

Conversion

William P Goff
9-27-2014

Scriptures from the KJV

Well my message today is going to focus on a very important instruction that Christ gave His disciples. It concerns entrance doors to the Kingdom of Heaven, and whether we will find them “locked” barring entrance, or “open” allowing admittance.

Christ gave His disciples a requirement that they were going to have to fulfill before they would be allowed to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Yes, a requirement that even the present day Disciples of Christ all need to comply with, before being granted access or admittance into God’s Kingdom.

Now eternal life in the Kingdom of God is a free gift from God, no one can “earn” their way in, but one does have to qualify. Entrance into God’s Kingdom, is not like entering some of these local churches for Sunday services.

We have a church here in town that displays a Hugh sign in front of its building that says: “Come as you are” – “All are welcome” “No dress code”.

Now the “essential requirement” that I want to address here today, has nothing to do with our “outward” garments, but much to do with our “inner” garments. It has to do with our attitude, is has to do with our behavior, is has to do with our character.

This important instruction given by Christ is found in Mathew 18:3. (Let’s turn there please. And I’d like to start in verse 1 to put it in proper context.)

(The disciples here were displaying some bad character, the type of character that was in need of change.)

Mathew 18:1 *“At the same time came the disciples of Jesus, saying, Who is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?*

*2, and Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, **Except** ye be **Converted**, and become as little children, you shall **not** enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

“Except ye be converted “turned” – “changed” and become as little children” You shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

My message today is going to focus on “conversion” a consequent “fitness” (if you will) required for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, a change of “mind” a change of “walk”. Yes, a complete change of character.

What I want to discuss today, concerns a change in our thinking, and a very “deep” change in our thinking, a change that needs to take place well below the surface. Conversion is a change that need to take place all the way down in the very depths our “heart”.

What I hope to achieve in today’s message, is to help us realize the importance of conversion, not to take it lightly in any way, because conversion, pertains to the very essence, the very crux (if you will) of our High Calling.

Conversion is not something that we acquire over night, and it’s not something that we receive instantaneously at baptism & hands, or come into possession with after finding Christ or His true church. On the contrary, conversion is something that takes time to achieve.

And let us not entertain a Laodicean attitude of complacency or smugness here, thinking that we have conversion under our belt, because true conversion brethren, harbors deep, deeper than some in God’s church have ever even ventured. Sad to say, conversion is not something held by the majority, but by the minority.

And it’s not something superficial, fact it’s measured by a sounding line that goes fathoms below the surface, all the way down to the very core of our being.

Let’s notice something here, this important instruction given by Christ, that one needs to be converted, and become as a “little child” was brought on by the “thoughts” of “unconverted” minds, and thoughts that originated deep in the hearts of Christ’s very own original 12 disciples.

(There’s nothing shallow about conversion, and nothing instantaneous about its change.)

(Consider this) Here were these men that had spent countless hours with our Lord, and observed many miraculous miracles. They saw Him change water into wine, cleanse a Leper, Heal a Paralytic, restore a man’s withered hand and make it whole, cast out daemons, rebuke the wind to calm the seas, they even witnessed Him feeding, yes feeding multiple thousands of people, with a mere five loaves of bread, and two little fishes.

They heard sermons, lectures, instructions & corrections first hand from Christ Himself....

Yet, here they were, still “unconverted” in their hearts... The account in Luke 9:47 states that His disciples began “reasoning among themselves, which of them, should be greatest”, and that Jesus “perceiving the thoughts of their hearts, set a child in the midst of them”, and began His instruction.

We read in the Scriptures that we have “hearts of stone” that need to be changed into hearts of flesh. (The shape of stones are not easily changed) I know, I’m in the Garage Door business, and sometimes the concrete where we set our doors is off a bit from the architectural blueprints, and has to be changed.

The design is perfect; it includes a small recess in the concrete where the door is to set, but that design is all too often deviated by the contractors, and in need of correction.

