

What is involved in conversion to Christ?

The word “conversion” means “to turn about, turn towards.” Our last two articles dealt with the conversion to Christ of practicing Jews. Today we will turn our attention to the first recorded conversion of a non-Jew. His name was “Cornelius, a centurion...a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:1-2). Here is a man and his family deeply committed to worshipping and serving the true and living God, yet they knew nothing of eternal salvation offered in Christ Jesus.

This case of conversion to Christ has often been misunderstood because of the miraculous events connected with it.

- The angel of God speaking to Cornelius
- The vision of Peter where the Lord commands him to eat foods unclean to Jews.
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the household of Cornelius, enabling them to speak in human languages they did not previously know.

These events, however, were peculiar to apostolic days and due to special circumstances. Jesus did not commission His apostles to go into all the world and command people to wait for a vision from Heaven or the voice of an angel, but to preach the soul saving gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature and to baptize the believers (Mark 15:15-16).

The miraculous events experienced by Peter and Cornelius were for bringing together preacher and prospective convert. More than that, though, these men represented two vastly different races of people who needed convincing that God desires all nations to serve His Son in one body, the church (Eph 2:11-22). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius was to convince Peter and his six companions that non-Jews (Gentiles) also have a right to salvation through the gospel. The miracle did have the desired effect, Peter later said, “If...God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God” (Acts 11:17).

Apart from the special circumstances, what do we learn from this conversion?

- 1) Cornelius and his household needed to **hear** the gospel. “Peter,” the angel said, “will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14).
- 2) This hearing of the gospel produced **belief** in Christ, the fruits of which we shall see in this example of conversion.
- 3) Cornelius needed to **repent**, i.e., to change his way of thinking. Did he repent? After hearing all the facts of Peter’s defense in taking the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews “became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18).

- 4) Cornelius, like the Ethiopian Eunuch and Saul of Tarsus, needed to be **baptized**. In fact, he and his household were *commanded* to be baptized in water. After hearing them “speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just and we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:46-48). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit did not substitute for this act of faith in the working of God (baptism, Col 2:12).

There is no eternal salvation apart from the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Phil 2:11). One is not a child of God until they are baptized into that name (Gal 3:26-27). Hearing the gospel produces a faith leading to repentance and baptism. Cornelius, his family and servants were converted to Christ Jesus, but not one step short of fulfilling the “words by which” they could be saved (Acts 11:14).

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~ C. Boyd Jennings