

# Conversion

by J. Wilbur Chapman

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of conversion and the role of faith in coming to Christ, highlighting the need to surrender to God and trust in His word.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 51:10, Matthew 18:3, Matthew 19:14, Mark 9:24, John 5:24, John 6:47, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8, 1 John 5:13

**Topics:** "Childlike Faith", "Spiritual Conversion"

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## Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the necessity of conversion and becoming like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, emphasizing Jesus as the greatest teacher and preacher who spoke with authority and used parables to convey deep truths. The text in Matthew 18:3 highlights the importance of being converted and having a childlike faith. Chapman delves into the concepts of conversion, the role of God's grace in the process, and the assurance of passing from death to life through faith in Christ.

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## Transcript

TEXT: "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."--Matt. 18:3.

Jesus Christ was the world's greatest teacher and preacher. Multitudes followed him because he taught them, not as the scribes, but as one having authority. He came to them with the deepest truth of God, but couched in such familiar expressions, and told in such a fascinating way, that all men heard him and went their way rejoicing that so great a teacher had come into the world as the messenger of God. He desired to speak to them concerning the kingdom, and seeing on the distant hillside a farmer sowing his seed, he gave them the parable of the sower; and every farmer in his company began to understand his message. He told them the story of a woman baking bread, and in the spreading of the leaven every housekeeper had a vision of one of the deepest principles of the coming kingdom. He gave them the account of the boy who went away from his home, breaking his mother's heart, and, according to tradition, putting her in her grave; causing his old father to bow his head in shame again and again, and yet in spite of it all, his father loving him; and every listener learned from the story a lesson concerning the love of God which could have been given to him in no other way. He was acknowledged as the world's greatest teacher and preacher.

The text is introduced by the word "verily," and this is peculiar to Jesus. The word calls especial attention to the coming message. It was as if he had sounded a bell and said, "Stop and listen"; and wherever the

word "verily" occurs the Bible reader would do well to give heed to the message of Jesus.

What hope is there for the moralist when Jesus said, "Except ye be converted"? What hope can there be for the man who says God is so merciful that he will not allow him finally to be lost when Jesus said "Ye shall not enter into the kingdom, except ye be converted and become as little children."

It will be necessary for us to read carefully verses eight and nine in this eighteenth chapter of Matthew, if we would be impressed with the importance of conversion. There are solemn words here. "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hellfire."

I have been told that there are two ways of reading this text. The first is as we have it in the King James version; the second would make it read thus: "Verily, I say unto you, except ye convert yourselves and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Those who hold to this second reading say that there is a difference between regeneration and conversion--that regeneration is God's part of the contract, while conversion is ours; that conversion is simply having the willing mind, while regeneration is God's imparting to us his own life; and to convert one's self is simply to be willing to be saved. And this is all-important, for even God himself cannot save us against our wills. But I prefer to use, in my treatment of the text, the generally accepted idea of conversion, and wish my message to center around the following questions: What is conversion? How may I be converted? Do I know when I was converted? How may I know certainly?

I

What is conversion? I own a piece of property, and you desire to purchase it. You pay me a price, and the property is transferred from my ownership to yours. It is a converted piece of property. This is just a hint as to what conversion is. We were sold under sin; and if any should object to this expression, we have sold ourselves under sin. Jesus came and in the shedding of his own blood paid the price of our redemption. As a child of God, I am bought back from bondage to freedom. To be converted is to be turned about. Going away from God, I turn towards him. With my face set away from heaven, I deliberately turn and accept Jesus, who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." To be converted is to cross the line which separates light from darkness, and may be done as easily as if one drew a line in the path before him and stepped over it. Both of these would be by the act of one's will; only it is to be remembered that when by faith we accept Jesus there is imparted to us a knowledge which comes from the Holy Ghost alone; while we seem to be acting in our own strength, yet really it is in the strength of God. Let it be remembered, however, that no two people may have exactly the same experience. There is an illustration of this in the healing of the blind men in the New Testament. I can imagine them having a convention, and each giving his testimony. One declares that the only way to receive your sight is to have clay and spittle put upon your eyes and to wash in the pool of Siloam. Another ridicules this experience and declares that only the touch of the fingers of Jesus is necessary. Still another speaks and emphatically declares that even the touch of Jesus is superfluous, for at the command of Jesus he saw clearly. Another says that instantaneous sight is impossible, and describes his own experience, when he saw men like trees, walking. But when all have given their testimony, they finally unite in declaring that whereas they once were blind, now they can see; and after all this is the important matter. A friend of mine described a number of people who came to view "The Angelus" that celebrated masterpiece of Millet's. Some people

admired the perspective; others, the figure of the man; others, that of the woman. One man simply stood aghast as he looked, and exclaimed, "What a marvelous frame that picture has!" and no two people expressed the same opinion concerning the masterpiece. How could we expect them to have the same experience in coming to Christ?

It may be that some will say, "Why insist upon conversion when my life is a moral one?" And my answer is that the difficulty with morality is that it is worked out according to men's standard and falls far short of God's.

