

# New Testament Conversion

by  
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# Introduction

In thinking about the kind of lessons that should be taught here, the question always arises, “what type of lessons are needed most?” I finally decided that I would deal with the subject of conversion and what the Bible has to say on this all-important theme. It is my contention that unless one knows what to do to be saved, regardless of the many other things that might be said, he can be helped very little. Putting first things first, one needs to know the truth on salvation so that he may hopefully act on that and then proceed to other matters.

I have purposely gone over this material again and again to familiarize the reader with these truths. Surely after reading these lessons, and along with one’s own personal Bible study, an individual cannot help but know God’s will on what he should do to be saved. Of course that is the whole point of these lessons. I would, therefore, encourage those of you to follow up on this knowledge by becoming a Christian and a member of the Lord’s church.

My prayer will continue to be that these lessons may be the means of helping many precious souls to learn God’s will and to encourage them to obey it. May the Lord be praised and honored through all of it.

J. C. Choate

# Contents

Introduction .....	i
1. What Is Conversion? .....	1
2. Conversion and the New Birth .....	6
3. Conversion and the Blood of Christ .....	12
4. Conversion and the Grace of God .....	18
5. False Teaching on Conversion, No. 1 .....	24
6. False Teaching on Conversion, No. 2 .....	31
7. The Conversion of the Pentecostians.....	37
8. Conversion of Those at Solomon's Porch .....	44
9. Conversion of the Samaritans .....	50
10. Conversion of Simon the Sorcerer.....	56
11. Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch.....	63
12. Conversion of Saul of Tarsus.....	69
13. Conversion of Cornelius and His Household .....	75
14. Conversion of Lydia and Her Household .....	81
15. Conversion of the Jailer and His Household .....	86
16. Conversion of the Corinthians .....	92
17. Conversion of the Ephesians .....	99
18. The Non-Conversions of the New Testament .....	105
19. Conversion and the Church .....	112
20. Conversion and its Blessings .....	118



# What Is Conversion?

In the book of Acts of the New Testament, there are recorded eleven cases of conversion. We often refer to Acts as the book of conversions. In our future lessons we will go through all of them so we can see for ourselves what took place in each individual case. For now, let's consider this question: "What is conversion?" Before we can talk about it, we need to know what it is!

The word "conversion" simply means "a change, turning from one thing to accept something else, to go in another direction, to be transformed, to become a different person." This is what happens when one is converted to Christ. An individual may be in sin, in the world, or a believer in another religion. On hearing about Christ, being convinced that He is the Son of God, and being willing to comply with His terms of pardon, he decides to give up his sin, the things of the world, his former religion, and thus to follow Christ. He decides to become a changed person and a new creature in Christ. This basically is conversion.

Conversion takes place when one obeys the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and then was resurrected that man might be saved and have the hope of eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). These are facts that one must believe if he is to become a follower of Christ. Jesus said emphatically, "*Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*" (John 8:24). But as important as belief or faith is, this alone is not enough to complete one's conversion to Christ. This is only the beginning point. It places one in the position to proceed with the process of conversion. Once you believe, there are

certain commands that you must comply with if you are to be fully converted or saved. There are not only facts of the gospel that one must believe, but there are also commands of the gospel that one must obey. Christ said to His Apostles, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved: but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:15,16). Please note that the gospel was to be preached to all people everywhere. Then observe that the Lord said that it was only those who would believe and be baptized who would be saved, and that those who refused to believe would be condemned or lost. Why would they be condemned? For failing to believe the facts of the gospel (that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected), and for failing to believe enough to obey the commands of the gospel, which included whatever the Lord required of one to receive salvation. If one believes in Christ, if one has the kind of faith that the Lord expects him to have, then he will do whatever Christ would have him to do without question or complaint.

An all-important part of conversion is repentance. Just as one could not be converted to Christ and Christianity without belief in Him, neither can one be converted without repentance. While belief in Christ concerns itself with a change of mind, repentance involves a change of life. A good definition is set forth in a story that Christ told: *“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before*

you” (Matthew 21:28-31). As you can see from this story, repentance has to do with a change of life. Here was a man who showed by his action that he had changed his mind.

Christ said again that one must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Paul exhorted, *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). Peter wrote, *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). More specifically, Peter said to those on the day of Pentecost who asked what they should do, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). All of these verses indicate that repentance is a vital part of one’s obedience to the Lord. As long as one continues in his sins, and refuses to give them up, he is in no position to follow Christ. Our Lord is asking one and all to give up their sins, their bad habits, their evil and wicked ways, so that they might complete their obedience and thus be forgiven of their sins. Repentance, then, means that one has changed his mind about the way he is living. He wants to turn from the things that he has been doing to follow Christ and do those things that are good and right. Paul described this when he said to the Ephesians, *“...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but*

*rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:22-32).*

Remember that it is impossible to become a Christian without conversion and it is impossible to be converted without repentance. Repentance is not just feeling sorry for one’s sins. If one genuinely repents, he is sorry for his sins, but true repentance demands that one quit his sinful ways, and that he replace them with those things that are right and good.

Another part of one’s conversion to Christ is confessing that He is the Son of God. This has to do with one’s change of allegiance. He no longer rejects Christ and curses Him, but now he is willing to acknowledge Him, to confess Him as the Son of God, as his Lord and Master. Christ Himself said, *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 10:32). Paul said, *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Romans 10:10). In Acts 8 we read of Philip being directed by the Spirit to go to preach the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch. On doing so, and coming to a certain water, the eunuch said, *“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”* Then Philip said, *‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he command-*

*ed the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him”* (Acts 8:36-38). From these passages of scripture we are able to see the importance of the confession in one’s conversion to Christ. The confession to be made is that Christ is the Son of God, it is to be made with the mouth, and it is to be made before one or more witnesses. All of this is for the purpose of confirming one’s allegiance in one’s own heart to Christ, that he now believes in Christ, and that he is ready to follow Him. How could one possibly be converted without such a confession?

Finally, baptism is a command of the gospel, and it likewise plays an important part in one’s conversion to Christ. In this act, a burial in water (Romans 6:3,4), for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), one changes his state. Through baptism he is transferred from that of being lost to that of being saved, from that of being in the world, to that of being in Christ. Christ said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). Paul tells us that we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27), and *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). From these verses, and others that could be given, it becomes very clear the role baptism plays in conversion. Without it, one cannot be saved, cannot be in Christ and His church, and therefore there is no conversion.

Have you been converted to Christ? If not, you need to believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess Him as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. If you will do this, the Lord will save you and add you to His church.

# Conversion and the New Birth

In our last study we defined conversion as set forth in the Bible. We said that it had to do with a change, turning, going in another direction, and being transformed. Conversion is a term that we use to describe what happens when a person obeys the gospel of Christ. He believes the facts of the gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), then he obeys the commands of the gospel, which includes repentance, confession of Christ as being the Son of God, and being baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38).

In this chapter we will look at conversion and the new birth as set forth in the scripture. We want to make it as clear as possible so there will be no doubt in your mind as to what it is and what takes place when one is converted to Christ.

Conversion, and obedience to the gospel, is also pictured as a new birth, being born again of the water and of the Spirit. In John 3:1-8 we read, *“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the*

*kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do no marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"*

Let's take some time to think about what the Lord is saying here. Jesus introduced to Nicodemus the idea of being born again, in order to enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom at that time had not been established, but it would shortly come into existence as recorded in Acts 2. On another occasion, Christ had promised to build it (Matthew 16:18,19), and He even said that some that were living in that day would still be living at the time of its coming (Mark 9:1). Often time, before it was established, Christ spoke of it as a kingdom, coming from God, the kingdom of God. In that particular time, the Jews were looking for a kingdom. Of course, the kingdom the Lord had in mind would be a spiritual kingdom, the church. In Hebrews 12:28, and other verses, the writer declares that we have received that kingdom, and that statement was written hundreds of years ago. The kingdom that Jesus had reference to was the church. When Christ spoke to Nicodemus, He was merely explaining the process of becoming a member of the Lord's kingdom, the church, once it was established.

Note that Christ said that it would be necessary for a man to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Although He stipulates "man" here, it should be understood that this is a generic term which means both man and woman. Observe also that He speaks of adults, older people, accountable people, as being the ones who would have to be born again to enter the kingdom. Babies or infants were not under consideration. Even Nicodemus

recognized this, because he wanted to know how it would be possible for a man, an adult, to enter again into his mother's womb and be born. Nicodemus misunderstood the birth that the Lord had in mind. He thought Jesus was talking about a literal, physical birth, but He wasn't talking about that type of birth at all. Rather, He was speaking of a spiritual birth. Sad to say, but even after Nicodemus made that mistake, many of our time make the same mistake. They try to explain away the water of the new birth as being that which is related to physical birth. Even as Jesus explained that the new birth was not physical, but a spiritual rebirth through baptism, so the people of our time need to take note of this.

Jesus said, *"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* The word "except" means that there is no other way to enter the kingdom of God, or the church. He said that it was accomplished only by being born of the water and the Spirit. What does this mean? In physical birth there has to be the begetting and the bringing forth. In spiritual birth, there is the Spirit that gives the word, (the word being the seed) and the begetting as the word, or seed, is planted in the mind of an individual. When belief is produced in his heart, he responds by obeying the Lord, and in obedience he goes down into the waters of baptism, and comes forth from the water — the bringing forth, the birth. It can be said that he has been born of the water and of the Spirit. It is just that simple. Peter said, *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1 Peter 1:22,23).



Let's go over that again to be sure that we understand what takes place in spiritual birth. The writers of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, (2 Peter 1:21) were inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen God's word. Because of this, the Holy Spirit is often spoken of as the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26; John 16:13). It is the Spirit as He works through the word that directs one to obey God. As one hears the word of the Spirit, the word of God is planted in his heart. "*The seed is the word of God,*" Christ said in Luke 8:11. That seed in the heart begins to produce faith (Romans 10:17), and when that faith becomes strong enough, it results in obedience (1 Peter 1:22). This is where water enters the picture. There are those who say that the water here in John 3:5 is not really water. They explain that it is spiritual water, figurative water, but not literal water. (Actually, they don't know what to do with it.) But the water mentioned here is just water. Here is a rule that you can always count on when you study the Lord's word: any time water is mentioned and it is not natural water, it is always made clear that some other type of water is under consideration. For instance, the scripture speaks of living water, the water of life, etc. Here in John 3:5 it just simply says "water", which means that it is literal water. In reading through the New Testament, what command do we come across that is connected with water? If you are familiar with the New Testament you know that there is only one command that is tied to water and that is the act of baptism. So the water of John 3:5 involves the act of baptism. It is through baptism, being buried in water, and coming up out of the water, that produces the birth that Christ speaks of when He says that one must be born of water.

Let's notice some verses of scripture that stress the fact that one is buried in water, and through this, a spiritual birth. Paul wrote, "*...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were*

*raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). Again he said, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4). Then, we have the example of where the Ethiopian eunuch was taken down into the water to be baptized, and after the baptism, he was brought up out of the water (Acts 8:26-39). In these various verses of scripture, and through this example, we can see that if the individual who is obeying the Lord is buried in the waters of baptism, then when he comes forth from the water, this represents a birth — and that is exactly right! After this baptism, one is new creature in Christ. When is one a new creature? At birth. So, those who have been baptized to enter Christ have been born of the water and therefore they are said to be new creatures in Christ. They are also children of God, newborn babes. Paul says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26,27). Again, Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Peter said, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).*

So you can see that to be born of the water and of the Spirit simply means to receive the word of the Spirit — to hear the word of God — and then to obey the Lord by being buried in the water to be cleansed of one’s sins. One is, therefore, born, or raised to walk in newness of life, being now in Christ, a child of God, a new creature in Christ, a newborn babe.

There are many who talk about being born again who have not the first idea of what the new birth is all about. Of course, when you go to the scriptures and get the whole picture, it becomes quite simple. As you can also see, through the new birth there is a conversion that takes place. One is born again, he becomes a new person, a different person.

If you will believe in Christ, repent of all of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and be baptized for the remission of your sins, you also can be born again, be converted to Christ, to be a follower of Him. By so doing you are born into the Lord's kingdom, added to His church, becoming a member of His family. I would like to encourage you to do this now.

# Conversion and the Blood of Christ

We have found that the word conversion simply means to change, to turn, to go in another direction, to be made over, to be transformed, to become a new person. We have further found that conversion takes place when one obeys the gospel of Christ. One believes the facts of the gospel, which are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and then he obeys the commands of the gospel, by not only believing, but also by repenting of all his sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized for the remission of sins. Another way of stating it: there is a change of heart, one becomes a believer in Christ; there is a change of allegiance, one confesses Christ as the Son of God; and there is a change of state, one is baptized into Christ and His church.

In the last chapter, we found that conversion and the new birth are one and the same. When one obeys the gospel of Christ, he becomes a born-again child of God. God does not have one obeying the gospel to be saved and added to the church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47), and then another person to be born again of the water and the Spirit, to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5; Matthew 16:18,19). Rather, the Lord has but one way to save. These are just different ways of describing the same thing. For instance, the church is said to be the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, the body of Christ, etc., but all of these descriptive phrases have reference to the same institution. Likewise, in our present age we talk about a car, an automobile, etc., but we are talking about the same machine. So it is with the plan of salva-

tion. We may speak of obeying the gospel, the new birth, conversion, becoming a Christian, and become a member of the church, but in each case we are talking about the same thing.

In regard to the new birth, Christ said that one must be born of the water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God, the church (John 3:3-5). This simply means that on hearing the word of the Spirit, the word of God, faith is produced in an individual's heart, and all of this process may be referred to as the seed, the word of God, being planted in the heart, or the begetting of the word, and then this produces obedience which includes baptism, a burial in water, and therefore being born of the water and Spirit. Please observe also that Jesus taught that one must be born of the water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God, which is the Lord's church. Paul tells us that it is through baptism that one enters Christ and His church (Romans 6:3,4; 1 Corinthians 12:13). So the new birth, being born of the water and the Spirit, is the same as obeying the gospel of Christ, when the Lord said, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15,16). You will note that He says that one must believe and be baptized to be saved, and then on being saved we are told that one is added to the church, which is the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ (Acts 2:47).

Now let's see if we can put it all together. Christ said that through being born of the water and the Spirit one enters the kingdom of God. Paul said that it is through baptism, and of course, that is based on the fact that belief or faith precedes baptism, that one enters Christ and His church. And finally, we are told that when one believes and is baptized he is saved and that

the Lord adds him to the church. So in all three cases the end result is the same. That means that in one process, or in simple obedience to God, that an individual is obeying the gospel, being born again, becoming a member of the Lord's church, which is the spiritual body of Christ and kingdom of God. To cover the whole thing, this is called conversion.

Now there is something else that we want to think about in relation to conversion, and that is the blood of Christ. How does the blood of Christ fit into all of this? Let's go to God's word for the answer.

First, we want to go to the scriptures that tell us of the importance of the blood of Christ. We are told that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to this earth to die on the cross for the sins of all mankind (John 3:16,17). That is, Christ shed His blood on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (1 Corinthians 15:3). In instituting the Lord's Supper, Christ said, *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). The Apostle Paul wrote, *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"* (Ephesians 1:7). Peter declared, *"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:18,19). These verses tell us that God sent His Son to this world to die for the sins of all, that Christ's blood was shed that man might have remission of sins, the forgiveness of his sins, and thus to be redeemed or set free. But how does one come in contact with the blood of Christ to receive the benefits of it?

