

## From idolatry to serving the true and living God

There's often a misunderstanding of what conversion is all about. Conversion is something that happens all the time in all religions. But what is conversion to Christ really about? Is it merely a change of allegiance from one religion to another for practical purposes of work or marriage or something else? Or maybe a change of scenery because of boredom with a person's own religion. At the time of the Indian independence Dr B R Ambedkar convinced millions of Hindu Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) to leave Hinduism and embrace other religions as that was the only way that they would be able to escape the caste system. They embraced various religions including Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Their motive for doing so was not faith at all but for social upliftment. Whilst this may be acceptable in other religions it is Biblically clear that no one can become a true Christian without faith and repentance.

1 Thessalonians 1: 1 – 10

### 1) The transformational power of the Gospel (1 – 5a)

- The letter was written to the church in Thessalonica. Hence Paul was writing to believers who had already experienced the power of the Gospel.
- The first aspects of the transformational power of the Gospel are coupled with the qualities of faith, love, and hope.
  - Work produced by faith
  - Labour prompted by love
  - Endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus
- Colossians 1: 3 – 6 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the **love you have for all God's people — the faith and love that spring from the hope** stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.
- 1 Corinthians 13: 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
- We've been transformed from:
  - being an unbelieving people to being a people of faith
  - being a people who lacked love to being a people who are characterised by our love
  - being a people without God and without hope in this world to being a people rooted in hope.
- The transformation came about through the Gospel which came with the power of the Holy Spirit and with conviction.
  - Acts 1: 8 tells us that the Gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit
  - John 16: 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong (convict) about sin and righteousness and judgment.
  - The Holy Spirit is enabling power that transforms us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
- Our transformation, like our salvation, is a work of God and not ourselves.
  - What we need to do is believe His Gospel, put our trust and hope in Christ and yield to the working of the Holy Spirit in us to work out our salvation.

### 2) Living as examples to others (5b – 9a)

- Paul reminds the Thessalonian church how he lived among them for their sake.
  - As the preacher of the Gospel to them he lived by the same standard that he would expect them to live by.
  - He didn't only preach to them but he lived out the life that he was preaching as an example for them to follow.

- Although Paul exhorts us to follow him he also knows that our ultimate example to follow isn't him but Christ.
  - 1 Corinthians 11: 1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
- The Thessalonians became imitators of them and they in turn became a model to the believers in other places.
  - Their faith and actions were such that they were reported to Paul by other believers.
- True salvation cannot be hidden. It is evident in the fruit of our lives.
- We ought to watch our lives carefully because, whether we like it or not, conscious of it or not, other people are watching how we live our lives as believers.
  - We are all models for others – either good models or bad models but models nevertheless.
- Preachers and teachers have even a greater responsibility to watch their lives carefully because they are preaching and teaching as much through their lives as through their words.
  - I remember young people retelling bad jokes that they had heard from pastors because if the pastor said it then it must be ok.
  - James 3: 1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
- A summary of living as an example to others is to live lives that reflect the character of Christ in such a way that He is glorified through us.

### 3) Our past and our future (9b – 10)

- So how did we get to be transformed and live as examples to others?
- By faith in Jesus – His death and resurrection for our salvation from His wrath.
- By repentance from idols
  - We might not worship actual idols such as the Greeks and the Hindus worship but an idol can be anything that draws the focus of our devotion.
  - Habitual sin can be an idol.
  - A wrong relationship can be an idol.
  - A prized possession can be an idol.
- We need to repent from these things.
- Repentance isn't merely turning away from sin but turning to serve the living and true God.
  - It's not merely saying a sinner's prayer and asking Jesus to come into our hearts as is the common modern day practice.
  - It's turning to Him to serve Him who is alive.
  - It's turning to serve Him who is true. He is not a false God who leads us astray. He is true in that He is in fact the creator of the heavens and the earth
  - He is also true to who He is and to His Word. He is faithful.
- He is true to save us from the coming wrath when He comes by taking us to be with Him forever.
- We repent and turn to Him to gain this living hope that is found in Him.
- This is what brings about the transformation in us making us to live as examples to others.