



*Volume 10 Issue 12*

# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



*December 2023*

*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

## *What Is True Conversion?*

Jesus said, “Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Jesus is clear that if a person of this world is to be accepted into this other kingdom—the kingdom of heaven—he must be converted. Put very simply, to be converted is absolutely necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

What does the word conversion mean? In the biblical sense, conversion means a turning—a spiritual turning away from sin in repentance and to Christ in faith. It is a dramatic turning away from one path in order to pursue an entirely new one. It involves turning one’s back to the system of the world and its anti-God values. It involves a turning away from dead religion and self-righteousness. It involves a complete pivot, an about-face, in order to enter through the narrow gate that leads to life.

Conversion also involves the idea of changing direction. A true spiritual conversion radically alters the direction of one’s life. It is not a partial change wherein one is able to straddle the fence between two worlds. It is not a superficial turning, a mere rearranging of the outward facade of a person’s life. Conversion is not a gradual change that occurs over a period of time, like sanctification. Instead, a genuine conversion occurs much deeper within the soul of a person. It is a decisive break with old patterns of sin and the world and the embracing of new life in Christ by faith.

This spiritual conversion is so profound that it involves many changes in a person. It involves a change of mind, which is an intellectual change; and a change of view, a new recognition of God, self, sin, and Christ. It involves a change of affections, which is an emotional change, a change of feeling, a sorrow for sin committed against a holy and just God. It involves a change of will, which is a volitional change, an intentional turning away from sin and a turning to God through Christ to seek forgiveness. The entire person—mind, affections, and will—is radically, completely, and fully changed in conversion.

Theologically speaking, regeneration and conversion are two sides of the same coin. Regeneration is God’s sovereign activity by the Holy Spirit in the soul of one who is spiritually dead in sin. Regeneration is the implantation of new life in the soul. Regeneration gives the gifts of repentance and faith. On the other side of the coin, conversion is the response of the one who is regenerated. Esteemed British pastor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: “*Conversion is the first exercise of the new nature in ceasing from old forms of life and starting a new life. It is the first action of the regenerate soul in moving from something to something.*” Regeneration precedes and produces conversion. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between these two. Regeneration is the cause, and conversion is the effect. Put another way, regeneration is the root and conversion is the fruit.

To affirm true conversion implies that there is also false conversion. Put simply, there is such a thing as non-saving faith. Not everyone who says, “*Lord, Lord*” has entered the narrow gate (Matthew 7:21). People may know the truth and may have felt grief regarding their sin, but it is a selfish sorrow over what their sin has caused them to suffer, not how it has offended a holy God.



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## *What Is True Conversion?*

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The most stark example of a false conversion we have in Scripture is that of Judas Iscariot. In a counterfeit conversion, there is no death to self, no submission to the lordship of Christ, no taking up a cross, no obedience in following Christ, no fruit of repentance—only empty words, shallow feelings, and barren religious activities. On the contrary, with a true conversion sin is abhorred, the world renounced, pride crushed, self surrendered, faith exercised, Christ seen as precious, and the cross embraced as one's only saving hope.

The whole purpose of conversion is to bring men and women into a right relationship with God. This is why Christ came, and it is the reason for which He died. It was God who was *"in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself"* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Conversion is the crying need of the soul. Until one's life is turned from sin to Christ, nothing else matters. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson - Founder and president of OnePassion Ministries in Dallas. He is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, professor of preaching and dean of D. Ministries at The Master's Seminary, and host of the Institute for Expository Preaching.**

## *Using Your Gifts*

In his correspondences with the various churches with which he interacted, the Apostle Paul is clear on the fact that God endows individuals within the body of Christ with skills and abilities for the purpose of edifying the whole body. In 1 Corinthians 12:7, he says it is generally the case that the manifestation of spiritual gifts are for *"the common good."* And by common good in that context, he means the body of Christ either at large or locally. In Ephesians 4:16, he describes the church as a human body with individual parts that are *"joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped."* And we are further told that when each joint is *"working properly,"* it *"makes the body grow, so that it builds itself up in love."* This is part of the beauty of the body of Christ. And one of the benefits of being a part of that body is that the mercies and love of God, which are located in Christ, are conveyed to us and nurtured within us and through the agency and giftedness of those with whom we are in fellowship.

However, the testimony of Scripture is that throughout redemptive history, God's people have used their gifts not just for those within the covenant community but for others as well. In fact, Abraham is told at the time of his calling that he will *"be a blessing"* (Genesis 12:2). Ultimately, Abraham is a blessing to *"all the families of the earth"* because in him we have the line from which Christ comes. But in Genesis 14, Abraham takes his army of 318 trained servants and defeats a coalition of nations that had taken his nephew Lot captive. The pagan kingdoms of Sodom and Gomorrah also benefit from Abraham's victory.

