled was conquered and added to the Jewish state about 130 B.C., and they submitted to the rite of circumcision and embraced Jewish religion. Most of the Herods were educated in Rome

and were considered ceremonial, half Jews at best (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*). The apostle Paul was well aware of this fact, and counted himself fortunate to finally give an account of the charges against him to Agrippa, “especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews” (Acts 26:3). Paul had spent over two years in confinement, pleading his case before Felix, who had a “more accurate knowledge of the Way” (Acts 24:22) and Festus, who couldn’t even put into words the charges against Paul (Acts 25:26-27), because the accusations were based upon what Festus called, the Jews superstition and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 25:19). Paul knew that not only was Agrippa an authority in Jewish customs, but he most assuredly was aware of the commotion caused by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers (Acts 26:26-27).

He Heard the Gospel Preached

Paul declared to Agrippa that he himself was a devout Jew, looking anxiously for the fulfillment of promises made

Willing to Accept the Gospel

The Ephesian disciples were willing to accept the gospel. In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that the good ground or the good hearts of men would, after hearing the word, accept it (Mark 4:20). Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, thanked God “because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). The Ephesian disciples had been baptized into John’s baptism, thus Paul “explained the way of God more accurately,” teaching them that they needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. They were willing to accept this teaching of Paul, even though it was foreign and new to them. Sad to say, too many people today are more like the Jewish disciples, who were not willing to accept the teachings of Jesus and “went back and walked with him no more” (John 6:66).

Willing to Obey

The Ephesian disciples demonstrated their willingness to accept Paul’s teachings in the fact that they were willing to obey. Jesus further stated that the good heart that accepted the word would “bear fruit” and be active in the work of the Lord (Mark 4:20). Paul went on to say that the word of God was “effectively working” in the lives of the Thessalonian brethren (1 Thess. 2:13). What do we see in our Ephesian disciples? “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). They did not complain, gripe, fuss, get mad, laugh, or reject. They simply did what they realized they needed to do, and they obeyed.

What a refreshing and encouraging example that we can read of in God’s word — the willing Ephesians of Acts 19.

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to the fathers (Acts 26:6-7). He goes on to say that he was a militant Pharisee, persecuting Christians even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11). But he relates to Agrippa his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. How, by the grace of God, he became a minister and witness to both the Jews and the Gentiles concerning the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:16-18). Paul left no doubt that his mission included instructing people to “repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:19). Paul nailed Agrippa right between the eyes when he asked the question he already had the answer for: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe” (Acts 26:27)

An Ego Problem

Maybe one of the reasons that king Agrippa wavered was due to his lack of acceptance by the people. Josephus mentions that Agrippa’s father, Herod the king, was “keenly fond of popularity and possessed much personal magnetism.” His status among the Jews was definitely heightened when he harassed the church and murdered James (Acts 12:1-3). However, his son Agrippa II was never popular with his subjects and might have lost even more esteem in the eyes of the Jews if he had converted to Christianity. History tells us that eventually he joined forces with the Romans to abuse the Jews and destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. So either way, he came out on the bottom of the popularity poll among the Jews.

Fear of Losing Power

King Agrippa could have been hesitant because the Romans were the ones that had carried out the crucifixion of Jesus. Why would they hesitate to remove Agrippa from his throne, strip him of his riches and possibly execute him? But Jesus assures us that nothing is worth holding

onto if it costs us our souls (Mark 8:36). God orchestrates the rise and fall of kingdoms (Rom. 13:1), Agrippa’s would be no different.

Without Excuse

We could speculate all our lives about why Agrippa chose not to become a Christian that day. But just like the Gentiles that Paul addressed in his letter to the Romans, king Agrippa was without excuse. Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

Lesson To Be Learned

God has an answer for all our procrastinations:

- We all have heard (Col. 1:23).
- We are to put aside our egos (Luke 9:23).
- Hold nothing of this world dearer than our souls (Mark 8:36).
- We are all without excuse, all have sinned (1 John 1:10).
- Why Wait (Acts 22:16).

King Agrippa’s words were obviously the inspiration to Phillip P. Bass’ hymn “Almost Persuaded.” How true the words ring in the latter portion of the last verse:

“Almost” cannot avail;
 “Almost” is but to fail;
 “Sad, sad, that bitter wail
 “Almost – but lost!”

