

THE NECESSITY OF CONVERSION

MATHEW 18:3 • TV058B

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Matthew 18:3

“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

My subject today is: **Conversion**. The title of the message is: **“The Nature and Necessity of Conversion.”**

Our Lord said in **Matthew chapter 18:3**, *“Verily I say unto you except you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.”*

I preached a message one time several years ago entitled, “The Lord’s Ultimatums” in which I presented four points. Our Lord said, *“Except ye repent you’ll perish.”* Repentance is imperative. If a man does not repent he perishes. That’s what Christ said. Repentance is essential; it’s necessary. *“Except ye repent you’ll perish.”* If you’ve never repented you’re perishing.

Again He said, *“Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* He said that twice, *“Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

Now you can laugh about born again experiences and you can poke fun at born again Christians but the Master from glory uttered these words; they’re unchangeable as His throne, *“Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

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Now I'm not saying that a man must be born again and according to the prescribed method in certain churches and by certain preachers. I'm saying by God's method, whatever born again means in the Scripture; that's what must happen, whatever Christ meant when He said, "*Born again.*"

That's what must happen, not what I say or someone else said but what Christ said. Whatever born again means in the Bible; that's what must happen to you and me or we'll never see the kingdom of God. That's what Christ said. It's very clear; it's an ultimatum.

And then He said: "*Except you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man you have no life in you.*" Now we better find out what He meant by, "*Eating His flesh and drinking His blood*" because He said; "Except you do; you don't have any life in you."

It's that clear, it's that plain. It's the Lord's ultimatum!

And then our text for today; our Lord uttered these words in **Matthew 18**; He said, "*Except, except you be converted, (whatever that means) except you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.*" And our Lord's very positive about it. He's very plain about it. "Except you do, you'll not enter into the kingdom of God."

And you and I need to ask for the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit as we look at the nature and necessity of conversion. Conversion, what is it, its nature and its necessity?

Now, before I enter into the subject let me clear away some difficulties that I believe exist in regard to this matter of conversion:

First of all: All conversions are not alike!

Now, you make a great mistake to think that they are. All conversions are not alike just as our Lord heals several blind people but He didn't heal them all alike. He healed them and they were healed. And the results were the same but the methods were different.

And if you will read the **16th chapter of the book of Acts** you have three remarkable conversions recorded there. You have the conversion of Lydia, the conversion of the demon-possessed girl who followed Paul and Silas and you have the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

But they were all different. They were all soundly converted. They all entered into the kingdom of God but they had different experiences.

Lydia came down by the riverside where the people were gathered to worship. They didn't have enough people in that town to have a synagogue so they went down by the riverside and worshipped and Paul came down there and preached to them.

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And the Scripture says, “*God opened her heart.*” Lydia’s heart was opened by the Lord. The Holy Spirit opened her heart to receive and to drink in the Word which Paul preached. And she was converted.

But the demon-possessed girl; her experience was so radical and unusual and traumatic and powerful. It wasn’t like Lydia’s experience at all. She was cast upon the ground and rolled and wallowed upon the ground as the demons were cast out of her by Paul.

And then the Philippian jailer a little later in the same **16th chapter of Acts**; here was a man troubled and afraid and trembling who came intelligently seeking an answer to a question, “*What must I do to be saved?*”

So, my friend, all conversions are not alike; they differ. The same God saves. The same God saves sinners and the results are the same, but He does it in different ways.

Secondly: We must never and I repeat never try to imitate another person’s conversion.

There are different degrees of conviction. There are different degrees of light and revelation. There are different degrees of grace. Our Lord talked to Nicodemus about regeneration. He talked to him about the new birth.

He talked to him about the Holy Spirit’s supernatural and unusual quickening of the heart, God’s part in redemption, God’s part in opening the heart, without any response on the part of the sinner.

He talked to the woman at the well about her sinful life. He didn’t talk to her about the new birth. He didn’t talk to her about her religious knowledge; He talked to her about her life, her need, her emptiness, and how He could fill it.

Our Lord talked to the rich young ruler about his idols and his riches. He said, “You have great riches. Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor. Take up your cross and follow me.”

And the young man walked away sorrowfully because he loved his riches and Christ knew he loved his riches. And Christ met him at his point of rebellion and Christ dealt with him in his point of need.