Keep in mind that Christ died on the cross, shedding His blood, for the sins of man. He died that man might be saved from his sins. As you think about this, listen to the words of Paul when he said, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:3,4). First of all, he is speaking of those who believe in Christ to the point of obeying Him. In a person’s obedience, he is buried with the Lord by baptism into His death. The individual who is being baptized has not only become a believer, but he has also repented of his sins, or died to his sins, and now he is being buried in the waters of baptism into the benefits of the Lord’s death. Why did Christ die on the cross? To shed His blood for the sins of man. Therefore, when one is buried in the water into the Lord’s death, he is baptized into the benefits of Christ’s death, that is, the blood of Christ washes away his sins, he is cleansed and purified by the blood of Christ in his obedience to Him. This being accomplished, he is resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life.

We read earlier how Christ shed His blood that we might have the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:28). Now turn to Acts 2:38. After the gospel had been preached to a large number of people on the day of Pentecost, the record says that they were cut to the heart; in other words, they became believers, and then they wanted to know what they should do. At this point we read, *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:38). From reading these verses 38 and 39, we would conclude that when one

believes in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized, that his sins are remitted, removed, washed away by the blood of Christ. This is the same procedure that we read about in Romans 6:3,4 where an individual, based on his faith, obeys the Lord by repenting and being baptized into the benefits of the Lord's death, and thus he receives the remission of his sins. That is, he contacts the blood of Christ through his obedience, and his sins are forgiven.

There is another passage that we want to turn to at this time in Acts 22. Here it tells the story of the conversion of Saul, later to be called Paul. The Lord had appeared to him, and Saul had asked what he should do. He went into the city, blind, fasting and praying, and continued to do this for three days. Then Ananias came to him and said, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16). Now what did he do? He became a believer in Christ, he showed repentance through fasting and prayer, and then he was asked to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins. He did that, of course, and immediately began to preach Christ. But how did he have his sins washed away? What washed them away? It was not the literal water, because Peter tells us that although baptism saves us, provided it is preceded by faith and repentance, that it is not by washing away the filth of the flesh, but instead it is done through having a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21). And how can one have a good conscience? By obeying God. That's what Paul did, and through his obedience he reached the blood of Christ and therefore his sins were washed away.

Going back to Romans 6, you will note that through one's obedience, he imitates the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. Christ died on the cross, and the sinner dies to his sins. Christ



was buried in a literal tomb, and the sinner is buried in the waters of baptism. Christ was resurrected from a literal grave, and the sinner, having his sins washed away by the blood of Christ in baptism, is resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life, to be a new creature in Christ. Isn't that beautiful?

I want you to continue to think about these great truths, and it is my prayer that you will become a believer in Christ, that you will repent of your sins, that you will confess Christ as the Son of God, and that you will be baptized for the remission of your sins. If you will do this, the Lord will save you and add you to His church. This is the only way that you can be saved and become a member of the church of Christ.

# Conversion and the Grace of God

We have devoted several lessons to the subject of conversion. I would like to urge you to read the book of Acts. It would be well if you would read it several times so that you may be well-acquainted with it. There are eleven cases of conversion listed in that all-important book. We are going to study them one by one as we go along. Before getting to them, however, we are trying to lay a foundation by discussing the meaning of conversion, and several related matters.

Keep in mind that conversion means to turn, to change, to be made new, to be transformed. This is something that is done by adults, by those who have reached the age of accountability, by responsible beings. It is that which takes place in one's mind and life. It is something that must take place if one is to be saved, to be a member of the Lord's church, to be a Christian.

Thus far we have discussed conversion in relation to the gospel of Christ, the new birth, and the blood of Christ. We have found that conversion takes place when one obeys the gospel, that is, one becomes a believer in Christ, repents of his sins, confesses Christ as the Son of God, and is baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). In being converted, in obeying the gospel of Christ, one is born again, that is, born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). He receives the word of the Spirit in his heart, and it produces faith, which leads to obedience to the Lord by being buried in water, baptized, for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3,4; Acts 2:38). Finally, through obeying the gospel, and being born again, one comes into contact with the blood of

Christ, and thereby his sins are washed away (Matthew 26:28; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38).

In all of this, where does the grace of God fit in? Is there a place for the grace of God, or is man saved by a plan, by his own devisings? These are some good questions, and they deserve answers. We will therefore take the time to show how grace plays a great role in man's conversion and salvation.

First, let us realize that God has always been and will always be. He was there in the beginning and created man (Genesis 1 & 2). That means that He is the creator and man is the created. But man sinned and became lost. Sin demanded that justice be done, and justice demanded that man pay the penalty of death for his sin (Romans 6:23). With man being unable to save himself, and with God being unable to save man with sin, then to satisfy God's justice, God gave His Son to pay the penalty for sin. To do this it would take a sinless sacrifice. Thus Christ came to this earth and lived a perfect life, a life without sin, so as to be able to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. We read, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (John 3:16,17). Paul said, *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8).

What about those who claim that they are good moral people and can be saved on that basis? There is no such thing as being

without sin. We read the words of Paul as he quoted an Old Testament scripture, "*As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one*" (Romans 3:10). He also said, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). That mean that since all are sinners all need to be saved. But to be saved, there must be a saviour, and as we have seen already, Christ gave Himself on the cross for the sins of men.

As we continue our study, keep in mind that God and Christ have done for man that which he could not do for himself. That is, God sent His Son to this world and Christ died on the cross that man might be saved. That is grace. That is mercy. That is unmerited favor. Paul wrote, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). These verses of scripture have been greatly misunderstood by the masses. The popular idea is that we are saved by the grace of God, and therefore God does it all, and requires nothing of man in return. This is certainly foreign to the teaching of God's word.

Even in Ephesians 2:8,9, when we take a closer look, we find that it does not say what many *think* it says, but rather it agrees one hundred percent with the rest of the scripture in relation to man and his salvation. It is true that we are saved by grace. There would be no way to deny that. Man could never do enough to earn his salvation. But notice again very carefully. The inspired man of God says that we are saved *by grace, through faith*. We know that the grace here has reference to God's part. But what about faith? Is that God's part too? No, and I think all would admit that it would have to refer to man's part. The writer says that we are saved by grace, through faith. That means salvation comes through grace on God's part, and faith on man's

part. If it is by grace only, then man cannot be saved. On the other hand, if it is by faith only, then man cannot be saved. But by putting them together there in salvation.

What does faith here include? It includes any and everything that the Lord has said and requires of man that he might be saved. It means that if we really believe in the Lord we will do what He says. What has He asked us to do to be saved? He says that we must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). What if we refuse to do that? Then it means that we do not have enough faith to be saved. But if we have to do something, then doesn't that mean that salvation is no longer by the grace of God? Who said that? The scriptures do not say so. It says we are saved by grace through faith. We must have enough faith to reach up to accept the grace of God. If we do not have enough faith to do that, to do what the Lord has asked us to do, then that means that our faith is too weak to save us.

Let us notice that He says that we cannot be saved by ourselves, or through our own goodness, schemes, or by doing enough good works to earn our salvation. Instead, salvation is a gift of God and we must comply with the Lord's will to have access to it. If we could be saved by our own works, or by the works of the Law of Moses, then we would have room to boast. But this is not possible. There are those who are trying to be saved in this way, but they will fail in their attempts.

Then turn with me to Titus 3:5-7 for a passage concerning the mercy of God. Paul says, *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that having been justified by His grace we should become*

*heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” Again the writer affirms the fact that we cannot be saved on the basis of our own works of righteousness. That means that we cannot do enough good deeds, apart from God’s will, to save ourselves and then to boast of our salvation. Rather, if we are saved, it will have to be on the basis of the mercy of God. That does not mean that we will have nothing to do, that there will be no conditions to comply with on our part, that there will be no commands to obey, that there will be no faith to demonstrate, etc. But it does mean that our salvation, our obedience to God, our worship, our faith, our hope, and everything has all been made possible by the grace and mercy of God.

The inspired man of God goes right on to say that God has saved us by His mercy, that is, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Actually, the word “regeneration” has reference to new life, and the word “washing” refers to the act of baptism and having our sins washed away. With that in mind, the author is saying that it is through the mercy of God that we are able to be baptized to be saved, to become a new person in Christ. That is exactly what the Lord said in Mark 16:16: *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* Then we read where Saul was told to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Doing this, one enters Christ, thus becoming a new creature in Him.

Paul continues by saying that in addition to the washing of regeneration, there is also the renewing of the Holy Spirit. This likewise is in harmony with what Peter told the believers on the day of Pentecost when they wanted to know what they should do to be saved: *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one*

*of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'' (Acts 2:38).*

In the last part of Titus 3:5-7 the writer goes on to reaffirm the fact that in the end we are justified by the grace of God, and because of it, we have the hope of eternal life. Let me also say again, that we are unable to save ourselves. To be saved, even by the grace of God, and to have eternal life, we must believe in the Lord enough to obey Him and to lay hold of the grace and mercy that He has extended to us. If we reject His grace and mercy, by refusing to do that which He has asked us to do, even His grace cannot save us. Please don't forget that.

Let it be understood that there is no conflict between conversion and the grace of God. Rather, in being converted to the Lord, one merely accepts the grace of God and the salvation that He has provided. Without conversion, there is not enough grace in all the world to save you.

I would like to encourage you to accept the grace of God by obeying His will. Believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. If you will do this, the Lord will save you and add you to His church. There is no other way. God's grace is there, but you must reach up in obedience to accept it.

Finally, even with our obedience and complying with all the Lord requires of us, it is still the grace of God that will save us and give us a home in heaven.

# False Teaching on Conversion, No. 1

We have been studying the subject of conversion. This is a Bible subject, and one that every person should be interested in. We have defined it as meaning to turn, to change, to be transformed. We have shown that conversion takes place when one obeys the gospel of Christ, when one is born again. We have also studied this subject in relation to the blood of Christ and the grace of God.

While we are in the early stages of defining conversion, showing by the Bible what it is, and what it is not, I think it would be wise if we spend some time in pointing out some false teachings on this matter. Unless you are aware of these teachings, it is possible for you to be deceived, and of course that would be disastrous for you, and perhaps others that you might influence.

Don't think for a minute that there aren't false teachers. The Apostle John warned, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). We are going to take John's advice, and we are going to try some of these false teachers and their teaching on conversion by God's word.

Some say that conversion takes place through the process of faith only, for certainly the Bible teaches faith and the importance of it in relation to conversion. But the point of controversy arises on the assumption that one is saved by faith only. Numerous verses could be quoted that mention only faith, but none of them say faith only. A number of scriptures could be listed that speak



only of repentance, baptism, love, works and other subjects. Does that mean that one could scripturally teach that salvation is by repentance only, by baptism only? Of course not. Neither could we conclude that salvation is by faith only simply on the basis that we may read some verses that speak only of faith. There is only one verse of scripture in all of the New Testament that mentions faith only: *“You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not** by faith only”* (James 2:24).

*“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:17-26).

In these verses and examples the point being made is that faith expresses itself in works. Where it is alone, or where it does not work, it is dead. Just like the body is dead without the spirit, so faith is dead without works. How could anyone believe that faith only can save a soul, that mental acceptance only of Jesus Christ as being the Son of God is sufficient to salvation?

The Bible teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), but this does not mean that one can please God by faith only. In John 3:16 we read: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* Many think that one can be saved by faith only. But this is not taught at all. The emphasis is on believing in Christ. If one believes in Christ, will he not do what Christ wants him to do? If so, then, among other things, he will believe and be baptized that he may be saved according to Mark 16:16. The word “believe” in John 3:16 means that one will continue to believe. He is not limiting belief to a mental acceptance of Christ, but it is something that goes on and expresses itself in action. God showed His love for the world by sending His Son to die on the cross that man might be saved. Man must show his acceptance of that love by believing in Christ and being willing to do what the Lord has commanded.

The entire New Testament is packed with commands, exhortations, and examples that clearly show that one is to believe and obey the Lord. One cannot be saved by faith only and neither can one live the Christian life by believing only. Conversion begins with faith, but that faith must be strong enough to lead an individual to repent of his sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and to be baptized for the remission of sins. Even faith does not stop. It continues. Peter said that we should add to our faith the Christian graces, or principles, that form a basis for the Christian life (2 Peter 1:5-9). Christ says that we must be faithful unto death that we may receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Akin to the foregoing, some teach that conversion takes place when one bows his head and says the “sinner’s prayer”, that is, he asks the Lord to forgive him of his sins. Such people may

refer to the thief on the cross, and his asking Christ to be remembered in His coming kingdom, as recorded in Luke 23:39-43, when the Lord told him that on that day he would be with Him in paradise. They take this to mean that the Lord saved the thief on the spot without baptism. What they overlook is the fact that Jesus had not died at this point, and therefore the commands of the great commission were not in effect. After the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, the New Testament became binding, and ever since that time we have been under the commands of the great commission, namely that one must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:15,16).

Radio and television speakers who teach that conversion takes place through prayer often urge their listeners to simply bow down by their radio or TV and pray to God for the forgiveness of their sins, accepting Christ into their heart as their personal saviour. They may even tell them to lay their hands on their radio while they are thus praying. Or preachers may tell their audiences that wherever they are they can pause and pray and be forgiven of all their past sins. I want to ask those preachers to give me an example of this being done in the New Testament. Read through the book of Acts and you will not find one time where any gospel preacher ever told an individual, or a group of people, to do such. Instead, you have them urging those who needed to be saved to believe and to be baptized to wash away their sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

While attending their church services you may find a preacher urging those unsaved in the audience to whisper a prayer where they are that they might be saved, or to come forward and bow at the altar, to ask God for salvation. Again, you do not read of any such procedures in the New Testament. Christ has already

died to provide salvation (Romans 5:8). You need not beg and plead with Him, through prayer, to save you. He wants to save you. He invites you to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30).

But to be saved you will have to submit to the Lord's terms of pardon. You will have to meet certain conditions. Why would the Lord require that? It is a matter of testing your faith, giving you an opportunity to show that you are serious about wanting to be saved. It is a means of going on record with yourself, with the Lord, and with others, that you have decided to be a Christian.

Therefore the Lord requires that you believe in Him (Hebrews 11:6), and if you believe in Him, that you show your belief, or your faith, by being willing to repent of your sins, to give up your sins (Acts 17:3).

If you are willing to go that far, He asks you to confess Him before men (Matthew 10:32). He wants you to publicly state to one or more witnesses that you believe that He is the Son of God (Romans 10:10). That means that you cannot be a secret believer (Matthew 10:32). At least one other person must know of your faith. The idea is that if you have faith strong enough to be willing to publicly confess Christ, then you will have enough faith to complete your obedience and to live the Christian life. But if your faith is not strong enough to publicly confess Christ before men, then you are not ready yet to be a follower of Christ (Matthew 10:33).

Once the public confession is made you are ready to be baptized. If your faith is not strong enough to lead you to obey the Lord in baptism, your faith is not strong enough for you to be saved (Mark 16:15). If you really believe in the Lord, and you are determined to do whatever He wants you to do, then you will

never question the command of baptism, or any other command. Your attitude will be, *“Command Lord, and I will obey.”* You will be like the Ethiopian eunuch, when he said, *“See, here is water; what hinders me from being baptized?”* (Acts 8:36). When you know what the Lord wants you to do, you will not be trying to find an escape from doing it, but you will be taking the lead to do what He said.

