

## Real Conversion

Are We Converted?

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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In this sermon we are going to talk about conversion—about the conversion of certain church members who seem to have dropped out of sight, or maybe have swallowed some of the false doctrines that have been promoted by the Worldwide Church of God, or have taken some extreme position on one major area or another. It rolled through my head (and it has probably rolled through yours too), that they might have never been converted at all, and then we gladly and gratefully and quickly remind ourselves that God is the Judge of their conversion.

We should really be concerned about our *own* conversion rather than somebody else's. It is a good thing God determines one's state of conversion, because it is an inward quality. You may be able to see the fruits of someone else's conversion. They appear on the outside, but it is very difficult for us to see another's heart, where real conversion takes place. We cannot see another's heart. All we know is that Jeremiah says "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," but it is that wicked heart that God is trying to change and convert. However, we *can* evaluate our *own* heart. We can examine our own conversion if we take the time to honestly judge ourselves against the standard, which is Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to study into what conversion is, and we are going to look at it from the angle of evaluating just how converted we are as individuals. Such a study, hopefully, will help to show us areas in which we need to grow and overcome, and it should make us a bit more appreciative of God, His patience, His mercy, His longsuffering with us, as we have taken so long to be converted.

This sermon must begin with the basic facts about conversion. First we have to ask, "Who can be converted?" That is about as basic as you can get. If a person professes to be a Christian and says that he has accepted Christ as his personal Savior, is he converted? Is that all it takes? If so, if that is the case,

does that not mean that there are millions of professing Christians out there—Catholics and Protestants and Orthodox, and all those other types such as Pentecostals, Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists? That it could be said that they are all converted?

Let us go to Romans 8. We are going to look at several verses here which basically answer all the questions about who can be converted.

**Romans 8:6-9, 13-16** For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. . . . For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

This passage tells us several things about who is a Christian and who is not. First off, it tells us that a non-Christian is not subject to God's law. If we want to put it the other way around, a little more positively, a Christian *is* subject to God's law. So if you see a person who claims to be converted, but he is not keeping God's law, then you have got a pretty good idea that person is not converted.

A second thing that he says here is that God considers one His, one of His children, if you have the Holy Spirit in you, and when you have the Holy Spirit in you, you are "in the Spirit," and you will do all those things that a person with God's Spirit will do.

The third thing that I find in here is that a person "in the Spirit" is endeavoring to put to death the deeds of the body. He is trying to overcome sin. He is trying to put down all those evil things that human nature tries to trip us up with.

The fourth thing I find here is in the last verse, verse 16: that God's Spirit in us bears witness. That is, it produces testimony or proof, or fruit, that we are indeed God's children. Not only are we overcoming, but Point 4 is that we are producing fruit that shows that we have the Spirit in us.

So right away we have four basic facts about who is a Christian, and consequently who is converted. We have

1. The person keeps God's law;
2. He possesses God's Spirit;
3. He is overcoming; and
4. He is bearing fruit.

If someone claims to be converted and does not do those four things, you have to wonder about his actual state of conversion.

We need to turn this back on ourselves. Are we keeping God's law? I am just going to assume we have God's Spirit at this point, because we will be able to tell whether we are overcoming and if we are growing and producing fruit. So we have to turn all these things back on ourselves to give us an idea if we are really converted.

Let us go back to Acts 2. The setting here is Pentecost, and Peter has just finished speaking, telling the Jews there they had just killed the Savior.

**Acts 2:37-39** 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."

Now let us go to Acts 3. This is a similar situation. Peter is preaching at Solomon's porch.

**Acts 3:19** "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."

These four verses give us some additional material to consider about conversion. The primary point here is that Peter shows conversion to take place at a definite time and all at once. He says, "Repent, and be baptized," and "Be converted." It is like snapping your fingers. Just like that.

So when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, and we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we are considered to be "converted."

Notice Acts 11:19. We will see a similar thing happening here. This takes place in Antioch.

