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**CONVERSION:  
PERSECUTOR TURNS  
PROMOTER**



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Founder/President  
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President  
India Bible College and Seminary

President  
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*Wish You All Blessings for 2024.*

The miraculous transformation of Saul of Tarsus gives us hope for our own day.

Saul of Tarsus was the last person anyone expected to follow Jesus Christ. That he would later become the missionary to the Gentiles, willing to face beatings, stoning, prisons, shipwreck, and to lose his life for the sake of Christ, was beyond unthinkable to anyone who knew his Jews-only snobbishness and murderous reputation.

He was a fanatical terrorist, pure and simple.

Already, he was implicated in the death of Jesus' first martyr, Stephen. He possessed a hatred and fury against Jesus' followers that rivalled or surpassed that of today's radical terrorists. When Jesus' followers fled Jerusalem to escape him, he chased after them, determined to destroy this affront to his beloved traditions. Who knows how many more believers died at his hands or at the hands of those who followed his orders?

In Galatians 1, we read his own description of his total devotion to the faith of his forefathers. He despised non-Jews. He despised Jesus' followers. The more people who followed Jesus Christ, the more infuriated and enraged he became. Nothing, he resolved, would or could stop him from achieving his goal of 100% eradication of Jesus' followers and Jesus' memory from the earth.

His furious determination, self-discipline, and leadership capabilities made it likely that he would succeed in his chosen mission in life. And then...

On the road to Damascus, he met Jesus Christ face-to-face. In a split second, Saul saw the Living Truth that wiped out all the lies and rubbish that governed his life. In that split second, Saul's life—and our own lives and destinies—were forever reversed.

In that split second, Saul of Tarsus became the man later

# SAUL OF TARSSUS AND US

known as Paul the Apostle, most likely the greatest Jesus-believer the world has ever known. Everyone who reads this piece owes an unpayable debt to him and to Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, who made it all possible.

In those dark days before the light from heaven blinded Saul of Tarsus, most Jesus followers wondered how long it would take before that relentless killer caught up to them. They did not count on what God would do to change the course of history.

In our own dark days, with so much demonic activity in India and elsewhere arrayed against the advance of the gospel, is it not also hard for us to believe that anything will soon change? By the day, everything seems to get worse and worse and worse. This trend toward worldwide spiritual and cultural decline has continued throughout our lives. At any moment, an explosion of society could take place, with wars, chaos and death breaking out everywhere.

Many prominent Christians say we live in a post-Christian age. Many of our children and grandchildren, raised in the church, are deserting the faith in droves for New Age, witchcraft, drugs, transgenderism, and the like. We are told, even by some of our most revered Christian leaders, we will lose. We will live as powerless exiles on the outskirts of Babylon until Jesus raptures us out of the growing mess.

It's the only course open to us now, we are told; otherwise, we will die in utter defeat as the Great Tribulation sweeps the world and the Anti-Christ takes the throne, making the Dark Ages seem like a picnic in comparison.

But God never adopts such a losing scenario. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the same God who reversed the life of Saul of Tarsus in a split second. Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit—and Saul of Tarsus' conversion—remind us that God's work on earth never retreats but always advances, even in the face of the fiercest demonic opposition. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

What God has shown us in the past is a foretaste of what He plans for the future. We haven't seen anything yet. The greatest works of Christ have yet to take place in India and the world, in your lives and in the lives of those we love. It will be the most unlikely people who will lead the way.

Our deluded children will become the most devoted generation to the Great Commission. The estranged and the prodigals will return. The perverted will preach the Good News. The addicted will find freedom and give it to others. The demonized will cast out demons. Even persecutors, today's versions of Saul of Tarsus, will become Christ's most loyal and eloquent representatives.

Surely, that day will come in a split second, like the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on that Damascus Road. Pray and praise God for that day!

Father God, I thank you that nothing is impossible with you. You can save the worst of sinners to accomplish your highest purposes. You save the best for last. Thank you for your love and salvation available to me and even to my worst enemies. I pray for a great awakening that will change my life and this world, even as you transformed the life of Saul of Tarsus. In Jesus' Name. Amen. ●

A magazine that will enrich and renew your spiritual life and give Christian perspective on current events.

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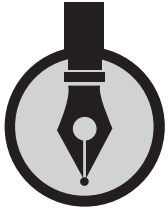
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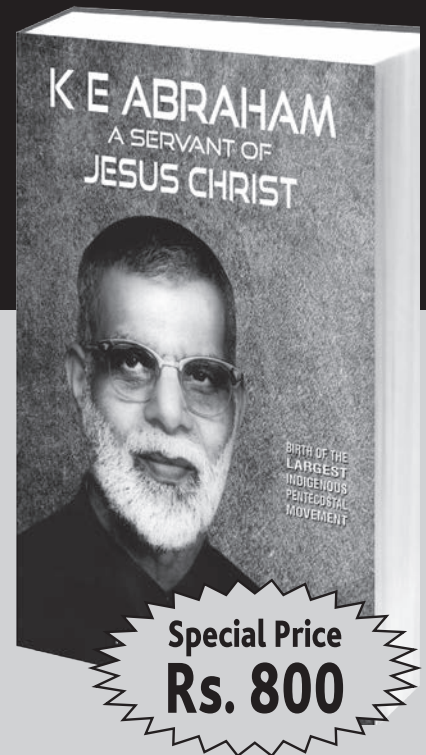
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

# FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

**"** *By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion, There on the poplars, we hung our harps... How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Psalms 137: 1- 4)*

It is believed that this Psalm is written toward the end of the second exile and the author is very nostalgic.

The memory of the past really hurts him and his agony is clearly evident in his words.

At times we are all gripped by the influence of nostalgia.

We see Job to be very nostalgic and he cries out, " how I long for the months gone by, for the day's God watched over me ...

Oh for the days when I was in my prime when God's intimate friendship blessed my house" (Job 29: 2, 4).

In the same way, David is longing for some water from the well in Bethlehem.

Memory is good to a certain extent, but we can't live in the past.

We need to face the reality of today. We know

that it is a time of isolation and alienation, anxiety, and lack of happiness.

It may be a time of unhappiness but certainly not a time of hopelessness because our God is the God of the future.

That's why God said to them who cried when the foundation of the second temple was laid, " the glory of this temple will be greater than the glory of the former house"( Haggai 2:9)

History reveals that the Kingdom of Babylon collapsed and a new kingdom came into existence, permission was given to the captives to return to their land.

So, in conclusion, may I write:

Forget the past for the time being.