But when He talked to the Centurion He talked to him about faith. He didn’t talk to him about riches. And I imagine the Centurion was just about as rich as this young man because he had said to the Lord, “I have servants and I say go and they go and I say come and they come.”

But our Lord didn’t talk to him about that. He talked to him about believing. He said, “*If you can believe all things are possible to them that believe.*”

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Our Lord talked to the Canaanite woman about sovereignty and about election. That's right; He did. He talked to her about sovereignty. He said, "*I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: And it's not right to give the children's bread to dogs.*" That's what He talked to her about.

But when He talked to the multitude in **John chapter 6**, He talked to them about the manna that fell from heaven. And He said, "*Now Moses didn't give you that bread of life; my Father gave you that bread of life. I am the bread of life. And he that eateth my body and drinketh my blood, eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life. And he that eateth not the flesh of the Son of man and drinketh not His blood hath no life in him.*"

Oh my friend, our Lord didn't give the same pill to every sinner. He dealt differently with them. Don't try to imitate another person's conversion. "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, (where it pleases).*"

And even so the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. And the Holy Spirit in regard to your conversion will deal with you at your point of need, at your point of rebellion. He'll destroy your idols. I don't know what your idols are. I know what mine are. I know where He has to deal with me. I don't know where He'll have to deal with you.

But when I'm trying to imitate another person's conversion, another person's experience; I may find out his is genuine and mine's just that, imitation, mine's just that, self-made, mine's just that; it's false. God dealt with him but I dealt with myself.

Thirdly: This is necessary; all conversions to Christ have points of essential agreement!

I don't care where the person is, whether it's Lydia or whether it's the demon-possessed girl, or whether it's the Philippian jailer, or whether it's Nicodemus or the woman at the well, or the rich young ruler, or Zacchaeus, or the Canaanite woman or the harlot, whoever it is.

They have one or two or three points of essential agreement in all conversions, I don't care who you are or where you are or how you were converted; in all conversions there will be:

First; there must be a conviction of sin.

Now my friend, the Lord Jesus said this, "*I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*"

So that lets the righteous man out and it's sinners who come to Christ. This is the one point, first of all in which all conversions are in agreement; they're all sinners, not righteous, but just sinful.

1 Timothy 1:15 says: "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.*" And Paul wrote in **Romans 5**, "*Christ died for the ungodly.*"

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So I don't care who you are, if you're converted, if you started here, you were a sinner. *"Our Lord came to seek and to save the lost. Thou shalt call His name Jesus; He shall save His people from their sins."*

So that's the first essential point of agreement; every person whom God saves, every person who is converted is a sinner.

Secondly, there must be a genuine desire for forgiveness. In other words, everyone who is converted and everyone who comes to God through Christ comes for mercy.

Our Lord gave this illustration on this point; He said, *"Two men went up to the temple to pray."*

Now here are two religious men and they went up to the temple to pray. Both of them had been going there for the same purpose, to pray, in other words to talk with God, to worship God, to communicate with God, to have some fellowship with God.

And the first man was a Pharisee, a religious man, a self-righteous man. And our Lord said, *"This Pharisee prayed thus with himself,"* not to God, with himself. This is not a true prayer. He said, "Lord I thank you that I'm not like other men. I tithe, I fast, I give alms. I do all these things. I'm not an adulterer, I'm not an extortioner, and I'm not unjust. I'm not like that old Publican down there."

Well our Lord said, *"The Publican would not so much as lift his eyes to heaven but smote upon his breast and cried, O God, be merciful to me the sinner."* And our Lord said, *"This man went down to his house justified, (converted, saved, while the other was shut out)."*

So this is the point of essential agreement in this matter of conversion. All who come to Christ come as sinners. And all sinners who come to Christ come for mercy. The sinner doesn't deserve mercy. He doesn't merit mercy. He doesn't earn mercy. Mercy is free. It's given freely.

Thirdly: There must be in all conversions a sincere faith in Christ alone.

Now there can be no saving benefit derived from Christ except as we're united in Christ. And there can be no union with Christ except by faith. *"He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life. He that believeth not, the Son of God shall never see life but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

Our Lord said to the disciples, *"Go preach the Gospel, to every creature (to all the world). He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned."*

"This is the record; God hath given us eternal life." That's the record. That's the faithful saying. This life is in His Son. It's not in your church; it's in His Son. It's not in your deeds; it's in His Son.