**Acts 11:19-24** Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The part I was really looking for here is verse 21. "And a great number believed and turned to the Lord." The same word that is translated "*turned to the Lord*" is the exact same Greek word as was found in chapter 3, verse 19 that was translated "*converted*." So "a great number believed and converted to the Lord." So there is a point where God considers us converted. It happens all at once, and happens after we are called and receive God's Spirit.

Yet we know that conversion is not just a one-time thing, because conversion is a process. This is a lot like the other subjects we have been studying lately, like salvation. Salvation happens all at once, in one sense, when we are justified. God considers us *saved* at that point; but it is only the initial part of a much greater process of salvation that will take the rest of our lives to complete. It is the same way with conversion. God converts us upon the receipt of the Holy Spirit, but we still have the rest of our lives to live, and convert even more, because that is only the first touch of God's mind upon us. We have so much further to go. As salvation is a process, so is conversion.

Now at this point we are talking about here in Acts 11, these people were just only *regenerated* by God. At this point, conversion is only the initial dose of God's Spirit.

**Hebrews 5:13-14** For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age.

Also in Ephesians 4:

**Ephesians 4:11-14** He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

Here Paul shows that we have to grow from being children into being mature. He shows in verse 15 that we "may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ." That is maturity. That is perfection. We have to grow from being babes, or children, into being mature like Christ.

He repeats this in I Corinthians 3:

**I Corinthians 3:1-3** And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.

They are babes in Christ. In I Corinthians 14 he says the same thing, as far as their understanding of "tongues":

**I Corinthians 14:20** Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

So, we must go through the process of maturity. We have to grow up as Christians to the point that God considers us ready to fulfill the destiny and the office that He has prepared for us. But if we were to be changed right now, how many of us are converted enough to fulfill the responsibility in which He would place us? I do not know.

But this process only makes sense. It is just like the natural, human process of growth of a baby, of a child. What would you think of a baby that was born six feet tall and 190 pounds? Woe to the mother who had one! Like a baby, a Christian must grow from a state of spiritual **immaturity**—because none of us is mature when we are first called—to a state of spiritual **maturity**. From carnality to spirituality. From flesh to Spirit. And that is the process of conversion.

Let us ask another question. If once we are converted, and a Christian sins, does he become automatically **unconverted**? Now you and I know the answer to this question is "no," but let us go through this just to nail it down and make it perfectly clear. The best place I know to answer this is in the first epistle of John.

**I John 1:5-2:2** This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

In this section John is specifically responding to certain claims that were probably voiced by the Gnostics in the church regarding sin and their ability to sin. They claim three false things:

(1) is that their conduct had nothing at all to do with their relationship with God. That is what they said in verse 6. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness . . ." That was their claim. But John says we lie if we say that.

Number (2) is in verse 8. They claimed that they had no sin.

And (3) is what they claimed in verse 10, that they were totally *beyond* sin. That is the difference between verse 8 and verse 10. Verse 8 says that they *did not have* any sin in them, and verse 10 says that they *could not* sin.

It shows you how little they understood, though they claimed to know it all. That is why they called themselves Gnostics. That is what the Greek word *gnostic* means. It means *one who knows*. I prefer the definition "*know it all*," because they were proud that they knew it all, that their knowledge gave them superiority. But they actually knew **nothing**. The truth was not in them.

John answers all their claims very simply.

The first claim: He says a Christian by definition is one who follows the example of Jesus Christ. So it is poppycock to say that your manner of life has nothing to do with your relationship with Him. He says if you are constantly trying to follow the example of Christ, the blood of Jesus Christ is there to cleanse you of your sins, and He will be doing that along the way.

The second one: They said they had no sin. John says that we are only showing our hypocrisy and self-deception if we say we do not sin, because we are obviously **full** of sin. We should be able to see that by looking in the mirror every morning. If we do not see sin in us, then we are deceiving ourselves. The truth is not in us.

The third one: They said they were incapable of sin. John says, "Look. You're calling God a liar." The whole plan of God is based on redemption from sin. We call it "The Plan of Redemption." So if we say that God has not redeemed us from anything, what is the use of having a plan of redemption? So we are calling God a liar. Again, we show how devoid of the truth we are. We do not understand the most basic things.