Face the reality of today and

Focus on the future. Amen. ●



# CONVERSION AS LIBERATION / TRANSFORMATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT



**DOMENIC MARBANIANG**

Christian Minister and Provost at Central India Theological Seminary. He is also author of several books on Amazon, Lulu, and Google Playstore. He prolifically blogs at [Marbaniang.com](http://Marbaniang.com)

**Jesus** declared that He was anointed by the Spirit and had come to “proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18,19, NIV). What Jesus proclaimed as His mission at the beginning of His ministry, Luke attests as done in Acts 10:38, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

The words “doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” encapsulates the entire scope of Christ’s missionary work. Christ’s kingdom work was essentially set against the anti-kingdom work of the devil. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), but this certainly meant causing maximum damage to the enemy who was holding us captive. The “Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

The devil leads and rules the rebellious world (1 John 5:18; Eph.2:2) and does it through blinding people’s minds (2 Cor. 4:4) and holding them captive in fear (Heb. 2:14). But Jesus came in flesh and blood so that “by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14,15). God has “rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves” (Col. 1:13) and has given us not a spirit that makes us “a slave again to fear” but “the Spirit of sonship” (Rom. 8:15). “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7, NKJV).

It would be quite alarming if a group of elite commanders went on a rescue mission having no clear idea about who they were to rescue, from whom, how and using



which tools. It would be fatal to be totally unaware of the enemy's capacity, strength, and ability. If that is true about human missions, how much more wouldn't that be true about the divine mission of Christ. A mission training program that ignores the reality of the devil and his work in the world might be able to provide intellectual and social work learning skills to its trainees; however, missing on the primary focus of saving souls from the fire (Jude 1:23).

Back in the 1960s, there were several attempts to secularize the concept of mission by moving it out of the Church's scope of work and both socializing and politicizing it. At that time, there were sociologists and theologians who were confident about the stride of secularization and believed that the world was increasingly moving towards a churchless humanized society. Eventually, some thought that the mission of the church was mainly social liberation and transformation rather than pure evangelization. As Lesslie New big in

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”**

observed in a 1977 article, “mission was seen as participation in secular programmes for urban renewal, for civil rights, for community organization, etc,” which eventually led to liberation and transformation theologies contextualized to regions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In India, as well, the decades saw an interest in various liberation theologies that attempted to respond to the concerns of the oppressed and marginalized people. While somewhat detesting the Marxist elements in the Christian liberation theologies of Latin America, Indian liberation theologians did look at the Nazareth declaration of Christ in Luke 4 as the “Nazareth Manifesto,” obviously inspired by Marx and Engels “The Communist Manifesto” (1848), as encompassing both social action and political activism towards Dalit liberation, green liberation, struggle for gender equality, anti-trafficking etc. The Church that does not stand against social injustice has lost its biblical ground and missional focus, they argued. These were also times of increased drive towards ecumenism or union of churches.

The primary focus of Pentecostalism in India and around the world, on the other hand, continued to be evangelism, church planting, and development. Peter Berger, an American sociologist, did studies on the social impact of Pentecostalism and noted that the 1960s secularization myth has collapsed because of the rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa that increasingly emphasized on physical healing and deliverance, prosperity, and this-worldly salvation. Contrary to the secularist's expectations, people were becoming increasingly religious and spiritual in their outlook as they found faith more convincing, practical, and beneficial



than the ultimate meaninglessness offered by atheism. Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics led the way by their strong emphasis on the Bible, simple faith, and powerful worship. Many of the independent Bible colleges and mission training centres emphasized on faith-based Bible study, regular prayer, fasting, spiritual warfare, and weekly evangelistic outreach work. They were clearly cut-off from the liberational and ecumenical tendencies of mainline seminaries and churches near them as they were more focused on imitating what the New Testament explicitly described Jesus and His disciples doing.

They emphasized empowerment of the Spirit that leads to inner transformation and power evangelism than the type of

“  
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social empowerment of the marginalized that transformational and liberational mission theologies were talking about. Pentecostals, though many of them did have support systems for widows and the homeless, desisted from interpreting Christian mission in socialist or social transformational terms. They usually draw a clear line between good works and mission work, between the Great Commandment to love God and one's neighbour and the Great Commission to preach the gospel to all nations.

Owing to their eschatological vision, Pentecostals do not commonly believe that any of the human political revolutions (proposed by liberationists) would bring in any lasting peace. Only Christ will put an end to all war and bring in true peace. However, this does not diminish their active engagement in works of charity in society. As Allan H. Anderson of Birmingham University notes in his 2020 article in

Spiritus, "They engage with society because of their conversion and the liberation brought about by their experience of and empowerment of the Holy Spirit."

On this note, we might understand the focus on conversion as liberation and transformation. While conversion positionally liberates a person from sin and the domain of darkness, personal transformation is continuous and progressive till it is consummated in the perfect liberation and transformation of the child of God at Christ's Second Coming. The baptism and empowerment of the Spirit is crucial to that effect. The ministry of the Church results not only in personal development but also development of the congregation. The emphasis on praying in tongues for personal edification, prophecy and the other gifts for evangelism and edification of the Church fall within the same scope.

In recent decades, Pentecostal theologians have become alarmed at the spate of

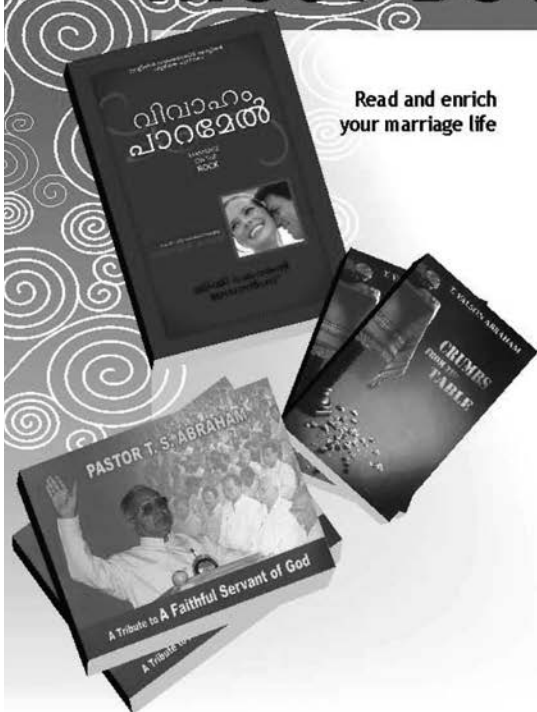
mammon-love within the Church. Several have raised their voices against the dangers of the prosperity gospel and preaching of cheap grace. It is certainly shocking when the gospel of Christ is presented as the gospel of mammon. In persecuted regions, however, Christians practically know that cost of discipleship. Therefore, though external political pressure tries to stifle evangelism, the word of God is not in chains (2 Tim.2:9).

