

Conversion

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6. Explain decision theology.
7. What is universalism?

Conversion

1. Sin and Salvation

II. The Human Predicament

A. The fall into sin

1. The LORD's creation – The LORD created a perfect world for His prized creature man to live in and enjoy. *{God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day. Genesis 1:31}*
2. Satan's rebellion – Created as servants of the LORD, many of the angels, under the leadership of Satan, revolted against God and tried to establish their own kingdom. *{God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment. 2 Peter 2:4}*
3. Man's involvement in sin
 - a. Command – The LORD gave man free will, so his service of God would be voluntary, but He warned him of the consequences of disobedience. *{“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Genesis 2:17}*
 - b. Temptation – Satan tempted Eve and Adam to join the rebellion against God by despising His command. *{“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:4-5}*
 - c. Disobedience – Eve and Adam soon fell to the temptation and tried to make their own way in the world apart from the LORD's way. *{When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6}*
4. Consequences of sin – True to His word, the LORD brought severe consequences upon mankind. Physical hardship was the immediate burden imposed, but the curse of man's disobedience would extend much further. *{To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Genesis 3:16-19}*

B. Original, or inherited, sin

1. Image of God – The LORD created mankind in His image, that is, in perfect harmony with His will. *{So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:17}*
2. Image of man – After mankind fell into sin, man was left with only his own image to transmit to his children. That image was corrupted by sin. *{When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. Genesis 5:3}*
3. Total corruption
 - a. From conception – The corruption starts with the conception of the person. The child in the womb is already part of the rebellious human race, and that becomes evident soon after birth. *{Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:5}*
 - b. Throughout life – The corruption cannot be repaired by a medical procedure, nor does it improve through moral training. *{As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12}*

C. Actual sins

1. The LORD's standards – The LORD is the creator, and it is He who sets the standards. No one is in a position to question or change His standards. What the LORD defines as sin is sinful and nothing else. *{There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. James 4:12a}*
2. Beginning in the heart – All sin begins in the heart corrupted by original sin. Merely avoiding sins of deed or sins of word therefore is not adequate to evade the LORD's judgment for the evilness of the heart. *{“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean.’ ” Matthew 15:19-20a}*

D. Inability to please God

1. The faithless are doomed – There is no way by nature that a human can please the LORD. Wholly corrupted, the individual can only contemplate his fate with dread. *{Without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6a}*
2. In rebellion – Because the LORD demands the total commitment of a person to Him and the complete repudiation of the person's own will, no one can by himself cross over the barrier between God and the camp of His enemies where all mankind by nature resides. *{The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Romans 8:7-8}*

E. God's righteous judgment

1. Standard is perfection
 - a. Like God – The LORD is not interested in half measures and summer soldiers. His will demands perfect obedience. This will be the basis of His judgment. {*“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’ ”* Leviticus 19:2}
 - b. No failures tolerated – The LORD will make no allowance for the almost righteous, those who look good but cannot quite make the grade. {*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.* James 2:10}
2. God's right to judge – The LORD is the creator and owner of the universe. Only He knows how it is supposed to work so that it will accomplish His purpose. No one else has the knowledge or power to do the job. {*One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ ” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?* Romans 9:19-21}
3. Severity of judgment
 - a. The curse – All people by nature have failed to keep the LORD's will and therefore are His enemies. They are cursed by the very Law they would like to use to save themselves from the LORD's wrath. {*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* Galatians 3:10}
 - b. The condemnation – Because His standards cannot be met by natural man, the LORD will condemn sinners to eternal punishment. It is a terrible punishment given for the terrible rebellion against the LORD. {*Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ”* Matthew 25:41}
 - c. The horror – There is nothing more horrifying than experiencing the wrath of the LORD, a God so powerful that we cannot even imagine His abilities and majesty. {*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* Hebrews 10:31}

III. God's Solution

A. The eternal plan

1. Salvation is by Christ alone – The LORD's plan of salvation is His alone. Since He is the ultimate judge, only He can determine what will satisfy His justice. His only acceptable method involves the work of Christ. {*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* Acts 4:12}

2. God's love, mercy and grace
 - a. Love – The LORD did not have to do anything for mankind based on his standard of justice. All mankind was guilty, and He could have punished everyone justly. But the LORD also loved mankind for reasons that are inherent in God and which we cannot understand. {*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16}
 - b. Grace alone – The LORD's plan requires that the deliverance from sin is effected through His grace alone. He will not accept the mixing of any foul works of mankind into His own plan. {*And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* Romans 11:6}
3. The revelation of God's grace – The LORD Himself announced the existence of His plan immediately after mankind fell into sin. He did not go into detail at the time, but He merely gave the promise so that people would have His assurance that the matter would be addressed to His satisfaction. {*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* Genesis 3:15}

B. The Savior

1. The incarnation – The Savior needed to be brought onto the scene to perform His work. The LORD did this through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary so that she became pregnant without a human father. {*The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”* Luke 1:35}
2. The Savior had to be a true human
 - a. Under the law (active obedience) – To take the place of humans before the LORD, the Savior had to be like them under the Law. This was because the LORD had placed mankind under the Law, and it is by the Law that they will be judged. {*“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”* Galatians 4:4-5}
 - b. Undergo death (passive obedience) – Because the penalty for sin is death, the Savior had to be able to undergo death and triumph over death. Only by enduring mankind's punishment and overcoming the power of death and the devil, could He truly free mankind from them. {*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* Hebrews 2:14-15}
3. The Savior had to be true God -
 - a. Weakness of man – Any savior who was only human could, at best, only save himself. His perfection would count for himself alone. Even a perfect man has no way to help others escape their sins. Only God could render a sufficient sacrifice to justify everyone. {*No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him--the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough--that he should live on forever and not see decay.* Psalm 49:7-9}