If you are vacillating about becoming a Christian, *don’t!*

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The Rich Young Ruler

Chris Nicholson

“Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? So Jesus said to him, Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother. And he answered and said to Him, Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth. Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, one thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me. But he was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:17-22, NKJV; cf. Matt. 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23).

The Ruler’s Desire

How profitable is it to ask at the feet of Jesus what we must do in order to inherit eternal life! This is what the young ruler desired to know. Mark pictures the scene. The young man was eager — expressed by his running; he was not afraid of the opinion of others, he made a public appeal to Christ; his respect for Christ is shown by his kneeling. There was no playing with words here; “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Christ alone is capable of showing us the way to heaven, since he is the way; he alone is incapable of deceiving us, since he is the Truth.

As seems to be the custom, one can search out for his own teacher. A person of great wealth can normally find the most popular teacher to give the desired answers. For this young man of wealth to bow before Jesus indicated tremendous respect. This ruler sought reassurance, some way of knowing for sure that he had eternal life. He wanted Jesus to measure and grade his qualifications, or give him some task he could do to assure his own immortality. The man did not understand that salvation is not earned. He did not understand what is impossible for man to obtain, can and will be given as a gift from God (Eph. 2:10). The

man needed to understand that what he needed was not just to keep another commandment, but to submit humbly to the leadership of God. No doubt this young man sincerely desired eternal life. Who, with a understanding of the judgment to come, would not want it. But as we will soon see by his sad departure, he had no idea what would be required to do in obtaining it. We must ask ourselves if we truly want to know how to please God. Do we desire to be known by God or by men. Have we come to grasp the understanding of the royal law according to the Scriptures, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Jas. 2:8). We all need to ponder the words of Matthew 16:26, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Do we think ourselves beyond the possibility of falling from the grace of God because of our material possessions?

The Startling Reply

It is remarkable how Jesus dealt with the man. Christ meets him on his own ground. Stating the commandments which regulate man’s conduct toward his fellow man. “All these I have observed” testifies to a great moral ignorance on the part of the young man. Can you imagine standing face to face with Jesus and stating that you have kept *all* of the commandments listed? If only God is good, the man will later have to admit he has broken some of the commands. Jesus felt love for the man, and said, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21). Jesus’ statement exposed the man’s weakness. In reality, his wealth was his god, his idol, and he would not give it up. He violated the first and greatest commandment (Exod. 20:3; Matt. 22:36-40). This challenge exposed the barrier that could keep this young man out of the kingdom; his love for money. Money was more important to the young man than God. He would not turn his entire life over to God. What barriers are keeping you from turning your entire life over to God?

The Young Man's Disappointing Refusal

But he was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions (Mark 10:22). Did the man ever give his life entirely over to God? We do not know. We know that he went away feeling sorrow, not anger toward Jesus. The piercing words of Christ were felt in the soul of the man. This man's wealth made his life comfortable and gave him power and prestige. Jesus was touching the basis of his security when he told him to sell all that he owned. He did not understand that he would be far more secure following Jesus than with his wealth. Have we come to that understanding yet? I mean really put this knowledge into practice? We must get rid of everything that has or may become more important than God. If your foundation for security has shifted from God to what you own, you must get rid of this weight. In Hebrews 12:1 we read, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sins which so easily ensnare us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Have you looked inward, with a sincere evaluation, and found the things that are weighing you down in your race for heaven? We all have our weights, and weaknesses toward certain sins. Christ loved us enough to die for us, and he also loves us enough to talk straight to us. If you are comfortable by the fact that Christ did not tell all his followers to sell all their possessions, then you may

be too attached to what you have. In Jeremiah 9:2-24 we read, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord."

The story of the young ruler should be linked with the previous incident of the blessing of the children. In Mark 10:15 we read, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." This ruler could not enter the kingdom because he would not receive it as a little child. His spirit was far removed from that of an obedient, trusting child. Jesus lead him through a test to realize that he hardly knew what keeping the commandments meant. In Matthew 22:37-40 we read, "Jesus said to him; You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Are you prepared to give all for the cause of the kingdom?

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No “Five-step Formula” (?)

Larry Ray Hafley

My wife was shocked to find the following statement in a book written by a woman who is a member of the church — “Never in the entire Bible did any prophet, nor Jesus, nor the Apostle Paul present a five-step formula for giving the heart over to God.”

