

God's Word- A Converter

Over five hundred years ago, there lived a very religious man over in the country of Germany. He was a man who had spent his life doing religious exercises and things that he thought would be pleasing to God. He denied himself things that he liked, he did kind things for others, taught others about Christianity, and even lived in a church! But this man knew that although he was doing good things, he was not deserving of the eternal life he had been promised by his church. He didn't know what to do, because he didn't know any other way to get to heaven.

Then one day this man was reading his Bible. He was studying it in the book of Romans, chapter 1. It was talking about the righteousness of God, and the man writes this: "At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me."

Some of you may know of whom I am speaking. It was a Catholic monk named Martin that came upon this revelation. Once he understood what the Bible was really saying, he said that it was like his eyes were opened. He understood the Bible and was born again. It was not religion or his good works that made him a new person, but it was the change that came through reading Scripture.

This story illustrates a phenomenon that has been repeated millions of times over the last twenty centuries. Someone has heard or read the Bible and been changed. There is something in what he reads that makes the Bible come alive to him, and he is converted. Many people try to change their lives through psychiatry, medication, programs, or plain willpower. But try as they may, they don't find themselves getting any better. They only feel more conviction about how much more sinful they are. For those of you who have ever known someone who has become a born-again Christian and really changed, how do you account for this? How did this change occur?

Several weeks ago we talked about what it means to be born again. We said that being born again means that God has made a change in your life. Just like a baby is a new person to the world, the Bible says that someone who God has changed is like a new person. Jesus said in John 3: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus said that if you want to someday go to heaven, you must be born again. This is not a phrase that was invented by Baptists. Jesus Himself described the change that happens when God moves in the heart of a person as being "born again."

This means that you won't be like you were before. The way that you were for so long before your conversion is the way that you were before, but God says He makes you a new person. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The Bible says that when God does a work in a person and he is truly converted, he is a new creature. The change that the Bible says happens to a person is inward, not outward, so they will not look different. But they will act differently. A truly born-again Christian will not want to do the things he did before. He will hate sin and get rid of it out of his life.

What explains this change? How can a person who has wrestled with sinful habits their entire lives, like addictions to drugs, sex, and alcohol, suddenly give up all of those things? How can a person who hated and disbelieved God overnight love and obey Him? This only comes through the change that God brings to a person. When a person believes with his heart in the blood of Jesus Christ, he is made a new person by God. It's not a decision to turn over a new leaf: it's a whole new tree. God is the only one who can truly change a person. Try as you may, there will be problems, habits, and sins that you will never be able to rid yourself without the power of God in your life. We here at First Baptist Church would love to be a help to you in this way. We have

an addiction program called “Set Free” that helps you understand God’s power over your sins. If you are interested, please contact us via the contact information heard at the end of this broadcast. Just remember, it is God who must do the work in you.

But how does God do the work in us? How can a man be born again? How can this change occur? First, we must talk about what does not work. Most people in the world who believe that there is a God believe that if they do lots of good things and relatively few bad things, they will get to go to heaven when they die. But do good works save a person? No, they do not, for two reasons. Reason #1 is this: If working your way to salvation resulted in a change, how does that explain the sudden change in so many born-again Christians? Good works cannot explain this change. Reason #2 is this: The Bible says that good works will not get you to heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 say “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

What about religious duties, such as going to church, giving money to the church, and getting baptized? Listen, I think doing those kinds of righteous things are good. You should go to church and you ought to get baptized. But those things come after you have been saved, not before. Those things cannot make a change in you. Titus 3:5 says this, and listen to what it says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” There are no good, religious things you can do that can affect this kind of change.

So how does this change come? Remember what Ephesians 2:8-9 said? “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” We are saved, not by good things that we do or bad things that we don’t do, but by faith. There are many other verses that say this same thing: Galatians 2:20 “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” That verse says that the change that happens in us is by the faith of the Son of God. Galatians 3:26 says: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” How can you become a child of God? By faith in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22 says that the righteousness of God comes by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. A few chapters later, in Romans 5, Paul says: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” The kind of conversion that changes someone comes only by faith in Jesus Christ.

But what is faith? We studied this a few months ago, and you are free to download that broadcast from our website, www.fbcpr.org. For now, let me summarize what I said back then. Webster defines faith as: “the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared by another, resting on his authority and veracity.” That means that you assent with your mind that what God is saying is the truth. You believe that He is trustworthy and not telling a lie. So what kind of faith do you need in Christ Jesus? Do I need to believe that He exists? Well, that is important, but Jesus was a historical figure. It doesn’t take much faith to believe that He existed. Do I need to believe that He was someone special? Well, He was special, but it doesn’t take much to see that He was special. What must I believe about Jesus? Here it is: God has said that when Jesus died, He died to take away your sins. He died and paid the penalty of sin you owed. If you will believe that God is telling the truth, and ask God to take away your sins because of what Jesus did, you can be saved. You can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. If you will accept His free gift of salvation as the only way of salvation, you can be saved. God will make you to be a new creature. You will be born again, and have the power to have victory over your sin. But it comes by faith.