- b. Effective for all times – The Savior could not be limited in His work by time or circumstance. His work had to save the people of all times, regardless of what they had done. Only God, who fills all time, could do this. He is always interceding for his children. *{Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. Hebrews 7:26-28}*

C. The plan implemented

1. The sinless life (active obedience) – Christ came and kept the Law perfectly. He was tempted, but He did not fall. As a result, He earned a perfect righteousness which He transfers to all who believe in Him. *{For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15}*
2. The vicarious atonement (passive obedience) – He also died not only physically, but in such a manner that He endured all the punishment of God's wrath for the whole human race. His punishment therefore takes the place of the punishment that every person deserves. He was our substitute, our sacrificial lamb before the LORD. *{The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29 Also see Isaiah 53:4-12}*
3. Redeemed and ransomed – Because Christ endured the punishment for the guilt of all our sins, that guilt is no longer on our record before the LORD. When judgment is made, it is made on the clean slate of Christ which He substituted for our record of sins and rebellion. *{Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Galatians 3:13}*
4. Universal justification – The righteousness which Christ won for us is not only an accomplished fact (objective justification), but it applies to everyone whether they believe or not (universal justification). The gates of heaven are open to everyone. There are no exceptions. *{For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24}*

Conversion

2. Faith, Not of Our Own

IV. Salvation Received

A. What saving faith is not

1. Universal – Not everyone will be saved because not everyone believes in the justification earned for the whole world by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith is therefore not an inherent property of man. {*“Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* John 3:18b}
2. Vague feeling – Faith is not just a feeling about the existence of God and His will. Many religions worshipping many gods of human creation exist, but no matter how strongly people feel about these gods, they cannot keep them out of hell. {*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* Romans 1:20}
3. Detached knowledge – Many people have learned something about the LORD, the God of the Bible. Some of them even have a very accurate knowledge about Biblical teachings. Yet if this knowledge does not change the attitude of the heart, it is of no benefit at all. Faith requires knowledge, but it goes beyond knowledge. {*He said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”* Isaiah 6:9-10}

B. The essence of saving faith

1. Accurate information – Saving faith cannot be based on ignorance. If you don't know something, you cannot believe in it. If one doesn't have correct knowledge, one's faith will prove unreliable to accomplish the purpose for which it is held. {*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* Romans 10:14}
2. Assent – For knowledge to become faith, it must be applied to oneself. One will not enjoy the benefit of seeing a circus that is in town if one does not act on the knowledge that the circus is present. The benefit comes from personalizing the knowledge into action in one's heart and life. {*“So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”* Revelation 3:16}

3. Trust – Saving faith requires more than a willingness to accept what Jesus has provided for us. There must be a change in the heart that causes us to completely rely on His promise to the extent that we abandon ourselves for Him and His kingdom. *{Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1}*

C. Synonyms

1. “Knowledge” – The Bible sometimes uses “knowledge” in a sense that extends beyond the mind to the heart. This is to know “with every fiber of your body” that something is true. Such knowledge is indeed faith. *{“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 17:3}*
2. “Obedience” – The Bible sometimes uses “obedience” in a sense that the heart has been so changed that it naturally desires to do the will of God. Such obedience is what God desires from all Christians. When He does not find such a faith, He punishes for lack of obedience. *{He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 1:8}*

D. How faith saves

1. Purely by grace – Justification for the world was earned by Jesus Christ because God is gracious. It is this grace that saves us. Faith accepts what has been done. It does nothing to effect salvation itself. *{For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9}*
2. Not as a good work – Our faith does not contribute to our justification and therefore to our salvation. If it did, then our salvation would depend partly on our own efforts, and we would have a claim on heaven based on our own efforts. *{Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” Romans 4:4-8}*

E. Why faith saves

1. Points to Jesus – A faith is no better than the object in which it trusts. If the object of faith can deliver on the belief of the adherent, the faith is true, regardless of the strength of that faith. If the object cannot deliver, the strength of the faith counts for nothing. Faith that saves eternally trusts solely in Jesus. *{They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.” Acts 16:31}*
2. Applies God’s reconciliation to us - When we believe in the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ for our sins, God applies the objective justification earned by Christ to us, thereby making us not guilty before God because we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness. Faith therefore coincides with subjective justification. *{All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19}*

V. The Bondage of the Will

A. A revelation contrary to nature

1. *Opinio legis* – Man’s natural response to the law written in his heart is to create a religion in which he addresses the law through refinements, sacrifices and indulgences. Because this “natural religion” is man’s way and not the LORD’s way, it is worthless before God. {*A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’ ” “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. Luke 18:18-21*}
2. Better life – Fearing that they cannot keep God’s Law perfectly and being unsure whether they know it all, people attempt to appear good by comparison, hoping to convince God they are among the group deserving salvation. {*“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ” Luke 18:11-12*}
3. Sacrifice of what is precious – Fearing that ordinary rule-keeping and *quid pro quo* bargaining will not be enough, people make sacrifices of their most precious things, even their own lives and the lives of their children, to appease the anger of God and earn a place among the blessed. {*“They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.” Jeremiah 32:35*}
4. Wrong mindset – Being corrupted by sin, buffeted by conscience and limited by human reason, man cannot grasp the hopelessness of his situation. He cannot turn to a God whom he cannot know and understand. {*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14*}

B. The spiritual condition

1. Spiritual blindness
 - a. Of the heathen – Those who do not know the LORD will follow their own ideas or those of some guru whom they think can help them to appease God. They will fall for one human-devised religion or another because they cannot imagine anything else. {*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4*}
 - b. Of the religious – Sadly, blindness to the message of the Scriptures also is found among those who know the Scriptures. They read the Bible but they see in it their own preconceived ideas of how the LORD should effect salvation. {*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” John 9:40-41*}