(I carry a Heavy Duty Hammer & Chisel on my work truck, because that’s what it takes to accomplish such a feat.)

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that our hearts are off a bit, and in need of change. Jeremiah says: *“the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*

How’s our hearts brethren, are they still deceitful & desperately wicked, still a bit on the stony side, or have they changed, and turned into flesh?

Christ tells His disciples: *“Except we be converted, and become as little children, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

The Geneva study bible says that the Greek word translated “converted” here, is an idiom taken from the Hebrews which is equivalent to repent. Yes, for us to be converted, we must repent of our old ways.

There has to be a change, a correction has to be made in order for us to conform to the blueprints.

I want to take a look now, at what Christ meant when He said *“unless you change and become as little children”*.

Surely he didn’t mean that those converted must act childish and immature. No, He meant that those who are converted, are those who are "childlike". There is a vast difference from being "childish" and being "childlike".

What Christ wants for His disciples, what Christ wants for us, is to have the qualities of a Child (And not just any child, but a “little” child) Christ was quite specific here. He called a “littler” child unto Him and set him in the midst of them. He stated that unless we become as a “little” child (and the word “as” here means about) we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the most outstanding qualities of a “little” child is his humble spirit. Young children have not yet learned what pride is.

(Turn with me please to Isaiah 57:15)

This is one of the most important verses in the Bible for us humans. Why? Because we have been created in the very image of God Himself. Why? Because He wants to dwell with us for eternity, but He's quite particular about whom He allows to live in His House!)

Isaiah 57:15 *“For thus saith the High and Lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, who's name is Holy; I dwell in the High and Holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to receive the spirit of the humble, and to receive the heart of the contrite ones.”*

(One has to possess humility to enter into God's house.)

Little children possess contrite spirit & contrite hearts, and they display an abundance of other fine quality and striking attributes.

Little children do not desire authority, they do not regard outward distinction, they are free from malice, they're teachable, a total stranger to guile, and they willingly depend on their parents.

A little child trusts with all his heart that his parents will be there for him in his time of need. A child trusts that his father will be there for him when he takes those first steps, or takes his first ride on his new bike. A child trusts that his mother will be there for him when he scrapes his knee, or when the other kids are picking on him.

Little children are also quite forgiving; they “don't hold grudges. Have you ever seen two children engaged in a scuffle, shouting to each other that they hate one another,, only to see them five minutes later playing together as best friends, as if nothing ever happened???

Children are so quick to forgive one another, and at the same time they are very quick to forget. Those of us, who desire entrance into God's Kingdom, and to live there with our Creator for eternity, need to possess these same qualities.

Brethren, these are His qualities, this is His Character. And changing, turning, taking a complete 180 from our rotten, sinful, arrogant ways, and consistently walking in all of His ways, is what conversion is all about.

(Constancy is the “key” to conversion.)

Possessing, and Exhibiting our Heavenly Father's Character, His Holy Righteous Character, is what we've been hearing from the “get go”. From baptism & hands, we been exhorted that we must be walkers (not Jonnie Walkers) but walkers of the walk, and not just talkers.

(Conversion has to do with an “enduring) walk of the way. (The difference between “repentance” & “conversion” is constancy.

Repentance marks a halt in a person's wrong course, a total rejection of that wrong way, and complete determination to take the right course. And if our repentance is genuine, it will be followed by conversion. (Firmly & steadfastly changed hearts & changed nature.)

(A lack of deviation from the straight & narrow path that leads to life.)

Conversion is when our character enforces self-discipline to do what's right and resist what's wrong, even against the strongest temptations and self-desires that bombard our carnality.

The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are very powerful projectiles. But the converted person will resist these temptations, and walk uprightly, even under pain, suffering & hardship.

And let us not think (like many do) that resisting the powerful temptations and walking uprightly is impossible while still in the flesh, because it is possible, our Elder Brother proved that.