In the 19th century, gospel preachers often taught the gospel plan of salvation to children and to unlearned and illiterate men and women. One convenient way to ground disciples in the truth was to hold up their hand and, grasping each finger one at a time, say, “Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, and be Baptized.” Sectarians began to ridicule it as the “*five finger creed of the church of Christ*,” the “*five finger formula of the Campbellites*,” and “*five steps of the water gospel*.” Christians were mocked and called “*five steppers*.”

Because truth was taught so simply with the “five finger exercise,” enemies of the cross made fun of the process. It was easier to do that than to show how it contradicted the word of God; so, they railed and reviled.

Omit Which Step?

If the Lord and the apostles never presented “a five-step formula,” which ones did they omit? Which should we leave out? *Should we:*

1. *Omit Hearing?* Since “faith cometh by hearing” the word of God, how can we leave it out (Rom. 10:17)? Jesus said one must “hear (his) voice,” his word, in order to have spiritual life (John 5:25; 6:63, 68). One cannot trust in Christ until he hears “the word of truth” (Eph. 1:13). If a person never “hears” the gospel, he can never believe; therefore, we cannot omit hearing.

2. *Omit Belief?* Since “without faith it is impossible to please” God, how can we fail to include faith (Heb. 11:6)? Jesus said, “if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). The Lord said, “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16; John 3:18). Obviously,

we must not omit faith as one of the “steps” one must take in order to be saved (Eph. 2:8, 9).

3. *Omit Repentance?* Since God “commandeth all men every where to repent,” how can we remove repentance (Acts 17:30)? Jesus said, “repent, or perish,” turn or burn (Luke 13:3). Christ connected repentance with the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38). Thus, we may not omit repentance as a “step” for the sinner to obey (2 Pet. 3:9).

4. *Omit Confession?* Since only those who confess that Jesus is Lord can be saved, how can we eliminate confession (Rom. 10:9, 10)? Jesus said, “Whosoever . . . shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father” (Matt. 10:32, 33). “If we deny him, he will also deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12). Hence, we cannot omit confession of Christ as a “step” “unto salvation.”

5. *Omit Baptism?* Since baptism is “for the remission of sins,” how can we possibly ignore it (Acts 2:38; 22:16)? Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Baptism is one of the conditions with which one must comply in order to be saved in Christ (John 3:3-5; Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21). So, we dare not omit baptism.

Jesus and the apostles *did indeed* present the “five-steps” which some say were “never” given. Again, which “steps” shall we take away from God’s book (Rev. 22:18, 19)? In the conversion accounts in the book of Acts, which ones were omitted? Did the Ethiopian eunuch fail to repent? Did the Philippian jailer not confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord? Was anyone ever converted who did not first hear the gospel? Which of the “five-steps” were omitted? Which ones may we exclude and still be saved? Those who ridicule the “five-step formula” need to tell us!

4626 Osage, Baytown, Texas 77521



God's Law of Pardon

Lewis Willis

No doctrine of the Bible is more ignored or misunderstood than *God's law of pardon*. Too many people are totally indifferent to the subject — they could care less. To those who are concerned, the truth must be known. That is the mission of this article.

What Does Pardon Mean?

The word translated “pardon” is from a Hebrew word, *selichah*, which means “a passing over, forgiveness” (Young’s 730). Job asked, “And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?” (Job 7:21). His inquiry was to God. Why? Because it is God who does the pardoning: “. . . but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, . . .” (Neh. 9:17). Also, Micah wrote: “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (Mic. 7:18). The good news is that God is willing to pardon; that there is a *law of pardon*. When the Hebrew writer spoke of the new covenant God would make with man, one of its greatest effects would be, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12; 10:17).

Pardon From What?

What do we need God to pardon? Job said we need pardon from transgression or iniquity. “Iniquity” is from a Greek word, *anomia*, which means lawlessness, wickedness, or unrighteousness (Vine 260). In a word, iniquity is “sin.” Isaiah said, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Consider these verses also: “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. . .” (Ps. 6:8); “. . . destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity” (Prov. 21:15); “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds!” (Mic. 2:1).

Who Needs Pardon?