2. In darkness

- a. Darkness recognized – The spiritual darkness of the human race was recognized by the prophets long before Christ. They knew the appearance of the LORD's light was needed to make His salvation available to mankind. {*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.* Isaiah 9:2}
- b. Darkness overcome – People could not find their own way in the darkness, so the LORD had to bring His light into that darkness to dispel it. Christ came as the light of the world because we could not find our way to him through the darkness of sin. {*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.* Colossians 1:13 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* 1 Peter 2:9}

3. Spiritually dead

- a. No spiritual life – The person who does not believe in the salvation through Jesus Christ has no spiritual pulse or brain wave. There is spiritual *rigor mortis*. There is not the slightest ability present that can assist in receiving Christ because sin has destroyed all the senses. {*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.* Ephesians 2:1}
- b. Dry bones – In fact, it is much worse. Before the Holy Spirit comes to man, he is nothing spiritually but dry bones scattered about. Those bones cannot arise and decide to live spiritually. {*The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'* " So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army. Ezekiel 37:1-10}
- c. Helplessness – If you are in a foreign country with a different culture and where no one speaks your language, you will be ignorant of the important things that are occurring around you. The language and culture of salvation are foreign to the unbeliever, who is effectively dead to what is happening around him. {*"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Romans 10:13-14}

4. Hostile to God

- a. In the devil's camp – People are by nature in the devil's camp. They can only see what he lets them see. He has so corrupted their spiritual sense that they are actively opposed to the teaching of the Bible. {*The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Romans 8:7-8*}
- b. No neutrality – There are no people who are on their way across the divide between the devil's camp and the LORD's camp. Those not actively serving the LORD are actively serving the purposes of Satan. {*"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."* Luke 11:23}

C. Free will?

1. Civil righteousness – People's reason tells most of them that an orderly society is to their advantage, so they will accept certain restraints on their conduct to preserve such a society. They will freely do "good deeds" because they hope to gain from their actions, at least, until they see a reason to circumvent the rules. Civil righteousness is valuable to earthly life, but it does not save. {*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. Proverbs 14:34*}
2. Civil liberty – People will restrain their actions in some areas to gain freedom of action in other areas. While these actions may appear to be freely choosing the right course, it is really a cost/benefit philosophy. Behavior changes quickly when that ratio changes. {*The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel....After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. Judges 2:7,10-12*}
3. Spiritual bondage – Despite the apparent freedom of people to choose for themselves their way of life and their path to God's favor, that is nothing but an illusion. Quite the contrary, a person can no more choose to be a Christian than a pear tree can choose to be a dog. {*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."* John 3:5-6}

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3. Effecting Conversion

VI. Conversion

A. Divine intervention

1. Election

- a. Eternal choice – The LORD's intervention and plan of salvation was not His attempt to respond to an unexpected situation. He already decided before the world or time existed how He would address the certain situation of man's fall into sin. *{He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Ephesians 1:4-5}*
- b. Temporal choice – Once mankind had fallen into sin, the LORD assumed the responsibility to reach out to those who would be saved and assure them of their place in His kingdom of grace. *{“You did not choose me, but I chose you.” John 15:16a}*

2. Calling

- a. Result of predestination – The LORD's plan was complete; nothing was left to chance. He made sure that the predestined were called and justified so that they could also be glorified in His kingdom of glory. *{For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Romans 8:29-30}*
- b. Means of the call – The calling to repentance and faith can only be accomplished through the work of God. He is the enabling and effecting agent without whose work there can be no conversion to faith. *{“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” John 6:44}*

B. Meaning of conversion

1. Turned to God's way – By nature everyone was headed down the road in the wrong direction, the direction of hell. In conversion the LORD changed our direction so that we will travel the road in the direction of heaven. *{For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25}*
2. Brought into light – By nature we were wandering in total darkness, with no ability to know how to please the LORD. In conversion He shone the light of His Son and His work into our lives and let us see the glories of the kingdom of God. *{“ ‘I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ ” Acts 26:17-18}*

3. Entered into God's service – By nature we were enemies of God and working for Satan. In conversion the wicked are turned from their evil ways and desire to serve the LORD. The preacher merely proclaims the message faithfully; the LORD changes hearts. {*"But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself."* Ezekiel 3:19}

C. The conversion process

1. Repentance
 - a. Narrow sense – The first way that the Bible uses the word "repentance" is to indicate the sorrow for having sinned against the LORD, i.e., contrition. The sorrow does not save; in fact, it is an act of despair because of the offense that has been given to the Almighty God. {*"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1:15}
 - b. Broad sense – The second way that the Bible uses the word "repentance" is to include not only contrition but also faith in Christ. In this usage, repentance is the whole process of rejecting one's sinful life and believing in the promise of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ. {*"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* Luke 15:7}
2. Illumination – Conversion shines the light of God's grace upon the sinner so that he can see His sin but also see His Savior. The way to heaven becomes illuminated so that the believer can see where to step to avoid sliding into the abyss of hell. {*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* 2 Corinthians 4:4-6}
3. Regeneration, or rebirth – Before conversion, a person does not exist in the kingdom of grace just as before birth he does not exist in the kingdom of power. Rebirth, the second birth, brings the person into the kingdom of grace as a newborn who is able to take spiritual nourishment. {*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.* 1 Peter 1:23}
4. Quickening, or making alive – Before conversion, an individual is spiritually dead and unable to do anything to save himself. Conversion puts life into the sinner so that he is spiritually alive, having been restored to life so he can serve the LORD. {*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.* Colossians 2:13}
5. Conversion and the human will – Before conversion, the human will is self-centered and a captive of Satan, believing that it can obtain all its desires by toiling in the service of Satan. Conversion replaces self-focus with Christ-focus within the human will. The person realizes the real purpose of life is to be joined to the LORD. {*"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."* Jeremiah 24:7}