There are two other Old Testament examples illustrated with even more clarity. In the first place, there is the case of Joseph in the book of Genesis after he had been sold into slavery and brought to Egypt. While Joseph was a servant in Potiphar's house, we read:

*The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. (Genesis 39:2–3)*



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## *Using Your Gifts* *Continued from Page 2*

The fact that Potiphar “*saw that the Lord was with Joseph*” and caused him to succeed does not mean that Potiphar gained a full and saving knowledge of God. But it does seem to indicate that Potiphar realized that Joseph’s extraordinary skills and success were divinely inspired, so much so that he put all of his household business under Joseph’s oversight. Eventually, things between Joseph and Potiphar soured because of false charges brought against Joseph by Potiphar’s wife that caused Joseph’s master to throw him in prison.

When Joseph is introduced to us in Genesis 37, he is depicted as a dreamer of dreams. But while in prison, he was gifted with the ability to interpret dreams. Eventually, this gift brought him before Pharaoh to interpret a difficult and troubling dream. When Pharaoh had Joseph brought into his presence he said, “*I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it*” (Genesis 41:15). Joseph responded by saying, “*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer*” (Genesis 41:16). In this “*favorable answer*,” Pharaoh was warned of a coming famine and instructed on how to establish a surplus ahead of the famine, a surplus that would allow people from outlying areas to buy grain during this period. Ultimately, God used the Egyptian surplus to preserve the seed of Abraham and the messianic line (Genesis 45:7). Pharaoh raised Joseph to the position of second in command in Egypt because, as he acknowledged, “*can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?*” (Genesis 41:38). We are not told whether Joseph’s encounter led people to worship the God of Joseph, but we do know that his gifts were used for the benefit of many (Genesis 50:20).

The second example is Daniel and his three friends while in Babylon. Daniel 1:17 says, “*As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*” The king of Babylon acknowledged these young men to be “*ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom*” (Daniel 1:20). As the Egyptian pharaoh did with Joseph, the king of Babylon placed Daniel and his friends “*over the affairs of the province of Babylon*” (Daniel 2:49).

What is on display in these Old Testament examples is what the Apostle Paul admonishes in Philippians 2:15: “*That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*” Yes, we have a prophetic function in this world sounding forth the word of God. We also have an evangelistic function in this world, captured in the Great Commission. But on top of all of that, we have a neighborly function in this world, captured in the summary of the second table of the law, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to use our gifts for the good and the well-being of all, in our homes, our jobs, in our communities, and throughout the world, as we have opportunity. This is what it means to be salt and light in a dark and unsavory world. ~ **Reverend Ken Jones - Pastor of Glendale Missionary Baptist Church in Miami.**

## *What Does Romans 8:28 Mean?*

Many people cling to Romans 8:28 during times of trouble. After all, Paul tells us that “*for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose,*” giving us a precious promise to cling to when we are facing tragedies and sufferings of various kinds. As with other biblical texts, however, Romans 8:28 can be misunderstood. So, let us take a closer look at this verse so that we can better understand and apply it.



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## *What Does Romans 8:28 Mean?*

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### **Romans 8:28 Does Not Mean That All Things Are Good**

We will start with what Romans 8:28 does not mean. *First*, the verse is not saying that all things actually are good. Scripture is quite clear that some things, in fact, are not good at all. The book of Psalms, for example, contains many psalms of lament that call out to God for vindication and salvation in the midst of many injustices. Even in the book of Romans, we see Paul identifying certain things as not good. For instance, the Apostle calls out many wicked behaviors and attitudes that are deserving of divine judgment (Romans 1:18–32). Romans 16:20 refers to the crushing of Satan under the feet of God’s people, and Satan is anything but good.

So, when we are facing physical evils such as natural disasters and illnesses, or moral evils such as abuse and injustice, Romans 8:28 is not telling us to call those things good. True, God can use those things for a greater good, but that does not make them good in and of themselves. They are still evils, consequences of living in a fallen world.

### **Romans 8:28 Is Not a Promise for All People**

We must also understand that Romans 8:28 does not promise that all things work together for the good of all people. Certainly, the Lord does good to all people in some sense. He sends the sun and rain on the just and the unjust, for instance, so that both groups of individuals can have food to eat (Matthew 5:44–45). Yet, Romans 8:28 is not about those universal blessings or common grace benefits that God gives to all people. Instead, the verse tells us that all things are working together for the good of a specific people: “*those who love God . . . who are called according to his purpose.*” The verse is a promise for Christians, for those who have trusted in Jesus alone for salvation.