Obviously, all need pardon who are guilty of iniquity

or sin. What this says is that we all need pardon, because we all have sinned. Paul wrote that, “. . . we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; . . . As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: . . . They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9, 10, 12, 23). There is not, therefore, an accountable adult who does not need pardon. The question today is the same as it has always been: What must I do to be saved?

Who Has God Authorized To Answer?

I know that men are ready to give their answers about the requirements for salvation. However, would we not be wise, since God is the one who pardons, to inquire of him who he has authorized to answer? After promising to build his church, Jesus gave binding and loosing authority to the apostles (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18). Just before Jesus went away, he told them: “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). The Apostle Paul affirmed that God made them ambassadors (official representatives) to announce his terms of pardon: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

What Did God Authorize Them To Say?

He told them to go teach, or preach the gospel to all nations. Those who believed were to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47). Men today do not seem to understand or respect this, but that is exactly what these passages authorized them to say.

What Did They Answer?

On the Day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, when the gospel was first preached by the apostles, thousands of Jews finally believed in Jesus. They were cut to their hearts with the knowledge that they had murdered the Son of God and they asked the apostles, "What shall we do?" They needed pardon and the apostles were the ones appointed by God to tell them how to receive it. When Peter answered the question, he told them what God had authorized them to say. He said, "... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). These people heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, and were baptized. They met all of God's requirements for pardon. One has to wonder how modern preachers can tell people to do something different than the apostles required. Does modern man know better? Were the apostles wrong? Did God change his mind?

Have You Complied With God's Law Of Pardon?

Remember now: All of us have sinned; God is willing to pardon; he told the apostles to tell us what to do to be pardoned; they told us to hear the gospel, to believe, to repent and to be baptized for the remission of our sins. Have you done what God requires you to do for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, do so today! We are ready to assist you in your obedience.

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"True Conversion" continued from front page item in greater detail.

A Change of Heart

The term "heart" is often used in Scripture to refer to the intellect and desire of a person (see Gen. 6:5; Matt. 6:21; Acts 5:4). Therefore, a change of heart is brought about through faith, that is, through becoming convicted based upon information that is learned. A man's faith is inspired by his response to the gospel message (Rom. 10:17). A true change of heart is much more than a mere acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God. In reality it is a change that destroys the love of sin and establishes the love of God in the sinner's heart. We might say that it causes one to hate what he once loved and love what he once hated. A true change of heart produced by faith in God's word is what caused the Jews on Pentecost to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Certainly, there can be no conversion without a change of heart.

A Change of Conduct

Since mere belief in God does not constitute conversion (Jas. 2:19), we can conclude that a change of heart will amount to nothing if it is not followed by a change of conduct. The change of conduct that is required by the Lord is brought about through repentance. It is quite evident from the New Testament that God demands repentance (see Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19). True repentance is more than feeling sorry for the sins that we have committed. True repentance is a complete change in the direction of one's life, as defined by the prophet Isaiah: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). When a man truly repents, he turns from desiring to sin, to hungering and thirsting after righteousness. There can be no conversion to the Lord without repentance.

A Change of Relationship to God

Although a change of heart and a change of conduct are required by God, we cannot acceptably follow Jesus until our relationship to God is also changed. Many in the religious world today change their hearts and lives completely, only to fall short of true conversion, simply because their relationship to God remains in its same dreadful state of disrepair. In Acts 3:19 Peter said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted," showing us plainly that conversion is not completed upon repentance. The truth is that the change in our relationship to God is brought about through water baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Scriptural baptism takes a man from a state of being outside of Christ and literally brings him "into Christ." Baptism will never change a man's heart or conduct, but it will change his relationship to God. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark

16:16). It is plain to see that baptism is not something we do because we have been converted, it is what we must do in order to be converted (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Conclusion

It is only after these three changes have taken place that the Scriptures recognize a person as having been converted to Christ. But we are involved in more than just a mental exercise in examining the what God’s word has to say on the subject of conversion. This message of true, Biblical conversion is a message that is sorely needed among the millions around us who are lost and dying in sin. “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?” (Rom. 10:14). Will you spread the word?

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“Conversion” continued from page 2

first and self last. Unless we are willing to put our hand to the plow and not look back, we are not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

The next time you are in a class and an individual wants to obey next week, tell him that you will study with him again. If he understand fully what God wants, he will obey right then, not because it is convenient, but rather because he wants to be saved now — at the accepted time (2 Cor. 6:2).

