

Genuine Conversion

by Paul Washer

Paul Washer emphasizes the necessity of genuine conversion through self-examination, repentance, and a transformed life in Christ.

Duration: 41:34

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 13:5

Topics: "Genuine Conversion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker challenges the common practice of reducing the gospel to a simple prayer or set of beliefs. He emphasizes that true revival is not just a temporary emotional experience, but a lasting transformation of life. The speaker highlights the importance of examining one's faith through the tests presented in the book of 1 John. He criticizes the tendency to simplify the gospel and urges listeners to seek a deeper understanding of biblical truth and a genuine conformity to Christ.

Transcript

Let's go to 2nd Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5. Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves, or do you not recognize this about yourselves? That Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, I come before you in the name of your Son. And I would pray that you would use the words spoken here today to bring glory to him, to edify your people, and to speak to those who are not your people. Father, help us, mercy and grace, all that we need.

Guard our minds and our hearts. Fix our attention upon that which is important. Lord, make us careful, knowing the importance of what is to be said here today.

In Jesus' name, amen. Now, we all know from our brief studies of the two letters to the church in Corinth that they were a problematic church, to say the least. There are a great many difficulties in that church, even though they were a very, very gifted lot.

Now, we come to the end of almost Paul's writings to the church in Corinth, and he tells them to do something. He doesn't suggest it, he commands it. And he commands it out of a heart of wisdom, out of a pastoral heart of love.

He looks at this church and realizes that many of the people who associated themselves with Christianity in Corinth, many of the people who confessed Jesus Christ as Lord were living as though they were not Christians. And so Paul tells them to test themselves, to examine themselves, to see if they truly are. America is a quite unusual country and we're full of mighty inventions.

But a lot of our inventions are not so mighty because we have taken scripture and created new things in order to suit our lifestyles. And one of the greatest inventions or heresy that's ever come out of the American church is called the doctrine of the carnal Christian. That a person can truly be a believer in Jesus Christ and yet live their entire life in carnality, look like the world, act like the world, talk like the world, never grow to maturity, never grow to the idea of discipleship and sacrifice and following Christ.

They have enough religion to make them respectable, but they are not in the kingdom of heaven. The doctrine of the carnal Christian. Now, can a Christian sin? A Christian does sin.

1 John is very clear about that. Can a Christian fall into a state of carnality? Can there be a Christian that is immature? Yes to all those. But a person cannot be a Christian and remain in carnality and remain in immaturity and never grow in the things of God coming to be a plant that produces fruit.

It is an impossibility. And yet this doctrine has totally infected us. It is the same thing that happened in an earlier period in our country, in an earlier period in England.

England, after the great reformation and many, many things, the work of the reformers and the Puritans, people had sound theology, they had a knowledge of the gospel, which far exceeded that which came under Catholicism, which preached no gospel at all. And so they understood something of the gospel and there was life and there was salvation and there were mighty workings of God throughout Europe. But eventually the church came to a point where... Well, anyone that's been baptized is a Christian.

We're a Christian country. We are Christian people. So the great mark that a person was genuinely a disciple of Jesus Christ is simply that they were baptized and they made a profession of faith.

Well, the same thing happens in America today. Most of the people in America believe they're saved because one time in their life... Are we okay? One time in their life they prayed a prayer. Can you believe that? One time they repeated a prayer or made a decision and therefore they're saved.

There are countless people living in sin in this city who believe they are saved because one time in their life they prayed a prayer and asked Jesus to come into their heart. That is one of the greatest heresies in America today. You say, well, Brother Paul, how is someone saved? Someone is saved by the working of the Holy Spirit where He so works in their heart that repentance is born and they repent of their sins and they believe the gospel and the evidence that they've truly repented and truly believed is that they continue walking in the gospel and growing in the things of Christ.

That is very different from one time in my life I prayed a prayer to reduce the gospel down to four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know and then have someone ask you at the end, would you like to pray a prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart? It will only take five minutes. And if you pray that magical prayer, you're saved. No, no, no.