D. Conversion of children

1. Sinful from the beginning – If a person has a genetic defect, he has it from the time he was conceived. It was passed from the parents to the child. In the same way original sin is passed from the parents to the child. Children are therefore sinful from the moment they exist. *{Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:5}*
2. Able to know from the beginning – The ability to believe and to understand what is necessary to be saved begins at birth, perhaps even before birth. Faith is not a matter of reason but a condition of the heart and soul. We do not understand how faith exists in a child any more than we understand how faith exists in an adult. *{How from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15}*
3. Able to fall away from the beginning – Anyone who believes can fall away from faith. This is also true of children, which is why just baptizing them and ignoring their spiritual growth until they are older is as dangerous to their souls as not giving them physical food is to their bodies. Those who do not train their children in the word of the LORD are guilty of spiritual genocide. *{“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” Mark 9:42}*

E. Conversion experience

1. God’s work in us – Conversion is completely the work of the Holy Spirit. As a result, it does not depend at all on us. There is nothing we can do to effect conversion; therefore, it is unproductive to set our mind on trying to define how we experienced conversion. *{It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:13}*
2. Without observation – When the kingdom of heaven comes to us through conversion, we should not expect any signs to accompany it. The change in our hearts effected by the Holy Spirit often is completely invisible to the world. The LORD knows who are His because only the LORD can read the condition of the heart. *{Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:20-21}*

VII. The Means of Conversion

A. God’s plan

1. The commission to Christians – The LORD could have used methods completely under His control to effect conversion of unbelievers. Instead, He chose to use those already called to faith to work with Him by spreading the message of salvation to those still in darkness. *{He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Mark 16:15}*

2. The Holy Spirit converting through means – The LORD also only effects conversion through means. These means of grace are the tools for the work of the Holy Spirit as He creates faith in the heart. *{You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1:23}*

B. Means of grace

1. The purpose of the Law
 - a. Revealing sin – Without the Law that is written in our hearts and that is preached by the Christian church, people would not realize that they were not doing what the LORD wanted. There would be no standard for what sin is. *{We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:19-20}*
 - b. Showing God's condemnation – The Law tells not only of sin but also that sin has guilt attached to it that will be punished by God. The fear of this punishment forces people to deal with the reality of an angry God. *{All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law. Galatians 3:10-11a}*
2. The purpose of the Gospel
 - a. Remove sin – The "good news" of the Gospel is that the punishment of sin has been lifted from mankind because the guilt of sin has been transferred to Christ. God's wrath is no longer directed at us. *{The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29}*
 - b. Bring comfort – Because the LORD is no longer angry with us, we no longer have to fear Him, so the Gospel brings comfort. We are assured that the LORD will take care of our every trouble. *{Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for; that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. Isaiah 40:1-2}*
 - c. Share in glory – As forgiven children of God, we are also heirs of His heavenly kingdom. There we will share His kingly glory. *{But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14}*
3. Baptism
 - a. Water – The Bible teaches a water Baptism, in which water is applied with the Word of God to effect or strengthen faith. No other baptism is indicated for general use in the Scriptures. *{And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:38}*

- b. Holy Spirit through the Word – Without the word of God, applying water only removes dirt from the skin. With the word of God it cleans the soul of all sin and works faith. *{Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38}*
4. Lord’s Supper
- a. Bread and body – To nourish our souls the LORD has given us His very body that died for us on the cross. He conceals this in bread which is consecrated with His word. *{While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Matthew 26:26}*
 - b. Wine and blood – He also nourishes our souls with His own blood which was shed for our salvation. This He conceals in the consecrated wine. *{Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:27-28}*
 - c. Power in the sacrament – Within the sacrament is the power of the LORD both to strengthen faith in the believer but also to hold the unbeliever guilty of affronting God by coming to His table unprepared to receive God’s gift. *{Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29}*

C. The means of grace applied

1. Sufficiency of the means of grace
 - a. Information sufficient – The Scripture gives us everything that we need to know so that the Holy Spirit can work and maintain saving faith in our hearts. No other revelation is needed. *{All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17}*
 - b. Not based on human cleverness – The saving message is effective because of the power of the Holy Spirit, not because of the cleverness of the messenger or any magic associated with the words. *{My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5}*
2. Efficacy of the means of grace
 - a. Power to save – The message of the Gospel has the power to save because the Holy Spirit is associated with the message. Without His presence, the mere words would not convert anyone. *{I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 1:16}*

- b. Power for God's purpose – The LORD's purpose in having His message preached is not always to save souls. It is sometimes a message preached to intensify the judgment upon a group of people. *{As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater; so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10-11}*
- 3. Work of Holy Spirit can be resisted
 - a. God acting alone – When the LORD acts through His word, nothing can resist His will. He commands and all must obey. *{“From ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?” Isaiah 43:13}*
 - b. God acting through means – When the LORD acts through agents, such as His pastors, people can ignore and despise what He desires, but they will be judged for their disobedience. *{“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” Acts 7:51}*

D. Why some are saved and not others

- 1. All are by nature lost. – Man's sinful nature is universal. All are dead in their sins, and none can be saved without His intervention. *{As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Romans 3:10-12}*
- 2. God wants all to be saved. – The LORD's plan of salvation and His desire for all to take advantage of it are also universal. Christ died for all, not just for a chosen few. *{This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:4}*
- 3. Not all are saved. – Many are lost because they did not hear the message, and many are lost because they rejected the word when they heard it. Regardless of why they didn't believe, their sins will be held against them on judgment day. *{Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. Isaiah 10:22 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” Matthew 22:14}*