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It's not even in the Bible; it's in His Son. It's not in the laws; it's in His Son. *"This life is in His Son and he that hath the Son of God hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* He that cometh to God must believe, that He is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

So, in conversion, while they're not all alike, and we must not try to imitate someone else's conversion, but yet there are some points of essential agreement; all who come to Christ come as sinners, self-confessed, unadulterated, unadorned sinners.

And they come for mercy and mercy alone. *"Let us come boldly before the throne of grace that we may obtain (receive) mercy."* God deals in mercy. *"God is plenteous in mercy. God delights to show mercy."*

God said, *"My goodness, is my glory, I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful."* And they all come with faith in Christ.

Fourthly: Conversion is absolutely necessary to life eternal: *"Except you be converted you cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

A friend of mine, an evangelist who died seven or eight years ago, was holding a meeting in a town and he was talking with a young woman about her soul. And he said to her: "Are you a Christian?"

And she replied, "Yes sir." He said, "How long have you been a Christian?" She said, "Well, I've always been a Christian." He said, "That's too long, that's too long. You have not always been a Christian."

Any person who is a Christian has been converted from something to something. That's what the Scripture teaches; any person who has been converted has experienced a change from one state to another, from darkness to light, from death to life.

Every person who is a Christian, who has been converted, is aware of becoming a new creature. *"If any man be in Christ he's a new creature. Old things pass away. Behold, all things become new."*

There is a new knowledge. There is a new faith. There is a new nature. There is a new life. There is a new experience. There is a new Master. There is a new King. There is a new direction. So, conversion is essential.

You haven't always been a Christian. There was a time when you were not a Christian. You haven't always walked in the light. There was a time when you walked in darkness. You haven't always loved the God of the Bible. There was a time when you by nature hated the God of the Bible.

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You haven't always seen who Christ is and what He did and why He did it. There was a time when you did not understand these things. There was a time when you came to understand them and to believe them.

And there was a time when you came to receive them; if any man receives Christ; to them God gives the power to become the Sons of God, if they receive Him. There was a time when you didn't have Him and there was a time when you did have Him.

There was a time when you didn't know Him and a time when you did know Him. I'm not asking you to name the time and the place, many people cannot but it has happened; it has happened.

Now, I want you to listen to two or three things in bringing this message to a conclusion:

First of all: Conversion to Christ is just that; it's conversion to a person!

Now this is essential. If you don't hear anything else I say; (you turn that knob just a little bit) and listen carefully to what I'm about to present. Conversion is not changing churches. Conversion is not changing denominations.

Conversion is not changing doctrines. Conversion is not changing your lifestyle. Conversion is by the grace of God, changing your Master. That's what conversion is.

It's turning from your idols to the living God. That's conversion. *"Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord."* That's conversion.

Satan was our master. In the book of **Ephesians** it says, *"In times past you walked according to course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;"* He reigned over you. He was your king. And now Christ is your King. That's conversion; it's change of masters.

Sin was our master. Paul said in **Romans 6:16**; *"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants you are, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?"*

Whoever you're minding right now, that's your master. If you're minding sin; sin is your master. But when you're converted Christ becomes your Master.

Self was our master. Our Lord said in **Luke 6**; *"You love them that love you. What thank have you? All men do the same. You do good to them that do good to you. What thank have you? All men do the same. You lend to those from whom you hope to receive something in return. What thank have you? All men do the same thing. But I say unto you, love your enemies."*

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We were under the direction of Satan. We were under the power of sin. And we were under the dominion of self. Everything we did was motivated by a selfish purpose and a selfish motive. We did it because we got something in return. Self was king!

A conversion; when you're converted these old masters are dethroned. These old masters are put off the throne. Oh they give you some trouble. They'll hang around the back porch and hang around out in the yard. They'll give you a lot of trouble but they're dethroned.

And Christ becomes the Lord. And Christ reigns in our hearts and His commandments and His principles become our commandments and our principles. And we say with the prophet of old: "Lord speak; your servant's listening, your servant hears."

We say with Thomas in the New Testament as we fall at the feet of our Master: "*My Lord and my God.*"

So, conversion is a whole lot more than walking down an aisle and giving mental assent to a few Bible facts presented by a fast-talking preacher. Conversion is a whole lot more than giving up a few bad habits that some fellow has talked to you in giving up so you can go to heaven and not go to hell.