### **Romans 8:28 Is about Our Ultimate Good, Not Temporary Goods**

When we read Romans 8:28 in the context of the entire epistle, it becomes clear that Paul expects Christians to suffer during this present age and that suffering will not end until the consummation, when Jesus returns to bring the new heavens and earth (see Romans 5:3–5; 8:18–27). Consequently, Romans 8:28 is not about the good of suffering’s end; rather, it affirms that things are working together for good in the midst of suffering and that God is working even in suffering for our good. All this serves to point us beyond the goods of this life, such as the alleviation of suffering, to our ultimate good.

Romans 8:29–30 confirms this when it lays out a fuller description of those for whom all things are working together for good. Paul goes through the order of salvation, moving from God’s foreknowledge and predestination of His people in eternity past, to their calling and justification in the present, to their glorification in the future.





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## *What Does Romans 8:28 Mean?*

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The good end toward which God is moving is the glorification of His people, which includes their full conformity to the image of Christ and their partaking of the divine nature, wherein they come to embody all of God's communicable attributes—love, holiness, goodness, patience, wisdom, and so on (2 Peter 1:3–8). To put it another way, all things are being used for the good of our salvation, for the consummation of all of God's promises to us that we will become perfected in Christ and freed from even the presence of sin.

### **Romans 8:28 Is about God's Work**

If we are not careful, we might think that Romans 8:28 is telling us that things work together for our good on their own. However, in light of the biblical teaching on divine providence, as well as the immediate context, Paul is really telling us that God Himself is the One who works all things together for our good. Look at verses 29–30 again, where Paul describes the end toward which we are moving. Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification are all things that God does, and God must work in and through the various circumstances we face—our joys, our troubles, and so on—in order to communicate all of the benefits of salvation to us. He works out all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

### **Romans 8:28 Is about God's Glory as Well as Our Good**

Finally, Romans 8:28 is about God's glory as well as our good, or it might be better to say that Romans 8:28 is about God's glory because it is about our good. God's purpose in creating and redeeming us is to reveal and magnify His glory (Isaiah 43:1–7; Ephesians 1:3–14). Scripture even tells us that man is the "*image and glory of God*" and woman "*the glory of man*," that is, "*the glory of the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 11:7–8). We were made to reflect God's glory, which is the goal of our existence, so we cannot be truly fulfilled unless we are glorifying God. Therefore, as Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

In working all things together for good, God is simultaneously working all things together for His glory. And this is the best thing He could ever do for us, for in magnifying Himself, we find our truest and fullest delight (1 Chronicles 16:28–34; Psalm 27:4; Philippians 3:12–14). To be sure, we do not always understand how He is doing this, but we can rest assured that our perfectly wise Creator is working in and through even the worst things for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory. ~ *Reverend Robert Rothwell - Senior writer for Ligonier Ministries, associate editor of Tabletalk magazine, resident adjunct professor at Reformation Bible College, and associate pastor of Spruce Creek Presbyterian Church in Port Orange, Fla.*



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## *God's Holiness and Your Worship*

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you worship God? Is it His infinite wisdom, His unlimited power, or His ultimate sovereignty? Is it some attribute or characteristic you find particularly appealing, awe-inspiring, or comforting?

Knowing that God is immutable, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient is significant, but those attributes give limited insight into what God expects of us. What is it—beyond His unchanging, all-powerful, infinitely knowing presence—that compels us to worship?

It is basically this: God is holy. Of all the attributes of God, holiness is the one that most uniquely describes Him and in reality is a summation of all His other attributes. The word holiness refers to His separateness, His otherness, the fact that He is unlike any other being. It indicates His complete and infinite perfection. Holiness is the attribute of God that binds all the others together. Properly understood, it will revolutionize the quality of our worship.

When they exalted God, the angels didn't say, "Eternal, Eternal, Eternal,,"; they didn't say, "Faithful, Faithful, Faithful,,"; "Wise, Wise, Wise"; or "Mighty, Mighty, Mighty." They said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty" (Revelation 4:8). His holiness is the crown of all that He is.

Exodus 15:11 asks, "*Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?*" The answer, of course, is that no being is equal to God in holiness. In fact, holiness is so uniquely and exclusively an attribute of God that Psalm 111:9 says, "*Holy and awesome is His name.*" That doesn't merely mean that the name of God is sacred and sanctified; it means holiness is so much the essence of God's character that Holy is one of the names God goes by.

### **The Standard of Absolute Holiness**

God doesn't conform to a holy standard; He is the standard. He never does anything wrong, He never errs, He never makes a misjudgment, He never causes something to happen that isn't right. There are no degrees to His holiness. He is holy, flawless, without error, without sin, fully righteous—utterly, absolutely, infinitely holy.

To dwell in God's presence, one must be holy. That was demonstrated when the angels sinned. God immediately cast them out and prepared a place for them separated from His presence. When sinful humans choose not to come to God, when they choose to reject Jesus Christ, their ultimate end is to be sent to the place prepared for the devil and his angels, out of the presence of God.