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Preachers Needed

Indianapolis, Indiana: The Lafayette Heights congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana is looking for a preacher to start working with them. The work is to start during the summer of 1998. They are a group of 133 members, with two elders. They will be able to furnish full support. If you are interested, please contact: Ronald Capps 317-856-6827 recapps@indy.net or Ronald Walker 317-856-6380 rwalker2@prodigy.net

Arbutus, Maryland: This congregation was established in November 1995 by faithful brethren who are determined to spread God’s word to their friends and neighbors in the Arbutus area, a suburb of Baltimore. They are presently meeting in the East Drive Professional Building, 5205 East Dr., Suite D (second level), Arbutus, MD 21227. The congregation has 22 members with an average Sunday attendance between 30-35. They are in need of a full-time evangelist to work with them. The congregation can provide \$1600 per month salary, plus health insurance, and pay for moving expenses. They are interested in someone who can provide partial support. This work is ideal for someone who is enthusiastic for the Lord and wants to work with brethren who are eager to spread the word. If interested, please write the Arbutus Church of Christ at the above address or call Jim Craig (410-789-2080), Jim Ruff (410-426-8723), or leave a message at the church building (410-247-1396).

Tehachapi, California: The church that meets at 20407 Brian Way, Tehachapi, California, is seeking an evangelist who will primarily work within the community to seek out and teach the gospel to honest hearts. Since there are at

present six families worshipping together and six men who share the preaching on a rotational basis, the evangelist would preach in rotation and spend the bulk of his time in teaching the lost and conducting home Bible studies. There is also a large prison population in the community, and the church has several studies in the prison. There is also an active correspondence course program in place. The group meets in an established rented building with room for growth. Some outside support would be required. Partial support is available and additional outside support is possible. Tehachapi is a high desert community between Bakersfield and Lancaster with moderate housing costs and a reasonable cost-of-living. The area enjoys all four seasons, educational and recreational opportunities, and lots of potential for spiritual growth. Anyone interested, please call Mark Huber at 805-823-7712, E-mail at hubermnd@tminet.com, or Mark Horton at 805-588-3199, E-mail at chelsea@lightspeed.net.

LaVergne, Tennessee: An experienced evangelist is needed to work full-time to help develop the small congregation at LaVergne, Tennessee, a rapidly growing area. Support of \$3200-3500 per month is available from the congregation. If interested, please write to Louis E. Mullen, 104 Hankins Dr., Smyrna, TN 37167 or call 615-459-8171.

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Churches Bar Straight Marriages in Ban Protest

"Nashville (AP) — Suzanne Prince married Hunter Allen at a friend's home. That wasn't the plan, but the couple had no choice because their church — Edgehill United Methodist doesn't allow marriage ceremonies.

"The Edgehill congregation decided that until the United Methodist Church allows gay marriages, no marriage ceremonies of any kind will be performed in their chapel.

"If the United Methodist Church wasn't going to allow gay people to get married in the church, I agree that straight people shouldn't either,' said Prince, who's been married nine months.

". . . The National Council of Churches has no information on how many individual churches perform gay marriage ceremonies, or refuse to allow traditional marriages to protest bans on gay marriages.

"Edgehill's policy was drafted when a pastor in Atlanta was disciplined for blessing a homosexual couple's wedding, said Kathryn Mitchem, who chaired Edgehill's Administrative Council that adopted the policy.

"We didn't feel we were taking something away, more that we were making a public witness to the denomination,' she said.

". . . 'By every standard we know, marriage is a union of a male and a female, made valid in the sight of God by blessing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,' said the Rev. Riley Case, pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Kokomo, Ind.

"Case is a member of the United Methodist Church Good News, a group that supports traditional scriptural views.

"If your primary loyalty is to the gay and lesbian agenda and not to the scripture or the care of persons who want marriage . . . I would question if they should call themselves Christians,' he said" (*The Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle* [November 11, 1997], B4).

Real Adults Don't Commit Adultery, Psychiatrist Says

"The Orlando Sentinel — If you're a married person contemplating a dalliance, don't tell Dr. Frank Pittman.

"The Atlanta psychiatrist and author of several books — including *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* — has had it up to here with adultery in particular and with Americans' notions of romantic love in general.

"Pittman enjoys dispelling what he calls the 'myths of adultery.'