If Paul had only been doing some social work and running some community development projects, he would not have been a matter of concern to either Jews or Romans. But he knew his calling: that he was "set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom.1:1) and it would only be woe to him if he did not preach it (1 Cor.9:16). He was, therefore, persecuted. It is time for us to strongly reassert our commitment to preach the gospel that truly liberates people.

The gospel we preach reflects the gospel that we believe in. If we believe in the

gospel that saves us from sin, deception, and the demonic domain of darkness, we will also preach the gospel that will deliver people from their sins, from deception, and from satanic bondage. We do not proclaim a theological pluralism that says that all faiths lead to the same goal; in contrast, we proclaim salvation in Christ alone. We embrace social and cultural pluralism but also understand that when a person believes in the gospel, he/she must break free from all those elements in culture and tradition that are contrary to the gospel. A true conversion would result in a true liberation from all false identities and bond ages and a full transformation into the identity and freedom that Christ gives us. ●

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# THE ISSUE OF CONVERSION IN INDIA



**J.N. MANOKARAN**

A Civil Engineer by profession. God called him and his family to be a missionary leader in Haryana as cross cultural missionaries for eleven years. Since, 1997 they returned back to Tamil Nadu to help missionaries and pastors to build their capacities by teaching, training and writing.

**Suddenly**, 'conversion' has become a bad word and a wicked deed. There is an alarm created as if 'conversion' is the first and foremost problem facing the nation and it should be tackled on war footing. Anti-conversion law has been enacted since 1967 in a few states of India, banning conversion by allurements. However, there is no case that has stood the test of evidence in the court. Hence, no one has been convicted or sentenced for conversion. Only several arrests are made for political reasons, and court acquits those who are arrested.

### Kinds of conversion

#### *Conversion as a choice:*

Humans have a basic freedom of choice. In fact, this freedom to choose has been given by God. However, nations, politicians, cultural custodians, religious leaders, family members and community leaders like to snatch this basic freedom. There are individuals who wish to use this freedom to exercise their rights against oppression. Like Dalits, who see 'conversion' as 'tool against oppression.' The oppressors are not happy for the oppressed to have this freedom of choice.

#### *Conversion by Coercion:*

This kind of conversion happens because of threat, harassment, violence, and compulsion. Subjugating a group of people who are voiceless or powerless by military might or by 'sword or gun.' In history, we see it has happened in several places globally. Conquerors and emperors tried to impose their religion or belief system on people who were defeated by them.

### **Conversion for convenience:**

This generally happens in an individual context. A boy or girl wants to be married to his/her sweetheart who happens to be a follower of another religion. One person persuades another person to convert to his/her religion for the sake of marriage and family life.

### **Conversion by corruption:**

There is an allegation that a person converts for sake of some 'allurement' – promise of possession or wealth or assets or guaranteed monthly income or job or education opportunity etc. However, it could rarely happen. If a person is willing to change his religion and identity for sake of some money, then s/he will be willing to change again for little more higher bidding. There is no integrity or honesty or truth in such a person and could not be trusted. Strangely, this allegation is repeated but there has never been a single conviction of such a fraud in the court of law.

### **Conversion by Conviction:**

A person who searches for truth, intellectually discovers Lord Jesus as the truth. Or a person experiences a miracle like healing or peace of mind or break through in his life and attribute to God who answers prayers. Another person may have a vision and becomes a follower of Lord Jesus Christ. Christian mission of making disciples happen when a person is convicted by the Spirit of God.

### **What is biblical conversion?**

The life-changing or life-defining or life-transforming spiritual experience can be termed as the beginning of a New Life and continues to spiritual maturity of becoming like Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Conviction of truth:**

A person receives the truth and accepts the truth that s/he is a sinner, needs a savior, the only Savior is Lord Jesus Christ. This is not reason that provides this conclusion, but the Spirit of God that reveals it to a person. When Peter confessed that Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Lord told him that 'flesh and blood' (human) did not reveal

that, only God the Father revealed it to him. (Matthew 16:17) Conversion is God's initiative, though God uses human instruments. Repentance from sin is essential aspect, which is to turn away from sin, sinful habits, selfishness, worldliness and evil thoughts, forsake such behaviour and seek forgiveness from the Lord. Seeking forgiveness is essential as a person is convinced that only Lord Jesus Christ could forgive the sins. Under heaven, among humans, there is only one name given for salvation. (Acts 4:12)

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**Conversion means to make right and righteous choices. The foremost choice is to receive Christ and reject all other ideas, philosophies, and ideologies. A person who is transformed by the love of Lord Jesus Christ will make righteous choices in all circumstances.**  
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### **Connection with the Lord**

Conversion is also being reconciled with God. When Adam and Eve committed sin, they were spiritually dead. They lost the capacity to be in right relationship with God. Through the first couple sin entered in the world and enslaves all humans. Paul writes that we are reconciled with God through His Son Lord Jesus Christ and have access to His presence. And disciples are entrusted with the ministry

of reconciliation to preach and teach the world inviting people to be reconciled with God. (II Corinthians 5:18)

### **Call from darkness to light**

Conversion is God calling a person who is spiritually blind and live in darkness to come into marvelous light. (II Corinthians 4:4; I Peter 2:9) Lord Jesus Christ is the light of the world. (John 8:12) The light of gospel shines in the hearts of those who receive Him. (II Corinthians 4:6) Those who believe Lord Jesus Christ walk in light. (I John 1:7)

### **Correcting worldview**

Conversion means to have renewed mind. Christian faith does not bypass reason or mind as most religions and meditations do. It is a spirituality that has active participation of mind, not a process to empty the mind. Paul writes to believers in Rome, not to follow the trends, traditions, fashions, patterns, or ideas of the world. Instead, converted people should have a mind that is renewed. This renewed mind knows the Will of God which is perfect, acceptable and pleasant. (Romans 12:2) Knowing the Will of God, provides believers a basis for their belief and world view; purpose and meaning in life. It is not to have seared conscience, but good conscience, based on faith in true living God and His Word. (I Timothy 4:2)

### **Choices**

Conversion means to make right and righteous choices. The foremost choice is to receive Christ and reject all other ideas, philosophies, and ideologies. A person who is transformed by the love of Lord Jesus Christ will make righteous choices in all circumstances. The choices are the fulfilment of the Royal Law: Love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40) The choices also has right priority of the



Kingdom of God. (Matthew 6:33)

### Character

Conversion means the process of becoming like Christ. A person is attracted to the personality of Lord Jesus Christ, inspired by His holiness, perfection s/he aspires to be like Him. When the Lord appears in the Second Coming, believers will be like Him. (1 John 3:2) Believers reflect God's glory in this world. They are salt of the earth and light of the world. Those who observe them, thank, or praise the Heavenly Father for having such children. (Matthew 5:14-16)

### Christ mind

Paul writes the believers should have the same mind of Christ. (Philippians 2:5) Lord Jesus Christ who is Son of God, chose to set aside His heavenly abode, throne to take a form a man, suffer and die. The same attitude and mind should be found in the lives of believers.

