

Essentials of the Faith Lesson 7

The Miracle of Conversion: “What Happens When Someone Becomes a Christian?”

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I. INTRODUCTION

a. The issue of the miracle of conversion answers the following questions:

- i. If none seek God, if we are in a constant and willful state of rebellion against God, how will humanity respond to God’s offer of salvation?
 1. Answer: God’s effectual call (Lesson 5)
- ii. What is that God-given, human response which occurs in every elect individual, without exception, that constitutes “becoming a Christian,” “salvation,” “being born again,” “conversion,” and so on?
- iii. What actually happens when a person becomes a Christian (gets “saved,” “trusts in Christ,” is “born again”)?
- iv. What is a “false conversion,” a “true conversion,” and what differentiates the two?
- v. What evidences a “false” and “true” conversion to Jesus Christ?
- vi. What part does the individual play in their conversion?

b. The miracle of conversion must be understood in terms of:

- i. The sovereignty of God over all things (Lesson 1) and election of the church to salvation prior to creation (Lesson 3).
- ii. The congenital depravity of humanity (Lesson 2). The condition reviewed, necessitating effectual calling and renders conversion a miracle:
 1. Depraved: the condition of humanity which is inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no ability to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly condemned.
- iii. The substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the elect (Lesson 4). This is the means by which they are forgiven, which occurs at conversion.
- iv. The effectual call on the elect (Lesson 5). This results in conversion for all the elect.

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1. At God’s appointed time, the elect sinner is effectually called by the Holy Spirit through the gospel message to Jesus Christ.
2. The miracle of conversion refers to those events immediately (simultaneously – a chronological time gap is difficult to ascertain) following the effectual call.
3. Because of God’s effectual call on the elect, a human response will immediately follow.
4. This response is known as conversion (or belief, repentance, and faith).

II. The Biblical Doctrine of Conversion

a. What it is not

- i. A decision invoked by the human will
- ii. Behavior change only – (“I was not angry anymore, now I’m not. I don’t know what happened...”)
- iii. Not evidenced by a profession, miracles, or work for Jesus

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²²“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

- iv. Something inherited from others, family, or friends. No one is biologically born a Christian/converted (John 1:12-13, 3:18, 3:36)

b. What it is:

i. An act of God

The Trinity – Eph 1:3-14 (Election in eternity past by the Father (vv. 4-6), redemption effected on the cross by the Son (vv. 7-12), and regeneration caused by the Spirit at the appointed time of one’s effectual call and conversion through hearing the gospel message (vv. 13-14).

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (a picture of coming to life, saving faith)

John 1:12-13

¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

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John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life.”

*Since humanity is totally depraved, sinful by nature, he requires a superior power outside of himself to bring about a conversion; a true and complete change in nature.

*God gives the elect the response of saving faith; quickens our minds to believe. It is a supernatural act of God upon the sinner whereby he becomes a new creature through faith and repentance in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ii. Repentance and Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

“Repent and believe the gospel!” – Jesus, Mark 1:15

Acts 17:30 ³⁰ “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent

Luke 24:47-48 ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ “You are witnesses of these things.

*It describes that particular change of mind demanded by God as a prerequisite for a right relationship with Himself, and which covers:

- (1) the initial turning to Christ, by a sinner, to establish the basic relationship necessary to being a believer, and
- (2) the turn, by a sinning believer, to an intimate and right relationship with the Lord

Repentance unto salvation/conversion (a few definitions):

- understanding, admitting, confessing, and forsaking of sin, while seeing, acknowledging, adoring, and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a change of inward disposition due to the effectual call of God and subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit resulting in a turn-about of one’s life.

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- A complete loss of confidence in one's own ability to save oneself and possession of righteousness, resulting in a complete confidence in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to save and provide forgiveness and righteousness, given as a result of the effectual call of God on the elect individual and subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The miracle of conversion/repentance has three identifiable elements to it, namely

(1) An emotional aspect: a genuine repentance involves acknowledgment that one has been wrong, done wrong, and is wrong -- Lk 15:17-18.

Lk 15:17-18 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;

(2) A vertical aspect: repentance must be toward God -- Ac 20:21 and see also Rev 16:9 in which failure to repent failed to give God due honor.

