

## Conversion – The Gift of Seeing the Truth

Series: Basic Christianity

Acts 9:1-22

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C. S. Lewis wrote a book called *Mere Christianity*, in which he addresses the essential philosophical basis of the Christian faith. I want to speak on a series I will call Basic Christianity. I am not going to address Christianity from a philosophical basis but rather, my intention is to give a primer for the Christian faith. In our Family Ministry Council we discussed the role of Legacy Path in our church. If you are unfamiliar with Legacy Path, it is an emphasis which seeks to guide children along milestones of faith as they develop. The last milestone is adulthood. The problem is that merely being an adult Christian does not mean you are growing in faith or that you have developed a strong life of discipleship.

Most adult Christians have never had anyone take them through a basic course on discipleship. They were saved, baptized, joined a church and became church attenders. Yet, attending church is not essentially discipleship. Many have learned to pray, read their Bible and attend studies. Yet those are not essentially discipleship either. They are good, but not what Jesus had in mind when he said “make disciples of all of the nations.” (Matt. 28:19) Disciples in Jesus’ day were people who followed the teachings and emulated the life of a master rabbi. That is why the 12 followed Jesus for three years. Jesus was their master teacher. They devoted themselves to learn from Him. It is not possible to truly disciple someone from weekly sermons. However, I can give you a basic understanding of what God’s purpose is in giving you salvation.

So, I want to begin my series speaking about conversion. What does it mean to be converted. If you say you are a convert to Christianity, what does that mean?

**Definition: Conversion is the act of transferring from one state to another.**

In terms of chemistry a substance is transformed into another substance through a chemical reaction. In medicine, a person is transformed from say an unhealthy state to a healthy state – for example, from cancer to cancer free. In physics a polarity converts from a negative to a positive. In philosophy a person converts from one worldview to another. In religion conversion means a person has transferred from one belief system to another. Specifically, In the Christian faith a person converts from a state of being lost to a state of being saved.

I have subtitled my lesson that conversion is **The Gift of Seeing the Truth**. Before conversion to Christ a person is held in the darkness of unbelief. What he thinks about God, Jesus, the Bible is false because his mind is held under the power of Satan, the ruler of the air. Sin threw us into darkness and we were held by its power.

Perhaps no greater example is found in the New Testament than that of Paul’s conversion. Even his name gets converted. He starts as a Saul and becomes a Paul.

Read

### **Acts 9:1-22 NIVO**

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. <sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, "Go to

the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

<sup>13</sup> "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

<sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

## 1. Conversion is the start for every believer.

There are many names we give to the experience of conversion.

**Conversion** – going from unbelief in Christ to belief in Christ.

Acts 15:3 *ἐπιστροφή* **convert, lit. a turning about. As a sailing ship tacks.**

**Born Again** – the new life of Jesus coming in you at the moment of salvation.

John 3:3 *γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν* born either from above or again.

Moving from being dead to being alive in the life of God is a new birth.

**Saved** – receiving the gift of salvation when you are converted.

Eph. 2:8 "have been saved" *σεσωσμένοι* "been saved," perfect passive participle. Perfect means the affects carry on in a state that remains.

Every believer has a start in the faith. No one is born a Christian. No one is saved because their parents were believers. There is a place for conversion for every person because every person has sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Saul had a conversion experience. He was at one moment an unbeliever. Then, Christ appeared to him and he was saved. Now, Saul was a person who had religion. He still needed to be saved. He believed in God. He still needed to be saved. He studied the Scriptures. He still needed to be saved. He believed in heaven and hell. He still needed to be saved. Saul kept religious rituals and did good things. He was a very religious and pious man. Yet, Saul was lost even in his religion because he did not have faith in what Jesus had done to save him. Everyone has to have a start.

## 2. Although everyone has a conversion, conversions differ in terms of experience.

### Radical Conversion (Paul)

Saul had a radical conversion by personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ. Saul was radically opposed to the Christian faith because he believed that Christianity was a false teaching. He was devoted to God and keeping the LAW. Christianity declared Jesus (a local rabbi) to be the Messiah and God. For many in rabbinic Judaism this is blasphemy. A man cannot be God. They are absolutely right. A man cannot be God. Yet, they fail to realize that God can be a man!

So, Saul went out hunting down Christians to put them in prison. He was on the way to Damascus to see if any Christians were there. He was going to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Then as he was on the way ... BOOM! Jesus appeared to him.

A light appears to Saul and he falls on his face.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Suddenly, Saul had a turn-about. He has a radical change. Jesus appeared to him and saved him from his lost and false belief. Saul, or Paul as he became known, had a conversion. He had been blinded by falsehood. When he saw Jesus, he was blinded in his sight. Yet, though blind, he finally saw the truth. Jesus is real. He is the Son of God. He is the Savior of the world.

Notice, Jesus did not appear to Saul because Saul prayed a prayer of faith. Saul did nothing to merit Jesus' appearance or salvation. Jesus just chose him and showed up. Saul was blinded until Ananias lays his hands on him. He was baptized. Then quickly, Saul begins to preach Jesus to his fellow Jews.

Some people are radically saved. In this case, Jesus chose Saul, who would be renamed to Paul. Jesus chose him, saved him, and at the same time, called him to service.

That doesn't happen for everyone. Some people have a more gradual entrance into the faith.