If you repent of your sins and believe the gospel, you're saved. And the evidence that you have done that is that your life begins to change. And so Paul comes to this church that in many ways was not acting like a church, at least some of them, and he doesn't come to them and say, you're all Christians and you need

to start acting like it.

He doesn't come to them and say, you're really saved because I was there when you made your decision, but you really need to start living like Jesus. That's not what he says. He goes, you're acting like unbelievers and there's a good chance you are.

And that's why he says in verse five, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Now, I want you to see something that's very, very important. Let's look just just above this text.

And he says in verse three, since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me. Now, what does that mean? Paul has a problem that no other apostle has. You see, he was born as one out of time.

He did not walk with Jesus during Jesus three year ministry on earth. He became an apostle and a believer after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. And therefore, many of the false teachers would say this.

Paul is not a true apostle. And even in the church of Corinth, we can see that he's constantly having to defend his ministry. And there were false prophets and false teachers saying Paul is not a true apostle.

So Paul comes to them and says, you want evidence. You're looking for proof that I really am an apostle. You're not just going to take my word for it.

You're looking for evidence that you can point to that I'm an apostle. Well, I'm telling you to examine your own life and look for evidence, hardcore, factual evidence that you're a believer. You see, they're wanting to see something.

Paul, show us with your life, with your words, with your teaching, with the power of Christ in your life, show us that you're truly an apostle. And then he looks at them and says, OK, then with your life and the power of Christ in you, show me you're a believer. It's not just enough, you say, for me to say with my mouth I'm an apostle.

Well, to the same degree, it's not just enough for you to say with your mouth you're a believer because you're not acting like one, which probably means you are not one. So he says this. He says, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.

Test yourselves to see if you're believers. And then he does something that's very, very Hebrew. He says not only test yourselves or examine yourselves, but he also says, he says, test yourselves and then examine yourselves.

He's saying it twice to give greater emphasis to the first truth. He's saying, look, church at Corinth, you have the greatest of all need to examine yourself to determine whether or not you're even saved. Now, we don't hear that language today.

If someone comes to most pastors in America, not this one, I understand. But if people come to most pastors in America and say, Pastor, I don't know if I'm saved. The pastor will usually ask this.

Well, let me ask you a question. Was there ever a point in time in your life when you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart? And if the person says, yeah, then the pastor says, well, then tell me this. Were you sincere when you did that? Well, I think so.

Well, then you're saved. This is just the devil bothering you. Now, we don't see that language in Paul.

We don't see that language in Jesus. We don't see that language anywhere in the New Testament. What we do see is examine yourself.

What we do see is make your calling and election sure by the way you live. What we do see is you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Now, none of these passages are teaching that a man is saved by works. A man is saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ. But what is being taught here is this.

Faith is the result of a supernatural working of God in the heart of a man. It's called regeneration. And if God has truly regenerated a heart, he's made that heart, that person, a new creature, and the evidence that there are new creatures, they're going to live a different way.

They're going to live like Christ. It's the same thing James was saying. You say you believe in God? You do well.

The demons believe. And they show more piety than you do because they believe in tremble and you don't even tremble. So salvation is not of works.

It's of faith. But faith, faith is the result of a supernatural work of God. And faith always has its evidences.

Now, he tells us to test ourselves and examine ourselves, but by what standard? That's a very good question. I mean, we could test ourselves by other people who call themselves Christians. We could compare ourselves to them, but that'll do us no good because Paul even told the church in Corinth, you test yourselves or compare yourselves by yourselves and that is not wise.

To determine whether or not we are truly Christian, we need to have a standard, and there's only one standard, and that is the Scriptures. What do the Scriptures say with regard to the true believer? Well, the Gospel of John, the Apostle John, is a marvelous, marvelous man. Why? Well, when he wrote his Gospel, he told us why he wrote it.

He said, I've written these things to you so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that you would have eternal life in Him. So he wrote the Gospel of John so that we would know that through believing in Jesus we could be saved. When he comes to his first epistle, he also tells us why he wrote it.

