

Marvelous Changes In the New Life (Ephesians 4–6)

The verb “convert” comes from a term that describes a turning from one direction to another. Also communicated in this word is the idea that one is returning to a previous condition. Acts 3:19 describes conversion as beginning with repentance and ending in a return that brings “times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord.” The gospel requires conversion on the part of those who want to obey God. One cannot simply listen to the preaching of the gospel and want to be in fellowship with God. If he wants to enjoy spiritual blessings, he must react to the gospel’s message and obey the Lord’s commands. The one who hears, believes, repents, and obeys the command to be immersed for the forgiveness of sins is blessed with a “newness of life” (Romans 6:4b).

The following words were written by Justin Martyr, who lived around A.D. 150. His discussion describes the change that is evident when one is converted:

And thus do we also, since our persuasion by the Word, . . . follow the only unbegotten God through His Son—we who formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to . . . God; we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have . . . and communicate [give] to every one in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with

us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all.¹

Conversion is illustrated in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 and Acts 14:15. The individuals involved demonstrated conversion by a radical change in their lives. They repented (changed the way they thought) and turned to God by obeying His commands. Their changed thinking resulted in changed actions! The Scriptures describe this evidence of change as “fruit in keeping with repentance” or as “fruit of righteousness” (Matthew 3:8; Philippians 1:11; see Matthew 7:16, 20; 2 Corinthians 9:10).

Paul illustrated the amazing change that occurs with genuine conversion. Acts 9 describes Saul’s conversion to Christ. Ananias taught Saul the gospel. Saul obeyed God’s commands (Acts 22:4–16). Before Saul became a Christian, he was a violent persecutor of the Lord’s church (Acts 9:1, 2). After Saul’s conversion, “immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’” (Acts 9:20). Others noticed this change: “All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, ‘Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’” (Acts 9:21). Now that you are a Christian, you will be marked by an amazing change, just as Saul of Tarsus was.

Ephesians 1 through 3 describes the conversion process. After one has gone through these

¹Justin Martyr *Apology I* 14.

steps, he will be like Saul of Tarsus; that is, his life will be significantly different *after* conversion than it was *before* conversion. The outstanding *after*-conversion change is described in Ephesians 4 through 6. This lesson surveys these chapters and offers a thumbnail sketch of how becoming a Christian changes one's entire lifestyle.

GOALS THAT REFLECT GOD'S PRIORITIES

(4:1–16)

One of the first changes is a change of the convert's goals in life. Success, status, wealth, pride, and other goals of this world dictate the paths that non-Christians follow. Before conversion, you may have been consumed with worldliness. When you accepted God's priorities, the old goals were forgotten.

The Christian becomes interested in what God wants, not what self wants (Galatians 2:20; 6:14). Ephesians 4:1–16 describes this amazing change. The Bible teaches that the new Christian becomes interested in encouraging unity among Christians (vv. 1–6) and involved in strengthening the congregation (vv. 11–16).

How wonderful it is to see a person who was once devoted to self working eagerly to accomplish God's goals! Before conversion, selfishness led to division and bitterness; but now, self-sacrifice diligently seeks peace and unity!

BEHAVIOR THAT REVEALS HIS POWER

(4:17–32)

When a convert changes his goals, then he will change his actions to accomplish the goals. Christians cannot behave as those in the world behave (vv. 17–20). Those in the world live ("walk") only for themselves because of their hard hearts. Such a lifestyle is one of "darkness." Paul said that those who lead lives devoted to self are "greedy." The greedy person has no concern for others!

The conspicuous change that occurs in the lifestyle of the new Christian is introduced in verse 20: "But you did not learn Christ in this way." Conversion brings new behavior patterns. Why? Because the person who has learned what Christ wants cannot live in his old ways!

Throughout this paragraph, the behavior of the new Christian is emphasized:

- There is a new decision-making process (v. 23).
- There is a new commitment to speaking truthfully (vv. 25–27, 29, 31).
- There is a new diligence to the work ethic (v. 28).
- There is a new eagerness to demonstrate the kindness of God (v. 32).

