

Are You Converted?

by Pastor Doug Batchelor

I have a simple but important question for you: Are you converted?

From time to time, I've asked that of other Christians and have received a few indignant glances. But even mature Christians need to occasionally ask themselves this probing question. I certainly do.

I base this premise on something the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (13:5). That's a challenge, a mandate, from the Word of God to a people who are more often concerned with critically examining other people in the faith than themselves.

Yet if you have to testify in court, your lawyers will test your preparation on how you will react on the stand before the judge. You want to be ready for your date in court. Well, we're going to have a huge cosmic court date someday, and while probation lingers and the door of mercy is still open, it is of value to us to determine if we are ready and truly converted.

And before we go any further, what is conversion? Jesus makes it simple. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 NKJV). A converted life is a life that has been reborn in Christ—a new birth for a new creature.

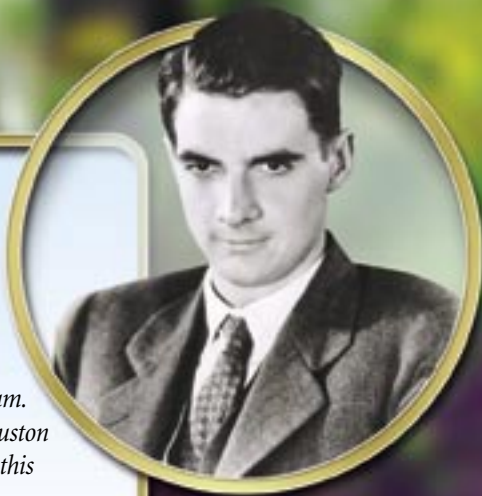
Free Ticket to Heaven

It's very important to understand that just because a person goes to church doesn't mean he is converted. In Luke 18, Jesus tells us about two men who went to the temple to pray—a Pharisee and a tax collector. Pharisees had a reputation for being religiously fastidious. They outwardly obeyed God's law in great detail. Conversely, tax collectors in those days weren't like corporate-type IRS agents today, but rather more like Mafia party animals who drank, lived lavishly, and were considered otherwise very sinful.

An Amazing Fact:

By 1966, at the age of 60, Howard Hughes was the world's wealthiest man. However, he also lived in constant fear of contagious disease. He insisted that the people who worked for him frequently wash their hands and wear white gloves. He would even burn his own clothing fearing he had been around someone who had contact with illness. Yet he was personally filthy. He never bathed, and his teeth rotted out because he never brushed them. He wore tissue boxes on his feet, never cut his hair, and his nails grew grotesquely long. Toward the end of his life, he was daily injecting codeine and taking Valium. His once-strapping 6'4" frame shrank to barely 90 pounds. While flying to a hospital in Houston in 1976, he died of kidney failure. The FBI insisted on taking fingerprints to confirm that this pitiful shell of a man was indeed that of the legendary tycoon aviator.

***"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' —and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked ..."* (Revelation 3:17).**



But Jesus' parable takes a surprising twist. The Pharisee stands tall, thanking God he isn't like the adulterers or that tax collector in the back pew. He takes pride in his fasting and tithing, citing his own long list of good deeds. On the other hand, the tax collector, so humbled by conviction that he will not turn his eyes up to heaven, did not present his goodness—but rather acknowledged his badness and begged for mercy.

Jesus observes that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, is the one who left the church that day forgiven. Who was ultimately converted? The sinful tax collector—not the ostensibly perfect Pharisee.

What does that mean for us? Well, for one thing, there is a very real danger for those who go to church, especially those who have been going for years and have generations of family members who have gone before them. You see, they can be as lost as any pagan on the street and not know it, simply because they think they automatically are issued a membership in heaven with their membership in church. They have enough exposure to religious things that they've confused themselves into thinking they're converted. They have been exposed to just enough religious trimmings to inoculate them against catching the real thing.