Notice what happened in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. *“And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing”* (Acts 8:37-39).

How could one possibly think that he could be saved without believing in the Lord? You would no doubt agree that faith is altogether necessary. But how could one hope to be saved without repenting of his sins? Again you could surely agree that one should repent. You would probably agree that it would likewise be impossible to be saved without confessing Christ. But what about baptism? You might be willing to compromise on that by saying that it is necessary only in the sense of showing that one is saved. Where does the Bible say that? Christ said that one must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). Peter said to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Saul was told to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). How could we think it would be possible then to bypass that command? We just can't.

Please do not allow man to deceive you by telling you that

# **False Teaching on Conversion, No. 2**

In our last lesson we dealt with some false teaching on conversion. Why take the time to do that? Because there are so many false teachers, and therefore there are numerous things taught concerning conversion that are not in harmony with the word of God. Jesus dealt with false teachers and their doctrines of His time. So did Paul, Peter, and others. We are also confronted with them in our time, and we must deal with them, showing that what they teach is error. It is necessary to rebuke them and also to inform good and honest people of the truth on these matters, lest they be deceived. And finally, we want one and all to know that we who have the truth have no fear of error. God's word is more than able to meet any and all false teaching. We do not say this in a haughty spirit, but with full confidence that the truth of God will always win out in the end.

So far we have pointed out that the teaching that one can be converted and saved through "faith only" is a man-made doctrine. The Bible teaches that salvation is by faith, but not by faith only. One must hear the word of God for faith to be produced in his heart (Romans 10:17), but then that faith must be strong enough to lead him to repent of his sins, to confess Christ as the Son of God, and to be baptized for the remission of his sins (Mark 16:16; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38), to live daily for the Lord (Acts 2:42), and to be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10). Faith only, mental acceptance of Christ only, will not do this. Therefore it is dead and it is a false doctrine.

Next we observed that although the Christian is commanded

to pray, and indeed it is one of the great blessings of the Christian, it is not possible for a sinner to merely bow his head somewhere and ask the Lord to forgive him, and expect to be saved in this way. There is a big difference in being a sinner and in being a Christian. There is the matter of one's relation with God. A sinner is not a child of God, and God is therefore not his spiritual Father. The Christian has a different relationship. He is a child of God, and God is his spiritual Father. That means that the sinner must obey God to become a Christian before he is in a position to pray. As a sinner he is not on praying terms with God (Isaiah 59:1,2). He cannot call upon God as being his Father because God is not his Father. He cannot be saved by merely praying to God. The Bible nowhere teaches that a sinner may be saved by prayer only. Instead, we read, "*Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him*" (John 9:31). If you are one of the many who claim that you were saved by asking God to forgive you of your sins, then you have been deceived. God wants you to obey Him. To do so you must believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. That is the only way one can be saved.

Next, we want to think about the popular teaching that God speaks directly to man today to reveal His will. It is amazing the number of people in our time who really believe that God speaks directly to them, separate and apart from the written word. In spite of this, let me say that based on the teaching of God's word, this is emphatically untrue — it is a false doctrine. To begin with, God has already spoken (Hebrews 1:1,2), and He has spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 17:5). What the Lord has said, and what other inspired men of God have said, has been written down and preserved in a book that we call the Bible. The

New Testament portion of the Bible in particular reveals God's will for man today. It is all inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17). All things that pertain to life and godliness have been given in that book (2 Peter 1:3). And finally, it is through a study of God's written word, or by hearing it faithfully preached, that faith is produced. Paul says, "*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). How does faith come? He says by hearing the word of God. If it is the perfect law (James 1:25), if it furnishes man to every good work (1 Timothy 3:16,17), if the Lord has given us through His word all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), then why would any additional revelation be necessary to produce faith, or for any other purpose?

Those who teach that God is still giving special revelation tell us that God speaks directly to them and to others. They speak of a wee small voice, of dreams, of visions, of being led to speak prophecies, etc. Where does the Bible teach that these things would happen? If there are special revelations in our time, then that means the Bible is not complete. That leaves us unsure and uncertain of what God really wants us to do. Is this true? A thousand times, No!

We affirm that the Bible is God's word, and when the New Testament was completed and given to man, divine revelation came to an end. There has been no additional revelation, written or otherwise, since the last part of the first century. If God has thus given us His complete will, what would be the purpose of giving more? If He should speak to someone, that would make it necessary for Him to speak to everyone, or else He would be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35).

You will note that those who claim that God has spoken



directly to them will always claim that God asked them to do something that is in conflict with the existing scripture. In the first place, the very fact that they claim to be receiving divine revelation, apart from the written word, conflicts with the scripture. In the next place, they have the Lord speaking to them as a denominational person, thus upholding man-made doctrines and practices, which cause division, and this is in conflict with the scripture. And finally, they have the Lord giving them a message that is in conflict with the written word. That means that in three ways the written word is contradicted. If the Lord was speaking to someone today, would He contradict what He has already said?

What would be the purpose of the Lord speaking to a person of our day, separate and apart from the written word? He already has revealed the plan of salvation, the church, and all things that pertain to life and godliness. Really, when it comes right down to it, there is actually no reason for any new revelation, and indeed there has been no new revelation. Should the Lord decide to give man some new revelation, He would give it to all alike.

The truth is, those who claim to be receiving messages from the Lord are usually very emotional, and on thinking about God and various things, all of a sudden they begin to conclude that their thoughts have been inspired of God, and in this way God is speaking to them. But of course this is not true. There are those who see things and hear things, or at least imagine that they do, and they conclude that this is God speaking to them. They could just as easily conclude that it is Satan speaking to them, and for sure it is Satan's teaching.

When we turn back to the scripture, we are told that God works today through earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). That is, God uses human beings, those who are willing to obey Him, to

carry forth His message. And as we have already noted, this message comes from the pages of the written word. The gospel is revealed there, and on hearing the gospel, and on obeying it, the Lord has commanded that it be taken to others (Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:19,20).

Even in the days of the early church, prior to the giving of the New Testament, neither the Spirit nor the Lord spoke to sinners directly. They never took it upon themselves to take the gospel message to the lost, but rather directed a man to do that. For instance, in Acts 8 the angel asked Philip to go preach to the Ethiopian eunuch. Why didn't the angel go? Because that was the work of an earthen vessel, a human being, a gospel preacher. Again in Acts 9 we read of the Lord appearing to Saul, but when he wanted to know what to do to be saved, the Lord told him to go into the city and it would be told him what he should do. Ananias, a gospel preacher, was sent to tell him and he obeyed the Lord. But why didn't the Lord tell him? Because that was not His job (Mark 16:15,16). That also means that if the Lord, or the Spirit, were to appear to someone today they wouldn't tell that person what to do to be saved.

Paul said that he had preached the one pure gospel to the people of his day. Then he added, *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8,9). That means that if someone today claims a special revelation, or preaches a gospel that differs to what Paul preached, then he will be cursed of the Lord.

Christ said that we should not add to His word or subtract

from it in any way. If we do, the plagues written in God's word will be added to us, and our name will be taken out of the book of life (Revelation 22:18,19).

The whole problem here is lack of respect for authority, the Lord's authority. Christ said that all power or authority in heaven and earth belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). When we respect Him and His authority, we will accept His word, and do what He says, and that will be final. Those who go off after the theory of special revelations do not respect the Lord and His word. They do not even know what it teaches. If they did, they would know that they are in conflict with what it says.

I ask you to come back to God's word for the truth. It is only through a study of His revealed written word that you can know what conversion is and what it is not. God wants you to be saved, and has revealed His will to inform you what to do to be saved. That is conversion based on the teaching of God's word. Anything else is in opposition to that.

I want to encourage you to be a Christian, a member of the church of Christ, as set forth in God's holy book, the Bible. Please don't put it off. Do it now.

# The Conversion of the Pentecostians

Let us continue now with our series of studies on the general theme of conversion. We are interested in this subject because it has to do with our salvation, and where we will spend eternity. Thus far we have tried to show what it is, and what it is not, and likewise to study some matters that are related to it.

Conversion itself simply means to turn, to change, to be transformed, to be made over, to become a new creature, etc. When we turn to the book of Acts of the New Testament, we are able to read of eleven cases of conversion. By going through each one, and seeing what they did to be converted, I think we will be able to clearly see what led to conversion, what is involved, and what results from it.

We will begin our study of these eleven cases of conversion by taking the first one that we come to in the book of Acts. Then we will go to the others until we have completed all of them.

In Acts 2 we read of the conversion of the Pentecostians. Prior to the day of Pentecost, on which day these people were converted, Christ had died, had been buried, had been resurrected, and had ascended back to the Father in Heaven. Even before all of this, He had taught and trained the Apostles to carry on after His departure. He had asked them to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they had been endued with power from on high. Being mere men, they would forget many of the things that the Lord had taught them. Neither did they understand many of the things that He had said to them. So Christ promised to send the

Holy Spirit upon them (John 16:7) to guide them into all truth, and to call to their remembrance all the things that He had taught them (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit would also give them the power to speak in other languages. They were unlearned people. They didn't know the different languages of the world and wouldn't have the time to learn them, and neither would it be wise to try to speak to so many who spoke in so many languages through translators. The people that they spoke to on the day of Pentecost were amazed when they heard the Apostles speaking to them in their own languages. And finally, through the Holy Spirit, they would be able to perform miracles to convince the people that they were not false teachers but that they were from God. We read in Acts 2:43, *"Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the Apostles."* Keep in mind that the Lord promised to send the Spirit upon the Apostles only, and only the Apostles received that power on the day of Pentecost, and only the Apostles were able to perform miracles on that day.

So the Lord gathered His Apostles around Him, just before His return to heaven, and said, *"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:46-49). We also read how Jesus said, *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). The record goes on to say that the Lord then

ascended up into heaven, and the Apostles returned to Jerusalem where Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas as an Apostle.

Beginning with Acts 2:1 we read, *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:1-4). The day of Pentecost here has reference to the Jewish feast day of Pentecost. It always came fifty days after the Passover, and that means that Pentecost fell on Sunday, or the first day of the week. Please keep that in mind as we continue our study. But realize that Christ had just died on the cross a few days earlier and although He had taken the old law out with His death, thus replacing it with His own law (John 1:17; Hebrews 10:9,10), the people in general at this point were still following the Law of Moses. So a large number from all over the world had come to Jerusalem at this time to celebrate Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost was chosen as the day on which the gospel would be preached for the first time, the day on which the church would be established. It would be a day in which Jews from all over the world would be gathered at this time, and it would be an ideal time for the gospel to be preached so that from this very first day the gospel could begin to be taken to all parts of the world. The Lord did not intend for the day of Pentecost to take on special significance, and for His people to be known as Pentecostals, etc. There are those who claim that they have

received the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did on the day of Pentecost, and that is why they refer to themselves as Pentecostals. But they are mistaken. They have been deceived. Had they received the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did, then instead of using the name Pentecostal, they would be rejecting that name. We never read of the Apostles, or any other Christians of New Testament times, referring to themselves or others as Pentecostals. That means that those who use such a name or title today are in error in doing so.

The Apostles were the ones who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they were the only ones who received it. This was because they were the only ones who received the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To show that they had received it, they began to speak in other tongues, or languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance. There are those today who claim to be able to speak in tongues. The problem is, they were never promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and therefore have never received it, and consequently they cannot speak miraculously in other languages. They only make silly sounds, but they do not speak in tongues or languages as did the Apostles.

There were people gathered there that day from all parts of the world, and they were amazed when they heard these unlearned men speaking in their languages. At first, they thought that they were drunk, but Peter assured them that this was not the case, since it was about 9:00 o'clock in the morning, a time that even those who drink do not usually get drunk. Rather, he informed the audience that what was taking place on that day was in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and whosoever should call on the name of the Lord would be saved (Acts 2:15-21). The

prophecy of Joel may be read in Joel 2:28-32. Notice that he specified that this would happen in the last days. The last days began with the death of Christ upon the cross, and we have been living in the last days since that time. This is a period of time between the Lord's death and His return.

It was prophesied that the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. That is, people of all nationalities would be blessed through the coming of the Spirit. The Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they would take the lead in taking the gospel to all the world. All who would obey God would be saved and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he prophesied that the day would come that whosoever called on the name of the Lord would be saved. As we read through Acts 2, and the other cases of conversion, we observe that this simply meant that by hearing the gospel, and obeying it, one was calling on the Lord to save him, that is, through his obedience he was asking the Lord to honor His promise to save him.

Acts 2:22-36 tells us that Peter and the Apostles preached to this great gathering. They were Jews and unbelievers in Christ. Some of them had taken part in the crucifixion of Christ. Therefore, Peter went back to the beginning to show how it had been prophesied that Christ would come. Then he showed how He came to fulfill those prophecies, and how He had performed miracles to convince the people that He was the Son of God. Then he told them of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, and how He had returned to the Father in heaven, to sit down on David's throne to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. He concluded by saying, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36).



The record then says, *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation’”* (Acts 2:37-40).

Now what happened? The gospel of Christ was preached to these people. They were convinced that Christ came from God, was crucified, was buried, was resurrected, and ascended back to the Father in heaven. Being pricked in their hearts, or becoming believers, they wanted to know what else they should do. Peter told them that since they now believed that they should repent and be baptized in the name of Christ, or by His authority, for the remission of sins, and then they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then what happened? Acts 2:41 says, *“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”* In Acts 2:47 it says that, *“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”* The last part of the chapter also emphasizes how they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ teaching, sharing their material goods with each other.

That is the story of the conversion of the Pentecostians. Briefly, they heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, were baptized for the remission of their sins, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was non-miraculous. In doing this, the Lord added the saved to His church. No, it was not a Pentecostal

church, or some other church, but it was Christ's church, the church of Christ.

My friends, if you will do what those people did at Pentecost, then the Lord will save you in the same way, and add you to the same church, His church.

# Conversion of Those at Solomon's Porch

In our last lesson we studied the conversion of the Pentecostians. Being the first case of conversion recorded in Acts, we were especially interested in the background that led up to it, and then what actually happened. We observed how Christ had died on the cross to provide salvation for all mankind. He was buried, resurrected, and then ascended back to the Father in heaven. By His death on the cross, He not only died for the sins of man, but He took out of the way the old law to give His own law (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9,10). He asked His Apostles to remain in the city of Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit, at which time they would preach the gospel and the church would be established.

We also learned that the Lord planned it so that all of this would take place on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish feast day, which would bring Jews together from all over the world. As far as the name Pentecost was concerned, it was of no significance. The important things were the fact that it was a day, the first day of the week, that brought together a large number of people from many nations, which would make it possible for the gospel to be spread to all parts of the world.

So Pentecost came and the people were gathered there in the city of Jerusalem. It was on the first day of the week, or Sunday, in approximately A.D. 33. The last days had begun, having begun with the death of Christ. The Apostles were there. Then the Holy Spirit was poured out on them to enable them to remember all that Jesus had taught them, so that no mistake would be

made. They had the ability to preach in other languages to enable them to speak to the local people in their own tongues, and to perform miracles to make it possible for them to convince the people that they were the true servants of God. Then they began to preach the gospel, assuring them that what was happening was in fulfillment of prophecies that had been made a long time before. They also pointed to Christ as one who had come in fulfillment of prophecies, had performed miracles to prove that He was the Son of God, had been crucified, buried, and resurrected, having appeared before many, and then He had returned to the Father in heaven to sit down on David's throne to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. With this they were cut to the heart, or pricked in their heart, which means that they were brought to the point of belief, and so they asked what they should do. Based on their faith, and their desire to know what they should do to obey the Lord, *"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). The record goes on to say that about 3,000 of them gladly received the word and were baptized *"...and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:41,47).