In my first pastorate I had a blind man as one of my hearers. He used to walk about the village where I preached, generally without a guide, and apparently went as easily as a man with eyes. He had a little stick in his hands, with which he touched the trees and the fences, and seemed to know by the very sound where he was. One day at noon, when he should be going home, I saw him walking rapidly away from his home. I finally convinced him that he was going in the wrong direction, and he asked me to set him straight, which I did. Going in the new direction, he used his stick in the same fashion, used his legs in the same mechanical way, but the difference between the man in the first instance and the second was this--that in the first picture he was going away from home, while in the second he was going homeward rapidly. The trouble with man's morality is that it is self-centered and not Christ centered if he is rejected.

## II

How may I be converted? For from the text which says "Except ye be converted" it would seem as if some power outside of ourselves must be working in our behalf, and this is true. The foundation of it all is the atonement by Christ, his sacrificial death upon the cross. Rejecting this truth, there is no hope for us. In our sinful condition, the spirit of God rouses us, convicts us of sin, convinces us of our need of a Savior, and finally God, in his grace, gives us the strength to yield, and we pass from darkness to light.

Sometimes great need drives us to light, as in the case of Nicodemus; while again great sin compels us to come to him, as in the case of the thief on the cross. But whether it be need or sin, let us start with little faith, if we have no more, and God will meet us the moment we start. I once conducted services in a soldiers' home. The commanding officer told me, when the service was concluded, of a former inmate, an old sea captain, who came to the institution a confessed infidel. He refused to attend any of the services in the chapel; finally he was taken ill, and then the commanding officer entered his room, asking him to read the Scriptures, which he declined to do. Again he came suggesting that he read the Bible to see if there was any part he could believe, and a bottle of red ink and a pen were left by his bedside, the officer suggesting that he mark any verse red if he could accept it. This appealed to the dying man and he said, "Where shall I read?" The officer said "Begin with John's Gospel." And he did so. He read through two chapters without making a mark, and through fifteen verses of the third chapter. Then he came to the sixteenth verse, which is a picture of the very heart of God, and he reached for his pen and marked the verse red. When this much of the story had been told we reached the old captain's room and passed the threshold to find the bed empty, for he was gone. "I wish you might have seen his Bible," said the captain. "I sent it to his family recently. There was not a page in it that was not marked red." Over his bed swung a pasteboard anchor; marked upon it were these words--"I have cast my anchor in safe harbor." For he had gone home.

## III

Do you know when you were converted? That is, do you know the exact time? There are two extremes in experiences in this matter. I recall the experience of an old man who sat in my lecture room one Friday evening, and just as the hands of the clock marked the hour 9:30 he said "I will," and came to Christ. That was the moment of his conversion. But, as for myself, I have not had this experience; I do not know just when I turned to Christ. It must have been when I was but a small child. One of the best women I know has had an experience similar to mine, while one of the greatest preachers in the land has told me that he was a drunkard until he was 21 years of age, and then, on his knees, by his father's death bed, he came to the Savior. After all, it is not so much a question of the knowledge of the day, or the hour, or the month of one's conversion as "Do we now know Christ?"

#### IV

How may we know that we have passed from death into life? Certainly not with our feelings as a proof, for they change as the sands shift on the seashore. If our feelings be the foundation, then we may be in the kingdom and out of it a great many times a day. It is not always to be determined by a great change in one's life, for men who have not accepted Christ have had such an experience. There is only one sure way of knowing it, and that is on the authority of the word of God. John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life." And John 6:47, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

It is said that Napoleon while riding in front of his soldiers lost control of his horse, when a private stepped from the ranks, seized the horse's bridle and saved the officer's life. Napoleon saluted him and called him captain. "But, sir," said he, "I am not a captain, only a private." "Then," said Napoleon, "I will commission you captain." And immediately he stepped into the company of those officers; they ordered him to the ranks, but he said, "I am a captain." "By whose authority?" they said. If then he had replied, "Because I feel like a captain," how ridiculous it would have been! Pointing to Napoleon, he said, "I am a captain, because he said it." Thus with God's word as a foundation we stand secure.

#### V

Do not forget to notice that we are told that we must come like little children. Not like the philosophers of the world, but like little children who always trust implicitly those who are about them. If we would be saved, we must be willing to be taught, and we must some time make a beginning. Then why not now?

Some years ago John B. Gough visited a home in a New England city, and the heartbroken mother told him that her boy, who was an inebriate, was confined in an upper room in the house, which was much like a cell. The great temperance leader went to speak to him and said "Edward, why don't you pray?" and he said, "Because I don't believe in prayer." "But," said Mr. Gough, "You must believe in God." And he replied, "I do not believe in anything." "I am sure you are wrong in this," said he, "for I know that you believe in your mother." Then there came a new look into his face when he said, "Yes, I believe in her." "Well," said Mr. Gough, "you must then believe in love. Let us fall upon our knees and pray." And the young man began, "O love," and the spirit of God said unto him, "God is love," and he changed his prayer and said "O God," and then came the same spirit and said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son," and he said "O Christ," and when he said this the deed was done. He immediately rose from his knees, and he has been free ever since.

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