(Let's go to John 1:14 please) I want us to notice the definition of a particular Greek word in that verse.)

We're going to John 1:14 but on our way there, let's remember that Hebrews 4:15 tells us that "*Christ our High priest was tempted in all points like as we are, but was without sin.*"

John 1:14: "*And the Word was made "flesh" and dwelt amongst us.*"

That word "flesh" here, pertaining to Christ, is the same exact Greek word translated "flesh" used when pertaining to the rest of us: the Greek definition of that word "flesh" implies human nature (with all its frailties (physically or morally) and passions, specifically, a human being.

Brethren, conversion is in our reach, and it's something that we need to take very seriously, and for numerous reasons.

James mentions 2 important reasons, he tells us that if we remain "unconverted" if we neglect to change from our old ways, and begin walking in His ways, we face death (the second death to be precise. The other reason is because the return of our Lord & savior is near, and time is of the essence.

(James 5:20 please, let's turn there.) We find this same word for "conversion" used here in this chapter, where James is exhorting us to have patience and to establish our hearts, because the return of our Lord is near.

(Let's start in verse 7)

James 5:7 "*Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of our Lord, behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early & latter rain.*

Be ye also patient; establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (Establish here means to bring about permanently, to set fast, to turn resolutely - meaning firmly & steadfastly)... (We're talking constancy here.)

(Dropping down to verse 19)

Brethren, if any of you do err (err here means = roam from safety, truth, virtue – to go astray) from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a sole from death and shall hide a multitude of sins.

(If we keep practicing sin, death is at the door, but if we become converted, life is everlasting.)

Conversion is a “Win Win” situation; it even pays a bonus to those who help to convert a brother.

(Now let’s turn to Luke 22 please, and notice another place where this word “Converted” is used.)

(Conversion takes time to accomplish, as we already noticed, even the 12 original disciples were lacking conversion throughout much of Christ’s ministry. In fact the Apostle Peter was lacking conversion right up to our Lord’s crucifixion.)

Peter thought he was ready to go with Christ both to prison and to death, but Christ knew better. Christ knew at that time, Peter could only but deny Him. (That’s in verse 33, but lets notice something that Christ told Peter in verse 32.)

Starting in Luke 22:31 *“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not (and now notice Christ’s next words to Peter:) and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”*

Peter wasn’t there yet brethren,, are we?

We may be consistent at attending Sabbath services each week, we may have changed our diet and begun eating “clean” food, made a habit of praying & fasting, but that doesn’t necessarily qualify us for entrance into God’s kingdom...

Our God, the one who created us in His very own image, require us to develop and possess His “Character” His “Holy Righteous Character” He want to see Himself, when He looks at us.

That is what true “conversion” really is, to have a complete change of character, and to be constantly walking in all of His ways.

And conversion is something that we can “know” if we have achieved it yet, or if we are still lacking in that change. Yes, it’s a state or condition that is manifested quite clearly by our actions, by our behavior, and it’s a condition that is unmistakably recognized by our conscience.

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Rome (a letter that was also addressed to all of us who are the beloved of God, and called to be saints) Paul states in that letter that at that time his “sinful nature” still controlled his behavior.

Paul knew quite well that he was not converted yet. We also can know (and need to know) whether we are converted yet.

Paul states in verse 15 of Romans 7 that “what he “wants” to do, he does not, and that what he “hates doing”, that he does.”

Now some use this passage here to “justify” their sinful behavior, they state that they (like Paul) have a sinful nature, that cannot be changed, and that sin will always prevail in their lives, until they are changed into spirit beings.

But this is not true; it’s only a “cop out”. This behavior was not something that Paul was content with, nor did he feel hopelessly incapable of conquering. We see what action Paul took to combat his sinful nature when he wrote to the Philippians.