In this answer, John admits that Christians do sin. We have sin still in us. Even though the whole thrust of Christianity is to turn from sin and live sinlessly, we still have sin in us. Yet if we sin, and admit it, and repent of it, and seek forgiveness for it, Christ's blood covers the sin, and then we go on striving *not* to sin. Hopefully, we have learned a lesson, and we have grown, and we have overcome it, and we are being converted. It is just one more step in the process of conversion.

When you look at it, the process of conversion and the process of salvation are for the most part the exact same thing. The same principles work in both of them. The goals are both the same. So they are basically the same thing.

Now this should tell us a few things about conversion once we come to that point. For one thing, it is not something we do alone. It is God that works in us by His Spirit, with our cooperation, to convert us. It is His creative process at work, transforming us as He has designed us to become. And this is where this sermon begins to dovetail very neatly with my Dad's sermons on "God's Workmanship," because the process of conversion is basically God's workmanship in us. He is bringing us through this entire process. But my sermon is on a much more basic level than what he has been giving.

Another thing that is now apparent is that no matter how long we live, we will never achieve complete success in this process of conversion. We cannot save ourselves. We certainly cannot convert ourselves all the way. It takes God in us to do that.

While we are in the flesh, sin will always be present with us. How long was Paul a member of God's church, and he still considered himself the worse of sinners? We look on his life and say, "Wow! If he was the worst of sinners, where does that put **me**? I am certainly far more sinful! I mean, just full of it. Black with sin."

Sin is involved in our conversion, and yes, we are endeavoring to overcome it; but of ourselves we will never overcome it, and in this life we will never be perfect. Even with the help of God's Spirit, the odds are that from time to time, however long we have been in the church, we will sin. Thus a converted person is not perfect, but the key here is, he is constantly working in that direction, with God's help.

Sometimes I think we get so caught up in our day-to-day activities, including overcoming our specific problems, that we forget the goal, the end product that we are supposed to become. It is not that we forget it really, we do not *per se* forget that we are supposed to become like God, but I think we lose sight of it in the rush of our lives. There is just so much that is happening. We have things going on here, there, and everywhere. We are always busy doing something, like ants, and we forget to answer the question, "What are we converting to?" "Where do we want to end up?" If we would answer that question, we can better evaluate how far along that process we are. So let us just get re-grounded in this.

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness."

Commentators say that these words, *image* and *likeness*, are practically synonymous, that they both pretty much mean the same thing. But I do not think they understand God's plan. If they did, I think they would probably see that there is a slight difference between these two words, especially the word *image* as it is used in the New Testament.

I have always understood the word *likeness* to convey the sense of form and shape, that mankind looks a lot like the God-kind, that basically we are a copy, a very rudimentary rough copy of what God is. He has a head, with two eyes, a nose, a mouth, and two ears, and He has a body, with two arms and two legs, and we basically **look** like Him, appear like Him.

*Image*, however, implies more **spiritual** qualities of God, like mind and personality and character. Though we are born in the likeness of God, we must be called to grow into His image.

**Galatians 6:15** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

I just wanted that last bit, "but a new creation." God's creation of mankind did not end at the end of the sixth day. It goes on, and will continue until the resurrection for us as individuals, and it will go on as long as there are human beings that are able to grow into the image of God. We are a **new** creation, God's creation. He is creating in us *the new man*.

Let us go to the scriptures that talk about "the new man."

**Ephesians 4:17-24** This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 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 righteousness and true holiness.

First he says put off this **old** man that we have carried around for so long, the way the Gentiles still live. We have not learned Christ that way. That is not the way of Christ, to live like the Gentiles live, but *put on* a whole new character, a new man. It is renewing us. It has something to do with righteousness and holiness.

Now let us read what he suggests we do as part of putting on *the new man*, and putting off the old man.

**Ephesians 4:25-32** Therefore, putting away lying, each one 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 communication 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 which 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, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Did you notice that in most of those specific things he gave us something to *put off* and something to *put on*? Put off *lying*, and what you put on is *speaking the truth*. Now this is the process of conversion. Putting off the old man and putting on the new man. This is the way God is creating His image within you.

