

Conversion

- What is conversion?
- Repentance
- Faith
- Confession

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What is Conversion?

- Descriptions of conversion:
 - Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*: “The initial human response to the Spirit’s working in the heart commonly known as conversion (belief, repentance, and faith)...a person’s decisive turning from sin, self, and Satan unto God through Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit” (235, 249).

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What is Conversion?

- Descriptions of conversion:
 - William Hull, *The Christian Experience of Salvation*: “a radical reorientation of my life beginning in the very depths of my being....While the process does not always follow a prescribed order, the normal progression is to move from (1) repentance to (2) faith to (3) confession” (21, 23).

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What is Conversion?

- Idea of conversion has been challenged.
 - Some say human beings are basically good.
 - Social gospel – what’s needed is social change.
 - Dialogue between Christianity and other world religions has downplayed conversion.
 - Process theology – nothing to repent of.

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What is Conversion?

- Views of conversion
 - Protestants: event between sinner and God.
 - Catholics: through sacraments.

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What is Conversion?

- Conversion isn’t unique to Christianity.
 - Other religions have converts.
 - Behavioral change happens for many reasons.
 - Experiential element isn’t the defining feature.
- So what makes Christian conversion unique?

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What is Conversion?

- Do we make conversion too important?

David Wells, *Turning to God*: “But conversion is not an experience that stands alone. It is the doorway to the building of salvation. And God does not want us to stand in the doorway, marveling at the threshold. He wants us to enter the building and marvel at what is inside.”

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What is Conversion?

- Do we make conversion too important?

David Wells: “Evangelicals often make the test of one’s spiritual life one’s willingness to testify about the moment of birth. Describing one’s sensations in passing through the doorway is considered proof that one is in the room! This shifts the focus from where it ought to be—the evidence of the Spirit’s renewing work in producing a God-centered life, a God-fearing heart, and God-honoring character and witness—and places it on a person’s autobiographical account of the conversion crisis. The only real proof of our conversion is an obedient and fruitful life.”

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Characteristics of Conversion

- Main Hebrew word: *shubh* (turn/return).
- Main Greek word: *epistrepho* (turn).
- Means turning or returning to God.
 - “Outsider conversion” – 1 Thess. 1:9.
 - “Insider conversion” – Matt. 3:1-12.
 - Turn away from sin: repentance (*metanoia*).
 - Turn toward God: faith (*pistis*).

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Characteristics of Conversion

- Models for conversion:
 - Alan Tippett: problem/solution
 - Heirich/Kuhn: paradigm shift
 - Stanley Grenz: disorientation/reorientation.

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Repentance

- Hebrew: *nacham* (regret or grief); *shubh* (turn).
- Greek: *metamelomai* (regret); *metanoieo* (change of mind, turning from sin).
- It's "a turning around of life from going in the wrong direction to going in the right direction" (William Hull).

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Repentance

- Bruce Demarest: "Repentance is a change of mind, ultimate loyalty, and behavior whereby pre-Christians turn from sin unto God."
- Thomas Oden: "A radical change of mind and heart followed by a behavioral reformation of a sinful life, a sorrowing for sin so as to forsake sin altogether."

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Repentance

- Involves mind, emotions, will:
 - Recognition of our wrong course.
 - Sorrow for sin.
 - Decision to turn from sin.

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Repentance

- William Hull: Repentance need not involve terrible remorse for a life of degradation.
 - “Repentance speaks to an urgent need which we all feel, even if our past is not particularly sordid, to reorient life so that it will be centered around ultimate goals.”
 - “Most of us miss the prize in life (Phil. 3:14), not because of some monstrous defiance of God, but because we live from day to day without ever really asking where it all will lead.”

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Repentance

- Why is repentance so difficult?

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Repentance

- How is repentance different from angst or despair?
- Repentance and faith go together.

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Faith

- Hebrew: *amman* (nourish, believe in, trust, be faithful); *emunah* (faithfulness, loyalty); *batah* (confide in, lean upon, trust).
- Greek: *pisteuo* (believe, have faith, be faithful); *pistis* (belief, faith, faithfulness).
- Not just cognitive.
 - Acceptance of facts (Rom. 10:9-10).
 - Element of trust (“believe into” - John 3:16).
 - Includes faithfulness (see Rom. 3:3).

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Faith

- Faith in and of itself doesn't save.
 - Must be faith in the right object.
 - We're saved *by* grace *through* faith.
- Three dimensions:
 - *Notitia*: knowledge of one's sin, Christ's work
 - *Assensus*: agreement with the truth of the gospel
 - *Fiducia*: personal trust in Christ; commitment

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Faith

- William Hull, faith-as-relationship:
“What we call *grace* refers to the openness of God to be known and loved which He demonstrated by giving Himself freely and unconditionally in His Son. Likewise, what we call *faith* refers to our openness to this divine initiative which we demonstrate by accepting Christ freely and unconditionally into our lives. . . The outgoing of God to us is grace, the outgoing of us to God is faith.”

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Faith

- Two sides of a covenant relationship.
- Thinking of faith as covenant relationship may keep us from asking “minimalist” questions.
- Christian life begins and continues by grace through faith.

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Faith

- Is faith a gift of God? A human work?
 - Calvinism: Gift of God; humans passive.
 - Arminianism: (Enabled) human response to God’s initiative.
 - See Ephesians 2:8-10.
 - Saving faith vs. faith as a spiritual gift.
 - Divinely enabled human response.

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Confession

- NT: public identification with Christ
 - John 15:27; Acts 1:8 – Believers are called to witness.
 - Luke 12:8-9 – If we confess Jesus, he will confess us.
 - Rom. 10:9-10 – Believe and confess.
 - Acts 2:38 – Believe and be baptized.

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Confession

- Three functions of public confession (Hull):
 - Confirmation of inward experience (makes us accountable and pledges our continuing faithfulness)
 - Unites us to the community of faith
 - Witnesses to the world (may bring us into conflict)

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