### Coronation and consecration

Converted people are priests and kings. In every society and culture these two are dominating

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People who are converted and follow Lord Jesus Christ, do as He did. Lord Jesus went about doing good. (Acts 10:38) Christians are called, equipped and entrusted to do good in this world.  
”

people. Priests through religion or what is unknown to common people control others. Kings with the military power dominate others. However, the believers are priests and kings serving God in his Temple and Kingdom. (1 Peter 2:9) As priests they offer praises, thanksgiving, sacrifices, offerings, and worship. As kings they reign with Him in His kingdom. (1 Timothy 2:12)

### Contribute to the world

People who are converted and follow Lord Jesus Christ, do as He did. Lord Jesus went about doing good. (Acts 10:38) Christians are called, equipped and entrusted to do good in this world. The history of the world is a testimony how the Christian contribution changed the world.

### Care and Share

Another trait of a person who experiences conversion is to care for others and share with others. Christian community is a caring community. Globally, Christians have cared for the orphans, destitute, widows, poor, sick, AIDS victims, during plague and pandemic. Lord Jesus Christ taught the blessed give rather than receive. (Acts 20:35)

### Congregational community

Conversion brings a person to be part of a community, that provides the sense of belonging. It is not individualistic pursuit of spirituality, but a family, rather a body, of course the Body of Christ. This sense of belonging provides dignity, affirmation and opens doors of opportunities, potential and usefulness.

### Competence and ethics

Converted person does things different and excellently well. John the Baptist called people to repent, convert and bring forth fruit of repentance. (Luke 3:8)

### Correlation

Conversion changes all relationships, very significantly family relationships. Only bible commands a husband to obey his wife, while other religions do not. Hence, a woman's role is affirmed, respected as a person, and regarded for her contribution. That brings peace and joy in the family. They also learn to respect and honour parents and parents-in-law.

### Legal and social aspect of conversion

#### *The provision under constitution*

The United Nations charter Article 18 provides freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which includes freedom

to change religion or belief. India as a prominent member of United Nations, aspiring to get a seat in the Security Council, is aware of this. Indian constitution provides this freedom according to Article 25. It includes to profess, practice, and propagate religion. However, there are some lawyers who interpret the word propagate is just teach and not convert people to another religion.

### General understanding

The general understanding is that a person is considered as convert when s/he takes baptism. Family members, relatives and caste relationships could object when a person takes baptism. Sometimes, it could be even violent that some are disowned. There is no objection as long as a person reads the bible or attends gatherings or prays to Lord Jesus Christ. Nowadays, even these activities are objected by anti-social and right-wing elements. Even having multiple copies of bibles in the church also attracts police filing false cases in some States.

### Effects of conversion

Following Lord Jesus Christ liberates people from oppression, exploitation, and slavery. Children go to school, they start dreaming. The caste hierarchy allots them a perpetual slavery, but gospel gives them aspiration and dreams. Yes, the servant maid also could dream as per Joel's prophesy. (Joel 2:28)

Here are two case studies. Few children wanted to join the government school. However, the local school did not give them admission in the State of Odisha. The parents appealed to higher officials and went to meet him. He shouted at them: "You beat drums in the funeral. If your children study, who will beat drums in my funeral?" They were chased out of the office.

An owner of a marble stone quarry filed false case against missionaries who were serving the quarry stone cutters. The missionaries taught the quarry workers children to read and write. When confronted he said: "If you educate these children who will serve my children,

when they run this business."

### Conversion and Liberation

Conversion provides liberation for those who follow Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Spiritual liberation:

A person is saved from Penalty of sin (past), Power of sin (present) and Presence of sin (future). As a child of God, they have a new identity in Christ. (John 1:12) The Eternal Life with God in heaven is assured. Any person can become a priest or pastor, could be promoted as Bishop, even as a Pope.

#### Social liberation:

When a person becomes a follower of Christ, the social stigma of caste is removed. They can partake in Lord's table, enjoy fellowship with other believers irrespective of caste or class.

#### Economic liberation

As a follower of Lord Jesus Christ new believers learn to live a dignified life. Discipline of hygiene, attendance of children in the school, ambitions, perspective and attitude changes. Being victorious over evil habits like alcoholism saves them a lot of money. Money spent on a lot of religious rituals, festivals and traditions is saved. They also escape money-lenders trap as they get education and help from the fellow believers.

### Persecution and conversion

The new believers from other religious background face persecution.

#### Honour and shame

In a culture, where honour and shame are the focus, truth and righteousness are sacrificed. Family members persecute new believers, because of social stigma. Family honour is in jeopardy because of conversion.

#### Caste pride

In some instances, the community of the caste makes it as a collective shame for one caste. Hence, the community turns against the individual or the family.

#### Insecurity

If people convert from the lower strata of society, they will become educated, get good jobs and flourish. The upper strata

feels that their privilege would be at stake, the resources would be distributed, and their portion will become smaller. Envious of the new competitors, they try to violently oppose them.