As you can see from the foregoing, it is rather obvious what took place in the conversion of the Pentecostians. They were lost, sinners, some of them having taken part in the Lord's crucifixion, but then things changed. The gospel was preached to them, they heard it, they believed it, they repented of their sins, they were baptized for the remission of their sins, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord added them to His church. Now they are different. They are believers in Christ. They are saved. They are members of the Lord's church. Not only that, but we are told, *"And they continued steadfastly in the*

*apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42). What happened? They were converted.

Now we want to go on to the second case of conversion as recorded in Acts 3. This is the conversion of those at Solomon's Porch. The record says, "*Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them — walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed"* (Acts 3:1-11).

Before going on to the preaching and the conversion part of it, let me pause here to make a few comments. The Lord had said to His Apostles before His ascension to heaven that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). They have now preached the gospel in Jerusalem, namely on the day of Pentecost, but that was

not to be the last time by any means. The Apostles were still in Jerusalem. With Christ having just shortly before taken away the Law of Moses, still the masses are not aware of this. The temple continued to be the center of daily life. Cripples would come there to find sympathy and help from those who passed by. Even Peter and John would find this a good place to preach and teach God's word.

On their way up to the temple, at about 3:00 P.M., a lame man asked Peter and John for alms. Peter explained that he had no money, but he would give him according to that which he had. He then commanded this man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise and walk. He took him by the hand to reassure him, and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. Then he leaped and walked around and jumped for joy, and praised God. The people seeing him, recognized him, and were amazed with what had happened.

As you recall, the Lord sent the power of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles to enable them to perform miracles. So this was Peter, one of the Apostles, who miraculously healed this man in the name of Jesus Christ. Why did he heal this man? To prove that he was God's servant and to give him and John the opportunity to preach the gospel to the people that would be attracted by this. But notice again that a man was healed who had been a cripple from his mother's womb. The people there knew this, and they also knew that when he was healed that it was genuine. Furthermore he was healed immediately, there on the spot, for everyone to see. All of this was far different to what we hear and see today. Those who claim to perform miracles deal with those who have sicknesses and illness of an internal nature. In other words, they do not perform the kind of miracles that Christ and

the Apostles did, miracles that left no doubt. The difference is that Christ and the Apostles performed miracles, but those today who claim to be able to perform miracles are impostors and fakes. Peter and John had no money, but those who claim to be miracle workers today are wealthy. Only the blind would follow such people.

Continuing the story of Acts 3, we read that after the lame man had been healed, and a lot of people took note of what had happened, they came together in a place called Solomon's porch, and there Peter took advantage of the situation and preached Christ to them. He began by saying, *"Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"* (Acts 3:12). Then he told them how the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob had sent Christ but they, the Jews, had delivered Him up to Pilate to be crucified. He explained that they had done all of that in ignorance, as had their rulers. After pointing out how all things that God had said through the prophets had been fulfilled concerning Christ, he said to them, *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."* But that wasn't all. Peter continues, and finally in Acts 4:1-4, we read the results: *"Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."*

What happened here? A man was miraculously healed, and

this gave Peter and John the opportunity to preach to a large number of people. Christ is preached to them, and then they are encouraged to repent and be converted that their sins might be blotted out, that the times of refreshing might follow. Isn't this almost the identical language that Peter used on the day of Pentecost, when he said, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38)? The only difference is that in Acts 3:19 he substitutes the word "converted" for the word "baptism" of Acts 2:38, "...*that your sins be blotted out*" instead of "*the remission of sins,*" and "*the times of refreshing*" instead of "*the gift of the Holy Spirit*". Really he is saying the same thing. Consequently, many of those who heard the word believed, repented, and were converted, or baptized, that their sins might be blotted out, or that they might have the remission of their sins, to receive the times of refreshing, or the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So we close this lesson with the plea that you do likewise. If you will, the Lord will save you and add you to His church.



# Conversion of the Samaritans

We have thus far noted the first two cases of conversion. The first one was the conversion of the Pentecostians. This particular case was most interesting, because it was not only the first case listed in Acts, but it also represented the first time that the gospel was preached, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the establishment of the Lord's church. The Apostles were the preachers in this case, and they preached the gospel to a large gathering. As a result some three thousand believed, repented of their sins, were baptized for the remission of their sins, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time that they were saved the Lord added them to His church. In this case the people were not saved by faith only, baptism only, or by any other one particular thing. Although the gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to those who would obey the Lord, they were not given the miraculous power of the Spirit. And so that is basically what happened in the conversion of the Pentecostians.

The second case of conversion dealt with those at Solomon's Porch. It was also in Jerusalem, a short while after the day of Pentecost. Peter and John were going up to the Temple and at the gate they came by a crippled man. Peter healed him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. All the people having seen what happened, it opened up an opportunity for Peter to speak to a large number gathered in what was called Solomon's Porch. As on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached Christ as the Son of God and then encouraged the people to repent and be converted, or to be baptized, that their sins might be blotted out, or might be

remitted, and the times of refreshing, or the gift of the Holy Spirit would follow. Actually, he told them to do the same thing that he told the people on the day of Pentecost, but said it with different words. Many of those who heard the word, believed. That is, they did what Peter said they should do. Some people would get on the statement that *“many heard the word and believed”*, and try to conclude from that that they were saved by faith only. The fact that the record says that they heard the word and believed, indicates that they obeyed God, and as the people on the day of Pentecost, they were saved and added to the church. Christ commanded that, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). That means when one really believes the Lord, he will do what the Lord has commanded. When one refuses to believe, or fails to act on his faith, then that means he is considered to be an unbeliever, and Jesus said, *“...he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

We are now ready to go to the third case of conversion listed in the book of Acts, and this is the conversion of the Samaritans. As you will recall, the Lord had commanded the Apostles in Acts 1:8 to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. We have already seen how the gospel was preached in Jerusalem, again and again, and of course it was preached in Judea. Then in Acts 6 we have the Apostles burdened down with so much work that even some of the widows were being neglected in the daily ministrations. *“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continual-*

ly to prayer and to the ministry of the word'” (Acts 6:2-4). Seven were chosen, “whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6). Now you will note that one of the things they stipulated that each of the seven should have, was that he be full of the Holy Spirit. Then notice again that once the seven had been chosen, the Apostles laid their hands on them. Why did they do that? So that they might have the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit. This then would give them the power to perform miracles, to speak in tongues, etc., but they could not pass this power on to others as the Apostles could. Later, we'll see that this was the case in Samaria.

Among those seven men chosen was one by the name of Philip. Eventually he went down to Samaria to preach the gospel. That means that after the gospel was preached in Jerusalem and Judea, it was now going to Samaria.

Let us read the text that tells of the conversion of the Samaritans. The record says, “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the king-*

*dom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:5-12).*

In this particular study we are going to concentrate on the conversion of the Samaritans, and we'll save Simon the Sorcerer till next time. As you will observe from the reading, Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ to those people. He performed miracles to convince them that he was preaching the truth of God. Among those miracles he cast out unclean spirits, healed those who had palsy, and healed the lame. There may have been others healed of various things, but at least these are mentioned. As a result of this, there was great joy in the city. Not only so, but even though Simon had been there impressing them with his supposed power, they were more impressed with that which Philip was able to do. On hearing Christ preached, as well as the kingdom of God, and seeing the miracles which evidently convinced them that this man was sent from God, they believed and were baptized, both men and women.

There are several things in this story that I would like for us to pay particular attention to. First, Philip preached Christ to these people. But in preaching Christ, he taught them the commands of Christ, which resulted in belief and baptism. Some of our religious friends today tell us that we ought to preach Christ and leave others alone, that we should preach Christ instead of talking about baptism, the church, and other such things. But evidently Philip didn't know that. Second, Philip preached to the Samaritans concerning the kingdom of God. That is, he taught them about the Lord's church, the one true church, the church of Christ. That's all he could have taught them about, because there was no other church at that time. Why shouldn't that be true today? Third, he taught them concerning the name of Jesus

Christ. That would have included Christ Himself, His authority, and His commands. Fourth, they understood what they should do to be saved because the record says that they believed and were baptized. That's exactly what Christ said one should do to be saved. He said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). Of course if they knew to do this, and they had been taught concerning the church, then they would likewise understand that upon obeying the Lord that they would be added to His church. Fifth, it says that both men and women obeyed the Lord. Nothing is said about infants or children. Why? Because they were not subject to the gospel.

Continuing, we read, *"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:14-17). Now that we have seen what happened, let's ask a question: Why did these Samaritan Christians need the laying on of hands measure of the Holy Spirit? Evidently this would enable them to work in their area in spreading the gospel. With the power of the Holy Spirit they could prove to those they would be preaching to that they were of God. You see, at that time they did not have the New Testament in written form, so they had to depend on such helps in preaching. But another question: Why didn't Philip lay his hands on them that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit? Although he had received the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit from the Apostles, he could not pass it on to others. That's why it was necessary for Peter and John to come

down to do it. But keep in mind that Christians in general, even in those days, did not receive the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. There are those who tell us that all should receive such power. The Samaritans were baptized in the name of the Lord, and therefore they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, but they had not received the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. Even when Peter and John came, they did not lay their hands on everyone. They didn't lay their hands on Simon the Sorcerer, even though he had also obeyed the gospel, and there may have been others that they did not lay their hands on. This power was not for everyone, but for only a chosen few who would properly use it.

In summing all of this up, what really happened in the conversion of the Samaritans? Philip went and preached the gospel to them, they believed and were baptized, and therefore they were saved and the Lord added them to His church. As far as their conversion was concerned, that was it, and of course that is exactly what we found that the people did in the other cases of conversion. Not only so, but if people do that today, the Lord will save them and add them to His church, just as He did with them.

# Conversion of Simon the Sorcerer

As we continue our studies on New Testament conversion, please turn to Act 8 for our lesson at this time. We are going to be studying the conversion of Simon the Sorcerer.

In our last lesson we considered the conversion of the Samaritans. The Apostles had chosen seven men to assist them with their work. Then they laid their hands on them that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to perform miracles, speak in other languages, etc., so that they might be able to convince the people that they were of God. Among that number was Philip, and in Acts 8 we read that he went to Samaria, preached Christ and the kingdom of God among them, performed miracles to demonstrate the power of God, and as a result they believed and were baptized. According to Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:47 the Lord saved them and added them to His church.

Even though Philip had received the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit, he was unable to pass this power on to his converts. The Apostles heard about the conversions taking place among the Samaritans, so Peter and John were sent, *“Who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 8:15-17). Allow me here to point out a few things in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious that it was one thing to be baptized to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, as

recorded in Acts 2:38, and as these people had done, and it was something else to receive the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit that came only by the laying on of the Apostles' hands. Although they had been baptized, and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, or the ordinary measure of the Holy Spirit, which all receive when they obey the gospel, the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them, and neither did they receive it until the Apostles had come to pray for them, and to lay their hands on them. According to Acts 8:18, when this was done, they received the Holy Spirit.

For the benefit of people today who think it is possible to have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, let me point out some things while we are thinking about the conversion of the Samaritans and the things that happened after their conversion. First, only the Apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost because Christ had made the promise to them, and to them only, that He would send the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon them (John 16:13). So they received that power on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). If you will read carefully all the way through Acts 1 and 2 you will see it was only the Apostles who received the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and it was only the Apostles who spoke in other languages and performed miracles. Now in Acts 6 and Acts 8 we are told that it was the Apostles, and the Apostles only, who laid their hands on the seven, and on the Samaritans, that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. But notice that with the seven, they were chosen on the basis that they already were full of the Holy Spirit. They had received the gift of the Holy Spirit by obeying the gospel (Acts 2:38), but it was non-miraculous. Therefore, it was necessary for the Apostles to lay their hands on them that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy



Spirit. The same was true likewise with the people of Samaria. They had believed and had been baptized, thus receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them until Peter and John arrived and prayed for them, and laid their hands on them, that they might have this power. So there are three distinct measures of the Holy Spirit revealed in these settings. First, the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to speak in other languages, to perform miracles, and to lay their hands on others that they might have miraculous powers. Second, the seven, and certain of the Samaritans, received the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit. This gave them power to speak in other languages and to perform miracles, but they could not pass this power on to their converts. And third, and final, all others who obeyed God received the ordinary measure of the Holy Spirit, which carried no miraculous power with it.

Now what about today? Since there are no Apostles, and inasmuch as they were the only ones who had the power to lay their hands on others that they might have the miraculous power of the Spirit, and since the ones who received the laying on of the Apostles' hands were unable to lay their hands on others that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit, and inasmuch as none of them live today, then there are no Christians today who have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit. Any who would claim to have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit are fakes and are attempting to deceive people into thinking that they have powers that they do not possess. They are like Simon the Sorcerer, wanting to be recognized as some great person. But there are any number of ways to show that they are fakes and anyone who will go to God's word and study it will be convinced of that. All people today who obey

God receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the non-miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit. We have no need of miracles in our time since we have the word of God to support the fact that we are teaching the truth, and faith is produced by hearing the word (Romans 10:17).

There was another man in Samaria who was converted. He stands out distinctly from the others, because of who he was, and because of the developments that followed. Before continuing, let's read the story as it appears in the scriptures: "*But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done*" (Acts 8:9-13). Then the record goes on to tell of the Apostles coming to lay their hands on the Samaritans. Of course, you will observe that they did not lay their hands on him, although he had also believed and had been baptized as they had done. Evidently the Apostles did not lay their hands on all Christians that they might have this power. It was just like back in Jerusalem. Of all the Christians that were there, only seven were chosen to receive the laying on of the Apostles' hands and the power of the Holy Spirit. So they had to choose those who were sincere, had a stable background, were of good report, etc. If the wrong person had been given this power, it could have been misused.

Continuing the story, we read, *“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’ Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me’”* (Acts 8:18-24).

From this account we observe that Simon was a sorcerer or a type of magician of his day. He was able to bewitch or to deceive the people of Samaria. He was able to charm them, to fascinate them, and use witchcraft on them, passing himself off as having the great power of God, and they looked on him as being one who was great. All were under his spell, from the least to the greatest. But then Philip came and preached Christ to them and seeing that he had greater power, the very power of God, they believed and were baptized. Likewise, Simon saw and heard these things, and he believed and was baptized, and according to Mark 16:16 he was saved. But with his background, and seeing Peter and John laying their hands on the Samaritans that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit, he was tempted to bribe Peter with money to give him that power. Evidently this was one of the reasons why Peter and John did not lay their hands on him in the beginning. They knew his background and that he would be tempted to use the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain his position over the people as being someone great. But Peter

rebuked him, telling him that the power of God could not be bought with money, that his heart was not right with God, that he had an impure motive, and that he needed to repent of his sin and pray to God that he might be forgiven. This he did, even asking that Peter pray for him.

