

CONVERSION

Conversion: *“A turning away from someone or something and a turning toward another person or thing.”* (Catholic Dictionary, p. 223).

“In the New Testament, the Greek word metanoia, often translated as conversion or repentance, means something very profound and personal: not merely a change of manners but a change of heart, a turning away from sin, a return to the Father’s love.” (A to Z, A Basic Catholic Dictionary, p. 27).

“The call of Christ to conversion continues to resound in the lives of the baptized. Conversion is a continuing obligation for the whole Church. She is holy but includes sinners in her midst.” (Compendium, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 299).

“Since the new life of grace received in Baptism does not abolish the weakness of human nature nor the inclination to sin (that is, concupiscence), Christ instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation for the conversion of the baptized who have been separated from him by sin.” (Compendium, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 297).

Conversion and Repentance Its Roots in the Old Testament

The word that expresses the biblical concept of “repentance” is *sub*. It is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament. It can indicate a ***turning from evil to God or a turning from God back to evil***. In Ezekiel 18:26-27 we see the description of both:

“²⁶ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. ²⁷ But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life.”

Returning to another Sacrifice

In Jesus we have forgiveness, wisdom, redemption and everything we will ever need. (1 Cor. 1:29-30).

The danger in the early church, as well as today was that individuals were turning away from righteousness in Jesus and were going back to the law to obtain righteousness (Gal. 2:21), returning to another sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:4), and to an inferior priesthood for

help (Heb. 7:11). In so doing, the Apostle Paul declares repeatedly and boldly: *“²Listen to me, for this is serious: if you are counting on circumcision and keeping the Jewish laws to make you right with God, then **Christ cannot save you.** ³I’ll say it again. Anyone trying to find favor with God by being circumcised must always obey every other Jewish law or perish. ⁴**Christ is useless to you** if you are counting on clearing your debt to God by keeping those laws; you are lost from God’s grace.”* (Gal.5:2-4) ^(LB)

Conversion and Repentance Turns FROM something, TO something.

In “repentance” someone always turns FROM something, TO something. On the positive side, it turned the Thessalonian believers FROM idols TO serve the true and living God (1 Thess. 1:9). On the negative side the writer of the Book of Hebrews warned of turning away from Christ and back to sin (Heb. 3:12-14), away from Christ and back to the law for their justification (Heb. 10:1, 14), and away from Christ and back to the Old Testament priesthood (Heb. 7:11). The same kind of warnings are given repeatedly throughout the book of Galatians and most of the New Testament. It is

surprising that most people have never seen this!

New Testament Warnings

A friend of mine who is a Protestant preacher says that (based on Hebrews 6:4-6) he believes that a believer can turn from Christ and His sacrifice, but it is so rare that it would be almost impossible to ever happen.

What my friend does not realize is that this same warning is given all through the New Testament and the New Testament writers also include themselves in the warnings that they give. The personal pronoun “**we**”, meaning “a group of people that includes the speaker”, is used repeatedly throughout the New Testament.

Example: *“How shall **we** escape, if **we** neglect so great salvation”* (Heb. 2:3).

*“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are **we**, if **we** hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”* (Heb. 3:6).

*“For **we** are made partakers of Christ, if **we** hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:14)*

*“For if **we** sin willfully after that **we** have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26).*

*“For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not **we** escape, if **we** turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).*

If **we** again turn towards sin, **we** begin a process of turning away from Christ and His sacrifice. If continued in, it can lead one to departure from the Living God.

*“¹² **Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.** ¹³ But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be **hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.** ¹⁴ **For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end”** (Heb. 3:12-14).*

The warning of the New Testament is:
Beware of sin, that leads to hardness of
heart, then to unbelief, and to departure from
the Living God.

Someone May Protest

Someone may protest: “But I believe in
eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).” “So do I.”
The redemption (sacrifice) won by Christ is
eternal but it appears from the New
Testament that man may turn away from it.
That is what the whole book of Galatians and
Hebrews is all about and many other New
Testament books as well.

“Conversion” and “Repentance” should be
towards God (see Acts 20:21), but
sometimes it appears that people change
their mind and turn back:

¹⁹*Dear brothers, **if anyone has slipped
away from God** and no longer trusts the
Lord and someone helps him understand the
Truth again, ²⁰that person who **brings him
back to God will have saved a wandering
soul from death**, bringing about the
forgiveness of his many sins.” (James 5:19-
20)*

*“²⁰ And anyone who has escaped the pollution of the world once by coming to know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and who then allows himself to be entangled by it a second time and mastered, will end up in a **worse state than he began in.**” (2 Peter 2:20) (Jerusalem Bible)*

*“ ... And have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they then commit apostasy ...” (Heb. 6:4-6) ^(RSV) **“Apostasy”** is “the renunciation or abandonment of a former loyalty to Christ.”*

Let me repeat this again: When a person turns towards sin he begins a process of turning away from Christ and His sacrifice (Heb. 10:26); and, if continued in, it will lead to a hardening of the heart, unbelief, and departure from the Living God (Heb. 3:12-14; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

These same warnings are repeated continually throughout the New Testament. Again, it is surprising that so many people have never seen these passages or acknowledged them. It may be the result of following men and their teaching, the result

of not having an honest and open heart, and the hardening effects of the lifestyles of a twentieth century. Nevertheless, the warnings are there and anyone may freely read them if they so desire. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, are full of these kinds of warnings.