Buying a Ticket to Heaven

And sadly, also like the Pharisees, we can sometimes get so involved in doing "good" things that we still have no relationship with God. If we don't have a vital relationship with God, how can we really be converted? It's a dynamic that Jesus and the authors of the gospel were expressly concerned about.

In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus visits the house of His friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. There we find Jesus at the table, teaching the apostles while Mary sits close by, mesmerized by His inspiring words. But Martha was busy, scurrying around

the kitchen trying to get dinner prepared. Irritated by her insensitive sister, she says, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." I can see Martha folding her arms and stomping her foot. After all, Jesus' words were wonderful, but you can't sit around all day—there is work to be done!

But Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But *one thing* is needful." How much is needed according to Christ? Remember the rich young ruler who sought eternal life? Jesus also told him, "*One thing* you lack."

Do you know what that "one thing" is? True conversion of the heart, not an outward demonstration of good things or obeying the law. It is what Mary was trying to experience at the feet of Jesus. "Mary hath chosen that good

part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Real Conversion

So ... how can you know if you're really converted? Assuming you have accepted the teachings of Christ, how do you know if your heart is truly transformed? Jesus said there are wolves in the church who wear His sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). A wolf is a wolf, even when it wears a Christian fleece. Indeed, are you one person in church, yet someone else entirely at home?

In her book *Steps to Christ*, Ellen White echoes Jesus' challenging insight. "It is true there might be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ." Atheists can quit smoking and drinking. They can "get the victory," even if they aren't doing it for God but rather for themselves.

Likewise, churchgoers can avoid the appearance of evil not because we want to please Jesus, but because we want to



Every good tree bringeth forth

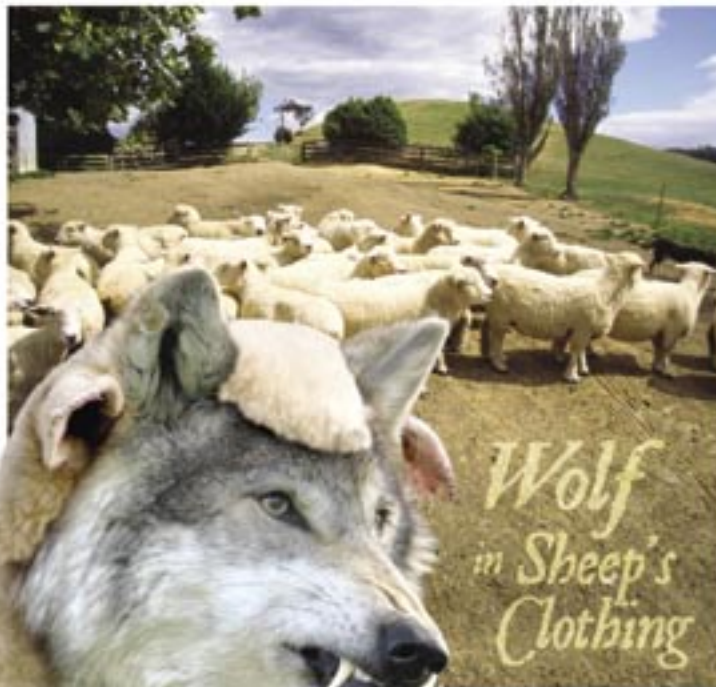
look good in the eyes of others. We might even protest in our hearts, “Why, I’d never do that. What would people think?”

We don’t ask what God would think.

White continues:

“A selfish heart may perform generous actions. By what means then shall we determine whose side we are on? Who has the heart? . . . our best energies? If we are Christ’s our thoughts are with Him. . . . All that we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, to breathe His Spirit, to do His will and to please Him in all things.”

When we are like that, deep in the heart, then Jesus says we will bear fruit. “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth



evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:16–18).