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev 16:9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

Note the use of μεταμέλομαι (*metamelomai*) in Matt 27:3 [Judas regretted and hanged himself] and Matt 21:32 [no remorse by chief priests and elders so as to believe] and in immediate context Matt 21:29 [son who said no, then regretted and went].

(3) A volitional element: repentance includes a change of will, which is more than a backward look of remorse (i.e. *metamelomai*, 'after-care') but a turning from sin and dead works unto God; a complete transformation of man at the deepest seat of his being, the heart, which will inevitably transform his motives. This change of will is sparked by God's effectual call, without which no genuine turning of the depraved will can result.

Repentance is correctly seen as both the gift of God and the duty of man:

What God grants -- Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25; cf. 2 Cor 7:10

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Acts 5:31 “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

2 Tim 2:25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

2 Cor 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

What man does -- Lk 13:3; Ac 3:19

Lk 13:3 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Acts 3:19 “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord

Repentance unto salvation is conjoined with faith and conversion, always standing first, and yet can also stand alone to represent salvation:

With faith/believe -- Matt 22:31; Mk 1:15; Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1

Mk 1:15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God

With be converted/turn -- Acts 3:19

Acts 3:19 “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord

Any one of three terms alone is sufficient to portray salvation:

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Repentance alone -- Lk 15:7; Acts 17:30

Lk 15:7 “I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Acts 17:30 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent

Faith/believe alone -- Acts 16:31

Acts 16:31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

(1) So, if repentance is a separate condition of salvation then it is evident John's Gospel is unorthodox, but this is untrue of course.

(2) about 150 passages in NT condition salvation on belief/faith without reference to repentance.

Turn alone -- Acts 9:35; 14:15; 1 Th 1:9

Acts 9:35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Acts 14:15 and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.

1 Thess 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God

*Therefore, “repent/repentance,” “turn,” “faith,” or “believe” are terms that are all used synonymously to describe the miracle granted by God upon one’s effectual call to salvation whereby they are regenerated and converted (become a Christian).

iii. Conversion is a single act of God that has two distinct but inseparable aspects:

1. Repentance is: 1) the forsaking of sin and the cultivating of a new hope, and faith, and 2) turning to Christ in belief and trust. They are related to one another as two sides of the same coin.
2. The two are interdependent responses, each incomplete without the other.

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3. Conversion involves both a believing repentance and a penitent (remorseful) faith.
4. It is impossible to believe in the biblical sense without a broken, penitent spirit that renounces sin.
5. Sin is the thing that keeps you from God and eternal life, therefore, repentance of sin is that which God grants to reconcile.

III. Conversion: A Living Tree Will Produce Fruit - The Certainty of Fruit

- a. Biblical support for a transformed life evidencing genuine conversion
 - i. Matthew 7:19: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."
 - ii. Matthew 13:23: "As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."
 - iii. John 14:15: "If you love me [Jesus], you will obey what I command."
 - iv. John 15:2 ² "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.
 - v. John 15:4-6 ⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.
 - vi. John 15:8 ⁸ "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples.
 - vii. Romans 6:1-2a: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"
 - viii. Romans 8:5-8: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
 - ix. Romans 8:12-14: "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (NKJV)
 - x. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor

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- male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."
- xi. 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"
 - xii. Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
 - xiii. Ephesians 5:5: "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."
 - xiv. Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.
 - xv. Hebrews 6:7-8: "For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned."
 - xvi. Hebrews 12:14b: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord."
 - xvii. James 2:14-20 ¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. ¹⁸ But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?
 - xviii. 1 Peter 1:15-16: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"
 - xix. 1 John 2:3-6: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."
 - xx. 1 John 3:6-9: "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.... Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil.... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

