

# The Christian Conversion

In our text this week, the Apostle Paul lays the groundwork for all of the ethical instructions he gives from here through the end of his letter to the Ephesians. None of our obedience can be rendered to the Lord apart from a miraculous and life-transforming conversion through faith in Jesus Christ and genuine repentance. God does the work, but we also participate with Him. He sovereignly and “monergistically” regenerates us, but we work out our salvation through faith and repentance. His work is regeneration; His work through and with us is Christian conversion. Let’s see how Paul articulates it in Ephesians 4:17-24.

## Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!—**21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Perhaps the most important thing for any of us to do in glorifying God is to profess our trust in Him and to live out genuinely the implications of our faith; on the other hand, one of the most damaging things that we can do is to profess our faith and then contradict that same faith by our disobedient behavior.

In our text, Paul teaches us the importance of true Christian conversion.

### I. Our walk must be a distinctive walk. (vs. 17-19)

In these three verses Paul teaches that our lifestyles must be radically different than those of the unbelievers around us. In chapter 4, verse 1, 17; 5: 2, 8 and 15, you will see the word “walk,” which means our lifestyle. In Paul’s day, most of the Christians had come from a pagan background. In our day, most of us have come from some sort of church background, but many of us have come from unbelieving backgrounds, and in either case, we must live distinctive lives. Paul explains why we must differentiate ourselves from the unbelievers:

- A. Their intellect is futile, darkened, ignorant, and alienated from God.
- B. Their hearts are hardened and calloused.
- C. Their behavior is sensual and greedy for all manner of uncleanness. Paul shows a similar sequence of degeneration in Romans 1, where he clearly shows that the unbeliever’s intellectual disagreement with the Scriptures are the result of willful disobedience to the truth.

### II. We have received an exquisite education. (vs. 20-21)

In these verses Paul shows us that we have been taught how to walk well. Just as our academic educations have left us with little excuse for ignorance, in the same way our Christian discipleship has left us with no excuse for errant lifestyles because:

- A. We have learned Christ, not just “about Christ.”
- B. We have heard Christ; that is, He has spoken to us through our church teachers and pastors.

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- C. We have been taught in Him, which reminds us that the context of our learning has been one of love and divine enablement.

### III. We must walk the talk. (vs. 22-24)

We have now been taught how to repent, therefore we must do it. Christian conversion consists of both faith and repentance, two sides of the same coin. In verses 22-24, Paul is speaking primarily of repentance. He says:

- A. We must put off the old self; that is, we cannot put on our new clothing unless we take off the old tattered garments—the old ways of the old self.
- B. We must be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Paul teaches us here and elsewhere (Romans 8:4-8; Colossians 3:1-4) that we must set our minds upon the things of the Spirit and not the things of the flesh. In the instructions given in verses 25-32, we can see that in all but one case Paul gives us something to contemplate to motivate our behavior. This is the way of Christian repentance—it is always reflective and thoughtful.
- C. We must put on the new self. Notice where this leads us: to the very likeness of God! One day we, former sinners, will stream into the New Jerusalem as saints who look like our Older Brother, Jesus Christ. This is the grand conclusion of Christian conversion and why we must stay on the path upon which He has placed us.

### Discussion Questions

1. How should our lifestyle differ from those of unbelievers around us? Why is this important?
2. Describe the mentality and lifestyle of the unbeliever (vs. 18-19).
3. Why is Christian discipleship so extraordinary? (vs. 20-21)
4. What does it mean to be converted? How is Christian conversion unique from other ways we change our minds or our behavior?
5. How can we renew the spirit of our minds?

6. What is the ultimate goal of Christian conversion? (vs. 24)

### **Going Deeper**

How do I need to be more deeply converted in my heart, mind, and behavior?

What steps can I take to deepen my conversion?