Speaking of the prize of the High Calling of God, He states in Philippians 3:13 *“I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the High calling of God.”*

Paul knew he had not succeeded at overcoming yet, so he pressed on to achieve that “fitness” (if you will) required for entrance into God’s Kingdom.

Measuring one “spiritual” condition is not much different that measuring ones “physical” condition. We can know if we are in good shape, or poor shape - fit, or unfit.

I work sometimes with a fine young man who spends much of his leisure time going to the Gym and exercising. He often comments on how his strength (his fitness if you will) is increasing.

I asked him how he knows that, how do you know that you are “improving” and becoming more fit. His response was, and I quote: “because things that I couldn’t do before, now I can do.”

The Apostle Paul wasn’t satisfied with his “unconverted” nature and his lack of walking uprightly. So he took action, and it paid off.

As we read in Paul’s letter to the Romans, he was lacking back then in his fight to control his behavior and he told the Philippians that he was going to fight even harder to overcome his sinful ways.

As Paul physical life was coming to a close, he wrote Timothy a letter of encouragement while he was imprisoned in Rome. In that letter, he told Timothy that his perseverance his continuous pressing for the mark, for the prize of the High Calling, had paid off.

He stated to Timothy that he had “fought a good fight” “finished his course” “kept the faith” and that there was now “laid up for him, a “crown” that Christ (the righteous judge) would give him at the resurrection.

Paul knew he had achieved victory, he knew he had become converted, that was a “crown” awaiting him at that Christ return.

Now I want to digress here just a bit and notice something about this “crown” that not only the Apostle Paul has laid up for him at the resurrection, but also all those who love Christ’s appearing.

There has been some discussion recently concerning whether we will be both “Kings” & “Priests” in the millennium, or just Priests.... Now I’m not looking to rekindle that discussion, but I do want to make a point here concerning those “crowns” that Christ will be distributing at His return.

I think understanding something about the “crowns” spoken of in the NT, will help drive my point home today concerning what “conversion” is all about.

There are two different Greek words, which are both translated into the text of the KJV by the word “crown” and these two words do in fact have different meanings.

The two Greek words are “stephanos” which is used 18 times, and “di a dem” which is used only 3 times.

“Di a dem” means: “to bind around the head” It’s a headband worn as a badge of royalty. This word symbolizes the position of a King – it symbolizes rulership.

It’s used only 3 times in the NT, and all 3 occurrences are in book of Revelation:

Revelation 12:3 *“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven “crowns” upon his heads.”*

The “Great Red Dragon” is a reference to Satan; and the seven “heads” probably refer to the seven major empires through which Satan has controlled, and still will control the kingdoms of this world: Babylon (1 head) Medo-Persia (1 head) Greece (4 heads) and Rome (1 head).

“Crowns” here is referring to kingly power and authority (this particular crown is a head band worn symbolizing the position of a king) same in the 2nd place this word “Di a dem” is used:

Revelation 13:1 *“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten “crown” and upon his head the name of blasphemy.”*

This is the same beast as in the previous verse we looked at, and again here “crowns” is also referring to kingly power, authority of Satan controlled kings of this world.

Now the 3rd (and last place) this word “Di a dem” is used, refers to Christ:

Revelation 19:12 *“His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many “crowns” and He has a name written, that no man knew but He Himself.”*

All three of these uses of “Di a dem” refer to royalty and rulership...

Now the word “stephanos” is used 18 times in the NT and always translated as “Crown”. But in all 18 places, it doesn’t refer to “kingship” or “rulership” but rather, it refers to “Victory”.

Like in Hebrews 2:7 speaking of *man* *“Thou madest him a little lower than the angles; thou crownedst (stephanos) him with “glory” & “honor”.*

“Stephanos” refers to crowns of victory, like we read in 2 Tim 4:8 *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a “crown” of righteousness. Symbolizing “victory”.*

The Lexical aids “Word Study” of the NT Greek by “Zodhiates”, says this about “stephanos”: “This Greek word is not used of the kingly crown, but of the crown of “victory”. As in games of “civic” worth, or military valor. It was woven of oak, ivy, myrtle, olive leaves or flowers.