Let us go to Colossians 3 where he writes of similar things, but he says a few things that are different.

**Colossians 3:1-2** If then you were raised with Christ [out of the waters of baptism], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Now it is talking about making our minds pure, and thinking of those things he talks about in Philippians 4:8.

**Colossians 3:3-4** For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

If we successfully work through this process of salvation, this process of conversion, then we will wind up in the resurrection.

**Colossians 3:5** Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Several transgressions of the commandments are stated there.

**Colossians 3:6-10** Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them. But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

The *new man* "is renewed in knowledge." Notice what the new man looks like. He looks like the image of Him who **created** him—we are back to God creating His image in us (Genesis 1:26).

**Colossians 3:11** Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

There is the standard. Christ is everything. He is the One we are all trying to put on. Not *put on*, as in "to deceive," but *put on*, as in "clothes." We are trying to *put on Christ*, who is *the new man*—we are trying to put on His image.

**Colossians 3:12-15** Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies [This is the character of God we are talking about.], kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

These are all qualities of God.

**Colossians 3:16-17** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And then he goes into what my Bible sub-titles "The Christian Home," which he probably did because this is where we first have to apply these things: first to our mate and then to our children.

But these are all areas in which we are becoming converted, converted to the mind of God. So in our frequent self-examinations, we might want to turn to these two chapters, Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, to fill out a report card to show how well we are doing in these specific areas. Are we putting *off* all those things? Are we putting to death, mortifying them that are part of the old man, and are we putting *on* the glory of the *new* man?

Let us go to verses 1 and 2 of Romans 12, another well-known passage:

**Romans 12:1-2a** 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 [the old man], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . .

Remember, we saw that in Ephesians 4:23, about being renewed in the Spirit.

**Romans 12:2b** . . . that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Now our minds are being transformed by a renewing process. This renewal is not *making new* in the sense of *time*. You know, you have a new bike. That means it is new. It was just made. The renewal Paul is talking about is in the sense of *quality*. You could also use the word *freshen*. When something is old and dull, the way you renew it is by making it fresh again. This is what God is doing with our mind. He is renewing it. He is refreshing it. He is reviving it, because another spirit has had many years to transform our mind to follow **his** way.

I am talking about Satan the Devil. His way is vanity, lust, and greed, and envy, and deceit, and murder, and adultery, and covetousness, and all those **evil** things we are supposed to be putting off. Those things Satan has conformed our minds to while he had a hold on us, and God *in us* is now taking us away from him and transforming us, refreshing our minds, so that we can change the quality of our minds over to that of His own. The transformation that we are making is from the destruction—the poor quality, the awful mind—that Satan has built in us, over to the pureness and high quality of God's own mind.

I am going to paraphrase the last part of verse 2. He says that He does this “so that you may **test**, or you may experience, all the good and the benefit of His will.” You see, without His mind being formed in us through the Holy Spirit, we have no way of truly understanding His will or His way. Our minds must be transformed so that we can have the capacity to understand the differences and the benefit between God's way and Satan's way, so that we can, as it says in Deuteronomy 30, “choose life.” We really cannot “choose life” until this process of transforming our minds begins to take place, because we do not really have the ability to understand the difference between Satan's way and God's way. So this is all happening in us so that we can make these choices that allow us to choose life, to choose God's way.

Let us see this in I Corinthians 2. I think you will see something else here that is very encouraging.

**I Corinthians 2:6a** However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature . . .

Maybe 'maturing' would be better. If we are not beginning this maturing process, we cannot understand this wisdom that he is speaking to us. He says he is speaking this wisdom among those who can understand it.

**I Corinthians 2:6b-8** . . . yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

You see, without that ability to distinguish between God's way and Satan's way, they put to death their Savior. It was a mystery to them. They had nothing in their noggin to give them the ability to comprehend who this Person was. So they put Him to death. No Spirit—no understanding—no ability to judge. This is what Paul eventually concludes.

**I Corinthians 2:9-10** But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Not only are we able to understand some of the things of God, we can understand the very depth; we can understand all the mysteries from top to bottom, of what God has given us. That is how powerful the Spirit of God is.

