

Sing beforehand: Psalm 105:2

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earthⁱ. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christⁱⁱ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Psalm of praise 9:1, 7

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*

Supplication (for pardon of sins):

- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Scripture reading: Acts 16ⁱⁱⁱ

Scripture text: Acts 16:14,15; Catechism Lord's Day 33

¹⁴And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. ¹⁵And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. (Acts 16:14,15)

The Bible knows two words for conversion. The one literally means turn in(to) [repentance] and the other turn back (translated with **convert / reform**). In Acts 3:19 both words appear in one sentence:

¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

The faithful often speak of conversion, but then the word is not always used according to its Biblical meaning; the word is then used to describe any change experienced by the believer.

Ofentimes the Bible describes conversion without using the word **conversion!**

- Thus we speak of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.
- The Bible describes this event three times (Acts 9; 22; 26) and not once does the Bible speak of conversion.
 - The Lord says: "He prays!"
 - Paul says "To me mercy has been shown"

We speak of Manasseh's conversion, but the Bible says nothing of the word conversion. The Bible speaks of **humbling before God** and **knowing that the LORD is God:**

¹² Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, ¹³ and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. (2 Chronicles 33:12,13)

Notice with which words and concepts conversion is described in the following:

... he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

And:

Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

There are more such passages where the *deed of conversion* is distinctly described, without the use of the word *conversion*. Think of the parable of the lost son and the history of the woman of Samaria.

We have just read of the Lydia, the purple seller's conversion - while the word conversion is also there not made use of. Of her the Bible teaches: **whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things, which were spoken...**

The description differs, but the content is exactly the same: The Lord fetched a person from the dark. The same things happen in the case of each one of these people:

- They receive the ability to be able to believe
- At once they are internally renewed
- They discover their sin and sinful lives
- They humble themselves before the Lord and they pray for the forgiveness of their sins
- They do indeed receive grace, forgiveness and absolution from the Lord.

The Bible describes this process as the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man (as with clothes).

⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, (Colossians 3:9, 10)

What does the Bible mean with the words **old man**?

- Naturally the old man is the one who walks about committing sin.
- It is the man who is disobedient to God.
- It is the man who makes up his own rules
- It is the man who neither wants to nor will enter heaven.

The new man is the person who does the things that Paul and Lydia and those people started doing.

- People who want to believe.
- People who turn away from the devil and his works and who then learn to do good in accordance with the Lord's will and style.

Everyone knows that such a live does not occur at a moment's notice.

- It is true that a person, who finds himself in sin, must get to a point where he must consciously make the decision to convert.
- That is why the Bible contains many of the Holy Spirit's commands: **Repent and turn!**

The moment of truth -when a person discovers that he is lost in sin and with surrender confesses the deity and omnipotence of God, and seeks salvation from Him – which is what is called root conversion.

- It is the Bible's word: turn!
- Which is the thing that the apostle Paul calls: **take off the old man and his works..**

Thereafter a life-long struggle follows during which we fight against and root out the evil in our lives.

- Which is the Bible word: conversion - daily conversion.
- And it is the thing, which Paul calls: **the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created..**

One's body is never immediately clothed with garments.

- We put on one piece of clothing at a time.
- It takes time to climb out of sin and grow into the glory of God.

What happens in the heart of man who goes through this process of conversion?

He experience two contradictory emotions all at once: Sorrow and joy.

Listen again to what the Lord writes in James:

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. ⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

Here the faithful (the Lord's church) is called to convert: **Lament and mourn and weep!**

Why are these sombre words written here?

- Because a person who sincerely wishes to be converted, experiences the matter severely and painfully.
- The realisation of his sin causes him pain, brings him to tears, and he humbles Himself before God.
- Listen to how the Bible describes David's humbling of himself before God and his remorse during the death of his and Bathsheba's first son:

And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. ¹⁶ David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. ¹⁷ So the elders of his house arose *and went* to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. (2Samuel 12:16,17).

With Lydia we find something similar - but with another element.

- The Lord opened her heart.
- It results in her entire house being converted. Everyone is baptised!
- Anyone who knows something of evangelisation knows that these things do not occur in a day's time. There were many conversations.
- That is why she insists that the men come to her home.
- The reason is apparent: she wished to learn more about the Lord, because to come to faith and to be baptised is but the beginning of the path to conversion!

In this woman's conduct the other side of conversion is abundantly clear! There is a heartfelt joy!

Paul also knew this:

¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

A concerted person does not live on the edge of sin.

- Does not do the things, which are dubious.
- Does what is fitting to a true faith:
²³ **But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin* (Romans 14:23).**

Someone who is truly converted possesses true faith. A true believer believes in God and His grace, which He gives:

⁶ But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Beware of your own opinions on these matters! The Lord warns us against it!

⁵ Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, ⁶ from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

Let us read what our confession teaches us in this regard in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33:

Question 88. Of how many parts does the true conversion of man consist? **Answer:** Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man. (a)^{iv}

Question 89. What is the mortification of the old man? **Answer:** It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them. (a)^v

Question 90. What is the quickening of the new man? **Answer:** It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, (a)^{vi} and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works. (b)^{vii}

Question 91. But what are good works? **Answer:** Only those which proceed from a true faith, (a)^{viii} are performed according to the law of God, (b)^{ix} and to his glory; (c)^x and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men. (d)^{xi}

Amen.

Prayer.

Psalm 45:1

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.^{xii}

Amen.

Dr. M.J. du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
Date: 22 Augustus 2010

ⁱ Psalm 124:8

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1:3

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+16&version=KJV>

^{iv} (a) Rom.6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Rom.6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Rom.6:5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Rom.6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Eph.4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; Eph.4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; Eph.4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Col.3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: Col.3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: Col.3:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. Col.3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Col.3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; Col.3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 1 Cor.5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 2 Cor.7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

^v (a) Rom.8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. Joel 2:13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Hos.6:1 Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

^{vi} a) Rom.5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: Rom.14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Isa.57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

^{vii} (b) Rom.6:10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Rom.6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Gal.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.

^{viii} (a) Rom.14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

^{ix} (b) Lev.18:4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. 1 Sam.15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Eph.2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

^x (c) 1 Cor.10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

^{xi} (d) Deut.12:32 What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. Ezek.20:18 But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: Ezek.20:19 I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; Isa.29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Matt.15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, Matt.15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. Matt.15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

^{xii} 2 Corinthians 13:14