#### Political reasons

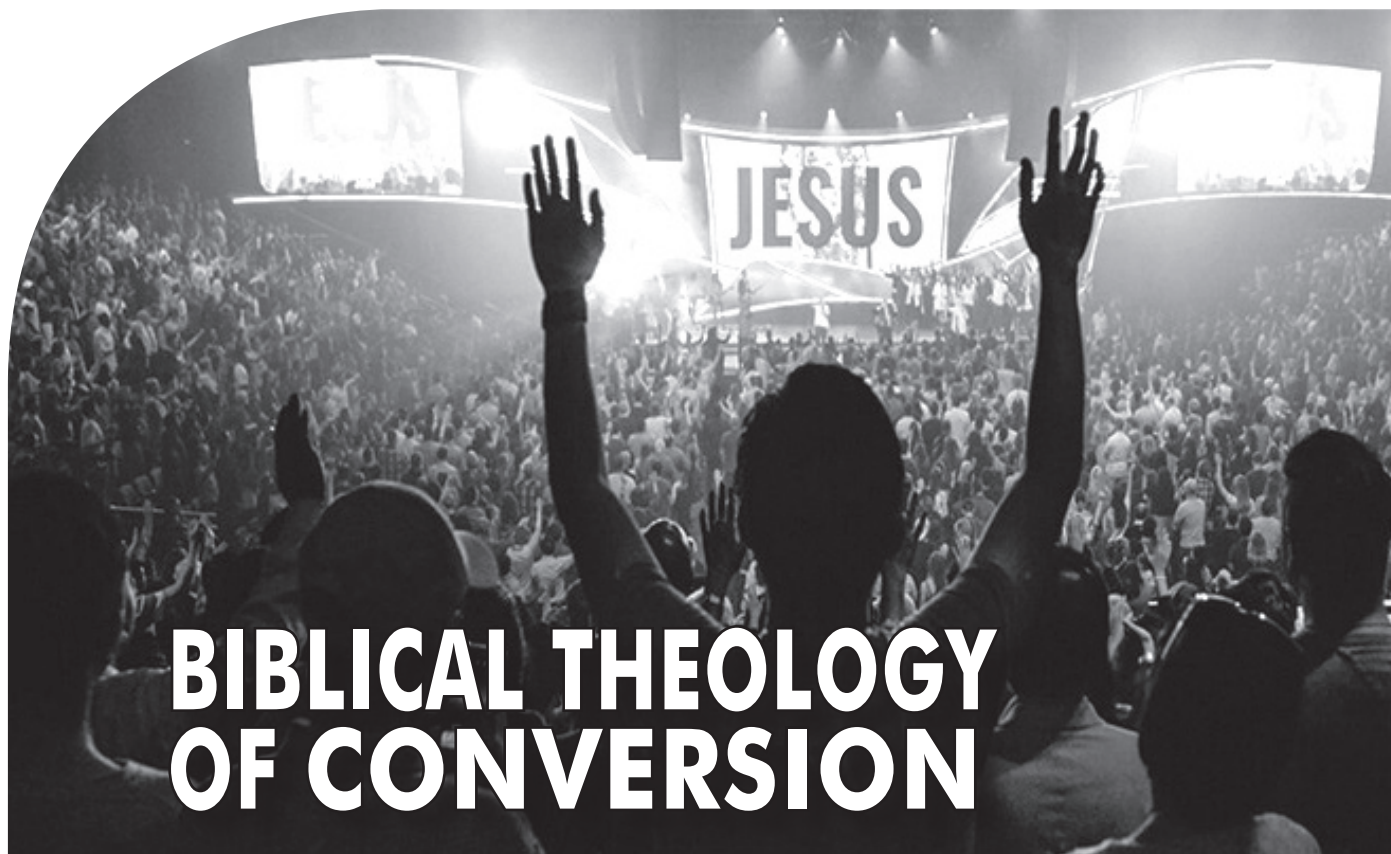
The right-wing ideology is opposed to equality and stand for hierarchy based on caste. When a person with inferior identity given by society and religion converts and gets a new identity that has dignity and global fraternity, they are scared. The young people who do not have spiritual strength and stamina to serve the poor, marginalized, downtrodden, instead show their power by indulging in ruthless violence. The spirituality of hate comes to open confronting the spirituality of love, which is Christian faith.

#### Spiritual warfare

Satan is not happy when a person moves out of his slavery and darkness to freedom and light. He will try to attack to make the new believer lose his faith and return to former lifestyle. Satan may also instigate his instruments to persecute the new believers.

#### Challenge

In the world, the truth will be proclaimed continuously by the Church as it is the mandate given the Risen Lord. When gospel is proclaimed, there will be some people who will respond to the call. There would be opposition, harassment, threats and even violence against the new believers. In the history, the Roman Empire one of the most powerful empires in the world persecuted Christians. The Empire does not exist today, but the Church exists today. Conversions will happen among all people, until the Lord comes again. ●



# BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION



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In recent years there has been a significant increase in opposition and violence against any form of Christian mission.

In the name of “forcible conversion,” some right-wing political groups attacks minorities, especially Christians. Furthermore, there have been a plethora of laws passed by state assemblies in the name of “Freedom of Religion” that deter anyone from changing faith. Besides, the Christian practices of divine healing, exorcism, and the use of other charismatic gifts are seen as a form of coercion.

Even without provocation, pastors and missionaries have been attacked and churches have been vandalized. When these incidents occur, the authorities and police often look the other way or even abet the perpetrators of violence. They may also file court cases against Christians under the guise of “forcible conversion.”

In this context, it is important to present the biblical concept of “conversion” in order to clear up any misunderstandings that the general public may have. It is also important to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are seeking spiritual transformation, without being accused of forced conversion. Therefore, in the following pages, we will explore the biblical concept of conversion from both OT and NT scripture, selecting few areas to understand what Christians believe and professing today. Here we will see that the genuine biblical concept of conversion is a voluntary act of turning to Jesus Christ in faith, and that it has nothing to do with coercion or manipulation but fully in accordance with the Bible.

**Biblical Concept of Conversion:** Both the OT and the NT present conversion as a crucial step of God’s saving work for people. The major image used for conversion in the Old Testament is, “turning back” (from sin, to God), and usually conveyed by the Hebrew word *šûb*, and its derivatives. The basic meaning of the word is to “turn” or “return” or “to turn around” or a change of course in life. The primary theological

meaning, however, is to turn to God in repentance. This idea can be seen clearly in Is. 55:7, turning away from immorality and injustice and toward God and in Ezek. 14:6, turning from idols.

Similarly, the New Testament uses the verb *epistrephō* ("turn back," "return"), the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *šûb*, meaning as spiritual conversion (Matt. 13:15; Mark 4:12; Lk. 1:16-17). A similar term used for "turning" in repentance to the Lord is expressed in the Greek verb *metanoein*. The word refers to a change of mind, adding the emotional and volitional functions of the intellect, and a sense of remorse resulting from dissatisfaction with prior activity. For instance, John the Baptist called the people to repentance and demanded them to change their attitude and actions (Lk. 3:7-14); his preaching led people to baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4-5; Matt 3:5-6). Another metaphor in the NT for conversion is that of birth, such as becoming God's children (Matt. 18:3), rebirth (1 Pet. 1:3), and being born again or born from above (John 3:3). In these cases, conversion appears to be a definitive and radical change in one's beliefs and practices and repentance of one's sinful life. Although the words "conversion" and "convert" do not occur frequently in the Bible, the basic concept of conversion experience and its doctrines that are fundamental to Christian faith are well defined in the Bible. According to the biblical theology, conversion comprises two vital elements: repentance and faith, both elements inseparable. Repentance is the turning from the former life and faith indicates the turning to God. Repentance implies a conviction of personal sin and an earnest appeal to God to forgive according to his mercy (Ps 51:1,2,10-14). Faith on the other hand, is the astute conviction that through Jesus Christ there is salvation and eternal life. They are the negative and positive aspect of the same occurrence. In a sense, each is incomplete without the other, and each is motivated by the other. As we become aware of sin and turn from it, we see the necessity of turning to Christ for the provision of his

righteousness. Conversely, believing in Christ makes us aware of our sin and thus leads to repentance.