Contrast to

“Di a dem” which was a white linen band encircling the brow to indicate the assumption of royal dignity.

Apart from the 3 places the Greek word “diadema” is used, the word “crown” is always used to focus on “victory” over something.

Christ made clear in Revelation 2 & 3 that rewards in God’s kingdom are for those who “overcome” and overcoming implies being “Victorious”.

Overcoming, being Victorious is a product of being “converted” to be walking this earth “uprightly”.

Brethren, if we are not yet converted, then we need to “press harder for the mark” because this is our “Calling” And it’s a High Calling, A High Calling from God the Father Himself.

He wants us, He has a purpose for us, and being converted is a must for us in order to fulfill that calling.

(Conversion is well within our reach.)

Jesus Christ is not the only one who succeeded at “overcoming” or “conquering” sin..... Others have also accomplished that feat.

Now don't get me wrong here, I'm not saying that Christ ever sinned, because we know that He never sinned, but He was tempted in all way, like as we are,, He still had to “conquer” sin, He had to “overcome” the temptation of sin.

And this is our obligation, this needs to be our mission (if you will) to overcome sin... To walk this earth “upright”. And make no mistake about it, it is possible, others have done it besides Christ.

Don't let the “false ministers” within the COG, Yes, the many “false ministers” within the cog lead you astray. I listened to a well known minister in the COG make a statement a while back that we, the members of the church, the members of the “Body of Christ” should always be I a state of repentance.....

Brethren, that statement is not correct, and it supports a false belief that is being taught by the majority of the pulpits within the cog, that we cannot stop sinning.... That it is humanly impossible...

If one thinks he can't stop, he won't stop.... Why even try? Why would anyone even try to do something, if they believed it is impossible???

We should not be in a constant state of “repentance”... We should be in a constant state of “obedience”. God's desire for us; God's hope for us is not to be constantly repenting... His desire for us is to be constantly “obeying”.

If one is obedient he needs not to repent, he already accomplished that feat, and is converted.

Make no mistake about it, Christ doesn't tell all of His church to repent (only those who still need to repent) O that might include the majority of His church.... But there's a minority out there who are converted, and not in need of repentance.

In Revelation 2 & 3 we read about the “seven churches” (Let's go there for a minute and notice something.)

Take a look at what the Spirit has to say to each of the seven churches, and you will find that 5 out of the seven churches were told to repent, but 2 of those churches were not told to repent. Why? Because Christ was pleased with their behavior.

Another important thing to consider when reading Revelation 2 & 3, is noting what He doesn't say. He doesn't say: “To him that is just “trying” to overcome will I grant this and give that, but to him that “Overcometh” One needs to succeed. (Just trying doesn't cut it.)

Brethren, let us not fool ourselves, conversion goes hand n hand with being “ready” being ready for the return of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. And there’s a “Midnight Cry” coming, a “Midnight Cry” that will announce the “Imminent” return of our Lord & Savior.

Those who are “Ready” those who have also (like Paul) “fought the good fight” and are “converted” will be given a “crown” at that time.

But others who have not “overcome” who have not been “converted” who have not been fighting the good fight, will be found “wanting” at that time.

There is no question here in my mind, about what “conversion” is all about – It’s a total change from habitual sin to holiness.

It’s a complete change from just “talking the talk” to “constantly” “walking the walk.”

Now as we keep this years fall feasts, I suggest we evaluate what condition our condition is in, and if we haven’t reached conversion yet, then we need to address it, and press even harder towards the mark, for the prize of our High Calling, and become Converted.

Because He tells His disciples, unless we have a dramatic change in our thinking, a complete change in our hearts, the entry door to God’s Kingdom will be closed.

*“Except we be converted, and become as little children, we shall **not** enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”*