INFLUENCE THAT RESEMBLES THE FATHER

(5:1–6:9)

As one begins to live for Christ, he immediately notices the impact of personal influence. Christians are as powerful in their influence as salt and light (Matthew 5:13, 16). The faithful Christian wants to make sure others see an example that will encourage them to obey the truth (Colossians 4:2–6). Personal influence is important, and Paul urged Christians to be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1). Christians are to look at God, their Father, with the same kind of pride a child has when he looks at his daddy. The little child will try to walk and talk like his daddy. Why? Because he is proud of his father and wants to be exactly like him. Likewise, the new Christian wants to be like the heavenly Father!

The potential for good influence can be destroyed if there is no change in morality (5:3–5), choice of friends (5:6–14), priorities in life (5:15–21), family relationships (5:22–6:4), or behavior at work (6:5–9). When one becomes a Christian, he decides that he will no longer do certain things, speak in certain ways, or attend certain activities. Why is such a decision made? Because personal influence is a critical matter and the Christian seeks to have the best influence possible (see Matthew 18:6–14; Romans 14:13–21).

A story says that in the army of Alexander the Great was a soldier whose name was also "Alexander"—but this soldier was a thief. The emperor was enraged at the soldier's behavior and said, "You either change your name or learn to honor it!" Paul discussed one of the greatest testimonies to the power of the gospel in Ephesians 5:1–6:9. Those who become Christians will change dramatically and will make a

remarkable impact upon society! You now wear the name of the Lord of lords, and you must honor it!

CONFLICTS THAT REVEAL HIS PROTECTION

(6:5–20)

By becoming a Christian, you enlisted in God's army and deserted Satan's army! The Christian life involves spiritual combat. Christians have been rescued from bondage to sin. Satan will do whatever he can to recapture those who have escaped from his bondage. The Christian must constantly beware of this danger (see 1 Peter 5:8–10; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

The Bible describes how you are now protected by God so that Satan cannot recapture you. The metaphor of a soldier's armor describes our spiritual safety. The description of the "Christian armor" in Ephesians 6:11–17 is a familiar passage.

You may be surprised to discover that you have entered into a war. Those whose faith remains strong will win this war. The Christian fights in the war by opposing attitudes, beliefs, and practices that previously were encouraged. This loyalty in the spiritual warfare evidences conversion.

ASSOCIATIONS THAT RENEW US

(6:21–24)

Having become a Christian, you may change friends. As a Christian, you will find associates whose example and influence can encourage you to remain faithful to God. Many who give their lives to Christ realize that they can no longer remain friends with those who do not share their values (see Matthew 10:34–39).

Becoming a Christian placed you in God's family. Consequently, you have the following:

- ... a compassion that helps you through life's adversities (6:21a).
- ... a connection with those who help you grow in faith (6:21b).
- ... a comfort that assures you of God's love (6:23).
- ... a confidence that you are safe and secure because of your love for the Lord (6:24).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Christian life begins with marvelous changes! In true submission to the Lord's authority, repentance must "bear fruits" (Luke 3:8). This process results in changes in the convert's thoughts, actions, and loyalties.

The Old Testament story of Queen Esther provides an illustration of the tremendous change that occurs when one is "converted." The evil Haman hated Esther's uncle, Mordecai, and had him sentenced to death. It appeared that Mordecai was in a hopeless predicament, but God's providence reversed the hopeless situation. Because of God's concern and planning, King Ahasuerus had Mordecai promoted rather than killed. The Scriptures give this record of the day when Mordecai was to have been hanged: "Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced" (Esther 8:15). An incredible change had transpired. The one condemned had been released and promoted. His common clothing had been taken off, and kingly garments had been put on him. Everything was different! This dramatic change is similar to what happens when one becomes a Christian. The doomed are changed to the hopeful by the power of God. Thank God for His marvelous grace and salvation which provide the opportunity to change in such an amazing way!

John L. Kachelman, Jr.

Spiritual Food

Christians are to grow toward maturity. To mature spiritually as part of the family of God, we must take nourishment from the Word of God, our spiritual food. First Peter 2:2 says, "Long for [desire] the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." The Bible is not just a book of nice sayings and good principles. It is the inspired Word of the living God and has the power to transform our lives if we permit it to do so. To grow spiritually, we must spend serious time in God's Word. Attending Bible classes, listening to the preaching of the Word, and personal Bible study can help us grow. Spiritual growth requires the right kind of food. The Word of God is food for the soul.

Jay Lockhart