

Awakening to the Change of a Lifetime

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DEANE MEATHERINGHAM

THE CHANGE OF A LIFETIME

When we make a counter movement to the downward drag of our existence, it is the change of a lifetime. Transformation comes from having our lives re-ordered in communion with Christ. We will have been faced with truth and reality as it is unveiled in the resurrected Christ. It is called having our eyes opened so that we turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God for the forgiveness of our sins to a life of faith amongst those requisitioned by God, Acts 26:18. The making of such a radical change of life is called converting to Christ.

That our lives should be changed by the love and power of Jesus Christ is a core expectation of the gospel. Conversion is not a marginal or peripheral idea on the edge of Christianity reserved for the lunatic fringe of the Church. What sort of God would we have if he did not alter our lives? Is humanity forever cemented into a form of psychological determinism?

Fostering a culture of conversion growth is a Key Direction of the Strategic Plan the Uniting Church of SA. We may carry some negative caricatures of conversion that cause us to freeze and discard the possibility. My purpose is not to impose a culturally governed style of gaining converts but to unpack some of the boxes of material in the bible that attends to conversion.

(Example; I am a chosen convert to McDonalds).

CONVERSION MEANS TO CHANGE OUR MIND AND TO TURN BACK

There are tonnes of biblical material dealing with this subject. In the OT, to convert occurs about 120 times and means to turn around, return, and come back in the sense of making a change of behaviour through a return to the living God.

The nature of the turning is described as being *from* evil (Jer.18:18) *to* God (Mal. 3:7). The impulse for turning originates in God (Jer. 31:18; Lam. 5:21). The result of not turning is disaster (Amos 4:6-8). The call of God to return may be best seen in Isaiah 55:7 & Hosea 14:1-7. The use of the word in the NT is similar to the OT. The turning is from wicked ways (Acts 3:36) from worthless things to the living God (Acts 14:15), from idols to serve the living and true God (I Thess. 1:9) and from going astray to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (I Pet. 2:25)

We need to include the word repentance in our understanding of conversion. Repentance means to change our minds after recognizing that our previous opinions were false or bad (Mark 1:4, 14-15; Acts 3:36; 17:29-31). When a person looks back and decides to leave behind errant ways and false worship that is repentance. When that person looks ahead in faith to trust Christ for forgiveness, as he or she returns to the Father that is conversion.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A PERSON TO CONVERT TO CHRIST?

Christians are those who have woken up. As they awake, they look up, and rise and turn on an axis. Straight ahead is the abyss and the plunge to death. They were encircled by death. We awoke because we were awakened. We do not awaken ourselves and get up, (cf. Karl Barth). We are roused from a sleep from which there can be no awakening except by the mystery and the power of God, (Hosea. 5:4; Eph. 2:1-5).

Ask yourself what caused you to become a Christian.

When we consider the resoluteness of the human mind coupled with the power of the imagination to set up a framework of beliefs and values, we face a closed door. Add to this the security of religion and addictions to give us pleasure and security then conversion is impossible. It may be that not all of the power of the atom or the creator God can make one defiant or rebellious person gladly surrender their will to God. It takes the action of the love of God, revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ to constrain a genuine change of heart and mind, II Cor. 5:14.

There are three elements necessary for a genuine conversion experience.

1. It needs insight or a revelation of the truth. The objective reality of the risen Christ speaking reveals the truth of God and of us. Paul discovered he was not working for God as he assumed, but against him, Acts 9:3-7.
2. Then there is turning. We turn *from, to*. Paul turned from opposing Jesus to following Jesus. He did not simply vow to get it right next time and in future try to do a better job of what God wanted.
3. Following our turning to Christ there is transformation. Our lives change as we live consistently with our new mind found in Christ.

CONVERSION FROM RELIGION TO LIFE IN CHRIST

We would be mistaken if we thought that conversion or transformation meant that we conquered all bad habits and became faultless religious people. Conversion is a transition, a movement in which we remain sinners but now turn to Christ to be put in the right through his death and to have Christ's life shape us up anew, Gal. 2:20.

Much of our ministry has turned back from a life in Christ to a work that we do for God. This leaves us with mundane ministries that are predictable and monotonous, flat and non-contagious. We make little impact on society and there is little passion in our worship or preaching. It leaves us drained, weary and disillusioned. Conversion for us would be trusting that the ascended Christ continues to hold us in communion with him before the Father, John 20:17. In addition, Christ gives his wisdom, his mind, his Word, his healing and his teaching to us vicariously, Phil. 1:21, Eph. 4:7-16; compare Gal. 1:6.

Whether we are converted suddenly or over a period of time is not the issue. The issue is whether we engage in ministry that originates in us with God helping or whether we have turned to Christ and trust him for his life in the power of the Holy Spirit to flow through us. To be effective in seeing other people's lives transformed we ourselves must be in the flow of transformation.