Several things need to be pointed out in regard to Simon's conversion. First, he heard the gospel. He believed it and was baptized. Therefore he was saved and added to the church. Peter acknowledged this, and when Simon sinned, instead of condemning him and saying that he had not actually obeyed God earlier, rather he recognized that he was an erring Christian, and exhorted him to repent of his sins, and pray to God for forgiveness that he might be restored to the position of being a faithful Christian. This also teaches the fact that it is possible for one who has become a Christian to sin, or to fall away, and to be lost unless he repents of his sins and asks the Lord for forgiveness that he might once more be accepted back as a faithful child of God. In the case of Simon, he asked Peter to pray for him that he might be forgiven. On this basis then we assume that Simon was accepted back as a faithful child of God. Still, there is no indication that Peter and John ever laid their hands on him that he might have the power of the Holy Spirit. With his background and weakness it would not have been wise for him to have such miraculous power.

What about you? Are you a Christian? Are you a member of the church of Christ? If not, then you are lost and without hope. As we study these cases of conversion, note that they heard the gospel; they believed it, meaning that they became believers in God, and Christ as the Son of God; they repented of their sins; they were baptized that they might have the remission of their

# Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch

In our last lesson, we gave our attention to the conversion of Simon the Sorcerer. Before that, we had considered the conversions of the Samaritans, those at Solomon's Porch, and the Pentecostians. In all of these we noted that there was always a gospel preacher present, he preached the gospel, the hearers believed it, repented of their sins, were baptized for the remission of their sins, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were added to the Lord's church. We will be taking a close look at others who were converted through the book of Acts to see if they followed this same pattern or if there was some variation to this procedure.

In this lesson we are going to return to Acts 8 for the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Before making any further comments, first we will take time to read this story. We'll begin with Acts 8:26-39: *"Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guide me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The*

*place in the Scripture which he read was this: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth. So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing."*

Now let's go back and make some observations. First, notice that Philip was in Samaria where he was experiencing great success in preaching the gospel. In spite of that, the angel of the Lord spoke to him, and asked him to go down south on the way that goes from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. Why did the angel ask him to leave Samaria? There he was able to preach to a large number of people, but the angel was directing him to go to preach to one man. Why didn't the angel leave Philip in Samaria to continue the work he was doing, and then the angel himself could have gone to that man who was traveling through the desert? The angel did not go because we are told that we now have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). In other words, the Lord has given human beings the responsibility of preaching the gospel, and He intends for them to

preach it. It is something they can do, and they must do it, if it is to be done. The angel in this case could direct Philip to go to this man, but in the end it would be up to Philip to deliver the gospel message. Of course today, having the New Testament in written form, and with the church having reached maturity, it is unnecessary to have such helps as the angel gave Philip, performing miracles, or speaking in other languages. Those who are depending on miraculous helps will wait in vain, being deceived.

There was a very important man out there on that road. He was from Ethiopia, a treasurer of great authority under Queen Candace of the Ethiopians. Being a proselyte of Judaism, and being a very religious-minded man, he had made a very long, tiring, dangerous journey all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. Not only that, but even on his way home he was so dedicated to God and his religion that as he was riding along in his chariot, he was reading from the Old Testament scripture. What a fine, sincere, good man he must have been!

Philip obeyed the angel, and went out there on that desert road, and sure enough, there was the eunuch riding along in his chariot. The Spirit then asked Philip to go near and join himself to this chariot. As Philip ran toward him, and hearing him read from Isaiah 53, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. Then the eunuch responded by asking how it would be possible for him to understand, unless someone should guide him. Here was a man minding his own business, traveling, and privately reading the word of God. He could have resented being bothered, not wanting any rider. And especially, he could have rejected anyone wanting to talk to him about religious matters. He could have become angry at the very idea of changing religions. But this was not the case with this man. He had an open

mind, a willingness to learn, a desire to be right, a longing to obey God, even if it meant changing his religion. How wonderful it would be if we had more people like that in our own time. But let's turn our attention briefly to Philip. Here was a man who created a teaching opportunity. He ran to the chariot. He was not lazy, disinterested, and reasoning that this man perhaps would not be interested in what he would have to say to him. Rather, he was enthusiastic and eager to get to this man. He put forth a real effort to avail himself of the opportunity before him to meet this man to teach him. Likewise, we need more Christians like that today. Notice that when Philip heard the eunuch reading from the scripture, he took this as an opening to speak up, and to ask him if he understood what he was reading. When the eunuch responded by suggesting that he needed guidance, inviting him to come into the chariot to sit with him, Philip immediately did so.

The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53, a chapter dealing with Christ, His suffering, and His death on the cross. Philip then asked the eunuch if he knew who the prophet was talking about. The eunuch didn't know, asking if it was of the writer Isaiah, or of some other man. Again, this gave Philip an opportunity to teach him. He then began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. What did he preach? Many tell us today that we should preach only Jesus instead of getting involved in condemning sin, false teaching, and division. They tell us that we should not spend a lot of time preaching about what one must do to be saved or emphasizing the importance of the church. They mean by this that we should refrain altogether from preaching on doctrine or the teachings of Jesus and concentrate on the person of Jesus, His birth, His life, His miracles, His works, His sacrifice, etc. To them that is preaching Jesus. But Philip preached Jesus. If we can find what he preached perhaps we can determine



what it means to preach Jesus. For sure, Philip preached Christ, His coming, His life, the fact that He was the Son of God and the saviour of mankind, but he also preached the commands of Jesus. We know that he did so by what follows. Here was a man who didn't know about Christ or His teachings, but within a short time he not only knows about Him, but he becomes a believer, he obeys Christ, and he goes on his way as a Christian. We must also preach Christ today just as Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch. That is, we are to preach the coming of Christ, Christ the Son of God and Saviour, His death, burial, and resurrection, and His return to the Father in heaven, but we are also to preach His teachings, the plan of salvation, His church, the kind of worship that He wants us to engage in, and the Christian life. Whatever Christ taught, then we are to preach the same today. If we limit our preaching, and exclude the teachings of Jesus from our preaching, we are not really preaching Christ, and therefore we will be condemned for it.

Going back to our text, we are told that on hearing the things that Philip had to say, and *"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'"* On hearing of Christ and His teaching, and understanding what he should do, when they came to some water, he wanted to know if he could obey the Lord. Philip replied that he could if he believed with all of his heart. Then the eunuch confessed that he believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. At this point, they stopped the chariot, both got out, both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him, and then they both came up out of the water. What happened? The eunuch heard the word of God, which produced faith (Romans 10:17), and then he confessed Christ as being the Son of God, and on the basis of his

faith and his confession of Christ, he was baptized. Christ had said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). Nothing is said of repentance as such, but we know that he repented, inasmuch as he was willing to give up Judaism to accept the religion of Christ. So the Lord saved him and added him to His church. We know that this followed because we are told that the Lord adds the saved to His church (Acts 2:47). Also note that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water so that Philip could baptize him. Why? Because baptism is a burial in water (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). Note again that water was out there in the desert. Sometimes we are asked what a person would do if he wanted to be saved, but he was out in a desert where there was no water to be baptized. Such people are trying to suggest that in that case one could be saved without baptism, and of course, they are implying that if you could be saved in the desert without baptism you could be saved anywhere without it. But there was water there, and whether there is water there or not, we must comply with the Lord's commands if we are to be saved.

Finally, the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. The rejoicing came after he had obeyed the Lord. Not only that, but being as zealous as he was, now that he had become a Christian, surely he lost none of his zeal, but no doubt he went home to preach Christ to his own people and to plant the cause of Christ in his land.

Have you followed the example of the Ethiopian eunuch?

# Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

So far we have taken a look at several conversions as recorded in the book of Acts. Some have dealt with a group and others have focused on one particular individual. Regardless of whether it was one or many under consideration, the same pattern was followed. There was the preacher, the subject or subjects, the gospel was preached or taught, it was believed, there was repentance, there was baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit was received, and the Lord added the saved to the church.

In our last lesson we considered the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. It would be difficult for one to read that account in Acts 8 and come away not understanding what is involved in conversion, or what one must do to be saved. It is so plain and so simple. Philip was eager to preach Christ to him and the eunuch was eager to know God's will. Consequently, just as soon as he learned the truth, although he was of another religion, he immediately expressed faith in Christ and obeyed the gospel. What a wonderful example for us today.

Let's continue now with a study of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. First, we'll read the story in Acts 9, and then we'll make some comments about it. Beginning with the first verse, we read, *"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell*

*to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.' Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*

*Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:1-22).*

The foregoing was a lengthy reading, but I wanted you to hear it to appreciate the conversion that took place in this man. From persecutor of Christians to that of being a persecuted Christian, that's the story of Saul, or Paul as he was later called. What a thrilling story to read, and it should encourage each one of us to want to put Christ first in our lives.

Now let's go back and take a little more time to consider the highlights of Saul's conversion. First, here was a man, according to the scriptures, who was born of Jewish parents in Tarsus, which would be southern Turkey of today, well-educated, and a Roman citizen. He was brought up as a Pharisee, following the Law of Moses, and was more than zealous for his religion. He viewed Christianity as a threat to Judaism. As a result, he sought to persecute Christians. After doing so in the Jerusalem area, he obtained letters from the high priest in Jerusalem to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any Christians in that part of the country, whether men or women, he might bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem to persecute them. He was serious about his religion and although he thought he was doing right, as he said later in Acts 26:9, of course he was wrong. You have to admire him though for his courage, zeal, and determination.

Having obtained the letter, along with others, he leaves for Damascus. On the way something would happen that would change his life so that he would never be the same again. We are

told that, somewhere along the way, suddenly a light shined around about him, a light from heaven, and as he fell to the earth, he heard a voice saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" And he wanted to know who it was, and the Lord said, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*" So the Lord lets him know that in persecuting Christians, in persecuting the church, that he was in reality persecuting Him. Then the Lord let him know that in doing so he was only hurting himself. He illustrated it by calling to his mind a mean animal kicking against goads, or spikes, and thereby only hurting himself by his own kicking. So it would be with Saul if he continued to persecute His people. Then Saul, trembling and astonished said, "*Lord, what do you want me to do?*" I don't think Saul would have been all that easily convinced of his need to become a believer in Christ under ordinary circumstances. That is, I don't believe we can say that Saul was the type that could easily switch from one religion to another. But I think that in this case, with the Lord appearing to him, all of a sudden he realized that this wasn't an ordinary happening. Rather, this was of a divine nature, this was Christ Himself appearing to him. So he realized at that very moment that truly Christ was real, He was from heaven, He did represent God, He was the Son of God. Based on that, he was ready to respond to His wishes. I have often wondered just how far Saul might have been able to go in persecuting the church had he not been converted. I don't think for a minute that he could have destroyed the church, but no doubt he could have done the Lord's cause a great deal of harm. On the other hand, it might have been the means of only helping it to spread more rapidly. Again, I have thought that perhaps the Lord saw in this man so many good qualities that if he could be converted, they could be used to spread His cause.

You will note that the Lord did not tell him what to do to be saved, but sent him into the city where he would be told. Saul continued there for three days, blind, fasting, and praying, yet he was not saved. In the meantime, the Lord spoke to Ananias about going to Saul. At first he was afraid, because he had heard much about Saul. But the Lord assured him that he was a chosen vessel to further His cause, and therefore he should go to him. Ananias did so, and later when Saul, or Paul as he was called then, related what happened. He said Ananias came to him and said, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16). Saul obeyed and immediately preached Christ in the synagogues as being the Son of God. Don’t you know that he surprised a lot of people when he did that?

Saul was renamed Paul, becoming an Apostle of Christ, an Apostle “out of due season”, an Apostle to the Gentiles. Actually, the Lord had appeared to him back on the Damascus road so as to qualify him to be an Apostle, one who was an eyewitness of Christ. Also you probably noted in earlier readings that it says he was filled with the Holy Spirit, or was baptized with the Holy Spirit. This was because he was to be one of the Apostles. Therefore, he received the power of the Holy Spirit as the other apostles had earlier.

What did Saul do to be converted, to be saved? He became a believer in Christ. Later in the city of Damascus he was blind, fasted, and prayed for three days, which indicates that he was sorry for his sins, and therefore he was repenting of them. To prove this, he was leaving his religion to accept Christianity. Then he was baptized to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, it is through

# Conversion of Cornelius and His Household

The last conversion we studied was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. In that story, we have one of the finest examples possible of what conversion is when it comes to that of making such a drastic change. Of course, Saul obeyed the same commands as others in becoming a Christian, but his over-all change was unique in that he persecuted Christians, was converted, and then as a Christian was persecuted. He is also a good example of one who was willing to change his religion on learning the truth. He didn't hold back because of family, position, friends, pride, or anything else. Rather, he was willing to change and willing to pay the price necessary to serve his Lord and Master. How wonderful it would be if we had more people like that today.

We could say much more about the conversion of Saul, but we want to go now to the conversion of Cornelius and his household. When we talk about the household of Cornelius we are talking about him and his family members. The story itself is recorded in Acts 10 and 11.

Cornelius was a Gentile who lived in Caesarea. He was a centurion of the band called the Italian Band. That means he was in the army and he was in charge of a hundred men. The scripture says he was a devout man, that he feared God with all his family, he gave to the poor, and he prayed to God always. Such is to say that as far as character, morals and religious devotion were concerned, he was a good man. Still, he was not a Christian, and therefore he was not a saved man. That being true, he was lost and needed to be saved. The story of his conversion



will prove that point. There are many people today, however, who would not even be able to match Cornelius in relation to his good moral qualities, and yet they are counted as being good moral people, and they believe they can be saved on the basis of their good moral living. Although many hold to this view, the Bible does not teach it. Good moral living is commendable, and even as a Christian one must have good morals, but that alone is not enough to save. It was not enough to save Cornelius.

No doubt, it was because of his background that led him to his eventual conversion. He had a good heart, a receptive heart, and was one who wanted to do God's will. On the other hand, once he learned the truth, he didn't excuse himself on the basis that he was good enough. This is where a lot of people today make their mistake. They try to equate good moral living with that of being a Christian, and therefore conclude that it is unnecessary for them to obey the gospel.

As we continue to read through Acts 10, the story is told that Cornelius had a vision around 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. An angel of God told him that his prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God, that is, God took special note of him, his devotion, his sincerity, and his desire to please Him. God wasn't going to save him as he was, but He was going to arrange things so that he could be saved. The record says that when the angel had departed, he immediately called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, and after explaining everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. But why didn't the angel go, or why didn't he tell Cornelius and his household what they should do? He didn't do so, even as the angel did not go to the Ethiopian eunuch, but instructed Philip to go, and just as Christ did not tell Saul what to do, but had Ananias go to him. That is, the Lord had

given His gospel to human beings, and had directed them to take the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15,16). So that is why the angel had Cornelius send for Peter, because it would be Peter's job to preach the gospel to him and his household. The Lord is not going to do anything for us today that we can do for ourselves.

Sometimes, we hear people saying that the Lord told them to do this or that, but why would He do so when He has already given us His word to reveal His final will to us? The fact is, the Lord is not doing that. Even back in the days of the Apostles, when they didn't have the written word, and when miraculous helps were needed, the Lord or an angel never told a person what to do to be saved, but always got that person together with a gospel preacher, so that the gospel preacher could deliver the message. Why can't we see that? We can see it if we want to. Read through the book of Acts and you will never find one example of where the Lord or an angel ever preached the gospel to anyone or told them what to do to be saved. Why would it be any different today? Think about that.

