

# *Conversions 1*

## **in Acts**

The term conversion comes from the Greek...

Epistrepho (e)pistre/fw, NT:1994)

**1**

"To turn about, turn towards" (epi, "towards" and No. 1), is used transitively, and so rendered "convert" (of causing a person to turn) in James 5:19-20. Elsewhere, where the KJV translates this verb, either in the middle voice and intransitive use, or the passive, the RV adheres to the middle voice significance, and translates by "turn again," Matt 13:15; Mark 4:12; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19; 28:27.

If you take an old school bus and turn it into a recreational vehicle, an RV, then you have converted it. You have turned it from its original use into something that will be used differently, thus, you have turned it, changed it, you have converted it. The term is used in the scriptures to indicate someone who has turned from one thing, in the specific, sin and the world, to God through Christ.

*James 5:19-20*

**2**

**19** My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, **20** let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**3**

In the scriptures the idea of conversion is seen in turning someone from their lives without Christ to living with Him in God and faithful obedience to the Word. There are 13 different occasions of conversions that can be seen in the book of Acts of people being converted. While I am sure that these accounts are more than familiar to most of us, I do think it good to review them and see what lessons there for us there so we will be looking at them over the course of the next few lessons.

The first is the obvious and probably the most well-known and that is the account of those that were converted on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In...

*Acts 1:4-5*

**4**

**4** Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Christ was preparing to leave His disciples for the last time as His ascension came nearer. He tells them to remain in Jerusalem and in a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then in...

*Acts 2:1-4*

**5**

**1** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole

house where they were sitting. **3** And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

The Apostles receive what Christ promised them and then the Spirit moves them to speak in tongues and the people gathered there accuse them of being drunk. Peter uses this as an opportunity to preach the first recorded sermon of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Isn't that interesting, Peter uses an accusation as the opportunity to share the Gospel. This illustrates a problem that exists in far too many who call themselves children of God. If we wait for opportunity to come knocking on our door, or for it to drop in our laps, we are going to be disappointed far more often than not. Peter shows us that opportunities are made, manufactured, looked for, not accidents.

*Acts 2:14-16*

**6**

**14** But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. **15** For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; **16** but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

There are some thoughts concerning conversion that I think will be applicable to each of the conversions we look at.

**7**

- 1) The Opportunity
- 2) The Character of the Convert (s)
- 3) The Nature of the Message

Conversion of anyone hinges on these three things. Until a person makes the decision that they need something they won't look for it, they won't accept it if it comes their way, they will ignore it. That is basic instinct within us. When I was 13 I started working with Brittany Spaniels, raising them. I talked with a number of old time dog handlers and learned from them the methods that they had learned over the years that worked for them the best. One of those things is that when an animal is presented with a constant source of food, they learn that they don't have to over eat. When an animal thinks that the source of food that they have is only temporary, they gorge, overeat, because they don't know when their next meal might be. When they don't feel the need, they don't gorge. An animal won't intentionally overeat once it starts to realize that its source of food is constant. When man doesn't feel the need for God in his life, he doesn't seek Him. When man feels that his life is good, then he doesn't feel the need for God in it. Helping someone recognize their need is what I mean by opportunity.

Recognition of our need is dependent upon our character. Psychologists say that someone who is a psychotic killer doesn't feel remorse, or even compassion for their victims. That type of person doesn't have the kind of character that motivates them to such emotions. Character is what makes us who and what we are. Note what Paul says...

*Rom 5:3-4*

**8**

3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

Paul summarizes our point that without character we will not come to God in hope. This term character comes from the Greek...

Dokime (dokimh, NT:1382) 9

- a) "The process of proving"; it is rendered "experiment" in 2 Cor 9:13, KJV, RV, "the proving (of you)"; in 8:2, KJV, "trial," RV, "proof";
- b) "The effect of proving, approval, approvedness," RV, "probation," Rom 5:4 (twice), for KJV, "experience"; KJV and RV, "proof" in 2 Cor 2:9; 13:3 and Phil 2:22. See EXPERIENCE, PROOF. Cf. dokimos, "approved," dokimazo, "to prove, approve"; see APPROVE.