**Conversion in the Old Testament:** As we turn to the Old Testament, the idea of conversion is prominently presented in the national life of people of Israel. As they were settled in Palestine, they began to backslide from the Lord, and began to serve the gods of the surrounding nations and adopted their immoral and evil practices. Then Joshua led Israel in a renewal of the covenant with Yahweh. The central aspect in this event was a call

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to repentance: "Throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel" (Josh. 24:23). Later, Samuel while addressing widespread idolatry, urged Israel to turn away from foreign gods and return to the Lord to serve him (1 Sam. 7:3). Moreover, returning to the Lord in repentance involved mourning, fasting, and prayer (v.6). Later, in 1 Kings 8:33-50 Solomon

spoke of "having a change of heart" (v.47a), confession of wrongdoing (v.47b), prayer and supplication (v. 33), turning away from known wickedness (v. 35), and return to the Lord with one's entire being (v. 48). Then Yahweh would hear from heaven and forgive their sins (vv. 49-50). The same idea can be seen in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

As we turn to Psalms, David's penitential psalm (Ps. 51) stands a paradigm for conversion, i.e. both repentance and astute faith in Lord for remission of sins. David composed the psalm after his sin with Bathsheba and deliberate killing of her husband. After prophet Nathan's warning, David realised his guilt and repented instantly. We can find the following elements here; first of all, David expressed awareness of his sins (vv. 1-3). Secondly, he offered heart-felt confession of sins (vv. 4-5). David wholeheartedly acknowledged to the Lord both the specific sins of which he was guilty (vv. 3-4) and his inherently sinful condition (v. 5). Thirdly, David showed a true attitude of contrition, reflected through the "broken spirit" and "a broken and contrite heart" (v.17). Fourthly, he expressed his repentance and sorrow through a prayer for pardon of sins (vv.7-9), pleading God to "cleanse" and "wash" him. Fifthly, David sought for a profound inner renewal (vv.10-12): he prayed, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10). Finally, David experienced the joy that comes from deliverance from sin and its consequences (v. 12). In prophetic literature, themes of repentance and conversion are



dominant motifs (Isa. 31:6; 44:22; Ezek. 18:30, 32; Hos. 3:5; Zech.1:3), especially in Jeremiah (Jer. 3:14; 18:11; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3). The Lord through Jeremiah commanded to the people: "Circumcise yourselves .... remove the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem" (4:4). The prophets renounced mere mechanical and ritual forms of repentance (Isa.1:11; 29:13; 58:5; Jer. 14:12; Hos. 7:14). True repentance consists of acknowledging one's guilt (Jer. 3:13), remorse for sins (Jer. 31:19; Ezek.36:31; Jonah 3:8a), forsaking evil thoughts and deeds (Isa. 55:7; Ezek. 14:6; Jonah 3:8b), turning to the Lord with the whole being (Isa. 55:6; Joel 2:12), and reflecting the change of heart (Hos. 12:6; 14:2). In response to genuine repentance, the Lord would withhold punishment

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**Here conversion consist of awareness of one's lost condition (v.17), honest confession of personal sins and guilt (vv.18, 21), acknowledgment of one's utter unworthiness before a righteous God (v.19), and the determination to return to the Father's house (vv.18-20a).**  
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(Jer.26:3), forgive the sins (Isa. 55:7), and grant life (Ezek. 33:15-16). Those who failed to repent would face divine judgment (Ezek. 33:8-11, 14).

Above all, the prophets indicated that repentance is an enablement of God; the sinners themselves cannot turn from sins and produce saving faith. Consequently, Jeremiah mentions Ephraim's petition: "Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord God" (Jer. 31:18). Moreover, Lord promised that he would create a new heart among them (Jer. 24:7) and he would make a "new covenant" (v. 31) which would change the human heart (v. 33). Furthermore, Lord would send his Spirit and carry out regenerating work. The same regenerative work of Spirit is explained in Ezekiel 36:24-27.

**Conversion in the New Testament:** The gospels portray Jesus' ministry and his call to conversion, "Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). Here we see both repentance and faith. Jesus showed the pattern of conversion by placing a little child among his disciples, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). In the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus explained a model for conversion. The younger son's journey into a far country with his share of wealth signifies humankind's rebellious departure from God (vv. 13-16). Here conversion consist of awareness of one's lost condition (v.17), honest confession of personal sins and guilt (vv.18, 21), acknowledgment of one's utter unworthiness before a righteous God (v.19), and the determination to return to the Father's house (vv.18-20a). The Father anticipated the lost son's return and accepted him with undeserved mercy and love (vv. 20b-24).

The story of Jesus' anointing by a sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50) similarly shows the nature genuine conversion. The woman's tears proved her repentance about her past sins; her gift of perfume was a sign of her faith in Jesus as Messiah. Her action was evidence of genuine love for Jesus. As a result of her repentant heart and genuine trust, Jesus forgave her sins and declared her as a saved person.

As we turn to the book of Acts, we find the conversion experience of the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:1–20, 22:1–21 and 26:2–23), showing that Paul's Damascus Road experience was decisive in the first century churches. He was a Jew by birth, circumcised according to the law and was raised in cultural and religious purity. Besides, he belonged to the strict sect of the Pharisees and was a zealous persecutor of the church. In Phil 3:6, Paul claims that he was blameless in his observance of the law. Out of his zeal for his religious heritage, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute and kill Christians, but his encounter with the risen Christ totally transformed him. Overcome by the power and grace of Christ, Saul repented of earlier life and trusted in Christ. After Ananias had laid hands on Saul, he was filled with the Holy Spirit (v.17) and was baptized (v. 18) and received the unique call as a "chosen vessel" to be a witness for what he was trying to destroy – Jesus the messiah and his followers.

Additionally, as a result of his conversion experience, Paul's life and vocation were completely transformed. His early Jewish life, his dependence on Jewish tradition and law, and everything that he once considered as gain, he now considered as rubbish and loss (Phil 3:7–8). Paul's encounter with the risen Christ brought about a paradigm shift in his theology. He became an apostle to the Gentiles and understood that they were now included in the people of God, as Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Paul also realised that through Christ, Gentiles became part of the commonwealth of Israel and that Jews and Gentiles joined together in Christ to form a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:12–20).

In Pauline epistles, the concept of conversion is vividly portrayed. Paul spoke of conversion as "turn[ing] to God from idols to serve the living and true God" when he wrote to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 1:9). Christian conversion is a turning from evil (cf. 2 Cor. 12:21) to God in devotion and service (cf. 2 Cor. 3:16).