Conversion

4. Effects of Conversion

VIII. Results of Conversion

A. Our relationship with God

1. Peace with God
 - a. End of hostile relations – When Adam and Eve sinned, the human race declared war on the LORD. It was a foolish war which mankind could only lose. When people are converted, they receive God's amnesty, and their battle with God is over. *{For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Ephesians 2:14}*
 - b. Tranquility – The end of the war with God means that there can be tranquility in our lives. The eternal trouble we were facing has disappeared, and our eternal future is guaranteed. *{And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7}*
2. Inclusion in God's family
 - a. No longer an outsider – Conversion is equivalent to our adoption into the LORD's family. We are no longer slaves of the evil master Satan, but are legally children of the loving Father in heaven. *{So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Galatians 4:7}*
 - b. Based solely on God's love – As God's enemies, we did nothing to earn this adoption and, in fact, violently opposed it. Despite this, the LORD has taken us as His own. *{How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! 1 John 3:1}*
3. Access to God
 - a. Ability to pray – As children in God's house, we are able to come before the LORD, the master of the house, with our requests. Slaves of Satan cannot do that, but they are thrown out of His presence before they can utter a word. *{In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3:12}*
 - b. Promise of response – Not only can we ask God for what we need and want, but we can expect that He will reply by giving us what is truly best for our soul's salvation. *{“In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” John 16:23}*

B. Our freedom

1. From sin
 - a. No longer bound – Before our conversion we were slaves to all the forces of evil, which dominated us. We are now free to serve the LORD rather than our sinful desires. *{For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. Romans 6:6}*

- b. Gift of God – This freedom from sin gives us spiritual life. Our conversion that gave us this freedom was a gift of God. Had we done anything, it would not be a gift. *{For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23}*
- 2. From death
 - a. Living with the living – The dead have lost all ability to will and act. Conversion has made us alive spiritually so that we can live with our LORD forever. *{“Because I live, you also will live.” John 14:19b}*
 - b. Death’s defeat – Death has been forced to give us up because it was defeated by someone stronger than death. We are Christ’s booty claimed from death when He conquered it. *{“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57}*
- 3. From the devil
 - a. No power over us – When we were slaves of the devils, we had no power to save ourselves. Satan could accuse us before the LORD and know that His righteous judgment would send us to hell. Satan can no longer accuse us because Christ has taken away our guilt before God. *{No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39}*
 - b. No terror for us – We no longer have to fear that the devil will somehow reclaim us and destroy us. We can rejoice even when he troubles us, knowing that soon we will be with the LORD in heaven. *{Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7}*
- 4. From the Law – The Law was Satan’s weapon against us. It was the standard that He could use to drive us to try to attain perfection and then ridicule us when we failed. Because Christ has fulfilled the Law, we receive Christ’s righteousness at our conversion. The Law can no longer be used to accuse us. *{Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. Romans 8:1-3a}*

C. Our life

- 1. New life
 - a. New creation – Our new self was created in us at our conversion to replace the evil self that was enslaved by the devil. Our new self is in harmony with our creator. *{You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:9b-10}*

- b. Bearing fruit – Our new self desires to do the will of the LORD, that is, to bear fruit that is pleasing to God. This replaced our evil self which sought its own aims and therefore opposed the will of the LORD. {*“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”* Luke 6:43-35}
 - c. Power from the LORD – The good fruit borne by the new self is only possible because of the continual influx of the power of the LORD through the workings of the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament. {*No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.* John 15:4b}
- 2. Growing sanctification
 - a. Constant battle – The new self in us is continually being challenged by the old self who refuses to give up the struggle to control us. Supported by the devil and his allies, the old self battles the new self on every issue, hoping to overcome him. {*For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.* Romans 8:22-23}
 - b. Eyes on the goal – Unlike justification, sanctification is an ongoing process. We must ever strive to conform our lives to the LORD’s will, knowing that we will fail again and again and not reach perfection in living until we reach heaven. {*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* Philippians 3:12}

IX. Repeated Conversion

A. Persistence in the faith

1. Repentance

- a. Life of repentance – Because we sin often during the day, we need to continually repent of our sins and seek the comfort of knowing our sins have already been forgiven when Jesus died for them. {*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:8-9}
- b. Continuous conversion – Someone who is “continuously converted” is someone who is in the state of grace. The conversion effected by the Holy Spirit continues to be valid within the person. {*Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* Luke 9:23}

2. Christians can fall from faith

- a. Continuous temptation – While Christians live in this world, the demons continuously try to drag them back into the camp of Satan. They lay various snares to catch people and take their lives captive. *{Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:12-14 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. 1 Peter 5:8-9a}*
- b. Sudden collapse – Even Christians who are well trained in the faith can fall away if some temptation comes along that allures them so strongly that they are not prepared to resist it. Even such men as Abraham and David were drawn away from the LORD by temptations that Satan devised to attack their weaknesses. *{So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12}*
- c. Loss of discipline – The Christian life is a life of discipline. When people stop their training in the word of God or grow tired of the routine of church, they will soon find themselves out of the competition for the heavenly prize. *{Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27}*
- d. Synergism – One of Satan's most effective tools is to convince people that they can and/or must do works of righteousness for their salvation. The more pride a person has, the easier it is to spring this trap. *{You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. Galatians 5:4}*

3. Repeated conversion (?)

- a. Realization of rebellion – When believers sin, they always need to repent. When believers adhere to their sins, they lose their faith and need to be reconverted to faith again. That can come from inner remembrance of the word of God previously learned or from again hearing the word proclaimed which demands repentance. *{“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ” Luke 15:17-19}*
- b. Realization of weakness – Not all sins, even public sins, lead to a loss of saving faith. If it did, Christians could never be certain whether they would be saved because they might die after committing some sin and before they can repent of it. *{Peter replied, “Man, I don't know what you're talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. Luke 22:60-62}*