But now the story shifts to Joppa. Peter was dwelling with Simon a tanner in Joppa, in a house by the seaside. While the servants of Cornelius were on their way to this place, about midday Peter went up on the housetop to pray. While there he became very hungry and would have eaten, but he fell into a trance. Then he saw a vessel coming down, and it was as a sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth. In this were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. And then there was a voice that said, "*Rise, Peter, kill, and eat*". Peter had grown up under the Law of Moses, which had forbidden the eating of certain meats because they were said to be unclean. But the voice spoke the second

time, pointing out, "*What God has cleansed you must not call common.*" Then the voice spoke the third time, and the vessel was taken up into heaven. While Peter wondered about all of this, the men sent from Cornelius arrived inquiring about him. As Peter continued to think on the vision, "*The Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'*" Then Peter went down and asked what they wanted. They told him about Cornelius, and spent the night, and the next day they went to Cornelius. Of course the vision that Peter had of a vessel of animals, etc., was to teach Peter that the Law of Moses was no more, that all animals were now clean and could be eaten with thanksgiving, and likewise the gospel was now for both Jews and Gentiles.

Cornelius had prepared for Peter's coming by inviting his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter came in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter asked him to stand up, saying that he also was a man. There are those who say that Peter became the first head of the church. Of course he did not, but his reaction to Cornelius bowing before him was far different to the way religious leaders of our time respond to men who bow at their feet. They not only allow it, but encourage it. Strange indeed!

After Cornelius explained how all of this had come about, Peter concluded, "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" (Acts 10:34,35). There is some question as to whether Peter really understood all of these things that were happening, especially in dealing with the Gentiles, something that had not been done before. But the Spirit was leading

him in all of this. He was taking part in an historical event — for the first time, the gospel would be preached to the Gentiles. Cornelius and his household would become the first Gentile converts, the first members of the church as Gentiles. This was the Lord's plan all along, since He had died on the cross for the sins of the whole world, and had commanded the gospel to be taken to all mankind (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 1:8).

Peter goes on to preach to these people, and the record says, *“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord”* (Acts 10:44-48). In this setting, we have the Holy Spirit being poured out on Cornelius and his household. In other words, they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, even as the Apostles had received this power. In all of the New Testament, Cornelius and his household were the only ones to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit besides the Apostles. This was done to prove to the Jews that the Gentiles had been accepted of God even as they had. In Acts 11, as Peter re-tells the story of their conversion, he said that they had received the power of the Holy Spirit even as the Apostles had received it in the beginning, meaning on the day of Pentecost. But he had to go back to Pentecost to find an example of someone receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

As to their conversion, they heard the gospel, believed it, and

were baptized. Again, this is in harmony with what all others had done in their obedience to the Lord. As far as the household or family was concerned, some have raised the question about the inclusion of children. Whether children were there or not, I do not know. I do know that the gospel of Christ is directed to accountable beings, those who are old enough to know right and wrong. Therefore, when it talks about the household hearing the gospel and obeying God, it would necessarily mean those who were accountable to God. When you understand that, there is no problem.

Have you obeyed God?

# Conversion of Lydia and Her Household

In our last lesson we made a detailed study of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. This study was especially interesting since Cornelius and his household were Gentiles. This marked the first time that the gospel was preached to Gentiles. Prior to Acts 10 the gospel was preached only to the Jews. Under the Law of Moses, the Jews were God's chosen people and all other people, as the Bible says, were a law unto themselves; that is, they had their own moral laws to live by and would eventually be judged on that basis. But with the death of Christ, the old law was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (John 1:17; Colossians 2:14). In spite of the fact that the law was taken away and a new law was given, the law of Christ (Hebrews 10:9,10), and in spite of the fact that Christ commanded the apostles to take the gospel to every creature under heaven (Mark 16:15,16), still it took time for things to be set into motion. First, the gospel was preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and around 3,000 souls obeyed God, and the church was established (Acts 2). Then the gospel was preached again and again in Jerusalem and Judea. It was taken then to Samaria (Acts 8). And finally, in Acts 10, things were set in motion for the conversion of the first Gentiles. After that, both Jews and Gentiles would be converted and added to the church in many different places, and so it has continued up to this time.

Cornelius was evidently chosen to represent the first Gentile convert, along with his family members and friends, because he was a good man morally in every way. He was a sincere man

who wanted to please God. Therefore, in a vision an angel of the Lord directed him to send for Peter who was lodging with Simon the tanner in Joppa, not too many miles to the south of Caesarea where he lived, and he did so. In the meantime, Peter had a vision, and in this vision he was taught the lesson that now all animals were clean. Back under the Law of Moses only a certain number of animals were clean and could be eaten. By teaching Peter that all animals were clean, he was also being taught that the Law of Moses had been removed, and now under the new law, which was the law of Christ, all people were to have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to obey. When the men came for Peter, he and others went along to Caesarea where they had the opportunity to teach Cornelius and his family the gospel. While Peter preached the gospel to those present, the Holy Spirit fell on them to prove to Peter and the Jews as a whole that the Gentiles had been accepted, as well as the Jews. Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Now, what do we have? The Lord got Cornelius and his household and Peter together, so that Peter might preach the gospel to them. The Lord, or the angel of the Lord, did not see fit to do that which Peter could do. After hearing the gospel, they believed it and were baptized in the name of the Lord. This is what Christ had commanded when He sent the Apostles forth to preach the gospel, and one of these Apostles who heard those words was the Apostle Peter. Christ said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:15,16). Cornelius and his household did that, therefore they were saved as the Lord promised that they would be, and He added them to His church.

Apart from the Apostles receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Cornelius and his family were the only exception to this. They received the power of the Holy Spirit to prove that God was no respecter of persons, to prove that the Gentiles had been accepted by God as well as the Jews. After Peter had preached to them and they had received the power of the Holy Spirit, he asked the question, *“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”* (Acts 10:47). When Peter tells of their conversion in Acts 11, he makes the remark that Cornelius and his household had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as they, the Apostles, had in the beginning, meaning Pentecost. That indicates that not everyone was receiving this power. As a matter of fact, Peter had to go all the way back to Pentecost to find another example of it. Therefore with this happening as it did, he knew that it was God’s will for the Gentiles to become Christians.

Now we are going to Acts 16 for the story of the conversion of Lydia and her household. We find Paul and his brethren on their second missionary journey, and the record says, *“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from*



*the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us" (Acts 16:9-15).*

In the foregoing setting, Luke, the author of the book of Acts, gives a running account of their travels. He tells how Paul had a vision and a man of Macedonia invited him to come there to preach the gospel. There again, the Lord is in the process of bringing together the one who can deliver the gospel message, and the ones who need to hear it. So Paul and his party left immediately for Macedonia, believing that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there. They set sail from Troas, and after going by several places, they arrived in Philippi, a chief city of that part of Macedonia, and there they remained for several days.

On the Sabbath day, the day recognized by those who kept the Law of Moses as the day of worship, Paul and those traveling with him went out on the river side where people would habitually gather to pray. They found some women there and they sat down and began to speak to them. One of these was a woman by the name of Lydia. She was from the city of Thyatira. She was a business woman, being a seller of purple, which was a very costly type of cloth. The wonderful thing about Lydia was that she not only worshiped God, but she was willing to listen to Paul as he taught her the Lord's will. The result was that the Lord opened her heart and she and her household, who also heard the gospel, were baptized. Now the question that comes to our mind immediately is this: How did the Lord open her heart? Was it miraculously done? Just think back for a minute and recall why

Paul was sent to Macedonia. If you will, then you will know that it was for the purpose of preaching the gospel. Had the Lord wanted to open Lydia's heart miraculously to the gospel He could have done that without having to have Paul and those other brethren travel all the way to Macedonia. Instead, Paul was there, he obviously preached the gospel to Lydia and her household, they heard it, and as a result they believe it, and obeyed it. But Lydia's heart was opened, as well as her family members, through hearing the gospel and coming to understand it and to believe it. Then on being baptized, they were saved and were added to the Lord's church. It doesn't say in so many words that they were added to the church, but we observed back in Acts 2 and the conversion of the Pentecostians that the Lord added the saved to His church. If He did so then, He did so with Lydia and her family.

As with Cornelius and his household, the same would be true with Lydia and her household, those who obeyed the Lord would have reference to those family members who were accountable to God. It would not include infants or babies. The gospel is directed to those who are old enough to hear and understand the gospel, to believe it, to repent of their sins, to confess with their mouth that Christ is the Son of God, and to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38).

So Lydia and her household heard the gospel, believed it, and were baptized. Therefore they were saved, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were added to the church. Their conversion, then, was like the others we have considered to date.

# Conversion of the Jailer and His Household

As we have noted, there is a pattern that has been established throughout all the conversions we have considered. There was always a gospel preacher on hand to preach to the individual, to family, or to a large gathering of people. The gospel was preached, they heard it, believed it, repented of their sins, acknowledged the Lord, were baptized, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord added them to His church. Sometimes different expressions or words are used for some of these, but the same idea is there.

At times faith or repentance is not mentioned, but they are always implied. Baptism is mentioned in every case except in Acts 3:19, where the word converted is substituted. But in being converted, baptism is certainly always there. To prove this, all we need to do is to go back to the Lord's great commission where Christ commanded the Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Then He added, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). Anyone who would argue with that doesn't want the truth, because he doesn't love the truth.

In our last study we discussed the conversion of Lydia and her household. On that occasion we found Paul and his brethren being directed in a vision to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel. They went to one of the main cities in that area, Philippi, and on the Sabbath day, the day the Jews worshiped according to the Law of Moses, the brethren went out to the river side. There

they found some ladies worshipping God and had the opportunity to teach them. A certain lady there by the name of Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, after hearing the word of God through which her heart was opened, that is, she believed, along with her family members, and then they were baptized. Again I remind you that this is what the Lord commanded in Mark 16:16 when he said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

Now let us continue with the ninth case of conversion found in the book of Acts. This one is the conversion of the Jailer and his household, and the story is likewise recorded in Acts 16.

Just after Luke tells us of the conversion of Lydia and her household, he gives some background on what led up to the conversion of the jailer and his household. Paul and his brethren were still in Philippi and Luke said, *“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. They brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe. Then the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when*

*they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God and all his household" (Acts 16:16-34).*

All of this was brought about through Paul's casting an evil spirit out of a young lady, and the unrest that it caused on the part of her masters. Of course, Paul had the power of the Holy Spirit, and was able to perform miracles, including that of casting out evil spirits. This was the miraculous age, prior to the coming of the New Testament in written form, and a time that he and the other Apostles, and those they laid their hands on, depended on signs and wonders to convince the people that they were not false teachers, but that they had been sent of God to preach the truth.

On this occasion the masters of the young lady were able to excite the multitude against Paul and Silas, and after beating them, they were cast into prison and the jailer was charged to keep them safely. Since the jailer recognized that it was either his life or theirs, he put them in the inner prison and put their feet in stocks. In other words, he was taking no chances of them escaping, and yet they would escape. Since God was with them, the prison could not contain them. The poor jailer did not know the type of prisoners he was dealing with.

The record continues by telling us of a strange occurrence that happened at midnight. It says that Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God, and the other prisoners heard them. What kind of prisoners would do such a thing? Most people who find themselves in jail are very sad, bemoaning the fact that they are there. Many would curse, shout their displeasure, plead their innocence, and ask for mercy. Not so with Paul and Silas. They seemed to be happy. Why? Because they knew they were innocent, and they knew that the Lord would take care of them. And sure enough, there was an earthquake, the foundations of the prison were shaken, the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed. Now do you suppose that this was an ordinary earthquake? Whoever heard of an earthquake that would do all of those things? Surely it was the Lord's doing. The jailer took it all very seriously. He rushed in and seeing all the doors opened, supposed that all of the prisoners had escaped. He knew that he would lose his life for allowing this to happen, so he drew out his sword to take his own life, not wishing to be humiliated by being executed for his failure. But then Paul cried out with a loud voice, "*Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.*" Can you imagine a prisoner today doing that? He would be more than happy to see the jailer commit suicide, although he would proba-

bly already be gone. But Paul and Silas were not ordinary prisoners. The record goes on to tell how the jailer called for light, rushed in, and trembling, bowed before Paul and Silas, and then brought them out asking them, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” I don’t think we could say that this question was prompted out of sheer fear of these men. Rather, it would appear that the jailer recognized that all of this was of a divine nature, that some higher power was in charge; and based on it, he asked the question, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”

They answered the question: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*” Truly a great question deserves a great answer. The sad part of all this is that many stop right here, concluding that Paul and Silas are saying that all one has to do to be saved is to believe only, or have faith only. But they didn’t say that. They said to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith, but not by faith only, or by belief only. On the other hand, if one really believes in Jesus Christ, then he will do whatever Jesus wants him to do. If he does that, he will obey the commands of the Lord. Why can’t people see that? Many don’t see it because they don’t want to see it. They have made up their minds as to how it should be, and that’s it as far as they are concerned.

Let’s take another look at the jailer, his question, and the answer. Who was the jailer? Was he a believer in Christ? We would have to say, “No”. That being the case, then how would it have been possible for the jailer to believe in Christ if he didn’t know anything about Christ? The answer is found in Acts 16:32, “*Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*” Paul and Silas preached the word of the Lord to the jailer and all of his family members. Why did they do that?

So that faith might be produced, so that they might become believers in Christ. We read in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the word of God. What did this man do after he heard the word of God and had become a believer? He took Paul and Silas and washed their stripes. Before, Paul and Silas had been beaten and the jailer had put them in the inner prison, and had put their feet in stocks. But now he is washing their stripes. That sounds like repentance, doesn't it? It sounds like he has had a change of heart, that he has turned from his former ways. Then the jailer and his family members, the ones who were old enough to obey the gospel, were baptized immediately. Why were they baptized? Paul and Silas had told them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and they would be saved. That is true, and that is what they did. They believed in the Lord enough to repent of their sins and to be baptized as Christ had commanded (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Then the jailer brought them into his house and, *"set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."*

So the jailer and his family heard the gospel, believed it, were baptized, and rejoiced in having done so. Have you done that? If not, let me encourage you to do so now. If you will, God will save you and add you to His church.



# Conversion of the Corinthians

The purpose of these lessons is to call people back to the Bible, and to pure New Testament Christianity. We cannot force people to do this, and neither were we meant to do so. We have no desire to pressure people, or to limit their freedom when it comes to religion. We believe that every person has been created in the image of God, that he is a free moral agent, and that he should be allowed to choose his course in life. It may not always be right, but at least he should have that freedom. Where there is freedom of religion then we can at least present the cause of Christ to people so that they may choose either to accept it or to reject it. Where there is no such freedom, there is slavery, and slavery of the spirit of man is the worst type of slavery of all. It imprisons one's soul not only in this world, but also in the world to come. I am therefore thankful that you and I have the freedom to study together God's word so that with that knowledge you can make an intelligent decision.

In our present studies we are devoting our time to the theme of New Testament conversion. We are not interested in what man teaches when it comes to religion, but we are very much concerned about what God has said on this subject, as recorded in the pages of the New Testament. One could accept the teachings of man, go through this life thinking he was saved, and still end up lost. That would be really sad. But one doesn't have to experience that sort of heartbreak and sorrow. If you and I will only go to the scriptures and read and study what it teaches on this subject, we may know exactly what the Lord requires that one must

do to be saved. That's what we are attempting to do in these lessons. Our salvation is too important to be careless with it.

As you know, conversion means to turn, to change, to be transformed. We are scripturally converted when we obey the gospel, when we are born again, when we are saved. If we continue to live like we always lived, if we are not members of the Lord's church, or if we end up in some denominational or man-made church, then these are indications that we have never been truly converted.