Hebrews 12:14 clearly states that apart from holiness, no one will see the Lord. The problem for us is that God's standard of holiness is absolute perfection. His own unblemished holiness is the ultimate criterion by which we are judged. Peter articulated that truth when he wrote: "*It is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'*" (1 Peter 1:16). Jesus said the same thing: "*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matthew 5:48).



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## *God's Holiness and Your Worship*

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This presents a seemingly impassible barrier for fallen humanity, because we have all sinned. We are fatally blemished by our own sinfulness. What God requires of us, we simply cannot attain on our own. Indeed, our very nature is tainted to the core with sin. Sinfulness has corrupted every aspect of our mind, our hearts, and our wills. We cannot be perfect; we are already deeply imperfect—seriously and indelibly corrupted with evil desires, evil motives, evil thoughts, and evil deeds. We thus have no hope whatsoever of ever obtaining for ourselves the perfect holiness God requires.

### **Holiness and Imputation**

But God's plan of salvation solves that whole dilemma in a remarkable and multifaceted way. God's own perfect righteousness is imputed—or put to the account of—every sinner who believes in Jesus Christ. Just as Christ took our sin and paid for it, we get credit for His righteousness and are rewarded for it. “[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Authentic faith therefore entails shedding every pretense of our own righteousness and confessing that we are hopeless sinners. In fact, even the most fastidious attempts to earn merit of our own count for nothing in God's sight. Our very best, most charitable human works are all deeply flawed because of our sinfulness. They are like garbage in God's holy estimation. But He imputes His own perfect righteousness to those who repent of their self-righteousness and trust Christ as Lord and Savior (see Philippians 3:8-9). That gives us an immediate right standing before God: “*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God*” (Romans 5:1-2). “*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1).

Having already justified us and clothed us in a garment of perfect righteousness (not one of our own making, but Christ's righteousness imputed to us), God is now conforming us to greater and greater Christlikeness, thus making us fit for heaven. When we die, or when Christ returns, that process will be instantly completed in our glorification (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2).

That is why we speak of God's holiness as one of His communicable attributes—one of the perfections of God that His creatures can, to some degree, share and participate in. God conforms us to the perfection of His own holy standard. He instantly gives us a righteous standing, and then over time He makes us perfectly holy. That is a fair summary of what God does for us in salvation.

### **Holiness and Hating Sin**

God's holiness is best seen in His hatred of sin. God cannot tolerate sin; He is totally removed from it. Amos 5:21–23 records God's strong words to those attempting to worship Him while polluted with sin:



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## *God's Holiness and Your Worship*

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*I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.*

That does not mean that God hates sacrifices and offerings and festivals and music as a means of worship. God desires all those things, because He instituted them. Rather, the point is God hates any kind of worship that is tainted with sin.

God doesn't want you to sin, even if it would make your testimony more exciting, or display His grace to a greater degree (Romans 6:1-2). He never approves sin. He will not necessarily keep you from sinning, and He may even use your sin to further His own wise and holy purposes. But He does not ever sanction or condone sin, and even when someone's sin helps fulfill the outworking of God's eternal plan, it is always the creature, not God, who is the agent responsible for sin. God never actively tempts or entices anyone to sin, and He Himself cannot be tempted to sin (James 1:13). Sin is the object of His displeasure. God loves holiness. Psalm 11:7 says, "*For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness.*"

### **Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness**

Acknowledging and understanding the Lord's utter holiness is essential to true worship. Psalm 96:2-6 exhorts us to:

Sing to the Lord, bless His name;  
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.  
Tell of His glory among the nations,  
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.  
For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;  
He is to be feared above all gods.  
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,  
But the Lord made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before Him,  
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

That describes acts of worship. Verse 9 makes the key statement: "*Worship the Lord in holy attire; tremble before Him, all the earth.*" Holy attire means the spiritual clothing of holiness. Tremble before Him implies fear. In fact, the King James Version translates that verse, "*O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.*"

Here we are introduced to the frequent biblical connection of the idea of God's holiness with fear on the part of the worshiper. It is a fear that grows out of an overwhelming sense of unworthiness in the presence of pure holiness. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**





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*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

If you have a birthday or anniversary in December that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at [gwlcf10415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com).

## *Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner December 2023*

### *Birthdays*

*Terrye B. (4)*

*Katie G. (9)*

*Auden T. (12)*

*Jennifer A. (13)*

*Wilma S. (16)*

*Scott T. (19)*

*John M. (21)*

*Cheryl P. (22)*

*Jessica T. (23)*

*Andrew K. (31)*

### *Anniversaries*

*John and Teresa H. (1)*

*Malcolm and Amber H. (14)*

*John and LeAnn M. (22)*

## **Life in the Spirit**

Romans 8:1–8

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. - ESV



## ***West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership***

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