He said, these things I have written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you might know that you have eternal life. Now, let's turn to 1 John 5 and look at this text for a moment. 1 John 5, verse 13.

These things I have written to you. Okay, what are these things? The things that are found in this letter, 1 John. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.

You say, oh, here they are, they're all believers. No, that's not necessarily true. What you need to understand is the apostles wrote to people and they considered people as people confessed themselves to be.

John is saying, I'm writing to you who believe in the name of the Son of God. Those of you who have confessed Christ as Savior and Lord, but John is not making the statement that through some special revelation he can look into their heart to determine whether or not they're truly Christian. He's simply writing to a group of people as though I would speak to you today and say, I am speaking these things to you who believe in Jesus.

You might be able to translate it this way. These things I have written unto you who claim to believe, who profess to believe in the Son of God. And why is he writing these things? So that through listening and considering the things he has written, they would know whether or not they were truly saved.

Now, folks, I want you to listen to this for a moment. This teaching is so foreign to American ears. Many times all around the world when I preach this, people say, I've never heard anything like this before in my life.

That 1 John was written so that I could look at the tests that are there and determine the validity of my faith. And yet, just a hundred years ago, this was a well-known truth among all evangelical believers. Do you see what we've done? We've taken the Gospel and dumbed it down to agreement with some creed.

Just think about it. Look what we've done. And the very things that our forefathers stood upon, we haven't even heard.

Let me give you an example. Look at what we've done to the Gospel. We've taken the glorious Gospel of the blessed God and we've turned it down to just a few things that if we can get someone to say yes to each one of those things, we declare them to be saved.

Do you know you're a sinner? Yes. Okay, let's go on to the next question. Do you want to go to heaven? Yes, I do.

Well, great. Now let's go on to the next question. Would you like to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart? Well, how long will it take? It'll only take five minutes.

Okay. And then after they pray, we say, did Jesus come into your heart? And they say, well, I don't know. Well, of course He did.

If He didn't, He's a liar because He promised He would if you asked Him. That's what we've done to the Gospel. Now just look at that for a moment.

Do you know you're a sinner? The person says, yes. That means absolutely nothing. Do you realize that? Ask the devil if he knows he's a sinner.

Well, yes, I am. And a mighty fine one at that. Thank you very much.

I take great pride in my sin. So when a man tells you he's a sinner, it means absolutely nothing, especially in our culture that drinks down iniquity like it was water. People are celebrating sin just a few blocks from here.

So what does it mean to say, I'm a sinner? It means nothing. Absolutely nothing. The question is not, do you know you're a sinner? The question is, has God so worked in your heart through the preaching of the Gospel that the sin you once loved and boasted of you now hate and are ashamed of? That's the question.

Has God done such a work in your heart that you have a new attitude and a new relationship with sin? The sin you loved you now hate. The sin you boasted of you're now ashamed of. Has God done something to you? Never forget, salvation is more than a human decision.

It is a supernatural work of God. It is a recreation, don't you understand? There is more power manifested in the salvation of a sinner than in the creation of the universe. When God created the universe, He created it ex nihilo, out of nothing.

But when He saves a man, He makes a new creature out of a sinful, horrible mass. Do you know you're a sinner? That's not the question. Has God so worked in your heart that your entire attitude and way of life has a new direction with regard to sin and righteousness? And then the question is, do you want to go to heaven? How many of you have ever heard someone say, well, no, I'd rather go to hell, thank you.

Do you want to go to heaven? Everybody wants to go to heaven. Don't you realize that? Everyone wants to go to heaven. They just don't want God to be there when they get there.

That's what every political theory since the beginning of history is all about. Creating a heaven on earth. Creating a utopian society.

A place where everything is wonderful. And almost all the time, without God. Everybody wants to go to heaven.

Everyone. Everyone. But we just don't want God to be there.

I was speaking with a man many, many years ago. He was talking to me. I was witnessing to him.

Talking to him. He was sort of religious. Had just enough religion to damn him forever.

And after talking to him, I said, well, sir, I've listened to you and I can just come to one conclusion. You're going to hell. He got so angry with me.