We don't tend to think of the idea of character as being a proof or proving. Today the term is understood as that inner factor that moves us to either do or not do something because our character. But when you think about in terms of a proving it makes a lot of sense. Our actions, what we do, are what show our character, our hope, our faith, that is how character is a proving. It is a proving of who we are.

This then brings us to what is it about the message that can accomplish the transformation, the conversion. What is it that the message contains that has the power to turn someone from the direction they are going to the direction they should be going.

These are the questions we are going to try and look at as we study the different conversions here in Acts to see what we pull from them for application for us today.

So we have come full circle to the passage we looked at in Acts 2. Here then is...

10 1) The Opportunity

*Acts 2:14-16* 11

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Peter looks out at these people, many or even most of which had been there before Pilate when he offered Barabbas or Jesus to be freed and they cried out for Barabbas. He sees and hears them crying that the Apostles are drunk and that is what is causing their unusual behavior and he takes the opportunity to begin teaching them. Talk about making your own opportunities. He takes a situation that could very easy get ugly and he turns it into an opportunity. As we go through this series on the conversions of Acts, take special note of the kinds of situations that are turned into opportunities for teaching. Jesus tells the disciples...

*Mark 16:15* 12

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

This is interesting. When Jesus sent his disciples out to spread His message, He gave them two commands...

- 13** A) Go  
B) Preach

Jesus, in telling His disciples to go and preach, didn't set up any parameters for them in how they were to accomplish it. He didn't tell them to look for any specific circumstance or situation to be the optimum moment to teach. That tends to be what most people today are looking for. We are all willing to share the Word with whoever, we just want to do it on our terms. We are all willing to go, as long as we get to say where and how far, and when. We all want to help someone find God, as long as we get to pick the someone.

Jesus told his disciples to go. He told them to make an opportunity to teach. I guess the point is that we make our own opportunities when and where we choose to.

This brings us to our next point...

- 14** 2) The Character of the Convert (s)

This is something that bothers us all. A lot. We go out and make or take an opportunity to teach, only to see the prospect walk away, or scoff, or get angry, totally rejecting the scriptures and in effect you. What we need to understand is that the problem with that rejection isn't with the teacher or the Word, the problem is with the rejecter. Therein is the issue, we tend to think that someone else's rejection of the truth is because of something lacking in us or our knowledge. It isn't. Christ speaks of this dynamic on several occasions in His discussions with His disciples.

**Matt 13:18-22**

**15**

**18** "Hear then the parable of the sower. **19** When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. **20** The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; **21** yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. **22** And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Jesus here is talking about the character of the convert, or at least potential converts. People are different the world over and that's what Jesus is saying. Some people have an evil character and reject outright God and His Word. Some kind of semi-accept God, but still choose to not follow His Word. Then there are those who start down the road of faith and obedience and their character is not strong enough to keep them in the right way of faith and obedience. Any of the above might become a convert but they won't stay a convert. But Christ also speaks of the convert who has the kind of character, the kind of heart that believes, accepts, and obeys, from the heart that form of teaching that saves us from sin through Christ Jesus.

**Matt 13:23**

**16**

23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

The heart of a man, his character, is, in the final analysis, what determines whether or not he accepts or rejects the truth...

**Mark 6:11** 17

11 Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them."

Consider the ramifications of this statement; when we refuse to accept, and friends, believe it that it is a choice we make to refuse, then Christ chooses to walk away from us.

I guess that the first indication of the character of anyone is their initial response to the truth of the Word, with that said, the 3,000 souls that responded on the day of Pentecost can only be assumed to have a character of good heart.

**Matt 10:32-33** 18

32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

How sad that we might choose to put ourselves into a position that Christ denies us before His Father. This brings us to our last point in this conversion...

19 3) The Nature of the Message

What is it about the message that can get into a good heart and change it, convert it. Notice what Peter has to say...

**Acts 2:36** 20

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

The message is and can only be Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The nature of the message is spiritual, Jesus is God incarnate. But the beauty of this spiritual message is how it works to change the physical lives of those who have a good heart. Peter convinced these people that this Jesus whom they crucified was the Christ, the Messiah. That convincing changed, converted, those who heard, actually heard, the message. That is what a good heart does, it actually hears the message. It responds to the message that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and in its response it obeys. A good heart knows...

**Acts 4:12** 21

12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."