You can know you’re converted if you are bearing the good fruit of a Christian. Wolves can wear sheep’s clothing and do some good deeds, but after a while, the unconverted can be sure they will bear rotten fruit that will be cast away and thrown into the fire. You can’t fool God.

The Evidence of Conversion

Some alcoholics say, “I drink, but I’m not an alcoholic.” But they now have a convicting checklist with nine questions about the motives for drinking. If you answer yes to three or

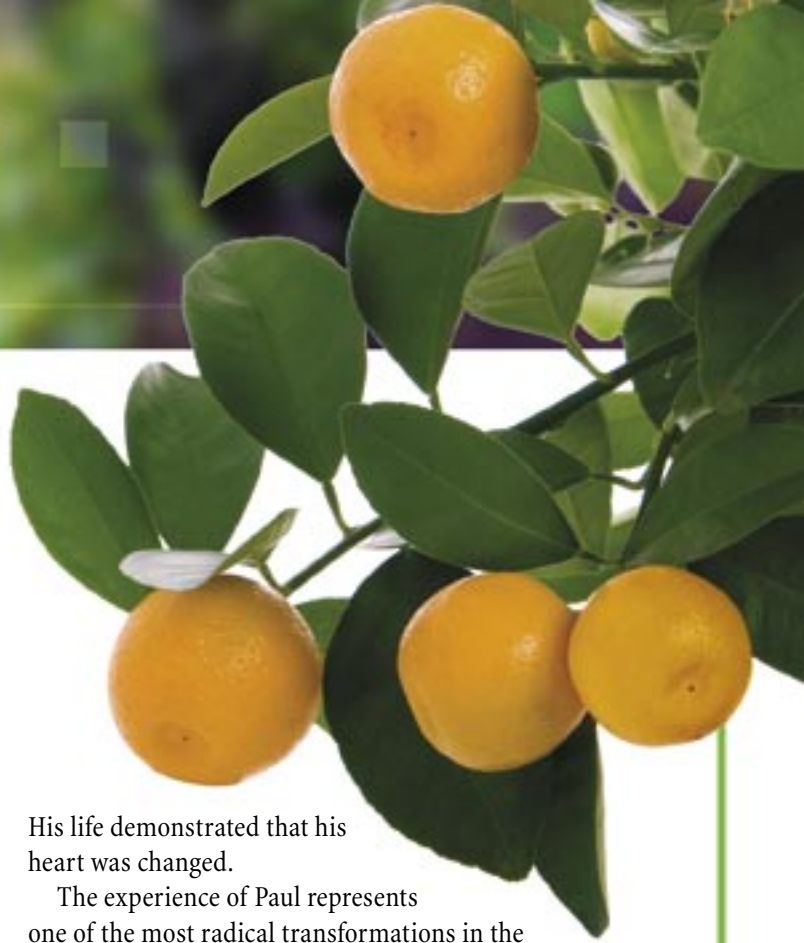
more of the questions, there is a good chance you are an alcoholic. Some people who look at the list say, “I never realized I was an alcoholic until I looked at the list.”

What are the fruits of a converted soul? You can make a list out of Galatians 5:22, 23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

I hope that you will stop for a moment and examine yourself with this list. Do you truly love God? Your neighbor?

Are you kind and patient with your brethren? Do you possess self-control? Sometimes I look at this list and worry. When I examine not just what I do but *why* I do it, I sometimes catch myself doing the right things for selfish reasons. I have to ask, “Lord, I’m doing the right thing. But help me do it for the right reason.”

Of course, if you’re doing the right thing for the wrong reason, do the right thing anyway. One day, by God’s grace, you might get your motives adjusted. But eventually, the essence of who we are must be changed from selfishness to selflessness. Love and selfishness are the two great flags that fly over the camps of the converted and the counterfeits.



However, don't misunderstand: We are and can be saved only by grace through faith. But that saving grace, that faith in Christ, will affect a change in the life. It has a sanctifying influence that converts us away from bad behavior. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). If a person says "Lord! Lord!" while living a life of deliberate rebellion, that person is a hypocrite.