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- b. Just as a child is born to grow and change, so a Christian is someone who has been “born again” to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.
- c. What about ongoing struggle with sin?
 - i. The fact that you struggle with sin is evidence of conversion, if, by struggle, you mean fighting it, hating it, and making imperfect efforts by God’s grace to turn from it, while experiencing progressive victory.
 - ii. Be encouraged if you are fighting with sin. Prior to conversion, you did not fight sin as a pattern, but gave into it and embraced it, or covered it up and justified it.
 - 1. Romans 7:14-25 “...For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of good is not.”
 - 2. 1 Peter 2:11
¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.
 - iii. The fact that you are in the battle means that you are in the battle.
 - iv. “Backsliding”
 - 1. Biblical: A period of spiritual dullness or disobedience in the life of a Christian that will incur the discipline of God (Hebrews 12:6-11) bringing them to repentance resulting in a renewed Christlikeness.
 - 2. Unbiblical: A perpetual state of rebellion or ungodly indifference on the part of one who professes faith in Christ, with no quick and eventual turning back to humble obedience.
 - v. God’s means of grace in our struggle
 - 1. The Holy Spirit
 - 2. The discipline of God the Father (Hebrews 12:6-11)
 - 3. God working through his people as they practice the one-anothers in Matthew 18:15-17

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Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ “But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

4. Church discipline if necessary (Matthew 18:17)

- d. Reason for celebration; that God, in his mercy, would not slightly change, but radically convert sinners to new creatures in the Lord Jesus Christ, where we are daily being transformed into his likeness.
- e. More resources (much of this section adapted from Demarest):
 - i. “The Cross and Salvation,” by Bruce Demarest, esp. pp. 249-275.

IV. BIBLICAL CONVERSIONS

- a. Zaccheus: Luke 19:1-10 ...there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich...⁵ When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, “Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”⁶ And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. ⁷ When they saw it, they all *began* to grumble, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”⁸ Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
- b. Prodigal: Luke 15:11-30 ¹⁷ “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’ ²⁰ “So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.



- c. Tax collector: Luke 18:9-14⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.¹¹ “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.¹² ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’¹³ “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’¹⁴ “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- d. Summary of biblical conversion:
- i. Awareness of one’s lost, depraved, and condemned state before a holy God
 - ii. Sobriety and fear of one’s sin in light of God’s holiness
 - iii. Mourning and hatred of personal sin as offensive to God; no trust in oneself as adequate for moral rectitude before God
 - iv. Turning from known sin and towards God for mercy and forgiveness
 - v. A humbled comfort in God and his mercy alone
 - vi. A resolve to live for God

V. CHURCH HISTORY ON REPENTANCE AND THE MIRACLE OF CONVERSION

- a. John Owen (1657)
- i. On the mindset of the converted: “This lies at the bottom of all the saints’ communion w/ Christ - a deep, fixed, resolved persuasion of an absolute and indispensable necessity of a righteousness with which to appear before God. The holiness of God’s nature, the righteousness of his government, the severity of his law, the terror of his wrath, are always before them. They have been all convinced of sin, and have looked on themselves as ready to sink under the vengeance due to it. They have all cried, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?’ ‘Wherewith shall we come before God?’ and have all concluded, that it is in vain to flatter themselves with hopes of escaping as they are by nature [in and of their own good works]. If God be holy and righteous, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, they must have a righteousness to stand before him; and they know what will be the cry one day of those who now bear up themselves, as if they were otherwise minded.”
- b. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) (Chapter XV)
- i. II. “By it [repentance at salvation], a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy

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nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.”

ii. III. “Although repentance is not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ, yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.”

c. Charles Spurgeon (died 1892)

i. “Faith, where it exists, is in every case, without exception, the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.”

ii. “All the fruits meet for repentance are contained in faith itself. You shall never find that a man who trusts Christ remains an enemy to God, or a lover of sin.”

VI. SUMMARY

a. Conversion defined (becoming a Christian):

i. An elect individual’s decisive turning from sin, self, and Satan unto God through the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

ii. “A divinely enabled human response.” (Demarest).

b. For all the elect, God will work in them by effectually calling them at his ordained time to regenerate them such that they see, mourn, and turn from their sin, and towards repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as their sin-bearer.

c. The Holy Spirit is the agent who causes this repentance such that without his indwelling, no such repentance unto salvation is possible.

d. Repentance is not what saves us, rather, it is the God-granted response upon one’s effectual call by the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in a whole-hearted embracing of Jesus Christ as the only sufficient substitute before God.

e. Christ is the object of saving faith. Repentance is that God-given response of saving faith.