**I Corinthians 2:11a** For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

You know this. A dog does not have man's spirit, so it cannot understand the things that man has done. But man, by his spirit, is able to do all these

technical marvels that we have done. We can laugh, and talk, and cry, and reason, and do all kinds of things because we have a spirit of man in us that allows us to know the things of men.

**I Corinthians 2:11b** Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

He is just making an analogy. The Spirit of God works the same way, except just at a higher level. It does not tell you the things of men, it tells you those deep things of God.

**I Corinthians 2:12** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

The Spirit of God allows us to understand all the benefits. Remember Romans 12:2, so that you may prove everything that is good in the will of God. We can know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

**I Corinthians 2:13-14** These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. [It is on a whole different level.] The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. [That is why they killed the Lord of glory. They just did not understand.], nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

He is repeating himself in as many ways as he can so that we get the idea of what he is trying to get across. The Spirit of God enables us to understand all these things, and it sets us apart from the people in the world. Do not expect them to understand.

**I Corinthians 2:15** But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

They cannot judge us, because they do not understand. They do not have the Spirit to understand where we are coming from.

**I Corinthians 2:16** For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

That makes it pretty plain. This section is really interesting in the light of conversion, or in the light of what **real** conversion is.

Remember the context. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians. Only a couple of verses later he says, "You are still carnal" (I Corinthians 3:3). He tells them that he is speaking to them because they are maturing, but they are still carnal. They had not even gotten to first base yet! They were still stepping out of the batter's box as far as their conversion goes. I Corinthians 2 gives them an idea of what true spirituality is, and thus what true conversion is. He is giving them something to shoot for—giving them reason to move beyond the batter's box, as it were. So he is giving them all this knowledge and understanding so that they can use it.

We saw what he says here. He tells us that he preaches God's wisdom to those who are maturing. They are already started in the process, and they are being transformed, and they are becoming perfect. They are becoming converted. Then he tells them that God's wisdom, the revealed knowledge and way of God, can only be understood through the Holy Spirit which was given to them with the *laying on of hands* at their baptism.

This then, by the time you get down to verse 14, leads into the subject of discernment, of judging. He goes on to talk a little more about judging a little bit later on in chapter 6. But with God's Spirit working in us—this is important—we now have the ability to discern true from false, right from wrong, good from evil, and this is the important part. We have the ability to discern true from false, right from wrong, good from evil *from God's perspective*. Those three words are the key.

Now remember, the knowledge of good and evil that was given in the Garden gave Adam and Eve an ability to discern right and wrong, but not from God's perspective. That came with the Tree of Life, which they did not take. That Tree of Life is a symbol of God's Spirit, and they did not take it. But we have.

The last sentence in verse 16, which reads, "But we have the mind of Christ," is really amazing in this context, because the word "mind" is *nous* in Greek. The word means, in its normal context, *thoughts*, or *the intellect*, or *the understanding*. You could put those words in, and that is really just astounding in itself, that we have *the thoughts of Christ*, or we have *the intellect of Christ*, or that we have *the understanding of Christ*. That is just simply mind-boggling to think that Paul would make such an astounding statement, and especially to these people who are still carnal.

But in the context of I Corinthians 2, the meaning is a little bit more specific than just thoughts, intellect, or understanding. *Nous* in this context means "the faculty of judgment; the ability to discern." Now put that back in there. What Paul is saying is, "We have the ability to discern just like Christ." Wow! That is amazing!

It places on us a tremendous responsibility, because now we have the ability to judge every situation that comes up just like Christ, because we have God's Spirit in us. Do you feel your shoulders suddenly sink down with the weight? You should. Remember, the Corinthians had this ability too, and they had never made use of it. Many of them I am sure will be in the first resurrection. At this point, though, their conversion had never really gotten off the ground because they were not exercising the spiritual faculties that they should have, and that is what conversion is.