A Radical Conversion

In Acts 9, we read about Saul, a Jew who hated the followers of Christ. He believed Jesus to be an imposter and deceiver, a cult leader. "Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," Saul earnestly wanted to eradicate the influence of Jesus from within his church.

Then one day, he was traveling on the road to Damascus, believing in the truth of his mission. Until God changed everything: "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

Shocked and afraid, Paul confesses a startling admission when he asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" This man "working" for the Lord admits that he doesn't know his boss. Instead, Paul was working *against* Jehovah.

Could that happen to us? Of course! Because we are often blind to our true condition, deceived with our own outward form of religion. "Then Saul arose from the ground and when he opened his eyes he saw no one." Paul thought he saw the truth, but he was really blind. God was illustrating that to his future apostle, and the Lord wants us to see the same thing. Why? It is dangerous for the blind to be leading. Paul was blind, and he was leading others to kill Christ's followers.

It's a startling and beautiful story. But how do we know that Paul was truly converted? Well, we have to keep reading. Instead of arresting Christians for believing in Christ, he now tells others to believe in Jesus. Moreover, he lays his life on the line by preaching the gospel and inflaming the religious leaders who had paid him to hunt down Christians.



His life demonstrated that his heart was changed.

The experience of Paul represents one of the most radical transformations in the Bible. But I don't think it happened when he first saw the light. Instead, remember when "he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink"? I believe he was carefully examining himself over three days of fasting and praying, and it was during that time he was thoroughly converted.

It is not easy to put your finger on the moment when you were converted. Sometimes people have a dramatic experience like Paul, but more often it is a slow process. Don't be discouraged if you can't say, "That was the day I was converted." You might be able to say, "This is the day I was baptized" or "That was the day I chose to follow Jesus," and if so, that is great.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that was the day you were converted. God changes our minds, which is what conversion is all about.

For most of us, it is a process, a gradual metamorphosis we must all go through, whether it happens over the course of three days or three years. Paul made a radical U-turn, and he never turned back again. His fruit bears witness to that.

Maintain Conversion

D.L. Moody said, "When I was converted I made the mistake of thinking that the battle was already mine. The victory was

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David as the one who killed Uriah, David's conscious wrenched his heart. He fell on his face and prayed for seven days.

What was he praying about? The baby that he and Bathsheba had made together was terminally sick. He didn't want to see that innocent baby die for his sin. It broke his heart. Did you catch that? Jesus is the Son of David who died for our sins. That should convert us. If it doesn't, perhaps nothing can.

David wrote, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me by Your generous Spirit" (Psalm 51:12 NKJV). In other words, "Forgive me, save me, help me have that experience that I lost. I want it back." It was only then that David could "teach transgressors your ways and sinners will be converted to you." Living like the devil, David couldn't spread the kingdom of God. The same applies to us.

Being Converted

Is there something that we can do to be converted—not only the first time, but a second time, and on a day-to-day basis? Absolutely. Ezekiel 18:31 says, "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." We are living during a time in history when mainline churches are saying we can't do anything to facilitate conversion, yet Ezekiel says, "Go. Get converted."

You can do that by cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit to receive that change of heart we all desperately need.

Take advantage of every opportunity to fix your eyes on Jesus. Isaiah was converted when he saw the Lord. Zaccheus was converted when he saw the Lord. Paul was converted in the

