

Be Converted

By David Phillips

There are many who obey the gospel in pursuit of salvation. They desire to have their consciences cleansed and to have the hope of eternal life in heaven, so they willingly obey the command of the Lord. But the question every individual must answer for himself or herself is, am I willing to be changed?

In Matt. 18:3, Jesus teaches His disciples saying, "*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" In this one passage Jesus illustrates for us the kind of change that must take place. Many people understand that conversion involves baptism. But Jesus teaches us that if we are to be converted, real change must take place in the way we think and in the way we live if we are going to enter the kingdom. We must in fact be "*converted and become as little children.*" Have you become like a little child?

Become As Little Children

Before Jesus said to His disciples that they must be converted, they came to Him in Matt. 8:1 and asked, "*Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*" They were still thinking about greatness in worldly, human terms. Their question was brought on by an attitude of pride because they wanted to be the greatest (Mark 10:37). That is the attitude that Jesus was teaching them to change.

All men have a sense of pride that must be overcome. Everyone who sins does so, in part, because they choose to disobey God; they choose to not fully submit themselves to His righteous standard. All are guilty of this, for it says "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). This sense of pride was part of the reason Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the garden, "*So when the woman saw that the tree was...desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate*" (Gen. 3:6). This is the "*pride of life*" that John described in 1 John 2:16. Where pride is allowed to remain in our lives, there is always self-seeking, arrogance, and a haughtiness that will not submit to the will of God. If we are going to have any hope of becoming children of God and entering His kingdom then we must be willing to set aside that pride!

To help us understand His meaning, Jesus used a little child as an illustration. He said, "*...unless you are converted and become as little children...*" What is it about children that we must learn to imitate? There are in fact several characteristics that are common in most children which men seem to lose as we transition through adolescence and into adulthood. Jesus summed up those characteristics in one word—humility. "*Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 18:4).

The humility of a child is manifest in several ways. First, they are completely dependent upon their parents—just as we are completely dependent upon God. In contrast, most adults have grown out of their sense of dependence. Teenagers are commonly known to reject authority because they want to be treated like "adults." They want to feel independent of their parents. If we want to enter the kingdom of God we must learn to reverse that process. We must set aside

our pride and learn to acknowledge and embrace our dependence upon God! Those who do not, but try to do things their own way instead, will most certainly fail. “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor. 10:12). Only when we learn to completely rely on God as we should will we be able to submit ourselves fully to His commands.

The humility of little children can be seen in the way they trust their parents. When in a strange place it is common for little children to cling on to the leg of their mother or father because that is where they feel most secure. From time to time they will simply need to be held, to be comforted by a loving embrace. This is the sort of trust we must be willing to put in our heavenly Father. Too often those who have not let go of their pride venture off, away from God’s embrace. They desire to strike out on their own, to pave their own path and in so doing forsake the will of God. They do not trust in the wisdom of God nor in the power of His gospel, so they establish their own way of doing things. They come to rely on the wisdom of men rather than the wisdom of God. With such an attitude no man can enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we come to Christ in obedience to the gospel, we must be willing to put on humility as little children. If we want to have God as our Father, then we must be willing to trust in Him, to submit to Him, we received His word and His correction with meekness (James 1:21; Heb. 12:5-11). These are the kinds of changes that we must be willing to make if we are to truly be *converted*.

“Repent and Be Converted” –Acts 3:19

Now that we understand these principles, let us consider them in the context of our obedience to the gospel. In Acts 3:19 Peter said, “*Repent therefore and be converted...*” Just as Jesus did, Peter emphasizes the need to be converted if we are going to be saved. But, Peter goes on to say, “*...be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*” We must understand from this that the responsibility in our conversion does not rest completely on our shoulders, nor does it rest completely in the hands of God. Rather, conversion is combined result of the working of God and the efforts of the individual.

Before one is ready to obey the gospel certain changes must be made in their own heart. As Jesus said, we must become like little children. Before Peter commanded his audience to be converted, he commanded them to repent. Repentance is a changing of the mind. Thus, before we can be converted we must *choose* to submit to the will of God. We must *choose* to set aside our old ways of sin and to begin living a new life; one in which we live in complete submission to God as His *little children*. Therefore it is written, “*...since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge...*” (Col. 3:9).

We begin to manifest that repentance when we confess Jesus as Lord and Christ, which is simply a verbal commitment of what we have already determined in our hearts—that we will submit to Jesus as our Lord and Christ. Then those who have truly repented will begin bearing the fruit of their repentance by submitting to the command of God to be baptized. In Acts 2:38 Peter preached the same thing as in Acts 3:19, but he used slightly different words, saying, “*Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*”

When many think of conversion they make the mistake of thinking that after baptism there is some sort of resting period; that because they have accomplished something big they need to

relax a little before they move on; that they need to “settle in.” It is just not so! Baptism is only the beginning point, the starting line of a race that ends when Christ comes. “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it*” (1 Cor. 9:24).

God has done His part in our conversion in that He created the means for our salvation. He sent His Son to die on the cross, He rose up His Son from the dead, and with the blood of Jesus Christ He cleanses our souls of sin. He has also revealed His plan of salvation for us so that we may know how to be saved. God makes our conversion possible.

While God is the One who facilitates our change, in order for His work to be complete in us, we must be willing to carry out those changes in our lives. We do so, in part, when we obey the gospel because at that point we are joined to Christ; we become children of God. Of those who have obeyed the gospel, it is written, “*But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor. 6:11). This is in itself a great change, but it is not the final change.

Our responsibility in our conversion does not end with baptism. Rather, it only begins. Yes, we have been made children of God, but we must be about changing our lives so that we may *live* like children of God. “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children*” (Eph. 5:1). If we truly obey the gospel with a pure heart, then our love for God will motivate us obey all of God’s commands (John 14:15; Matt. 22:37). If we have truly been converted and have become like little children, then that change will manifest itself in our *continued* transformation as we learn more about the will of God. Thus, Paul exhorts all Christians to complete the changes that begin with conversion saying, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Rom. 12:2).

If it is one thing that a person must understand when it comes to obeying the gospel it is that change is necessary. Too many people have come to Christ expecting a free ticket to salvation with no responsibility. But God’s word is very clear: Heaven is for those who love the Lord and for those who are willing to strive to be like God. Through the gospel it is possible for us to do that. If we want to have any hope of heaven then let us not only obey the works of the gospel, but let us truly be changed in our hearts. Let us not merely act like Christians, but let us truly be followers of Christ wherein we learn to live like children of God.

July 15, 2007

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