The apostle taught that true repentance (turning from sin) involves the emotional element of sorrow for misdeeds. Thus, his painful letter to the Corinthians stimulated a "godly sorrow" that led to repentance unto salvation (2 Cor. 7:9–11). Besides, in Paul's writings faith is explained as belief in the truths of the Gospel and total trust in Christ. The saving faith is the correct beliefs concerning the person and work of Christ (2 Thess. 2:13; cf. Titus 1:1). To be saved and to become a Christian one must believe the fact of Jesus' atoning death (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Thess. 4:14), resurrection (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:4, 17; 1 Thess. 4:14), and divine lordship (Rom. 10:9). And the

**Conversion leads to regeneration, or a change of nature, as the Holy Spirit gives the person new life. This new life is characterised by the liberation of the human will from its bondage to sin and evil.**

saving faith comes through hearing and understanding the Gospel (Rom. 10:14, 17; 1 Cor. 15:1–2, 11).

**Summary:** The brief examination of biblical literature above shows that conversion is a voluntary act in which a person wholeheartedly rejects his former way of life and turns to God for salvation. It involves repenting of sin, abandoning false gods and evil practices, and surrendering to God in faith through Jesus Christ. Conversion leads to regeneration, or a

change of nature, as the Holy Spirit gives the person new life. This new life is characterised by the liberation of the human will from its bondage to sin and evil. Rather than the old self of sinful disposition, attitudes, and impulses, a new being emerges, including a new heart, mind, and will. In the words of Paul, "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has passed away, and the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

Additionally, the new nature is one of holiness and righteousness, as Paul writes, "Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Love is a vital element in the life of the reborn person, and it identifies a person as genuinely "converted." What the Apostle John states is apt, "He who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 Jn 4:7–8).

Thus, if the biblical concept of "conversion" means a voluntary act in which a person abandons their old self and puts on a new nature, then the allegation of "forcible conversion" cannot be applied to a person who becomes a genuine Christian. Again, conversion is not merely changing one's religion or old way of life, but producing love, righteousness, holiness, self-control, mercy, and long suffering, thus becoming like Christ (Phil 2:5ff). These genuine godly natures cannot be attained through merely changing one's religion or being a part of a church or any new organization. It requires total surrender of one's will and total being to become a transformed person. Therefore, the label of "forcible conversion" does not stick to those who genuinely follow Jesus Christ. This concept of conversion is what Christians profess and practice in India. ●

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**Conversion** is a highly personal phenomenon—Augustine in the garden had the company of the voices of children and a profound biblical verse while Luther spent days in solitary conversation with Paul’s letter to the Romans. Yet conversion, as personal as it often is, can also ramify outward into the world with great force, galvanizing new communities, breaking old ones, and changing the world utterly. The conversions of Martin Luther and John Wesley were two cardinal events that helped change the course of Christianity to a transformative level.

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 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, 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 between two worlds. It is not a superficial turning, a mere rearranging of the outward facade of a person’s life.

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.

**The Conversion of Martin Luther**

Martin Luther, a central figure in the Protestant Reformation, underwent a profound spiritual transformation that reshaped not only his personal beliefs but also the course of Christianity. Luther's conversion, marked by a deep sense of spiritual crisis and subsequent theological insights, laid the groundwork for the significant changes that would unfold within the Church and beyond.

To understand Luther, we must understand that his conversion was not an isolated event in his life. We can trace Luther's development in grace from his childhood. Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, in AD 1483. Luther came from a peasant family; his mother was a pious Catholic. She instilled the fear of God into her strong-willed son. Martin entered the

**Martin Luther's journey towards conversion can be traced to a moment of intense spiritual crisis. As a young Augustinian monk, Luther struggled with a profound sense of guilt and unworthiness before a holy God.**

University of Erfurt when just 17 years old. After his studies, Luther was transferred from Erfurt to a monastery in Wittenberg.

Martin Luther's journey towards conversion can be traced to a moment of intense spiritual crisis. As a young Augustinian monk, Luther struggled with a profound sense of guilt and unworthiness before a holy God. The prevailing theology of the time, centered around the Catholic Church's teachings on indulgences and salvation through works, exacerbated Luther's internal turmoil. The pursuit of righteousness through religious rituals and sacraments left him spiritually unfulfilled and haunted by the fear of divine judgment.

To find solace and answers to his spiritual struggles, Luther embarked on a pilgrimage to

Rome in AD 1510. However, his experiences in the holy city deepened his disillusionment rather than providing the comfort he sought. Witnessing corruption, decadence, and a lax attitude toward spirituality within the Church hierarchy left Luther questioning the authenticity of the religious practices he had previously held in high regard.

### **The Turning Point for Martin Luther: Study of Romans**

Luther's pivotal moment of conversion occurred as he engaged in a close study of the Scriptures. Romans 1:17 – "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith,'" became a catalyst for a profound paradigm shift in his understanding of salvation.

The breakthrough came as Luther grasped the concept of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) – the idea that salvation is a gift from God received through faith, not earned through human works. This revelation, coupled with a renewed understanding of God's grace, brought Luther the assurance and peace he had desperately sought. In Luther's own words, "I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed" that had stood in my way. I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith."

Motivated by his newfound convictions, Luther boldly challenged

the Church's practices, particularly the sale of indulgences, by posting his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in AD 1517. This act of defiance, intended to spark academic debate, instead ignited a broader movement that would become known as the Protestant Reformation.

### **Martin Luther's Legacy and Impact:**

Martin Luther's conversion was not merely a personal transformation; it became a catalyst for widespread change within Christianity. The doctrines he espoused, emphasizing justification by faith and the authority of Scripture, laid the foundation for the Protestant movement, leading to the establishment of various Protestant denominations. Even while in hiding at the castle of Wartburg, he worked furiously, writing volumes, and even finding time to translate the New Testament into German. This translation enabled the common man to read the Bible, a very important impetus for the Reformation.

Beyond theology, Luther's ideas on individual conscience, priesthood of all believers, and the importance of direct engagement with the Bible left an enduring mark on Western culture. The ripple effects of his conversion extended to realms of education, governance, and the shaping of modern democratic principles.

### **The Conversion of John Wesley**

John Wesley, an influential 18th-century Anglican cleric, theologian, and the founder of Methodism, underwent a profound and transformative spiritual experience that would become the cornerstone of his life and ministry. His conversion, marked by a deep sense of spiritual unrest and a subsequent encounter with divine grace, laid the groundwork for the development of Methodism and left an enduring impact on Christian history.

John Wesley's early years were marked by academic excellence. He attended Christ Church, Oxford, and later became a fellow at Lincoln College. Along with his brother Charles and other like-minded individuals, he formed the Holy Club,

a group dedicated to rigorous religious discipline and charitable works. Despite his earnest pursuit of a godly life, Wesley felt a void within himself, a sense of spiritual dissatisfaction that he could not reconcile.