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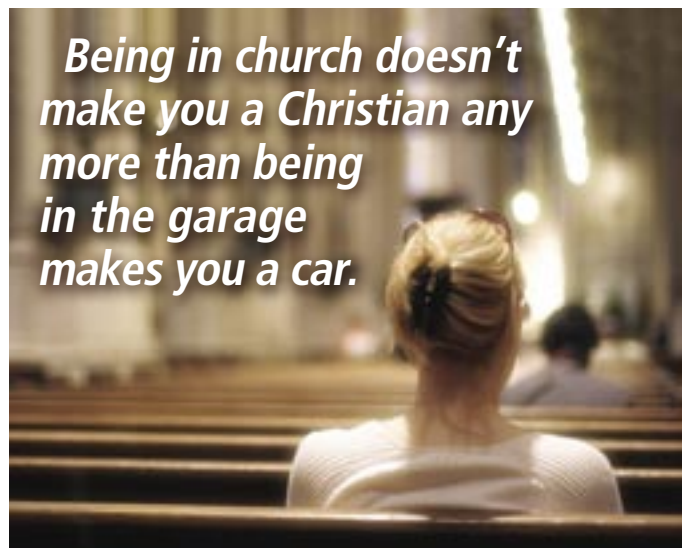
won. The crown was in my grasp. I thought old things had passed away. All things had become new and my old corrupt nature, the old life was gone. But I found out after serving Christ for a few months that conversion was only like enlisting in the army. There was battle on hand."

Be clear: Conversion is something that can unravel—you can backslide; therefore, it is something that must be maintained. "Conversion" could also be called "a love relationship with Jesus." It isn't a vaccine, like something you get for small pox when you are young. Conversion doesn't work that way. Some churches teach it does, but we have plenty of biblical examples that say otherwise.

You can be serving the Lord and your motives can slowly change. How do we know? Because King David, slayer of Goliath, had to be re-converted. He backslid from the will of the Lord. Perhaps it was the power and wealth that clouded his thinking when he decided it was time for a new wife, a wife that already belonged to another man. He sinned big time.

What brought about David's re-conversion? Real conversion and repentance are very similar. When Nathan confronted

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new heart a new spirit within you

same way. Even Joseph's brothers were converted when they beheld their grieving father pining for his lost son.

So search out those places where you can see God—in His Word. There you will see that He first loved you, which will pave the way for you to love Him in return. When you look at the love of God for us on the cross, you will experience its converting influence.

Pray every day, even if you don't feel like it. Spend time on your knees because you need it. Search for good Christian literature that will stir your heart. There is a direct relationship between the amount of time you spend with God, in study and in prayer, and where you are in your relationship with Him.

And the more you do that, God promises, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

We all like it when the Lord does His part. "Do it for me, Lord. Convert me." But it may not always happen like Paul on the road to Damascus. Only God can start us on the road to conversion. Without the Holy Spirit, we'd never even pay attention. But we have a part to play—we must surrender our will.

One in Twenty

Ellen White writes, "Not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as a common sinner. They professedly serve God but they are more earnestly serving mammon" (*Christian Service*).

Not even one in 20! That's a frightening statistic! Churches could be built on a much smaller scale based on that passage. But it is supported by something Jesus said. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name

done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them I never knew you: depart from me" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Somebody noted, "Being in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in the garage makes you a car." It doesn't matter how buried you are in religious practices—going to Christian schools, showing up on Sabbath, tithing, whatever. The question is: Are you converted? Are you really born again? Is your heart truly changed?

Why is it important for you and me to be converted? It's more than for our own salvation. It's much more than that—the many in our own churches who are not converted are crippling the growth of God's kingdom. The gospel spread like a prairie fire in the first generation after Christ because He spent three years with 12 men inspiring a real conversion in their lives.

If you have a church with 240 members, and if only one in 20 is truly converted, then you have only 12 real converts. But that's the point. Twelve men preached a message that spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. One truly converted soul, one Elijah, one Paul, can do wonders for God's kingdom.

Spread your heart before the Lord. Offer it to Him as a living sacrifice. Honestly confess your sins and claim

His mercy. Begin the journey of ongoing transformation remembering that true conversion is an ongoing process and an investment in your eternity.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1, 2).



Do you ever wonder, "Lord, am I even converted? The things I think about ... the things I do ... am I even converted?"