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- f. All of the benefits of salvation—regeneration, union with Christ, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation, and glorification—proceed from the experience of genuine conversion (some sooner, some later).
 - i. Immediately: regeneration, union with Christ, justification, adoption
 - ii. Progressively until death: sanctification into the image of Christ, preservation (though the converted are preserved without exception based upon the work of Christ)
 - iii. At death: glorification

VII. MISCONCEPTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

- a. “I prayed the ‘sinner’s prayer,’ therefore, I am a Christian and going to heaven.”
 - 1. Conversion is not brought about by an individual’s prayer, but the effectual call on the elect whereby the dead sinner responds in repentance.
 - 2. A prayer may be the result of conversion at that moment, but not the cause.
 - 3. The prayer is a sign of genuine spiritual life (a newly hatched Christian), not the magical words which earn/gain it.
- b. “I am a Christian but I have not been born again or converted yet.”
 - 1. That’s like saying, “I am alive but I have not been created or conceived yet.”
- c. “I am a Christian because I have believed in Jesus, but I have not repented yet.”
 - 1. The NT word for “belief” is used synonymously with repentance.
 - 2. The biblical term, “belief,” in reference to Christ and the context of salvation, carries the idea of whole-hearted commitment resulting in action of an abandoning of one’s sin and self and trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness.
- d. “I am a Christian because I believe in Jesus, but I have not surrendered to him and made him my Lord yet.”
 - 1. Regardless of our perception of him as Lord or not, Jesus is the Lord of the universe.

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2. We don't make him our Lord, he already is.
3. “Lord” is one of the most common terms used of God's people in reference towards Jesus.
4. One common term for a Christian is “slave.” In biblical understanding, a slave was one who had a lord. To not have a lord was to not be a slave, and thus to not be owned. Therefore, to not know Christ as one's Lord is to not be his. To not be his is to not yet be converted (a Christian).

VIII. CONFUSION ON CONVERSION AND THE “LORDSHIP SALVATION” CONTROVERSY

a. The Issue

- i. In 1918, Lewis Sperry Chafer, late president of Dallas Theological Seminary, published, “He That Is Spiritual,” writing that 1 Corinthians 2:15-3:3 speaks of 2 categories of Christians: carnal and spiritual. “The ‘carnal’ Christian is...characterized by a ‘walk’ that is on the same plane as that of the natural [unsaved] man.”
- ii. “To impose a need to surrender the life to God as an added condition of salvation is most unreasonable. God's call to the unsaved is never said to be unto the Lordship of Christ.” – Chafer
- iii. Evangelism Rallies
 1. Raise a hand, say a prayer, sign a card, walk an aisle and you are saved.
 2. Encouraged not to question their salvation again. However, in the Bible, there was a church with many people claiming Christ, but living in sin. What did Paul do? Did he tell them to never question their salvation even though they lacked fruit? 2 Corinthians 13:5 ⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?
- iv. “Lordship salvation” was defined by opponents as: “the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority.” This view was coined a heresy by many.
- v. The issue also asks if repentance from sin is “necessary” at salvation.

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1. Zane Hodges argues that repentance is a response that properly occurs later in the Christian life. It has to do more with the believer’s communion with God and discipleship, not with the gift of eternal life.
- b. “Jesus as Lord”
- i. Proponents came to call this “lordship salvation.” However, the term is unhelpful because it insinuates that there is another type of salvation.
 - ii. Proponents claim that the word “Lord” does not mean “Master” but it is a reference to his deity.
 - iii. However, “Lord” has the idea of someone who rules, who has slaves, and is master. There is no such thing as a lord without slaves. We get to be Jesus’ slaves. NT writers often referred to themselves as “slaves of Christ” in their letters (Phil 1:1, Titus 1:1, James 1:1).
 - iv. Proponents claim we do not have to “make” Christ as Lord of our lives at salvation. However, this confuses the nature and reign of Christ. He is Lord, whether or not anyone regards him as such.
 1. Philippians 2:9-11
⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
 2. Luke 9:23
²³And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.
 - v. “The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is—the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords! He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives.” – A.W. Tozer
- c. “Carnal Christian”
- i. “Carnal Christian” – possible to be saved by the grace of God but not really come under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

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ii. Derived from 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not *mere* men?

iii. Context: Paul rebuking them for not living according to their position in Jesus Christ. This is a warning; a rebuke for sinful living. He calls them “spiritual babies,” in a sense. This is not a category for a different kind of Christian.

iv. No such thing as a converted person characterized by “carnality.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

d. “Repentance is a Work”

- i. The truth that repentance is synonymous with salvation is often countered by the argument that “repentance is works.”
- ii. Repentance is a God-given response resulting from effectual call.