4. Restoring the fallen – our Christian responsibility
 - a. The weak – Some of the Christians at Galatia had fallen for the teachings of the Judaizers. Because this meant that they trusted to some extent in their own works, they were no longer in the kingdom of God. They had fallen from faith through weakness. *{I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Galatians 6:1}*
 - b. The rebellious – When David started his romance with Bathsheba, he knew he was sinning, but he kept up the activity because he had stopped caring about whether he was pleasing God. He was in rebellion against God. *{Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.’ ...Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.” 2 Samuel 12:7,13}*

B. Dangerous sins

1. Sin of hardening
 - a. Hardening by the sinner – When sinners refuse to listen to the Law and claim it does not apply to them, they are hardening their hearts against God. They can also harden their hearts against the Gospel if they refuse to believe that Christ died to pay for all their sins. Hardening inhibits the work of the Holy Spirit. *{As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2}*
 - b. Hardening by God – After people begin hardening their hearts and do so for long enough, God may complete the job by making it impossible for them to respond to the means of grace. *{But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses. Exodus 9:12}*
2. Sin against the Holy Spirit
 - a. Blaspheming the work of the Holy Spirit – When a person comes to know the work of the Holy Spirit and vigorously sets his heart against it, then the Holy Spirit can no longer work on that heart. Because the person has cut off the only way that saving faith can be created, this sin is unforgivable. *{“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Matthew 12:31-32}*
 - b. Active sin – The sin against the Holy Spirit can only be committed by active opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit on the part of someone who knows His work. It can never be committed by a Christian or an ignorant unbeliever. *{A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Isaiah 42:3}*

C. Certainty of faith

1. How do I know that I am a believer?
 - a. Acknowledgement of sin – Christians acknowledge that they are sinful, in fact that they are totally depraved. *{If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:10}*
 - b. Acknowledgement of Savior – Christians accept that Jesus died for their sins and that they have been given His righteousness so that they can stand before God. *{That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9}*
 - c. Acknowledgement of by grace alone – Christians believe that they are saved solely through God’s grace and not through anything which they have done. *{So in the same way at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. Now if it is by grace, then it is not the result of works—otherwise grace would no longer be grace. Romans 11:5-6}*
2. How can I be sure that I will remain a believer?
 - a. Power of God – It is only through the power of the LORD that anyone comes to faith or remains in faith. God’s power is overwhelming so that nothing is able to overcome it and snatch us from His hand. *{Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Romans 8:35}*
 - b. Way of escape – If the LORD allows trials to come upon us, He will also create a way for us to deal with the problems. He will not leave us on our own to face the onslaught of Satan. *{God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13b}*

Conversion

5. European Assaults on Conversion

X. Pelagianism and Synergism

A. *Opinio legis*

1. Natural law – When the LORD created man, He wrote into man's heart His unchanging Law. When man sinned, the Law in the heart began to be corrupted by the devil and the things of this world. This corrupted law, the natural law, still guides people's actions because the conscience and the devil use it to accuse people of their transgressions of the natural law.
2. Natural defense – The human mind responds to these accusations with *opinio legis*. In effect, the mind tries to develop an argument from the natural law that it is not sufficiently guilty of transgressing that law to deserve any punishment, certainly not severe punishment. It argues that it is willing to work with God to remove any obstacles that exist to its salvation and is perfectly capable of contributing what it has to in order to satisfy God.

B. Pelagianism

1. The man Pelagius
 - a. British monk born in 354
 - b. Wanted to improve sanctification in Christians
 - c. Rejected original sin
 - d. Fled to North Africa to escape collapse of Rome
 - e. Died in the Middle East in 418
 - f. Was condemned by Augustine and the Council of Ephesus (431)
2. Teaching
 - a. Adam was mortal, doomed to die even if he had not sinned.
 - b. Adam's sin only affected him; it did not corrupt the human race.
 - c. At birth all people are in the same state as Adam was at creation.
 - d. People can keep God's Law perfectly.
 - e. The Law is as effective as the Gospel in getting people into heaven.
 - f. Unbaptized infants who die will be saved.
3. Pelagianism today
 - a. Masonic lodges
 - b. Secular (Radical) Humanism
 - c. Boy Scouts
 - d. New Age Movement

C. Semi-Pelagianism

1. Impaired but not dead – Faced with the condemnation of the church, but unwilling to abandon the thesis that Adam's fall did not hopelessly corrupt mankind's nature, the followers of Pelagius after his death decided to compromise to try to gain acceptance. They claimed that Adam's sin had impaired every person's ability so that he could never completely please God, but yet by his natural powers and his intellect, he could make a start at a God-pleasing life which would lead to God embracing his efforts and converting him to salvation through Christ.
2. Meeting God halfway – To those who believe in Semi-Pelagianism, everyone can be saved because everyone can make an effort to reach out to God. Those efforts may be tainted by sin, but if they are carried out to the best of man's ability, God is obligated to respect them and reach out to them through Christ either in this life or at the time of judgment. The process is man-driven.
3. Condemned by the church – The Synod of Orange in 529 condemned Semi-Pelagianism as being incompatible with the Christian faith.