And after his anger just vented itself and everything else, I said, sir, I'm very surprised at your anger. He said, how can you be surprised at my anger? You just judged me and told me I was going to hell. I said, sir, you're correct.

I did judge you, but I thought telling you that you were going to hell would make you happy. He said, how is that going to make me happy? I said, why would you want to go to heaven? What makes you think you want to go to heaven? I said, in heaven, God is everything. In your life, God is nothing.

And you've chose it to be that way. You live as a practical atheist. God has no permanent residence in your life.

He has no effect upon your life. You don't want Him. You don't desire Him.

God is everything in heaven. He's nothing to you. Why would you want to go there? Sir, heaven is all about doing the will of God.

Have you never heard Jesus say, pray in this way, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven is all about the will of God.

The will of God has absolutely nothing to do with your life. You don't seek the will of God. You don't desire to obey the will of God.

When you break the will of God, it has no effect upon you. You live oblivious to God. So, sir, why on earth would you want to go to heaven? You see, everyone wants to go to heaven simply because they think of a utopian sort of life, existence.

But the question is not, do you want to go to heaven? The question is, the God that you have hated, ignored, shunned, and despised the totality of your life, has He so worked in your heart through the preaching of the gospel that you now love Him and desire Him and want to know Him? That's the question. So you see, it's not, do you know you're a sinner? The question is, has God so worked in your heart that the sin you once loved you now hate? The question is not, do you want to go to heaven? The question is, do you want God? And then, if you want Jesus, my dear friend, how much damage we have done. My dear friend, Las Vegas isn't the problem.

Liberal politicians aren't the problem. Preachers are the problem. Because of the things they say that have nothing to do with the New Testament.

Okay, you want Jesus? Then ask Him into your heart. On what basis? Well, He says, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens up the door, you know, I'll enter into Him and I'll sup with Him, have fellowship with Him.

So just open up the door of your heart. Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart, but the handle to that door is on the inside, and sir, only you can open it. My dear friend, Jesus owns that door and if He wants to kick it down, He will.

The passage in Revelation 3, verse 20, Jesus standing at the door and knocking. He is not knocking on the door of a sinner's heart. He is knocking on the door of a church.

I tell evangelists that all the time and they say, yes, we know that's not the context, that's not really what it means, but it's such a great illustration. You don't have the right to do that. How are men saved? They are not saved by repeating a prayer.

They are saved by repenting of their sins and believing the Gospel. Well, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Yes, a person that the Holy Spirit has dealt with that's broken over their sin and can see the beauty of Christ and they cry out to Him, they will be saved.

But someone who asks, now, you're sure it will only take five minutes at an evangelistic crusade? No, my friend, they are not getting saved. You see what we've done to the Gospel? We've reduced it down to a meaningless, empty creed. And anyone who jumps through our little questions and at the end prays that little prayer, we popishly declare them to be born again.

And what does born again mean? I'll tell you what it means in modern American evangelicalism. It means you made your decision. You can make a decision all day long for Christ and still go to hell, do you know that? Unless a man be born again.

Salvation is a supernatural work of God that always, always produces fruit. Always. There's no such thing as a barren Christian.

No such thing. Yes, some Christians grow faster than others. Some Christians deal with more problems than others.

Some seem to run so fast and others crawl so slow, but every one of them will bear fruit. Jesus has said so. He's appointed it, ordained it before the foundation of the world.

Now, so John looks at these people and he says, these things I've written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. Now, we need to be very careful with this passage. Very careful.

We'll probably get to the test tonight because I want to explain carefully how this is to be done. John did not write this passage in order to convince people that they were lost. He wrote it in order to assure true believers that they were actually saved.

It is a positive purpose. He wrote these things so that true believers who were struggling with assurance might come to have true assurance. You see, a bunch of false teachers had entered in.

Probably the beginnings of what we call Gnosticism. And they were a horrid group. And they had shaken up this church so bad that many of even the foundational things were being shaken.

