

Dear Friend,

Recently, at our Wednesday morning Men's Bible Study we began talking about "conversion". We began by simply asking what the word means. One of the men talked about converting coal into electricity. Another mentioned "conversion" vans. Another, seeking to provoke me, said, "Some people even convert garages into cabins." He was referring to the fact that my brothers and my dad and I have a hunting cabin in Minong, WI that began as a garage in 1995. Over the past eight years we have added insulation, "box car" interior siding, eight beds, wall-to-wall carpet, a refrigerator, a wood burning furnace, counter space, a sink and this year, finally, running water. While we put a wall in the garage door opening with a regular sized door in it, the big, pull down garage door remains in its tracks. We close it when we are gone for security purposes and then open it when we are there to use the smaller door and to look out the large picture window that is in the wall that fills the opening. While I would argue that we have converted the garage to a cabin, yet there are reminders that it was once a garage.

The more I thought about what we did to our garage the more excited I became thinking about the conversion of a sinner into a saint. Modern English translations of the Bible do not use the word "convert" or "conversion" very often. It was frequently used in the King James Version, first published in the 1600's. The word that is normally translated with the English "convert", "conversion" is the Greek and Hebrew words for "to turn". These are frequently used words describing what happens to a person who turns away from idols or false teaching/beliefs and turns to God in repentance for sin and faith in Christ. In Luke 1, the angel told Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist that his son would "turn (convert) many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God". In Acts 14:15 Paul tells the people of Lystra who think that he and Barnabas are the two Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes, and are trying to offer a sacrifice to them, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn (convert) from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." Paul in Acts 26 summarizes the gospel he preaches to Jews and Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn (be converted) to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

Conversion is an excellent word to describe what happens when a sinner trusts in Jesus Christ. A life that was once used in the service of sin, Satan and the pleasures of the world is now given over to God to be used to display the greatness of his saving work. While the transformation, the "turning", is a radical change from one use to another, yet, at least in this life, there remain many "marks" of the old life. You can tell that we were once only sinners, even though we have been converted into saints by the work of God producing faith in Christ in us. Repeatedly, in both the Old Testament and the New, turning away from an old way of life and turning to a new way of living distinguishes "conversion".

"Have I been converted from sin, to Christ?" is the critical question. While there will always be evidences in our lives that we are converted sinners, yet all of us ought to be able to look back at our lives and say, yes, my life is being used differently now than it was before. I have turned away from these "worthless" things and have turned to God. I am performing deeds that show that I no longer seek my happiness and security in this world or in myself but seek it in Christ. Just like we have renovated our cabin and so no longer park cars in it but rather live in it, so the Christian is a renovated sinner who no longer uses the members of his body to serve sin, but to serve God. May God grant that we are sinners converted into saints to his glory!

Living a new life with you,