

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 25 JANUARY 2021 – 31 JANUARY 2021



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

Having seen our guilt before God (Q3-11), and God's grace towards us sinners (Q12-85), we now consider our grateful response to God (Q86-129). This week, we think about the important topic of conversion. What does true conversion entail? Below I quote from Kevin DeYoung's excellent treatment on it based on the Catechism questions and answers (Q88-91).

Conversion is essential to the gospel. The world needs to learn and we frequently need to be reminded that Christianity is not about refurbishing a few morals here, or helping you find your own unique spiritual journey there, or simply trying to get you to agree to a few theological statements. We need to be converted. [...]

Conversion is not simply a new way of living—though it leads to that. Conversion is a new way of thinking and feeling. It means we behold Christ in a new way, so that He looks clear where He had been confusing, brilliant where He had been bland, and supremely glorious where He had been just another regular, slightly above average guy.

Having our eyes opened to Christ's divine and supernatural light means more than just a twinge of conscience or being moved with pity at Jesus' suffering. [...] When the Spirit of God brings us to life in Christ, He operates on the mind, the will, *and* the affections. We not only think differently and act differently, we also feel differently, so that we can truly say, "I've tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

In short, conversion brings newness. New life. New direction. New inclination. New affections. The old has gone and the new has come. In conversion, the Spirit of God gives us a new awareness of sin, a new interest in the Word of God, a new passion for holiness, a new desire for prayer, and a new sense of the majesty of God.

This means we obey not because we are slaves bound to our master's will, but because we have been set free and are now at liberty to do what we ought. At times, people may be able to be scared into temporary law keeping. But true conversion goes deeper and affects the heart, making us happy to walk in God's ways and do what is good.

But what, asks the Catechism, is truly "good"? For most people, good deeds are simply those that help people or society in some way. So we figure we have no shortages of good deeds—after all, we recycle, build houses with Habitat for Humanity, give to the American Red Cross, and take our kids on fun vacations. But God's standard is higher and deeper. Good deeds are only those that (1) arise out of true faith (John 15:5; Heb. 11:6), (2) conform to God's law (1 Sam. 15:22; Eph 2:10), and (3) are done for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). This doesn't mean we can't be thankful for the morality and kindness we see in non-Christians. Certainly, most people do nice things for others. But truly good deeds must do more than help people and spring from more than good intentions. Truly good deeds are done in God's strength through faith in Christ, conform to God's revealed will, and aim to make much of God and not us or the ones we serve.

The Word of God must be our standard of goodness, not nice thoughts, nor pleasant smiles, nor the usefulness of charity. We can be thankful for kindness instead of meanness, but true goodness goes deeper into the heart and higher up to God than mere moralism.¹

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, p159-161.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM²

Lord's Day 33

Q88) What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

A) Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the coming-to-life of the new.

Q89) What is the dying-away of the old self?

A) It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.

Q90) What is the coming-to-life of the new self?

A) It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.

Q91) What do we do that is good?

A) Only that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for His glory; and not that which is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

You might have regrets about things you have done before. You might be ashamed of what kind of person you have been. But, if you are in Christ, you are the new creation. Becoming a Christian means you are no longer what you were before. Your identity is in Christ. You are a new person, you are living a new life, you have a new destiny. How wonderful is God's grace!

2 CORINTHIANS 7:10

2 Cor 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Godly sorrow is not merely feeling sorry for the consequences of your wrong-doing. It is about the wrong-doing itself. An unrepentant fraudster might be sobbing when he's put in prison because he's sad that he got caught and now has to spend time in that scary place. On the contrary, if he was truly repentant, he would be more sorry for the fraud he committed than the prison sentence he now must serve. He would feel sorry for those he cheated, and would be seeking God's forgiveness. Do you know this godly sorrow?

HEBREWS 11:6

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

If we do some good works, can it fail to please God? If God is totally and truly good, then good works must please God without fail. To assume otherwise is to accuse God of some evil intent hidden behind His pretensions. But Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that it is impossible to please God without faith. This means that we cannot perform any good works unless such work arises from true faith in God through Christ. To be sure, we are and must be thankful to God that there are many people in the world who do many acts of kindness. Yet, unless such an act stems from true faith in God it can never be good works as God sees it. So this day, whatever you plan to do, how are they related to faith in God? Are you acting out of your faith in Jesus our Lord and Saviour?

² The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.