D. Synergism

1. The teaching – In a synergistic relationship two entities work together for the benefit of both of them. In its Christian application synergism means that God and a person work together to convert and/or justify the person. God has to make the first move because the corruption of sin is so great that man cannot reach out to God. Once God has taken the first step, however, man can respond and help to complete the process. The process is God-driven.
2. Eastern Orthodoxy – The Eastern Orthodox churches have always tolerated or encouraged the synergistic view of salvation. There are threads of it in the early writings of the Greek fathers of the church. It is encouraged by the obsession with icons in the Orthodox church, as veneration of these is to help fulfill man's part of the process of justifying the soul so God will take it to heaven.
3. Roman church
 - a. Initial struggles – The Roman church struggled with the doctrine of original sin for centuries. The supporters of Augustine believed that man was totally depraved, the Semi-Pelagianists argued that man was minimally impaired and could be led to prepare his heart for Jesus, and the synergists argued a middle position that man was heavily impaired but still capable of responding to grace if offered by God.
 - b. Council of Trent – The Lutheran Reformation forced the Roman church to unify behind one of the doctrinal positions. It chose synergism because that position gave the church the greatest ability to control its members. The pope could define what was needed to satisfy the human portion of the salvation requirement and change the needed deeds to meet his goals.
 - c. As time has passed, the Roman church has also accepted the Semi-Pelagian position in an effort to appear tolerant to other religions. The church still maintains that effort from the church is necessary to effect salvation, but that action no longer requires an active faith in Jesus to offer at least some hope of salvation.

- d. Conversion versus justification – While the Roman church has long favored synergism in relation to justification, it has also bought into synergism, at least to a limited extent, being involved in conversion. For a long time this was not an issue in Europe because everyone joined the church when baptized as an infant. The Roman church adapts to the cultural mores by morphing its doctrines.
4. Distinction between Semi-Pelagianism and Synergism
 - a. Both – Partnerships between man and God for justification and/or conversion
 - b. Semi-Pelagianism – Man-driven
 - c. Synergism – God-driven

XI. False Teachings in Reformation Era

A. Partitioning the universe

1. Things of God (God's space) – The nature of the LORD God Almighty is beyond our ability to comprehend. Those things touching the attributes of the LORD we cannot understand, and we must take them solely by revelation. They do not need to make sense to the human mind, and we can only suffer harm by trying to learn more about them than the Scripture teaches. Examples of the things of God are the workings of the Trinity, creation, predestination, conversion and incarnation.
2. Things of the world (man's space) – The things of this world are those things which are involved in our daily living while here on earth. These things can be understood by the human mind, and logical decisions can be made about them. Examples are employment, marriage, laws of nature and government.
3. Role of the church
 - a. Protestant view – The Lutheran and Reformed churches view the ministers of the church as being ambassadors of God. They are to proclaim the message of God – both the Law and the Gospel. They have no special power of making laws or representing people before God.
 - b. Catholic view – The Roman church views its role as being one of deal-maker between God and man. The bishops, and supremely the pope, believe that they can set articles of faith on behalf of God and that they can negotiate on behalf of individuals to mitigate God's wrath.

B. Calvinism

1. The man John Calvin
 - a. Born into a French clerical family in 1509.
 - b. Studied law and was supported by church offerings.
 - c. Turned Protestant after reading Luther.
 - d. Fled to Switzerland to escape persecution in France.
 - e. Was a theologian and prolific writer.
 - f. Organized the religious and civil life of Geneva.
 - g. Died 1564.

2. Sound teachings
 - a. Total depravity – Calvin, like Luther and Augustine, believed in original sin and the total depravity of all people. All mankind therefore was lost without acceptance of God’s plan of salvation.
 - b. Vicarious atonement – Calvin also opposed any form of synergism. He believed that people were saved solely by the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. He believed that predestination was solely based on God’s will and not on any merit of the people selected. He believed that conversion to faith was solely the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. Doctrinal errors
 - a. Irresistible grace – Because the LORD God is almighty, Calvin argued that if He wanted to save someone, that person would be converted and preserved in the faith regardless of the person’s actions. Because only the Holy Spirit can bring people to faith and He is irresistible, therefore God did not want to save anyone who was not saved. By doing this, Calvin inserted human logic into God’s space.
 - b. Double predestination – Because God knows all things, Calvin further argued that predestination was a sorting process in which some were assigned to heaven and some to hell. Once again Calvin was operating in God’s space.
 - c. Preservation of the saints – Finally, Calvin taught that because no one can snatch the elect out of God’s hand, once a predestinated person believed, he or she could never lose their faith, even if they lost their focus on Christ. Moreover, those people who were not predestined to salvation could never believe and be children of God, no matter how sincerely they may have believed during parts of their lives. Because many baptized children were subsequently lost to the faith, baptism could not bring them into true faith or they could not be lost. Once again, Calvin inserted human logic into the things of God.
 - d. Limited atonement – Calvin’s followers reasoned that since those predestined to hell could never be saved, it would have been pointless for Jesus to die for them. Therefore He only died for the elect; that is, there was only limited atonement, complete for those who were to be saved, but nothing for the rest.

B. Melancthon and synergism

1. Predestined to faith – Luther, Calvin and Augustine thought that men who were predestined by God “to faith” were predestined to believe because God had chosen them for some reason internal to God.
2. Predestined in view of faith – Melancthon came to believe that Luther’s position effectively said that God was showing partiality toward some people. He therefore argued that there had to be some difference among men which caused some to accept the message of salvation and others to reject it. Clearly God saw this and predestined only those who would not resist to the point of unbelief.

C. Arminianism

1. Arminius – Joseph Arminius was a Dutch pastor who objected to God being so arbitrary as to choose from eternity to damn some and save others. He therefore moved the cause of salvation from God to man.

2. Arminianism – In its various forms Arminianism teaches that the decision to be converted and to persevere in the faith is man's. God looked forward in time and saw who would persist in the faith and predestined only those to be saved. While the Holy Spirit is a powerful force in bringing people to salvation, He will succeed only if people let him in.