**Hebrews 5:12-14** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God [They were back there where the Corinthians were. They were in the same boat.]; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Conversion, then, is the process of exercising our **senses**; that is, our faculties of understanding and judgment. This is not talking about our five senses. This is talking about our senses up in the noggin—our faculties of reason and judgment and understanding. If we are not making judgments about things that are going on in our lives, to ourselves, in our families—if

we are not determining whether they are right or wrong, and if we are not doing things to correct those situations once we discern they are wrong, then we are failing in our conversion. We are going backwards, like these Hebrews were. We are in danger of neglecting our salvation and drifting away.

What do you think happened to all of our former brethren in the Worldwide Church of God who have taken no action as a result of the doctrinal changes? At the very best, they have drifted to the point that they are once again babes and need to be taught again the basic things of God. The worst is that they have fallen away entirely! Paul goes on in chapter 6 to say they will not be able to be renewed again. That is **serious!**

Let us go to Hebrews 6 and see what Paul tells them to do.

**Hebrews 6:9a** But beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you . . .

He had just told them that if they do not turn around, they are going to go in the Lake of Fire.

**Hebrews 6:9** We are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

He is speaking harshly to them. Though he is speaking harshly, he is very confident that they are going to turn things around.

**Hebrews 6:10** For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

He tells them God has not closed His eyes to the good that they were doing.

**Hebrews 6:11-12** And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Now notice what Paul encourages them to do here. He says in verse 11 that *they show the same diligence to the end*. This is **earnestness, zeal, deep commitment with eagerness**. Plunge your whole life into this, he says, to the end. What we are supposed to be doing in this is imitating those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. So what they had to do was—since they had put their conversion on hold because they had allowed themselves to drift—they needed to launch zealously into a campaign of regaining all that lost ground.

Let us go to II Peter 1. Peter says much the same thing as the apostle Paul.

**II Peter 1:1-3** Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.

God has left nothing out. Through His Spirit God has given us everything we need.

**II Peter 1:4** By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature [We will have the character of very God, if we put all these gifts to use.], having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

He mentions *putting off the old man*. What does he say to do?

**II Peter 1:5-8a** But also for this very reason, giving all diligence [zeal, earnestness], add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound . .

If you have inculcated them into your character, and they are **living** in you, and they are prospering in you, then:

**II Peter 1:8b** . . . you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You will be producing fruit, he says, if you put these things in your character and they are prospering in you.

**II Peter 1:9a** For he who lacks these things is shortsighted . . .

He does not see the goal. He probably does not see beyond the end of his nose. He is shortsighted.

**II Peter 1:9b-11** . . . even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent [*more earnest, more urgent*] to make your calling and elections sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is what makes our calling and election sure. Our growth and maturity as Christians is based upon us zealously, diligently working to *move* our conversion along. Peter very emphatically says right there that if we are doing these things, you *will* be found worthy to enter God's Kingdom. We will not have to wonder. An entrance will be provided for you to enter the Kingdom of God without a doubt.

So what is **real** conversion? It is the transformation of our character, our intellect, our emotions, our actions, our words, our very thoughts from the

evil way inspired by Satan and man's carnal nature, into the divine nature—the very nature of God Himself!

So how much like God are you? That is the question. How straight and true is your trajectory to putting on the image of God? How much of the old man have you put off, and how much of the new man have you put on? Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord (II Peter 3:18)? Are you conforming to His image? Can you see Christ in you when you look in the mirror?

The Corinthians had problems like we do. After the tumult that upset that congregation, they needed to be settled. So Paul gave them some advice which we should take regularly as a method of gauging our progress in our conversion before God.

**II Corinthians 13:4** For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. [Even Jesus, by God's power, was raised.] For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

He is giving them some reason to hope, because Jesus went through this same weakness, and God raised Him. So if we are going through our weakness now, we do not have to worry, because God will raise us too.

**II Corinthians 13:5a** Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove [test] yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?

If Jesus is in you, you should not have to worry. But test yourself. See where you are. Examine yourself.

**II Corinthians 13:5b** Unless indeed you are disqualified.

But then he says:

**II Corinthians 13:6** I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

That is something to hope for, something to be happy about. A positive thing.

**II Corinthians 13:11, 14** Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. [Work toward perfection. Work toward maturity.] Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. . . . The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.