"Among them: 'The idea that adultery is normal, expectable behavior, that everybody does it, and that affairs can revive a dull marriage.'

". . . given his own statistics — that one-half of married men and one-third of married women commit adultery — is there any way to forestall all this dallying?

"We'd do well to choose a better class of celebrities as role models,' Pitmann says. The folks in *People* magazine, as well as 'politicians, TV evangelists and other kinds of people who need to be celebrities are just not normal,' he says.

"In addition, 'It would be very nice if we saw movies about marriage that were not ridiculing it, or making it seem boring and silly,' he says. Oh, and 'stop justifying adultery with romance.' Stop rationalizing irresponsible, destructive behavior with the idea that 'if you're in love, then it's OK.'

". . . 'Children need to see courageous adults holding marriages together whether they're in love or not" (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 20, 1997], A1).

Woodward Trial Sparks Criticism of Absentee Child-Rearing

"Mark Patinkin, *Providence Journal Bulletin* — The real issue in the Louise Woodward *au pair* case, says Richard Gelles, isn't whether the verdict and sentence were justified.

"It's about how American parents raise children. Most,' he says, 'don't: More than ever, adults delegate their most important job.'

"A generation,' he says, 'is being parented by parents who are not there, and cared for by caretakers who are often children themselves.'

"Gelles, a University of Rhode Island professor often called as an expert in child-abuse trials, has written 21 books on children's welfare and directs a research program on family violence.

"Part of him, says Gelles, hesitates to question two-career couples who struggle nobly to balance work and family. But as a social scientist, he can't ignore what his research tells him.

"Having one parent there, present, that's nature's plan. That's what kids need.'

"I think we're playing with fire in a society that provides as little parental supervision for children as we do.'

". . . 'The one thing we know in the child development literature,' he says, 'is that kids do best with a primary caretaker who's truly there for them in every way.'

". . . 'The people I admire are those who make tough sacrifices for their kids, who say, "I could be a star, but I have something more important to take care of'" (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 14, 1997], E1).

Where The Ethical Line Is Drawn

"Cal Thomas — The birth of the McCaughey septuplets produced joy and thanksgiving for the couple and their families. It has also produced a debate among medical ethicists, some of whom argue that Bobbi McCaughey should have aborted (euphemistically a 'fetal reduction') in order to limit the risk to the babies and reduce the cost to the taxpayers of giving birth to so many children.

"First, a definition. 'Ethics' is 'the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.' This implies a standard by which an ethic may be measured. The McCaugheys accepted such a standard when they said that God had a plan for their children, and they never considered killing one or more of them.

"Medical ethicists abandoned such a standard when they endorsed abortion 'choice.' That Bobbi McCaughey made a choice favoring life over death isn't enough for them. They have other concerns.

"Where the ethical line is drawn with indelible or disappearing ink, is relevant to what the medical profession will be allowed to do to the rest of us in the future. As medicine costs more, it will be necessary to consider whether life's value can depreciate, like a car.

". . . Some ethicists and commentators question the 'right' of women to have multiple births, suggesting the government may wish to regulate the practice. This sounds disturbingly like China's policy of limiting couples to one child, with forced abortion for those who attempt to violate the law. Do we want to go there?

". . . One category of life cannot be declassified without endangering others. If the unborn can be aborted, individu-

ally or 'selectively,' then why not kill the newly born and the elderly if they become 'inconvenient'? If there is no God to govern in the affairs of men, then why shouldn't government or medical ethicists or public opinion be our god?

"On the eve of the 25th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade*, we are quickly regressing to a raw, purely arbitrary utilitarianism increasingly hostile to the notion that life is sacred and unique among living things" (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 30, 1997], D2).

Field Reports



James Johnson, 2987 Homeworth Ln., Beavercreek, OH 45434: I started a mailing list on the web because I did not find an existing list that met my needs. I began a Nice List as a place on-line where Christians can meet and discuss the Bible. Different views may be openly discussed, but hostile, unchristian attitudes (flames) are not tolerated. Unchristian behavior will result in suspension or expulsion from the list. Interested readers may sign up by writing to Majordomo@listbox.com and putting "subscribe nice-list" as the only text in the body of the message. The digest form where individual messages are consolidated into a single large file and sent out once a day may be obtained from Majordomo@listbox.com and putting "subscribe nice-list-digest" in the message body. This list is free.

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