We are attempting to show from the Bible what conversion is, and what it is not. With such information we will be better prepared to obey God, and to live the type of life the Lord would want us to live.

In our last lesson we considered the conversion of the jailer and his household. Before we go on to the next conversion, we will take some time for a brief review. Paul, Silas, and others were in Philippi. They had already converted Lydia and her family. Staying on in the city, their attention was directed to a young lady with an evil spirit. Day after day she would follow Paul and his party and cry out, "*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*" This grieved Paul, and finally he turned and said to the spirit, "*I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.*" *And he came out that very hour.*" This was a wonderful thing, but it happened that she was being used by some men for the purpose of soothsaying or fortune telling. Therefore, when the spirit of divination was cast out of her, it greatly upset her masters, because this brought to an end their means of earning. As a result of their displeasure, they stirred up the people, including magistrates, against Paul and Silas, who beat them and cast them into prison.

Continuing the story, there was an earthquake at midnight that set the prisoners free. The jailer, being responsible for them with his life, thought that they had escaped, and was ready to take his life until Paul shouted out that they were still there. The jailer, recognizing that all of this was of a higher power, came to Paul and Silas and humbly asked what he should do to be saved. Being an unbeliever at this point, he was told that he and his household should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. Then to enable him to have faith in Christ, Paul and Silas preached the word of the Lord to him and his family. As a result he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes, and immediately he and his people were baptized. Following this, the jailer brought them to his house, gave them food, and *“he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”*

All of this would indicate that the jailer and his household were truly changed. They had been unbelievers, and now they were believers. They had been enemies of Paul and Silas, but now they were brothers and friends. They were taught the word of the Lord, they believed, repented of their sins, and were baptized. Therefore they were saved, according to Mark 16:16, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:38, and they were added to the Lord’s church according to Acts 2:47. Who would doubt this? But if a person did likewise today, what would happen? Surely the result would be the same. If not, why not?

But now we will continue with the tenth case of conversion as recorded in the Book of Acts. This is the conversion of the Corinthians as found in Acts 18:1-11. Let’s read the text: *“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had*

recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

*“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.*

*“Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city’. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”*

Paul had not had much success in Athens. It was an idolatrous city, and after hearing about Christ and His resurrection, “...some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them” (Acts 17:32,33). Although this was true of the majority, Acts 17:33,34 says that certain people joined him and believed, two of which are named, one a man, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the other a woman named Damaris.

From Athens, Paul traveled some fifty miles to another major city of the area, to Corinth. Being a tentmaker by occupation, he came into contact with other tentmakers there in the city, two of whom were Jews by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. They had come from Italy because Claudius Caesar of the Roman Empire at that time had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome. The world hasn't changed much from that day to this because there are still those who are expelling others out of their city because of race, nationality, religion, or something. It is sad the way man treats his fellowman. But Paul lived with Aquila and Priscilla and they worked together. Nothing is said about them being Christians, it may have been that they were in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:9), heard the gospel, and obeyed it, or it may have been that they had been converted while in Rome. It would seem odd that Paul would go into the synagogue to teach, but not try to teach this couple, if they were not already Christians. There are definite indications later that they were, because the church met in their home (Romans 16:3-5).

Next we read that Paul went into the synagogue every Sabbath day to teach the Jews and Greeks. The Sabbath day, or Saturday, was the day of worship under the Law of Moses. Of course, the Law was no longer binding by God at this time but the Jews continued to hold on to it. Some claim that Paul continued to recognize the Sabbath day as the day of worship, but this is false. He worshiped with Christians on the first day of the week, or the day we call Sunday (Acts 20:7). The synagogue was a place of Jewish worship and with both Jews and Greeks being there it would indicate that the Greeks had become proselytes, or converts to the religion of Judaism. These people were meeting to worship, believing in God, and believing the Old Testament scripture, believing in the idea of the coming of the Messiah, so

Paul found that it was an ideal place to go to preach Christ. The Jews usually gave visitors an opportunity to speak in their meetings, and Paul was always ready to take advantage of the opportunity.

When Silas and Timotheus joined him from Macedonia, Paul was encouraged to make his message concerning Christ a little stronger. As a result, the Jews opposed him, blaspheming God in their rejection. Paul told them plainly that their blood would be upon their own heads for their rejection of the Lord. He further declared that he had presented the truth, and therefore he was clean and pure, that he had done his duty, and because of their unwillingness to accept Christ, he would turn his attention to the Gentiles.

Paul's preaching was not entirely unsuccessful, however, since he went to the home of a man by the name of Justus who worshiped God, and who lived next to the synagogue. Also Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, along with his family, and many of the Corinthians, hearing the gospel, believed it and were baptized. This was the beginning of the Lord's church in Corinth, and Paul stayed there a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. At the beginning of this time, the Lord spoke to Paul and told him not to be afraid but to continue to speak up because He had many people in that city. He meant by this that there were many who would obey Him if they could but hear the gospel preached. And that was true.

But let's go back a minute and ask this question: How were the Corinthians converted? The record itself says, "*And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized*" (Acts 18:8). Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the word of God and Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized*

*will be saved*" (Mark 16:16). The Corinthians did that and, based on what Christ said, they were saved. We read in Acts 2:47 that the saved are added to the church. So the church had its beginning in Corinth in this manner.

Are you a Christian? Are you a member of the church of Christ? Have you done what the Corinthians did? If not, I want to encourage you to do so now. If you will, you can be saved like the Corinthians were saved, and you can be a member of the church that they were members of there at Corinth.

# Conversion of the Ephesians

So far, we have studied ten cases of conversion as recorded in the book of Acts. In all of these cases we have found that there were certain similarities. There was always a preacher present. There was the audience, the gospel was preached, it was heard and believed, there was repentance and confession, or acknowledgement of the Lord, there was baptism and the remission of sins, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they were added to the church.

In our last lesson we dealt with the conversion of the Corinthians. Paul went to Corinth and there he preached in the Jewish synagogue on Sabbath days. He did this because that was the Jewish day of worship, since they were still holding on to the Law of Moses. They were believers in God, in the Old Testament scriptures, and they looked for the coming of a Messiah. Paul was a Jew by birth, and at one time was very zealous for that religion. He was knowledgeable of it, and knew the people and their customs and traditions, so it was ideal to go first to Jews to preach the gospel. Paul reasoned with them, teaching them of Jesus Christ. Finally, they rejected the message, and he turned his attention to the Gentiles. Going to the home of Justus, who lived next to the synagogue, Paul preached. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, along with his family, and also many of the Corinthians, believed and were baptized. Thus, what they did to be saved is very clearly written. The gospel was preached, they believed it, and were baptized. This is what Christ had commanded in the great commission, when He said, "*Go into all*



*the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:15,16). Did the Corinthians do that? Acts 18:8 says they did. If that be true then the Lord saved them and added them to His church (Acts 2:47). How could anyone misunderstand such a clear record?

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, there is interesting information that I think we might well tie in with our study of the conversion of the Corinthians. As already stated, through Paul's preaching the church was established in Corinth. With the passing of time, division resulted from the fact that some claimed to be of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas or Peter, and some of Christ. To show the absurdity of this, Paul asked, "*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*" (1 Corinthians 1:13). Of course Christ had only one spiritual body, or church, and He was the one who had been crucified for them, as well as for all others, and they had been baptized in the name of Christ. Therefore, Paul was saying that they should turn from their divisions and follow Christ only. He continued by saying that, at least in his case, he could recall baptizing only Crispus, Gaius, and the family of Stephanas. He was not keeping a tally of the people he had baptized because he had not been sent out primarily to baptize but to preach the gospel. This did not mean that he was saying baptism was unnecessary, as some people imagine, but he was saying that his first duty was to preach the gospel. Of course, when he did that, and when people wanted to obey the gospel, naturally they would be baptized by Paul or some other brother as the Lord had taught. At this point though, Paul's discussion was condemnation of the divisions that he found in the church at Corinth. We would do well to take note of his warning.

We come now to the eleventh and last case of conversion recorded in the book of Acts of the New Testament. Turn to Acts 19:1-7 and let's study those verses. *"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?' So they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all."*

The account of this conversion is very interesting. It came about in a different way than the others, but we will see that in the end they did the same as everyone else.

On arriving in Ephesus, Paul came in contact with about a dozen men, called disciples. It is not stated just how he came across these people, or what circumstances brought them together. But finding himself in their midst, he asked them, *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"* There is no way of knowing whether he was asking them if they had received the ordinary measure of the Holy Spirit, or if--understanding them to be Christians--he is wanting to know if some Apostle of the Lord had laid his hands on them that they might have miraculous gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit. The whole matter is cleared up, however, when they answer by saying that they had not even

heard whether there was an Holy Spirit. Then Paul wanted to know, *“Into what then were you baptized?”* They answered, *“Unto John’s baptism.”*

Based on the questions Paul asked, we conclude that he understood that these men had had some connection with God’s teaching on these subjects. Anyway, he explained that, *“John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”* On hearing this, they did not argue the point, but were simply baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul then laid his hands on them that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit. This was demonstrated by the fact that they were able to miraculously speak in tongues and to prophesy.

Let it be understood that John’s baptism was that of the baptism of repentance. It was for the purpose of introducing baptism, of preparing the people’s hearts to the idea, since baptism would be required by the Lord of those who would obey Him. It was also a demarcation line for people hearing John’s warnings that they must repent of their sins, preparing their hearts and lives for the coming of the Lord’s kingdom or church. But evidently there were some preachers and teachers who had lost contact with what was happening, and therefore they had gone on teaching John’s baptism, and baptizing accordingly, even after that baptism had been replaced by the teachings of Christ and the baptism of the great commission. Because of these changes, even though it was a burial in water, John’s baptism was no longer in force at the time these disciples met Paul. Consequently, they needed to be baptized in the name of Christ and for the right purpose, to be born into the family of God. Christ had said after His death, burial, and resurrection, *“All authority has been given to*

*Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:18-20). This was the one baptism that Paul spoke of in Ephesians 4:5. Christ also said that those who believe and are baptized are saved (Mark 16:16). Peter said that those should repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Again Paul said that this baptism puts one into Christ and into His church (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26,27; 1 Corinthians 12:13). So once these men learned the truth they were baptized in the name of Christ.

There are those in our day who have been immersed in water like the Ephesians, but *for the wrong purpose*. Therefore, they have never been scripturally baptized. They should be as eager to obey the Lord as the Ephesians, and on learning the truth, they should be baptized. Others have been *sprinkled*, and without doubt, they need to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins. Such people cannot be saved until they comply with the Lord's terms of pardon. They have never been converted to Christ. Perhaps they have been converted to what they *thought* was the truth, but it is not until one complies with the teachings of Christ that one can actually be saved.

Paul was the teacher of the Ephesians and, as an Apostle, he could lay his hands on them and they could receive the special power of the Holy Spirit. When the Ephesians had obeyed the Lord, they not only received the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit (the non-miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit that makes the new Christian spiritually alive to God), but Paul laid his hands on them and they received the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

But Paul is not living today, and neither are any of the other Apostles. Since they were the only ones who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the exception of Cornelius and his household, the first Gentile converts, and since only the Apostles had the power to lay their hands on others that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, then Christians today do not have miraculous gifts. No one is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and neither is there anyone to lay their hands on new converts. All must therefore be content to have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But having the written word to guide us and to authenticate what we teach, all things that pertain to life and godliness, we have no need of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit today. Those who claim to have it are mistaken and deceived, and by their teachings and actions demonstrate to all who know God's word that they do not possess it.

So in all of the eleven cases of conversion found in the New Testament, all heard the gospel, all believed it, all repented of their sins, all acknowledged the Lord, all were baptized, all were saved, all received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and all were added to the Lord's church. The wording varies a little at times from conversion to conversion, depending on the situation, but when all was said and done, all did the same thing.

I would like to encourage you to do what they did. If you will, Christ will save you and add you to His church. He is the same Lord, and He has but one plan to save all who are obedient to Him.

# The Non-Conversions of the New Testament

We have had a prolonged series of studies on New Testament conversion. After having several lessons on the meaning of conversion, and what conversion is related to in the teachings of the New Testament, we went to the book of Acts and analyzed one by one the eleven cases of conversion that are recorded there.

We found that conversion means to turn, to change, to be transformed. We also found that in every single case of conversion, some dealing with an individual, others having to do with a family, and still others focusing attention on a large group of people, that all of them followed the same pattern. The preacher was there, and the sinner. The gospel was preached, it was heard, believed, there was repentance, the Lord was acknowledged, there was baptism, the Holy Spirit was given to make them new spiritual creatures in God, and the Lord added the saved to His church. Sometimes faith was not mentioned, but it was always implied. At other times, repentance was not specifically referred to, but again it was understood, and the same was true in regard to the confession of Christ. But in all of the cases of conversion, except one, baptism was always there. The one time the word baptism did not appear, the word "converted" was used as a substitute, but the same preacher that said, "*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*" (Acts 3:19) also said, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). So was there any conflict? Not at all. In order for true conversion to occur, baptism has to be there.

Going beyond the book of Acts, you may read throughout the remainder of the New Testament and find that all other scriptures that have to do with one's salvation agree with what is taught in all these cases of conversion. Surely we would not think for a minute that one thing is taught in one place, and a contradictory thing taught elsewhere. But someone would probably like to know about the thief on the cross. Let me ask this question: In all the cases of conversion in the New Testament which serve as a pattern for us, which preacher ever mentioned the thief one time as an example of being saved? There is not one! And neither can we go to the thief. He lived under the Law of Moses. We live under the law of the great commission and we must respond accordingly.

In the various cases we have studied, those converted were from different countries, some were Gentiles, some had to be immersed again, one was a persecutor of the church, another was a jailer, etc. But all received the gift of the Holy Spirit on being obedient to the gospel. These events took place in the days before the New Testament was given in written form, during a special age of miracles. The Apostles had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day the church was begun. Cornelius and his household were the only others to receive such an outpouring, for the purpose of showing that God was no respecter of persons, and that the Gentiles had received this power as well as the Jews. The Apostles were the only ones who could give the power of the Holy Spirit to others by the laying on of their hands. There is no record of any other Christians receiving this measure of the Spirit.

Today we draw our authority for what we teach from the New Testament itself, so there is no need for miracles to prove

the truthfulness of our message. We are so much more blessed in this way, because there is no danger of deceivers, like Simon the sorcerer, leading us astray by their “wonders”, if we will only check everything by the Bible. Faith is produced by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), not by some “miraculous sign”. We may know whether a person is preaching the truth or not by comparing the teaching with the word of God. The gospel is to be preached, and all who will believe it and obey it will be saved (Mark 16:15,16). Those who refuse to do so will be lost. Paul says that the Lord is coming to take vengeance on those who know not God and who obey not the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Peter asked, *“What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* (1 Peter 4:17). The answer is, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, that they will be lost.

After going through the different cases of conversion, I would now like to go back to the book of Acts and take a look at some of the non-conversions that are to be found there. Not all who heard the gospel obeyed it. We want to see what was preached, and why perhaps these people did not obey God.

The first case we will notice is to be found in the 6th and 7th chapters of Acts. This is the account of those to whom Stephen preached. In the first part of Acts 6, the Apostles chose seven men to help them with the Lord’s work. To make it possible for these men to be more effective, the apostles laid their hands on them that they might have the power of the Holy Spirit. Stephen was one of this number. The record says, *“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people”* (Acts 6:8). *“Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were*



*not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, 'This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.' And all who sat in the Council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel"* (Acts 6:9-15).