### **Gradual Conversion (Peter)**

Many people have a more gradual conversion. It is a change that takes place over time. It may come over days or years. It may come after hearing the gospel over time, or growing up in church where the message of Christ is heard over time. At some point the Holy Spirit alerts a person to make a confession of their faith in baptism. This conversion is as real as those who like Paul suddenly experience Christ.

This gradual is more likely the experience of the Apostles who followed Jesus. Consider Peter. He was baptized likely under John the Baptist. He followed Jesus as his teacher and master. He was given power of the kingdom of God in service of Christ. Yet, his conversion likely comes after Jesus' resurrection. I say this because faith is based on what Jesus has accomplished for our salvation in his death and resurrection.

### **1 Peter 1:3 NIVO**

**<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

Even though Peter confessed faith that Jesus was the Christ – or Messiah, he did not understand the work Jesus would do as Christ. The twelve Apostles minus Judas are saved over a period of time.

Many people who are raised in church are exposed to the gospel early in life. They may make a confession of baptism early in life. This does not mean they understand everything about faith. As we will learn, faith is a growing experience. It is never static. We will grow in understanding, in gifts, and in ministry.

Some people cannot tell exactly when they were saved. That is okay. Ruth Bell Graham, wife to Billy Graham, was raised in a home of missionaries in China. She said she did not know the exact time Jesus became her Savior. She knows she had faith in Christ. Her faith came over a period of time growing up in a family of faith.

In contrast, Sid Roth, a Jew who is a convert to the Christian faith, tells his story. He tells his conversion experience on One For Israel as having a radical conversion experience. He was raised a Jew, but eventually quit attending Synagogue. He wasn't even certain if he believed there was a God. He got involved in something that promised to give him higher powers. He was an investor and was told he could train his mind to new states that would reveal things he could not know. He thought that would be great. He could learn about stock futures that could make him millions. So, he did the things they said. He relaxed his mind into a hypnotic state. Then he was told he could invite a "friend spirit" to come in. That "friend spirit" would give him the new power he needed. He said it sounded like hocus-pocus, but it really worked. *He had a new power.* There was a voice in his mind that told him things. Yet, once that power came into him, it began to do some scary stuff. He also realized he couldn't get the power out of him. He went to his parents and asked what he should do. His parents, being Jews, sent him to a rabbi. The rabbi sent him to a psychiatrist. They did shock therapy. It didn't

help. He didn't know what to do. He had been taught his whole life never go to Christians or read the New Testament. That would be bad for him. Christians believe in *Yeshua* - Jesus. He was desperate. He was having out of body experiences and he was afraid he wouldn't be able to get back again. So, on his bed one night in desperation he prayed a two word prayer -- a two word prayer that radically saved him. He prayed, "Jesus. Help." The next morning the voices were gone. The evil power was gone. A simple prayer, "Jesus. Help." He was converted. He was saved. From that time on, he has found his life meaning in *Yeshua* the Messiah.

Sometimes salvation is radical. Sometimes it is a process that occurs over time. In both cases, Jesus brings a new life.

### **3. Conversion is a start of a new life in Christ Jesus.**

However you experience conversion in Christ, it is the beginning of a new life. It is really being born again. If it is a radical conversion, it is a sudden new life contrasted to the old. If it is a gradual new life experience, it is still a new life compared to the old life under the lost state of sin.

This is what Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. Jesus appeared to him. In some people's experiences, they hear the gospel preached and feel convicted of sin. They fell drawn to Christ. Someone explains the gospel to them and they ask Jesus to save them. They submit to baptism and begin their new journey of life. In Paul's case, he never knew a gentle drawing of the Holy Spirit. He never heard the gospel preached. He never sought God or salvation in Christ. Instead, Jesus just interrupts his path. **Boom!** Jesus shows up on the road. Paul is blinded. Jesus rebukes his persecution of the church. What is more, Jesus explains to Ananias that He has plans for Paul and knows that Paul will suffer much for his service of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

Salvation is not always our own seeking of God as much as God revealing Christ to us. This is one of the reasons we must be praying for God to reveal Christ to our world. I believe that God reveals Jesus to people in accordance to the prayers of his church. Jesus has taught me to pray for Muslims, Jews, Isis, communists, rioters and mobbers, and corrupt politicians. I pray for everyone.

The new life is a new *life*. It is a life to be lived in growth and service. When Paul's life was changed. He did not spend the rest of his life sitting in a church pew. He did far more than attend Bible studies or attend conferences. Paul often talks about being transformed in this new life into the nature of Christ and the glory of God.

### **2 Corinthians 3:18 NIVO**

**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

He talks about his labor to see us be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

### **Galatians 4:19 NIVO**

**My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.**

The new life in Christ comes as the Holy Spirit brings the life of Jesus into your soul. You are born again by faith in his saving work of the cross. It has a beginning. Yet, it has no end. It begins in the new birth then ends in eternity, living in the glory of the presence of God in heaven.

### **Have you been converted? Are you saved?**

It does not matter how. It matters that you have come into the faith of Jesus as your Savior.

If you are on the outside of faith and looking in, be aware it may be God's Holy Spirit who is drawing you to Christ. Open your heart and act in faith. Call on the name of Jesus to save you. Then, submit to public baptism as a confession of your faith in Jesus as the Savior. You will begin a new life in Jesus that will live on forever.