But what is it about faith that converts? How does a simple belief save you? Faith in God says that He is trustworthy. It shows that you believe that He is telling the truth and that He is worthy of being believed. It is a little improbable to think that a Jewish man 2000 years ago paid for your sins by dying at the hands of Romans. But when you put your faith in God, you are saying that you believe what God said about that man: namely, that

He was the Son of God who died, was buried, and rose again after three days. When you believe God, you are allowing God access to your life, by saying you trust Him with it.

But the next question that comes is this: By what means does this faith come? The answer is found in Romans 10:17, which says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Faith comes when we hear the Word of God, or the Bible. But how can a mere book have this much power? We have talked in recent weeks about how remarkable the Bible is. It is unlike any other book ever written, because it is written by Almighty God, the Creator of the universe. We saw that the Bible is one of the oldest books in history, yet we have evidence that it has not changed over the 4000 years of its existence. You ought to read the Bible, not because it is good literature, but because it has a special blessing on it. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." We can be born again by believing in the Word of God.

God does not put His special blessing on just any book. He has promised to bless only the words that He has written. He will not put his Power on any book written by a man, because men are not perfect, and God is. We spent four weeks talking about proofs for how we can know that the Bible is really the words of God, not the words of man, even though God used men to write them. If you would like to listen to them, you may get them from our website. God wrote the Bible for a very special reason. God had a specific purpose in mind: bringing men to Himself. God therefore has put His blessing on the Scriptures so that it will do what He has purposed. Isaiah 55:10-11 say "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God says that the Bible will do what He has sent it to do, and that is to save men.

What has God said about His word? One of the best verses for what God says about His word is from Psalm 19. It says this in verse 7: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." When the Bible says, "The law of the LORD," it is talking about Scripture. What does God say about the law of the LORD? He says that it is perfect, and that it converts the soul. God's Word can change you. We talked earlier about being born again, and what a change that is for a Christian. 1 Peter 1:23 says "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." That verse says that it is the Word of God that makes us be born again.

Where does the Bible say that God converts people through His Word? The Book of Acts is a story about how the early church was formed. Hear what the book of Acts says about the way the Bible converted people. Acts 17 tells the story of how Paul went into a town called Thessalonica. Verses 2-4 say "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ, and some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas." When the people of the city heard the Scriptures, they believed.

A few chapters later, in Acts 18, we find Paul in an area called Achaia. Verse 28 says that Paul: "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." That verse says that Paul not merely convinced the Jews, but mightily convinced the Jews with the Scriptures. They believed because of the power that the Bible has in converting souls. James 1:18 says: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." In 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul says to his young friend Timothy: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The Bible has great power to change people.

But how can God's book have this power? One reason is one we have already stated. God has blessed the Bible because it is His Word. They are the very words of God. They are perfect, and so they can convert the soul, and

God has blessed it. The Psalmist says in Psalm 138:2 “Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” God’s words are so important, that God has magnified them above His name. Isaiah 42:21 says that God “will magnify the law, and make it honourable.” God loves the Bible, and has blessed it. He has sent it out to bring people to Himself. The Bible will last forever. People have tried to destroy it, but they will not be able to. Jesus Himself said this: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” God has blessed His Word.

God has blessed His Word because it is true. God Himself cannot tell a lie, and all His ways are true. He is truth, and His Words are truth. Truth is always mightier than lies, as good is always mightier than wickedness. Scripture is the only completely true book the world has ever seen. No other book has as much truth in it as the Bible does. This includes any other religious book or any textbook. Psalm 33:4 says “The word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.” Jesus said in John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The Bible over and over refers to Scripture as the “Word of Truth.” Ephesians 1:13 says “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” That verse not only calls the Bible the “word of truth,” but it says that once you hear it, the Holy Spirit uses it to convince you to believe, then seals your salvation.

Another important verse is 1 Thessalonians 2:13, which says: “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” That verse says that the Word of God works effectually in the hearts of those who hear it. That word “effectually” means that the Word of God works efficiently and mightily. God’s Word is effective. It works in your heart more than any other book, and the words more than any other words. It is truth, and truth does a work in a person that nothing else can do. Jesus said in John 8:32 “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The Bible has that power to work inside you. Hebrews 4:12 says “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The last reason that God’s Word is so effective is that the Bible is how we find out about God. We said earlier that faith is believing what someone has said. People today speak of faith as something that they just believe. They say, “Oh, I’ve got faith,” and think that they have some kind of spirituality. That is not faith. Others say, “I have had faith for forty years!” By that they mean that they have been attending church for four decades. That is not faith. Some think of faith as something you believe, whether it is true or not. This is ridiculous, and is not faith. Faith is believing what someone else has said. Faith in God is believing what God said.