We'll not continue to quote, but Acts 7 tells us how Stephen preached Christ to these people, going all the way back to the Old Testament, tracing the history of the Jews, showing how God had worked, had eventually sent Christ and that they crucified Him. And the record continues, *"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'"* Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, *'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'* Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, *'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.'* And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:54-60).

Stephen was not successful in converting these people, and perhaps through the leadership of Saul who later was converted

as we studied in Acts 9, this was the beginning of a great persecution of the church, the Lord's people. But instead of bringing an end to Christianity, this only set it on fire. In Acts 8:4, it says, *"Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."*

Please remember that when people persecute others for religious reasons, using physical violence, suppressing freedom of religion, or whatever form the persecution may take, those who do so are wrong. Obviously, they are afraid that their own religion is not strong enough to withstand the teaching of another religion, and in the end they will lose. That was true with these people who persecuted Stephen, and it is true of those today who would persecute those who do not agree with them. No set of beliefs should be spread through violence and persecution.

Another prominent example of non-conversion in the book of Acts would be when Paul stood in the midst of Mar's Hill and preached to the people of Athens. He said to them, *"Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To The Unknown God. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you."*

*"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find*

*Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'*

*"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.' So Paul departed from among them"* (Acts 17:22-33).

What was the problem here? The people were given to idolatry. They were philosophers, interested in hearing new things. Paul pointed them to the God of heaven as their creator, but with their background and lack of interest, these truths didn't seem to phase them. There were a few there who believed, as recorded in Acts 17:34, but for the most part his preaching went unheeded. We have the same situation today on the part of so many people who have a curiosity about many things but the strength of conviction on nothing.

There are two other cases of non-conversion I want to at least mention. Paul had been taken prisoner at Jerusalem on false charges. When the authorities realized that he was a Roman citizen and that there was a plot to kill him, they arranged to send him to Caesarea and to be placed in charge of Felix the governor. Felix was living in adultery at the time that he received Paul, and the record says that as Paul *"reasoned about righteousness, self-*

*control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you''* (Acts 24:25). The sad fact is that, as far as we know, Felix never did have time for Paul and the gospel, and he evidently died without God and hope.

Next, Paul was taken before King Agrippa. He told his story, including how he was converted to Christ. Then Paul got personal when he said, *"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe. Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains'"* (Acts 26:27-29). Again, as far as we know, King Agrippa never became a Christian. But how did he know about the name Christian? Evidently on the basis of Paul being a Christian and through his knowledge of the teaching Paul had done. Paul didn't teach him to be "this kind of Christian", or "that kind of Christian", but to be a Christian only. How wonderful it would be today if people in general could understand that they can be **just** Christians when they obey God. If one obeys the teachings of man, that's a different matter, and he will wear some religious name other than "Christian".

Which group would you prefer to be with? Those who were converted to the Lord or those who refused to obey Him?

# Conversion and the Church

In conversion one hears the gospel, believes it, repents of his sins, confesses Christ as the Son of God, and is baptized for the remission of his sins (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 17:30; Matthew 10:32; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). While going through the eleven cases of conversion in the book of Acts we found that all of them obeyed these commands. We have every reason to believe that when we do the same, we will likewise be saved.

In this lesson we want to study conversion in relation to the church. We believe that it is important that we study the church and see what role it plays in all of this, since there are so many who teach that the church is unimportant, and that one can be saved and go to heaven without being a member of *any* church.

It is true that one can be saved and go to heaven without being a member of any *man-made or denominational* church, and they themselves will tell you that this is so. Furthermore, you cannot read about these organizations in the Bible. Surely no one would say that the apostles and the early Christians were members of any of these modern-day religious bodies. They could not have been a part of them because they did not exist until hundreds of years after the apostles had departed from this earth. But if these early Christians could be saved and go to heaven without having been members of these religious bodies, then surely the same would hold true for all people since that time.

But when it comes to the church that we read about in the Bible, that is an entirely different matter. The church that Christ

built was in no way like the denominations of today. It was divine, made up of the saved, and wore the name of Christ (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Romans 16:16). Its members were Christians only (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Christ died for it, shed His blood to purchase it, and therefore became the Saviour of it (Ephesians 5:27; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23). These are only a few of the marks identifying the Lord's church.

The church existed not only in the days of the early Christians, it also exists today around the world. As long as there are those who will follow the New Testament pattern, they can reproduce that church. Men reproduce denominational churches around the world by preaching the creeds of their churches wherever they go. Likewise, when we go to the Bible and follow its teaching, without addition or subtraction, then we become the church of Christ. How could we be anything else? If you will do the same, wherever you are, the Lord will also save you and add you to the same church, His church.

The Bible teaches that when one is converted he is saved, and in Acts 2:47 it says, "*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*" What about those who claim that they are saved, but they are not members of any church? They might be saved without being a member of some *man-made* church, but it would be impossible to be saved and not be a member of *Christ's church*. Why? Simply because the Lord adds the saved to His church. That means that if one is *not* a member of the Lord's church, he is *not saved*.

Paul tells us that baptism puts one into Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27). But what does it mean to be in Christ? It means to be in the Lord, in His spiritual body, in His church. So he says, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —*

*whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). But again, what is the body? In Colossians 1:18 Paul says that the body is the church. Then in Ephesians 1:22,23 he says that the church is the body. How many bodies are there? In Ephesians 4:4 he says there is but one body. If there is but one body, and it is the church, and we are baptized into the body, then it means that we are baptized into the church. But again, he says we are baptized into the body, or the church. That means to be in Christ is to be in the church and to be in the church is to be in Christ. Furthermore, we are told that when we believe and are baptized that we are saved, and the Lord adds us to the church. Paul says in several verses that we are baptized into Christ, or the body, or the church. So to be baptized, to be saved, and to be added to the church is equivalent to being baptized into Christ, into the body, into the church.

I am aware of the fact that there is a lot of prejudice today against the church. That is because of all the false teaching that has been done concerning the church. Man is constantly making fun of it, saying the church isn't important. But that is the teaching of Satan. Nowhere does the Bible belittle the church. It belongs to God, Christ died for it that it might exist, it is the spiritual body of Christ, it represents Christ on earth, its members are those who have been saved by the blood of Christ, it wears and honors His name, it is said to be His bride, the lamb. Christ is glorified by it and He is coming back one day to receive it to Himself. Surely it is a mistake to belittle the church, and degrade it, and to teach that it is not necessary to be a part of it.

I would strongly urge that you take another look at the church. Forget about what man has said and go to the Bible and

see what it says. If you will, I am very confident that you will change your whole attitude.

It is true that the church is not the saviour, but Christ is the Saviour of the church (Ephesians 5:23). That means that for you and me to be saved, we must become members of the church. There just isn't any other way. In the Bible we read of Noah and the ark. Certainly the ark was not the saviour, since God was the saviour, but the people had to be inside the ark to be saved. Those who were outside were destroyed in the flood. And the same is true today. In the end, the Lord will save His church, but what about all of those left outside? In Noah's day the majority made fun of him and the whole idea of the flood and entering the ark to be saved. But who ended up being lost? Today we have a similar situation. The majority of the people make fun of the idea of the Lord having a church, and of the necessity of being members of that one church to be saved and to go to heaven. But the Bible says that the Lord is coming back for His kingdom, His church. What about all of those left outside it? Who will be laughing at the church then?

People need to wake up to the fact that the Lord is not playing games. They need to take Him and His church seriously. If not, one day they are going to realize that it is too late. Paul says that the Lord is coming again to take vengeance on all of those who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). What are the results when one obeys the gospel? He is saved and added to the church (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:47). So the Lord is coming again to take vengeance on those who know not God and do not obey the gospel, or those who are not saved, and therefore are not members of the church.

The Lord's church is made up of those who have been con-



verted, those who have turned from their sins to obey God, and therefore to be saved and to be added to the church. One is in a new state, a safe state, being in Christ and in the church. And because he has changed, he is a new person, a new creature. Paul says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ pictured an individual being born again of the water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God, or the church (John 3:3-5).

Paul said that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation when he declared, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:16,17). Please note that he says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It has the power to save, to change, to make whole, to make new. In obedience, the power is in complying with the terms of the gospel, through which God saves. To the same Roman Christians, to those who had obeyed the gospel which has power to save, Paul said, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:1,2).

We are, therefore, calling one and all back to God’s way. It is through the gospel of Christ that one is converted and it is in the one body of Christ, the Lord’s church, that the Christian demonstrates the transforming power of God. My friends, God

is not the author of division and confusion. One day every plant that the Father has not planted shall be rooted up, and that means to be destroyed (Matthew 15:13). One day all of those who have not followed Him, and who have not been a part of His family, will be rejected. That is a sad thought, and we don't like to be negative, but now is the time to come to grips with these matters and to learn the truth about the church, and all other things that have to do with your soul's salvation. God has provided everything and made it possible for you to know the truth and to obey His will. I would pray that you will respond to that while you have the time and opportunity.

# Conversion and its Blessings

To really see what conversion is all about when it comes to obeying God, being a Christian, a member of the church, all one needs to do is to go to the book of Acts. In each of the eleven cases of conversion recorded there, you will find basically the same thing happening. There was a preacher, and there was the individual or individuals who needed to be saved. The gospel was preached to them, they heard it, and believed it. But that wasn't all, as some would tell us today. They also repented of their sins, and confessed or acknowledged Christ as being the Son of God. Then they were baptized to have the remission of their sins, or to have their sins washed away. In doing this they came into contact with the blood of Christ, the benefits of the Lord's death, and their souls were cleansed or purified of sin. They likewise received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were added to the Lord's church.

If you don't believe that they did this, turn to the book of Acts and read it for yourself. The fact is, the Lord didn't have one message preached to one person and another message preached to another. He didn't add one soul to one church, and another soul to another church. All had the same disease--sin--and all needed the same cure--the gospel. That was true then, and it is true today.

How can one be saved today? By obeying the same gospel, the same commands, that the people did in the different conversions in the book of Acts. Those cases of conversion serve as an example, or a pattern for people of our time to follow to be saved.

There is one way only. There is one church only. Just as there is one saviour only.

But let's go on, now, to think about the blessings that come from conversion. We have already shown to some extent what conversion does. The initial result is that one is saved and added to the Lord's church. But there is much more. The one who is converted is blessed to be a member of the church of Christ, which is the spiritual body of Christ, the Lord's family. As such, one finds himself in a very special relationship. He becomes God's child, His son or daughter, and God becomes his Father. In this relationship one is in a position where he always has the love and blessings that only a Father can bestow upon His child. Beyond that, a child of God may call upon his Father through prayer any time he so wishes. John says, "*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*" (1 John 5:14). Being in Christ, in the Lord's family, we have many brothers and sisters all over the world. As such, we may have fellowship with each other, worship together, work together, and help each other.

Being converted, and therefore being saved and in Christ and in His church, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Paul said, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). Please notice that these blessings are to be found *only in Christ*. How does one get into Christ? According to Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:26,27 there is only one way to enter Christ, and that is through the act of baptism.

In Christ one is a new creature. Paul says, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed*

*away; behold, all things are become new.*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ one is blessed to be in a position to begin anew. As he said, "*Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" Old things are passed away because the new Christian has been forgiven. Having obeyed the Lord to enter Christ, he has been changed. He is not the person that he was. He has put away his bad habits and old ways. Now that he is a Christian he is a new person, a different person. He has a different attitude. He has a new outlook on life. He now wants to obey God and have a good relationship with his fellowman. This is what conversion is all about. If you will read through the pages of the New Testament, you will find that most of it is directed to this type of person, to the one who has been converted. It tells of what it was like to be in sin, of how conversion took place, of what it means to be converted, of the many principles and teachings that are to govern the new convert's life, physically and spiritually.

When one is converted, and therefore saved, he enters Christ and His church. He has become a new creature, having been born again of the water and of the Spirit, and therefore he is a newborn babe. Peter says, "*As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*" (1 Peter 2:2). As a newborn babe the new Christian is to feed on the first principles, the simple teachings of the scriptures, that he may gradually grow up so he can be strong. In other words, one is not born a full-grown Christian. The growth process must follow the spiritual birth just as it does in physical birth. Eventually, as he continues to grow, he will be able to partake of the *meat of the word*, or the teachings of the Bible that are deeper and more difficult to understand. But with growth comes maturity and therefore one is able to understand more fully the things that are being taught.

The growth of the Christian is made possible by being in Christ, among Christians. He is shielded from the world. He associates with good moral people. He has removed from his speech bad language, curse words, ugly and suggestive jokes. He attempts to dress modestly, and in keeping with Christian principles. He stays away from questionable places. He disciplines himself in the use of his money by setting aside a certain amount each week for the contribution on the Lord's day (1 Corinthians 16:2). Learning to discipline himself in giving properly will help him with the use of his money in other things. He disciplines his habits by beginning to attend the assemblies of the church each Lord's day for the purpose of worship. He finds delight in being in the presence of the Lord's people. He disciplines himself in his thinking, his attitude toward work, toward his family, toward his friends, and toward people in general. He disciplines himself in his daily living. He works hard, abstains from things that are bad and immoral, tries to be honest in all things and in dealing with others. He walks in the steps of Christ, believing that while Christ is his example in all things, he must likewise set a good example for those who may follow in his steps.

As a Christian he learns to work with others in carrying out the Lord's will. As a man, he may participate publicly in the various aspects of worship. As a woman, she learns to be a better mother, how to take care of her family, how to be hospitable, to visit the sick, to help people in need, etc., and therefore to have a good influence among all those around her.

There are some who have a false concept of Christianity. For some reason they think that when one becomes a Christian, he may now do many things that his former religion would not permit. He thinks that Christianity gives him the freedom to deal

more openly with the opposite sex, that he can smoke, swear, dance, go to clubs, and perhaps many other things. But where in the world did he get such an idea? The Bible certainly doesn't teach it. Of course he may have seen some weak Christian doing some of these things and perhaps he thought that this represented Christians in general. But such is far from the truth. When one becomes a Christian he does have freedom — freedom from his past sins, freedom to worship. But he does not have permission to live in sin, to have bad habits, to go to questionable places, to be immoral, or to do anything that is bad and wrong. The Christian looks to Christ, who lived a sinless, a perfect life as his example. He would have us to be pure, godly, and holy. The Bible condemns the things of the world and we are exhorted not to love such things. If we do, the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15-17).

As a Christian we are blessed to know that the Lord has promised to be with us, to help us, and to care for our needs. John says, *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

Not only do we have all the blessings already mentioned, but many others beyond these. Finally, Christians we have the hope of eternal life. The Lord has promised to come back to receive us unto Himself and to take us home to heaven; that is, if we have been faithful to Him unto death (Revelation 2:10).

So conversion — salvation, and all that it implies, places us in a position to be blessed above all people on earth. We are sons and daughters of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. We are members of the greatest institution in all this world, His church. We are the light of the world.

We are the salt of the earth. The world itself literally stands today because we are here to represent Christ. After all that the Lord does for us in this life, we are promised eternal life with God. How could you ever find any life that would come close to comparing with the rewards of the Christian life?

Are you a Christian? If not, then you don't know what you are missing! The Lord Himself, the church, and Christians everywhere urge you to obey God that you might be saved, and that you might be added to the church and be a Christian. You can do so by believing in God, believing in Christ as the Son of God, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, and by being baptized to wash away your sins.

Welcome into the family!