

Two Choices

1 Peter 4:1-4 (10/30/16)

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1 Peter 4:1-4 *Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.*

A THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION

Verse 2 - *So as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.* I want to give you a theology of conversion based on this verse. Next week we'll finish the series on this passage in verses 3-4 with "Contra Mundum." Google it.

Verse two describes conversion. Conversion literally means turning around. One day on a trip to Indy we got off I-69 and turned right onto 231. After driving for about 20 minutes, something didn't seem right. Eventually we found out we were going the wrong way. We stopped, turned around, and headed the other way. We were converted! There are conversion charts for measurements, for money, and a ton of other stuff. You sometimes hear of people converting to Judaism, or to Roman Catholicism, or to Islam. These are not what the Bible is talking about. Conversion is not making changes in your behavior, or deciding to start going to church, or reading your Bible, or beginning to live for a higher purpose or power. It isn't joining a religious group. It isn't even deciding to believe in God and all that. And biblical conversion is not just psychological help for people who can't handle life.

YOU MUST BE CONVERTED

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "Unless you are *converted* and become like a child, you won't enter the kingdom of God." In Acts 15:3 Paul and Barnabas head up to Jerusalem. "Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the *conversion* of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren."

Conversion is the change in your life when God gives you a new heart through the gospel message, resulting in you turning from living for your own pleasures and desires to turning in faith to Jesus Christ and trusting Him alone as your Savior and Lord. When God gives you this new life, you become a new creation in Christ. Your heart, the core of your being, is made alive by God, and His inner work of regeneration is evident in the change in your life.

Picture it like this. There you are, traveling down the days of your life, living according to your own desires, maybe indulging yourself at the expense of others, toying with sexual desires, cursing people who cross you, doing whatever feels good at the moment. Or maybe you are trying to be good and even religious, being very moral like that rich young ruler who thought he had kept all the commandments. Suddenly you hear the gospel message that Christ died on that cross for sinful people who have not been living for God's glory, that only through Him can your sins be forgiven, and that He is the only way for you to have eternal life in heaven. God tugs at your heart and calls you through the message. God opens your eyes to see how wrong you've been and you repent of going your own way; you turn to Christ in faith alone. At a moment in time you are converted. God regenerates your heart, gives you new life, and you are born again. Now you are headed down the road in exactly the opposite direction you had been going. Rather than living for your own pleasures, you now desire to live for the will of God, to please God, to live for His glory. Your heart's desires have changed. However, your sinful habits and selfishness will continue to plague you. You are now at war with those fleshly lusts as those self-pleasing desires try to hijack your heart from God's road for you. But because you have been born again and have God's Spirit, you are able to grow spiritually through the Word of God, worship, prayer, and fellowship.

That's what Peter is getting at here. You've been converted, so you are no longer living for human, self-pleasing desires, the lusts of men. Rather in strong contrast, you are now living for the will of God! You have been converted and are living a radically different life than you were before. Have you been converted? Are there evident changes in your life?

YOUR HEART WAS RULED BY THE "LUSTS OF MEN."

Those "lusts of men" identify the hearts of all humans. All 7.4 billion on planet earth, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, philosophy – every human being, is born with a heart controlled by these self-serving human desires. You were born with a heart cursed by sin, totally depraved of any heart desire to please God. You have lived for your own glory, to please yourself. Your heart is the fountain of all your desires and decisions, all your words, pride, gossip, bitterness, unbelief, and self-serving. Why are you like this? It all began in Genesis 3 with your first mother and father.

BACK TO THE GARDEN

Genesis 3:1-7 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

God created Adam and Eve to live their lives for the will of God, right? And they did, for a short time. But then along came their test. Did they continue to live for the will of God, doing what pleases Him, living for His glory? We know what happened. This seductive and deceiving serpent, Hebrew "Nachash," "ssssss" slithered into their lives and countered God's will, "Has God said?" Even more – "*Indeed*, has God said?" Really? Are you serious? Surely not! He hasn't said this, has He? A question is raised, "You can't eat from any tree?" A doubt is injected into Eve's heart, "Well, yes, He did put a limitation on us – there's that one tree we are not to eat or even touch!" Oops. She added to God's word, exposing the beginning of the conception of sin in her heart. She debated with the devil; not a good thing to do. There's only one thing to do with the devil – resist him, flee from him. Don't even rebuke him – that's God's business.

But Eve replied, "Well, yes, it's strange, but that one tree over there, though we are free to eat any of them – that one tree over there, which we've been noticing for some reason above all the others, and it's really beautiful, we're not even supposed to touch it. If we do, we'll die!" She toned down the penalty a bit. God said, "You will *surely* die" in Genesis 2:17. Satan counters God's will in his most convincing, assuring, pleasing and comforting voice to Eve, "You surely shall not die!" BOOM! Sin rode into Adam and Eve's heart on the back of a lie! Our first parents are about to plunge into the abyss of sin, the curse, condemnation, and death, both physical and spiritual. Everything is about to change, radically change, and not just for them.

Professor Hiss instructs Eve (v. 5). "Listen, let me give you insight into what God is doing. He obviously doesn't want you to be free to make up your own mind. He is keeping you from being all you can be. And here's the fact: You can be as god. You will know and become wise. Your eyes will be open and you'll become your own boss, your own master, your own god. You'll be free to live however you want to live! He has no right to tell you what is right and wrong and neither does anyone else. You have the right to do whatever pleases you."