And believers were being thrown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. So John comes in here and he says, I am going to give you the standard, certain tests. And if you're a true believer, you can compare your life to these tests and see that you pass, that you truly belong to Him.

So the purpose is pastoral and it's to help believers. But at the same time, while these tests are being given, there are also people in the church, I mean, in the congregation or the fellowship who may believe themselves to be saved, and yet they are not. And so it is a double-edged sword in a good way.

Now, as I said, tonight we're going to go through the different tests. But I want to just for a moment share something with you. Do you not realize that America is quickly becoming one of the most godless nations on the face of the earth? That we slaughter thousands of babies every day? That we do all sorts of things and yet the great majority of people in this country claim to be evangelical believers.

And the name of God is blasphemed among the unbelievers because of the wicked lifestyle of those who claim to be believers. I am preaching because I care about your soul, but that is not my primary purpose. You are not the center of my world.

I am preaching more to honor the name of God. If you go to hell, that is a tragic thing, but there are worse things that can happen that God's name not be honored as it ought to be honored. We have had generation after generation of evangelists who should have spent less time preaching and more time studying their Bibles, who have convinced an entire nation that they are born again, saved, and on their way to heaven because one time in their life they prayed a prayer.

And yet we are a godless nation. We only have two conclusions we can draw. One, God has no saving power.

Or two, the great many people who claim to be born again are not. They are not Christian. I know of one famous evangelist.

If I were to mention his name, you would all know him. He said, if even 5% of all the people who have made professions of faith in my conference or my crusades have been saved, I will be pleased. The problem is, why doesn't he tell them that? So many people.

Do you realize that today if we had enough money, we could rent out the greatest halls in Las Vegas. We could promote this thing just right. We could make it all look like a circus or a Six Flags Over Jesus.

We could advertise. We could be so slick. We could get the great majority of this population into that building and we could manipulate them enough telling them exactly what they want to hear and just adding the name of Jesus on the end of it and get this whole town converted, but it wouldn't be changed.

And that's what's gone on. And that is the reason for the demise of evangelical Christianity in America. We must return to a biblical gospel of God as God.

Holy and righteous is He. Loving. A doctrine of man born in sin.

Radically depraved. Every one of us could make Hitler look like a choir boy if it were not for the grace of God restraining us or either changing our hearts. That man is radically depraved.

It's proven every night just a few blocks from here. And the judgment of God. Be very, very careful, as Jeremiah told the people, when everyone is saying peace, peace, and there is no peace.

There is a God. And as we will talk about this week if we get to it, He is an angry God. As a matter of fact, He says He's angry every day.

I hear so many evangelists today who say, now, the first thing I want you to know is God's not an angry God. They have just contradicted Psalms 7 and Psalms 11. And Psalms 5. And the teachings of Jesus Christ.

God is angry. A righteous God is going to be angry when He sees the wickedness that goes on in this world. And in love, He will judge it.

And in holiness, He will judge it. And the only thing that stands before judgment or between judgment is Christ. I am not here because this is a religious hobby.

I am not here because this is a part of my life. I would be home with my children except that this is a matter of life and death. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's not something you add to your life like a little accessory, a belt or a buckle on a shoe. Jesus Christ either is your life or you have no part of Him and He has no part of you. One of the things that I always try to do is this.

When I'm speaking at a university or conference or something, I want people to know exactly what Christianity is. I feel like that is the kindest, most loving, and the thing of most integrity that I can do. One of the worst things you can do is what a lot of these TV preachers do today.

In the name of Christianity, they teach a Christianity that is no Christianity at all and deceive a multitude of people. When people hear me preach, I want them to know what historical, biblical Christianity is so that when they receive it, they know exactly what they're receiving and when they reject it, they know exactly what they're rejecting. Not some morphed version of Christianity suitable to the American palate.

But true Christianity. Radical Christianity. Life or death Christianity.

That Jesus Christ is either Lord of all and worthy of every breath and beat of the heart or he is nothing. He's not a ticket to heaven. He's everything.

And that's what we're going to be dealing with this week. Christ. Christ.