### **The Turning Point for John Wesley: Aldershot Experience**

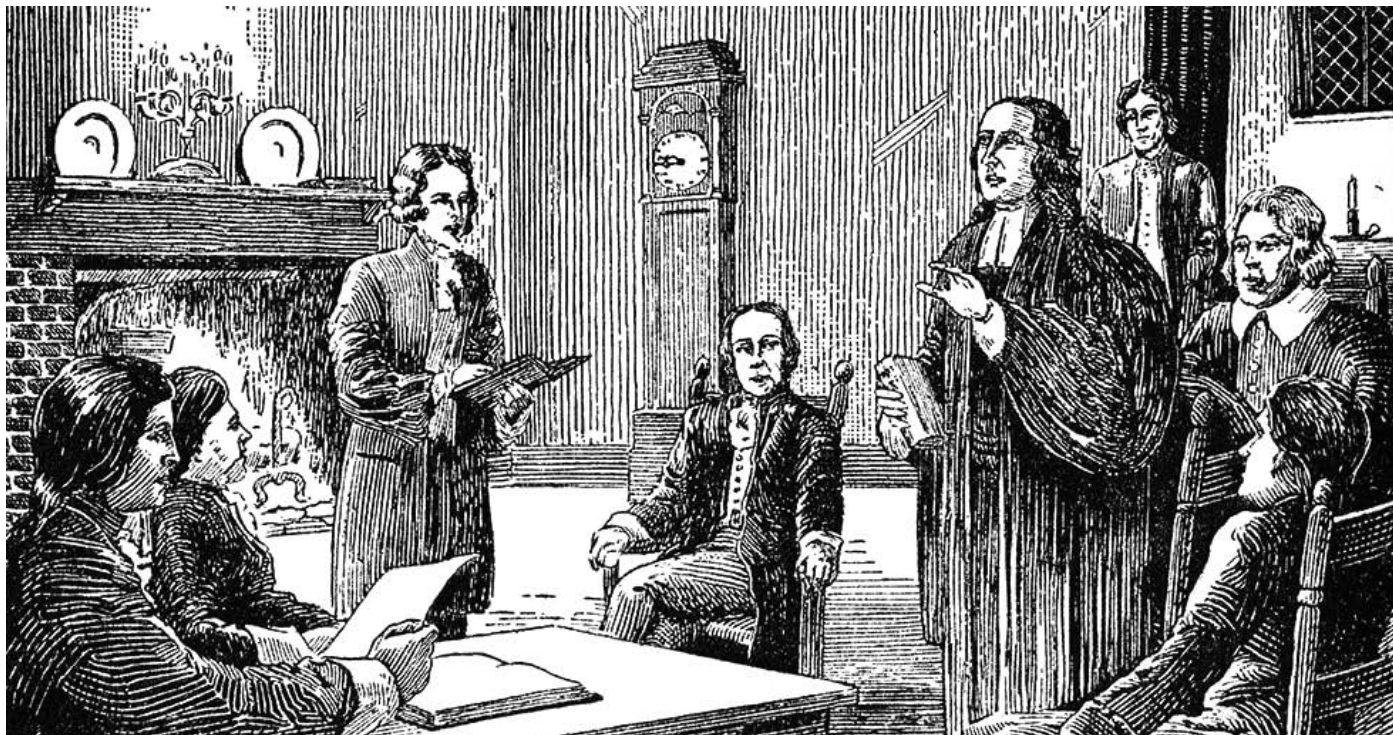
The turning point in John Wesley's spiritual journey occurred on an evening in AD 1738, at a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. While listening to the reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, Wesley experienced a profound spiritual awakening. He later recounted this experience in his journal, stating that his heart was "strangely warmed" as he felt a transformative assurance of God's grace and forgiveness through faith in Christ.

Wesley's encounter with divine grace at Aldersgate marked a shift in his understanding of salvation. He moved from a legalistic view of righteousness through works to a realization that justification comes by faith alone. This realization not only brought Wesley personal peace but also became the driving force behind his future ministry and the Methodism movement.

Empowered by his newfound understanding of grace, Wesley embarked on a mission to share the message of salvation with others. Along with his brother Charles and other associates, Wesley engaged in itinerant preaching, emphasizing the importance of a personal relationship with Christ and the transformative power of God's grace. The Methodist movement, characterized by small group meetings, accountability structures, and an emphasis on practical piety, grew rapidly, spreading across England and eventually reaching other parts of the world.

### **John Wesley's Legacy and Impact:**

The conversion of John Wesley not only transformed his own life but also left an indelible mark on the landscape of Christianity. Methodism became a significant force in the evangelical revival of the 18th century, contributing to a renewed



emphasis on personal holiness, social justice, and an experiential relationship with God.

Wesley's theological contributions, often summarized in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral – Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience – continue to shape Methodism and influence broader Christian thought. The Methodist movement also played a role in the formation of other Christian denominations, fostering a renewed interest in personal piety and social reform.

Until his conversion, Wesley preached, taught, wrote, composed hymns, and even gave himself to missionary work—all to no avail. After the conversion experience, Wesley took to the fields, preaching to coal miners and commoners. Despite recurring opposition, his itinerant evangelism soon expanded throughout England and beyond. It is estimated that he rode over 250,000 miles on horseback and preached over 40,000 sermons. He also published selections of his sermons and wrote voluminously. His use of lay preachers and small “societies” spread the movement to some 120,000 followers

by the time of his death.

Yet the conversion and subsequent ministries of John Wesley were not isolated events whose impact ended with the passing of the 18th century. His life continues to greatly influence the church. Many Methodist denominations today still embrace those notable elements of the Wesley ministry: an emphasis upon preaching; the organization of small groups for prayer and Bible study; the importance of book and tract distribution; and a concern for the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised, which to John Wesley and his followers was the natural expression of the religious life.

The theology of John Wesley also has an ongoing influence outside of strictly Methodist denominations. Wesley's emphasis upon the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the church has fired up the Holiness movement, the Pentecostal movement, and even the Charismatic movement.

**Conclusion:**

The conversions of Martin Luther and John Wesley stand as a pivotal moment

in the history of Christianity. Luther's conversion marked the beginning of a transformative era in Christendom from the 16th century. John Wesley's conversion marked the birth of the Methodist movement and contributed to the broader evangelical revival of the 18th century. From a tormented monk wrestling with his own inadequacies, Luther emerged as a bold reformer, challenging centuries-old traditions and reshaping the theological landscape. His conversion not only shaped the trajectory of Christianity but also left an indelible imprint on the broader development of Western thought and culture. Wesley's personal experience of grace, coupled with his commitment to spreading the message of salvation, left an enduring legacy that continues to influence Christian theology, practice, and mission. ●



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