Question: If you need faith to get to heaven, and you need to believe what God says to have faith, can you get to heaven if you don’t know what God says? The answer is “no.” You cannot claim to have faith in God if you don’t know what He has said. If you’ve never read or heard God’s Words, in our case the Bible, you cannot have faith. I refer you to Romans 10 once again, where it says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” You need to hear what God has said, then decide whether or not you believe Him. Is God telling the truth about your sinfulness? Is God telling the truth about how you can have forgiveness? Is it true that Jesus died on the cross for your sins? If God is telling the truth, act on that truth and accept His free gift of salvation.

One final question before we end this broadcast: “How can God’s Word have this power on me?” How can I have the same “born again” experience that so many others have had? This is a good question, and for the answer, let us once again look to the Bible.

Two weeks ago we learned about Jesus' parable of the Sower, which again, is available on our Website under the "Way of Truth" tab. Jesus told a story about four different types of soil on which the seed fell. The seed represented the Word of God, the Bible. The soil represented different types of hearts. One was hard, and wouldn't receive the Word of God. Another was shallow, and the roots didn't go very deep, and any salvation died before it could do anything. Another was thorny, and the cares of this life choked out the work that the Bible was going to do in the life of the individual. Finally, the last soil was a heart that had been prepared and was ready to receive the Word of God.

If the Word of God is going to do a work in your life, you need to be prepared. You will not experience any real, lasting change in your life until your heart is ready to receive what God has to say. Since God created you, He knows you best and how you work. His Book, the Bible, is His instruction manual to show you how the world He made works and how you fit into it. If you want to prosper in this world, you need what the Bible says. This doesn't mean that if you become a Christian you will be rich and your life will be problem-free, but it does mean that you will have the wisdom of God to navigate this world that has been corrupted by sin. How can you have your heart be prepared to receive His Word? If you have skepticism, it is important that you get your questions answered. If you have any questions about the Bible or God, please feel free to contact me and ask. Another way to prepare your heart is to get rid of some of the things that may be a distraction to you. Get rid of those things that draw you away from God.

Second, in order for God's Word to have changing power in your life, you must read it. The power that comes from the Word of God comes only when you read it. Having a Bible in your house won't effect any kind of change in your life. It's not a religious relic. Having a Bible on your coffeetable won't scare the devil away. It doesn't work like that. But when you read the Bible, then it can make a change in your life. Then you can have victory over your sins. Do you read the Bible? How often do you read it? Every month? Every week? I encourage our people to read their Bibles every single day. I myself right now am reading through the book of Proverbs. And do you know what? I have found things in there that God has started to use to make some changes in me.

That brings me to my third point. How can God's Word have power in my life? It can only work when you heed it. It doesn't do much good to say: "I've got a Bible, and I've read it. But I won't do what it says." In order for you to be changed by the Bible, you must allow it to change you. Psalm 19:9 says this: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." Psalm 19:11 says that by keeping the words of God is great reward. Psalm 119:11 says "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Colossians 3:16 says this: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." You must allow God to work in your life, using the Scripture, if you are going to have any success over the sin in your life.

Lastly, if the Bible is going to change your life, you must ask God to do the work in you. Again, the Bible is not a magical book, but it is a book that God uses to do miracles in your life. You cannot make the change you want in your life, but God can, and so as you read and heed His Word, you need to ask Him for the help. Matthew 7:7-8 say "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." God wants to help you more than you want to be helped. He has promised to help all those who are seeking His Will for their lives.

Friend, it is a privilege to bring you the Word of God every week. I love it more than any other book, and by His grace and with His help, I want to proclaim it all over Park Rapids. Now in these last few minutes, I would like to share with you the Word of God, and what it has to say about the Gospel:

Ecclesiastes 7:20 "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" Romans 3:10 "As it is written, There is none righteous,

no, not one:” 1 John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Proverbs 20:9 “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” Psalms 51:5 “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” 1 John 3:4 “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:8 “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.”

John 3:36 “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;” James 2:10 “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Hebrews 2:3 “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;” Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” 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.” John 14:6 “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 6:47 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” 1 John 4:9-10 “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Romans 5:1 “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” Romans 10:9-10 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Hear the Word of God, and let Him change you.

If you have any questions about what we have talked about today, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways: You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That's CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. I would like to once again invite you ladies who are interested to our ladies Bible study. Our last meeting is tomorrow, Monday the 22nd, at our church building from 11:45 to 12:30. Feel free to bring a lunch with you and study the book of Ruth with us. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, Minnesota.