Acts 17:30

³⁰ “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,

Luke 24:47-48 ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ “You are witnesses of these things.

- iii. “Far from being a human work, it is the inevitable result of God’s work in a human heart. And it always represents the end of any human attempt to earn God’s favor. It is much more than a mere change of mind—it involves a complete change of heart,

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attitude, interest, and direction. It is conversion in every sense of the word." – John MacArthur

- iv. Since repentance is synonymous with faith in Christ, it is not a work.
- e. Confusion Between Justification and Sanctification
 - i. Works do not save anyone, but they will appear in those who are saved.
 - ii. Sanctification is the result of God's grace in justification
 - iii. Justification cannot be separated from sanctification because they are the result of union with Christ.
 - iv. The loving grace that saves us will be the grace that sanctifies us:
 - 1. Galatians 2:20
²⁰ "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
 - 2. Romans 6:11
¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.
 - 3. Romans 6:14
¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.
 - 4. Romans 8:29-30
²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.
 - v. The reason we are under grace is so that sin can finally be overcome, which was impossible prior to conversion.
- f. No-Lordship Position Does Not Consider the Purpose of Salvation in History
 - i. God calling a people for 2 purposes for his glory:
 - 1. To be a living-mural of his character

Ephesians 3:10-11
¹⁰ so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*. ¹¹ *This was in*

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accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord

2. To be a means by which others are called

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

- ii. No-lordship does not see salvation in light of WHO the church is and WHAT her purpose is:
 - 1. The church is the Body and Bride of Christ. Such union with and representation of Jesus Christ necessitates a changed people, which God accomplishes by justification and progressive sanctification.
 - 2. The church is made a new creature by conversion through faith in Christ.
 - 3. The church is progressively transformed into their position in Christ through sanctification.
- iii. To be included in God's plan for redemptive history requires God making us a new people with different characteristics from the world from which we are called and to whom we are to go.

g. Conclusion:

- i. “Genuine conversion thus will involve sincere repentance, total commitment to Christ, and submission to the Lord's sovereign rule. We are not saying that faith plus works saves; we simply invite an honest assessment of what biblical conversion involves. We tremble at the fact that it is possible for a person to believe in Christ without being united to him savingly. As James wrote, the “demons believe—and shudder” (Jas 2:19, NRSV). We must avoid a cheap and easy-believism that fails to repent and commit the whole life to the Lord Jesus Christ, our prophet, priest, and king.” – Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 270.
- ii. Therefore, to deny the centrality of embracing Jesus Christ as Lord at salvation; to deny repentance as synonymous with salvation; to deny the biblical teaching of fruit

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accompanying genuine conversion, is to tamper with the gospel of the Bible and to propagate a false gospel (“another gospel,” Galatians 1:6-9).

IX. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION IN YOUR LIFE AND IN COUNSELING AND DISCIPLESHIP

- a. Affirm that salvation is by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- b. Beware of testimonies and professions of faith that are not biblical .
 - i. “I have always been a Christian...”
 - ii. “My parents were Christians so I am too.”
 - iii. “I had a profound emotional experience.”
 - iv. “I had a supernatural experience of visions and so on..”
 - v. “At camp, I walked forward.”
 - vi. “When I was younger, I made a profession.”
- c. Examine yourself from time to time. A spiritual examination is NEVER unwise or unhealthy.
- d. Receive seriously the questioning of salvation or encouragement of self-examination from the godly (2 Cor 13:5).
- e. Beware of sinful patterns of living, but a counselee’s insistence upon their salvation because “they know it,” an unbiblical testimony, because of a profession made years previous, or a baptism years previous.
- f. Ensure that you are drifting towards, and not away from, salvation.
- g. Do not give assurance where God’s word does not (cf. 2 Cor 13:5).

*A faith that saves will be a faith that transforms, all by God and for God.