Christ. One last thing. There is a principle in Bible hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is simply a fancy word we use to make people think we're smarter than we actually are. Hermeneutics is simply the science of studying Scripture. Now, what I'm going to teach this week, you need to understand something about theology for a moment.

If I just get up here and teach and say, this is the way it is, you have every right to say, listen, you're contradicting most TV preachers and the popular this and the popular that and the Christian culture of our age. You're contradicting everything. What right do you have? Well, this is something that we need to look at for a moment.

There's a principle in Bible hermeneutics that says something like this. We should always do our theology in the context of the church. Now, what does that mean? If I study the Bible and I interpret a certain verse a certain way and I go back through 2,000 years of Christian history and everybody's in agreement about that passage and they all disagree with me, then who's probably wrong? Me.

And so one of the safeguards we have in Bible interpretation is this, when we interpret Scripture, we take our interpretation and we compare it to 2,000 years of Christian history to see if we are in the same vein with historical, biblical Christianity. Now, what I want you to see is the strange things you're going to hear this week are not new. They're not just something that popped into my head as though I had some special channel to God.

After all, I'm not a TV preacher. What it is is this. If you were to go back to Augustine, go back to the Reformation, go back to the Puritans, the early Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, those who came out through that movement, you would find that the things I'm going to teach were the rule of the day.

What you need to understand is that Christianity in America today, the best thing that I can say is it's a six flags over Jesus. Every kind of hype, every kind of thing, every kind of promotion. It doesn't seem like the Apostle Paul, but Wall Street marching through our churches.

And what I am claiming is that not we need something new. We need to go back to what is old. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was the Gospel of the Apostles, which was the Gospel of a long strain of Christian history.

Nothing new here this week. Just a whole bunch of old things. Yet old things that at least in America have been forgotten in the name of a Hollywood form of Christianity.

A billboard form of Christianity that is weak and pitiful and cannot save. So now, the three of you who are going to come back tonight, we will be dealing with 1 John and where we exegete the text. We will look at what it says and apply it to our lives.

Now, we all talk about having a special preacher in to have revival. There is no revival here. OK? These are meetings.

A revival is not when a lot of people get saved. A revival is when those who were made alive begin to show life again, anew and fresh. Now, could come in here and in the four days that I have, which you can't get anything done in four days, but the four days that I have, I could get you all fired up.

I mean, you'd be like a football team. And guess what? A week after I was gone, you'd be back to the very same place that you were when you started. That's the way most revivals are.

Quote, unquote, revivals. Get all souped up. Acquire the fire.

Do all this stuff. And in the end, the fire burns down and there's nothing. What you need is historical, biblical truth and the Spirit of God working through that historical, biblical truth to set you on a path that leads to greater and greater conformity to Christ.

That's what you need. That's what you need. Now, we're not going to give an invitation because I've been giving one for about 40 minutes.

If God has struck your heart about any matter, I'll stay here all night to talk with you. But we are not going to, at least while I'm in the building, we are not going to play a bunch of soupy songs to get your emotions going and give you 387 stanzas of just as I am until we finally break you down and get you to come forward. It's going to be this.

If God's dealt with your heart and you need to talk to someone, then just come and talk to someone. A guy told Spurgeon one time, well, I believe in striking while the iron's hot. And Spurgeon said, well, if God's the one who heated up the iron, it'll stay hot and you don't have to worry about it.

So if you need to talk about anything. This has just been an introduction this morning, but if you need to talk about anything that has to do with God, then feel free. We'll counsel or anything.

So let's pray and then we'll turn it over to the pastor. Father, come before you, Lord, in just utter helplessness, that, Lord, you and you alone do great things. And man, what is he but a nose full of breath? Dear God, help your people and those who are not your people get great glory for yourself and work in a way that is real, biblical, that honors you.

Lord, this day, as we prepare for the meetings in the evening, Lord, protect us that the devil not steal the word of God out of our heart and we begin to think about the vain things that charm us most. Lead us on, O King Eternal, and help us, and we will be helped. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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