Conversion is a whole lot more than just believing there's one God, for the devil believes that a whole lot stronger than you do and he's not saved.

Conversion is crowning Christ, a new King, turning from our idols to the living God, enthroning Christ in our hearts as our Lord. "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord and believe in thine heart God hath raised Him from the dead; thou shalt be saved.*"

And when He becomes your Lord the Word becomes His Word. See the difference? The Bible becomes His Bible. The church becomes His church. The law becomes His law, it's different.

The people become His people. The cross becomes His cross. And your life becomes His life. **Galatians 2:20**; Paul caught the spirit of that when he said: "*I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live, yet not I; Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by and the faith (the power) of the Son of God who loved me, who gave Himself for me.*"

Conversion; what is it? It's not changing churches, not changing denominations, not changing doctrine, not changing your lifestyle; it's changing your Master!

Secondly: Conversion; it's a radical change too! "*If any man be in Christ he's a new creature.*" And this change is a change that operates not only on the mind that I become a spiritual intellectual; it operates on the affections of the heart. And if it has not, you haven't been converted.

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It operates on the heart. It operates on the will. It operates on the nature. It operates on the conduct. All the way through the Bible; listen to me, all the way through the Bible men are divided into two classes, believers and non-believers, sons of God and sons of Satan.

There are those that are nigh unto God and those that are far off. There are those who walk in the Spirit and those who walk in the flesh. No middle ground is ever given and no hint that anyone can do both.

Christ said, *“Those who are not with me are against me. No man can serve two masters.* It’s a radical change. It’s an abrupt change. And it’s described in this way, it is a new birth.

Now my friend, the new birth is not just a decision for Christ. A new birth is when God comes to the dead womb of the sinner and begets and imparts and implants the life of God. And He puts in there a new person.

There’s an old person and there’s a new person. There’s an old man and there’s a new man. There’s an unregenerate man and a regenerate man. There’s a natural man and a spiritual man.

And just as you were born the first time of your parents and received natural life; if you’re born again you’re born of God and you receive spiritual life. And that’s what it means to be born again.

It’s a new man and it’s a new nature. That’s pretty radical, a man that didn’t exist before. God doesn’t take old bottles and put new wine in it and old clothes and put new patches on them. *“He makes all things new.”*

There’s no crossing over of those two people either. They are miles apart, poles apart, east and west apart. It’s a quickening from the dead. *“You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin.”*

God brings a man out of the spiritual grave. It’s called, *“A new creation, the new man created in righteousness and true holiness.”* John called it, *“A passing from death to life.”* Paul called it, being translated from darkness to the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

And then conversion is a change which is recognizable by certain signs. Someone said when a man is converted he’ll be perfect. Well I wish that were so don’t you? Someday it’ll be so but not now.

The apostle Paul wept over his sins. David wept over his sins. Peter wept over his sins. Anybody who has been converted will grieve and weep and mourn over sin and confess them. And God will forgive them.

Some say that when a man is converted he is free from all doubt. I wish that was so too, don’t you? Some people say that when a man is converted the way becomes easy. Well, I wish that was so too but it’s not.

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Conversion is the beginning of a life of conflict and a life of faith. Conversion is the beginning of a spiritual struggle that is not ended till we're like Christ. It's the beginning of a warfare in which there is no discharge until the day we die.

But it's marked by this, all men who are converted become servants of Christ. Paul used the word over and over again, "*Paul a servant, (a bond-slave) of Jesus Christ.*" All who are converted experience a change in attitude and a change in character, "*He that loveth not abideth in death.*" That's what Christ said. "*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*" He hasn't been converted. "*He that loveth not knoweth not God. God is love.*"

So you see, this thing of conversion is a change of attitude. Now I know there is a progress in sanctification and a growth in grace and there are babes in Christ and young men in Christ and elders in Christ. But there's a change in attitude.

And the believer walks by faith, not by sight. And the believer longs to be like Christ. He says with David, "*I shall be satisfied when I awake with His likeness.*" These are evidences of conversion, "*Except you be converted and become as a little child you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.*"

That is my prayer, "Oh Lord convert me by the power of thy Spirit, through the blood of thy Son, through the instrumentality of your Word, convert me; make me a new creature in Christ!"