D. Pietism

1. Public morality – Herman Francke was appalled at the level of public morality that existed in supposedly Christian communities. Like the Roman church before it, the Lutheran church had become more interested in “churchly” activities than in teaching the whole counsel of God's word. He therefore thought that a new emphasis on Christian living was essential.
2. Form before substance – Pietists wanted people to feel their commitment to the LORD more strongly and soon began emphasizing that one wasn't really converted until one had an experience where one could sense God coming into one's life. To get this feeling required preparation, often following routines not unlike those followed in some monastic orders. Only after a person had punished his sinful flesh and felt the power of God within him could he truly regard himself as being within the kingdom of God.

Conversion

6. Conversion Teachings Today

XII. False Teachings in America

A. Conversion experiences

1. Puritanism – Although they were Calvinists, the Puritans placed an emphasis on a convincing event in their lives that showed they were really people whom God had called into His church. People who did not fit the mold were treated with suspicion, excluded and even persecuted as witches.
2. The Great Awakening – The great awakening of 1740-1742 was caused by several powerful preachers who raised the emotional level of their congregations. Some members claimed that they had stepped up to a new level of Christian faith. This new level soon became the standard by which true belief was judged. Every minister who did not adopt this form of ministry was regarded as “unconverted.”

B. The Arminian onslaught

1. Methodism

- a. Predestination based on foreknowledge – Charles Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement. Having broken with Calvinism on predestination, he concluded that the reason some are saved and some are lost lies in man. Therefore, God had to predestine based on seeing beforehand who would believe. It was up to each person to believe and therefore determine his own predestination to salvation.
- b. Salvation without means – Unable to accept the damnation of those who were ignorant of Christ, Wesley declared that God had given everyone a “prevenient grace” that permitted the person through his own efforts to put himself into a relationship with God that God would count as sufficient to admit him to heaven. In short, faith in Christ was not necessary for salvation (a Zwingli heresy).

2. Revivalism (Second Awakening)

- a. Brainwashing – Revivalist meetings were designed to generate great emotional excitement in those present. Those who did not believe at the beginning of the sessions were pressured in many ways to give up their old ways and to rise to the joy of full commitment to Jesus. People were driven by various stimuli to altered states of consciousness.
- b. Human conversions – Those who practiced this approach to ministry felt that the method rather than the Holy Spirit was the cause of the conversions. Those who effected many conversions therefore had the best method and were the best servants of God. Doctrine meant little, and visible changes caused by conversion were the measuring stick for success.

C. The Americanization of conversion

1. Denial of total depravity
 - a. Roman view – The Roman Catholic church has maintained its view that man is not totally corrupted and that baptism removes original sin, leaving only a concupiscence that man can overcome by good works and the help of the Roman church. It has expanded its claim of who it can help to include all Christians, as well as Jews and Moslems.
 - b. Baptist view – The Baptists and Pentecostals also believe that original sin is only a weakness that needs not be dealt with until a person reaches the age at which they can decide consciously to sin. Moreover, because humans can strive against this concupiscence, it is possible to achieve perfection in this life.
2. Human basis of predestination
 - a. Man's equality in creation – The Humanistic principle that all men are born equal has caused churches to more and more press to place the reason for man's salvation on man. They argue that just as a man can decide to behave so as to remain out of prison, so he can decide to do those things that will keep him out of hell. God is obligated to follow the free-flowing human will.
 - b. *Intuitu fidei* – The desire to explain why some are saved and many are lost has also divided American Lutheranism for the past 150 years. Those who cannot accept that predestination is caused only by God's internal decision and not by human action have become wedded to the idea that it was done "in view of faith."
3. Decision theology – The belief that people are saved by making a decision for Christ is the natural consequence of rejecting that the LORD's methods of predestining and converting the elect are something in God's space that cannot and need not be understood by mankind. If humans influence God, then they have to have a role in their coming to faith. If they have to have a role, then they cannot come to faith until they are capable of playing that role. Young children must therefore be sinless. People must therefore be given the opportunity to play their role as soon as they are old enough, and repeatedly thereafter, so that they can make the decision that God will have foreseen and therefore have predestined them.
3. Universalism – Because of the growing belief that there is a certain core of human rights that apply to all people in the world, one of those rights in the eyes of many people is the right to eternal salvation, in whatever way salvation is defined by a particular group. Any group that denies that salvation is universal is therefore regarded as being against the common human heritage and consequently radical. Some religious groups have actively embraced this teaching, while many hold it as an active possibility.

XIII. Conclusion

A. The certainly of conversion

1. Hopelessness of self-reliance – If a person is totally helpless, he will not be able to do anything to help himself. Sin has made us totally helpless, in fact, spiritually dead. We will not find the least bit of strength within us to meet God half-way or any of the way. *{The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. Genesis 6:5}*
2. Completeness of redemption – Because our salvation cannot rely to the smallest extent on ourselves, Christ has done everything for us. It is a done deal by an Almighty God. Who can prevent Him from doing His will? *{He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2}*
3. Conversion as the work of Holy Spirit – Because conversion is completely the work of the Holy Spirit, when He does it, it is done. There is nothing remaining for us to get wrong. *{I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 11:19}*

B. Conversion in doubt

1. Searching for a Savior – People desiring a “conversion experience” are looking for something that is not necessary and that God has not promised. It is an example of putting God to the test, expecting Him to give us what we want. Such searching directs us away from our Savior. *{“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.” Matthew 24:26}*
2. A culture of independence – Two pillars of Americanism are self-reliance and the belief that we have a right to have it our way. Both of these attitudes are contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures which call on us to rely on the LORD with our whole heart and accept His ways. *{Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever. Psalm 146:3-6}*