It is a shame that repentance towards God has been linked with legalism, the keeping of God's commandments has been confused with works of the law, or the confession of sin as being sin consciousness (Acts 3:19; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn.1:9; Acts 8:22).

The Other Side of the Coin

The other side of the coin: ³⁹ *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day*" (Jn. 6:39). It is not the will of the Father that any who come to Jesus should be lost, neither is it His will that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). But the freedom of men to act and their responsibility cannot be overlooked.

Jesus said, ²⁸ *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall*

*any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand” (Jn. 10:28-29).**

We must not overlook the preceding verse 27 which is an integral part of this context. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”* The condition of the Savior’s promise is that the sheep listen to His voice and follow. The person who ceases to hear and to follow has no right to this promised eternal life. This is an essential truth affirmed many times in the New Testament. It is easy to say, “We are the elect!” but the Scripture admonishes us to: ¹⁰ *Set your minds, on endorsing by your conduct the fact that God has called and chosen you. If you go along these lines there is no reason why you should stumble.* ¹¹ *Indeed, if you live this sort of life, a rich welcome awaits you as you enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10-11) (see also Acts 26:20; Rom. 2:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:10-11).*

Facing the question

Is it not time to stop trying to cancel the plain explicit warnings of Scripture by an

incomplete comprehension by misuse of proof passages resulting in supposed doctrines which the early Church knew nothing of, and first heard of 1500 afterwards. Is it not time to heed the many warnings of our Savior and His Apostles? Men's eternal lives are at stake. Shall we continue to avoid the urgent warnings which the Apostles and so many others faithfully sounded?

“Therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

[For] *by virtue of that one single offering [Christ's sacrifice] He has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom He is sanctifying [in Greek this has a continuing sense: *who are sanctified, set apart to God and continue to be sanctified*]. (Hebrews 10:14)* (Jerusalem Bible)

Questions

1. **Read Ezekiel 18:26-27.** Repentance can indicate a turning from evil to God or a turning from God back to evil. True or False

²⁶ *When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die.* ²⁷ *Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life* (Ezekiel 18:26-27). ^(RSV)

2. Read 1 Cor. 1:30-31. In Jesus we have forgiveness, wisdom, redemption, and everything we will ever need. True or False

³⁰ *It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,* ³¹ *so that, as it is written, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord."* (1 Cor. 1:30-31) ^(NAB)

3. Read 1 Thess. 1:9. In Repentance someone always turns FROM something, TO something. On the positive side, it turned the Thessalonian believers FROM idols TO:
a. keeping the Jewish Sabbath. b. serve the True and Living God.

⁹ *For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols **to serve the living and true God.*** (1 Thess. 1:9) ^(NAB)

4. Read Hebrews 3:12-14. In the book of Hebrews we are warned not to turn away

from Christ, and not go back to practicing sin. True or False

¹² Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. (Heb. 3:12-14) ^(RSV)

5. Read Hebrews 3:12-14. The warning of the New Testament is: a. Beware of dogs. b. Beware of sin, that leads to hardness of heart, then to unbelief, and to departure from the Living God.

¹² Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. (Heb. 3:12-14) ^(RSV)

6. Read Hebrews 6:4-6. When a person turns towards sin he begins a process of turning away from Christ and His sacrifice. If continued it will lead to a hardening of heart, unbelief and departure from the Living God. This renunciation or abandonment of Christ is called: a. having a good time. b. having a bad day. c. Apostasy.

⁴ *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. (Heb. 6:4-6) ^(RSV)*

7. Read 2 Peter 3:17. We should beware that we are not being led away with the error of the wicked and fall from: a. a chair in the kitchen. b. our own steadfastness.

¹⁷ *You therefore, brethren, knowing these things before, take heed, lest being led aside by the error of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:17) ^(Douay-Rheims)*

8. Read Hebrews 10:14. By the Sacrifice and Offering of Jesus on the Cross He has achieved the eternal perfection of all:
a. those who have a one-time moment of faith. b. whom He is sanctifying (by His grace).

¹⁴ *[For] by virtue of that one single offering [Christ's sacrifice], He has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying [in Greek this is present tense: who are sanctified, set apart to God and continue to be sanctified]. (Heb. 10:14) ^(Jerusalem Bible)*

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