"Hmm," thought Eve (v. 6), "that makes sense. Let me take a closer look at that tree – I'm not eating it or even touching it. I'm just looking at it. The fruit definitely looks good to eat. Healthy, too. It is very beautiful. Nothing wrong with what it looks like. Plus, by eating it I'll be wise. I'll know stuff I don't know

now. I see it. I want it. I'm going to eat it. Adam, eat it with me. We'll be wise. We'll really live. We can make up our own minds. We don't have to live under God's oppressive will. We can live by our own desires." The desires of men!

Instantly our original father and mother fell into condemnation, sin flooded their hearts, their relationship with God changed completely, they knew they were guilty, and when God came looking for them they ran, covered, hid, and blamed. We sinners have been doing the same ever since.

Every human being since then is born with a heart driven by the self-pleasing desires or lusts of men! Ephesians 2:3 says, "We all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." All of us lived for our own glory. These human desires aren't all bad. There's nothing wrong with desiring to eat, or sleep, or watch football, or enjoy sex in marriage. Lots of human desires are good in themselves. The problem is that we live for them. We want them too much. We aren't motivated by God and His pleasure, but by our own pleasure. Self rules our hearts. This is why we need to be converted. We don't just need behavior change; we need heart change. We need a new heart that will live for the will of God.

CONVERSION IS THE FRUIT OF REGENERATION

What does conversion look like? Here are two passages that describe conversion as the fruit of regeneration.

Ezekiel 36:25-27, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh – that's regeneration. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. That's conversion. When God regenerates us on the inside which we can't see, how do we know we've been regenerated? The evidence is that our life direction changes. We have new desires and affections. We love God. We want to please God.

1 Thessalonians 1 describes conversion. Paul preached the gospel to them and because they were chosen by God, He worked powerfully in their hearts, giving them the gift of repentance and faith. They were converted and everyone knew it. Their lives were transformed and they became imitators of Paul and other believers. They "turned to God from idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is for Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." That's biblical conversion. Is this your story? Have you been converted?

CONVERSION RESULTS IN A BATTLE TO LIVE FOR THE WILL OF GOD

Back to 1 Peter 4:2. You used to live for the desires of mankind, but now you've been converted. Everything changed, from the inside. Up to this time you followed your heart and you lived for your own pleasure. But! There's a BC and an AD in every believer's life. In your BC days you used to, but since you came to Christ, you now.... Next week those being baptized will tell of their conversions. "I used to live for this, that, and the other thing, then Joe shared the gospel with me. God opened my eyes and I became aware of my sin. I received Christ and God radically changed my life. I'm not saying it's easy, but now I really want to do what God wants me to do!"

So you have the rest of your days to live for God and please Him! Notice some key words in verse 2. "Live" is the verb of *bios*. Your life is a biography – hopefully for God's glory! "Time" is *chronos* and speaks of moment-by-moment time. It's the ever ticking clock of your life. Every beat of your heart takes you closer to standing before Christ and giving an account of your life. Jonathan Edwards resolved "never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can." This is what Peter focuses on. "Only one life, will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." That means living your life for His glory in everything you do! Ephesians 5:16 says, "Making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

"In the flesh" simply means your body, just like verse 1, and that will mean some degree of suffering. You have this flesh, this "earth suit" as Paul Tripp calls it, to live for God's will. You have a head with a brain,

eyes and a mouth and ears, arms and hands, legs and feet, all given you to live for God's will. Remember the ceremony in Leviticus of consecrating the priests to their ministry? Blood from a sacrifice was applied to their right ear lobe, right thumb, and right toe! Isn't that beautiful? You have been purchased with the blood of Christ which has spiritually been sprinkled on you. You belong to Him. You have ears to hear His Word, hands to serve His people, and feet to walk His mission in this world!

God says as your days unfold, you are to live them for the will of God. Make choices that honor Him. You'll be tempted to live for your own desires. Every day for the rest of your life you have a decision to make in every area of your life. **"Just two choices on the shelf: pleasing God or pleasing self."** Unsaved people don't have that choice, but you do. You still have the remains of sinful habits and desires, and these try to hijack the cockpit of your life, rule your heart and control your attitudes, words, responses. Oh, I know!

But God has given you His Spirit, His Word, and your daily moment-by-moment choice to temporarily please yourself or God! How are you doing? Are you choosing to please God? Paul said, "I make it my aim or goal or ambition to be pleasing to God." Is that your daily goal? Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, are you doing it for your own pleasure or are you doing it for the glory of God? Live for God's will, even when it's hard! Adam and Eve brought the sin curse by saying, "Not Your will, God, but ours be done." Mankind has paid dearly. Jesus prayed, "Not My will, but yours be done!" Mankind has been blessed abundantly by that choice!

SO WHAT?

Conversion turns you from the path of the lusts of men and plants you firmly on the path of living for God's will. This is the theology of conversion. How do you know God's will? Immerse yourself in His Word, pray about whatever you read, ask Him for wisdom, and determine to honor Him with your choices. Don't be molded by the world culture around you, but be transformed by renewing your mind and feeding it God's truth; then you can test and do what God wants you to do (Romans 12:2). Love God and your neighbor. Forgive people who hurt you. Rejoice, pray, and give thanks in everything. Be content, guard your tongue, pay your bills, and pursue purity.

I love Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may do all that is written in it. Then you'll make your way prosperous, and then you'll have success." What great instruction! What a promise! You will honor and please and glorify God in the name of Jesus!

Are you converted on an inner heart level? Have your desires changed from pleasing self to pleasing God? Does your life reflect that you have bowed your knee to Jesus as your one and only Lord and Savior? Are you living for the will of God? That's true conversion!

